

Reimagining Reference: Training Undergraduates as Peer Research Consultants

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Further Reading

Torreano, J., & O’Kelly, M. (Ed.). (2022). *Training Research Consultants: A Guide for Academic Libraries*. Association of College and Research Libraries.

An edited book of case studies from various libraries. Includes information like job descriptions, training topics and schedules, assessment information, surveys, and more.

Epstein, M., & Draxler, B. (2022). *How to Be a Peer Research Consultant: A Guide for Librarians and Students*. Association of College & Research Libraries.

<https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=6830172>

A 7-chapter book designed to be read more chronologically than *Training Research Consultants*. Contains chapters that address both the librarian/information science perspective and the student perspective, allowing it to be a librarian’s reference material and/or a student’s handbook.

Training Topics & Schedule

Note: the original dates were Wednesday, 1/21, through Friday, 1/23, with a review on Monday, 1/26. However, snow days on 1/22 and 1/23 created a gap between the first day of training and the next time we were able to meet. We presented the information with a monitor while everyone sat at a table. To promote a conversational tone, we encouraged other librarians to attend and add their thoughts. Lunch was provided on 1/21, 1/28, and 1/30.

Day 1: Wednesday, January 21st, 12pm-1:30pm

- Research training expectations
- Example Reference Interview
- Breaking Down the Reference Interview

Day 2: Monday, January 26th, 10am-12pm

- Library Search (WMU’s discovery layer)
- LibGuides & Subject librarians
- Interlibrary Loan
- Amazing Library Race (scavenger hunt activity around the library for 1st year students)

Day 3: Wednesday, January 28th, 12pm-1:30pm

- Hands-on practice (students role-playing in pairs as consultants with assignment descriptions from subject librarians and consultants)
- Topic Selection
- Library Ethics
- Artificial Intelligence & Plagiarism

Day 4: Friday, Jan 30, 1pm-4pm

- Linger questions from previous training days
- Databases
- Triage (consultants sorted example questions by whether they would refer to a librarian or answer them themselves)
- Forms & RefAnalytics
- Assignment practice (more role-playing in pairs with example research assignments)

Advice

- Evaluate which other services are available at the library; e.g., if your library has a student-staffed desk, the pilot could extend training rather than being a new program.
- Anticipate that you *will* be reinventing the wheel. Use case studies (such as in the recommended reading on page 1) and training materials (including from other peer programs on your campus) for inspiration. Then, customize the training, policies, handbook, etc. for your library and program.
- Dedicate time in the training for questions or unexpected elements; it can be easy for us to take for granted the skills we have as librarians. This is not like a typical library instruction session. The information and retention must have more depth, and the students must show a command of the skills you are teaching.
- Source real assignment descriptions from subject librarians and students for hands-on practice. Students can practice role-playing in pairs, with one acting as a student, and the other as a consultant.
- Have concrete exercises for boundary-setting and when to end the consultation; consultants may struggle to end appointments despite a student overstaying or speaking/acting inappropriately.

Consultation Form

This is a form that the consultants fill throughout the consultation with a student. This serves as both a comprehensive checklist for the consultant to refer to as well as an appointment summary for the student to recap and proceed with the next steps. The information is then pasted into RefAnalytics for statistical tracking. The following form has been **filled out with sample information** that was used as a guide for the consultants in training.

Student Name:

Class:

Briefly describe assignment:

- The background section of a research proposal
- An annotated bibliography that will be used to write a research paper later
- Find 1 empirical article and write an analysis

Reference question

- I need help finding sources for my paper
- I'm not sure if the sources I'm finding are peer reviewed
- How do I cite this source?
- I don't know what topic to do for my paper
- I found a source, but I can't figure out how to access the text

Source requirements (if applicable):

- 5 secondary sources
- A peer-reviewed empirical study
- 3 articles from one of these 5 journals

Topic:

Keywords:

The student has already tried:

- Google scholar searches
- Library website
- Nothing yet, just getting started

What we did in the consultation:

- We searched "early hominids" AND language in Library Search; found a few promising articles
- We did some reading on Wikipedia to narrow down the topic, and we found articles about the new topic in Library Search
- We used Library Search to find books that contain primary sources on the topic
- We found the subject guide and used it to choose a database and find citation resources

Recommended resources (including links):

- Library Search: <https://wmich.edu/library>
- Theatre subject guide: <https://libguides.wmich.edu/theatre>

What the student will do next:

- Continue searching with the new keywords we found: ("ultra-processed food" OR UPF) AND (weight OR obesity)
- Evaluate the sources we found to decide if they are fit for purpose
- Use the Excelsior OWL to format citations
- Consult with librarian LuMarie Guth for help using business databases. We made an appointment for Wednesday at 11:00 am.

It's normal to need help more than once! If you have more questions, feel free to:

Return to the peer consultant service

Contact your subject librarian: (name)_____ (email)_____ (consultation link)

Email or chat with library staff

Job Description

Position

Waldo Library is hiring student employees for the new Peer Research Assistance Program. We're looking for students with a strong track record of research success in their first year and a solid understanding of library resources. As a Peer Research Assistant, you'll work one-on-one with students, supporting them throughout their research journey— from thinking it through to citing their sources. You'll help build their confidence by strengthening their research skills and connecting them with librarians for more in-depth support when needed. This role is a great fit for students who enjoy learning, collaborating, and helping others succeed. Students will be required to work a minimum of 12 hours within the days/times listed below. There will also be a mandatory three-day training at the start of the spring semester. Please submit your cover letter, resume highlighting your experience, and Spring 2026 class schedule and availability. Please also include a list of 3 references, one of whom can speak to how you have demonstrated three to five of the required academic areas below.

Primary responsibilities

- Help plan and develop a strategy for peers' research projects
- Guide peers in identifying and accessing relevant resources (physical and digital)
 - Evaluating resources for credibility in and suitability to their assignment
- Assist peers in citing in formats appropriate to their assignment
- Referring to a librarian when appropriate, for general or more specific needs.

Hours

Part-time (around 20 hours per week). Availability that aligns with our current scheduling needs will be a factor in the selection process. You must provide your availability and class schedule. Availability **MUST** include at least 12 hours within the following schedule:

- Sunday – 2 – 6 (4 hours)
- Monday – 11 - 3 (4 hours)
- Tuesday – 11 – 5 (6 hours)
- Wednesday – 1 – 5 (4 hours)
- Thursday – 11 – 3 (4 hours)

Required Skills:

- Outstanding customer service
- Positive attitude

- Willingness to work within a fixed schedule, report for shift as scheduled, and follow appropriate procedures to request time off or call in sick
- Comfortable with computers and technology
- Ability to work independently and as part of a team
- Comfortable working one-on-one with peers
- Attention to detail
- Strong communication skills both written and verbal
- Proven success in the following academic areas:
 - Formulated research questions and designed effective search strategies
 - Accessed print, digital, and physical resources using library systems
 - Evaluated source credibility and relevance to research goals
 - Accurately cited sources using APA, MLA, or Chicago styles
 - Participated in and utilized library tours and services

Desired Skills

- Previous library experience
- Previous experience working one -on-one with peers

Additional Information

Candidates must also demonstrate reliability in adhering to assigned shifts. Compliance with procedures for requesting time off or reporting absences is required. Applicants must be enrolled for Spring 2026. Applicants must be able to work at least 12 hours per week. Anticipated start date is January 21. **Pay Rate: \$13.75/hr.** with the potential for a raise with excellent job performance. There will be 3-4 days of mandatory intensive training at the beginning of spring semester. If contacted for an interview, the interview can be conducted on-site or remotely. Applicants will not be contacted until the position closes. Only finalists will be contacted.

About WMU Libraries

WMU Libraries empowers the community to discover, explore and shape the information universe. We help you discover and use our research and unique collections. Our spaces give the community a place to study, collaborate, or gain new knowledge. We are experts in finding information and helping you succeed academically.

WMU Undergraduate Library Research Consultant Web Page

URL: <https://wmich.edu/library/help/ulrc>

Archived URL (4/30/2026):

<https://web.archive.org/web/20260430185012/https://wmich.edu/library/help/ulrc>

Question Triage by Department and Format

The following reference table encompasses most questions users have when visiting the library. This table was used to reference the overlap between different services: the User Services students working the circulation desk; the peer consultants themselves; and the Instruction & Outreach subject librarians.

Question	User Services/Circ	Peer Consultants	Subject Librarians
Directional	X	X	X
How do I...	X	X	X
General/undergrad research		X	X
Deep/grad research			X
Available virtually			X
Available in-person	X	X	X
Walk-ins	X	X	X
Appointments		X	X

Presenter Contact Information

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