

Strengthening Access to Overseas Library Collections

by Mary E. Jackson, ARL Senior Program Officer for Access Services

Interlibrary loan (ILL) and document delivery (DD) services involving international trading partners are playing an increasingly prominent and key role in several projects of the AAU/ARL Global Resources Program. Traditionally, collection development librarians have been hesitant to rely on other libraries to meet their users' needs, in part because interlibrary loan was viewed as too slow, inefficient, and costly. Low fill rates, short loan periods, and restrictive and inflexible lending policies of some libraries have also contributed to the view that ILL is not responsive to user needs. There has been even less reliance on collections outside North America for all of the above reasons and the added concern about potential loss in the mails and the length of time that an item might be away from its local collection. In the most fundamental sense, the ILL/DD services being tested in the Global Resources Program prompt a reexamination of these negative assumptions. The projects also reexamine, in an international context, the perennial dynamics between acceptable levels of ILL/DD performance (primarily turnaround time) and the range of costs for such services. Lessons from the ILL/DD components of the projects will help us evaluate the extent to which collection interdependence with overseas libraries is a viable strategy for strengthening North American access to global resources.

The German Resources Project, the Japan Journal Access Project, and the Latin Americanist Research Resources Project have strong ILL/DD components. Each is designed to test whether North American libraries can provide their users with rapid and reliable access to materials from other libraries or suppliers, including those that are located in the country of publication. This is a significant shift from the more traditional approach of building strong and deep local collections and relying on ILL for the occasional item from other North American libraries.

Latin Americanist Research Resources Project

The Latin Americanist Research Resources Project was the first of the Global Resources Program projects to incorporate an interlibrary loan component when it introduced an article ordering link between the University of Texas at Austin's Latin American Network Information Center (UT-LANIC) table-of-contents database and the OCLC ILL system. The ordering link, based on OCLC's proprietary ILL Prism Transfer software, permits individuals with access to the World Wide Web to initiate an ILL request for any article they identify in the UT-LANIC database. Requests are sent to the OCLC ILL Review file, where ILL staff in the patron's library are alerted to review the requests, choose locations, and transmit the requests to the first potential lenders. This linkage was one of the first examples of transferring bibliographic data from an external citation database into the OCLC ILL system without re-keying the citation. UT-LANIC and OCLC have agreed to discontinue use of this proprietary software by April 2000 and will use instead the ISO ILL Protocol to transfer requests into the OCLC ILL Review file. The Project also established a goal of three working days for expedited turnaround time. The expedited turnaround time provision proved to be unnecessary because many institutions offer such service voluntarily, so it was dropped from the second renewal agreement.

The Project is looking to expand its membership and document delivery opportunities by adding Latin American partners. The first of these partners, a private Bolivian library that is not an OCLC member, offers another opportunity to implement and test the use of the ISO ILL Protocol.

Japan Journal Access Project

Improved interlibrary loan and document delivery for Japanese journals and newspapers is being advanced in three complementary ways in the Japan Journal Access Project. The first is increased access to North American holdings of Japanese journals and serials via Ohio State University's East Asian Libraries Cooperative Web site at <http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu/>. The site provides access to the

Union List of Japanese Serials and Newspapers, a list which includes nearly 6,000 titles held by 25 libraries or available on the Web.

A second area of focus is the ILL/DD agreement with Japan's Waseda University Library. Project participants have agreed to send ILL requests via OCLC, articles via Ariel, books via airmail, and pay any lending fees using the OCLC ILL Fee Management (IFM) service. This ILL service is bidirectional—Waseda may borrow from North American participants, and the North American participants may borrow from Waseda. The agreement, begun in November 1998, is designed to avoid the creation of special procedures or handling outside of the main workflow of ILL operations.

A third component of the Japan Journal Access Project is a new agreement with the Association of National University Libraries (ANUL), undertaken in conjunction with the National Coordinating Committee on Japanese Library Resources (NCC). The nine-month, bidirectional pilot with seven Japanese public university libraries and ten North American university libraries is limited to non-returnable journal articles and book chapters. Documents will be transmitted from the U.S. to Japan via Ariel and from Japan to the U.S. as email attachments. Methods of requesting materials, payment of lending fees, and copyright compliance are three key elements to be tracked and assessed during the project.

German Resources Project

The German Resources Project has taken yet a different approach to ILL/DD services. North American participants in the German project are being offered access to the German GBV union catalog and several article citation databases. The service, GBVdirekt/North America, permits North American participants to order materials held by participating German libraries. Initially, the service is limited to articles sent as email attachments to the requesting library. ARL has agreed to maintain deposit accounts for the participants and to remit payment to Göttingen University Library for filled requests. Tested in the spring of 1999, GBVdirekt/North America was made available to all German Resources Project participants on 1 July 1999. Project participants are beginning to explore how to expand the service to include requests for books and other returnables, as well as how to offer German libraries the ability to order books and articles from North American participants.

ILL/DD Barriers and Challenges

Although most of these interlibrary loan and document delivery services are just getting underway, the projects have already identified a number of challenges, which are discussed below. Satisfactory solutions for these problems must be found in order to permit international ILL/DD services to provide the required timely, efficient, and cost-effective alternative to local ownership.

Holdings Information

Verifying the holdings of potential lenders is one of the first steps of the ILL/DD process. The UT-LANIC database, the Union List of Japanese Serials and Newspapers, Waseda's loading of its holdings into OCLC, and the availability of the German GBV union catalog all simplify the process of identifying potential suppliers for these projects. However, these various databases and union catalogs still represent only a portion of the universe of relevant resources. The lead institutions in the various Global Resources projects could play an important role by accelerating their cataloging of relevant foreign language holdings as well as by identifying additional information about North American and overseas holdings of foreign language resources.

Patron Identification and Authentication

A second issue is patron identification and authentication. As scholars, students, and others are offered the ability to initiate unmediated ILL/DD requests directly from their desktops to suppliers without the

re-keying or review of orders by ILL staff, library managers need to ensure that they are providing this service only to eligible patrons. A host of legal and financial issues prevent libraries from providing such a service to patrons without local interlibrary borrowing privileges. Early experience in the Latin Americanist Project suggests that the ILL staff are not encouraging their patrons to identify materials and place orders using the UT-LANIC/OCLC link because of the lack of patron authentication. Currently, ILL managers are more worried about patron authentication than saving their staff time in processing requests. Perhaps the low volume of ILL transactions transferred directly from UT-LANIC into the OCLC ILL system reflects a service philosophy that encourages patrons to use the UT-LANIC database for searching but requires them to initiate ILL/DD requests via the traditional, mediated process.

The 1997–98 ARL ILL/DD Performance Measures Study confirmed the cost effectiveness of unmediated requesting.¹ Although there is keen interest in offering unmediated ordering, the lack of patron identification and authentication is requiring the Global Resources projects to begin with library-mediated services. The German project faces further technical and policy issues: the system used in the German project considers the library as the user; if unmediated ordering were offered, one individual would have access to the orders placed by other individuals within that institution, violating the principles of library patron confidentiality and individual privacy. Also, the German project is not yet equipped to handle numerous deposit accounts or credit card transactions.

ILL/DD Workflow & Locus of Responsibility

With the initiation of these projects, several practical issues have arisen that are specific to requesting and receiving ILL/DD services from overseas suppliers. Many North American libraries find it more efficient to use a single messaging system for all their ILL transactions; for most, that is the OCLC ILL system. Requests sent or received via any other method may be treated as exceptions and are often handled outside the normal workflow. This tends to delay those requests and raise their cost for the requesting library. For example, will ILL/DD staff receive sufficient numbers of requests for German language articles to remember how to order them from GBVdirekt/North America? The Global Resources projects are testing models that use the OCLC ILL system, as well as non-OCLC systems, for order placement and tracking. All of the projects are encouraging adoption of the international standard for interlibrary loan communication, the ISO ILL Protocol, by the various ILL messaging systems. Implementation of the ISO ILL Protocol would, for instance, permit an American library to use OCLC to initiate a request that could be received by a German library via GBVdirekt/North America. In that way, both libraries would be able to use their messaging system of choice.

A related question is, Which library department should be responsible for ordering materials from overseas libraries? Are there circumstances when area studies bibliographers should place ILL/DD requests because they have the language and subject expertise? Or, when should those requests be handled by ILL staff because they have knowledge of complex ILL policies and procedures and may find ways to mainstream the requests into ILL workflow, thereby minimizing the costs associated with handling the requests? The Japan and German projects are testing both options. It is doubtful that the results will identify a single strategy suitable for all libraries and circumstances, but the experience should provide insight into the pros and cons of each approach.

Choice of the Most Appropriate ILL/DD Supplier

All ILL/DD departments have developed preferred trading partners as the result of experience. In most cases, these preferences reflect reciprocal agreements that seek to balance benefits among all partners. The preferred trading partners of most North American academic and research libraries are other libraries in North America. However, when it comes to borrowing foreign publications, should U.S. or Canadian participants exhaust all North American resources before initiating overseas requests, or should they instead be encouraged to order from the supplier that provides the best and most cost-

effective service? This is another issue to be addressed in developing international ILL/DD programs. The German project is aiming for 72-hour delivery at a cost of approximately \$10 per request—faster and at a lower fee than many North American library suppliers. Are there reasons why North American participants should not order first from efficient foreign suppliers, rather than exhausting North American resources before approaching a foreign library?

Community Readiness

The challenge of providing timely and cost-effective delivery is a key element in encouraging global ILL/DD. Use of RLG's Ariel electronic document delivery software, Ariel-compatible software, or email attachments eliminates mail delays when sending scanned copies of journal articles and book chapters. The Global Resources projects may give us a better sense of whether North American ILL operations and patrons are ready and able to accept email attachments in lieu of documents sent via Ariel to ILL offices.

The expense of shipping books and other returnables overseas is an additional issue raised by international ILL/DD. The Waseda agreement requires participants to ship items via Airmail Printed Matter, with the requesting library responsible for payment of the shipping fees. Will that arrangement scale? Even if libraries are willing to absorb shipping costs, some remain reluctant to ship their own materials overseas. The Waseda project seeks to minimize *hydrophobia*, or "the fear of shipping ILL materials over oceans," with the use of insured shipments or carriers and the earning of trust among partner libraries.

Managing the Financial Side

Another major challenge to global ILL/DD service is the practical matter of managing the finances: it is imperative to find an efficient way to pay invoices for ILL transactions issued in different currencies. An explicit assumption of several of the projects is that libraries should not and will not waive their normal lending fees when filling international requests; therefore, the projects are seeking ways to reduce the expense of paying in different currencies. The Waseda agreement to use OCLC's ILL Fee Management (IFM) service is very promising because the service aggregates and mainstreams all OCLC ILL transaction invoices into a single statement, thereby eliminating the difficulties of handling individual invoices, especially those in a foreign currency. Unfortunately, OCLC's IFM cannot be used for non-OCLC transactions. ARL's agreement to serve as the "banker" for the German project is a short-term strategy to permit the Project to develop a viable long-term payment method. Although the ANUL participants in the Japanese project agreed that payment of lending fees was one of the key elements to be tracked during the pilot, no short-term payment option was found that would meet the Japanese legal requirements for transaction-based invoicing. All participants agreed to waive their lending fees for the duration of the pilot project with the hope that a long-term solution to charging will be found.

Copyright Compliance

Compliance with varying national copyright laws and related regulations is another challenge to effective international resource sharing. The German and Japan projects have identified copyright compliance, especially regarding digital scanning of printed works, as an area that needs additional study. It is as yet unclear whether German or Japanese libraries are permitted to scan materials using the Ariel software, or whether their national laws permit libraries to send materials directly to end users.

A Different Kind of Challenge—Assessing the Experiments

Effective interlibrary loan and document delivery services balance user expectations with sustainable costs. The various projects of the Global Resources Program offer a wide variety of testbeds to find ways of understanding and surmounting the challenges of trading with overseas libraries. These challenges arise from the fact that foreign libraries employ different ordering and delivery systems, use

different monetary currencies, are accountable to different copyright laws, and have significantly different traditions of lending policies.

Assessing the results of the ILL/DD components of the Global Resources Program presents an additional challenge, however. The level of use of foreign language materials in research libraries has never approached that of English language materials. The potential number of users, and therefore usage, may grow with improved accessibility and awareness of resources, but it is unrealistic to expect dramatic increases. This relatively low use is, in fact, one of the reasons these materials are vulnerable to elimination from so many library collections in North America. Yet, they represent an essential component of a comprehensive research level collection. This characteristic adds to the challenge of evaluating new models of ILL/DD services for these materials.

How should participant libraries interpret a low volume of use of a new service? How many requests need to be exchanged for the projects to consider any new ILL/DD service to be successful? Is the UT-LANIC to OCLC link unsuccessful because fewer than 50 requests were transferred to the OCLC ILL system over a two-year time period? Or, is the database being used to identify materials that are then ordered through the more traditional, mediated ILL process? What criteria should libraries enlist when attempting to answer these questions?

In the first six months of the document delivery project with Waseda, six U.S. participants filled 23 requests for Waseda, and Waseda filled 19 requests for the U.S. participants. The volume of ILL/DD requests in all of the projects may be modest, but it parallels the findings from the ARL ILL/DD Performance Measures Study that suggest that international ILL/DD represents less than one percent of a library's total ILL/DD traffic. With the exception of Germany, the regional projects represent areas of the world with which North American interlibrary loan operations have had very little, if any, communication or exchange. Although virtually all of the 119 participants in the Performance Measures Study engage in international ILL, no participant indicated that libraries in Latin America, Asia, or Africa were their most common international trading partners. The Global Resources projects may establish new trading partners in those areas of the world, especially as the projects expand to include non-North American participants.

The scale of any single project may never be large enough to provide a definitive assessment of different approaches to ILL/DD services. While the Global Resources projects gain experience and grow, thought needs to be given to identifying realistic indicators of their combined success and impact, perhaps via interviews and focus groups with users of the service. Evidence at this early stage suggests that merely quantitative indicators will likely underplay the potential long-term significance of the services. The ultimate success of any or all of the Global Resources projects might be demonstrated when the volume of borrowing from a foreign country is equal to or even less than lending to libraries in that country. True reciprocal lending will result when foreign libraries rely on the distributed collections held by North American libraries as much as North American libraries rely on foreign collections.

Endnotes

1. The ARL ILL/DD Performance Measures Study was a two-year effort to measure 1995/96 performance of ILL departments in 119 North American research and college libraries. The Study, funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, examined four performance measures: direct cost, fill rate, turnaround time, and user satisfaction. The Study also examined the differences among libraries and identified characteristics of low-cost, high-performing ILL operations to suggest strategies for other research and college libraries to improve local performance. For more information about the study, see <http://www.arl.org/access/ildd/ildd.shtml>.

[Table of Contents for Issue 206](#) | [Other "Current Issues" Articles](#)
[Other Access and Delivery Articles](#) | [Other Collection Management Articles](#)



ARL policy is to grant blanket permission to reprint any article in the Bimonthly Report for educational use as long as full attribution is made. Exceptions to this policy may be noted for certain articles. This is in addition to the rights provided under sections 107 and 108 of the Copyright Act. For commercial use, a reprint request should be sent to ARL Director of Information Services, [Julia Blixrud](#).

© The Association of Research Libraries

Maintained by: [ARL Web Administrator](#) Site Design Consultant: [Chris Webster](#) **Last Modified:** October 18, 1999