

The Weinberg Memorial Library’s Virtual Reference (VR) services—also branded as “Ask a Librarian”—are always developing in response to user needs and preferences for delivering library assistance at the point of need.

In Spring 2010, the Weinberg Library adopted the platform LibraryH3lp to offer VR service during library hours via Instant Messaging (IM) through online chat widgets as well as via text messaging (SMS). Library web pages were then populated with chat widgets, therefore, more fully embedding VR service into the user experience.

In Spring 2011, the relatively new SMS service was heavily promoted through a marketing campaign that featured images of University of Scranton students using mobile devices. By linking this new service to the expectations and behaviors of Scranton students, the Weinberg Library was responding to a need that students were not aware that they had.

The Weinberg Library has offered 24/7 chat reference service since 2006 through the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) VR Project consortium. In July 2013, the consortium transitioned to the LibraryH3lp platform, which the Weinberg Library was already using for local chat reference service. This move meant that the after hours VR service would be fully integrated into the same chat widgets that students had already grown accustomed to using. This seamless user experience serves as further evidence that the Library’s VR program prioritizes the user experience in its development of services.

Overall VR usage statistics reflect the success of these initiatives:

Academic Year (June-May)	Scranton Students Served via 24/7 AJCU VR Project	IM Reference Interactions (incl. SMS and embedded chat widgets)	Total VR Interactions for Academic Year
AY 09-10	397	510	907
AY 10-11	434	1251	1685
AY 11-12	428	972	1355
AY 12-13	288	960	1248

Although students were never directly queried about their satisfaction with the Weinberg Library’s VR services, the overall growth of usage indicates that their needs continue to be met. Anecdotal feedback from students indicate the value of these services to their research activities. An applicant for the 2014 Library Research Prize commented in her submission essay how valuable the VR services were to her research process, describing her experience with them as “convenient,” “thoughtful,” “quick,” “efficient,” and “impressive.”

In the future, the Library plans to incorporate a link on the VR chat widgets that will lead to a feedback survey for users. Once this is in place, the Library will be in an even stronger position to respond to user needs in relation to VR services.