

**Cultivating Community with
Future Colleagues:
Reference and Instruction Skill Building**

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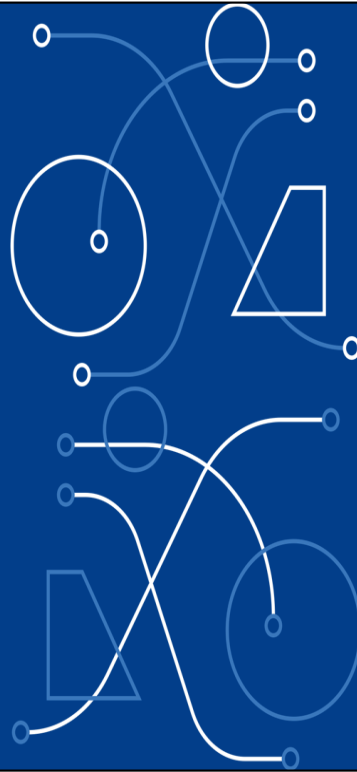
LOEX Fall Focus • November 15, 2023

ACE - Thank you so much for attending our session, “Cultivating Community with Future Colleagues: Reference and Instruction Skill Building”. We’ll be discussing our training program for Reference Graduate Student Assistants at the University of Rhode Island and engaging you all in some guided reflection about your own training experiences and how you approach training at your institutions with the goal of sharing best practices together.

Thanks for joining us!

Amanda Crego-Emley
Reference & Instruction Librarian, Head of Reference

Amanda Izenstark
Reference & Instructional Design Librarian,
Interim Co-Chair of Public Services



ACE - We are...

On the agenda

<u>Context</u>	<u>01</u>
<u>Our Training & Development Program</u>	<u>02</u>
<u>Implementing Iterative Improvements</u>	<u>03</u>
<u>Fostering Strong & Supportive Community</u>	<u>04</u>
<u>Reflection</u>	<u>05</u>

ACE - We'll begin by explaining our local context at the University of Rhode Island and give some specifics about how we approach Reference Graduate Student Assistant training and development. Then we'll discuss the iterative improvements we've been making to the content of our training and onboarding sessions as well as the steps we've taken to better foster community and a sense of cohort among our students. As we move through the presentation, there will be several opportunities for engagement and reflection - we hope that this presentation will be an opportunity for everyone to share advice and reflections together for the collective benefit of all.


We're going to be using Slido to gather your responses in today's session. On the next slide you'll see the joining information. If it doesn't work for you, no worries - please feel free to share your responses in the chat.


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What is your role when it comes to training or instructing new (or emerging) librarians?

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Context: About URI

pauk. (2009). English: Locator map of Block Island in the North Atlantic Ocean — the southernmost island of Rhode Island, U.S.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:PrudenceIsland.GIF>. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Block_Island_Map_of_Rhode_Island.png

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To get started, we'd like to share some context about URI.

The University of Rhode Island occupies the traditional stomping ground of the Narragansett Nation and the Niantic People.

We honor and respect the enduring and continuing relationship between the Indigenous people and this land by teaching and learning more about their history and present-day communities, and by becoming stewards of the land we, too, inhabit.

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First, we'd like to share our land acknowledgement, which was written with members of the Narragansett Nation.

By the Numbers



- Land and sea grant institution, 17,800 FTE
- A (very) small number of these students are graduate students in URI's Library and Information Studies Program, which is separate from the University Libraries
- One main library, one small branch library; students work at the main library

AI

URI is a land and sea grant institution with just under 18000 students. A small number of these students are in URI's MLIS program, which is an entirely separate program from what we do at the University Libraries. We have one main library on the Kingston campus (where the pointer was on the map), and a small branch a few miles away. The students we will be talking about today work at the main library.

(BTW, you do not need an in-house LIS program to do something similar to what we do! For example, Boston College doesn't have an MLIS program but hires grad students from nearby Simmons College, which does have a graduate library program)


Before we go further, we'd like to hear how you learned to be an instruction librarian.


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How did you learn to be an instruction librarian?

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Our Reffie Program

Reference Graduate Student Assistants

- 3-4 employed per academic year

Three duties:

1. Instruction
2. Research Help
3. Other duties as assigned (e.g. updating LibGuides, working with instruction assessment data)



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Each year, we hire a few students enrolled in URI's MLIS program to serve as Reference Graduate Student Assistants (we affectionately call them "reffies"), and they have three main responsibilities: instruction, providing research help services, and the perennially vague "other duties as assigned." We'll talk in more detail about those later.

The students may come in with library experience, but they may not.

Goal: Prepare graduate students to provide general research assistance at our in-person and virtual Research Help Desk, and lead programmatic instruction sessions for First Year Writing classes.

With a healthy dose of additional professional development to foster the colleagues we ourselves would want to work with in the future!

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The goal of our program is to prepare the students to work independently at our Research Help Desk and to lead instruction sessions for our First Year Writing classes. As a bonus, we find a way to help them build the skills and qualities necessary for future success as professional librarians.

Onboarding & Training



Two Overview Sessions

Three hours each, covering the basics: Reference interview, service philosophy, search strategies, etc.



Weekly Targeted Sessions

Focus on instruction or specific subjects, e.g. business, history. 6-8 weeks.



Ongoing Mentoring

Paired with a librarian at the desk for first 6 weeks; librarians serve as on-call backup after that period.

AI

We have an onboarding and training program that consists of the following components:

- Two longer general orientation sessions prior to the semester (optimally in person, but sometimes virtually via Zoom)
- Weekly specialized and subject-specific training sessions (mostly via Zoom, with a few exceptions) for approximately 6-8 weeks
 - These sessions are primarily delivered by the Head of Reference, but other librarians (on our team of 4) contribute based on their expertise and availability
- And ongoing mentoring by librarians during the students' early shifts at the desk, and then as on-call backup as needed

Additional Supports

Reffie Resources Guide

Evolving guide includes:

- How to describe Reffie tasks in application materials
- Examples of resumes and CVs
- Role and benefits of participation in professional organizations

Projects that align with career aspirations

Students are encouraged to review job postings and list skills they need to develop in order to be competitive candidates.

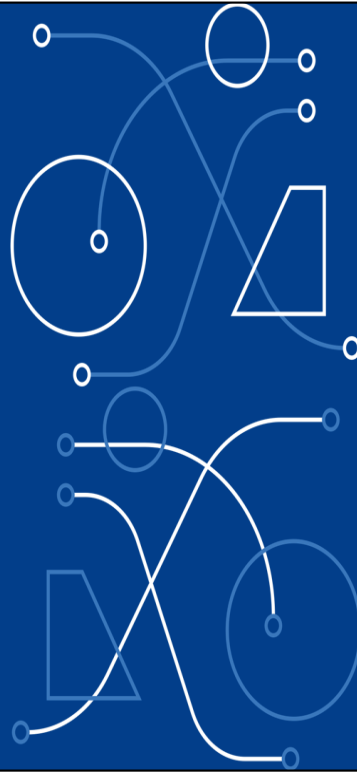
We develop projects that help them build those skills.

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We have two additional supports to assist their professional development, again with the goal that the Reffie position be a helpful and formative stepping stone for them in addition to being a big help for us:

1. Our (evolving) Reffie Resources Guide, which covers how to describe the work done as part of the job in application materials, resume and CV guidance, and the importance of being involved with professional library associations, especially while they're students
 - We encourage our reffies to tell us what they'd like us to add to the form. Recently, one of them asked about unions in libraries, so I added a page on the topic.
2. Projects that align with potential job opportunities
 - Students review postings that they might be interested in, and list the areas where they'd like to build their skills
 - We then develop projects that help them meet the requirements - and perhaps some of the preferreds

Questions?



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We've talked a bit about our program so far, and before we transition into some of our plans, what questions do you have at this point?



[Do you have training practices that seem to be working well at your institution?](https://padlet.com/amandacregoemley/do-you-have-training-practices-that-seem-to-be-working-well--xazv21ymixsk22yd)



AI

We're using Padlet here so that you can return to this if you see any ideas that might work well for your own institutional context!

<https://padlet.com/amandacregoemley/do-you-have-training-practices-that-seem-to-be-working-well--xazv21ymixsk22yd>



ACE - With that, we'll launch into some of the improvements and modifications we've made to our training program this semester that we are particularly excited about!

Our Collaborative Approach

Leveraging a partnership with different expertise:

1. an established, mid-career librarian with deep institutional knowledge
2. an early-career librarian with recent experience as a graduate assistant

Structuring our program revisions:

1. Pain Points
2. Coverage Gaps
3. Sense of Community & Belonging



ACE - After I was onboarded this summer, Amanda Izenstark and I approached modifying our training program collaboratively. Amanda has been at URI for many years and has been involved, at least peripherally, in Reffie training for [??] years. Her wealth of knowledge about both institutional context and historical needs and priorities of the role was invaluable. However, she was also open to and excited about new ideas. As a recent graduate of an MLIS program where I worked as a graduate assistant myself, my experiences of training were fresh in my mind. As I adjusted to my new role, I started by thinking about pain points I had experienced as a graduate assistant - areas where I had felt inadequately prepared and tasks or experiences that had caused me anxiety when I first started working at a reference service point. The next thing we discussed were coverage gaps - topics that Amanda had noticed our training program didn't address that were nonetheless very relevant to work at our research help desk. Finally, we turned our attention to strategies for cultivating stronger community and a robust support system for our Reffies.

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Is there anything that you'd like to improve in your training practices?

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ACE - [short transition] We approached our updates and revisions to the program collaboratively, and the program benefitted from our open conversations. The first areas for development that we addressed were pain points I shared from my previous, recent experience.

Pain Points

Application & Hands-On Practice During Training Phase

- Sample questions & scenarios before the first shift
- Reflection & application to reduce cognitive overload & anxiety
- Ongoing homework questions to practice with new resources

Sample Scenarios:

During initial onboarding:

- *"How do I know if this article is scholarly?"*
- *"How do I access current newspapers?"*

After subject-specific training:

- *"I'm looking for articles about the civil rights movement in the late 1960s. I need both primary and secondary sources. Which databases should I use?"*
- *"How can I search for patents relating to biodegradable polymers?"*

ACE - The first thing I wanted to address was the incorporation of more hands-on practice during training and before the first shift. When I was trained as a graduate assistant, my training program was thorough, but it left me feeling overloaded with information. I had been given all the tools, but hadn't had structured opportunities for practice and reflection before my first shift on the desk. Impostor syndrome - or the feeling that you aren't qualified to help with research or reference needs outside of your comfort disciplines - can be a real issue for new librarians, but especially so for brand new graduate students. It was important to me that we structured chances for practice to help our Reffies build confidence in their skills and in their ability to help before their first experiences working with the public. By incorporating sample questions and scenarios into training and having them role play how they might answer questions and how they would approach a reference interview, we hoped to reduce anxiety and mitigate cognitive overload. Rather than deliver nonstop content, we incorporated pauses for application, synthesis, and reflection. This approach continues after the initial onboarding sessions with homework questions that our Reffies work on during quiet moments on the desk where they get to continue honing their skills and getting feedback from us in a low stakes setting.

Pain Points

Equitable, Knowledgeable Services
for Patrons with Disabilities

Contextualizing the Need:

- Library science graduate programs aren't adequately preparing students to engage with disability/accessibility (Pionke, 2020)
- Revised 2023 RUSA Guidelines specifically underscore accessibility & inclusion

Training for Accessibility & Inclusion:

- Consciousness raising; addressing diverse needs proactively rather than reactively
 - Building & facility accessibility
 - Referring students to DAI for support & assistive technology
 - Mental health & wellness resources
- Alternate physical and e-resource access
 - Service through multiple modalities
 - Paging materials
 - Authorized proxies

ACE - The second pain point I wanted to address was explicitly incorporating a discussion of disability and accessibility into our training program. An important study conducted by JJ Pionke surveying library employee and library graduate student views of patrons with disabilities and their self-perception of their own preparedness for providing equitable services for patrons with disabilities found that librarians across library types generally rated themselves as unprepared. In particular, Pionke noted that his respondents reported that their graduate programs hadn't proactively addressed issues of library accessibility in any substantive way. I certainly felt this was the case - in my own degree, I had to seek out courses with an accessibility focus and, even then, there was little emphasis on practical interventions. My own training experiences also did not explicitly address accessibility, which meant that I had to seek guidance reactively as questions came up that I couldn't answer. I felt passionate that I wanted to at least scratch the surface of this conversation in training and, when I consulted the updated RUSA Guidelines in preparation for making training revisions, I was pleased to see that the updated Guidelines now make explicit mention of the importance of accessibility and inclusion at service points. Clearly, this issue is getting increased attention. We incorporated accessibility and disability into our initial onboarding sessions explicitly by...

Expanding Training Topics

Alternative Text

Sources

Textbook affordability and access are priorities

- OER repositories
- Internet Archive, Google Books
- Local public libraries

Artificial Intelligence

- AI can support topic brainstorming for students who need ideas
- AI-generated citations present searching challenges

AI

There are two topics that we're fleshing out and incorporating as the environment evolves.

Because we get a lot of questions about textbooks at the start of the semester, and because we can't possibly collect every textbook assigned, we want to do what we can to ensure that students have access to the materials they need to succeed. To do this, we're incorporating more information about OER repositories, the Internet Archive and Google Books as sources for books, and highlighting the resources of our local public libraries.

AI is another hot topic. We're mostly seeing this in the form of hallucinated citations that researchers come to us to find, so bibliographic verification - as it was called in the day - is once again front and center. We also want to highlight ways that students can use AI to support their learning, and one way is making sure they know how it can be used to brainstorm topics and keywords for research.

Community & Dialogue

From Professional Standards to Community Agreement

- Evolution from static expectations document to a mutual agreement grounded in dialogue (via Padlet)
- Anonymous forum to articulate wants & needs for mentorship

Padlet Categories:

1. We expect our supervisor(s) to...
2. We expect Reffies to...
3. Our expectations for communication & feedback
4. Things I value in a working relationship are...
5. I hope to receive mentorship and support in...

ACE - Beyond addressing training topics and content, we also took time this summer to brainstorm how we could create a more collaborative and supportive environment for our Reffies. We decided to move away from a static document detailing our professional expectations for Reffie conduct and instead adopt a mutually agreed upon community agreement. On the last day of training, I shared a Padlet with the following categories: [slide]. We took several minutes to all add our expectations and values to the document. We chose Padlet because posts are anonymous - I felt this was important so that Reffies would be able to advocate for and express their needs without being identified by name. As this process took place on our second day of training, it was early in our relationship and I wanted to ensure they felt comfortable asking for what they needed. This process enabled us to create shared standards for conduct and come to a consensus about the kind of working environment everyone expected while still providing a forum for me to articulate my expectations for their work and responsibilities. The Padlet was then saved as a PDF and uploaded to a shared drive so that Reffies could refer back to it at any time. My hope is that this also provides a mechanism for accountability - all parties can refer back to our agreement in the event that conflict or unmet expectations arise.

Supporting Reflection & Growth

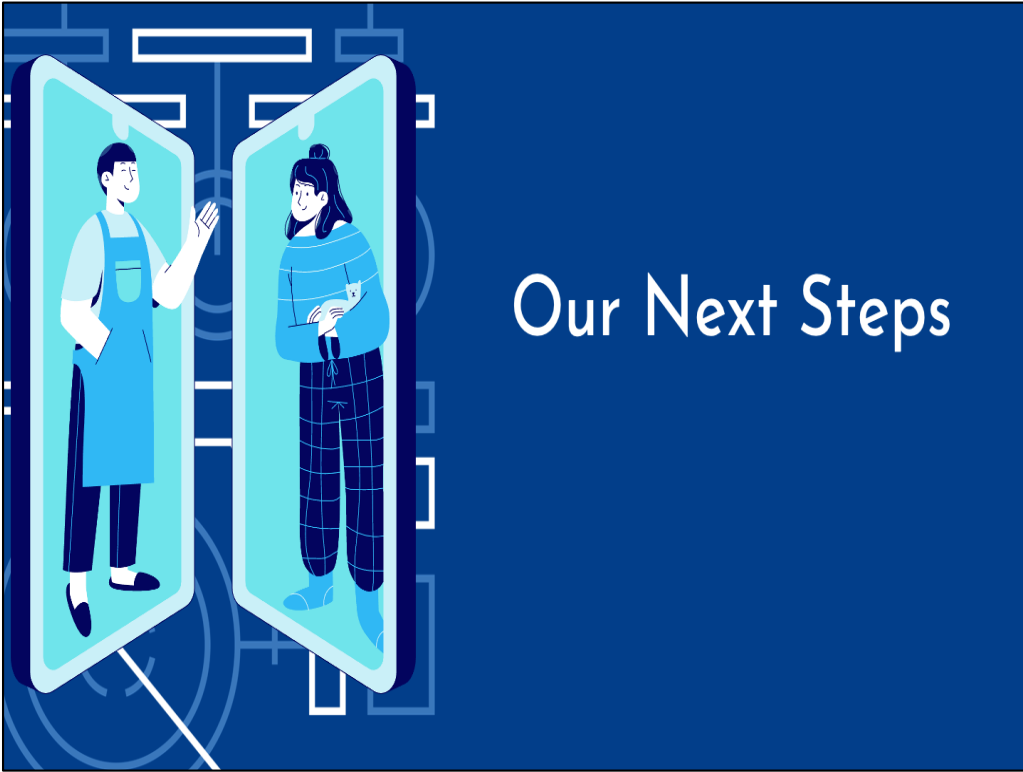
End of Orientation Exit Ticket

- Opportunity to reflect on & process training concepts
- Option to ask questions in writing with more privacy than in a full-group setting
- Normalize and address lingering concerns

Exit Ticket Prompts

1. Share one thing you're excited about learning or doing in this role:
2. Share one thing you're nervous about learning or doing in this role:
3. What particular experience do you hope to gain and how can we support you?

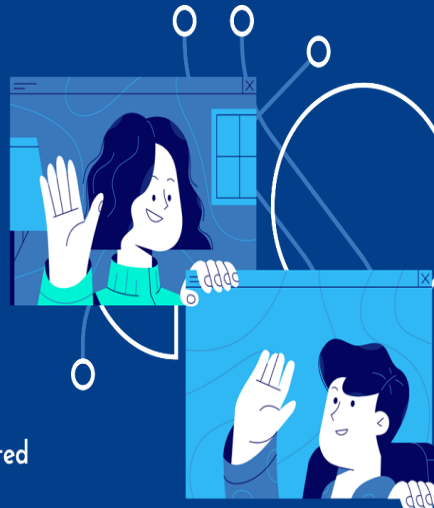
ACE - Lastly, we ended our initial onboarding session with an end of orientation exit ticket. I wanted to give Reffies an opportunity to reflect on their training, ask questions of me directly (without needing to do so in front of the full group), and to normalize and address any lingering concerns, questions, or anxieties. I wanted to make clear that I believe this to be a learning position - nobody has to be perfect on day one. What I expect is thoughtfulness, reflection, and clear communication. On the exit ticket, I asked Reffies [slide]. This was valuable in that it let the Reffies share personal interests and areas of concern or nervousness as well as their hopes for the job. I then had this feedback to inform future subject-specific training sessions, project assignments, and one on one meetings.



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Iterative Changes

- Gathering Reffie feedback annually
- Exploring an exit interview process
- Updating training materials as needed
- Considering supplemental training modules hosted in our LMS



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Some of the changes we're planning to make include:

- Gathering Reffie feedback annually
- Exploring an exit interview process
- Updating training materials as needed
- Considering supplemental training modules hosted in our LMS



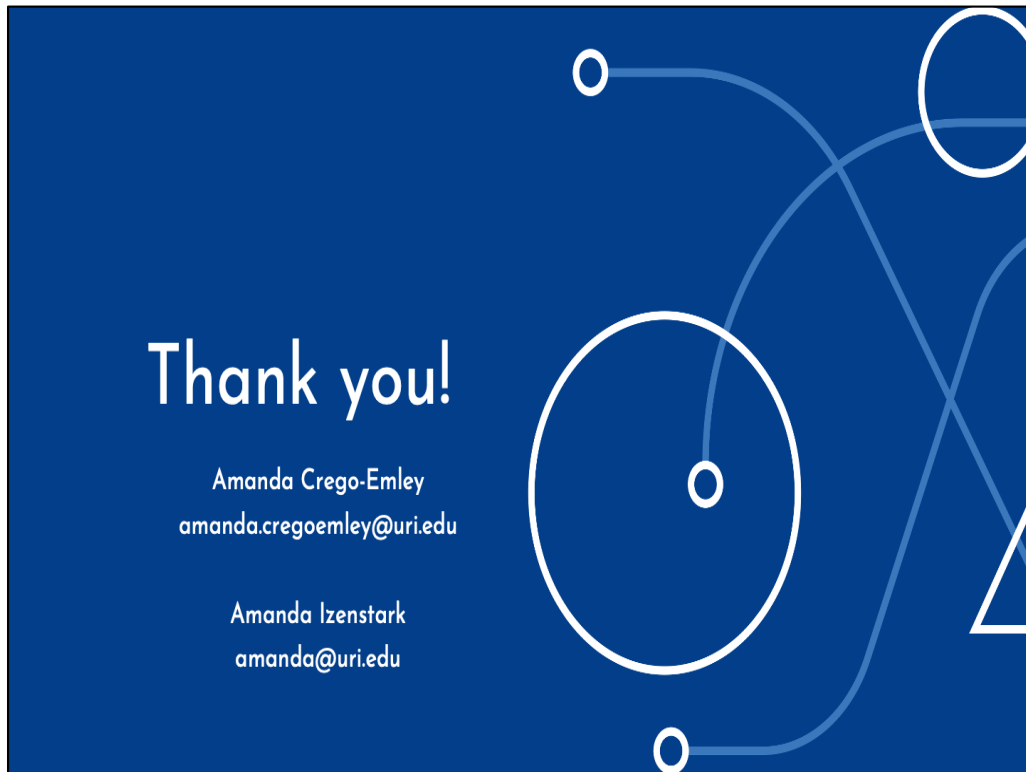
[Have you heard anything today that might be useful in your own programming or training?](https://padlet.com/amandacregoemley/have-you-heard-anything-today-that-might-be-useful-in-your-own-programming-or-training?)



AI

To wrap up... Have you heard anything today that might be useful in your own programming or training? Please share on this padlet:

<https://padlet.com/amandacregoemley/have-you-heard-anything-today-that-might-be-useful-in-your-own-programming-or-training?>



AI

Thanks for coming! Please reach out to either of us if you any questions.

References

Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers. (2008, September 29). [Text updated 2023]. Reference & User Services Association (RUSA).

<https://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral>

Pionke, J. J. (2020). Library Employee Views of Disability and Accessibility. *Journal of Library Administration*, 60(2), 120-145.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2019.1704560>

Additionally:

- [SlidesCarnival](#) was the source for the template
- We used the Padlet logo from [The George Washington University's site about Padlet](#)