

Reference Service Policy

Saint Mary's College Library

I. Introduction

A. Purpose

1. This document explains the policies and guidelines used by Library staff providing reference services. This policy reflects our commitment to a high quality of reference service consistent with the available resources of the Saint Mary's College Library. They are informed by professional best practices including the American Library Association RUSA Access to Information Committee *Guidelines for Information Service*¹ and the RUSA MOUSS Management of Reference Committee *Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers*².
2. While written primarily for Library Staff providing reference services in the SMC Library, this document may be made available to Library patrons. This policy is subject to annual review by the Reference Team and the Coordinator of Reference Services. Policy revisions are recommended by the Reference Team and are then approved by the Dean of Academic Resources. If the recommended revisions are substantial, the Dean will consult with the Academic Senate Library Advisory Committee.

B. Reference Service Objectives

1. Provide consistent and thorough assistance to all primary users of the Library's collections, resources and services. Reference served may be provided in a number of ways as systems, staffing and patron needs change. The primary services provided are regularly scheduled hours of service at the Reference Desk (both in-person and online), and in-depth interview and follow-up appointments for patrons with complex information and research needs.
2. Reference staff will use every opportunity when providing the services described above, to instruct Library users, especially Saint Mary's college students, in general and specialized information literacy skills.

II. Reference Staffing

- A. Reference service is provided by librarians and other trained library staff. Individual commitment of hours is established according to duties outlined in job descriptions, and in consultation with the Reference Team and appropriate supervisors.
- B. The Reference Desk is staffed on a regular schedule during fall and spring semesters and January Term. Reference hours are increased slightly during

¹ American Library Association. RUSA Access to Information Committee, Reference and User Services Association. (2000). *Guidelines for Information Service*. Retrieved February 27, 2014 from the American Library Association/RUSA Web site <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesinformation>

² American Library Association. RUSA/MOUSS Management of Reference Committee. (2011). *Guidelines for Behavioral performance of Reference and Information Service Providers*. Retrieved February 27, 2014 from the American Library Association RUSA Web site <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral>

midterms and finals and reduced during semester breaks, the winter holidays, and summer.

III. Reference Services

- A. **Primary Clientele:** Current Saint Mary's students, faculty, faculty emeriti, administrators, staff, and members of the Saint Mary's Brothers Communities comprise the primary clientele for the Library's reference services. Primary clientele have access to all reference and related services.
- B. **Non-primary clientele** may have access to the Library's reference collection, Reference Desk service, and electronic databases on site without charge. Guest computers stations are made available to non-primary clientele using a guest login. Non-primary clientele may **not** use Interlibrary Borrowing services, are **not** eligible for remote access to Saint Mary's Library subscription catalogs and databases, or in-depth reference appointments. Limited telephone reference service is available to non-primary users. The email service, "Ask a Librarian," is chiefly a service for primary users. However, exceptions may be made for questions that are unique to Saint Mary's collections (e.g. questions regarding the College and local history or the Lasallian or Catholic traditions of the College).
- C. **Service Priorities:** Patrons are ordinarily served in the order that they come to the Reference desk. Patrons needing brief assistance, however, may be served before those needing extensive assistance. Primary clientele should be given priority during busy periods. Primary clientele requiring extensive help may be referred to the appropriate subject librarian. Instances in which students from other colleges or schools are asking for extensive help, or assistance which conflicts with the staff's ability to meet the needs of primary clientele, should be reported to the Coordinator of Reference services who will follow up with the patron (s) and the institution in question.
- D. **Service Limitations:** Reference Staff make every effort to assist with a wide range of inquiries from a variety of patrons; however, staff do not provide medical or legal advice, appraise books, complete assignments or compile bibliographies for students. Reference Staff may provide patrons with materials to answer such questions themselves. Reference Staff do not provide in-depths assistance for genealogical research unless the research necessitates use of unique College collections such as the College Archives, or unless the research directly relates to the completion of academic coursework or research. The Library does not provide proctoring services.
- E. **Confidentiality:** Although reference transactions take place in a public area, and although Reference staff must sometimes exchange information regarding particular questions, the transactions and all related records are regarded as confidential. Particular care should be taken concerning electronic communications with patrons (Ask a Librarian email, IM, and Text). Patron IM addresses collected by the program will be deleted regularly. Ask a Librarian messages will be deleted every 3 months. (See "Library Confidentiality Policy" and Saint Mary's College of California's Library Response to Court Orders, Subpoenas or Search Warrants" in the "Reference Procedures and Policies" binder at the reference desk.

Approved by Librarians' Council, 8/11/88; revised 9/93 and 12/95 by Reference Librarians; revised 12/01, 6/05, 8/08 by The Reference Team and approved by the Library Cabinet, 8/08; revised by the Reference Team 2/14; approved by the Dean of Academic Resources and the Senate Library Committee, 4/14.