Book Review

Review of *How to Be a Peer Research Consultant: A Guide for Librarians and Students*

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ABSTRACT

Review of Epstein, M; & Draxler, B. (2021) *How to be a peer research consultant: A guide for librarians and students*. Association of College and Research Libraries.

KEYWORDS

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One major development in academic library reference services over the past decade has been the move away from an all-professional librarian staffing of the reference desk. Many libraries now depend on classified staff to answer directional and lower-level research questions, reserving the attention and expertise of professional librarians for more advanced questions. In addition, some libraries hire students to assist librarians and staff. These student workers can assume a variety of job titles: student reference assistants, peer resource counselors, peer research consultants, and research tutors, to name just a few. For the supervisors of these students, training is a major concern. Luckily, the recent publication of *How to Be a Peer Research Consultant: A Guide for Librarians and Students* can facilitate the training process for both students and their supervisors.

As a training tool, this book offers a clear and concise breakdown of the components of a reference transaction and the issues to consider when helping student researchers. Like writing tutors, peer research consultants—the term this book employs—can serve as a gateway for students who needs to access library resources and services. *How to Be a Peer Research Consultant* emphasizes the peer research consultant's role as a student peer to those they assist, yet it provides sufficient explanation of the research process and related issues to help these student employees develop informed research and empathic listening skills. The goal is to help create "better researchers, not just better research" (viii). Easy-to-read tables describe common research-need scenarios and offer responses, in some cases suggesting "don't do/say" responses to avoid and better responses that model best practices. For instance, rather than outlining the research session agenda for the student researcher, the peer consultant can ask the student to identify the most important tasks to work on together in that session.

More than just a training manual, this book offers a concise review of the research process, including brainstorming, finding background information, engaging in more advanced searching, evaluating and saving sources, and engaging in scholarly conversations based on the sources located. Issues such as privacy and the ethical acknowledgment of sources are also covered. Much of the background for this manual draws on best practices for writing tutors, though the advice here stops short of covering writing and editing assistance for student patrons. In fact, the peer research consultation modeled in Chapter Five seems more like an extended research consultation than the kind of brief reference inquiry that student employees frequently encounter at the reference desk. This described consultation covers the reference interview, goal setting for various patron scenarios, guiding the session with open-ended questions, encouraging a growth mindset, and concluding the session—steps a brief reference transaction might not have the time (or need) to address fully. Still, being aware of the process librarians use to address student research inquiries should help even the less-experienced student assistants aspire to better patron service.

This guide also covers online consultations, inclusivity and sensitivity to researchers' needs, cultural humility, and self-reflective practices. The authors emphasize that the skills

developed from this type of training can transfer to other situations requiring interpersonal communication. Chapter Seven reviews common research assignments such as annotated bibliographies, literature reviews, and research papers, and acknowledges disciplinary variances with examples of diverse types of assignments, sources, and citation styles. Finally, the appendix includes activities for each chapter to help peer research consultants not only practice the skills covered, but also engage in self-reflection on their own behavior as a peer research consultant. These activities would be most beneficial for training if they were reviewed by a librarian supervisor who can offer feedback on students' responses and, in fact, would be useful for teaching classes where students are learning how to work with sources and understand the publication process.

As a guide for novice student research assistants, this manual offers both a concise review of the research process and a variety of examples and activities to help prepare peer research consultants, especially those who offer one-to-one student research consultations rather than simpler reference desk transactions. While the book's promotional copy suggests that it could be distributed to each student as a training manual, the cost—though an affordable $50.00 in print and $35.00 in e-format—may be prohibitive for programs with many research consultants. Still, in preparing this manual, the authors have successfully produced a useful handbook for acquainting new peer reference consultants with the best practices of reference services. Librarian supervisors of student assistants who engage in less extensive research service support can likewise find useful tips for better preparing their student employees for the nuances of working with students with research needs.