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## **AskAway Actions & Achievements**



AskAway Actions & Achievements

BC Electronic Library Network

Released March 2013

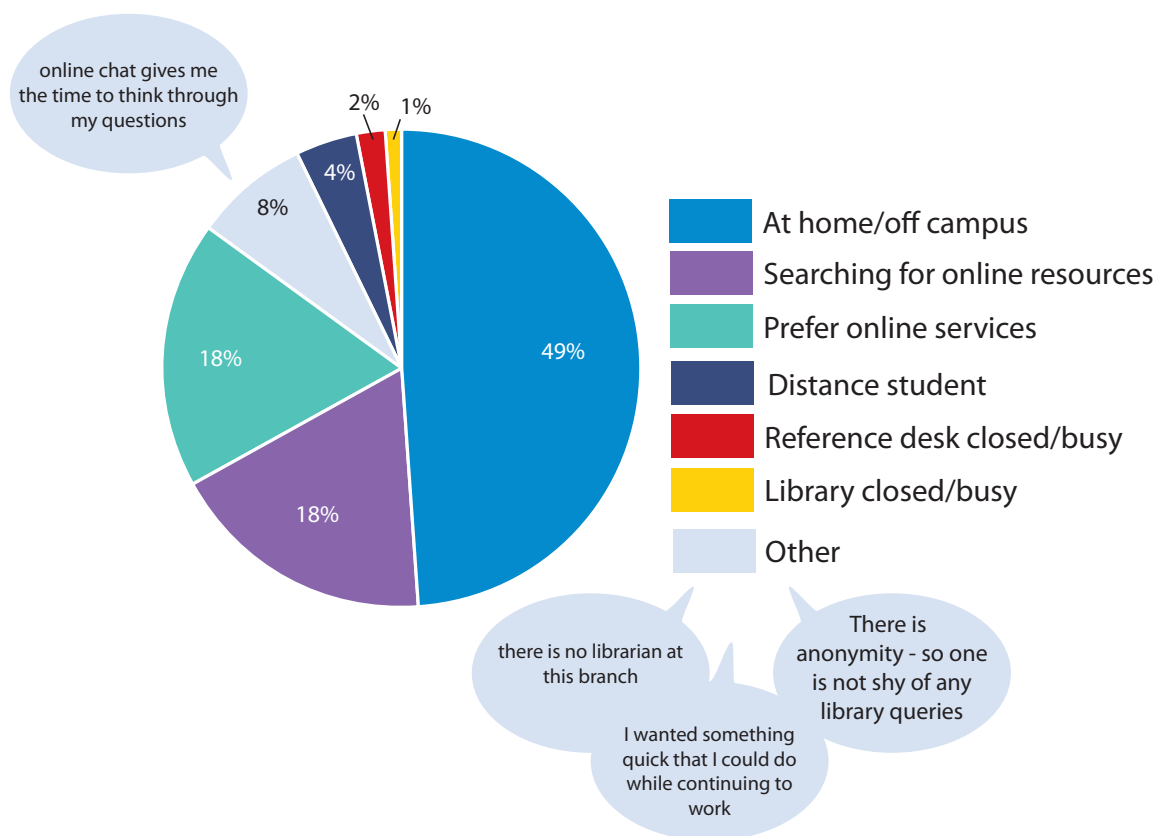
Cover photograph courtesy of University of Victoria.

Institutional photographs courtesy of the library.

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## Why Use AskAway?



# Message from the Chair

Nicoletta (Nikki) Barber is working on her MA in Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University, with a focus on the social conception of health and human sexuality. She volunteers at Options for Sexual Health doing community relations, and works at a small, independent candy store.



Nikki says she is "always on the go" and that convenient help with research is "absolutely essential" to her. She adds, "Producing interesting, high-quality work with excellent sources is very important to me ... AskAway really helps me with research whether I am on a break at work, or with my [mobile phone] on the SeaBus."

Nikki recalls a time when AskAway was particularly useful to her; she was writing a paper on the notion of feminist choice and birthing options, and was having a hard time finding research with a global perspective. An AskAway service provider introduced her to a couple of databases that she was not aware of; together they refined her search terms, leading to several pertinent articles.

Nikki adds that in addition to the research assistance, she appreciates that AskAway service providers are "always prompt, professional, and friendly ... that's why I keep going back!"

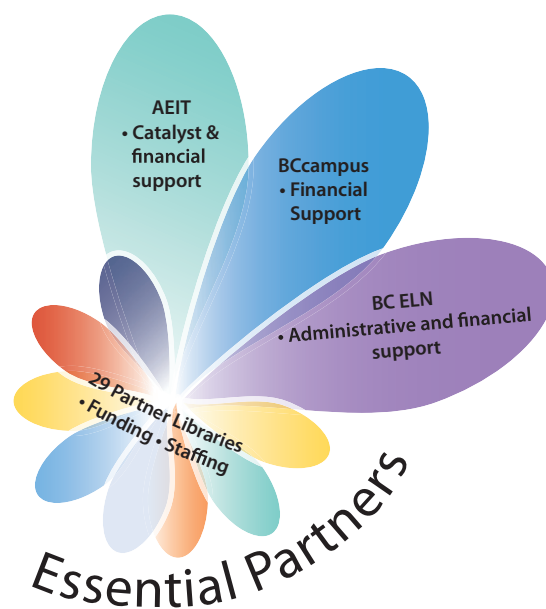
Nikki's story demonstrates the real impact that AskAway has in the lives of BC learners. Comments from AskAway users regularly show not only the gratitude for the quality assistance they receive, but also the broad diversity of learners that benefit from speaking to AskAway service providers.

A Thompson Rivers University distance learner shared with us, "since I don't live in the city where my university is located, being able to chat with a librarian online was very helpful." And the University of British Columbia student who told us "as a mature adult student who is definitely 'technologically' challenged, I am greatly appreciative of this service."

These snapshots of student's lives and their unique needs make it clear that AskAway provides incredible value to the post-secondary learners of British Columbia.

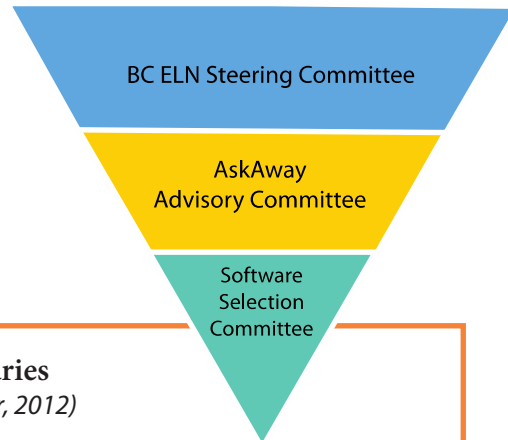
Through collaboration, cost-sharing, and coordination of existing infrastructure and resources, AskAway creates a service far beyond what any individual institution could provide on its own. This collaboration could not be possible without the contributions of our essential partners.

We look forward to another strong year for AskAway in 2013.



Todd Mundle  
Chair, AskAway Advisory Committee  
University Librarian, Kwantlen Polytechnic University  
Todd.Mundle@kwantlen.ca

# Governance



**Advisory Committee**  
*(as of December, 2012)*  
**Focuses on policy, planning, and operations**  
 Sheryl Adam, *University of British Columbia*  
 Anita Cocchia, *BC Electronic Library Network*  
 Lynette Gallant, *North Island College*  
*(Member-at-Large)*  
 Marjory Jardine, *Justice Institute of BC*  
*(Member-at-Large)*  
 Leva Lee, *BCcampus*  
 Todd Mundle, *Kwantlen Polytechnic University*  
*(Chair)*  
 Christina Nilsen, *Thompson Rivers University*  
*(Member-at-Large)*  
 David Pepper, *BC Institute of Technology*  
*(Regional Universities and Institutes with 4 year Programs)*  
 James Rout, *Emily Carr University of Art + Design*  
*(Small Universities)*  
 Tracie Smith, *University of Victoria*  
 Ross Tyner, *Okanagan College*  
*(Urban Colleges)*  
 Melanie Wilke, *Northwest Community College*  
*(Rural Colleges)*

**Partner Libraries**  
*(as of December, 2012)*  
 Alexander College  
 British Columbia Institute of Technology  
 Camosun College  
 Capilano University  
 College of New Caledonia  
 College of the Rockies  
 Columbia Bible College  
 Douglas College  
 Emily Carr University of Art + Design  
 Justice Institute of British Columbia  
 Kwantlen Polytechnic University  
 Langara College  
 North Island College  
 Northern Lights College  
 Northwest Community College  
 Okanagan College  
 Quest University Canada  
 Selkirk College  
 Simon Fraser University  
 Thompson Rivers University  
 Trinity Western University  
 University Canada West  
 University of British Columbia  
 University of Northern British Columbia  
 University of the Fraser Valley  
 University of Victoria  
 Vancouver Community College  
 Vancouver Island University  
 Yukon College

**Software Selection Committee**  
**Oversees the upcoming platform evaluation process**  
 Tina Bebbington, *University of Victoria*  
 Debra Flewelling, *Douglas College*  
 Ben Harrison, *College of the Rockies*  
 Kealin McCabe, *University of Northern BC*  
 Sunni Nishimura, *AskAway Coordinator*  
 George Villavicencio, *Capilano University*

**Administrative Centre**  
 Gordon Coleman  
 Leah Hopton  
 Sunni Nishimura  
 Reece Steinberg

# Shared Services & Collaborative Programs

*This is a very valuable and useful service especially for those of us studying from home, and on a Sunday!*

- CapU learner

*This was incredibly helpful. Whoever was on the other end of this just helped me for over half an hour with a tricky APA problem. UNREAL service. So grateful!*

- Camosun learner

*In my first few years of university I did not make use of extra library services. That being said, this past year or so, and particularly this semester I decided to try using AskAway for help and every time I have been able to talk to and work with someone who has not only been extremely helpful, but genuinely nice as well. I wish I started using these services sooner. All of the people I have talked to have been very well informed and have spent anywhere from 5 min to 45 min to make sure I received the help I needed. It really is an awesome service and I hope SFU and the library continue to use it.*

- SFU learner

## Partnering to Support our Students

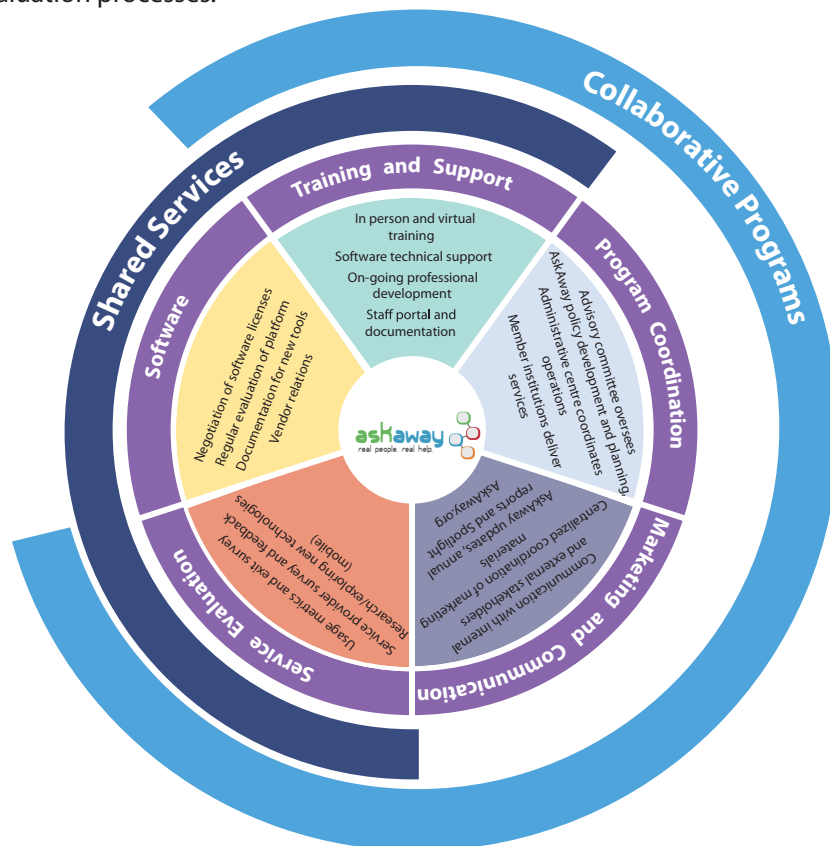
BCcampus support for collaborative services enables post-secondary institutions to combine infrastructure and expertise to maximize service and boost systemic efficiencies. AskAway leverages system wide resources so that students have access to an extensive online support network. At the same time, AskAway reduces costs and eliminates redundancies across the sector via centrally coordinated software licensing, training, support, marketing, and assessment.

## Leveraging Technical Infrastructure

AskAway negotiates on behalf of institutions to secure system-wide licensing of software. The outcome is greatly reduced licensing and support costs for individual institutions. With support from BCcampus, AskAway:

- Investigates and licenses the virtual reference software required in the provision of service,
- Monitors the shared service via ongoing evaluation of current software used, and
- Reviews additional technologies that could augment the service.

The AskAway Administrative Centre oversees and coordinates triennial platform evaluation processes.



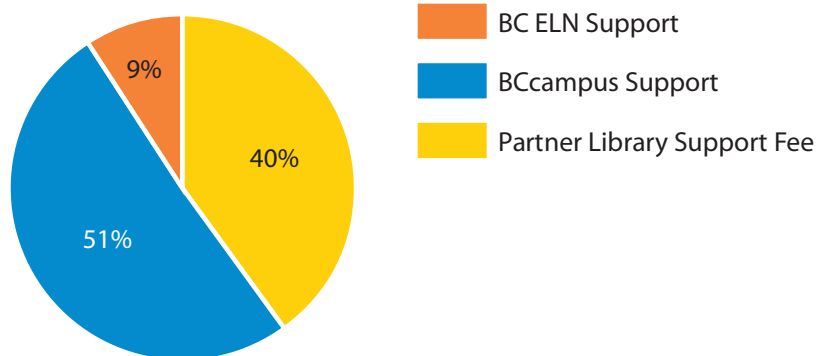
# Funding Request

Centralised funding and support ensures that AskAway can operate from a neutral position, maintaining a system perspective while benefitting all institutions.

Funding of **\$60,000 through BCcampus Shared Services and Collaborative Programs** is critical to support AskAway coordination, technical infrastructure, and service costs in 2013/14.

	2013/2014 Proposed	
	Revenue	Expense
BCcampus Support	60,000	
BC ELN Support	15,000	
Partner Library Service Support Fee	47,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>122,000</b>	
Service Support		100,000
Governance/Technical Infrastructure		22,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>122,000</b>
<b>REVENUE-EXPENSE</b>		<b>-</b>

AskAway Support



*I was super impressed with how quickly the response came. I will certainly pass this little gem on to my cohort.*

- SFU graduate learner

*My Librarian was so helpful! I have been sitting here for two hours trying to find the right resources, and within fifteen minutes she had helped me find everything I needed. I'm incredibly thankful for this service.*

-UBC learner

*I just love AskAway librarians!! They truly are godsend, especially in the situation that I am in. I am a mother of two and get little time to delve deep into assignment intricacies ... I am and will always be indebted to AskAway for giving me answers when I needed them at the last minute and according to my convenience and suitability. Thanks a million AskAway, all what I am, I owe it to you all hard-working librarians, for coming up with solutions in the nick of time.*

- KPU learner

# Value for Students

*I am a distance education student and I found AskAway VERY helpful. Since I don't live in the city where my university is located, being able to chat with a librarian online was incredibly helpful. Thanks for making library services so accessible!*

- TRU learner

*Thank you so much for offering this service. I live about 1.5 hours away from school and this just makes it easier to get help when I need it.*

- UBC learner

*I really love AskAway, I was having problems finding primary sources. I was getting stressed out and found the link at the side of the page. I asked my question stating that I was getting a little stressed over it and the librarian calmed me right down. She showed me just how easy it really was. GREAT IDEA!*

- Douglas learner

AskAway offers students flexible, convenient, online access to learning support that is responsive to their evolving needs. AskAway further impacts student learning by:

## Entering the Digital Classroom

Increasingly, the post-secondary experience is virtual. Educators provide online lectures and forums; students complete assignments electronically; courses are delivered through learning management systems. Library and research assistance access points must be online to be responsive to student's evolving needs.

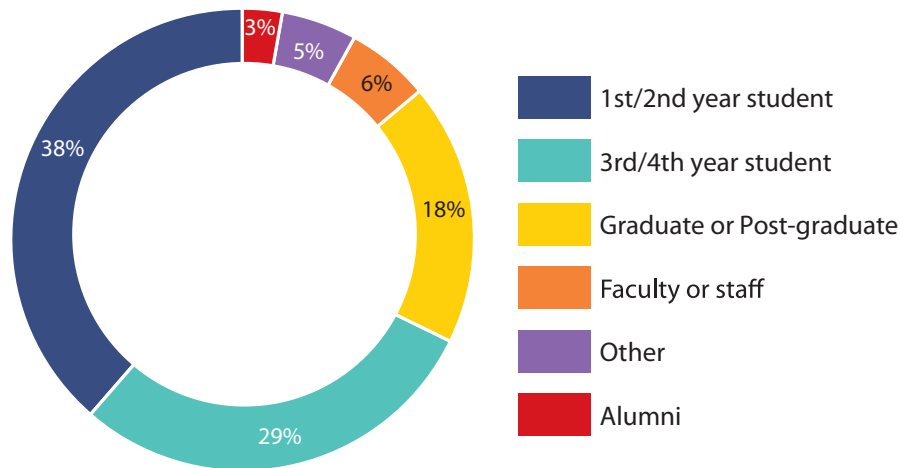
## Providing a Seamless, Accessible Service

Accessibility is key to AskAway - students rarely experience wait times and are never turned away. Regardless of which institution students originate from, 250+ professional library staff from 29 partner libraries are standing by each week to help. Each service provider has full access to all partner library resources, meaning that students experience a seamless exchange - as if they had visited a help desk at their own institution.

## Meeting Students at Point of Need

Research and discovery is not limited to regular working hours or campus buildings. AskAway provides fast, flexible access to reference service beyond the limitations of library buildings and traditional hours of service.

## Who is using the AskAway Service?





# Value for the Sector

Individual institutions and the post-secondary sector as a whole benefit from the low cost delivery of an innovative learning support service.

## A Model for Collaborative Service Delivery

Partnerships between post-secondary institutions are strengthened by AskAway's collaborative environment. The infrastructure developed to support AskAway has become a model of successful service management for other collaborative ventures like WriteAway.

## Equal Service for BC's Learners

By sharing resources across the system, institutions are able to extend services far beyond what each could offer alone. Students from all institutions receive 67 hours of access per week – regardless of where they live, what mode their course is in, or which institution they attend.

## Significant Cost Reductions

AskAway total costs are greatly reduced because of its centralised coordination and ability to leverage existing infrastructure. The cost-sharing model supported by AskAway means that even the smallest institution can offer their students access to quality research support, often well past regular hours of library operation.

## Mitigating Risk

AskAway mitigates risks in several areas through its centralized coordination role: economically by negotiating advantageous pricing with vendors; operationally through centrally coordinated training, scheduling, and marketing; and through infrastructure efficiencies by providing back-up research help for students should their home library services be disrupted.

### AskAway Vision

Province-wide collaborative virtual reference will:

- Facilitate equitable access to quality information for all post-secondary learners.
- Extend chat reference service to all British Columbia post-secondary libraries.
- Provide post-secondary learners with reference assistance online at point of need.
- Provide convenient, timely access to province-wide reference resources, beyond the restrictions of library buildings and opening hours.
- Facilitate collaborative reference and referral.

## Annual Cost Comparison for a Typical Library

\$100,000 – non-consortial retail cost (staff of one)

vs.

\$14,827 – cost with BC ELN (staff of one)

**85% savings** for partner library to participate in the collaborative service as opposed to offering on their own



**69%** of AskAway users choose AskAway because they are at home or do distance education

# 2012 Achievements & Value Added

## Financial

### Reduced Per Transaction Cost

In 2011, AskAway achieved a cost per transaction of \$3.18. In 2012, the cost was reduced by 3% to \$3.08 per transaction.

### Low Cost Licensing

Through centralized coordination, advantageous software licensing costs benefit all institutions by greatly reducing the individual expense for each participating library. Coordinated software review for new licenses allows individual libraries to focus on local needs and issues while still benefiting from software that best suits their needs.

## Infrastructure

### Summer Sustainability Success

AskAway student traffic during the summer semester has greatly increased over the past few years. A summer sustainability plan was endorsed in 2012 that enabled the service to continue without disruption, balance participation without undue burden on any institution, set adequate staffing levels, and reduce administrative overhead.

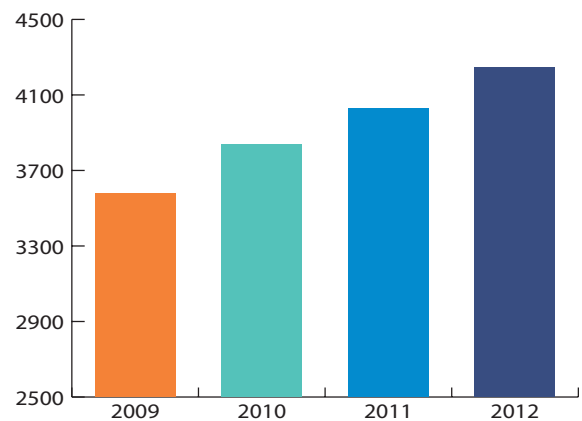
### Streamlined Service

Improvements were made to AskAway procedures in 2012 which resulted in enhanced service provider responsiveness during peak traffic times. Students remain unencumbered by the complex behind-the-scenes service infrastructure, and simply enjoy prompt answers to their questions at all times.

### Expanding Partnerships

Two new libraries were welcomed to the service in 2012: Columbia Bible College and University Canada West. New partners bolster the depth of library staff available and broaden student access across the post-secondary sector.

AskAway Sessions, Summer Term, per year



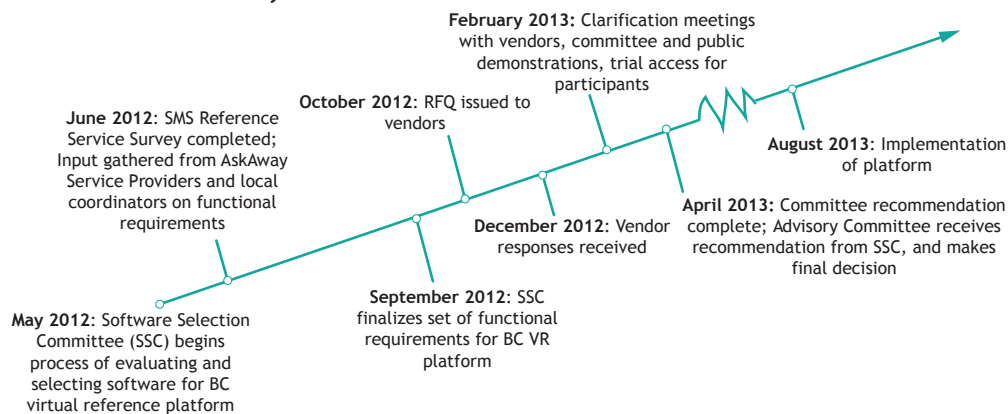
## Technology

### A Refreshed Public Website

In 2012 the AskAway.org public website and the staff portal were migrated to a new content management system and given a facelift, ensuring they continue to meet the service's communication needs, but in a more efficient and user friendly manner.

### Software Selection Committee – Reviewing and Renewing

As part of a triennial software evaluation process, a Software Selection Committee is on track to provide a recommendation for a software package that best suits the needs of the AskAway service.



## Student Experience

### Enhanced Mobile Accessibility

AskAway remains nimble in response to student needs. Analysis shows that 40% more students connected to AskAway through their mobile devices in 2012 than in 2011. The AskAway chat window – called the Qwidget – is compatible with most mobile devices.

A survey of institutions in 2012 determined that partner libraries are interested in a consortial approach to licensing an SMS provider. The Administrative Centre is currently exploring consortial licensing opportunities.



*This is a great service, super helpful, friendly staff, always answers my questions quickly and professionally.*

**- UFV learner**

*I can't think of a single way that the librarian could have improved my session. She was constantly informative, had a sense of humour, and managed to find exactly the reference I needed. I very much appreciated being able to have the conversation thread e-mailed to me for future reference.*

**- UVic graduate learner**

# The Road Ahead

Noted as a groundbreaking collaborative service in BC, AskAway joins other online student support services as part of BC's expanding Online Learning Commons. What is in store for AskAway in 2013 ...

*For ten years, BCcampus's mission has been to achieve synergies through collaborative, multi-institutional activities that benefit students, institutions, instructors and staff across the British Columbia post-secondary system.*

**- BCcampus Strategic Plan 2012-2015**

*B.C.'s post-secondary system is focused on ensuring students are supported to achieve their education, training and employment goals.*

**- Advanced Education, Innovation and Technology 2013/14-2015/16 Service Plan**

**Enhanced User Experience:** A triennial software evaluation and selection process is currently underway. Regardless of the final product chosen, students are assured a seamless transition to a more modern, user-friendly interface, featuring improved accessibility for vision-impaired, and compatibility across devices for most tablets and smartphones.

**Fostering Academic Integrity:** Approximately 10-12% of questions received by AskAway are from students asking for advice on how to properly cite sources in academic papers. Investigation will begin of an online resource to support service providers assisting students with these types of questions. This would be a living community resource - service providers will be invited to contribute content for continuous improvement.

**A Community of Student Support Services:** AskAway has served as a highly successful model for initiatives such as the WriteAway online writing support service. In the future, coordination and collaboration between services will be facilitated by common approaches to infrastructure, policies, and communications architecture. The resulting system efficiencies will increase cost-savings to the post-secondary sector.

**Developing Best Practices:** BC ELN is currently spearheading the development of an assessment framework that will clearly demonstrate the value that core services like AskAway bring to the post-secondary system. The newly developed value indicators will be used to measure service progress.

*When there are barriers to information, [distance education] students just do the minimum; with AskAway and electronic sources available, we can have a quality educational experience. We have access to quality information, and can write quality papers.*



**- Travis Cross, TRU - Open Learning student**

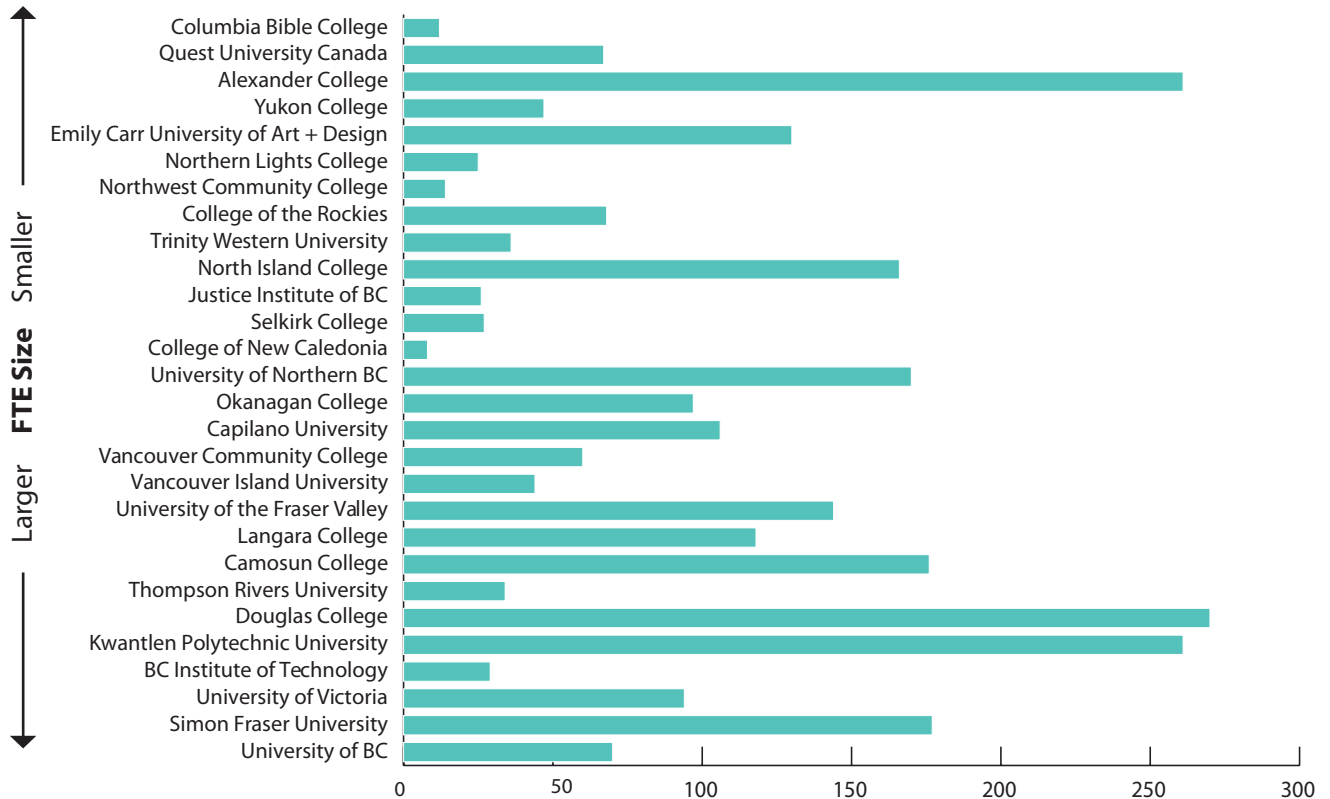
# Appendix A: Usage Statistical Table

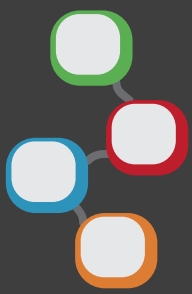
## AskAway Patron Use Over Time by Institution, Fall 2008 – Fall 2012

Institution Name	Sept-Dec 2008	Jan-Apr 2009	May-Aug 2009	Sept-Dec 2009	Jan-Apr 2010	May-Aug 2010	Sept-Dec 2010	Jan-Apr 2011	May-Aug 2011	Sept-Dec 2011	Jan-Apr 2012	May-Aug 2012	Sept - Dec 2012
Alexander College	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	12	18	21	24	32	59	60	93	36
BC Institute of Technology	147	218	105	130	117	60	141	169	56	147	132	62	149
Camosun College	78	219	114	620	553	145	644	490	179	722	494	213	555
Capilano University	13	105	33	143	105	23	188	179	92	387	177	60	339
College of New Caledonia*	7	10	8	17	15	2	7	5	1	6	5	1	18
College of the Rockies	51	26	0	32	10	17	62	24	15	67	46	9	65
Columbia Bible College	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	0	0	5
Douglas College	585	597	256	651	783	368	913	828	342	909	846	358	1052
Emily Carr University of Art + Design	6	7	7	33	37	40	100	105	17	87	65	26	90
Justice Institute of BC	3	8	8	0	3	10	16	19	9	25	30	6	25
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	105	642	331	543	557	455	687	555	485	992	807	597	983
Langara College	148	150	70	161	177	98	278	338	119	347	243	155	432
North Island College	98	107	38	105	71	26	160	116	32	167	123	40	203
Northern Lights College	25	29	5	9	31	10	22	31	5	27	17	8	12
Northwest Community College	42	37	50	77	29	11	12	11	2	4	1	1	23
Okanagan College	127	165	84	296	252	75	207	194	35	288	179	41	249
Quest University Canada	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6	8	6	7	4	33	8	3	19
Selkirk College	25	19	24	52	23	6	38	5	6	48	17	8	39
Simon Fraser University	1112	1436	901	1694	1389	1095	1639	1992	1147	2233	1942	1234	1876
Thompson Rivers University	51	96	111	260	220	67	173	147	71	133	178	80	391
Trinity Western University*	22	18	99	49	9	4	12	8	6	26	12	11	13
University Canada West	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	51
University of BC	567	1295	627	1472	1211	674	1687	1279	682	1478	1337	596	1004
University of Northern BC	36	31	165	339	360	77	372	293	72	314	231	64	291
University of the Fraser Valley	130	514	137	491	378	156	577	384	162	647	384	130	447
University of Victoria	290	365	269	453	545	255	530	633	423	852	640	342	570
Vancouver Community College	24	28	13	54	39	18	86	56	14	142	144	67	180
Vancouver Island University	157	216	67	418	419	85	457	95	13	161	113	35	146
Yukon College	7	8	2	19	22	4	9	6	0	13	12	2	21
<b>TOTALS</b>	3900	6400	3577	8155	7450	3837	9090	8029	4031	10315	8244	4244	9288

# Appendix B: AskAway Sessions per FTE, 2012

The following sessions per 1000 FTE table gives a sense of AskAway use at each institution based on population, instead of total number of questions.

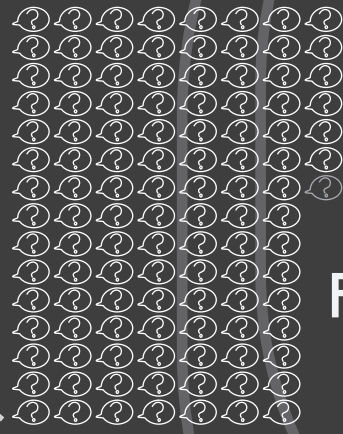




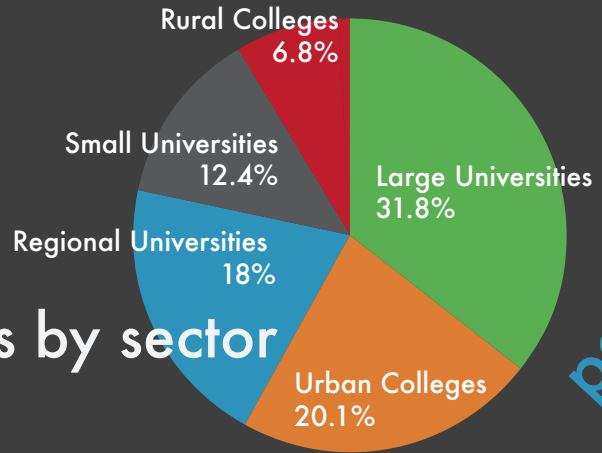
# askaway 2011-2012

184 079 total FTEs covered  
67 hours per week

111.2 sessions per day



FTEs by sector



## Why

use AskAway?



69.2% are at home/distance ed.

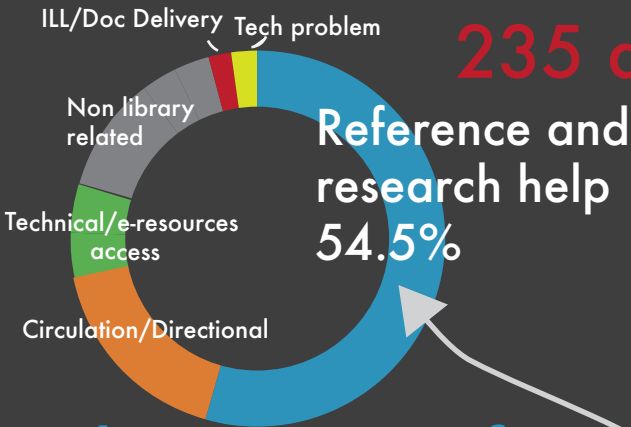
72.5% prefer online assistance, or are looking for online resources



Average of 3.6 staff on duty

94.2% would use AskAway again

22 813 sessions  
235 days of service



59% of sessions were initiated by first-time users

## What types of questions?

AskAway is a collaborative project of BC and Yukon post-secondary libraries with:

# For more information: askaway.org



