Principles of Referral

The Reference Department in Mullins Library is the central service point for referring patrons to sources of information unless a patron’s question falls into the clearly defined parameters of another service area. Reference assumes responsibility for any question that falls outside the parameters of another area. Employees of other areas are encouraged to call the Reference desk for assistance or guidance whenever the direct route to the appropriate service area is unclear or the area is closed.

Each service area should keep in mind the following principles when answering any question:

1) Offer patrons more than one avenue since multiple options may be relevant; e.g.,
   i) Call the main Reference desk or other service area on behalf of the patron
   ii) Direct the patron to Reference
   iii) Give the hours and location of the service area that you think can help

2) In any case of uncertainty, call ahead for the patron in order to
   i) Verify that the other service area should answer the patron’s question
   ii) Notify the other area so that staff may prepare for the patron
   iii) Explain to the staff in the other area what sources have been consulted

3) Make a second attempt to help if the first attempt fails; e.g.,
   i) If the appropriate area is closed, call the Reference desk and refer the patron to Reference if appropriate
   ii) If you cannot reach anyone, take down the patron’s question and contact information so that the appropriate person can follow up

4) Determine that the patron is satisfied (ideal) or assisted to the best of your ability
   i) Ask if the patron needs additional help
   ii) Ask if the patron would like to speak with a librarian or supervisor
   iii) Suggest a substitute title or an alternative source, or use ILLiad to request material not available at the University Libraries from another library
   iv) Contact Reference or another appropriate service area for suggestions

5) Regard every interaction with a patron as an opportunity for good public relations
   i) Provide a business card or a name, department, and phone number when appropriate
   ii) Treat patron respectfully and try to help, but refer as soon as appropriate to avoid wasting time

6) Engage patrons in the research process and encourage them to do their own research in order to help them develop information literacy for lifelong learning

7) Offer a user response form and administrative contacts, especially for patrons who are either noticeably satisfied or displeased and who may want to comment further

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