

Case Study:

# Desk Tracker™ in a University Library System



## About University at Albany

Established in 1844 and designated a University Center of the State University of New York in 1962, the University at Albany's broad mission of excellence in undergraduate and graduate education, research and public service engages 17,000 diverse students in ten schools and colleges across three campuses. The university has a total of 189 degree programs.

<b>Name of Library:</b>	University Libraries
<b>Name of University:</b>	University at Albany, State University of New York
<b>Location:</b>	Albany, NY
<b>Population Served:</b>	12,457 undergraduates 4,977 graduate students 1,041 faculty

The University at Albany serves its campus communities with three libraries housing over two million volumes: the University Library, Dewey Graduate Library and Science Library.

## The Challenge: Tracking Reference Activity

According to Cathy Dwyer, Head of Reference at the University Library, the libraries are required to report statistics on public service desk activity to several collection bodies including the State of New York, the Association of Research Libraries, the University at Albany for its annual report and library management for reference desk staffing decisions.

As in many libraries, staff was using a paper-based system with tick marks. Papers needed to be collected and tick marks tallied. Staff was investing too much effort in compiling the required statistics and the occasional loss of statistic sheets or totaling errors added to that effort.

Furthermore, Cathy said, extracting information for effective staff management required even more time investment. For example, without knowing the busiest hours and the types of questions asked at those times, it was difficult to determine which hours needed to be staffed by librarians and which could be staffed by students.

The library staff wanted to get rid of all the paper and save time.

## The Desk Tracker Solution

**"By looking at the patterns we can ensure we are using our staff resources wisely."**

*Cathy Dwyer  
Head of Reference*

Library staff first saw Desk Tracker at a library conference. The fact that it is web-based meant that it could be used easily across all three libraries and at a variety of public service desks, from circulation and reference to periodicals, special collections and archives. The data gathered could be customized for each group. Most importantly, said Cathy, administrators could look at the data immediately, something they could never do before.

With Desk Tracker, Cathy said, staff can track the ebb and flow of a workday as well as of the semester. This is a huge help in trying to evaluate staffing needs. "Recently the decision was made to increase Sunday reference hours," said Cathy. "With Desk Tracker, we are able to track week by week to see if this is a good return on investment in terms of the number of questions and the types of questions. This will give us real data to make a case one way or the other – we could never do this before. We can even look at specific days like moving in day or the day before or after Thanksgiving. By looking at the patterns we can ensure we are using our staff resources wisely."

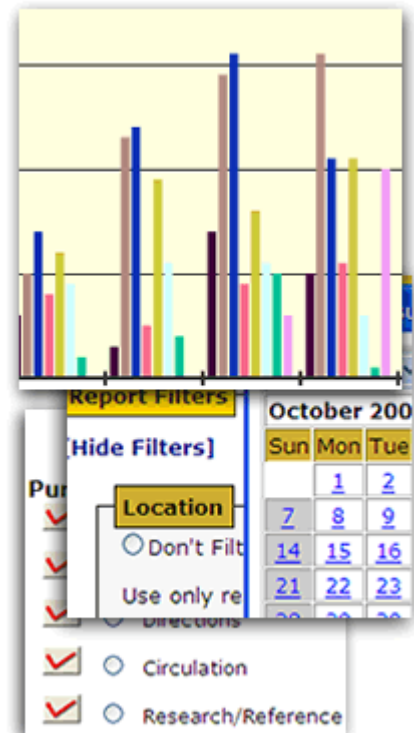
## Why Libraries Need Desk Tracker

Cathy said library staff is happy with Desk Tracker and that “it does what we need it to do.” She points to several reasons why Desk Tracker makes sense for today’s libraries.

- **Save time and money.** Desk Tracker has eliminated all the manual work of tracking, compiling and reporting statistics. This has been a huge time-saver for staff, Cathy said. “We used Desk Tracker at the end of June to compile our year-end statistics. We figure Desk Tracker saved us a day or two of time in not having to total up paper statistics for our year-end reports.” Freeing up staff from manually compiling statistics has allowed the library to re-allocate resources.
- **Ease of data entry.** It takes just seconds for a staff member to enter information into the Desk Tracker system after helping a user in person or on the phone. Desk Tracker is always open at the reference desk and toggling back and forth between reference resources and Desk Tracker is simple and easy to remember. Reference librarians are aware of the importance of maintaining statistics and the potential impact on their workload. Desk Tracker makes this a seamless activity for them.
- **Instantaneous access to information.** According to Cathy, compiling year-end statistics with Desk Tracker gave library staff greater confidence in the accuracy of the numbers they presented. Desk Tracker makes it easy to evaluate the impact of decisions like increasing Sunday hours. “We can get the information we need by running reports comparing last Sunday’s traffic with this Sunday’s traffic. With the data at our fingertips we can make shifts in policy quickly, based on facts.”
- **Make data-driven decisions.** Desk Tracker removes subjective impressions and anecdotal information from the decision-making process. For example, Desk Tracker is helping the library evaluate the effectiveness of IT student consultants in answering questions about hardware, software, wireless access, and other technical issues. Reference librarians think they are still fielding most technical questions, when these questions should instead be going to the consultants. With Desk Tracker, staff can monitor the routing of technical questions and determine whether more training for the student consultants, better signage, or more reference staff is needed.

This kind of analysis with subsequent recommendations would be very difficult without Desk Tracker, Cathy said. “When you’re trying to make a case for changes in staffing, it’s a whole different thing to go to the administration with a colored bar chart instead of anecdotal information.”

“With the data at our fingertips we can make shifts in policy quickly, based on facts.”



## About Desk Tracker

A product of Compendium Library Services, Desk Tracker provides the fastest, easiest way to track library activity at every public service point. Web-based and fully customizable, Desk Tracker provides instant access to the data needed to effectively manage library resources. Visit [desktracker.com](http://desktracker.com) for more information, or contact Compendium Library Services at 970-472-7979 or PO Box 82, Bellvue, Colorado, 80512. You can also visit us on the web at [compendiumlib.com](http://compendiumlib.com).