

## PASSHE Library Chairpersons' Meeting

*Questions in italics were submitted to me by Stephanie Steely.*

### 1) What is Ask Here PA?

Ask Here PA is a new service of the Office of Commonwealth Libraries, Bureau of Library Development, and managed by HSLC/Access PA that will provide synchronous virtual reference, including online chat services to the residents of Pennsylvania, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Ask Here PA will also be part of a national consortium organized by OCLC which will provide shared virtual reference services on a national basis.

### 2) What are the local coordinator's job descriptions?

The Ask Here PA Site Coordinator will play an important role in the success of the Ask Here PA service. The Site Coordinator will have the following responsibilities:

- a) The Site Coordinator serves as the primary liaison between the participating library and Ask Here PA administration
- b) The Site Coordinator ensures that training needs and quality assurance is being met by:
  - i) Reviewing transcripts of sessions provided by staff
  - ii) Working with staff to ensure that skills are obtained and maintained
  - iii) Requesting training for staff as needed
- c) The Site Coordinator's scheduling responsibilities will include:
  - i) Working with Ask Here PA administration to schedule the library shifts for the Ask Here PA service
  - ii) Ensuring that local staff log-in and staff Ask Here PA during the library's assigned times
  - iii) Working with other Site Coordinators to exchange shifts as necessary
- d) The Site Coordinator's support responsibilities are:
  - i) Serving as the first line of support for local scheduling changes
  - ii) Understanding the Ask Here PA support procedures
- e) The Site Coordinator's promotional responsibilities are:
  - i) To work with local web administration to ensure that the Ask Here PA logo is prominently integrated on the first level web site and throughout the web site as appropriate
  - ii) To work with local public relations staff to ensure that Ask Here PA is integrated into the local promotion plan.

### 3) What are the duties of the librarians with regard to this service?

Ask Here PA staff members are expected to provide live chat coverage to all Ask Here PA patrons during scheduled shifts and in follow-up when necessary. Academic librarians have primary responsibility for patrons that enter via the academic queue and provide back-up coverage to the public queue.

**4) Who is the overall coordinator of the service for the Commonwealth Library?**

Ask Here PA is a service of the Office of Commonwealth Libraries and is managed by HSLC/Access PA as part of the Access Pennsylvania program by which the service is funded. The service is coordinated by Vince Mariner and staff training is conducted by staff from HSLC or PALINET.

**5) Is there any money involved for the schools that are participating?**

No. Funds are not provided to participating libraries. The cost of the service (software, participation in the 24/7 Cooperative, promotion) is provided by the Office of Commonwealth Libraries. Libraries contribute staff time (5 hours per week) and are provided with access to the QuestionPoint software, a unique link for their web sites, promotional materials, and staff training.

**6) Is the software as robust as Docutek's VRL?**

Yes. I have three years experience with Docutek's VRLplus software. The software is quite similar. One of the benefits of using OCLC's QuestionPoint software is that it provides Ask Here PA with the opportunity to participate in the national 24/7 Cooperative, thus enabling us to provide live chat 24/7/365.

**7) Would we be able to replace our VRL with this?**

Yes.

**8) Will I have to install the QuestionPoint software on computers for staff and/or patrons?**

No. QuestionPoint is a web-based product.

**9) Will my patrons be able to use traditional instant messaging services like Yahoo!, MSN and AIM with Ask Here PA?**

Not at this time. OCLC has plans to integrate this functionality into a future version of QuestionPoint.

**10) Does it have a chat function?**

Yes. QuestionPoint includes both live chat and page pushing functionality. Additionally, QuestionPoint is a complete reference management system for live chat, follow-up to live chat, and for any question received by a library; no matter the point of origin.

**11) For statistics, can we keep track of reference questions from our students?**

Yes. Libraries that participate are provided with a unique link to the service for use on their web sites. This unique link enables staff to identify your users during the live chat session, automatically directs "follow-up by patron's library" questions to your library, and provides you with a robust reporting system.

**12) Will SSHE librarians be asked to staff this? There may be some contractual issues...**

SSHE librarians already staff Ask Here PA. Mansfield, Bloomsburg, and Kutztown are already participating in Ask Here PA.

**13) What if someone is scheduled to work at say, 3:00 am? Will we be paid for overload, or given compensation time off from our primary jobs if we participate?**

Pennsylvania librarians staff Ask Here PA from 8am to 9pm. Participating libraries provide availability and they are scheduled to staff Ask Here PA based on the availability provided. Participating libraries provide 5 hours per week to Ask Here PA. After hours staffing is provided by the OCLC Cooperative.

**14) What is the OCLC 24/7 Cooperative?**

The 24/7 Cooperative provides round-the-clock coverage for libraries and to bolster service when and where it is needed most. Librarians at participating locations in the cooperative utilize the QuestionPoint software system hosted by OCLC in order to provide virtual reference to all member libraries, contributing a fraction of time in order to receive complete coverage.

**15) What happens to a question if we can't answer it in a timely manner? Do we follow up the next day, or pass the question along to another librarian?**

If the answer cannot be answered in a timely manner during live chat, the librarian can make the determination to set the resolution code to "follow-up by me" or "follow-up by patron's library".

**16) What electronic resources will high school students, for example, have access to?**

All Ask Here PA staff has access to the entire suite of EBSCO databases provided in the Power Library. Any librarian staffing Ask Here PA can use the EBSCO databases to provide resources to any Ask Here PA patron. We are actively pursuing access to other subscription databases for the service.

**17) How are requests for homework help handled? Will we be expected to spend time providing tutoring services?**

Ask Here PA will help students understand what they can expect from the Ask Here PA service. Assistance will be provided to students with research and answering questions but not with tutoring or homework help.

**18) We pay for database subscriptions based on an FTE equivalent. How do we count high school student users? High school students currently do not have access to our databases, due to licensing restrictions.**

Please see the answer to number 16. You must refer to your license agreements when determining whether or not you can use your databases with others. Participating libraries are encouraged to provide access to databases for other librarians so they are able to access databases for your patrons. However you are not required to provide access outside of your primary clientele or your existing licenses. (Note that the

patron selection process makes academic librarians the back-up for all non-college patrons.)

**19) *Are outside people being hired to provide reference service for Ask Here PA? If so, they are doing bargaining unit work and APSCUF would frown on this.***

The Office of Commonwealth Libraries and HSLC/Access PA do not hire staff. We do participate in the national 24/7 QuestionPoint Cooperative. QuestionPoint does hire librarians as independent contractors to provide back-up for overnight and holiday coverage. These are normally hours that are beyond the regular work times for most Pennsylvania librarians.

**20) *How will the Ask Here PA librarian know what electronic resources are available to the student posing a question? We might know what databases our sister SSHE schools offer, but we won't know what type of access a high school student may have.***

Via an easily accessible tool built into the chat monitor software called "Policies", librarians staffing the service will have access to a plethora of information about the patron's library. This information includes; Homepage URL, Web Catalog URL, Phone, Hours, Location, Databases, Research Guides, Library Cards, Loan Periods, Loan Limits, Renewals, Late Fees, etc.

**21) *Are questions that can't be answered by the Ask Here PA librarian on duty forwarded to the institution of the virtual patron?***

Yes, the librarian can code the question as "follow-up by patron's library" and the question will automatically be routed to the patron's library or shared follow-up, depending upon whether or not the patron's library is a participating library.

**22) *What are the legal implications of answering medical or legal questions for virtual patrons? For example, what if the Ask Here PA librarian offers medical or legal information to a 17 year old about abortion, etc.? There may be liability issues.***

Medical and legal information is handled in the same manner as if the patron were in-person or on the phone. There are no liability issues outside of those that exist for reference services already being provided through other means. Best practices apply in the same manner. An added benefit of the chat service is that transcripts are available for review by site coordinators and service management permitting close monitoring of service quality and any issues which may arise.