

 <b>DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY</b> <i>Inspiring Minds</i>	<b>Killam Memorial Library</b>	<b>Policy Number: 4</b>
	<b>Title:</b> Reference and Research Services Policy	<b>Date Issued:</b> November 28, 2012
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	<b>Issued by:</b> Head, Killam Memorial Library	<b>Approved by:</b> University Librarian

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of the Killam Memorial Library Reference and Research Services Policy is to promote a uniform standard of service of the highest possible quality consistent with available resources.

The policy is designed to

- orient new staff members
- be an information resource for experienced staff members
- assist library patrons who have questions about the Library's service policy

The Head of the Killam Library will review the statement every two years for currency, accuracy and completeness. Revisions may also be made as the need arises.

## 2. Definitions

"Patron" refers to any person using the Killam Library or its services.

"Staff" refers to library employees providing reference and research assistance to patrons.

"Research Assistance Service area" refers to the service desk located in the South Learning Commons of the Killam Library.

"Subject areas" refers to the subjects supported by the Killam Library collections. These include computer science, humanities, management, sciences, and social sciences.

## 3. Roles and Responsibilities

The University Librarian is responsible for approving this policy.

The Head of the Killam Library is responsible for updating this policy and ensuring that it is followed.

The staff members of the Killam Library are responsible for applying this policy.

## 4. Goals of Reference and Research Services

The Reference and Research Services Department aims to

- meet the information and research needs of library patrons accurately, efficiently, and pleasantly in the subject areas the Library supports

- provide instruction by the most effective means so that patrons may become self-sufficient in their use of library resources
- maintain an up-to-date, relevant, and readily accessible working collection of electronic and print reference materials including bibliographic, numeric, and full-text databases
- provide appropriate reference assistance by determining the need of the patron, the exact information requested, and the sources appropriate to the level of knowledge and interest of the patron
- facilitate access to materials needed by patrons but not available in the Library
- promote an increased awareness of Library resources available to the Dalhousie community
- create an environment and a tradition of good service and promote the effective utilization of available staff members and materials
- co-operate with other Library units by providing information about user needs derived from ongoing contact with our users.

## **5. Access to Reference and Research Services**

Reference and Research Services are available to all members of the university community and to members of the public.

### **5.1. Service to Patrons not affiliated with Dalhousie**

No distinction is made between University and non-University patrons when giving routine reference and research service, but priority will be given to Dalhousie patrons if funding, space, or staffing is inadequate to meet demands for service.

Patrons affiliated with another library may be referred to that library for assistance. In cases where the Killam Library has special resources in staff members or materials and patron needs warrant it, assistance beyond the routine may be given.

### **5.2. Service to Patrons with Disabilities**

The mission of Dalhousie University Libraries is to provide equal access to information to all who request it. For those patrons with disabilities, the Library will make special provisions insofar as feasible to permit the patrons to examine sources and conduct research.

## **6. Scope of Reference and Research Services**

Reference and Research Services staff members offer the following services to patrons:

- assistance in finding the answer to specific reference questions
- assistance in developing research strategies for course assignments, reports, term papers, theses, and dissertations. If a problematic class assignment arises, the instructor will be contacted either by the Subject Specialist or the Head of the Killam Library.
- instruction in the use of the Library and its resources
- compilation and production of various instructional aids

The following types of service fall outside the responsibilities of Killam Library Reference and Research Services staff members:

- interpretation of information or provision of legal, medical, or financial advice

- recommendations about patrons' purchases. Staff members may refer patrons to standard reviews and advise the patron to examine any available library copies.
- appraisal of patrons' private property. Staff members may advise patrons to consult a professional appraiser, but specific appraisers are not recommended.
- genealogical searches. Staff members may offer assistance in using the catalogue and in locating standard reference sources. Genealogical questions are generally referred to other institutions such as the Halifax Public Library and the Nova Scotia Archives.
- searches for answers to puzzles, quizzes, contests, and the like. Staff members may advise individuals about where they might locate such information
- formal translation services

## **7. Guidelines for Providing Reference & Research Services**

Staff members are the public face of the Library and work to create a positive impression of the Library. Individual assistance to patrons who come to the Library is the primary responsibility of staff members on duty.

Willingness to provide assistance is reflected in the attitude and behaviour of staff members. Desk staff members appear alert, friendly, and interested. Staff members apply well-developed communication skills to ascertain the needs of patrons and are not judgmental regarding a request. Courtesy, patience, sensitivity, and tact are part of all interactions with patrons. Staff members survey the reference area for patrons who appear to need assistance and offer to help them. Staff members on duty wear the appropriate name tag which identifies them by name and role (Reference Librarian, Reference Library Assistant, or Reference Intern).

When assisting patrons, staff members:

- use question-negotiation skills to determine exactly what the patron requires
- provide accurate answers to patron's queries
- explain and instruct while assisting patrons
- tactfully recheck catalogues and databases if patrons say they cannot find an item
- accompany the patron to sources whenever appropriate
- consult a colleague for additional assistance whenever necessary

### **7.1. Service Availability**

Reference & Research Service is typically available between 10 am and 8 pm Monday to Wednesday, 10 am and 6 pm Thursday and Friday, and reduced hours on weekends and holidays.

### **7.2. High Use Periods**

If patrons are waiting for assistance, staff members offer help to the individual who has been waiting the longest. Staff members also contact the backup staff member for assistance but may also answer first the briefer questions of other patrons who are waiting.

### **7.3. Low Use Periods**

During low use periods staff members may work on other assigned tasks, examine new reference materials, or read e-mail, professional or subject-related literature, as long as these activities do not interfere with the provision of service.

#### **7.4. Messages for Staff Members**

Messages providing the answers to recurring questions, to difficult questions, or about materials being held for patrons are left for other staff at the Killam Library Service Point (KLSP).

#### **7.5. Paging Patrons**

Library patrons are not paged. Emergencies are referred to Library Administration or Dalhousie Security staff. Emergencies in the evenings and on weekends are referred to the Circulation Supervisor.

#### **7.6. Personal Telephone Calls**

Only under exceptional circumstances do staff members make personal telephone calls while on desk duty. Personal calls received while on desk duty are kept as brief as possible.

#### **7.7. Public Use of Library Telephones**

The telephones at service points are generally for official Library use only. Patrons are referred to the nearest pay phone but may be permitted to use a desk phone if the need is urgent and university related.

#### **7.8. Patron's Belongings**

Staff members do not undertake to look after patrons' personal belongings at a service points or in the Learning Commons.

### **8. Guidelines for Providing Service by Telephone**

The manner in which telephone inquiries are handled has a direct bearing on the public's impression of the Library. Staff members practice high standards of telephone etiquette.

Patrons who are asking for assistance at a service point are given priority over patrons who are asking for assistance by phone.

#### **8.1. Incoming Calls**

Unless busy assisting other patrons, staff members are responsible for answering incoming calls received at the Research Assistance Service Point.

If a call is not answered, it will be forwarded to the Killam Library Administration office. If available, the Department Administrative Secretary will answer forwarded calls and may answer routine questions (i.e., ones relating to hours, library staff and departments). Non-routine questions will be referred to a reference librarian.

##### **8.1.1. Answering Calls**

Staff members use a pleasing tone of voice and speak clearly and slowly. To ensure that the callers know immediately that they have reached the right department, staff members answer the phone by saying, "Killam Reference and Research Assistance Services office", "Killam Research Assistance" or "Research Assistance, Killam Library."

##### **8.1.2. Holding or Calling Back**

Staff members do not leave a person holding the line indefinitely while searching for an answer. If a search cannot be done while talking to the patron, staff members arrange to call the patron back if it is a local call, or ask the patron to call back at a specific time if it

is long distance. Staff members indicate that the information will be left with the person then on desk duty if the return call will not occur during the present desk shift.

### **8.1.3. Making Referrals**

Callers may not know the person who can help them and staff members refer callers to the right person by using sources such as the online Campus Directory.

If the information a caller wants can be better provided by another department or library, staff members make sure callers know whom they should consult and the type of service they can expect. If possible, staff members refer callers to a specific person by name and title.

Calls may be transferred but staff members also generally give the number to the caller in case the call is cut off.

### **8.1.4. Personal Calls**

Calls for other members of the Library are referred or transferred and staff members give the correct number to the caller for future use. If the person called is not listed in the Library staff list or the online campus Directory, the call should be referred to Library Administration or to Dalhousie Human Resources.

### **8.1.5. Messages**

If a call is for someone who cannot be reached immediately, staff members offer to take a message. Staff members record clear, concise, and complete messages and ask the caller to repeat or spell information if necessary. Messages should include date, time, and signature of the messenger.

### **8.1.6. Emergency or Nuisance Calls**

In an emergency situation, such as a bomb threat, staff members try to obtain as much information as possible from the caller and write it down. (See Dalhousie's *Emergency Procedures Manual* kept on the bulletin board in the Reference and Research Services office and in the Research Assistance Service binder.)

Nuisance calls should be dealt with as quickly and unemotionally as possible.

## **8.2. Outgoing Calls**

Staff members generally limit the number of outgoing calls made during a desk shift.

### **8.2.1. Long Distance Calls**

Long distance calls cannot be made from the Research Assistance Service Points.

Staff members on desk duty answer questions received from patrons calling long distance immediately, arrange for the caller to call back after estimating how long it will take to answer the question, or call the patron back from an office phone.

## **8.3. Limitations on Telephone Reference Questions**

Answer all general information calls that can be answered in a few minutes. Lengthy telephone conversations at the desk are to be avoided.

### **8.3.1. Exceptional Extended Telephone Reference Service**

When it is clear that a question will take more than a few minutes to answer, it may be necessary to take into account not only the nature and urgency of the request, but university affiliation of the caller.

For example, if the caller is a member of the faculty or administration and needs information for official university purposes or if the caller is a distance education student, staff members may make the extra effort rather than require the caller to come to the Library personally.

Many factors enter into decisions concerning the amount of service that can be given to individuals, and judgment must be exercised. If unsure, staff members should consult the Head of the Killam Library.

## **9. Guidelines for Virtual Reference and Research Services**

The Library provides virtual reference and research services by email and by chat reference.

### **9.1. Email**

Responses to email queries are typically short. Email queries are responded to within 72 hours whenever possible.

### **9.2. Chat Reference**

Responses to chat queries are typically short. Patrons requiring complex research assistance are encouraged to contact their local library or subject specialist for more detailed assistance.

## **10. Guidelines for Handling Patron Complaints**

Occasionally Library staff members will encounter patrons who are unhappy with the services the Library can provide. As a result all staff members need to be familiar with, understand, and be able to explain Library rules, regulations, policies, and practices.

When a patron has a complaint, staff members will:

- remain calm and polite and listen to the complaint
- explain the reason for the policy and the need to apply it consistently
- refer the individual to the Head of the Killam Library or other appropriate Library staff member if the complaint cannot be resolved

## **11. Reference and Research Assistance Service Statistics**

The measurement of reference and information services is the responsibility of the staff members and Library Administration. In order to have a basis for the review of library services, staff members keep daily statistics on queries.

### **11.1. Query Definitions**

The following types of queries are recorded:

- Directional Questions: quick, specific "Where is? " (e.g. library service, reference tools, physical location)
- Quick Reference: questions answered quickly, using known source (e.g. library catalogue or *APA Style Guide*) taking less than 10 minutes.
- In-Depth: Questions requiring a number of resources or requiring more than 10 minutes

- Referral: questions needing specialized help better given by another person or department (e.g. Navigators or Circulation)

### **11.2. Statistics Gathering**

Research Assistance staff members are responsible for accurately recording the number and type of queries received by marking the appropriate section of the daily statistics form.

### **11.3. Off Desk Statistics**

Staff members also record the number of queries they receive while not at the desk, including questions received in-person, by telephone, email, IM, and during chat sessions. By the end of each month, these statistics are recorded on a statistics spreadsheet stored on the Library network for tabulation in Monthly Summary sheets by the Administrative Secretary.

### **11.4. Monthly Summary of Reference Statistics**

Monthly summary sheets are sent to Library Administration.

### **11.5. Special Surveys**

Special surveys may be conducted to determine the relevance and effectiveness of the services offered. Proposed surveys are submitted to Library Administration for approval.

## **12. Lending Killam Reference Materials**

Reference materials should be used within the Reference Area.

### **12.1. Copying Reference Material**

Patrons may take materials to a Library photocopier or scanner to make copies. Materials should be returned to the reference area once copying is completed.

### **12.2. Short Term Exceptional Loans**

Dalhousie faculty, graduate students and staff members may sign out reference material on an exceptional loan basis only if they hold a valid Dalhousie identification card. This type of exceptional loan may be arranged for very special needs, such as

- having slides made for a presentation
- showing a particular reference work to class
- having access to a technical bilingual dictionary to complete translation work over a weekend when the Library has reduced hours.

There are unlikely to be more than one or two requests per year for this service and the time that the material is out of the Library is kept as short as possible.

The Reference and Research Assistance staff member authorizing the loan accompany the user to the Killam Library Service Point and explain that this item can go out for a specific period of time. The staff member will then manually sign the material out on a short-term loan.

Exceptions to the above must be approved by the Head of the Killam Library.

### **12.3. Non-circulating Non-Reference materials**

Requests to borrow any other non-circulating material must be approved by the Head of the Killam Library.

### **13. Library Instruction and Orientation Services**

Dalhousie faculty, staff, and students are offered a variety of opportunities to learn about the Killam Library and its resources. These include:

#### **13.1. Workshops**

Dalhousie faculty may request a staff member to conduct a course-related session designed around a specific class assignment. These sessions may be supported by instructional handouts and may include online demonstrations. Workshops will be conducted for external groups only if staff time permits.

#### **13.2. Instructional sessions**

General sessions on how to use various resources such as the catalogue, RefWorks, or individual databases may be scheduled at various times during the academic year.

#### **13.3. Tours**

Tours provide a physical orientation to the Killam and introduction to Library services. Tours may be requested for a specific group. Staff members may give tours which point out Library resources and services of interest in a given discipline at the request of new faculty or graduate students. Tours will be conducted for external groups only if staff time permits.

#### **13.4. Instructional Handouts**

Handouts on various subjects are available electronically and include point-of-use guides and research guides.

#### **13.5. 13.5 Online Tutorials**

A variety of directional and instructional videos are available at [http://libraries.dal.ca/using\\_the\\_library/online\\_tutorials.html](http://libraries.dal.ca/using_the_library/online_tutorials.html) to assist patrons in locating and using Library services and resources.

### **14. Related Policies**

- Killam Memorial Library Learning Commons Policy
- Killam Service Point Policy
- Killam Code of Conduct