



Interim Report: Ask a Librarian Email Reference Service User Feedback (Fall 2016)

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Contents

Background.....	1
Fall 2016 Results.....	2
Conclusion: What We Learned and Next Steps.....	7
Appendix A: Feedback Form (Qualtrics)	9
Appendix B: Instructions to Email Service Providers	11
Appendix C: Comments from Respondents in Response to Question #7	13
Appendix D: Comments from Respondents in Response to Question #8	14

Background

This report covers user feedback on the Ask a Librarian email reference service from October 10, 2016, to December 31, 2016. We will continue to ask for user feedback during the winter 2017 semester to obtain data across semesters.

Starting in fall 2016, email reference service providers sought feedback about users’ motivation for seeking help via email. Email service providers invited users to provide feedback by including an invitation when responding to email replies. Each invitation was based on the following template:

“I hope this information helps you.

If you’d like to, please consider filling out our short, anonymous feedback form
https://umich.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bw2tUs8sAUuR2hn

Thank you for using the Ask a Librarian email service at the University of Michigan!

Sincerely,

[Service provider name]

Ask a Librarian staff’

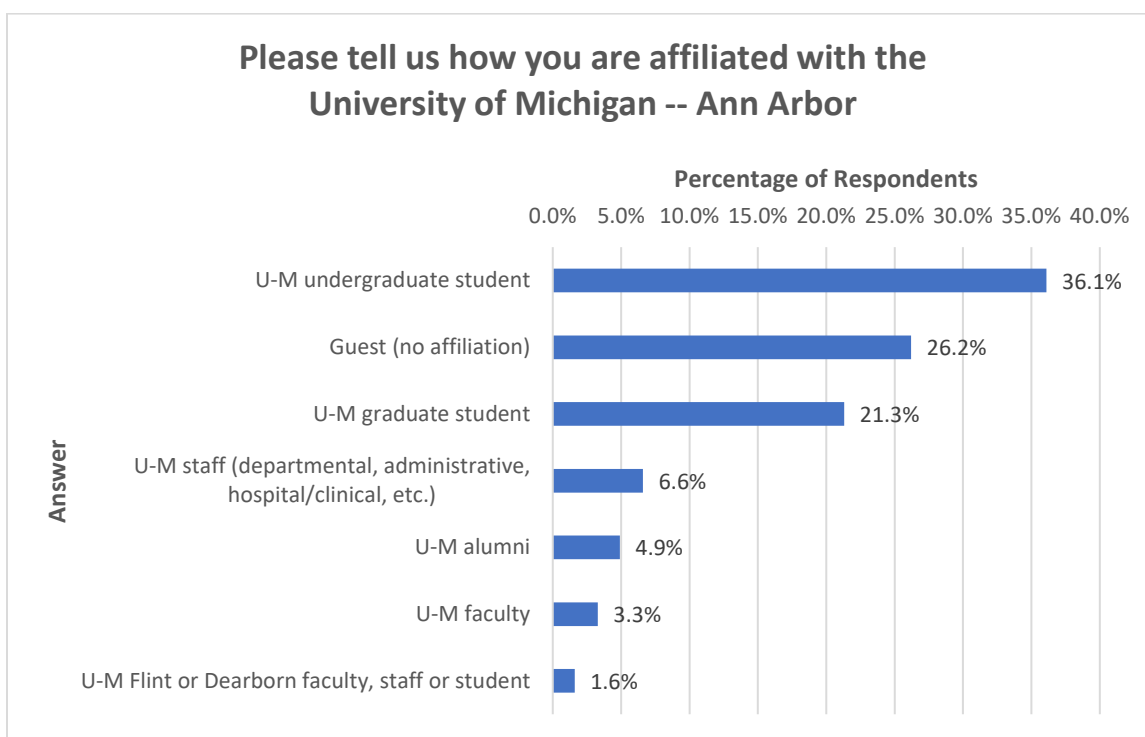
The invitation link led users to a Qualtrics survey form with seven questions (see Appendix A).

Fall 2016 Results

Who Responded?

The number of users who responded to the feedback request during this period was 66. This is not a statistically significant number given that email service providers answered 1,181 questions between October 1, 2016 and December 23, 2016. The completion rate for the feedback form was 87% (66 responses out of 76 forms started). Partial responses (5) were included in the responses and following data analysis.

Of the 61 respondents who provided their affiliation, the majority was students. The group with the second most respondents was guests (no affiliation) and U-M alumni. For students, undergraduate students totaled 22 respondents or 36.1%, and graduate students numbered 13 respondents or 21.3%. Almost a third, 19 respondents or 31.1%, were guests (no affiliation) and U-M alumni. The remaining 7 respondents or 11.5% were U-M faculty, U-M staff, or U-M Flint or Dearborn faculty, staff, or student.

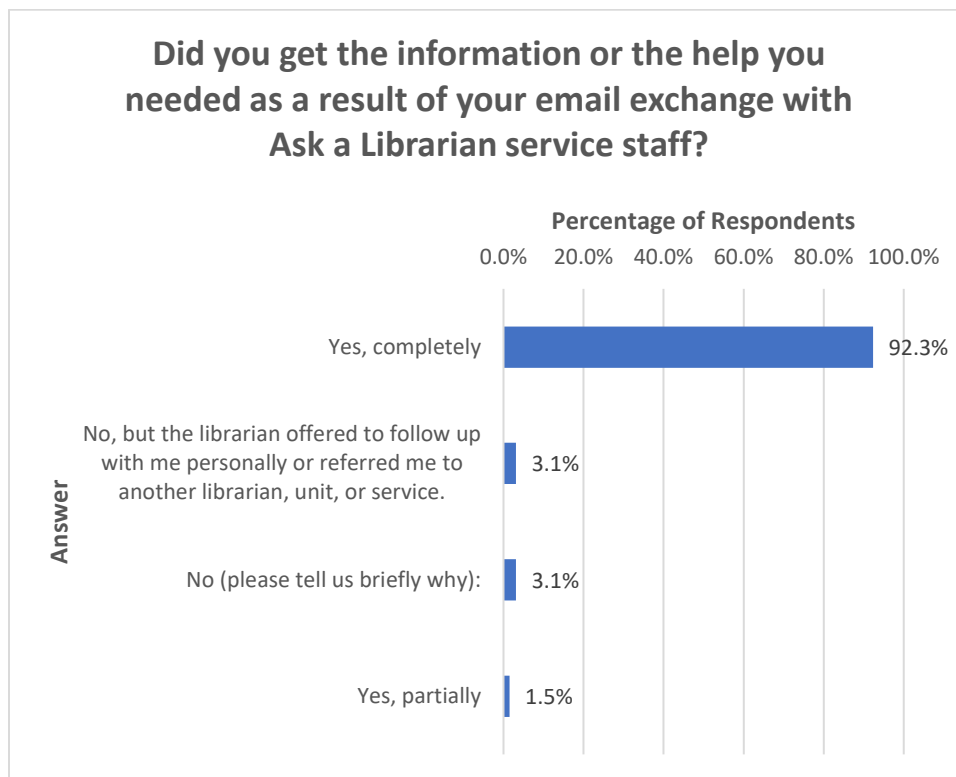


It is notable that the most respondents were students. It could be that students were more likely to fill out a feedback form. It could also be that they represent a high volume of the email service use. Data about students' motivations for seeking help via email is analyzed later in this report. As compared to data captured in 2012, many respondents or 62% were also students.¹

¹ Barbara Beaton, Lisa Campbell, Karen Reiman-Sendi, and Harold Tuckett, "Ask a Librarian Email Reference Service Report (2012)," (report, University of Michigan Library, March 2013): 1-10.
https://staff.lib.umich.edu/sites/staff.lib.umich.edu/files/askemailfeedbackreport_58.pdf

Did Respondents Get What They Needed?

The feedback showed that the overwhelming majority received the information or help that they needed from the email service. The percentage of respondents who “completely” received the information or help needed was 92.3%. Only one respondent (guest (no affiliation)) partially received the information or help needed; that same respondent also commented that the email reference service was, “[v]ery helpful but almost too detailed in reply.”



While two respondents (3.1%) did not get the information or help needed, the librarian offered to follow up or referred them to another librarian, unit, or service. Of those two, one respondent (U-M alumni) expressed alarm at being referred to Google or Good Reads for a book recommendation. The other respondent (guest (no affiliation)) called the service “excellent” when asked what else we should know about the email service.

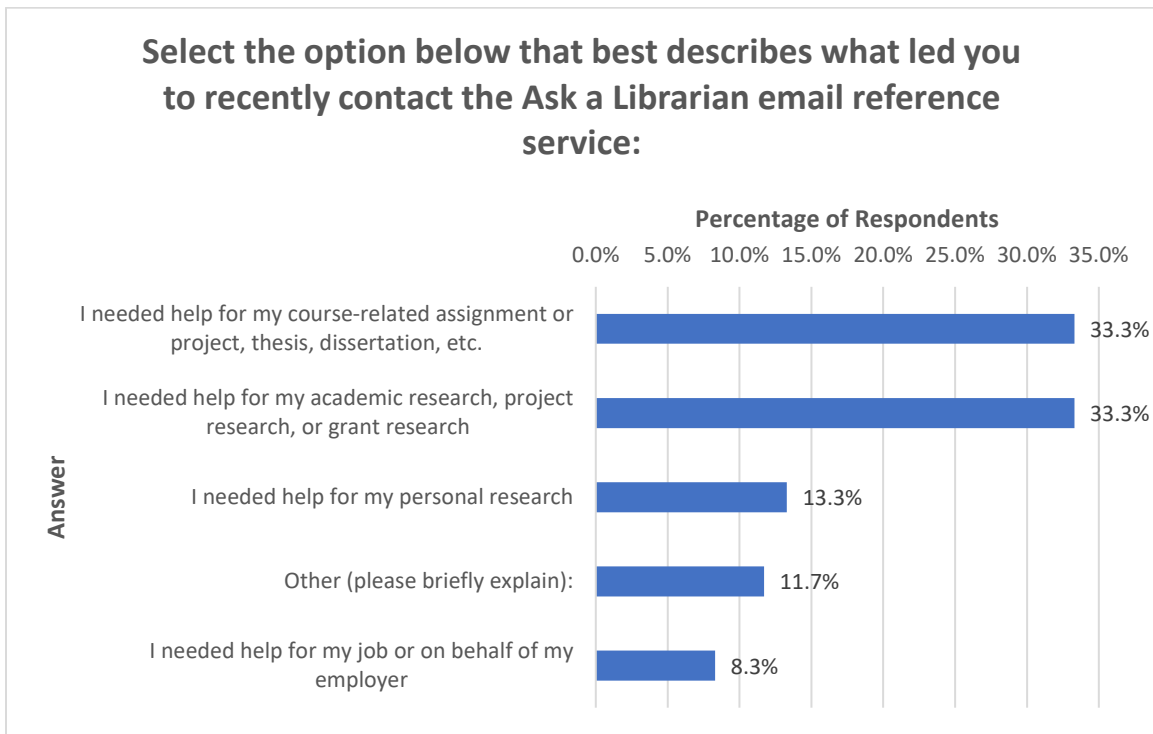
Of the two respondents (3.1%) who marked the option “No (please tell us briefly why)” for getting the information or help that they needed, one respondent (guest (no affiliation)) expressed appreciation for the prompt reply and, when asked what else we should know about the email service, said that the question had been answered. The other respondent (guest (no affiliation)) expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of access to online documents. It should be noted that guests who are not affiliated with the University of Michigan do not have access to online resources from off campus but can access resources on the guest computers in the libraries.

What Led Respondents to Contact the Ask a Librarian Email Reference Service?

Two reasons tied for the most common motivation to contact the email service; each accounted for 20 users or 33.3% (60 of the 66 respondents filled out this question). Their reasons were course-related and academic, project, or grant research-related.

Reasons listed by respondents who selected “Other (please briefly explain)” included (paraphrased):

- Help with PDFs of articles for a class (1 U-M faculty)
- Linking problems (2 students)
- Personal research on a topic (2 guests (no affiliation))
- Circulation-related issues (1 graduate student)
- Help with a “journal assignment” (1 undergraduate student)



Analyzing these responses by affiliation illuminated motivations for the two groups with the most respondents. Students’ main motivations for contacting the email service were course-related and academic, project, or grant research-related. Specifically for undergraduate students, the top reason was course-related help; the second was “help for my job or on behalf of my employer.” For graduate students, the top reason was help with academic, project, or grant research; the second was course-related help.

For guests (no affiliation) or U-M alumni, the top motivation was personal research. The second and third motivations were, respectively: academic, project, or grant research and “help for my job or on behalf of my employer.”

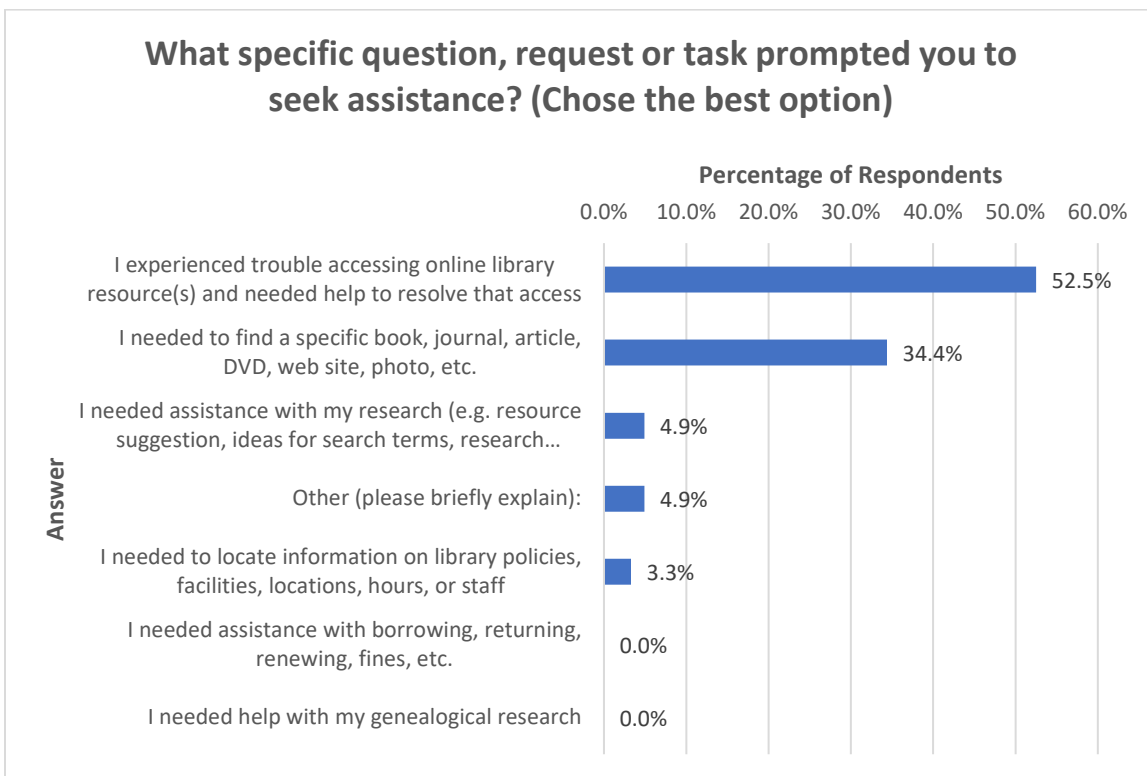
Specifically, What Were Respondents' Questions? Who Had Those Questions?

Trouble accessing online library resource(s) accounted for more than half, or 52.5%, of respondents' questions sent to the email service. The second most common question for which 34.4% of respondents used the email service was help finding a specific item.

Two other questions accounted for a total of 8.2% of respondents: help with academic, project, or grant research and help with library policies and services. Only guests (no affiliation) chose the latter.

No respondents marked that they needed circulation or genealogical research help.

Of the three respondents who chose "Other" and explained why, two of the comments (from students) would fall under the question regarding trouble accessing online library resources. The third comment fit in the "Other" category; the respondent (guest (no affiliation)) expressed a need for translation help.



Again, reviewing these data by affiliation revealed motivations for seeking help from the email service. For undergraduate and graduate students combined (the group with the most (35) feedback responses), the top reason for contacting us (26 responses) was trouble accessing online library resource(s). Students' second most common question (5 responses) regarded a specific item.

For the second largest constituency of guests (no affiliation) and U-M alumni (19 feedback responses), the top reason (13 responses) regarded a specific item. The second and third most common questions (both

with 2 responses) were: trouble accessing online library resource(s) and library policies, facilities, locations, hours or staff.

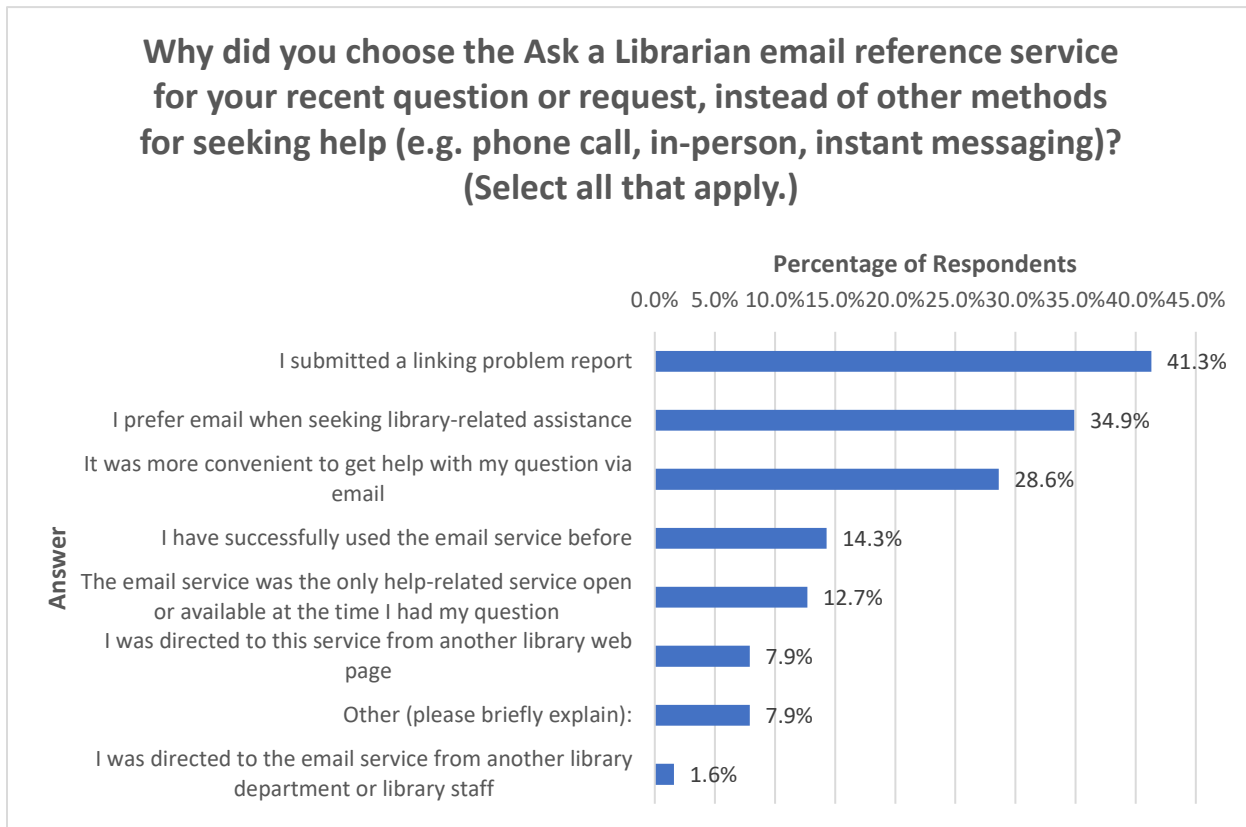
Why Did Respondents Choose the Email Service?

The top motivation for choosing the method of email was submitting a linking problem report (41.3% of respondents). Of the 26 linking problem reports, 20 concerned course-related or research-related needs from students.

The second and third top motivations for choosing email regarded the format and features of email as a means of communication. In particular, the second most common reason was a preference for using email for library assistance (34.9% of respondents). The third most common reason was the convenience of email (28.6% of respondents).

Comments from the users who selected “Other (please briefly explain)” included (paraphrased):

- No answer to a call so the respondent tried email (1 graduate student)
- Referral to the email service from a library staff member (1 U-M alumni)
- Overseas and in a different time zone (2 guests (no affiliation))
- Instant message “seems apt only for short question” (1 guest (no affiliation))
- Record of the response (1 guest (no affiliation))



Respondents could choose multiple answers to this question. Again, looking at the answers by the two top user affiliations is illuminating. For all students, top motivations for choosing the method of email were:

1. Linking problem report (21 responses)
2. Convenience of email (11)
3. Preference for email when seeking library-related assistance (8)

Top motivations for guests (no affiliation) and U-M alumni were:

1. Preference for email when seeking library-related assistance (11)
2. Convenience of email (5)
3. Other (4)

These top motivations reveal that students come to the email service primarily for linking problems, and guests (no affiliation) and U-M alumni like the method of email.

What Else Did Respondents Want Us to Know?

Twenty-one respondents provided comments. Nineteen respondents commented in the question for additional comments, and two more respondents submitted general comments in the question for providing their contact information for us to get in touch with them. A sample of those comments about the service is provided here:

- “Very helpful thanks :)”
- “It’s wonderful, works well, and is a big reason why the University of Michigan’s library network is one of the best in the world.”
- “I appreciate how fast and courteous the service was!”
- “Replies are always helpful and prompt. There are many stresses in research, but this is not one of them, thankfully.”
- “I have had overwhelmingly positive experiences. Great response times and very helpful replies, thank you for all your help!”
- “I’d like to thank the service for being there and for being well-staffed!”

The complete lists of comments are in appendices C and D.

Conclusion: What We Learned Thus Far and Next Steps

The feedback responses informed us about users’ motivation for seeking help via the Ask a Librarian email reference service. Feedback was extremely positive, similar to the previous feedback effort we conducted in 2012. As the 2012 report noted, this pattern of positive feedback could result from reluctance to share negative feedback.

From the comments, several themes arise. Feedback overwhelmingly showed that patrons received the information they were seeking from our service. Patrons deliberately chose email as a means of communication. The email service was described as convenient, prompt, thorough, and helpful.

Feedback also revealed motivation by respondents' affiliation. The largest group of respondents, which were students, had trouble accessing online library resources and were motivated to use the email service to report linking problems. They expressed that these needs were primarily course- or research-related. The second largest group of respondents, which were guests (no affiliation) and U-M alumni, needed help finding a specific item. They expressed a preference for email and noted the convenience of the method of email. As email service providers, the authors know that both of these main motivations for the two largest groups of respondents require instruction about access and options for obtaining resources. We also know that a timely, quick response is often crucial for course- and research-related questions.

A high volume of questions (32 or 52.5%) regarded trouble accessing online library resources. Even though ArticlesPlus links to full text content has been improved and updated over the years, linking problems as a result of failed systems (26 or 41.3%) were a high proportion of reasons respondents contacted our service. (Note: the email service is the automatic point of contact when users submit a linking problem via the library's Qualtrics reporting form.)

While the email service responds to a large volume of linking problems in relation to our total email volume, the volume of linking problems is typically small compared to the tens of thousands of successful linking transactions that go through without a hitch every month. Still, next steps to address this high volume of email questions about linking problems could be: taking a closer look at email transcripts to pinpoint unusual problems and to continue to share these findings with the Electronic Access Unit (EAU) and Library Information Technology units.

A second report including winter 2017 feedback will follow.

Appendix A: Feedback Form (Qualtrics)

U-M Library Ask a Librarian Email Reference Service Feedback

Q1 We appreciate your comments about the University of Michigan Library's Ask a Librarian email reference service. Your feedback will help library staff anticipate and respond to our community's needs and expectations around personalized library research assistance services. The feedback form will take only a few minutes to complete. Your comments are completely anonymous. If you have questions about this feedback form, please contact Karen Reiman-Sendi (karsendi@umich.edu).

Q2 Did you get the information or the help you needed as a result of your email exchange with Ask a Librarian service staff?

- Yes, completely
- Yes, partially
- No, but the librarian offered to follow up with me personally or referred me to another librarian, unit, or service.
- No (please tell us briefly why): _____

Q3 Why did you choose the Ask a Librarian email reference service for your recent question or request, instead of other methods for seeking help (e.g. phone call, in-person, instant messaging)? (Select all that apply.)

- I prefer email when seeking library-related assistance
- I was directed to the email service from another library department or library staff
- It was more convenient to get help with my question via email
- I have successfully used the email service before
- The email service was the only help-related service open or available at the time I had my question
- I was directed to this service from another library web page
- I submitted a linking problem report
- Other (please briefly explain): _____

Q4 Select the option below that best describes what led you to recently contact the Ask a Librarian email reference service:

- I needed help for my course-related assignment or project, thesis, dissertation, etc.
- I needed help for my academic research, project research, or grant research
- I needed help for my job or on behalf of my employer
- I needed help for my personal research
- Other (please briefly explain): _____

Q5 What specific question, request or task prompted you to seek assistance? (Chose the best option):

- I needed to find a specific book, journal, article, DVD, web site, photo, etc.
- I experienced trouble accessing online library resource(s) and needed help to resolve that access
- I needed assistance with my research (e.g. resource suggestion, ideas for search terms, research strategies, instruction on appropriate technologies, etc.)
- I needed to locate information on library policies, facilities, locations, hours, or staff
- I needed assistance with borrowing, returning, renewing, fines, etc.
- I needed help with my genealogical research
- Other (please briefly explain): _____

Q6 Please tell us how you are affiliated with the University of Michigan -- Ann Arbor:

- U-M undergraduate student
- U-M graduate student
- U-M staff (departmental, administrative, hospital/clinical, etc.)
- U-M faculty (7)
- U-M Flint or Dearborn faculty, staff or student
- U-M alumni
- Guest (no affiliation)

Q7 What else would you like us to know about the Ask a Librarian email reference service?

Q8 Your comments are strictly anonymous. However, if you would like us to get back in touch with you about any aspect of the University of Michigan Library's Ask a Librarian email reference service, please include your preferred contact information here:

Appendix B: Instructions to Email Service Providers

GATHERING USER SATISFACTION FEEDBACK FROM ASK A LIBRARIAN EMAIL USERS

Fall 2016

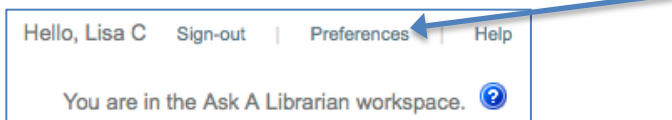
BACKGROUND

To learn more about the users of the Ask A Librarian email service, we have developed a short feedback form. (See Appendix A for feedback form example.) The aim is to **invite all users** of the Ask a Librarian email service to complete the feedback form from October 10 through December 12, 2016. We will share the submitted feedback results with Ask email staff as well as other interested staff during winter term 2017.

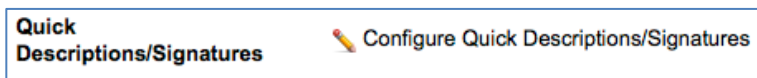
The following information explains how to use the FootPrints *Quick Descriptions* feature to insert an anonymous feedback form link into your Ask a Librarian email transactions. This feature in FootPrints will make it easier for busy email staff to include the feedback invitation in all responses.

CREATE A QUICK DESCRIPTION

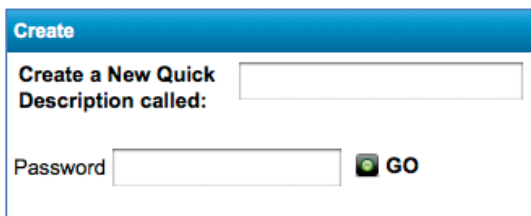
1. From the FootPrints homepage, click on *Preferences*.



2. From the *Question Page* tab, click on *Configure Quick Descriptions/Signatures*.



3. Enter a name for your *Quick Description* (e.g. Feedback Form). Enter your password and press the green GO button.



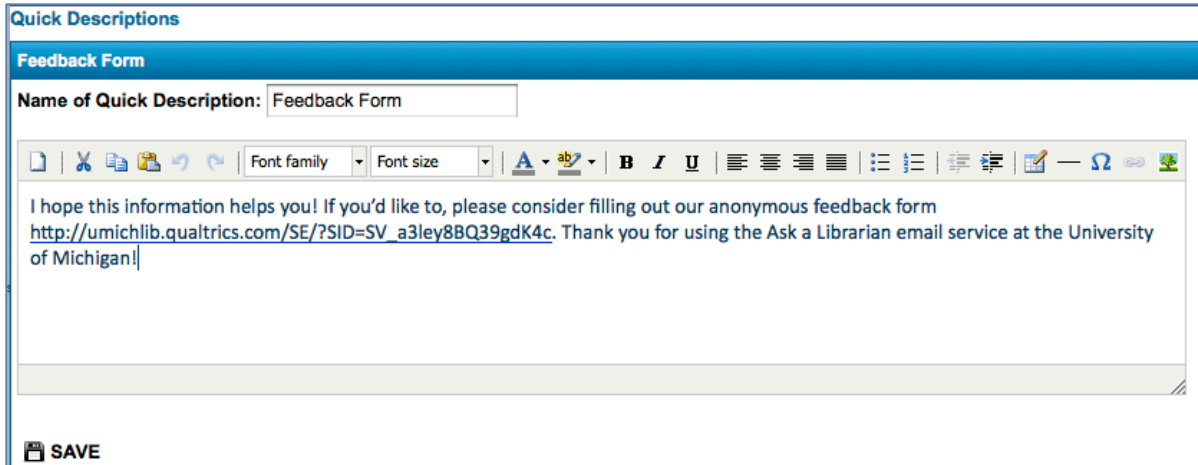
4. Compose a *Quick Description* and click *SAVE*. Recommended text:

"I hope this information helps you.

If you'd like to, please consider filling out our anonymous feedback form

https://umich.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bw2tUs8sAUuR2hn

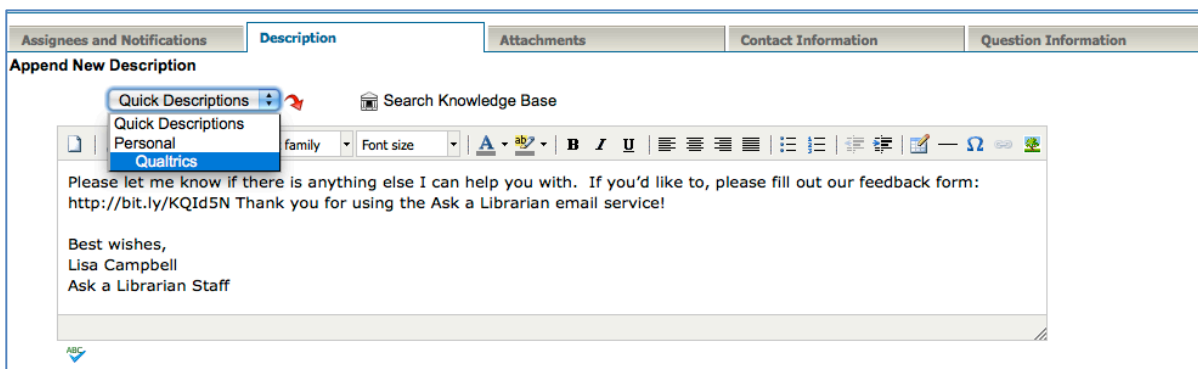
Thank you for using the Ask a Librarian email service at the University of Michigan!"



ADDING THE FEEDBACK FORM LINK TO YOUR RESPONSE

When you think you've reached the end of the email reference transaction, include the feedback form with your final response.

In edit mode, under the *Description* tab, use the "Quick Descriptions" drop-down menu to select the Feedback Form *Quick Description*. This will insert the feedback form into your response.



Please include the invitation to complete the feedback form at the end of every response, **except for those questions that you transfer to another FootPrints workspace**. For example, if you are moving a FootPrints question to the Grad Circ FootPrints workspace, do not include your quick description text. (But if you are actually answering a question and not just transferring it, and part of your answer includes a referral to another unit or library, do include the feedback invitation link). Also, it is not necessary to include the feedback invitation link in every one of your responses to a single individual or within a single conversation thread.

QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW TO INSERT A QUICK DESCRIPTION? CONTACT HAROLD TUCKETT (HTUCKETT@UMICH.EDU).

Appendix C: Comments from Respondents in Response to Question #7

What else would you like us to know about the Ask a Librarian email reference service?
I'd like to thank the service for being there and for being well-staffed!
Excellent turnaround time. Thank you!
I was asking for a book about the 'Thirty Years' War that I could read for personal enrichment. There are dozens and dozens of them out there, and I felt overwhelmed. A friend who's a librarian at a small college here in Philly suggested I try this service, so I did, and both she and I are alarmed that the response was that I should check Google or Good Reads. I wonder what the purpose of this service is if it only gives me a name and information that I can find independently?
Very helpful but almost too detailed in reply
I really appreciate your kind and prompt help. Thank you guys very much.
Very helpful, [name deleted] was prompt and answered my question fully.
Replies are always helpful and prompt. There are many stresses in research, but this is not one of them, thankfully.
It's wonderful, works well, and is a big reason why the University of Michigan's library network is one of the best in the world.
very helpful thanks :)
She was very helpful.
I appreciate how fast and courteous the service was!
it is an excellent service
I would like to say THANK YOU and send greetings from POLAND. [respondent's name deleted]
very helpful service today. thank you!
I have had overwhelmingly positive experiences. Great response times and very helpful replies, thank you for all your help!
The Librarian's response was very thorough and helpful -- thank you!
I'm a retired UM-Dearborn faculty, which isn't exactly covered in the choices you provide. More importantly, I received an accurate answer within 24 hours, which makes this most helpful to me.
It was excellent and speedy
Very helpful

Appendix D: Comments from Respondents in Response to Question #8

While Question #8 was for respondents to provide contact information for a follow-up from a librarian, two respondents provided feedback, not contact information. Their comments are included here.

Your comments are strictly anonymous. However, if you would like us to get back in touch with you about any aspect of the University of Michigan Library's Ask a Librarian email reference service, please include your preferred contact information here:

"[Name deleted] was the staff member that replied to my question, and he was very polite, helpful and thorough. I appreciated his efforts."

"Great Job!"
