

# Algonquin's Experience Offering Research Assistance in Real Time

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# Albertson Library, Boise State University

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itKYsmBpKBO>
- Created by: Amy Vecchione's University 106 course. Retrieved March 2 2011.
- Used with permission

# Way back to the beginning

- Seneca College wanted to cover more hours
- Offered other colleges opportunity to join
- Algonquin, Mohawk and George Brown accepted the challenge.
- Started offering service Sept. 2003
- VAL (Virtual Academic Librarian)

# Questions/Issues

- Who will participate in the Virtual Reference team?
- How will that effect Reference desk schedule or other Technical services duties?
- Can we do this while providing reference desk service?
- Do we need a dedicated workstation?
- Do we have the right software, equipment?

# Bigger questions

- How will we handle the technical setup?
- How much training or practice will be required?
- Will we be overrun with questions?
- Can we do this? -- TERROR



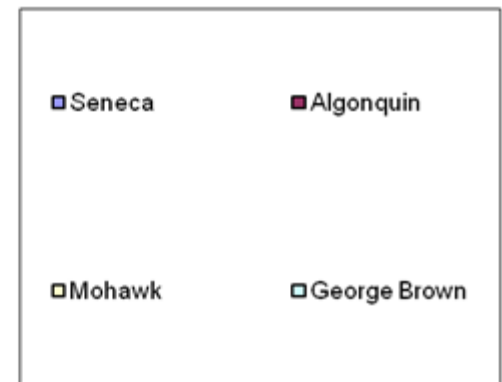
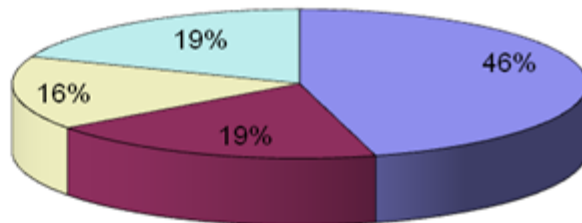
# Other realizations

- Database issues
- Language/communication issues
- Abuse



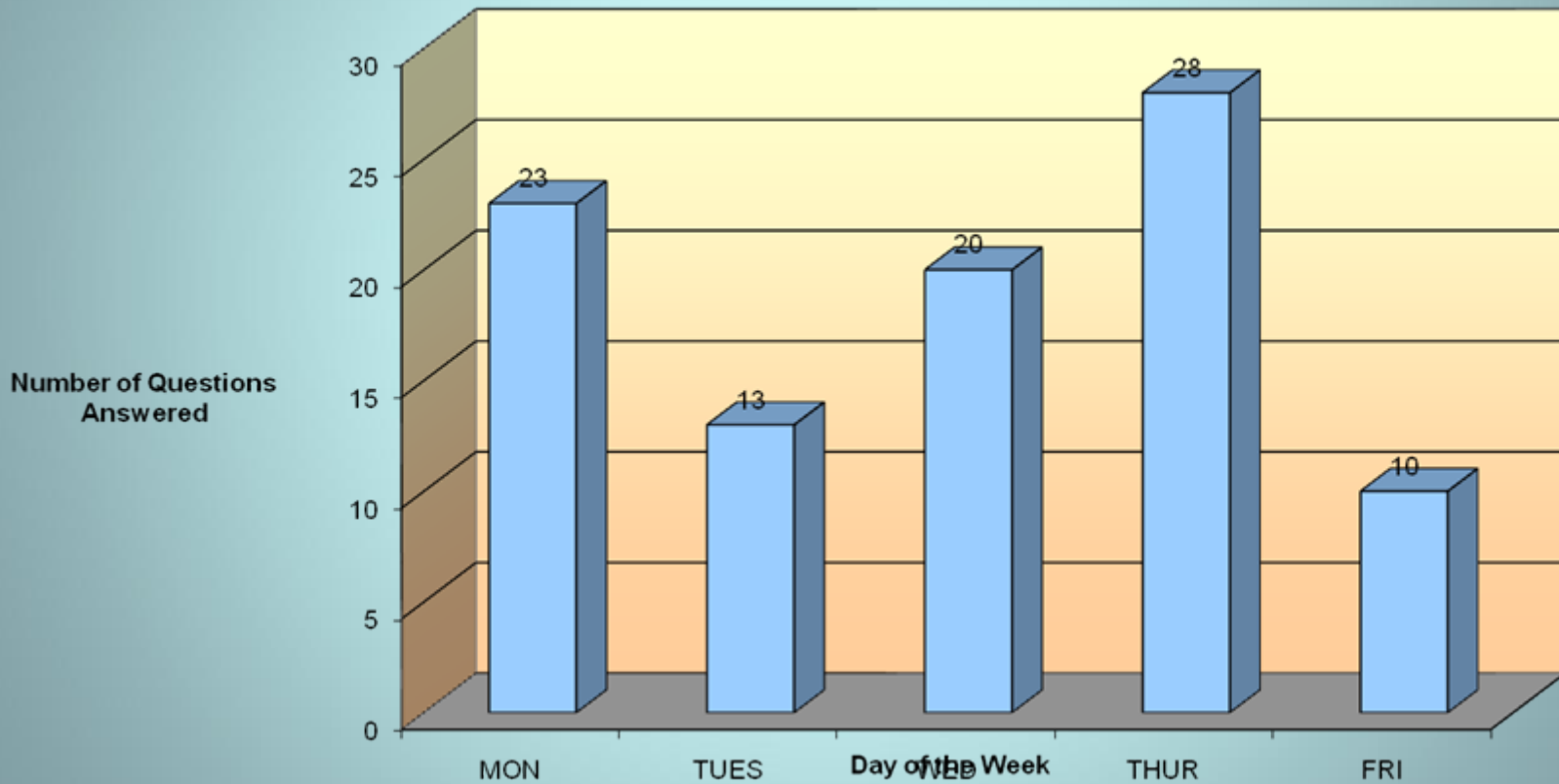
# Our First Month

VAL September 2003 - Total Calls Answered (94)



# By Day

VAL - Questions Answered per Day

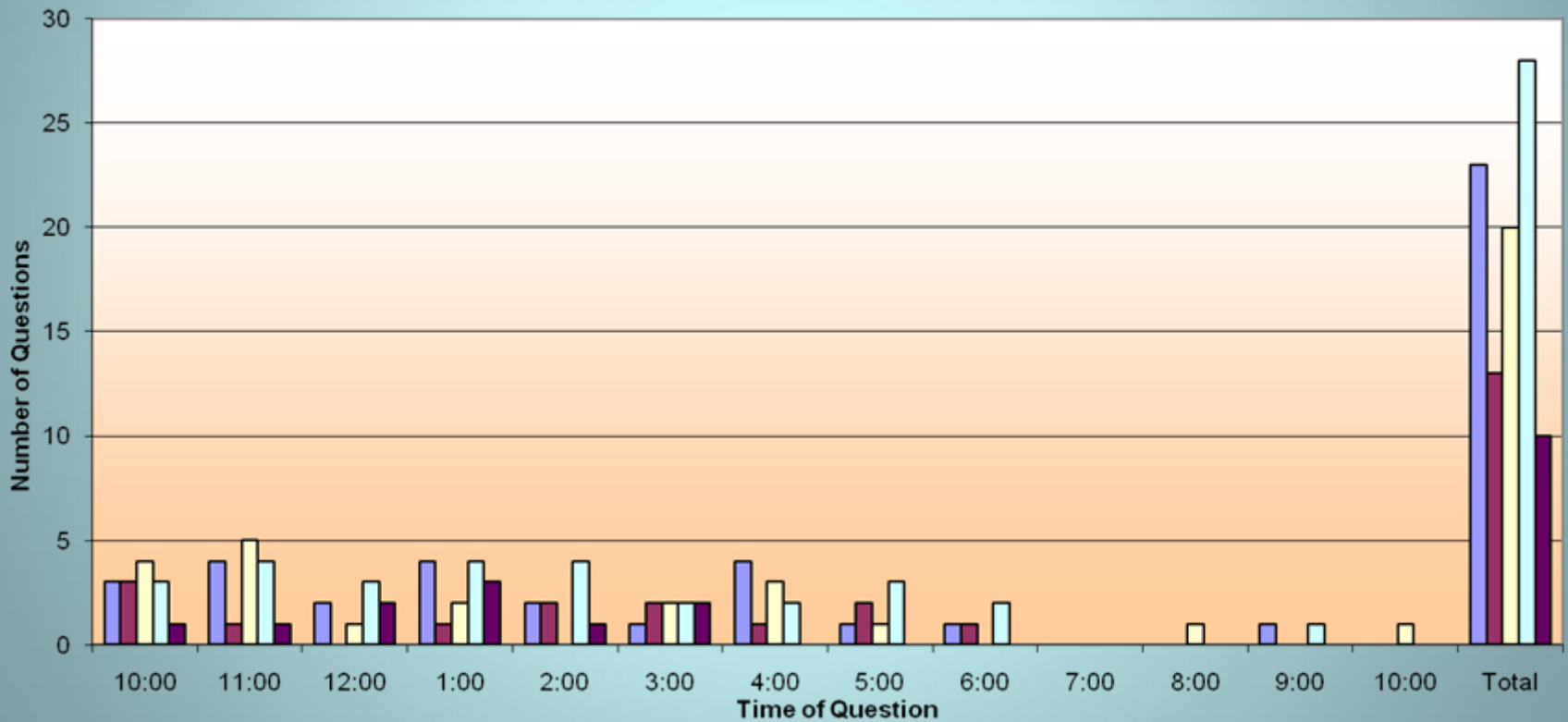




# By Hour

VAL - Questions per Day per Hour

■ MON ■ TUES ■ WED ■ THUR ■ FRI



# Software

- Specific software for Virtual Reference service
- Co-browsing functionality
- Taking over student computer (escort)
- Sending single pages
- Sending other types of files
- Arrow highlighting specific link on page
- Multiple sessions
- Transferring sessions
- Knowledge base
- Canned responses/comments

# Software surprises

- Opening new browser windows – lost student
- Window “blow-ups” – lost functionality
- Different browsers and versions of browsers
- Speed of student’s connection

# Transition

- Knowledge Ontario starting online reference service (Jan. 2008)
- Included 2 already established groups
- VAL (colleges) and York/Ryerson
- Added Lakehead



# Train the Trainers

- 2 day session in Toronto for the original College and University Library Staff Trainers
  - Reference skills expectations
  - Meebo
  - Chat setup
  - Portal and information
  - Practice drills

# In House Training

- 7 staff were recruited for the team: 2 Librarians and 5 Library Technicians
- Had to ensure that equipment was suitable
- Downloaded software required
- Set up Meebo accounts, Wordpress access
- Set up training accounts
- Tried buddy sessions within our group and were assigned a buddy from another institution as well

# Challenges

- Remembering to switch from training to actual account
- Working with three windows open
- Getting used to the wait time between sending a response and receiving more data
- Accessing another institutions databases
- Trying to explain “Racer” without having seen it

# Challenges

- Users think they're speaking to someone from their own institution
- University questions – resources
- Lack of visual clues
  - Reaction, Understanding, English
- Learning how to pick up the call that you wanted to answer
- Snow day in GTA

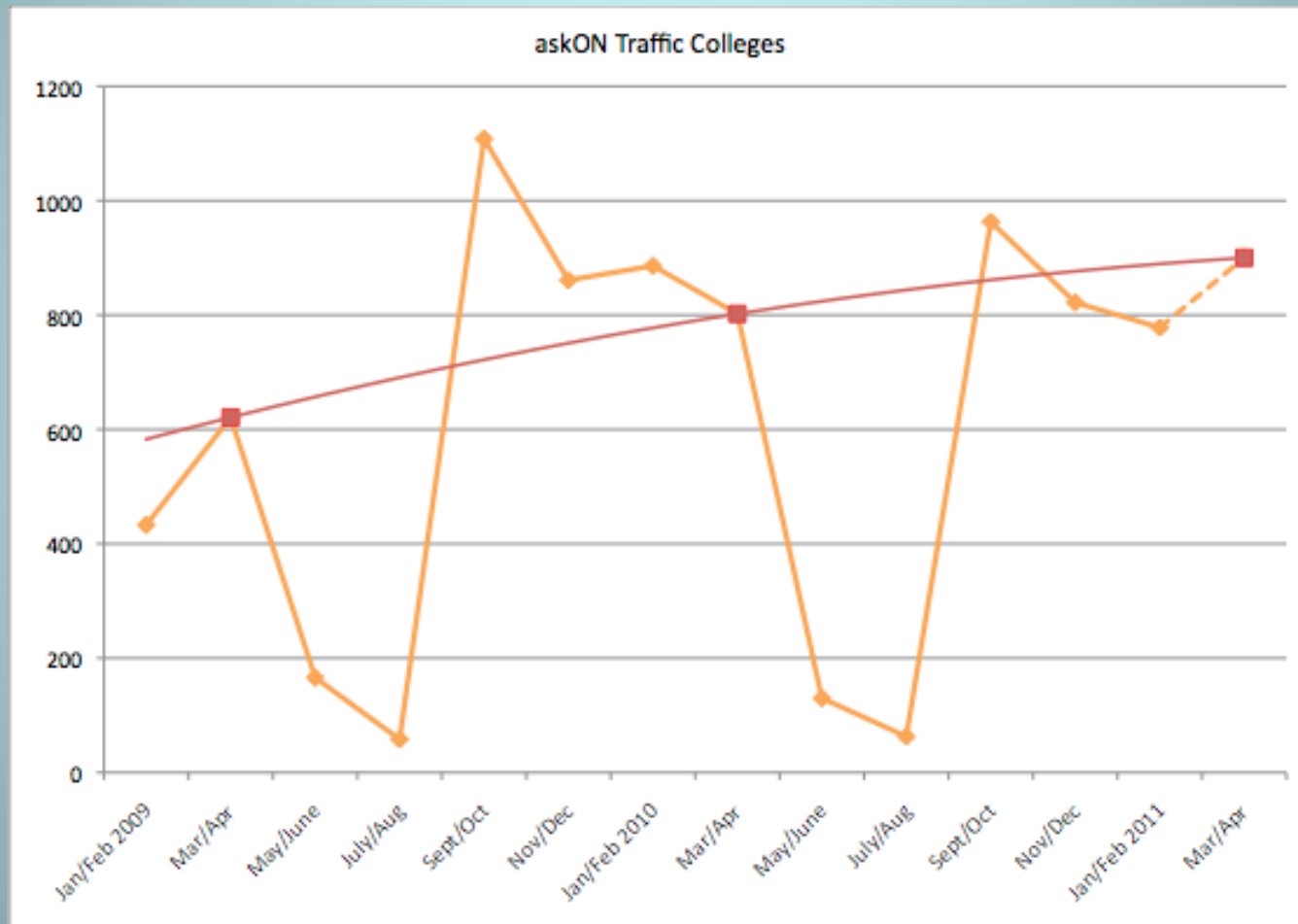




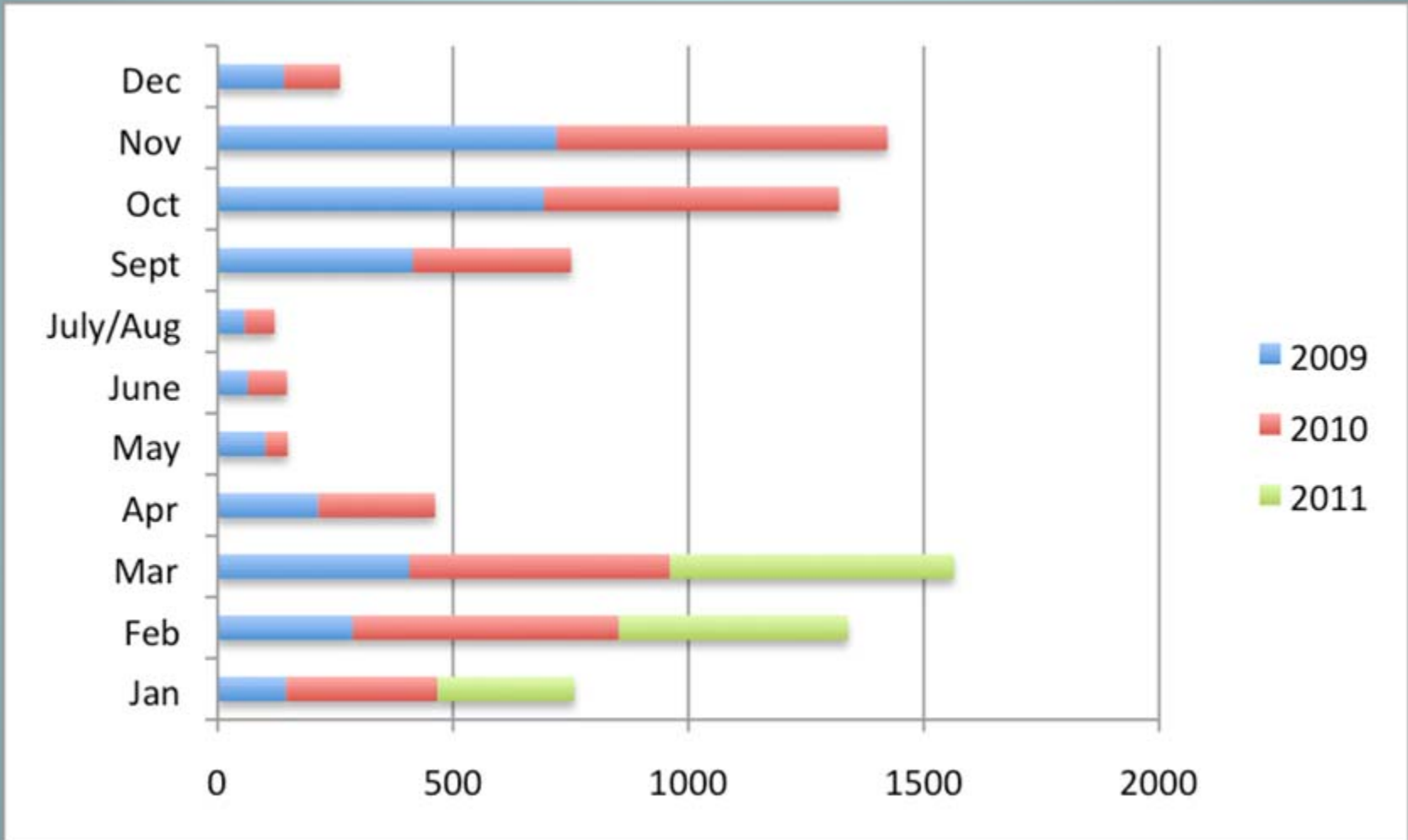
# Marketing

- Buttons
- Tent cards
- Displays
- Orientations
- In-class presentations
- Newsletter
- “What’s new” - webpage

# Usage Statistics for 2 year period



# College Statistics



# Types of questions

- Where do I find information about infant sign language?
- I am having a lot of difficulty learning how to use the program and I need to find 4 journals on culture, socialization, groups and organizations, and deviance and crime. Please help me.
- What is the correct etiquette for presenting gifts to German Businessmen?

# Questions (cont.)

- Where can I get information online for Historical Roots of Nursing in Canada during periods of 1600's through 1800's?
- I just want to see a list of all videos offered...I know how to search for them but I want to see them all so I know how many there are and what they range in.

# Questions (cont.)

- Is it possible over the library catalogue to see the index of an edited book so that I can see what chapter was done by whom? The book I have in mind is Old Age and Agency by Emmanuelle Tulle?

# Student Testimonials

- As a part-time student I use AskOn to get reference help from real librarians. Because I also work full time I don't always have time to make it to the library for help, but I can always access Knowledge Ontario from home to find the information that I need.
- I am a mature student taking my courses online. ...In addition, the virtual AskON reference desk, is a fabulous service. The librarians are friendly, knowledgeable, and highly skilled at guiding me to the resources I need.



# Staff Feedback - Pluses

- Users reactions
- Opportunities to learn more
- Another opportunity to enhance library reference skills
- AskON had a dedicated set up staff.

# Staff Comments – Less than plus

- Takes longer to answer the question
- Difficulty answering questions about other library's services
- Scheduling
- Communication
- Typing and Reference skills
- Working Front Desk and Virtual Reference

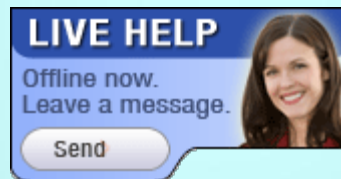
# On the Horizon

- VoIP
- Mobile devices



# Demo

<http://askon.ca/academictraining.html>



# Further Reading

- Reference and User Services Association (2010). *Guidelines for Implementing and Maintaining Virtual Reference Services*. Retrieved April 28, 2011 from <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/virtual-reference-se.pdf>
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# Further Reading

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- Meola, Marc; Stormont, Sam. c2002. *Starting and Operating Live Virtual Reference Services: a how-to-do-it Manual for Librarians*. New York : Neal-Schuman Pub.