**Reference Inquiry: Phone Interview Submission [INFO 210]**

**Assignment**

For this task, I was asked to ask a non-reference ready question through the phone and gauge the reference staff’s performance based on said synchronous phone interaction using the five guidelines for the behavioral performance of reference personnel provided by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA); but frankly I would NEVER ask a complex question over the phone. My experience in working in a noisy arcade and band participation in grade school has resulted in some minor but significant hearing loss. Specifically, I find it difficult to distinguish certain consonants and rely on context, to identify words in a verbal conversation. From experience, transmission through a phone increases the severity of the difficulty. When answering other people’s reference questions through the telephone as an employee of the Fresno County Public Library, I have developed an interview process that copes for this deficit; but my recent experience on the other end was rather challenging, as I was forced to ask the staff person to repeat their final referral multiple times until I was sure that I had got it right.

**Setting: The Henry Madden Library**

Named in honor of a previous long-serving University Librarian, the Henry Madden Library curates a physical collection of informative materials and provides access to digital resources to support the academic community of California State University, Fresno. This library has over 365,000 square feet of space and features the largest installation of compact shelving in the United States. As the center of the campus community, the Henry Madden Library provides a neutral meeting place to foster collaboration between students and faculty of multiple disciplines with 1.5 million people visiting the library each year. In addition, the library provides a home for exhibits and events to add to the vibrancy of the Fresno State academic community.

**Reference Interaction**

As part of my work with the Fresno County Public Library, I’ve been asked to create a display that could potentially be hosted at various library branches. Currently, I have selected the ordeal of the Franks and the Van Pels of hiding in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam as detailed in Anne Frank’s diary as the topic of my display. My selection was based as a way of connecting the public to literature and the importance of literature in preserving historical events for future generations.

I have already identified the **Historical Construction Kit of the Anne Frank House** as the centerpiece of the display but could use some help in solidifying the content to accompany this model of the Anne Frank House. The reference question that I selected to test the capability of the reference staff of the Henry Madden Library is designed to help me in this regard.

The reference question is as follows: “What resources does the library have to assist in developing a display highlighting Anne Frank’s story?”

I first called (559) 278-8174 which is listed as the primary contact for the Henry Madden Library from the Henry Madden Library’s contact directory. This led to a phone tree which ended up leading to a message instructing me to call the faculty.

My assumption that this contact number would lead to the reference desk as it does with the Fresno County Public Library was false. After revisiting the contact directory, there was no obvious “reference number.” Therefore, I called the listed circulation desk number—(559) 278-2551—in the hopes that they would be able to answer my query or that they would transfer me to the appropriate staff person.

A female librarian picked up my call. After listening to my query, she asked if I was looking for a book and I indicated yes. Also in my answer, I explained in more detail the nature of the display that I had hoped to compile. She then determined that it would be appropriate to transfer me to “library administration.”

After my call was transferred to the library administration, I reiterated my query to a student worker or volunteer, whereupon I was quickly told that I would be transferred to a more appropriate contact for my request. While it was not clear which department or position I would be transferred to my next contact was also a student volunteer or employee. After reiterating my request, I was transferred back to library administration, where I was placed on hold as the student volunteer or employee consulted with other staff persons. When the student staffer picked up the call I was given name, an email address, and a phone number. I asked her to spell out the email address three times. I ended the call by thanking the student employee or volunteer for her time. It should be noted that not a single library staff took the time to introduce themselves.

I then composed the below email and consulted the Fresno State Faculty directory to ensure that my contact information was correct.

Emailed:

To David Celaya,

     I was referred to you this morning for my request on resources I could use to a display on the Anne Frank House and the story of the Franks and the Van Pels and the people who assisted them in hiding in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam. The main artifact will be the historical construction kit of the Anne Frank House.

See <https://web.annefrank.org/en/Shop/Books/Historical-construction-kit-of-The-Anne-Frank-House/>.

Sincerely,

Jason Sue

The Fresno State Faculty Directory indicated that I needed to make a change in the contact’s name and email address. I then sent the email, but have not yet received a reply over the course of several days.

**Evaluating the Reference Transaction**

The Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) has five guidelines for the behavioral performance of reference personnel. They are:

1. Visibility and Approachability
2. Interest
3. Listening and Inquiring
4. Searching
5. Follow-up

Below is my discussion of each of these traits as outlined by the RUSA.

**Visibility and Approachability**

Frankly, the approachability of the staff of the Henry Madden Library during my over the phone reference interaction was pretty poor. In terms of friendliness, the most that I got from my phone interactions was a simple hello. Also, none of the staffers of the Henry Madden Library introduced themselves. One criterion that the staff of the Henry Madden Library did perform adequately was their timely response. After listening to my reference question, they took action most often by transferring to another staffer. Even when my last contact put me hold to consult other staff persons, the time I waited was minimal.

**Interest**

The three people that I talked to did not express any interest in my query. Responses were professional, but otherwise devoid of emotional inflection.

**Listening or Inquiring**

In terms of listening and inquiring, the tone of voice of all three staffers conveyed an appropriate professional tone, even if their responses were lacking. Only the first person, asked me a single question, which was “Are you looking for a book?” Particularly, I was somewhat irked that at no point did the staff gauge the amount of time I had to devote to the reference question. I was really looking forward to the answers that could help shape the display I will be putting together within the next couple of months.

**Searching**

From what I could tell, due to the briefness of my interactions, no actual effort was put into obtaining resources for my use in a display centering on the Franks and the Van Pels ordeal of hiding from the Nazi. As such, I can’t say that any technology was leveraged to assist me in satisfying my information need. The best thing I can say about rating the Henry Madden Staff’s performance in searching is that if a staff person who could help on my question was not currently available at the time that I called that they at least provided me with a referral, but I am skeptical that this was the case.

**Follow-Up**

My over-the-phone reference interaction ended up with a referral to a library administration staffer, but it has been several days, and I have still not received a response., the only response that I can give in rating the follow-up as defined by RUSA is that there was no such follow-up.

**Why it Matters**

Clearly, my over-the-phone reference interaction is a demonstration of how ignoring the principles for the behavioral performance of reference personnel can result in a wholly unsatisfactory result. I wasn’t really depending on this question to build my display highlighting Anne Frank’s story; but I was hopeful, that I could get ONE quality resource that I would not have otherwise discovered on my own or perhaps ONE artifact—or at least the digital representation of an artifact—to add to my future display. I was literally provided with nothing. There was no instruction on how to obtain such information. No resources were identified, not even the most basic readily available ones were given to me. I am stunned that at the end of my reference interaction that I am no better off than I was before I asked the Henry Madden Library for assistance in my compiling a display on Anne Frank’s story.