

Exploring the Value of Interlibrary Loan

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Interlibrary Loan services are a key strategy in ensuring that scholars and researchers have the opportunity to study, teach, and conduct research in a resource-rich environment, enabling discovery, analysis, and reflection leading to the creation of new knowledge. It augments the library's carefully selected collection, and almost unquestionably seems to bring value to the work of the university community. But are traditional measures sufficient to demonstrate the success of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery, and Resource Sharing and their impact on the university? Are traditional measures actually output measures, rather than indicators of value and impact? This pilot study attempts to discover or at least, begin to move in the direction of data collection and measures that will point more clearly and directly to the value of ILL services to the university enterprise.

“Traditional measures” are defined here as the data long collected by interlibrary loan services: number of borrowing requests, number of lending requests, fill rate, turnaround time, overdues, direct costs (copyright and other fees), as well as statistics about consortia and other reciprocal borrowing partnerships. All of this data is critical in judging the operational effectiveness and overall efficiency of the service. Comparisons to the data of aggregated or individual institutions can provide a benchmark or target for process improvement. These comparisons can show whether staffing or other resources may be inadequate to efficiently and accurately fill requests. These data also supply a way to compare departmental performance over time. They are indicators of areas in which operational improvements and changes are needed, and can indicate the positive effect of implemented improvements and changes over time. They can be an important point of pride to staff who can see the direct result of changes in process, training, and new tools on their work.

How are libraries assessing the value and operational effectiveness of interlibrary loan? Current literature shows the use of a number of measures to evaluate Interlibrary Loan. In Littlejohn¹ the study focuses on turnaround time and user satisfaction as the primary tools in assessing Interlibrary Loan. Customer satisfaction is also the focus of the three-library study in Little,² in which the survey asks patrons about the value of interlibrary loan services. At one of the libraries, the University of Kansas, 87% of survey respondents rated the value of interlibrary loan as “very important”, while 11% ranked it “somewhat important” and 2% ranked it “not important”. Comments on the surveys about the service were largely positive. Answers still provided ideas for improvement in service and showing the need to promote the interlibrary loan service. Interlibrary loan is one of the services evaluated in Whiting³ which conducted a patron perception study to gather “satisfaction and value information”. Users found “access, speed and people (presumably the Interlibrary Loan staff)” to be valuable. Like the other studies, the assessment of value is based on patron perception. Another interesting use of customer satisfaction survey results is shown in Reed⁴ which targeted service improvements as well as a demonstration of value. Many libraries also use interlibrary loan requests in assessing the collection. Leykam,⁵ examined potential gaps in the

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collection. Waller,⁶ as well as Kohan,⁷ included interlibrary loan as part of an assessment of a patron-driven acquisitions program.

Is user perception of value and customer satisfaction a complete indicator of value? Does it demonstrate impact on the teaching and research of the university? Here at the University of Central Florida (UCF), brief customer satisfaction surveys have been conducted over time, with positive results and grateful feedback to the staff. Patrons authoring books and dissertations have repeatedly expressed thanks in their published works. Although returnables (books and other items) can be picked up and dropped off at the Circulation Desk, and articles are delivered electronically, a steady number of Interlibrary Loan customers make their way to that office to thank the staff in person. These occurrences are not quantified, and while the patrons may mean to demonstrate the personal value of the service by these courteous gestures, this does not demonstrate impact. It is important to remember that Interlibrary Loan is different from most services in that the service request is very defined, very precise. Exact information about the requested item can be checked and refined. Unlike research and information services, there is usually only one correct answer, one correct item, to fill the request. So generating satisfaction is relatively easy. Even if the item does not contain the information the customer hoped, the customer receives the item requested, most of the time. While it is true there are other variables in service satisfaction, such as turnaround speed, a user-friendly process, and a courteous, efficient staff, the ultimate result of a request is usually precisely what was requested.

The Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery Services (ILL/DDS) department at the University of Central Florida serves one of the largest public universities in the country. Thirteen colleges offer 177 bachelor's and master's degrees and 31 doctoral programs. ILL/DDS is a standalone department, with a department head and 3 staff assisted by 5–7 student assistants. The majority of requests come from full-time faculty, graduate students, distant (online) learners, and students at the medical and hospitality campuses and regional campuses.

UCF's ILL/DDS department has “always” collected the statistics that other interlibrary loan departments have collected. Although the statistics are sometimes considered outcomes, they are actually output measures, which take a process-oriented look at a service. Courteous and professional staff plus training plus technology plus borrowing and lending agreements plus a user-friendly procedure equals operational efficiency, a fast turnaround time, a strong fill rate, satisfied customers and consortial partners. The outputs are direct results of the efforts and technology of the interlibrary loan department.

What are the outcomes of interlibrary loan services? They are supported by the outputs. They are what we would envision as the result of sustaining a strong, efficient interlibrary loan operation. They should be quantitative and qualitative contributions to the educational enterprise of the university. They should demonstrate the value of the service to the institutions and its faculty, staff and students. This pilot study, to explore possible outcomes of interlibrary loan, began with penetration of the potential market for interlibrary loan services, examining interlibrary loan-retrieved material that is picked up or downloaded, and a citation search of the publications of interlibrary loan users to determine if interlibrary loan-retrieved material is cited in articles published by those faculty. Use, and repeated use of the service demonstrates that the service holds value for users. If returnables (books and other items) and articles are picked up and downloaded by requestors, this is a positive indicator that they are being used. Finally, citations for an interlibrary loan retrieved item in a publication would evidence use of the items. The purpose is to show the usefulness of interlibrary loan service in the research, teaching, and learning of the university.

The decision was made not to focus on student success as an indicator of value in this first pilot. There are factors in the use of interlibrary loan by undergraduates, such as the types of assignments they receive, and the propensity of instructors to lead them to resources that are on hand. Undergraduates are less likely to require the

use of interlibrary loan. Anecdotally, most undergraduate users are enrolled in the Honors College or involved in Undergraduate Research projects. The correlation of interlibrary loan use and the success of these already outstanding students may not demonstrate the contribution to their success that we would desire.

While interlibrary loan is used by most faculty members and the departments offering 177 degree programs at UCF, it was decided that the initial focus would be on a sample of 8 “power user” departments, using statistics from August 2011 to December 2015. Four departments are in the STEM disciplines, 3 departments from the Arts and Humanities, and 1 could be classified as Professional Studies. Penetration of the potential market in these departments, retrieval of interlibrary loan-retrieved material, and citation of interlibrary loan retrieved material in a large sample of publications would be examined in each. Departments have been labeled as STEM 1–3, A&H 1–4, and Prof. Studies.

A total of 247 faculty members are members of these 8 departments. One hundred fifty-one, or 61%, used interlibrary loan during this time period. Penetration of the market varies by discipline: 74.5% of Arts and Humanities faculty in the study used interlibrary loan, while 55% of STEM faculty and 61% of Professional Studies requested items from interlibrary loan.

A total of 9,255 requests were submitted by the 151 faculty members who used the service, between August 2011 and December 2015. These requests include both interlibrary loan requests and document delivery service requests. The document delivery service delivers returnables (books and other items) and non-returnables (articles, book chapters, etc.) from UCF’s collections. Articles, chapters, and other items held by the library in print are scanned and sent electronically. Links to items held electronically are sent to the requestor (see Table 1).

	ILL		DDS	
	Articles	Loans	Articles	Loans
A&H-1	365	225	168	57
STEM-1	391	62	223	2
A&H-2	689	966	109	264
STEM-2	248	179	107	26
STEM-3	661	27	397	2
A&H-3	947	865	530	142
PROF STUDIES	661	131	593	21
A&H-4	10	4	4	3
	3,972	2,459	2,131	517

Rank is a determining factor in the use of interlibrary loan. Associate faculty members in the sample departments submitted 3698 requests, while Assistant faculty members submitted 979 requests and University ranked faculty submitted 1055 requests. Instructors, Associate Instructors, Adjuncts, Visitors, and Researchers submitted the fewest number of requests.

To increase market penetration, it may be most productive to focus awareness-building efforts on Assistant professors, who may be working toward tenure and promotion. Faculty in the Instructor and Associate Instructor ranks focus on teaching rather than research.

The Associate Instructor rank was established to provide an opportunity for promotion to those who are not seeking tenure or are assigned to conduct research. It was designed to award those who deliver (and constantly improve upon) instruction.

An interlibrary loan button inside the library-provided databases provides a quick and easy route to making an interlibrary loan request, and to building awareness of the service. Information on the article is transferred to an ILLIAD form, giving the library an accurate citation to search, speeding the processing of the request. Forty-nine percent, or 4,558 requests in this study were submitted by faculty members during database search sessions. The use of this convenient feature varies by discipline (see Table 2). STEM faculty in this study requested items using this feature, contrasted with Professional Studies and Arts and Humanities. A question not related to in-

TABLE 2
Requests Submitted Directly from the
Databases

	Total # of Direct Requests	Total # of Requests
A&H 1	199	815
STEM 1	279	678
A&H 2	852	2,028
STEM 2	215	560
STEM 3	728	1,087
A&H 3	1373	2,484
Prof Studies	899	1,406
A&H 4	13	21

terlibrary loan arises from this information: Why the difference? Arts and Humanities are getting citations for material they would like to read from reading print materials, from books, from conference proceedings, from colleagues, or from other sources, and then filling in the request form. Yet Arts and Humanities faculty in the sample departments had a higher percentage of using interlibrary loan services.

Another area of analysis was the retrieval and non-retrieval of interlibrary loan-obtained items. Once the request has been made, it is easy for the faculty member to track it. Faculty are notified by email that their returnable has been received by the library and is available at the Circulation Desk. When they submit a re-

quest, faculty members can request delivery to a Circulation Desk at any UCF campus for their convenience. Items are due back at the lending library at times ranging from 2 weeks to 60 days. There are studies that link longer turnaround times with the failure to retrieve an item. Two-thousand, four-hundred, and fifty-nine filled requests were returnables. Of the 2,459, an estimated 77 items were not retrieved. They were sent back to the lender without being used. Non-returnables are usually delivered electronically to the email account of the requestor with a URLink to the article. The faculty member has 28 days to click on the link and download the article. Once downloaded, it can be saved or printed. Of 2,465 requests that were reviewed for fulfillment of article requests, an estimated 249 were not downloaded.

It was disappointing to review these numbers, but easy to understand why this happens. Priorities can change quickly. A resource already obtained has all the information needed. Interest in the topic may have waned. Or, despite email reminders, the request may be forgotten.

So during this time period, 249 non-returnables were not downloaded, and 77 returnables were not picked up. We do not have a precise estimate of the total cost of processing and filling these requests. But, given that borrowing items from non-reciprocal libraries cost an average of \$17 during this time, and direct costs of ordering through ILLIAD are \$3.31, costs of ordering through RAPID (the majority of orders) is lower, and none of these includes copyright or indirect costs such as salaries and wages, we used a “placeholder” average cost of \$15.00 per item. Non-retrieved items at a cost of \$15.00 each would cost the interlibrary loan department \$4,890.00 during this period (August 2011–December 2015).

As a result of this study, email notices to borrowing faculty now contain the phrase, “if the item is no longer needed, please contact us.” At least the returnables can be sent back to the lending libraries sooner, freeing them for use by other patrons, although interlibrary loan still incurs the cost of filling the request.

Non-retrieval of articles varies by department. It would be possible to approach the chair of a particularly egregious department to let them know about the problem. In the past, UCF Interlibrary Loan has approached several repeat or egregious offenders. One faculty member, at the start of a research project, gave a number of students his/her proxy to order ILL materials. None of the 35 ordered items was picked up. Profuse apologies followed.

Retrieved items could be said to demonstrate the value of the materials to faculty members, and to their research and teaching. Although there is no proof that, once retrieved, the items are used by faculty, at least this shows that they were initially perceived as useful, and the majority of items was retrieved. The occurrence and cost of non-retrieved items will continue to be examined in more detail, as well as potential solutions.

A strong indicator of the value of interlibrary loan-obtained items to the faculty, and the university, would be the use and citation of these materials in faculty publications. To determine if faculty are citing interlibrary loan-provided materials in their publications, citations from their publications were searched against items they received from interlibrary loan. This study began by using the library's discovery tool, EBSCO OneSearch, to compile a list of publications for the 151 faculty in this study who used interlibrary loan from August 2011 to December 2015. Use of OneSearch began at UCF in August 2011. To obtain the C.V.s of 151 faculty would have added another level of detail to the study, so it was decided to examine the faculty publications listed in OneSearch. Citations were taken from each publication and searched against the items obtained by that faculty member through UCF's Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery Service. The results are shown in Table 3.

	# of Articles/ Books Published	# of ILL Requests Cited	ILL Requested Past 5 Years	# of Citations within Each Article
A&H 1	73	77	815	4,284
STEM 1	143	19	678	8,374
A&H 2	83	73	2,028	2,779
STEM 2	280	19	560	9,228
STEM 3	118	5	1,087	3,667
A&H 3	46	112	2,484	3,107
Prof Studies	119	29	1,406	3,701
A&H 4	1	2	21	230
	863	336	9,079	35,370

The total number of citations in all of these items is 35,370. Three-hundred thirty-six of those items, or .9% of them, are citations of items obtained by interlibrary loan. Of the 9,079 items obtained during this time by these faculty members, 336, or 3.7% were cited in faculty publications. So while there is some quantifiable use of interlibrary loan-obtained materials in this sample, it is not a large number. We can conclude that interlibrary loan does add value to the academic enterprise, but cannot conclude that it has a great effect. Interlibrary loan materials can lead to other resources needed for research, or can help scholars form foundational ideas or concepts on which more research and discovery are built.

This pilot study's major conclusion is that more work on assessing the value of interlibrary loan needs to be done. Market penetration, retrieval of requested materials, and citation analysis have demonstrated use of interlibrary loan materials, and some indication of value. It was hoped that citation analysis would be a stronger indicator of value, but despite a painstaking and time-consuming effort, results were far less dramatic than had been anticipated.

Several areas of research require a qualitative follow-up. Interviews and/or surveys to ask faculty from where they get resources for their work would balance the examination of market penetration and yield suggestions for outreach and awareness-building. Anecdotally, conversations with faculty have told us that numbers of them receive material from colleagues at other institutions. Or some of them send a request for a specific article out on social media, such as Reddit, and someone at another institution will forward the article.

A more thorough cost analysis also remains to be done. Another area that remains a question is the impact of interlibrary loan materials on teaching. Is there any impact, and how can it be shown? Faculty who do not use interlibrary loan are another potential area of study. Why do they not use it?

Discussion of the results of this study, as well as all the questions that have arisen, will continue to take place as we continue to try to demonstrate the value of interlibrary loan service.

Notes

1. Littlejohn, Nancy E., and Barbara Wales. "Assessment plan for interlibrary loan departments at academic libraries." *Journal Of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Electronic Reserves* 7, no. 2 (January 1996): 3–18.
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3. Whiting, Peter, and Philip Orr. "Evaluating Library Support for a New Graduate Program: Finding Harmony with a Mixed Method Approach." *Serials Librarian* 64, no. 1–4 (January 2013): 88–98.
4. Reed, Kathleen. "Follow-Up Study on Free Document Delivery and Interlibrary Loan Service Demonstrates Customer Satisfaction and Generates Improvements." *Evidence Based Library & Information Practice* 8, no. 3 (July 2013): 64–66.
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6. Waller, Jeffrey H. "Undergrads as Selectors: Assessing Patron-Driven Acquisition at a Liberal Arts College." *Journal Of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Electronic Reserves* 23, no. 3 (July 2013): 127–148.
7. Kochan, Carol, and Jennifer1 Duncan. "Analysis of Print Purchase on Demand Titles Ordered via Interlibrary Loan: A Collection Development Perspective." *Collection Management* 41, no. 2 (April 2016): 51–65.