

Student Leadership at the Reference Desk: Overcoming Obstacles to Student Success

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Libraries frequently utilize students to serve as peer leaders at the reference desk, but this decision is often accompanied by a high turnover rate, mundane customer service, or a lack of professionalism. Libraries can increase the value of their organization by implementing small changes to the way in which they hire, train, manage, or mentor student employees for leadership. At Biola University Library, Reference Services Assistants (RSAs) function as peer leaders by answering reference questions in-person, via the phone, and through the chat reference service every hour the library is open (98.5 hours per week). They also keep statistics and serve as liaisons for the campus IT department. RSAs undergo a rigorous interview process, comply with a strict appearance policy, participate in group and peer to peer training, and receive continual feedback from reference librarians. These practices promote a professional working environment, in which students can excel at customer service and maintain interest in their job. One goal of the university is to increase student vocational preparation, in both curriculum and co-curricular areas. As one of the largest employers of student workers on campus, the Library is in a unique position to assist with this goal.