

AskColorado/AskAcademic Celebrates Eight Years, Reflects on Importance of Collaboration, Change

Friday, September 2, 2011

Today the AskColorado/AskAcademic Virtual Reference Cooperative is celebrating its eight-year anniversary and wishes to thank all the libraries and librarians, who, over the years, have worked collaboratively toward helping AskColorado/AskAcademic to become the high quality, personalized service it is today.

This year, in light of the budgetary and other challenges faced by all libraries in recent years, we reflect on the importance of collaboration. Our service "Objectives" focus specifically on collaboration:

- **AskColorado Objective:** "Colorado libraries are collaborating to provide a 24/7 online chat reference service that efficiently and effectively meets the information and learning needs of Colorado residents."
- **AskAcademic Objective:** "Academic libraries are collaborating to provide a 24/7 online chat reference service that efficiently and effectively meets the information and learning needs of their students, faculty, and staff."

And we're not the only ones thinking about the importance of collaboration this year. My counterpart in Oregon, Caleb Tucker-Raymond recently wrote a nice piece about L-Net (Oregon's equivalent to AskColorado/AskAcademic) in their statewide library publication OLA Quarterly, where he eloquently states:

- "When libraries collaborate, we create, among all of our various groups of patrons and staff, a shared experience of just what that word "library" means. From that basis, we have the opportunity to shift that definition so that it continues to positively impact and resonate with the communities we serve."

You can read more of Caleb's wonderful article "Why Collaborate?" on p. 9 -12 here:

http://data.memberclicks.com/site/ola/olaq_17no2.pdf

Another aspect of our collaborative we've been highlighting recently is our organization's flexibility and general willingness to enact change. Our service today is not the same service that opened for business on Sept. 2 in 2003. Here is a major summary of changes we've enacted since that time:

2003:

- Service launched. Two queues available, General and Spanish.

2004:

- Offered companion "Live Homework Help" service
- Separated academic queue out of general queue (initially, the academic queue was combined with a general, public queue)

2005:

- Discontinued "Live Homework Help" project

2006:

- Started "Live Help Queue" for state government (Colorado.gov)

2007:

- Collaborative continued to grow with the addition of new member libraries, but no major service changes

2008:

- Rebranded: New logo, tagline, website
- Closed "Live Help Queue" for state government (Colorado.gov)
- Added an academic library from Texas (University of North Texas) to academic queue

2009:

- Selected new software vendor (non-library vendor)

2010:

- Implemented new software from InstantService (Later ATG Live Chat. Now Oracle Live Help on Demand)
- Expanded and branded the academic queue: 1 more Texas academic
- Launched AskAcademic.org domain (www.askacademic.org)
- Discontinued Spanish service queue
- Created Staff Intranet using Drupal
- Started the ASK After-Hours service to staff evenings, nights, and weekends

2011:

- Created modified widgets (for embedding on libraries' web pages) allowing easier patron entry to the service
- Expanded AskAcademic again with addition of two more Texas libraries as well as a campus in Missouri (part of Colorado Technical University)
- Started pilot project answering questions for first "client" – Jones International University
- Launching second "client" queue today: CSU-Global

We believe in our organization, and we continue to embrace and accept member feedback in a collaborative environment--all with the goal of improving service to patrons. We look forward to the current year with anticipation, and wonder what new changes and challenges lie ahead.

More About Our Organization:

The AskColorado/AskAcademic Virtual Reference Cooperative is organized on a model similar to public radio: it is grant-funded and paid for by member libraries. Federal monies through the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) are supplied via the Colorado State Library, a unit of the Colorado Department of Education. In addition, member libraries contribute financially and through staff support.

Libraries of every type — public, academic, school and specialized libraries — contribute money and staffing to make the service a reality. If your library would like to join, or you would like additional information, please contact Kris Johnson, Operations Manager.

Websites: <http://www.askcolorado.org> * <http://www.askacademic.org>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/AskColorado>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/AskColorado>

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