

Evaluating reference consultations in the academic library

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Dr. Lorie A. Kloda

lorie.kloda@concordia.ca

Associate University Librarian, Planning and
Community Relations
Concordia University

Alison J. Moore

ajm30@sfu.ca

Applied Sciences Librarian
Simon Fraser University



Why evaluate consults?

- 54,175 reference transactions
- 1,323 consults
 - 45% 30-60 minutes

(McGill Library 2014-2015)

How do you define a consult?



- Consultations, reference meetings, appointments, RSVPs, “book a librarian”
- Consults are “in-depth, personalized instructional research sessions” (Gale & Evans, 2007).
- “a reference service in which the librarian meets with a student in a scheduled session away from the reference desk” (Magi & Mardeusz, 2013).

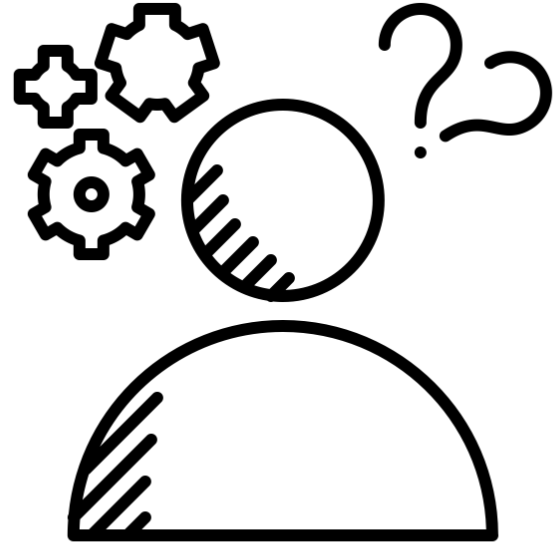
Research questions

Why do users book consults?

What occurs during a consult?

How helpful do users find
consults?

To what extent do consults
address and fulfill university
values?



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Literature review & environmental scan



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- Satisfaction-style surveys
 - Faix, MacDonald, & Taxakis, 2014; Gale & Evans, 2007; Magi & Mardeusz, 2013
- Citation analysis
 - Reinsfelder, 2012
- “Not counting what counts”
 - Savage, 2015
- Scoping review
 - Fournier & Sikora, 2015
- Student interviews
 - Bielat & Arnold, 2016
- RUSA best practices, ACRL guidelines
- Environmental scan & assessment listservs
- Fact-finding interviews with liaison librarians
 - Typical consult
 - Perspective on evaluation

Creating and distributing the evaluation tool



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- 7 questions + comments
- Feedback from:
 - McGill Library Assessment Advisory Committee
 - Liaison librarians
- Paper based pre-test
- Review of online survey platforms → Google forms
- Bit.ly
- Librarians provided with:
 - Custom link to evaluation tool
 - Draft email text
 - 3 reminders

Response rate

— — —

- 98 invitations sent
- 53 total responses
- Response rate: 54%



McGill

Library
Bibliothèque

Consult Appointment Feedback Form

If you have recently completed a consult appointment with a librarian or library staff member at the McGill Library, we are interested in your feedback.

Your responses provide the Library and librarians with a clearer picture of the effectiveness of consult appointments, and may influence improvements to this service.

Completing this form should take no more than 2 minutes. Responses are anonymous. Thank you for your consideration.

1. When did your consult appointment take place?

If you had more than one consult recently, please select one and reply to the remaining questions for that consult.

2. What was the purpose for booking your most recent consult?

Select all that apply:

Purpose	Number	Percent
Coursework/Assignment	22	41.50%
Thesis or dissertation	21	39.60%
Non-sponsored (non-funded) scholarly research	12	22.60%
Sponsored (funded) scholarly research	11	20.80%
Other activities, including general interest	3	5.70%
Teaching	2	3.80%
Patient care	1	1.90%

3. What did your consult help you with?

Select all that apply:

Activity	Number	Percent
Identifying or locating specific information/resources	38	71.80%
Improving my skills in using one or more resources	37	69.80%
Learning how to access print or electronic materials	24	45.30%
Improving my ability to use software	12	22.60%
Other	4	7.50%

4. How helpful was your consult with the above?

Helpfulness	Number	Percent
Very helpful	53	100%
Neutral	0	0%
Not helpful	0	0%
Not applicable	0	0%
Total responses	53	100%

5. To what extent did the library staff and the consult address the following values?

Value	Did not address this	Neutral	Completely addressed this	Not applicable	Total responses
The consult facilitated excellence in teaching, learning, or research	1 (1.9%)	1 (1/9%)	38 (71.1%)	2 (3.8%)	42 (79.2%)
The librarian/library staff responded to my information needs	0 (0%)	1 (1.9%)	46 (86.8%)	0 (0%)	47 (88.6%)
The consult reflected a respect for my confidentiality as a library user	1 (1.9%)	2 (3.8%)	35 (66%)	14 (26.4%)	52 (98.1%)

Additional comments you have regarding the consult:

Typical comment responses:

“I have booked many appointments with [the librarian] to get help with researching databases. [They are] **AMAZING**, very helpful, passionate, knowledgeable, patient, and friendly!”

“I’ve learned so much from these appointments that has been **crucial** to my research and course work and always **highly recommend** fellow students to use this fabulous resource!

Recommendations & next steps

- Conducting survey on a sampling basis
- Remove or revise problematic questions
- Mandatory questions
- Change distribution process
- Incentive?
- Adapt the tool for other reference interactions



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Thank you!

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References & image credits

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