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Satellite Reference at the University of Mississippi

The Oxford campus of The University of Mississippi (UM) currently has approximately 12,600 students; about 3,400 of them are in the School of Business Administration (SBA). There are around 3,300 undergraduates, 47 MBA students, and 62 PhD students (although not all are at the Oxford campus). The UM SBA has forty-two full-time faculty and eighteen part-time adjunct instructors. I arrived at UM in December 2003; it didn't take long for me to realize despite the fact that business students make up more than 25%% of the total student body, they were not coming to the library. I spoke with several business faculty about their frustrations with their students relying too heavily on Google and various Internet sites for their research.

It is not secret that the nature of library reference is changing. Students don't have to come to the library to get everything they need for their assignments. Educating the user to do his or her own research is becoming the norm as opposed to the old reference model of doing the research for the user. So, if students aren't going to come to the library, why not take the library to the students?

In the summer of 2004 I began to explore the idea of establishing satellite reference in the SBA. No one in my library had considered off-site reference, and I wanted to hear from other academic business librarians who had done satellite reference. I emailed the following message to the BUSLIB listserv on July 8, 2004:

This is mainly directed towards academics librarians who are business librarians in general libraries.

Have any of you set up an office in the business school? If you have, did it prove to be worthwhile?

I received numerous responses from librarians who were either holding reference hours or had considered it. My initial listserv post led to several off-list email conversations with librarians who currently had business school office hours. I asked about number of hours, equipment needed, and overall response from faculty and students. I put together a list of what I would

Because it is subject reference, most consultations are lengthier and in-depth; most will last twenty to thirty minutes. I am still working on the promotion of my satellite reference, but little by little, the word is getting out. Students and faculty are not beating down the door to get to me, I have had days when I had anywhere from two to four people waiting for assistance.

I have accomplished what I wanted: make business students and faculty aware of the resources the library has available—and one of those resources is me. While forty consultations over two semesters may not seem like a lot, the majority of those consultations would never have happened if I had not been in the business school. Through satellite reference I have developed