REFERENCE DEPARTMENT POLICIES

I. OBJECTIVES OF THE REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

The primary objective of the Reference Department is to assist the library’s users in locating and using information resources. Specific objectives include:

1. answering questions by providing directions or information from reference resources
2. suggesting information sources and approaches, including referrals to resources outside the library, that are likely to serve the information needs of users
3. assisting with the use of reference resources
4. providing instruction in the use of the library and of library resources

II. DEFINITIONS

A. For purposes of this policy, a university affiliated person is defined as:
1. Students who are currently enrolled or are enrolled for the next semester
2. UW-River Falls faculty and staff
3. Emeriti/retired faculty and staff

B. Library staff members who provide coverage at the Research Help Desk are considered reference staff.

III. SERVICE ETHICS

A. The questions and information needs of users are treated confidentially. The resources used by library patrons and the transactions between users and reference staff members will not be discussed or disclosed except within a professional context.

B. While the library is primarily a resource for the faculty, students and staff of UW-River Falls, as a state-supported institution it is also open to the public. No distinctions are made between different categories of users when providing routine reference service. Reference staff provide service to library users accurately, efficiently, and with courtesy without showing favoritism to any one user or group of users.

C. Generally, users asking ready reference questions will have the information provided for them, while users with more difficult and involved questions will be instructed in how to conduct their own research.
IV TYPES OF REFERENCE SERVICE

A. Reference Interview. Reference staff always determine the needs of the patron, using a reference interview when necessary, to clarify the patron’s request.

B. Directional questions. Reference staff provide directional assistance and answer general questions about the library and its services. Questions about photocopiers, microform copiers, printing, software, and other technology-related issues are referred to the Circulation Desk or the Division of Technology Services Help Desk as appropriate.

C. Ready Reference. Staff provide reference information to patrons on a person-to-person basis, and by telephone, email, or letter.

D. Reference. When assisting patrons one-on-one with reference requests that require the in-depth use of one or more reference sources, staff instruct them on the use of information resources in order to teach them to obtain information themselves.

E. Instructional Materials. Reference staff prepare and provide instructional materials to help patrons locate library material and use information resources.

F. Interlibrary Loan/UW System Borrowing. Reference staff provide assistance to university-affiliated patrons in using Interlibrary Loan/UW System Borrowing to obtain materials not available in the Chalmer Davee Library.

G. Government Information. The Chalmer Davee Library serves as a depository for federal and state documents. Reference staff provide assistance to all library patrons needing to access government information in any format. Users with more complex questions or information needs are referred to the Government Information Specialist.

H. Reference staff orient new freshmen to the library at the start of each new academic year.

I. High school groups and other groups not affiliated with the University are welcome to schedule a formal instruction session if need dictates.

J. Email. UWRF faculty, students, and staff and the non-UWRF community at large can request research help by submitting a form linked to the library homepage. Questions from non-UWRF affiliated users are accepted if the subject is clearly something that the UWRF library is better equipped to handle than other libraries in the area. Questions related to local and campus history or genealogy are referred to the University Archives and Area Research Center.
K. Telephone. Telephone reference calls are accepted at the Research Help Desk but do not take precedence over patrons being served in person. Generally, staff provide answers to directional and factual ready reference questions. Callers requiring extensive subject searches or lengthy assistance are asked to come to the library.

During times when staff are unavailable at the Research Help Desk, calls are automatically transferred to the Circulation Desk.

L. Librarians to Go. Faculty and staff may request a consultation with a librarian in their office by filling out a Librarians to Go form linked to the Research Help page.

M. Genealogy and Local History. Questions related to genealogy, local, and campus history are referred to the University Archives and Area Research Center.

N. Medical, Legal, Tax or Consumer Advice. Librarians do not offer medical, legal, or tax advice or recommend particular consumer products but will give patrons the appropriate sources to assist them in finding information.

O. Contest and Trivia Questions. Librarians will provide general guidance in where to look for information to find answers for contest, trivia, and scavenger hunt questions.

P. Referrals to Other Libraries. When another library is likely to have information of relevance to a user’s need beyond that available at the Chalmer Davee Library, reference staff will refer the user to that library. Users are often referred to the River Falls Public Library to access a more popular level of information.

Q. At times when staff are not available at the Research Help Desk, Access Services staff provide limited research assistance from the Circulation Desk. Library users needing additional assistance are referred to the Research Help form linked to the library homepage.

V RESEARCH HELP DESK STATISTICS

A weekly record is maintained of all questions answered by reference staff at the Research Help Desk. The statistics are used to determine staffing levels at the Research Help Desk, as well as for reports submitted by library administration.

VI LIBRARY ASSIGNMENTS

A. Faculty Consultations. Consultation with faculty members who give their classes library assignments is occasionally necessary. Any information provided is made available to all staff working at the Research Help Desk.

B. Levels of Assistance. Because librarians routinely do not ask the purpose of a
patron’s question (except to assist with determining the patron’s needs during the reference interview), they do not withhold assistance from students working on take-home exams or other class exercises. When a class assignment requires extensive assistance, to save staff time a list of correct sources may be drawn up and kept at the Research Help Desk.

VII  REFERENCE COLLECTION

The Reference Department maintains a collection of print and electronic resources to support reference services.

VIII  SPECIAL PERMISSION CHECKOUT

A. Materials from the Reference Collection do not circulate outside of the library. Permission to checkout reference materials to UWRF faculty, students and staff will be granted by librarians at the Research Help Desk.

B. The length of time that materials may be kept is determined by the librarian, based on the needs of the library user.

XI  QUIET STUDY

The reference area is not intended to be a quiet study area, and consultation in a normal voice between librarians and library users is necessary for effective reference service. Library users requiring quiet study are directed to designated quiet study areas.

XIII  SUPPLIES

Generally, reference staff will provide small amounts of supplies to patrons. Scrap cards and pencils are routinely supplied at public workstations. Small amounts of paper clips, rubber bands, white-out, etc. are provided.