



**Chapter Council Presents  
Sharing Roundtables  
MLA Annual Meeting  
San Antonio, TX  
Monday, May 16, 2005**

## **Table 28: Virtual Reference Services**

**Facilitator:** Penny Coppernoll-Blach – [pblach@ucsd.edu](mailto:pblach@ucsd.edu)

**Recorder:** Roger Russell – [russellr@mail.ecu.edu](mailto:russellr@mail.ecu.edu)

**Additional Participants:**

Doug Blansit – [bblansit@atsu.edu](mailto:bblansit@atsu.edu)

Lisa Fried – [mlapd2@mlahq.org](mailto:mlapd2@mlahq.org)

Fred Heidenreich – [fredheid@ahsl.arizona.edu](mailto:fredheid@ahsl.arizona.edu)

Deb Lovett – [dlovett@psu.edu](mailto:dlovett@psu.edu)

Donghua Tao – [dt6b3@mizzou.edu](mailto:dt6b3@mizzou.edu)

**Topics Discussed:**

Chat Reference – resources tried, scheduling & staffing, promotion of service, successes and failures, answering questions for Public Libraries

The group discussed librarian consortia that can handle questions for a school over their different campuses. Librarians working evening chat hours from home, assigning questions as they come in and other scheduling issues. We discussed various software packages for sharing desktops with patrons and allowing chat sessions, and for managing “email” Ask a Librarian questions. Question Point and “24/7” was discussed as was “CENTRA” and “DocuTech” and AOL Instant Messenger.

Shared Reference – answering chat and “Ask A Librarian” requests for other libraries in a system, software that can facilitate, getting buy-in

The group discussed handling chat questions from patrons of other libraries, including public libraries and the pros and cons of this. Pros included issues such as having a larger staffing pool, cons included difficulty to get buy-in from all involved and cross-training.

Live Conferencing – sharing a patron’s desktop during a chat session, chatting with more than one patron at a time

The group talked about experiences sharing desktops with patrons in order to show them how to search a database, where to find items online and answer various questions. Penn State shared that they use 24/7 to follow a patron who are sometimes students at other universities into that school’s databases. Because most databases are similar, and librarians are more adept at navigating and searching, they feel comfortable answering chat reference questions in this way.

Also discussed was the configuration and speed of the patron's computer. The group seemed to agree that this has not been a problem for those having tried chat reference.

Quality Assurance – archiving sessions, HIPPA concerns, reviewing archives for quality assurance and training

The group discussed archiving sessions and how this effects or will be affected by HIPPA, Penn State strips out all identifying information from their archives and has the librarians review them and use them as case studies for quality improvement.

Products, etc. – 24/7, Question Point, AOL Instant Messenger, DocuTech, CENTRA, LSSI, Tudor. Virtual Reference Desk ([www.vrd.org](http://www.vrd.org))

The group discussed there experience with each of the products above and the skill level necessary to use them. Question Point and 24/7 were discussed the most. The Virtual Reference Desk was suggested as a good website for finding more information on virtual reference issues.