

AskMN: The Librarian Is In!

FY09 Report

AskMN: The Librarian Is In! goals are to:

- Create a cooperative network for libraries to more easily contribute and participate in an online reference service for the benefit of its communities.
- Provide a cooperative statewide digital reference service that is of benefit to all Minnesota residents allowing 24/7 access to resources and informational assistance by trained and experienced librarians.

This report summarizes who is asking questions, who is answering them, what time of day questions are being asked, the reach of our libraries to Minnesota residents, and how satisfied patrons were with AskMN: The Librarian Is In!, Minnesota's statewide digital reference service.

In FY09, we welcomed 4 libraries to AskMN: Macalester College's DeWitt Library, Dakota County Library, Saint Paul Public Library, and Washington County Library. See Map 1 for a full list of participating libraries.

Lake Agassiz Regional Library joined AskMN in July 2009. We expect to see high usage from its patrons in FY10.

Libraries can chose not to participate in staffing AskMN but may still opt to have AskMN.org links on their websites thus providing Minnesota residents with another reference service at their time and place of need.

Who Asked Questions?

From the beginning of the service in July 2008 – June 2009, AskMN accepted a total of 7654 questions. Table 1 shows a breakdown of these questions. Of the 8109 total questions received, 4729 (62%) questions were from Minnesota patrons, and 2925 (38%) were questions from non-Minnesota patrons that Minnesota library staff answered for the QuestionPoint 24/7 Reference Cooperative.

AskMN participates in the 24/7 Reference Cooperative. This means that questions submitted by Minnesota residents at times when our service is not staffed by Minnesota library staff are picked up and answered by the 24/7 service. The 24/7 coverage of AskMN benefits Minnesota patrons at their point and time of need, giving them access to reference services when their libraries are typically closed. Similarly, our participating libraries answer questions for other members of the 24/7 Reference Cooperative. In subscribing to the 24/7 Reference Cooperative, we are obligated to provide reciprocal service to the Cooperative.

Table 1

Total Questions Received, July 2008 – June 2009

Questions received from MN patrons	4729	62%
Questions received from non-MN patrons	2925	38%
Total questions received from all patrons (MN and non-MN)	7654	100%

Table 2 and Graph 1 show the total number of requests Minnesota patrons sent via AskMN.org and participating Minnesota libraries by queue (4729). In AskMN, patron requests are directed to one of two queues: an academic queue and a public queue.

Each participating library is given a unique online form specific to their institution type: academic or public. These two queues were created to best manage requests by experienced academic and public library staff.

There is also a statewide portal, <http://www.askmn.org/>, to assist Minnesota residents not affiliated with a participating library.

It is evident from the academic queue in Graph 1 that the majority of questions are submitted during the school year. The large spike in the academic queue in October was attributed to students returning to school and an article in the University of Minnesota's Minnesota Daily, October 7, 2008, about AskMN.

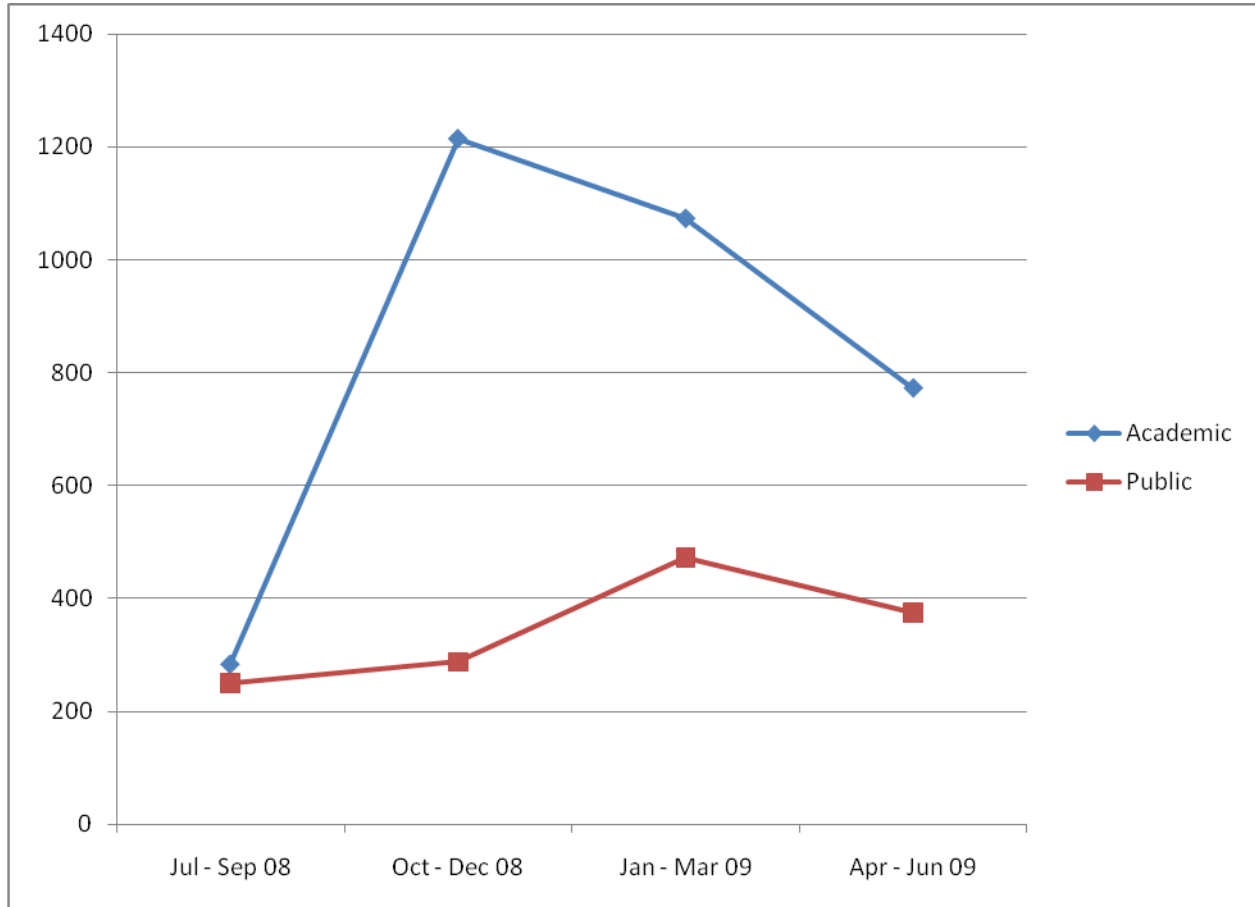
Table 2

Questions from Minnesota Patrons

MN Patron Requests	Jul - Sep 08	Oct - Dec 08	Jan - Mar 09	Apr - Jun 09	Total	% Total
Academic	284	1214	1073	773	3344	71%
Public	250	288	472	375	1385	29%
Total	534	1502	1545	1148	4729	100%

Graph 1

Questions from Minnesota Patrons



Part of our agreement with the 24/7 Reference Cooperative requires AskMN to accept questions from non-Minnesota patrons. Our participation in the 24/7 Cooperative began December 15, 2008. Table 3 and Graph 2 indicate this activity. Questions are directed into one of the two AskMN queues, academic or public.

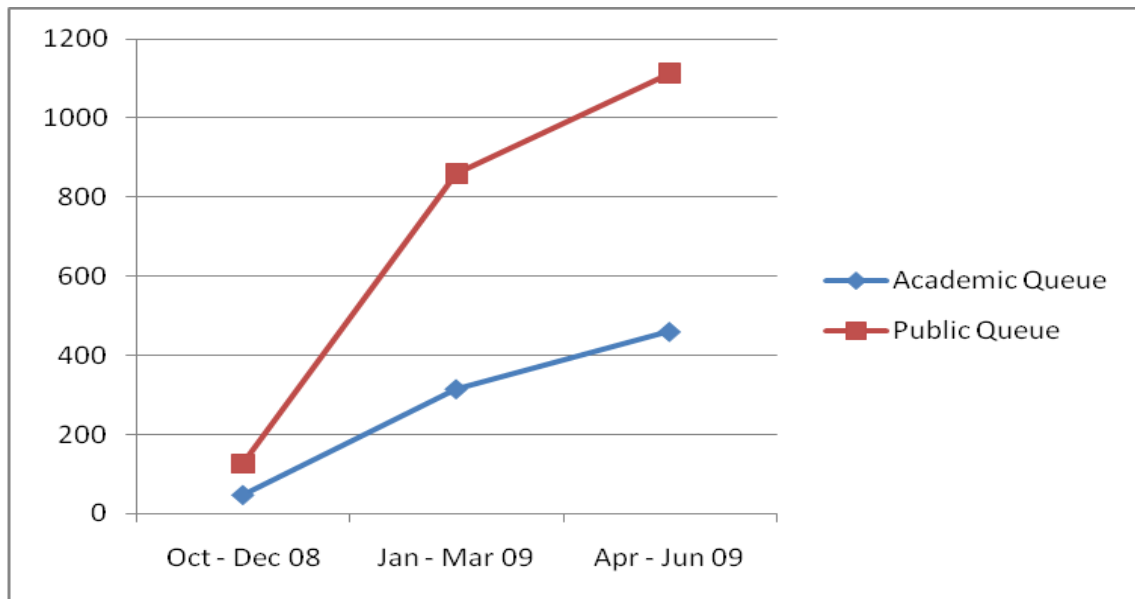
Table 3

Questions from Non-Minnesota Patrons

Non-MN Patron Requests	Jul - Sep 08	Oct - Dec 08	Jan - Mar 09	Apr - Jun 09	Total	% Total
Academic	0	48	316	461	825	28%
Public	0	127	860	1113	2100	72%
Total	0	175	1176	1574	2925	100%

Graph 2

Questions from Non-Minnesota Patrons



When Did Patrons Ask Questions?

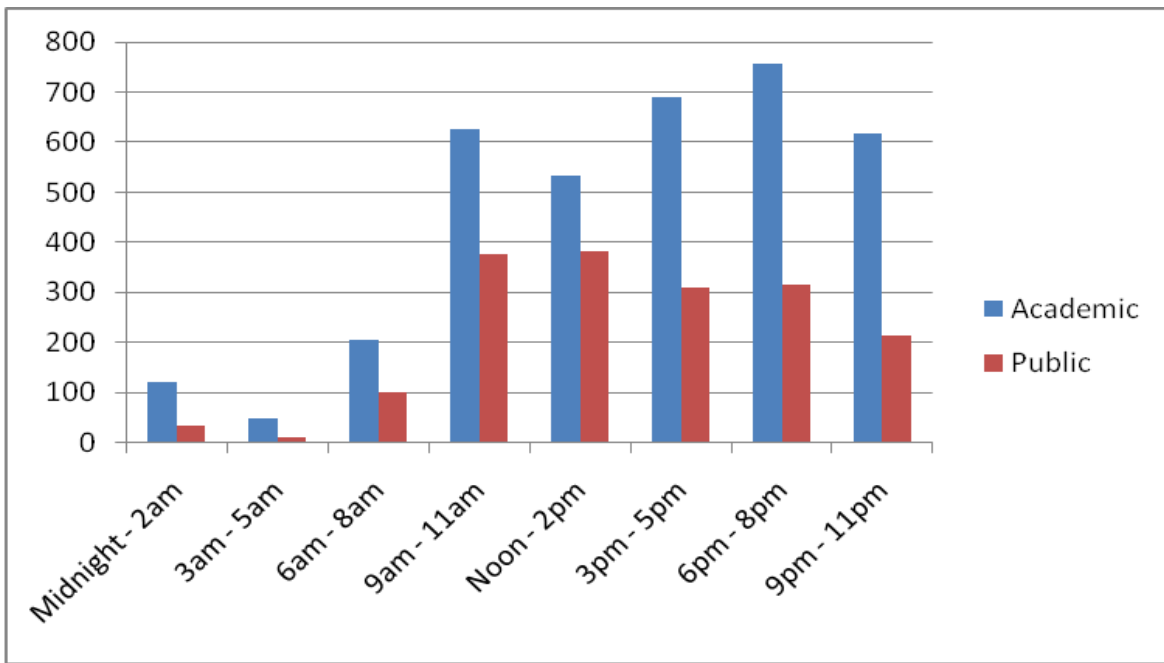
Graph 3 shows the times of day questions are submitted to AskMN by Minnesota patrons.

The highest times of use in the academic queue come between 9am – 11pm; requests peak between 6pm – 8pm. The public queue shows a similar pattern. The majority of requests come between 9am – 8pm; midday between 9am – 2pm has the most activity.

Typically, AskMN librarians staff the service between 9am – 5pm Monday through Friday. After hours coverage of 5pm – 9am weekdays and weekends are handled by the 24/7 Reference Cooperative.

Graph 3

Sessions by hour of the day



Who Answered Questions?

Table 4 shows the breakdown of who answered the 4729 questions from Minnesota patrons during this period.

Questions are answered by either staff of participating Minnesota libraries or by staff of the OCLC QuestionPoint 24/7 Reference Cooperative in which AskMN participates. Minnesota library staff answered 889 (19%) and the 24/7 Reference Cooperative answered 3840 (81%) of the questions from Minnesota patrons. AskMN is meeting its contractual obligation to OCLC and the Cooperative.

Table 4

Questions Answered for Minnesota Patrons

Answered by MN library staff	889	19%
Answered by QP 24/7 Reference Cooperative	3840	81%

Total questions received from MN patrons	4729	100%
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Table 5 and Graph 4 show which Minnesota queue, academic or public, handled the 889 questions received from Minnesota patrons. It is not surprising that the academic queue handled more questions from Minnesota patrons; academic libraries teach students, staff, and faculty to use the service.

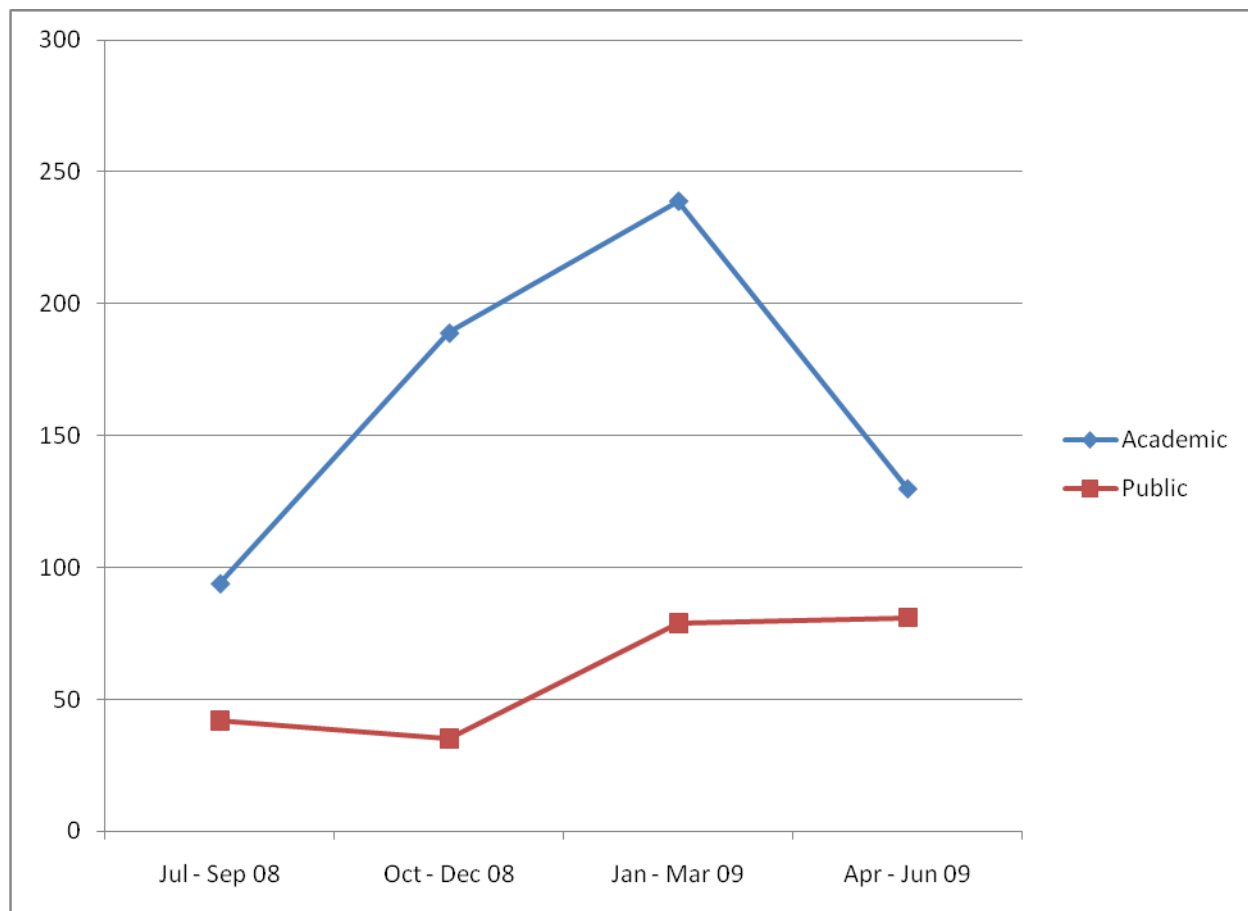
Table 5

Minnesota Questions Answered by Minnesota Library Staff

MN Questions Answered by MN Library Staff	Jul - Sep 08	Oct - Dec 08	Jan - Mar 09	Apr - Jun 09	Total	% Total
Academic	94	189	239	130	652	73%
Public	42	35	79	81	237	27%
Total	136	224	318	211	889	100%

Graph 4

Minnesota Questions Answered by Minnesota Library Staff



While 19% of questions from Minnesota patrons are answered by Minnesota library staff, Table 6 and Graph 5 show when the 24/7 Reference Cooperative stepped in and answered the other 81% (3840) of questions from Minnesota patrons. This illustrates the vital importance of participating in the 24/7 Reference Collaborative.

Table 6

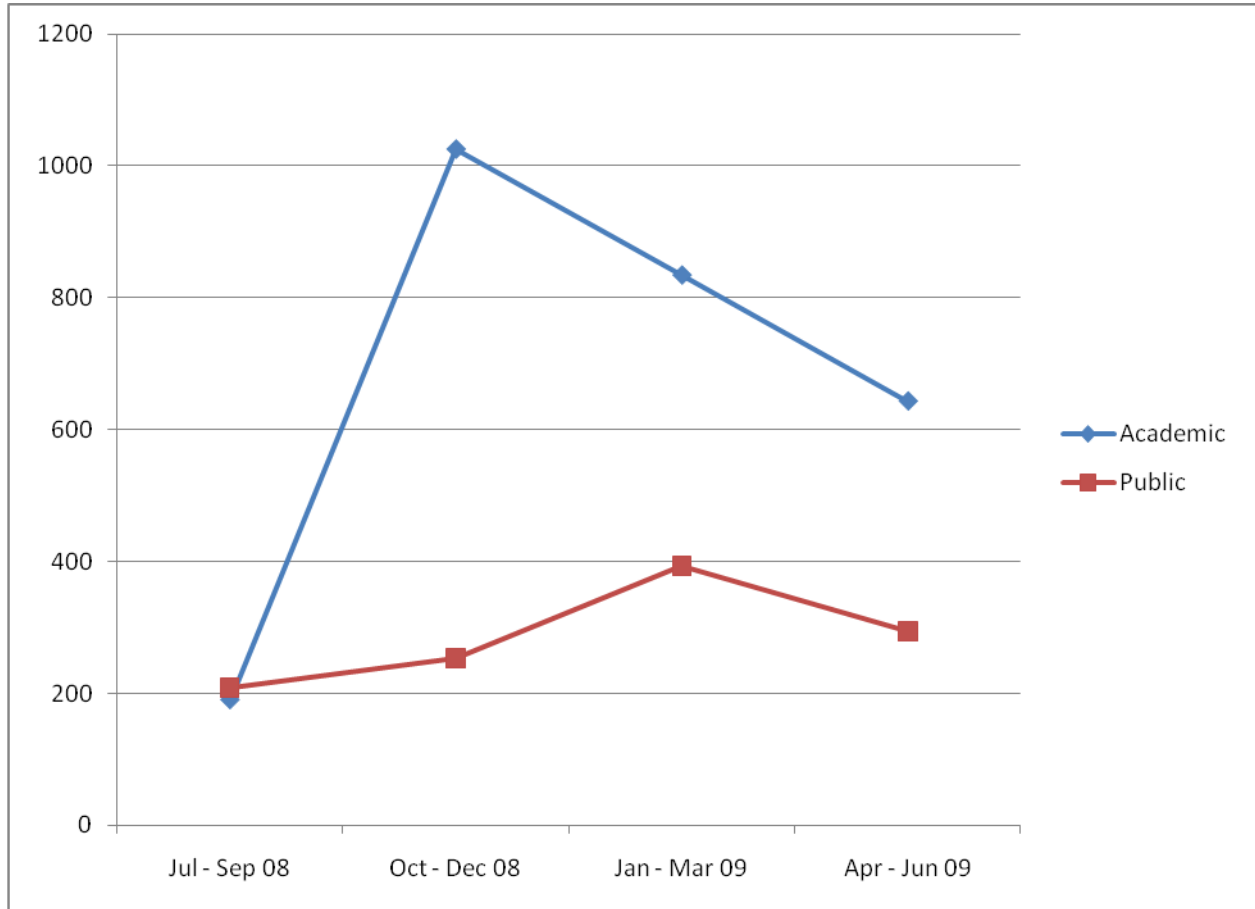
Minnesota Questions Answered by 24/7 Reference Cooperative

MN Questions Answered by 24/7 Reference Cooperative	Jul - Sep 08	Oct - Dec 08	Jan - Mar 09	Apr - Jun 09	Total	% Total
	95	190	240	130	655	17%
	45	35	80	80	240	63%
	140	225	320	210	905	23%

Academic	190	1025	834	643	2692	70%
Public	208	253	393	294	1148	30%
Total	398	1278	1227	937	3840	100%

Graph 5

Minnesota Questions Answered by 24/7 Reference Cooperative



AskMN Activity by Queue

Tables 7 and 8 summarize the activity of the academic and public queues. 16% of Minnesota patrons who submitted questions to the academic queue were assisted by Minnesota library staff contrasted with 7% in the public queue. Furthermore, 12%, or approximately 4/5ths, were assisted by the patron's *affiliated academic library* whereas only 4%, or under a third, of questions in the public queue were answered by the patron's *own library*.

Table 7

Activity by Academic Queue

Questions received		
From MN patrons	3344	80%
From non-MN patrons (24/7 Cooperative)	825	20%
Total questions from all patrons	4169	100%
How are Minnesota patrons being assisted?		
By patron's library	496	12%
By another MN library	156	4%
By 24/7 Reference Cooperative	2692	64%
Total responses provided	3344	80%
How are all patrons being assisted?		
By patron's library	496	12%
By another MN library	981	24%
By 24/7 Reference Cooperative	2692	64%
Total responses provided	4169	100%

Table 8

Activity by Public Queue

Questions received		
From MN patrons	1385	40%
From non-MN patrons (24/7 Cooperative)	2100	60%
Total questions from all patrons	3485	100%
How are Minnesota patrons being assisted?		
By patron's library	111	3%
By another MN library	126	4%
By 24/7 Reference Cooperative	1148	33%
Total responses provided	1385	40%
How are all patrons being assisted?		
By patron's library	111	3%
By another MN library	2226	64%
By 24/7 Reference Cooperative	1148	33%
Total responses provided	3485	100%

Patron satisfaction

At the conclusion of each transaction (question/answer), Minnesota patrons are invited to complete a brief survey. Of the 4169 total questions received from Minnesota patrons, 406 (10%) responded. Table 9 shows that approximately 1/3 of the responding patrons have used the AskMN service on multiple occasions. An overwhelming 90% indicated that they would use AskMN again. 85% thought the librarian was helpful although only 74% were satisfied with the answer to the question asked. There could be many reasons why this response was lower; however, patrons were not asked to provide additional comments.

Table 9

Patron Satisfaction Survey

First time using service?	Yes	284	70%
	No	93	23%
	N/A	29	7%
Would you use this service again?	Yes	364	90%
	No	10	2%
	N/A	32	8%
Was the librarian helpful?	Yes	344	85%
	No	23	6%
	N/A	39	9%
Were you satisfied with the answer to your question?	Yes	299	74%
	No	43	10%
	N/A	64	16%

Where did questions originate within Minnesota?

Map 1, Questions from Minnesota Patrons by County, illustrates the numbers of questions submitted to AskMN by county. Those counties with libraries or library systems participating in AskMN show dramatically higher usage than do those not participating.

These numbers reflect correct/identifiable zip codes submitted via the AskMN chat form.

Contact Information

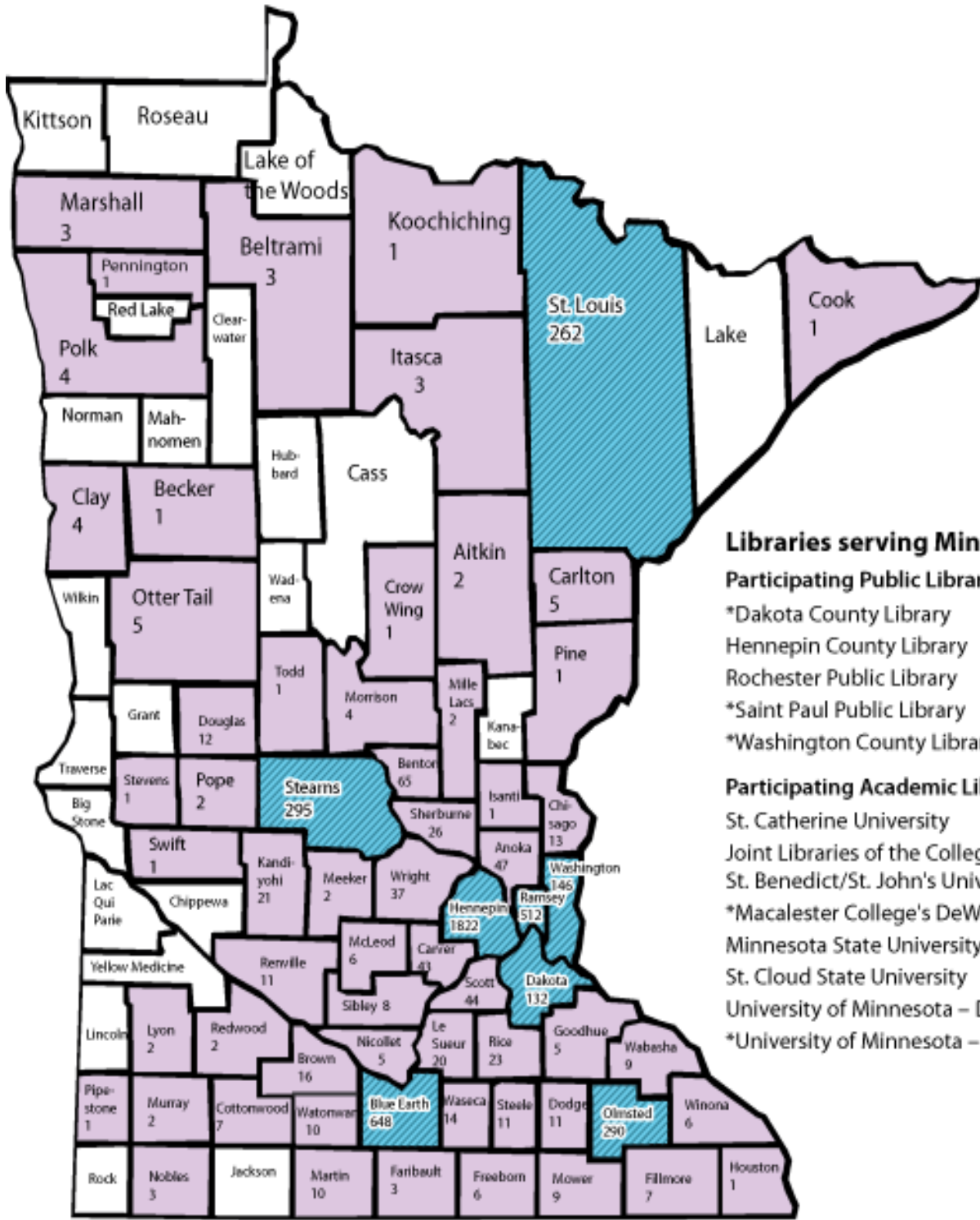
For more information about AskMN: The Librarian Is In!, please contact:

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Map 1
April 2008 – June 2009
Questions from Minnesota Patrons by County



Libraries serving Minnesota

Participating Public Libraries

- *Dakota County Library
- Hennepin County Library
- Rochester Public Library
- *Saint Paul Public Library
- *Washington County Library

Participating Academic Libraries

- St. Catherine University
- Joint Libraries of the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University
- *Macalester College's DeWitt Library
- Minnesota State University, Mankato
- St. Cloud State University
- University of Minnesota – Duluth
- *University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

■ Counties asking questions via AskMN

■ Counties with participating library or libraries

*New participating libraries in FY08-FY09