

ATHENS STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY

Philosophy of Reference Service

Athens State University is committed to the provision of high quality, individualized reference service to any Library user who needs assistance. As affirmed in the American Library Association's Bill of Rights, assistance will "not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views." The Library mission statement emphasizes the obligation to provide access to information and research and the encouragement of research and lifelong learning. The primary responsibility of reference librarians on duty is attending to patron requests.

The Library provides users with helpful and timely reference assistance. A reference librarian is on duty during all hours of Library operation. Reference librarians are expected to provide a welcoming, approachable presence. All information requests receive a prompt, accurate, efficient, thorough, and courteous response. Information may range from simple ready reference or practical answers to more complex strategies requiring significant research. Each individual asking a question will receive respect and a thorough, attentive response.

Reference service is extended beyond the immediate Athens State user population to students and faculty of other institutions, as well as to the broader community. The Library strives to provide quality service to all users, whether requests are made face-to-face, by telephone, or through e-mail. During Library operating hours, responses to all e-mail requests will be provided within 24 hours; if the Library is not open when the request is made, the reference librarian will reply on the next business day.

Since the Library is part of an educational institution, reference service is instructional in nature. An important role of the reference librarian is to help students gain confidence and skills in using research tools, a better understanding of disciplinary criteria, and a sense of how scholars use resources in their research. Librarians focus on cultivating self-sufficiency and lifelong learning among the user population. Reference librarians seek to teach users about efficient, effective information-seeking strategies and the use of quality, relevant resource material, rather than simply locating the answer. Librarians will not complete student assignments or write research papers for students.

As stated in the Library's Privacy Policy, the confidentiality of users' queries is respected. Discussion among reference librarians may on occasion be appropriate when it is known that a librarian not on duty has particular expertise, or when the question and its answer might be instructive for other librarians to perform duties capably.

The Reference Collection and Its Development

A well developed, non-circulating reference collection supports the reference librarian. Reference librarians have responsibility for the selection of new and retrospective reference materials that compose the collection. Librarians endeavor to select a variety of print and non-print sources, representing a variety of perspectives, in order to respond to varying types of users and anticipated requests. User requests for particular materials are welcome; however, the Library reserves the right to purchase or reject such requests based on reviews, budget constraints, and professional assessment of the item's usefulness to the University or the community as a whole.

Limitations of Reference Service

- When the reference librarian has multiple patron demands, first priority is placed on serving the needs of current Athens State students and faculty.
- If it is expected that a telephone request will entail significant research time, a return call may be required.
- The Library is not equipped to handle most questions of a genealogical nature. Usually, these requests are referred to a local archive or public library.
- The Library has limited medical and legal resources. Many questions of this nature may be referred to a local medical or law library. Reference assistance at Athens State does not include giving legal or medical advice or opinions.