



ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES

ARL White Paper on Interlibrary Loan

Anne K. Beaubien

Director, Cooperative Access Services

University of Michigan Library

Definition of Interlibrary Loan:

Interlibrary (ILL) loan services supplement libraries' collections by obtaining materials needed for research, scholarship and private study that are not available at a user's home institution. Research and academic libraries place ILL requests on behalf of faculty, staff, and students for returnable items (e.g., books, audiovisual items, microfilms) and non-returnable items (e.g., copies of journal articles, conference papers) usually to obtain material out of scope for the collection or to support a specialized research interest of one of their users. Many research and academic libraries send reports of items requested on interlibrary loan to their selectors/bibliographers so they can review these requests for possible purchase and addition to the collection. Generally, the journals and books libraries request on ILL are ones they would not purchase because they are out of scope. These policies are carefully considered and reviewed to ensure that they reflect the research interests of the institution.

Research and academic libraries provide ILL services only to their own clearly defined user community. Since ILL services are costly to operate, libraries attempt to control the volume of lending requests that they handle. Research and academic libraries set up reciprocal arrangements with very specific and limited numbers of partner libraries. Fees are charged to libraries not in those consortial arrangements to set up a barrier for non-reciprocal sites and discourage use of interlibrary loan. The majority of ILL work is reciprocal; charges are made for only a small percentage of requests. That small amount of revenue generated provides only a fraction of the operating expenses of ILL activity.

Statistics/Trends:

ILL activity is up in the United States but the majority of the increase is for returnables. The ARL statistics show that member libraries are borrowing more items today than they did 19 years ago. However, the ARL statistics do not distinguish between returnable and non-returnable requests. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), located within the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences, is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education. NCES collects data biennially from about 3,700 degree-granting postsecondary institutions that provides an overview of academic libraries nationwide and by state. These statistics for academic libraries show ILL requests for returnables went up 26%

between 1998 and 2004 while requests for non-returnables went down 4% during the same period. In the Oberlin Group of Libraries (college libraries), requests for returnables went up 100% between 1994/1995 and 2004/2005 while non-returnable requests went down 18%. The licensing of electronic journals (e-journals) and the availability of extensive backfiles of e-journals has had a huge impact on interlibrary loan operations. Research and academic libraries purchase licenses for needed journals so the number of ILL requests for non-returnables has gone down.

Reasons for Increases in ILL transactions:

ILL transactions have increased due to several factors. There has been an increase in discovery tools, such as indices, searching the Web, and Google Books that has augmented people's awareness of publications. This knowledge has increased ILL requests and has also created an increased demand for both in-print and out-of-print books.

In addition, research and academic libraries have tried to make ILL more effective for users by making the process simpler, improving delivery options, and thus decreasing the turn-around time for requests. One such practice is the introduction of "unmediated" ILL. There is confusion in the term "unmediated" which is defined in the ARL study (*Accessing ILL/DD Services: New Cost-effective Alternatives* by Mary Jackson) as user initiated. User initiated requests are primarily used for returnables and have little impact on Section 108 issues. Many consortial borrowing programs have implemented user initiated borrowing and ILL requests have increased. These requests are still library controlled and must match certain profiles before they can be sent to a potential supplier. User initiated requests are prescreened to be sure that users are part of the community served and the items requested fit specific parameters. Library staff set up programming in computer systems that route user requests based on agreements between libraries. One prominent example of this is the *Borrow Direct* program set up with participating academic libraries on the east coast so that users can check the catalog of a participating library, e.g., Princeton, and request that a book be sent to their home library at say, University of Pennsylvania. Staff at University of Pennsylvania do not have to interact with this request until the book arrives at the University of Pennsylvania. *Borrow Direct* has been very popular and successful – it is so popular that the number of book requests at least triple when user initiated requesting is instituted (some institutions report five fold increases). These figures contribute to the increase in ILL borrowing and lending statistics, but the user community and the consortial partners for these transactions remain the same.

Many research and academic libraries have been hard pressed to maintain adequate collections budgets with budgets often flat or with extremely modest increases. This situation has been further exacerbated by skyrocketing journal prices, unfavorable currency exchange rates, and new pricing models so that the dollars libraries have don't purchase as much as in prior years. At the same time

publishing output has dramatically increased. As a result, academic and research libraries are unable to purchase as large a percentage of what is published and must rely more on ILL to fill in for little used materials.

Description of Current Practice: Workflow for Borrowing Requests:

Most ILL borrowing requests are placed via the OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing system <http://www.oclc.org/services/sharing/default.htm>. ILL borrowing staff check library holdings of reciprocal partners and place requests on OCLC. For non-returnable items, many academic libraries are now providing requested documents to their users electronically. In this scenario, when a requested article arrives it is posted to a secured Web site and the user is given a URL with which to access the article. Access to the article is limited via password or other means to the user who requested it and the user has a limited time frame and a limited number of views before the article is automatically deleted. Most academic and research libraries do not send articles via e-mail because it is not secure, e-mail boxes may not be large enough, and articles could easily be forwarded. On rare occasions the same article is re-requested for the same user because the user was unable to use the item in the timeframe dictated by the library in support of copyright compliance.

Research and academic libraries only order directly from publishers and commercial document delivery suppliers when it makes sense to do so, e.g., short turnaround time required. Going directly to publishers is a very inefficient workflow and a higher per-transaction cost. ILL departments receive requests by journal title and staffs have to figure out who the rights holder is and then send an order to individual publishers. All publishers have separate procedures for placing requests as well as separate account numbers and passwords. Some publishers' terms and conditions do not allow ILL departments to purchase articles on behalf of users. It is very time consuming to place requests this way and is an unacceptable way to execute all ILL business when patrons need, and are now accustomed to, quick turnaround time. Placing requests via OCLC keeps requests in one workflow.

Most individual research and academic library users do not want to expend time and effort to figure out multiple places to obtain the materials they need for research and scholarship—they just want the item and the convenience of ordering it from one place (their ILL department). Users are not interested in determining the publisher and searching for multiple Web sites to purchase single articles at their own expense. In fact, most researchers cannot absorb these costs on their own.

Books are loaned and then returned to the owning library. Many libraries (such as University of Michigan and Purdue University) have programs to purchase rather than borrow books with recent imprints that are within scope of their collection. Similarly, academic and research libraries will add a journal

subscription if a title is in scope if their users are making a number of ILL requests for it.

June 2007