

Library on Location Report

Summary

In the second semester of 2007 a Library on Location service was trialled at the University of Canterbury. This involved taking a wireless-enabled laptop and library materials out to student areas to promote the Library and offer a convenient and non-threatening access point for reference queries. Library on Location was received positively and many students and staff expressed surprise at learning about services and collections they had been unaware of. The best response was achieved when it was sited in a high traffic area at a busy time of day and supported by two librarians, but it could be difficult to staff such a service on a regular basis. However, as a tool to increase the Library's visibility, Library on Location could be a valuable addition to occasional events such as Orientation or Library Week.

Background

With the rapid increase in the number of library resources and services available especially electronically, university students and academics are often unaware of all the services on offer.

Furthermore, anecdotal reports suggest that campus library buildings can intimidate some people, particularly new students who are often only familiar with relatively small school or public libraries. "Library anxiety" can present a formidable barrier to use of the library.¹

In order to promote library services to those unaware of them, to introduce the library to students in a non-threatening way, and to provide a convenient alternative for busy students and academics, we considered the idea of offering a portable library service outside library buildings. A review of the literature indicated that this type of service had been attempted by a small number of other academic libraries. As two examples, Harvard College Library had trialled a "Roving Librarian" service to provide research assistance in their undergraduate common area², and Macon State College Library sent "Laptop Librarians" to student cafeterias in a regular Tuesday lunchtime slot as part of their outreach programme³.

Trial

With the aid of a wireless internet connection we could offer reference services, demonstrate the use of Library web pages, and issue or return items from the Library collection. We settled on the term "Library on Location", since we were taking resources as well as an information service to people in non-academic spaces on campus.

¹ Mellon, C. A. (1986). Library anxiety: a grounded theory and its development. *College & Research Libraries*, 47, 160-165.

² *Reference on the road: a roving librarian in Loker Commons brings library services to students.* (2003, April 18). Retrieved January 30, 2008, from http://hcl.harvard.edu/news/2003/libinloker_pr.html

³ *Laptop Librarians: have laptop will travel.* (2007, January 16). Retrieved January 30, 2008, from <http://staffweb.maconstate.edu/library/blog/?p=24>

Our intention was to target high traffic areas for undergraduate students, so we chose two sites: the first beside the Engineering cafe, the second below the Reboot cafe and outside student computer labs. We ran two one-hour long sessions at each of these locations, one morning and one afternoon. Later, we also collaborated with academics to tailor Library on Location to their classes. In one session, we attended a physics lab where we introduced students in groups to basic search concepts, and issued books and gave advice throughout the lab. In the last (only ten minutes long) we set up outside S2 lecture theatre with materials relevant to an upcoming assignment for the lecture that was just finishing inside. Our presence was announced during the lecture to encourage students to stop by on their way out.

Equipment we took included:

- book trolley
- library banner and Library on Location sign
- bowl of sweets
- laptop with wireless connection and barcode scanner
- textbooks, fiction, popular magazines, movie DVDs and music CDs
- library pamphlets
- Feedback forms, statistics sheet and pens

Although most trials elsewhere have focused primarily on reference services, we found that the issuable material made for a visible prop to draw attention to the Library on Location. It also served to promote the range of materials available through the Library.

Results

Enticing people to stop at the stand was not easy since most people were pressed for time, wary of our motivations, or simply not interested in anything labelled "Library". The bowl of sweets was a useful ice-breaker and over time we developed the technique of:

- offering a sweet;
- if they came to accept one, pointing out the borrowable DVDs;
- if they looked interested in those, briefly describing the Library on Location idea.

Avoiding library jargon or dry language such as "resources" was also important.

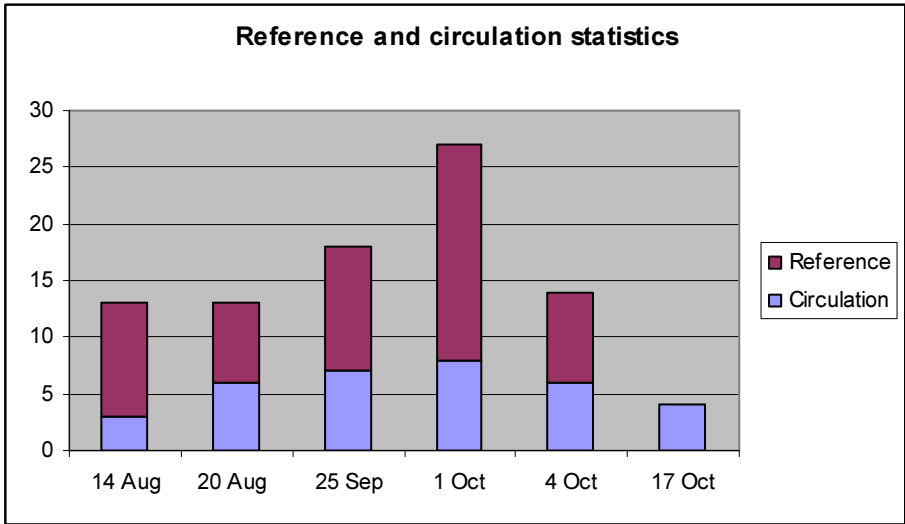
Once engaged in interaction with us, some people then asked questions relating to their own information needs. Even of those who didn't, many expressed pleasant surprise that the Library stocked movies, music and recreational reading material. One general staff member was even surprised to learn that he was eligible to use the library – that is, it wasn't just for students.

Two librarians were needed to staff Library on Location. Although at times we received little attention, when people saw someone already interacting with us they often showed more interest, so when one of us was busy assisting someone it was necessary to have another person available to approach or to answer questions from others.

Usage statistics

We kept reference and circulation statistics for each session, based on the reference statistics maintained at branch service desks:

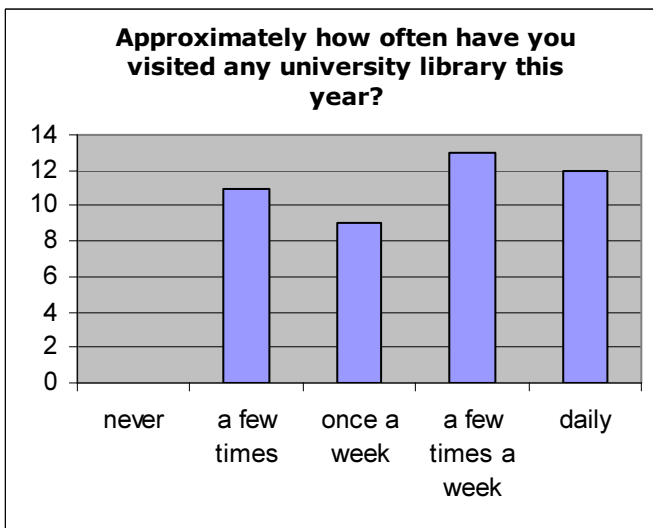
Library on Location Report - D Fitchett & M Upjohn – 18/2/2008

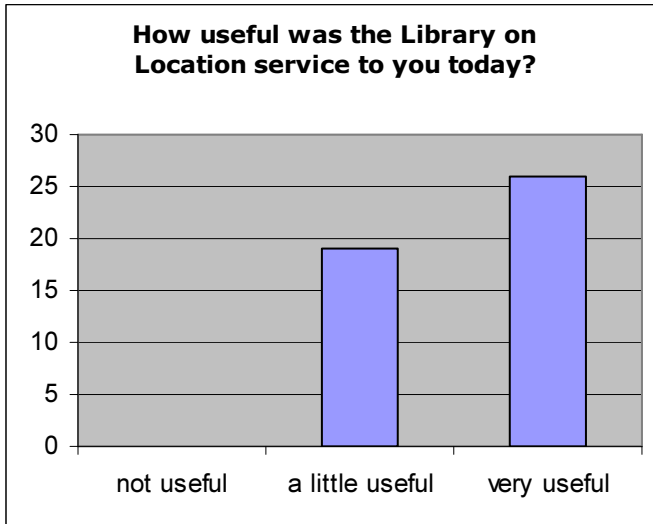


These statistics were significantly lower than at a regular service desk during comparable periods, however the interactions were generally more thorough than at a service desk. It should also be noted that these were interactions that might never have happened by waiting for the student to come to the standard library environment. The statistics also do not include the large numbers of students who, while passing the Library on Location stand, were made aware of library resources they hadn't previously known about.

Feedback

We asked students who used our services or spoke with us to fill out a short feedback card consisting of two multi-choice questions and a space for optional comments.





Eleven people wrote comments for us and we recorded two pieces of verbal feedback from people in too great a hurry to fill out a card. Three said simply "great idea" and one "very handy". One wrote, "More Common reading (Current) stuff needed" and another recommended we bring *The Economist*. An Engineering academic interested in our trial suggested a busier timeslot to try. A student wrote, "Approachable lovely librarians who are very capable of helping. I feel comfortable in both the PSL & ENG Libraries".

Other comments were clearly for the Library in general: one recommended *Prometheus Rising* by Robert Anton Wilson, another suggested X-box games, and another said, "[I] Use Physical Sciences Library but would like to see videos, novels etc". Two people said that it would be "great" and "awesome" to get easier access to Education Library books by requesting them to be brought to Physical Sciences Library; such a service was already in the planning stages and a trial began a couple of months later.

Conclusion

Library on Location was relatively simple to operate and feedback showed that the service was welcomed. This trial demonstrated that Library on Location increases the visibility of the Library so that, even if they don't use the service, many people are exposed to the concept that the library has more to offer than they realised.

It is likely that more people would stop and use the Library on Location service if it appeared regularly at the same place and time. It could be helpful to identify the most effective locations and the best times of day and year to operate it. There may be potential to offer it at various locations on campus, including department staffrooms, postgraduate study areas, high traffic undergraduate zones, lecture blocks, and computer workrooms. An after-hours service at the halls of residence would be particularly valuable, but probably impractical in terms of staff availability. Indeed, since two people were needed to staff the service, it might be difficult to offer it anywhere on a regular basis in our tightly staffed work environment.

Alternative models for Library on Location might be to support the information needs of specific classes, or to target events such as Orientation and Library Week in order to promote the Library in general, or as part of a campaign to raise awareness of a new service or resource. In this way, Library on Location would not require a large staff commitment but could still reach a significant audience beyond the Library walls.

Appendix

Full reference and circulation statistics

	14-Aug 2:30 - 3:30 Eng Café	20-Aug 10 - 11am Reboot	25-Sep 1:40-3pm Reboot	1-Oct 11:10-12:10 Eng Café	4-Oct 2:00-3:00 Phys Lab	17-Oct 12:50-1:00 S3
Directional/factual		2		6		
Library resources	9	2	11	12	8	
Referral	1	1		1		
IT questions		2				
Longer than 5min	2	1				
Reference total	10	7	11	19	8	0
Checkout	2	6	7	8	4	4
Checkin					2	
Renewal	1					
Circulation total	3	6	7	8	6	4

Full written feedback comments

Outside cafes:

- *"very handy"*
- *"More Common reading (Current) stuff needed"*
- *"Great idea!"*
- *"A great idea!"*
- *"Prometheus Rising by Robert Anton Wilson would be an excellent addition to the library"*
- *"A service where we could request books from Education to be brought to the PSL would be awesome"*
- *"It would be great to have a service to get easier access to all our Education books that are now in the Education library :(We are computer scientists in the field of AI in Education"*
- *"Use Physical Sciences Library but would like to see videos, novels etc"*
- *"How about some computer games (X-box) ?"*
- *"Approachable lovely librarians who are very capable of helping. I feel comfortable in both the PSL & ENG Libraries"*
- *"Great idea"*

In Physics lab:

- *"Don't use the Library often so have (sic) had much experience of this service"*
- *"specific demo of finding information needed?"*

Outside S3 lecture theatre:

- *"good resource"*