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## Peer Research Mentors at Gettysburg College: Transforming Student Library Jobs into High- Impact Learning Experiences

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# Peer Research Mentors at Gettysburg College: Transforming Student Library Jobs into High-Impact Learning Experiences

## **Abstract**

Research and Instruction librarians at Gettysburg College developed a Peer Research Mentor (PRM) program for undergraduate students. The program is designed to empower a group of student employees to work in partnership with experienced librarians in order to increase a PRM's own research skills and support other student researchers more effectively. The program focuses on student training, reference service, and outreach to other students. The authors share the development of the program; describe their approach to training, supervision, and assessment; and offer insight about how to operate and sustain a similar program with limited resources.

## **Keywords**

peer-assisted learning, research mentorship, student employment, college library, gettysburg college

## **Disciplines**

Educational Leadership | Higher Education | Information Literacy | Library and Information Science

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### Transforming Student Library Jobs into High-Impact Learning Experiences

#### **Institutional Context**

Student workers are central to the life and operation of academic libraries. Without student labor, many libraries would be hard-pressed to quickly shelve returned materials, staff late-night library hours, keep up with incoming and outgoing interlibrary loan requests, and complete the wide variety of small tasks that are essential to library operations. Gettysburg College's Musselman Library is no different. As a four-year, residential, liberal arts college in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, we have a full time enrollment of 2,632 undergraduates (Office of Institutional Analysis, Gettysburg College, 2015). The library hires more student workers than any other campus office – on average, 60 student employees during the academic year.

While student employees are placed in all library departments, our office (Research & Instruction) has historically employed only a single student worker who typically worked less than six hours a week entering data or updating pages on the library website. The published literature is rich with examples of how other reference librarians have hired students to work as reference assistants, training them to answer basic reference questions and referring to a professional librarian only when needed (Faix, 2014; Faix, et al., 2010; Holliday & Nordgren, 2010; Stanfield & Palmer, 2010; Heinlen, 1976). For these institutions, training students to answer most reference questions has enabled librarians to spend their available work hours answering more advanced and complicated user questions through the research consultation. This model also enables librarians to provide more information literacy instruction or be a more

active liaison with academic departments. However, we were not interested in shifting librarians away from the desk. Instead, we wanted to use peer-assisted learning to transform both our student employees' work and the service provided at our Research Help Desk. Our primary goal was to empower a group of student employees to work in partnership with experienced librarians in order to increase their own research skills and to support other student researchers more effectively.

In our residential liberal arts college context, librarians from all library departments value time spent working directly with students, faculty, staff, and campus visitors. Our reference work informs a range of other library activities, including website design, cataloging, collection development, and instruction. Indeed, it is a point of pride that all Gettysburg librarians (with the exception of the dean and college archivist) work at least two hours a week at the Research Help Desk. We wanted to invite student employees into this service point and engage them with our existing service philosophy.

At the institutional level, Gettysburg College's four "strategic directions" also inform the philosophy of our Peer Research Mentor (PRM) program. These themes were first articulated in 2007 and include engagement, distinction, access, and connection. At the library, we paid particular attention to the first direction, engagement, which for Gettysburg means that we will "...offer the most compelling educational experience possible, emphasizing active engagement through a variety of learning experiences inside and outside the classroom that build leadership potential in our graduates" (Gettysburg College, 2015, p. 3). Library staff began to reexamine how the library supports this strategic direction through our collections, events, internships, and programs. In a 2013 update on the plan's progress, Gettysburg's president challenged the campus to "build a culture that values academic rigor that supports students as they cultivate their

intellectual and civic passions...” (Riggs, 2013, p. 4-5). Around the same time, the high-impact educational practices identified by George Kuh (2008) became a particular focus for our provost. Of the eight practices that Kuh identifies as being beneficial to increasing rates of student retention and student engagement, we gave particular attention to service learning/community-based learning. This practice emphasizes opportunities that enable students to apply their classroom learning to real-world settings. We felt we could contribute to institutional goals by changing the nature of how we work with students in the library. Specifically, we wanted to structure certain student positions less like student jobs and more like high-impact educational experiences.

### **Background of the Program**

As a team of research and instruction librarians, we have followed the Project Information Literacy (PIL) reports since their inception in 2009 and have used them to inform our teaching practice, outreach efforts, and learning materials. Two PIL studies were especially influential as we began thinking about what would become our Peer Research Mentor program. We were struck by the findings in a 2013 study on the information-seeking challenges faced by first-semester college students (Head). As part of their transition from high school to college, first-year students found it daunting to work in college libraries that were significantly larger than their school libraries. In the same study, students also communicated an awareness that their Google-style searches were no longer adequate for college-level research. As a bit of good news for libraries, 29% of student respondents found campus librarians helpful to guide them with college-level research. This comparatively high number caught our attention because an earlier study by Head and Eisenberg (2010) found that only 11% of college student respondents turned to librarians for help when evaluating sources during research for coursework.

Knowing that students both need and benefit from the help of librarians and that students are more likely to seek assistance from peers than from librarians, we considered how to bring these groups closer together. We wanted to help our first-year students with the difficult transition to college and connect with the significant number of upper-level students who were not seeking help from librarians. As reference providers and information literacy instructors, we knew where students struggled in the research process and where they were and were not getting help. We were familiar with the practice of placing students at reference desks, but we wanted to go further in order to attract reluctant student researchers to our services. We began to search for how other libraries were addressing this situation.

Bodemer (2014) describes a program at California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo in which undergraduate students have been employed to provide reference assistance to their peers and basic information literacy instruction in single sessions with lower-division English and communications courses. Bodemer describes the impact of the student-taught instruction sections positively. In a survey delivered to students at the end of the student-taught session, student teacher scores were higher than librarian scores for several questions. For example, student instructors ranked higher than librarians on questions focused on the perceived relevancy of the session to the research assignment, presentation of information in a way that could be understood, that questions were encouraged and responded to, and that the session provided a solid understanding of the material presented.

Our excitement about working with student colleagues at the Research Help Desk grew. We strategized about how to capitalize on the peer-to-peer connection and knew that visibility of our student employees would be key. We wanted students in the library to see a PRM at the Research Help Desk who seemed similar to them, who knew what their assignments were like,

and who could explain how to successfully conduct research in appropriate, student-friendly language.

Because peer-assisted learning is already an established part of our campus culture, we felt that students and faculty would respond positively to this model applied in the library setting. Many Gettysburg students already work as diversity peer educators, leadership mentors, orientation leaders, and peer learning associates in courses. We also felt that if we carefully selected PRMs from a range of disciplines and co-curricular activities, the program could capitalize on existing social relationships among students and connect the library with student researchers who may not otherwise seek help from a librarian at the desk. We intentionally chose the title “Peer Research Mentor” to associate our student employees with other peer educators in our existing campus culture.

We knew that other libraries were supporting peer-assisted learning by training students well and having them provide reference service, and we wanted these two activities to form the core of our program. However, we also knew that reference and instruction could take many other forms (like creating online research guides, designing online tutorials, delivering workshops, or doing other projects conceived of by PRMs), so we added a third central element to our program: an outreach project. These three pillars helped us describe the PRM experience to potential applicants and drove the design of the training program.

Next, we identified five major learning goals for Peer Research Mentors. We wanted our PRMs to be able to:

- demonstrate a working knowledge of information resources and services available at a small, academic library;



- apply advanced search strategies and evaluative criteria in order to assist and mentor library users during the research process;
- conduct a reference interview in a variety of modes (in-person, telephone, and virtually);
- design and implement outreach programs for peers, including one-on-one research appointments, drop-in workshops, instructional videos, etc.;
- contribute to a dynamic, supportive, peer research mentor community.

Based upon our planned goals, we drafted a job description that would be attractive to potential student applicants. The job advertisement describes a PRM as “a student who works alongside librarians to support students engaged in research, while also improving one’s own research skills” (Musselman Library, 2014). In order to ensure a broad representation across class levels, we specified that the position would be open to four rising sophomores and two rising juniors in any major. We explicitly identified three important qualifications for potential applicants: a desire to learn, improve, and master research skills in more than one academic area; an interest or background in education, mentoring, and/or tutoring; and strong communication and organization skills (Musselman Library, 2014).

At this point in our planning process, we refined our PRM program goals and placed them into language easily understood by students. The job advertisement articulates that PRMs will engage in the three main pillars of our program:

1. **Training.** The mentors will participate in a series of concentrated training sessions in August during the week before classes begin, as well as ongoing training throughout the year.

2. **Reference service.** Mentors will work at the library's main Research Help Desk two to four hours per week, partnered with another peer mentor and/or professional librarian.
3. **Outreach.** Mentors will design and implement an outreach program each semester. Each mentor will consult with a supervising librarian in order to customize a project that reflects the mentor's interests and skills (Musselman Library, 2014).

We created a recruitment plan that would allow us to appeal directly to students. We employed all of the communication media available to us on campus: messages to the news and event email digests for first-year students and sophomores; a promotional article in our campus newspaper; and promotional web banners and other images that we used on the library website and social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram).

We contacted faculty in certain departments that are traditionally heavy library users (English and History) or that we thought would have interested students based on interests in teaching/mentoring (Education). We advertised through our monthly update email that all librarian liaisons send to faculty in academic departments. We sent targeted messages to instructors who had taught first-year seminars the previous fall and might be able to recommend strong rising sophomores. During hiring for the fall 2015 cohort, we made a special effort to attract a more diverse pool of applicants by appealing to campus offices like the Intercultural Resource Center and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Asexual (LGBTQA) Advocacy & Education office, as well as to various student organizations.

Based on our previous success with streamlined and accessible application requirements for library intern positions, we kept the application process simple for aspiring PRMs. To apply, we asked only for a letter describing their interest in the position, their education and career goals, any relevant coursework they have completed, and the names and contact information for

two to three references. When reviewing applications and interviewing students, we looked for students who were eager and excited about the possibility to work with their peers in this way, who had coursework or jobs in which they have had to teach or mentor others, and who came from a variety of class levels, disciplines, and campus activities. After the initial round of hiring, we began including current PRMs in the interviews, too. We also routinely consider the unique qualities of the existing PRM pool and try to add fresh elements to round out the group's composition. Figure 1 describes PRM class levels and majors by semester.

Figure 1

*Composition of PRMs by Academic Year and Major, Fall 2014-Spring 2016*

	Academic Years Represented	Majors Represented
Semester 1 (Fall 2014)	Sophomores (4) Juniors (2)	English French/Globalization Studies Psychology (2) Sociology Studio Art/Environmental Studies
Semester 2 (Spring 2015)	First-years (2) Sophomores (4) Juniors (2)	English (2) French/Globalization Studies Health Sciences Psychology (2) Sociology Studio Art/Environmental Studies
Semester 3 (Fall 2015)	Sophomores (4) Juniors (2) Senior (1)	English Health Sciences History/International Affairs Music Education Psychology (2) Sociology
Semester 4 (Spring 2016)	Sophomores (5)	Biology

	Juniors (3)	English English/Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies French/Globalization Studies Health Sciences Music Education Psychology (2)
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*Note.* The total size of the PRM cohort averages around eight students, depending on the number of graduating students and students studying abroad. Some PRMs have double majors.

During any given semester, the PRM cohort includes six to eight students. The composition of the group fluctuates as students study off campus or graduate. Our budget restricts us to eight students per semester. We began the program with no new source of funding; our library dean reallocated internal funds to launch the initiative. Colleagues in other library departments evaluated and consolidated their existing student positions in order to reallocate funds to the PRM budget. We should note that Peer Research Mentors are paid a higher wage than other library student workers due to the high level of training and knowledge required. The starting wage for library student employees is \$7.25/hour; PRMs earn \$8.50/hour. The reallocation project made it possible for us to begin the program, but we are investigating potential donors to supplement the budget and sustain the program into the future. For now, we are able to support six to eight PRMs per semester for an average of six to eight hours per week.

### **Training/Preparation of Peer Mentors**

We know that conducting research is challenging for students, so we predicted that our PRMs would feel even more anxious about the prospect of assisting their peers in doing research. In our initial cohort, only one of our students had worked in a library before, and a few had

experience with tutoring or teaching. None had experience with a help desk or even felt confident about the full research process.

Knowing this, we carefully developed a training design that would help PRMs feel prepared and supported from the outset of their work – this evolved into an intensive initial training we dubbed “boot camp.” The boot camp curriculum provides information about our library building, how to conduct a reference interview, and best practices when working with peers. Training also included opportunities to meet a range of library staff members who might support the PRMs or to whom PRMs might refer students, such as the library dean, the systems librarian, the director of special collections and archives, or the extended operation specialist who works until 11:00 p.m. The heart of the boot camp curriculum is structured around the common difficulties students face throughout the research process, as identified in Head’s 2013 PIL report. These challenges include: getting started, defining a topic, finding articles in library databases, and evaluating sources (see Figure 2). By the end of the boot camp, we hoped PRMs would be able to understand where a student patron was in the research process and feel ready to guide them to the next step.

Figure 2

*A Model Training Curriculum for Peer Research Mentor Boot Camp*

<b>Library Tour</b>	PRM-guided tour of the library
<b>Introduction to Research</b>	Training overview and introduction to the research process model
<b>Discovery &amp; Access: Books</b>	Local catalog vs. WorldCat, Library of Congress classification, course reserves, interlibrary loan, etc.
<b>Practice – Library Olympics</b>	Games as assessment: book relay race, “Where in the Library is It?” location-based trivia, “The Hot Seat” to practice reference questions related to book searches

<b>Discovery &amp; Access: Finding Articles</b>	Understanding database structure, identifying the best research for a question, searching and advanced search techniques
<b>Discovery &amp; Access: Journal Locator and Evaluation</b>	Checking library holdings for serials, retrieving full text articles, and interlibrary loan; Evaluating information sources (peer review, scholarly vs. popular, etc.)
<b>Research Help Desk Basics</b>	Conducting the reference interview; Recording reference questions, printing, and technology troubleshooting
<b>Practice: Library Olympics and Closing Ceremonies</b>	Games as assessment: “Find that Citation” and “Can You Help Me?” to practice reference interview skills
<b>Final Reflections</b>	Self-assessment reflection on own skills and possible outreach projects to discuss with supervisor

PRMs beginning in the fall semester participate in a two-day version of the boot camp, which is scheduled the week before classes begin. PRMs beginning in the spring experience a condensed boot camp that takes place during a single day. The entire staff of the Research & Instruction department is present throughout boot camp, but sections of content are developed and taught by pairs of librarians. Each pair keeps the program learning goals in mind when designing lessons. We also work hard to consolidate information in “chunks,” avoid lecture in favor of active learning exercises, gamify pieces of content, and integrate formative assessments throughout the training. Now that we have taught the lesson plans several times, we rotate responsibility for different parts of the training content. As a result, we have a shared ownership over the curriculum and update it together as needed.

The research boot camp is only one element of our training program. Peer Research Mentors also receive continuous training throughout the semester through a series of biweekly

meetings. In addition to developing a sense of comradery and community within the group, the meetings provide us an opportunity to build upon content provided during boot camp, introduce new concepts and skills, and respond to timely topics or shared issues from the Research Help Desk or with PRM-designed outreach projects. Initial meetings were librarian-led, but now veteran PRMs design and facilitate the meetings. In so doing, they further develop their teaching and mentoring skills. Meeting topics have included disciplinary resources, copyright issues for students using images or video, reading and downloading ebooks, open access publishing, and more (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

*A Sample of Leaders and Content for Biweekly PRM Meetings*

<b>Librarian Led</b>	<b>Peer Research Mentor Led</b>
Historical resources for research on the American Civil War	Funky technology in the library: microfilm readers and more
Interlibrary loan and off-site storage	Resources for research in music
Designing outreach projects	Searching for art images
Reading and downloading library ebooks	Academic integrity and the honor code
Using Special Collections & Archives	Citing primary sources in Turabian

Another element of our training approach is the weekly research question or resource of the week, which alternate weekly. These give PRMs a chance to both puzzle out tricky reference questions without the stress of a patron waiting for an answer and explore databases they have not yet used. Practice questions include finding statistical data, locating sources from an incomplete citation, using a reference work to identify a poem based upon its first line, and more. We also use the weekly questions to introduce PRMs to a range of specialized disciplinary indexes, digital historical primary source collections, or other less frequently used tools. In fall

2015, we transferred these questions to Moodle, our campus learning management system (previously they were shared via email). We used the “advanced forum” feature to post the questions, so that all PRMs could respond and review other responses. In this way, PRMs see the wide range of possible strategies a person may take to arrive at the same answer, or how a person’s individual research experience can result in different perspectives on the same resource.

The final element of our approach to ongoing training is the “librarian buddy” system. PRMs co-staff the Research Help Desk with an experienced librarian. The PRM sits in the chair at our primary service point, and the librarian is close enough to see and hear any interactions and assist the PRM in a supportive, collaborative way. When users are not at the desk, PRMs and librarians can debrief patron interactions and research questions. PRMs are encouraged to work on the weekly questions during their desk shifts so that they can discuss topics and resources with their librarian buddy. Librarians who have shifts scheduled with PRMs develop strong working relationships with them!

### **Implementation of the Program**

Our PRMs’ average week includes two shifts at the Research Help Desk (four hours total), planning or carrying out outreach projects (about two hours), and a weekly check-in meeting with their direct librarian supervisor (30 minutes). Every other week, students attend the biweekly meeting with all PRMs and Research & Instruction Librarians (one hour).

Direct supervision of the PRMs is distributed across librarians in the department in order to balance the work load and sustain the program. This also enables PRMs to develop a close, mentoring relationship with their supervisor. Individual meetings are devoted to advising on outreach projects (which may be completed individually or in groups), debriefing reference



questions, discussing areas in which PRMs would like more training, and other topics of concern to PRMs.

While all PRM supervisors are Research & Instruction Librarians, the program could not thrive without support from a range of other library staff members. Staff from outside the department have been especially important to the success of the PRM outreach projects. They have connected PRMs to key departmental faculty, assisted with technology, and provided insight about resources and issues relevant to their librarian liaison areas. Obtaining this buy-in across the library was never an issue as we have an established culture which prioritizes supporting our student library interns in several departments.

When we began the program, the outreach pillar was necessarily the least developed. We waited eagerly for the first cohort of PRMs to develop, implement, and assess outreach projects. After three semesters, we can boast an impressive range of projects that have extended the reach of the library to new student populations on campus. Our PRMs have designed drop-in workshops on bibliographic management tools like RefWorks and Zotero. They have created a series of research workshops for first-semester international students. PRMs interested in our formal instruction program have updated and created new online research guides, designed and developed online instructional videos, and provided research consultations to students in whose courses they are embedded. In many cases, students have had great success working with faculty in courses they have already taken; typically these PRMs are available during “office hours” to provide research consultations on assignments. Some PRMs have even taught short research help lessons as part of a class or co-taught an information literacy instruction session with a librarian.

### **Evaluation of the Program**

From the very beginning, we planned a range of approaches to help us understand and assess the impact of our Peer Research Mentors. First, we assess PRM activity at our Research Help Desk by tracking questions and answers in our Springshare LibAnswers system. We record the usual detail about reference transactions (who answered it, question, answer, time, mode, and READ scale). In addition, we also track what we call a “PRM connection.” A PRM connection is when a student patron approaches the Research Help Desk because they know or at least recognize the PRM on duty. If the PRM knows the student from a class, residence hall, student club, or some other context, we assume a PRM connection and instruct PRMs to check the custom box in LibAnswers. PRMs do not always have a PRM connection with student patrons, but they often do.

Before implementing the program, we hypothesized that PRMs would draw student patrons to the Research Help Desk who might not have come otherwise. We certainly hoped for this outcome as our reference transactions had declined 20% between the 2010-11 and 2013-14 academic years. Figure 4 shows the decline in reference transactions recorded during the two academic years preceding the PRM program, as well as the increase experienced after PRMs started working at the desk.

Figure 4

*Reference Transactions by Semester: Fall 2012-Fall 2015*

	Total Reference Questions	Questions Answered by PRMs	“PRM Connection” Questions
Fall 2012	2,196		
Spring 2013	1,487		
Fall 2013	1,933		
Spring 2014	1,230		

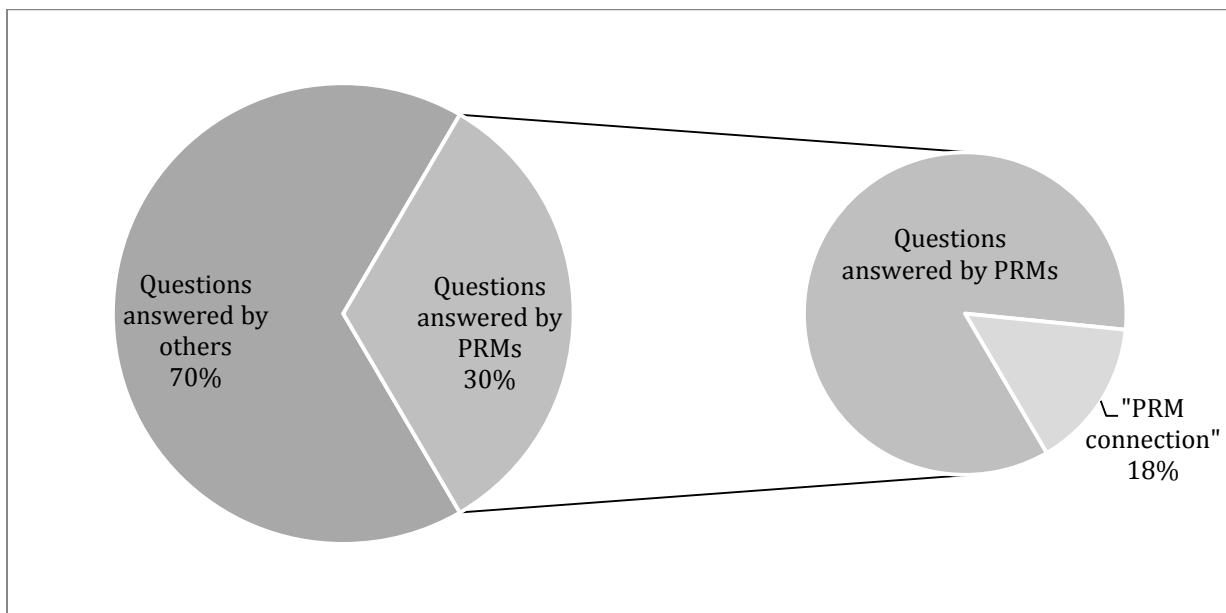
Fall 2014	1,997	530	94
Spring 2015	1,544	520	91
Fall 2015	2,005	463	62

*Note.* The PRM program began in fall 2014.

Figures 5 and 6 show the percentage of transactions that were handled by PRMs compared to other library staff. In 2014-15, 30% of all questions were answered by PRMs. In fall 2015, the percentage was slightly lower at 23%. Figures 5 and 6 also show how many PRM questions were asked by someone with a connection to the PRM.

Figure 5

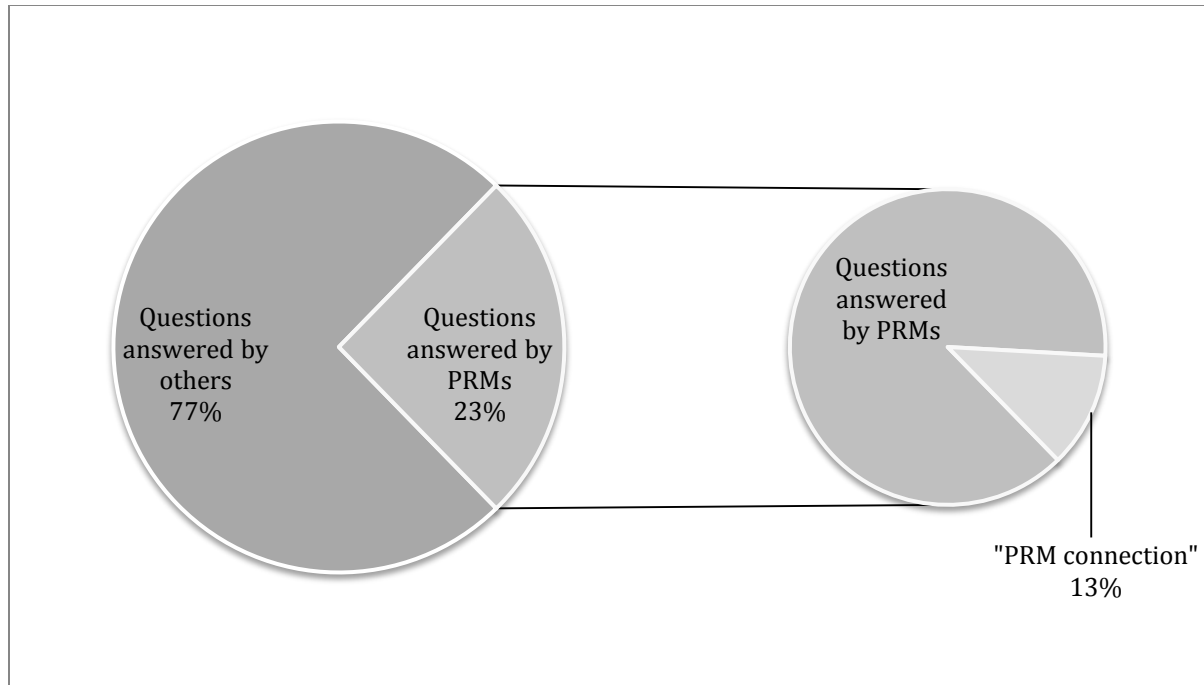
*Percentage Breakdown of Reference Transactions, 2014-15*



*Note.* 3,541 total questions answered during the 2014-15 academic year.

Figure 6

*Percentage Breakdown of Reference Transactions, Fall 2015*



*Note.* 2,005 total questions answered during the 2015 fall semester.

Assessing the PRMs' research skills requires a more qualitative approach. We use mid-semester and end-of-semester evaluations which ask students to reflect on their skills, their confidence in helping other students, the impact their skills have had on their own coursework, and other factors. One sophomore PRM shared the following feedback on boot camp training which has clarified the importance of active learning games:

I think that August boot camp prepared me very well for working at the reference desk...

I learned a lot of useful tools and resources that I did not previously know about. I also liked the games interspersed in the learning. The games made learning about the library more fun and it helped me retain information better.

The evaluations ask the PRMs to identify goals for the next semester and also if there are any areas that they would like to improve in. One sophomore PRM noted that:

My goals for next semester are to continue to familiarize myself with the library's many resources. I think there are still many online search engines that I have not used or

completely understand. I tend to stick with a few favorite resources that I know but it would be beneficial for me to expand my knowledge to continue to better aide [sic] patrons.

Another sophomore PRM noted that their involvement in the program has had the following impact:

I think working at the desk has definitely taught me how to be a better teacher and be better at explaining things to others. One of my definite weaknesses is working with a group and this program has definitely strengthened my skills in that area. Plus of course my research skills have been sharpened!

One of our first-year PRMs made the following remark about the program's impact on their future career:

I think I will use the skill of finding and filtering articles and citation in my career in scientific research. Additionally, as I would like to teach, my experience at the desk has given me valuable mentoring experience and helped me learn how to teach people.

Collecting this qualitative assessment twice a semester has proved invaluable for ongoing program development.

In addition to evaluating the PRM experience through their self-reflection, we ask the PRMs to design their own assessments of their outreach projects and support them in developing ideas about how to do that. Participant feedback helps them improve design and content for future sessions. This feedback also helps PRMs develop confidence in their own skills. For example, a PRM who provided research consultations for a first-year seminar administered an end-of-the-semester survey to all 17 participants. Eighty-eight percent of respondents (15 of 17) reported that they found the consultation either very helpful or mostly helpful. Students also

identified that they felt they were able to search more effectively as a result and were more likely to seek assistance at the Research Help Desk. Another PRM had presented drop-in workshops that focused on a citation management tool. The PRM created and administered a survey to participants after the session that inquired about the presentation style, level of instruction, other topics that might be of interest for a workshop, and how students found out about the workshop. The responses to these questions influenced how the PRM advertised similar sessions the following semester. While these are small assessments, they have increased the PRMs' confidence and helped to improve any issues with content or delivery.

Librarians also provide regular feedback to PRMs. Constructive criticism is often discussed during the weekly meeting. Outreach projects are debriefed throughout the project duration and at its conclusion. PRMs have a supportive environment in which to discuss what worked well, what did not, and what they would change next time. Supervisors also engage PRMs in discussion about their individual learning goals for the semester.

### **Implications and Lessons Learned**

PRMs have positively impacted their peers through their work at the Research Help Desk and their outreach projects, but they have also had a positive – and significant – impact on the Research & Instruction department. PRM-developed videos, research guides, research consultations, and workshops have enabled us to expand our reference and instruction services to a wider variety of students. PRM work has also helped us strengthen collaborations with campus partners like Academic Advising and International Student Services. As we do not often have the opportunity to sustain connections with students over a span of years, the mentoring relationships we have with PRMs are especially fulfilling to librarians. PRMs have also helped librarians gain a clearer view of the student perspective. They operate as an informal student advisory group and

are often the first students with whom we share ideas about new programs or changes within the library. In turn, PRMs have invited librarians into student life; one librarian is now the campus advisor to a student dance group co-founded by a PRM.

Some elements of our young program work very well. For instance, we are quite pleased with the size of our PRM cohort – a group of eight students is manageable if we share the mentoring and supervision. We also know that our tiered training program works well – providing foundational training through “boot camp” and building on that with weekly questions, biweekly meetings, and individual supervisor meetings gives students a steady stream of learning. Just as we had hoped, our senior PRMs are mentoring newer PRMs, and all PRMs are developing their ability to mentor their peers.

We are not yet satisfied with our efforts to achieve the final learning objective: “contribute to a dynamic, supportive, peer research mentor community.” The PRMs’ busy course schedules keep them from spending much time with one another, with the exception of the biweekly meeting (which is a logistical challenge to schedule each semester). We have started to address this by having additional, fun, informal gatherings (not more training). Now that the program is firmly established, we will devote more attention to achieving this goal. We are considering reducing our hiring/training cycle to once a year. Not adding new students mid-year might help the group cohere better (it would also reduce the training load for librarians).

We have a few issues to work on, but the program is firmly established within our library. Upon reflection, we have identified two vital factors which we feel were essential to our early success:

- Support from the library dean. We could not have worked with colleagues outside our department to reallocate student employee positions were it not for support from the dean.
- Recognize limits and start small. By starting with a small cohort, we were able to spend time developing a well-considered, intentional training model. We also had time to identify when and how administrative work for the program needs to take place. For example, we created most of our training materials during summer and winter breaks.

### **Next Steps**

As the program matures, we continue to follow campus conversations about student engagement and high-impact practices, as well as to seek opportunities to engage students in these practices. We are already using the PRM program as a model for another library-led learning experience involving academic research and peer mentoring: our new Digital Scholarship Fellows experience (launching in summer 2016). We hope the program may serve as a useful model for other parts of our campus – and for other libraries, as well.

In order to sustain what we have established, we are working with our dean and campus development office to articulate the value and impact of the program to potential donors. Ideally, we will create an endowed fund that will provide ongoing support.

Of course, we will work to maintain a strong cohort of Peer Research Mentors, which will help us attract and recruit future PRMs and retain them for two-three years. We have already noticed that our PRMs seem especially active around campus and draw upon their library experience when they serve on the Honor Commission, mentor international students, or join the Queer Peer Mentor group in our LGBTQA Advocacy & Education Office. We expect that their broad engagement will continue to strengthen our program.



Our advertising materials for PRM openings describe the experience as “a student job that makes you a better student.” Certainly, students benefit from the program – both the PRMs themselves as well as the undergraduate researchers whom they assist. The PRM program also improves the effectiveness of the Research & Instruction department as we are able to deepen and expand the reach and impact of our services to students. While the Peer Research Program continues to evolve with each new cohort, it has transformed what had previously been “just” a student job into a high-impact learning experience for students.

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