VI. WORK ETIQUETTE AND PROTOCOL

The Library staff provides various information service activities, primarily for the academic community, but for anyone who wishes to use the library collections. These services include:

- directional assistance;
- online assistance (LUIS; library electronic-based resources, Internet);
- general reference/information service (the Reference/Information Desk (1st floor) is the central referral point for library questions, but there are service desks at Check-out, Interlibrary Loan, Teaching Materials, Government Documents, and Periodicals, and within the Rare Books Department, and the Career Center Library);
- specialized reference/information service (to assist the library user in locating information sources in a specific collection or materials in a specialized format: e.g., periodicals, microfiche);
- quick reference/information to provide immediate answers to basic informational or locational inquiries;
- use of new technologies to locate information sources in other libraries or the Internet (we continue to have a number of customers who are unaccustomed to using electronic resources);
- advanced reference/information service by reference librarians;
- production and distribution of instructional materials (print and online) to aid library users in finding and using information resources;
- reference/information service to remote access users of the Library Network (LIBNET): general reference and retrieval services to extension students; and Internet access.
KNOW THE LIBRARY! These days, this generally means, KNOW THE LIBRARY WEBSITE as well as knowing where the bathrooms and the reference books are. Whether you are employed at a service desk, or whether you work behind-the-scenes, you will interact with both library staff and library users. Many library users will have no idea of the wide range of information and resources available. Often students have written assignments that are confusing to both them and the library staff. Community users may still be looking for the card catalog. Communication skills are an important aspect of any job, but are essential to the library employee. In addition to general skills, there are a few library tricks-of-the-trade when it comes to interacting with library users. This section discusses some general techniques, but with a slant towards library situations. These techniques are divided into PERSON-TO-PERSON skills and TELEPHONE USAGE skills.

A. PERSON-TO-PERSON

Be COURTEOUS to co-workers, supervisors and other library staff members, as well as library users. Similarly you should expect courteous treatment in return. Remember to say "Please," "Thank you," and "You're welcome."

If you are approached while at a service desk or working on a task, follow these general guidelines:

- stop work immediately, smile and "tune in" to the conversation
- show interest, courtesy and empathy (if possible, all at the same time!)
- initiate the conversation: May I help you?
- establish and maintain eye contact
- listen carefully
- be enthusiastic
- help the user as much as possible (see section C below for more info on this). For example, if you recommend a resource that the user has never heard of, at least go to the source and, then, if necessary, explain its use. If you don't understand, get assistance from someone else.
- offer future assistance: Let me know if you need any more help.
- acknowledge those waiting their turn for help: I'll be right with you; also, try to take them in order: Who's next?
B. TELEPHONE USAGE:

When answering the telephone, you are speaking on behalf of your department and the entire Library. Prompt and courteous handling of telephone calls is important since first impressions are usually lasting impressions. You will be trained in how to use the various telephones in the library. Some are more sophisticated than others. You should at least learn HOW TO TRANSFER CALLS and HOW TO PLACE A CALLER ON HOLD.

Some departments have their own rules regarding telephone answering; of course, follow these rules. But generally,

- ALWAYS answer the phone with the name of the department, your first name, and ask: May I help you?

- Be ready to take a message; have pencil and paper handy. Be sure to write down complete information [name of caller, phone number or extension, date & time called, message]. Know where to post messages to ensure the person they are intended for will get them promptly; if uncertain, place message on person’s desk chair.

Personal calls on library telephones are allowed only with the permission of your supervisor. Remember, you can use the phone in the Staff Lounge on the Lower Level during your break. Telephones are also available in the outer lobby near the public lockers.

C. CLARIFYING A USER’S REQUEST:

Many library users have problems explaining what it is they need from the library. Library staff should learn to ask OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS, questions which must be answered by more than just a simple Yes or No. Library staff have found that the first question that a person asks is often NOT the real question that needs answering. A general question often leads to a more specific question. Engaging the library user in a conversation can often change your response to the initial query.
Sample Interaction #1:

Library User: Where is the Reader’s Guide?
Library Staff: It’s over in the Reference alcove.

Sample Interaction #2:

Library User: Where is the Reader’s Guide?
Library Staff: It’s over in the Reference alcove. Do you need help?
Library User: No, I’m fine.

In sample #1, the library staffer responds to what seems to be a simple directional question. But in #2, the library staffer has tried to engage the user in a conversation to see what is really needed. Unfortunately, this is a CLOSED QUESTION. The user will almost always respond with a simple Yes or No.

Sample Interaction #3:

Library User: Where is the Reader’s Guide?
Library Staff: The printed issues are over in the Reference alcove, but you may want to use ProQuest, an online database, to find articles on many topics. What are you working on?
Library User: I’m doing a paper on the stock market for my business class.
Library Staff: Oh, then you might also want to use ProQuest, as well as Academic Universe. That’s enough to get you started, but we have some other specialized business resources if you need them. Let me show you how to get started.

Sample #3 illustrates what happens when the library staffer uses an OPEN-ENDED QUESTION. The user will usually give some kind of descriptive answer. Most people don’t mind you asking what they need the information for. If they have an assignment sheet, ask to see it.
D. WHEN TO ASK SOMEONE ELSE

The longer you work in the Library, the more you will pick up the kind of information you need to help library users. But you must not make the mistake of overestimating your expertise. **NEVER HESITATE TO ASK QUESTIONS** of other staff in your department or unit. Your department may have specific guidelines regarding the types of questions you should be prepared to answer; if so, please refer to them.

If you are unable to answer the library user’s questions and you cannot find a library staff person, take down the information request and the user’s phone number. Explain that someone on staff will get back to them. You can also suggest that the user check back later.

Finally,

» **DON’T SAY:** I DON’T KNOW [and leave it at that]; YOU WANT WHAT!!?? [in a voice that implies, you've got to be kidding, or, wow, is that a dumb question]; WE DON’T HAVE ANYTHING LIKE THAT [meaning, go away]

» **INSTEAD, TRY THESE:** I’M SORRY, I DON’T KNOW. LET ME ASK or I THINK YOU NEED TO ASK AT THE [Information Desk]. LET ME CALL AND CHECK.

» **NEVER LEAVE A LIBRARY USER UNTIL YOU HAVE HELPED THEM OR HAVE GOTTEN SOMEONE ELSE TO HELP THEM.**

» **THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A STUPID QUESTION.**