

RUSA STARS INTERNATIONAL INTERLIBRARY LOAN SURVEY

Executive Summary

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The RUSA STARS Executive Committee charged the International Interlibrary Loan Committee with evaluating trends in international interlibrary loan (ILL) and resource sharing, to develop materials and resources for international ILL practitioners, and to promote international ILL resource sharing efforts. Since information concerning international interlibrary borrowing and lending is limited, the Committee identified information gathering as an early step.

At the 2006 ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, the Committee decided to create a survey to assess the state of North America's international interlibrary services. Committee member Aimee Lind, librarian at the J. Paul Getty Trust, collected committee notes, drafted and redrafted the survey. Lynn Wiley, librarian at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, coded the survey into a web-based instrument. The final version of the survey was approved by RUSA STARS after the 2007 ALA Midwinter Conference. In the spring of 2007, Jennifer Cella (Chair) and the 2007 International Interlibrary Loan Committee members publicized the survey on four major national ILL-focused listservs.

The committee conducted the survey with the intent of tracking issues and practices related to international interlibrary loan activity. The survey results will help guide the committee in developing tools to help resolve issues that may hinder international resource sharing. The survey would also uncover opportunities to promote and expand both the use of and the participation in global ILL services. Specifically, the survey seeks to determine what types of libraries in the U.S. participate in international interlibrary services as borrowers and lenders, to what extent libraries work internationally, and what tools and services survey participants use to go global.

International interlibrary loan has been a hot topic of discussion in the resource sharing community for two to three decades. ILL practitioners have lamented the lack of coherent procedures and communications methods and sought ways of improving international cooperation. Our information environment has been on a course of rapid change during this time. The need to solidify international ILL practices is important as a means of improving our service and making our departments more efficient and effective in the face of this ever-changing environment.

Global visibility is an essential step in building global access to materials. As Wanner, et al. aptly state, "as libraries are making their collections visible on a global scale, so should they provide an international resource delivery system or a service model that combines the strengths of all participating libraries" (Wanner et al. p. 93). Despite our recognition of this need, obstacles still exist in achieving this goal.

In 2002, Robert Seal clearly delineated many challenges of international ILL including:

(1) inadequate human resources to carry out interlibrary loan, especially on an international scale; (2) insufficient funding which prevents starting and sustaining collaborative projects; (3) out-of-date computer technology, incompatible systems, and poor telecommunications infrastructure; (4) a lack of international standards for bibliographic description, record format, and exchange of data; (5) copyright issues; (6) insufficient information about foreign holdings; (7) a lack of knowledge about methods of access, regulations and policies abroad; (8) negative attitudes or mistrust; (9) lack of resource sharing tradition; and (10) an unwillingness to share limited resources which could be lost or damaged (Seal p. 231-232).

As the results of this survey show, many of these challenges still exist or are perceived to exist. However, the ease with which library patrons are able to locate international resources is constantly growing. Anyone can easily locate the online catalog of an international library. It is also increasingly common to find international holdings in OCLC's WorldCat regardless of whether those libraries participate in international lending. Our patrons are not aware of the difficulties in obtaining these resources. When they request items, they expect to get them. With the speed of new technology, our users are accustomed to instant gratification in their information seeking.

Despite the many challenges we face, the United States is in an excellent position to build a successful international ILL program. We already have an effective national resource sharing program, the strong foundation on which to build international ILL policies and activities. IFLA recommends a national policy for international ILL within which all libraries in the country should operate (IFLA, Principle 3). Perhaps the next step is to create an intermediary document to bridge the gap between the Interlibrary Loan Code of the United States and IFLA's international guidelines and to promote the best practices that have proved successful in the U.S. The STARS International ILL Committee hopes to use the insight gained from this survey to identify and initiate the appropriate next steps.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Demographics

Of 157 survey participants, 88 (52%) identified themselves as a unit within a university or college library, and 66 (39%) said they were with a medical or special library. Fifteen respondents (9%) indicated that they were with a public, law, or state library. Twelve participants chose more than one type of library resulting in 169 responses.

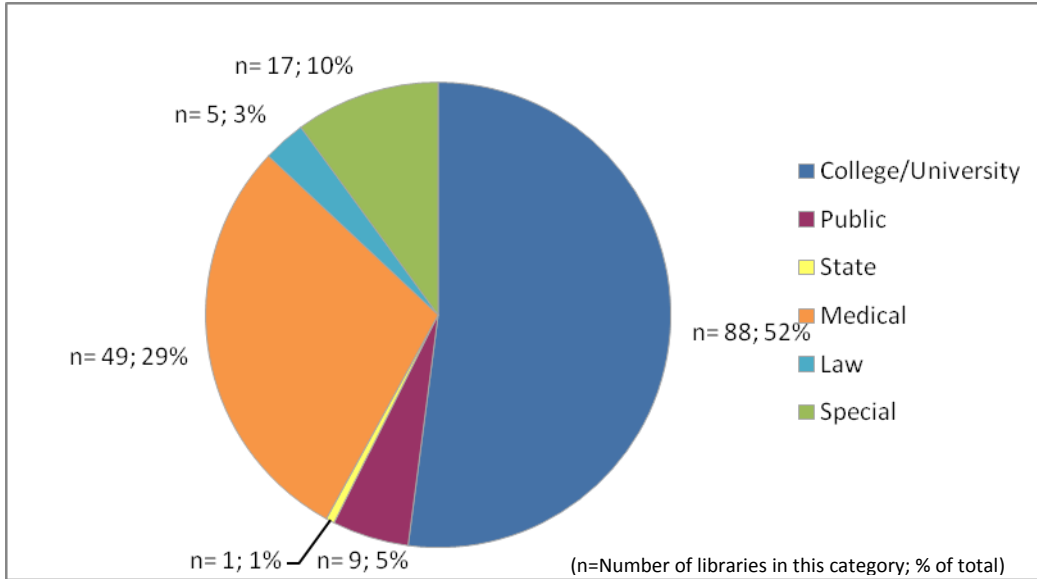


Figure 1: Survey demographics

General ILL Activities

The majority of respondents represented libraries with borrowing activity of fewer than 5,000 transactions of returnables and non-returnables.

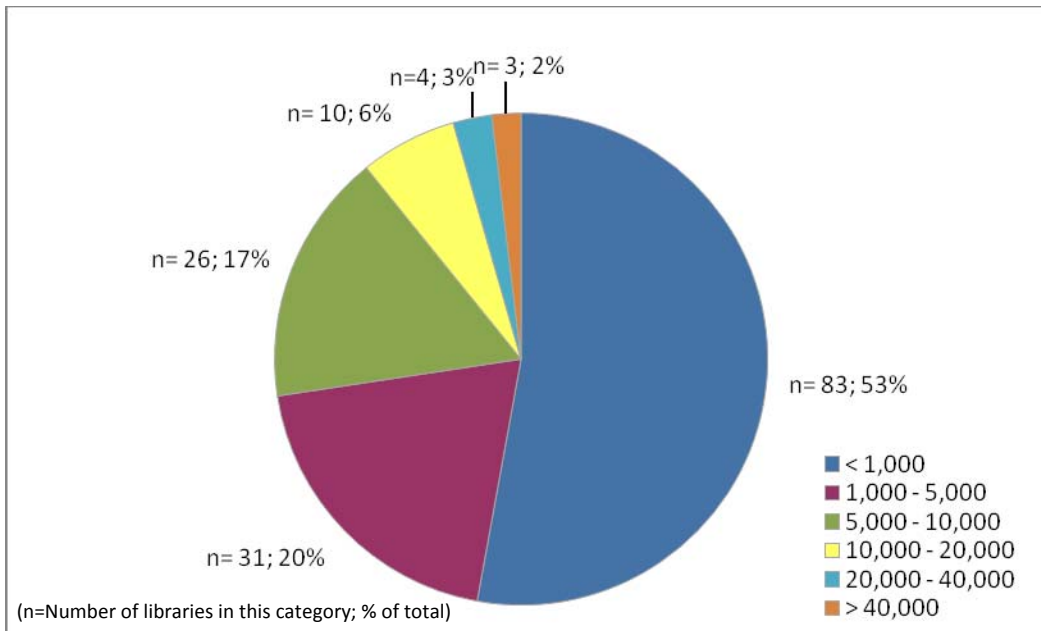


Figure 2: Annual count of borrowing transactions (returnables)

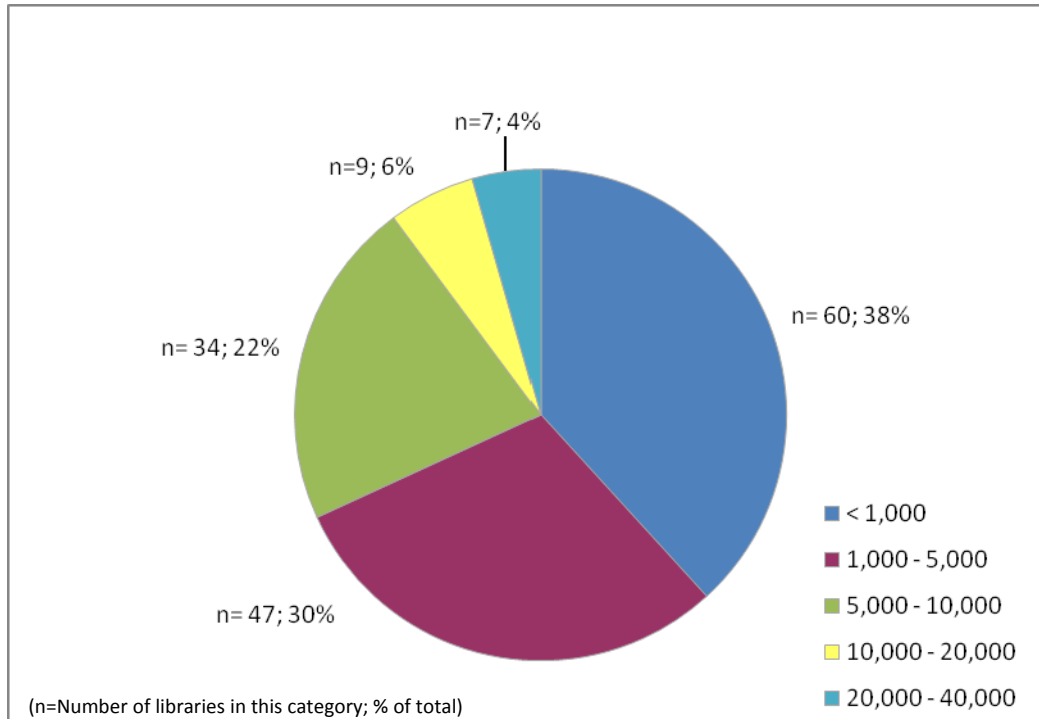


Figure 3: Annual count of borrowing transactions (non-returnables)

On the lending side, 81 (52%) respondents reported total annual lending transactions of less than 1,000 for returnables; 50 (32%) indicated a range of 1,000 and 10,000 transactions; and 26 (17%) lent over 10,000 returnable items. For non-returnables, 65 (42%) respondents reported total annual lending transactions of less than 1,000; 64 (41%) indicated a range of 1,000 and 10,000 annual non-returnable deliveries; and 28 (18%) are in the range of 10,000 and 50,000 or more.

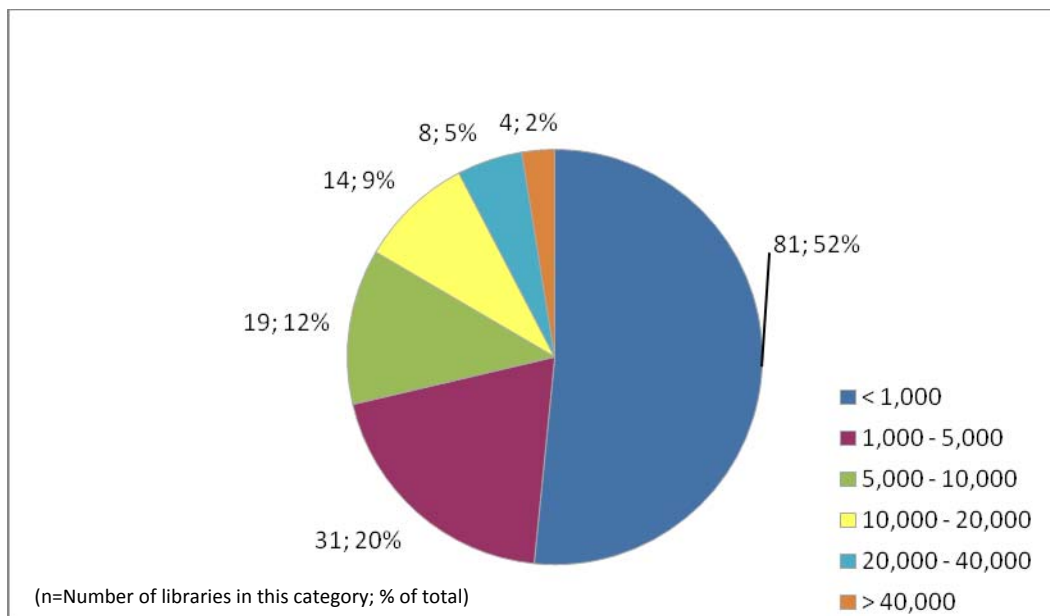


Figure 4: Annual count of lending transactions (returnables)

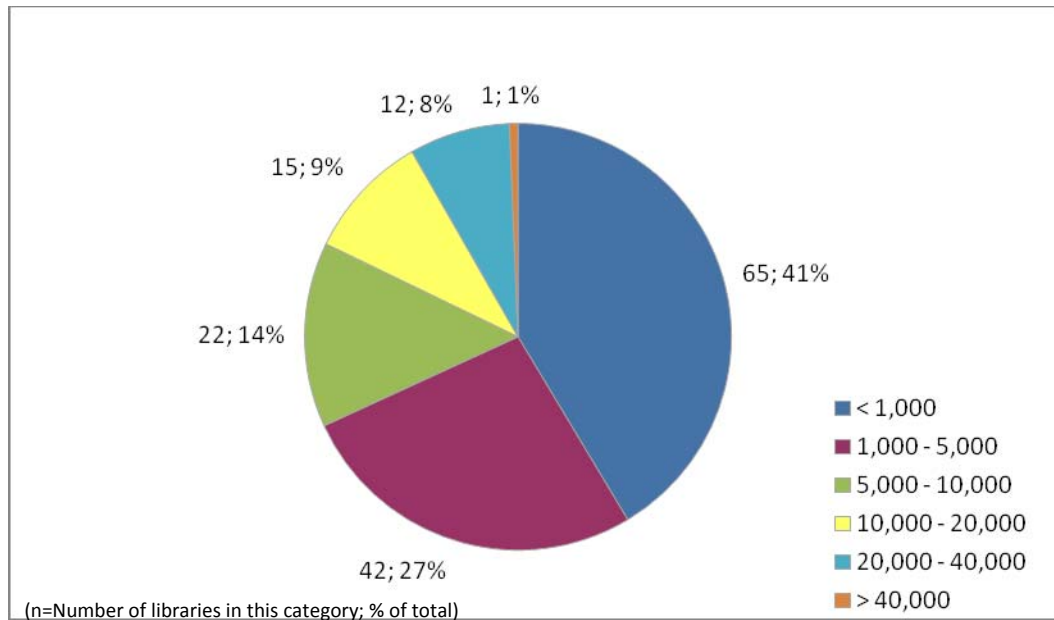


Figure 5: Annual count of lending transactions (non-returns)

International ILL Activities and Restrictions

Of the 157 survey participants, 94% (n=147) indicated that they participate in both international borrowing and lending. The remaining 5% (n=8) participate in international lending only. Two respondents completed the survey in error, as they neither borrow nor lend internationally. Although the survey did not specifically ask about annual transactions of international lending and borrowing, we can infer from participant comments that annual international ILL transactions are a relatively small part of total volume as most ILL requests can be filled domestically. However, among those who process both borrowing and lending, certain factors were considered in their decision to borrow or lend internationally. Factors identified include geographic distance, delivery time, risk of losing or damaging loaned materials, and international shipping costs and fees demanded by the lending libraries. These factors were weighed more when determining whether to borrow or lend returnables. One practice mentioned by some was to not request returnables from international libraries with the exception of Canadian libraries. Some U.S. academic libraries are subject-specific, allowing international ILL borrowing and lending only if the requested materials are needed to support certain identified faculty and research areas that are either very special or unique on their campuses. For example, one library revealed that because they had a large Norwegian-American collection, they limited their international borrowing and lending activities to only Scandinavian countries.

Lending

Sixty-eight percent (n=107) of respondents reported that they supply both returnables and non-returnables; 31% (n=48) said they supply non-returnables only.

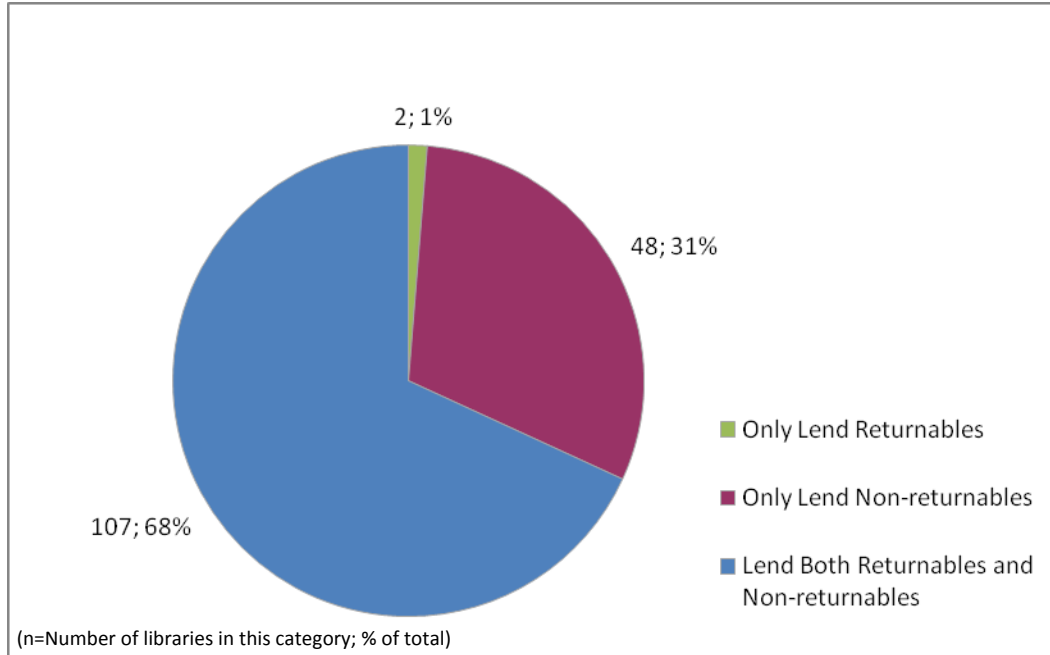


Figure 6: What type of requests will you supply to libraries outside the United States?

A similar majority of respondents (70%, n=108) did not charge additional fees to international borrowers.

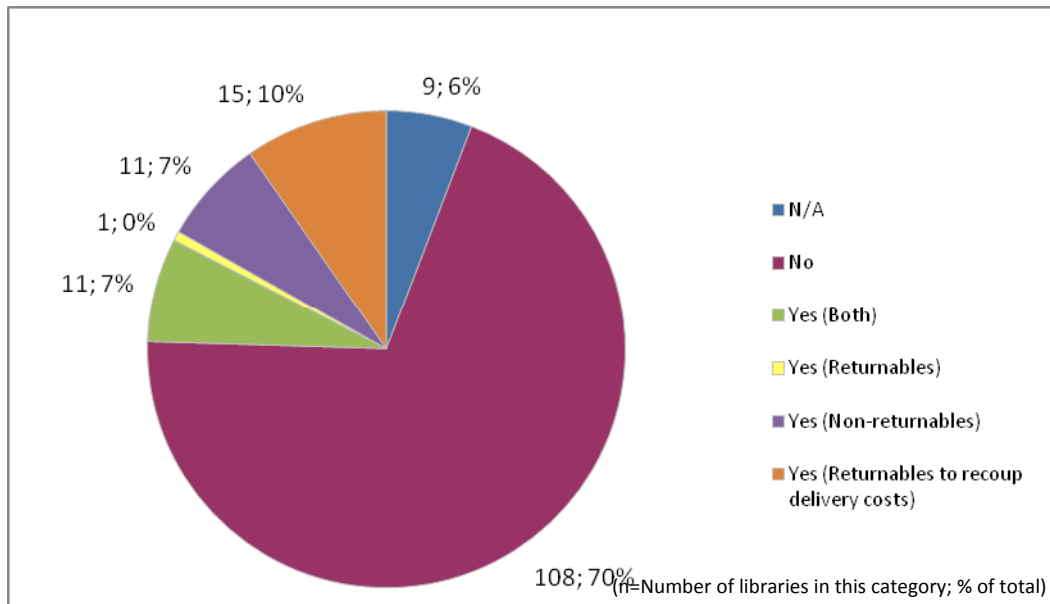


Figure 7: Do you charge additional fees for interlibrary loan service provided to international borrowers?

Forty-nine percent (n=76) of respondents list themselves as international lender in the OCLC ILL Policies Directory; 31% (n=49) were not sure; and 21% (n=32) said they did not indicate so in their directory listing.

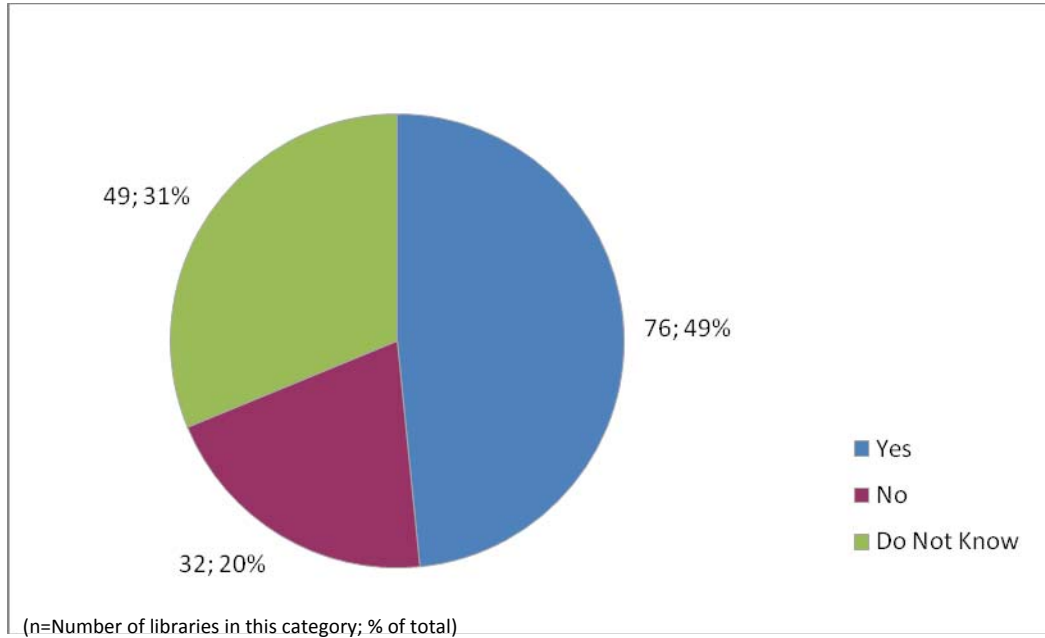


Figure 8: Are you listed as an international lender in the OCLC ILL Policies Directory?

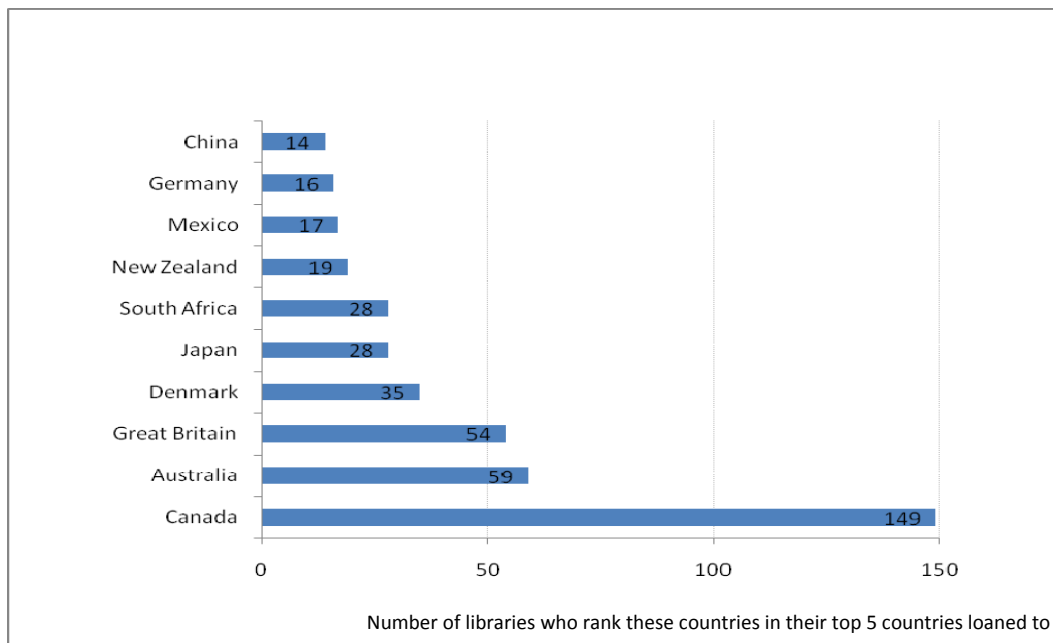


Figure 9: To which countries do you lend most often? Check off your top five.

The top five countries that respondents said they lent to are Canada, Australia, Great Britain, Denmark, Japan and South Africa (tied). On the other end of the spectrum, small countries such as Caledonia, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Cyprus are also cited as destinations of U.S. interlibrary loan deliveries. Again, the number of ILL requests, cost of shipping and delivery, and the receiving libraries' tracking records in returning materials responsibly were all considered. Bad experiences with a few libraries in a country could negatively affect a U.S. ILL service's willingness for further business with the

country. A couple of respondents named Mexico and other Central and South American libraries to which they would not loan. Several went as far as to say that they would not lend returnables to any country other than Canada because of cost and difficulty in shipment.

The following materials were identified as most likely to NOT be sent out for international ILL lending: audio/video, multi-media materials, books over 100 years old, materials in rare/special collections, serials and bound journals, micro-format materials, and local theses/dissertations. Other restrictions mentioned include items considered valuable, fragile, out of print, in reference collections, or on reserves.

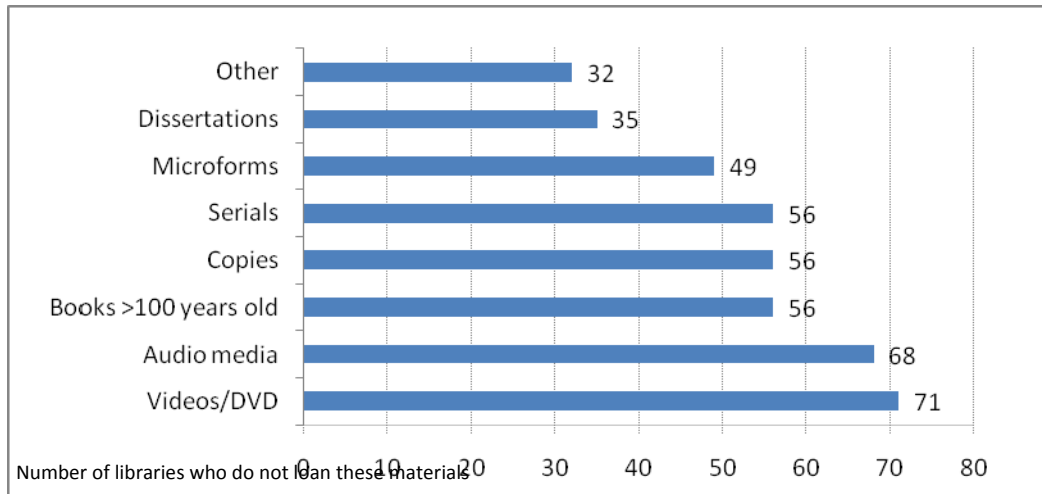


Figure 10: Types of materials not loaned internationally

Borrowing

Sixty-six percent (n=105) of respondents indicated that they request both returnables and non-returnables, while 31% (n=50) said that they only request non-returnables. A small percentage either does not borrow or only borrows returnables.

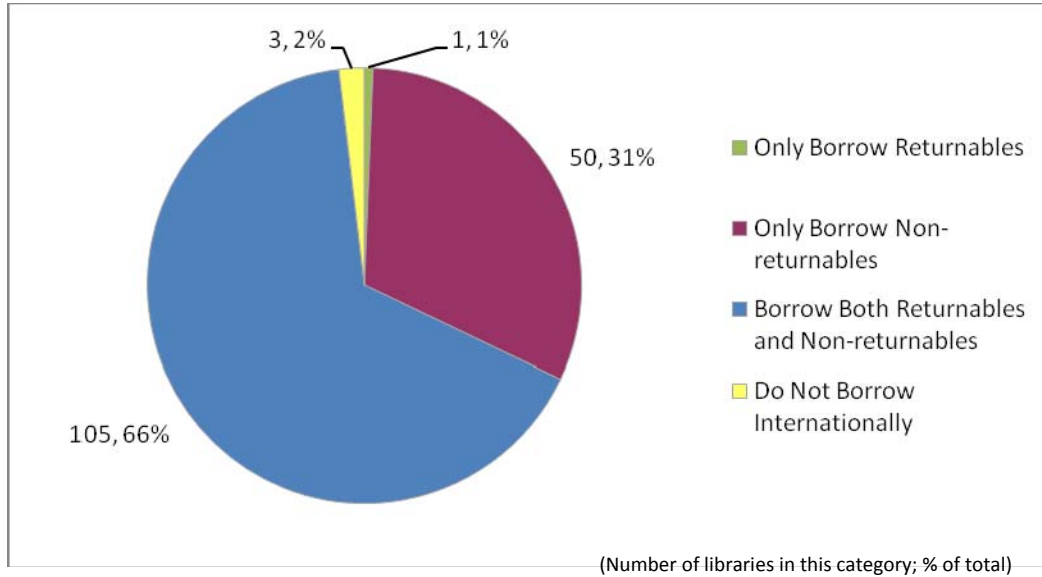


Figure 11: What type of requests will you borrow from libraries outside the United States?

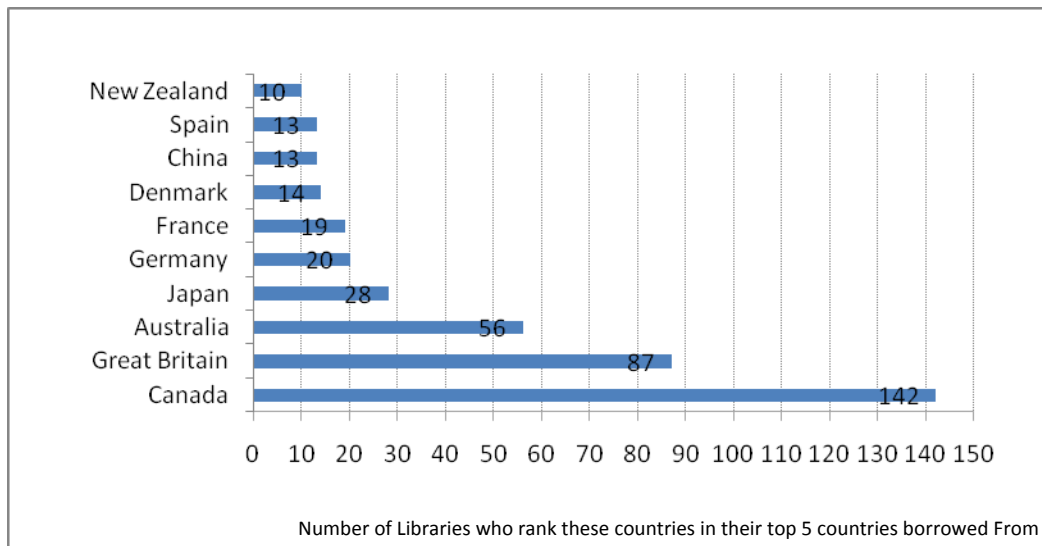


Figure 12: Countries most frequently borrowed from

As expected, the top five countries that respondents borrow the most from are: Canada, Great Britain, Australia, Japan, and Germany. ILL borrowing from Canada and Britain are particularly strengthened by national document supply services that participate in OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing: Canadian Information for Scientific and Technology Information (CISTI), and British Library Document Supply Services (BRI).

Respondents located in the U.S. indicated difficulty in borrowing audio/visual materials, books over 100-years old, dissertations, rare materials, serials, and microforms. Respondents also identified certain materials as difficult to locate and verify such as genealogical materials, dissertations from European universities, and German and Chinese journal articles.

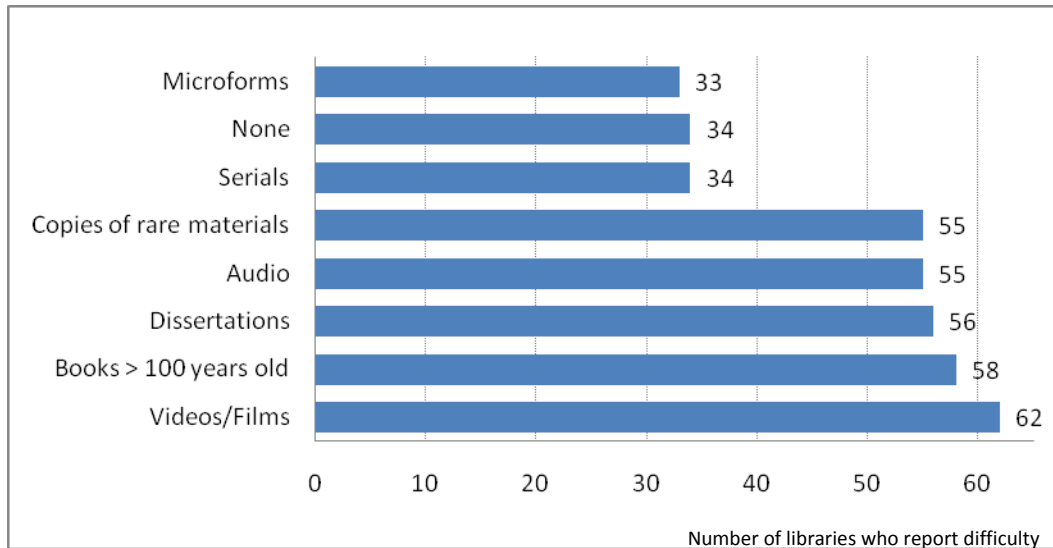


Figure 13: Types of materials difficult to borrow internationally

Bibliographic Citation and Holding Library Verification

International interlibrary loan faces numerous challenges and one of the hardest may be citation verification.

Verify Citation and Holdings

As borrowers, 68% (n=106) of respondents routinely attempt to verify citations prior to sending requests. Fewer respondents (20%, n=32) verify citations whenever possible, while 9% (n=14) never attempt to verify. As lenders, only 39% (n=61) of respondents confirm that they routinely verify requests received from overseas libraries. 40% (n=62) said they never do while 19% (n=29) verify only when time allows. The data suggests that citation verifications are generally done by the requesting libraries, and the lending libraries mainly fill or reject an international request as it is.

As a borrowing library, 86% (n=135) of the respondents said that they do attempt to verify holdings (especially for journal articles) before requesting; only 10% (n=15) said they do not attempt to verify holdings. The other 4% (n=7) of respondents do not borrow internationally.

With regard to referring international requests as a lender, 40% (n=61) of respondents try to refer international borrowing requests to other lenders when they cannot supply; 41% (n=62) said they do not offer any further referrals. 19% (n=29) stated they refer only when time allows.

Bibliographic Tools Used

Respondents were invited to answer an open-ended question about bibliographic and holding verification tools used. An overwhelming number of respondents listed Internet resources, especially Google, as their preferred method for locating international holdings. A few respondents did still mention traditional print resources like the National Union Catalog. The Gateway Service Center of Chinese Academic Journal Publications <http://www.library.pitt.edu/libraries/eal/Gateway-Home.htm>, and the Global ILL Framework <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~ncc/illdd/links.html>, were recognized by a majority of the respondents as the

gateways and resources they find the most useful for locating Chinese and Japanese materials. A number of respondents, however, said they had neither heard of nor used these two resources.

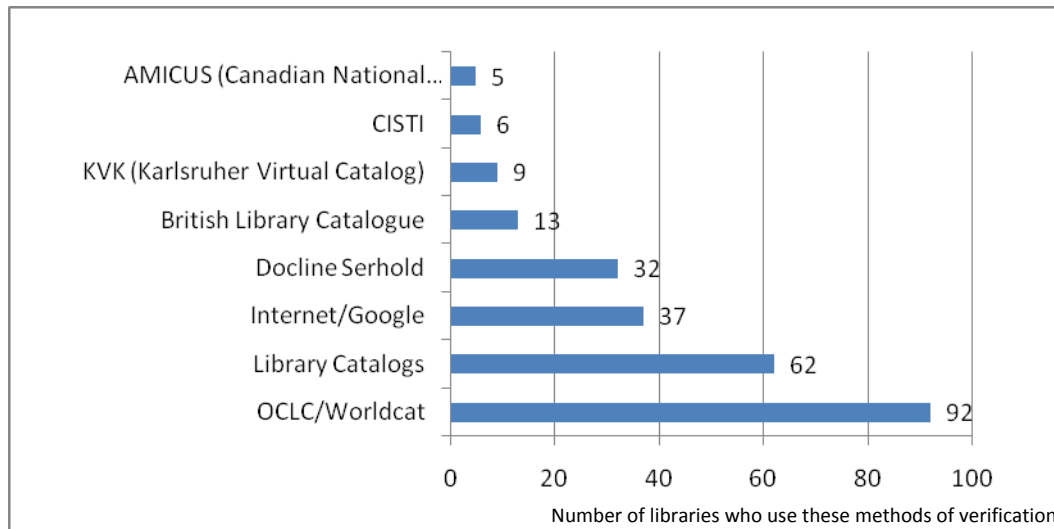


Figure 14: Most common bibliographic verification tools

Communication Methods

Communication and request submission play a critical role in international requesting. Language barriers and communication methods directly affect the time it takes to submit and receive a request. The survey results indicate that OCLC (30%, n=116), e-mail (29%, n=114), and fax (15%, n=59) were the three most frequently used communication methods by U.S. libraries when initiating international borrowing requests. More traditional requesting methods, such as phone calls, IFLA forms via mail (5%, n=18) and ISO messaging (3%, n=10), were also used. As borrowers, the top three preferred methods of communication with international libraries were respectively: email (36%, n=123), OCLC (33%, n=110), and fax (10%, n=33).

When asked how they received lending requests from international libraries, a similar pattern emerged: 26% (n=118) report receiving requests through OCLC, 25% (n=111) through e-mail and 16% (n=70) via fax. Eight percent (n=36) of respondents report receiving requests via IFLA forms in mail delivery. ISO messaging was used by 2% (n=9) of respondents. As lenders, the top three preferred methods of communication with international libraries were: e-mail (35%, n=121), OCLC (32%, n=112) and fax (9%, n=30).

Thirty-eight (24%) respondents report using DOCLINE as a communication method. However, we cannot say what the division between borrowing and lending is.

Payment and Fee Methods

Respondents reported a wide range of acceptable methods of payment because the question allowed respondents to choose all applicable payment methods from a list of twelve. However, choices of

payment methods were not solely based on efficiency but more on feasibility and lending/borrowing libraries' accounting policies and their ability to handling international currencies.

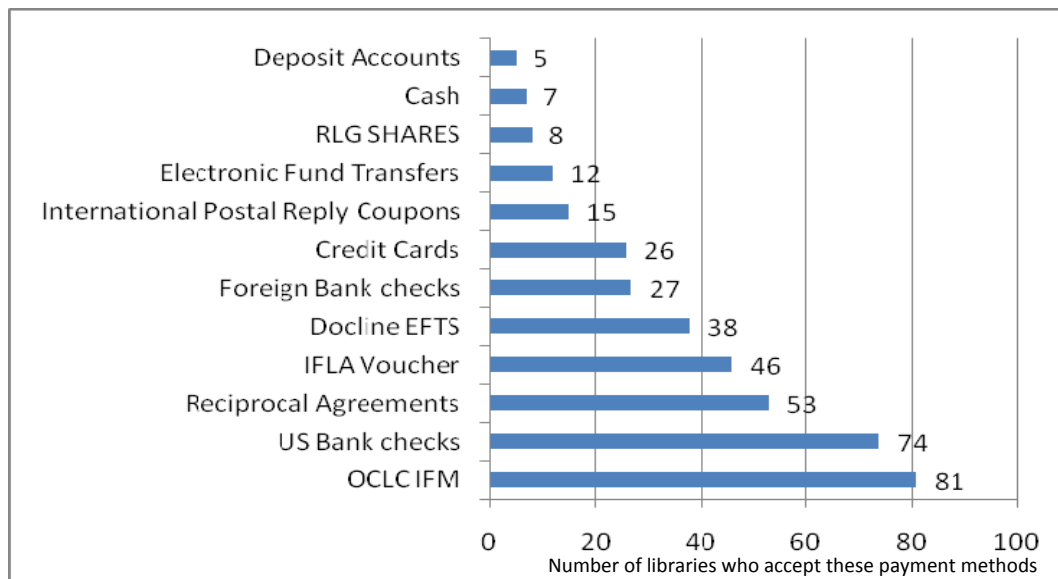


Figure 15: Acceptable payment methods

Those who did not use any of the listed payment methods generally did not charge the requesting international libraries for a variety of reasons, including that they did not want to deal with payments made via non-U.S. banks; they honored “free for all” agreements such as “FreeShare”¹; or they only charged those who would charge to lend to the U.S. libraries.

While credit cards are accepted as a convenient payment method for commercial document delivery services, they have not become a universally accepted method of payment for international ILL with only 8% of respondents preferring this method. Instead, 57% (n=89) U.S. libraries prefer receiving payment through OCLC IFM. Other preferred methods include DOCLINE-EFTS (22%, n=39), U.S. bank checks and reciprocal agreements (24%, n=37) and IFLA vouchers (20%, n=31).

Seventy-eight percent of respondents said they did not have problems accepting payments from international libraries. Those who reported problems indicated the following obstacles:

- Institutions in the U.S. do not accept payment in non-U.S. currency
- Some U.S. libraries are not capable of accepting electronic fund transfers nor do they have a specific account ready for that type of payment
- Difficulties in matching a payment to a specific ILL transaction, especially when money is wired to a library's bank account
- Payments were made in forms other than methods specified as acceptable by the lending library (i.e. coupons, IFLA vouchers, or credit cards)
- International borrowers did not pay

¹ FreeShare is a group of DOCLINE-participating libraries that agree to fill each other's DOCLINE requests free of charge. <http://nlnm.gov/rsdd/freeshare/>

- Late payments and lengthy delays in receiving payments made it very time-consuming to monitor and track the payments
- Some U.S.-based public institutions or their state governments do not allow payments in non-U.S. currency or checks
- Some international libraries wanted all bills to be handled by an unknown third party
- When payments were electronically transferred to a university account, the local ILL office was not notified and therefore unable to credit the payments

As is shown in Figures 16 and 17, responses regarding acceptable and preferred borrowing payment methods were similar.

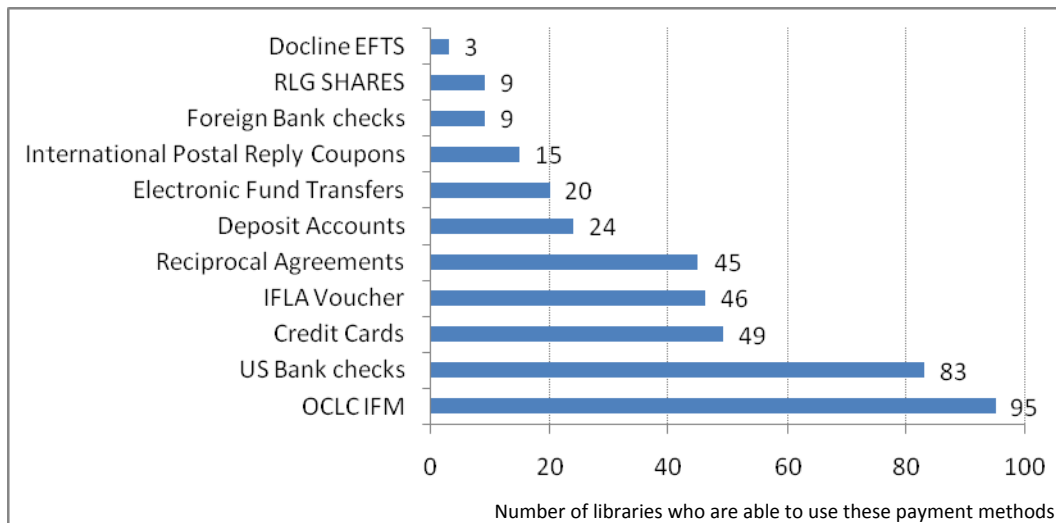


Figure 16 Acceptable borrowing payment methods

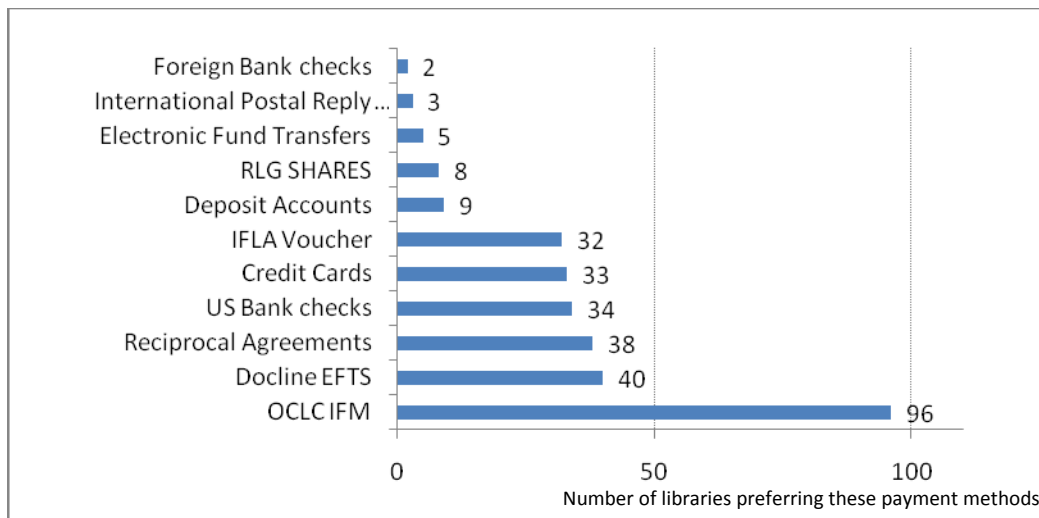


Figure 17: Preferred borrowing payment methods

Eighty percent (n=125) of respondents did not report any problem with making payments for international borrowing. Some problems mentioned were:

- Limitations on payment options for the borrower, especially if a lender could not accept OCLC IFM, DOCLINE--EFTS, or checks drawn from U.S. banks
- Checks, if they are required, take a longer time to be issued and sent
- Payments to some overseas libraries are not correctly recorded and the borrowing library has to pay again or have service cut off
- Requirement of prepayment before requests are processed
- Currency fluctuations that make it difficult to send a check to “the right place on time and for the right value”
- U.S. ILL managers sometime have to pay with personal credit cards and be reimbursed because of the restrictive policies of their parent institutions
- Invoiced amounts for borrowing the item are smaller than the fees for electronic funds transfers
- International libraries do not accept a check drawn from a U.S. bank even if it is issued in the receiving country’s currency

Shipping and Delivery Methods

Respondents were asked to select which of the following carriers they use to ship returnables: United States Postal Service (USPS), FedEx, UPS, or DHL. Sixty percent (n=95) of respondents used the United States Postal Service (USPS) as their standard carrier followed by FedEx at 26% (n=41) and UPS at 25% (n=40). DHL was used by 4% (n=7) of the respondents. 6% of the responses were “other” (e.g. don’t ship returnables overseas).

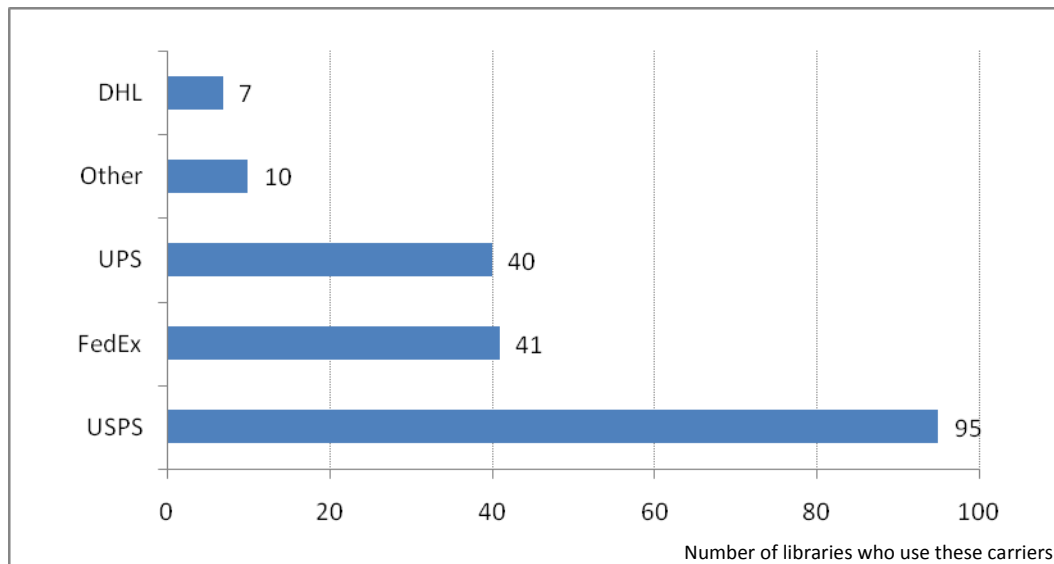


Figure 18: Carriers used when shipping returnables overseas

Most respondents indicated that the benefits for using USPS are convenience and price. Of the three remaining carriers, speed and tracking were the primary benefits, which happened to be the two primary drawbacks to using USPS. The two primary drawbacks for FedEx, UPS, and DHL were price and paperwork.

Respondents were asked if their carrier choice for international shipping was limited by an institutional contract. Half of the respondents are not limited; 21% are limited; and 29% did not respond.

CONCLUSION

Limitation of the Survey

Problems with a few of the survey questions were noticed and therefore limited the findings in the following aspects:

1. This survey only intended to study the international ILL practices among U.S. libraries and it did not look into the perception and practices from the perspective of an international library. The results, however, do include the responses of at least one Canadian library.
2. The survey did not ask for annual transactions in international borrowing or lending. Therefore we were unable to assess the overall demand for international borrowing and lending. The survey did not provide sufficient data to estimate if and how the size and type of a requesting library correlate to the volume of international ILL transactions.
3. Some questions were too general and did not get to the specific level of response we intended to obtain. Examples of this kind could be found in question 26, 27 and 28 that asked (1) if respondents verify holdings of the international library before requesting; (2) what tools they used to locate international holdings; and (3) if they use any of the gateway search tools available for identifying holdings in China or Japan. The survey results yielded the amount of usage, and a list of tools, but did not help rank verification strategies, which could be important based on the type of materials being requested (e.g. types of language, disciplines and subjects, formats).
4. OCLC and DOCLINE were widely used as they support efficiency and standardization. DOCLINE, however, was not consistently listed among the choices on the survey. Respondents had to write DOCLINE in if they used it. This potentially affects the rating of the various ILL tools.

Findings and Suggestions

1. The survey identified libraries in Canada, Great Britain, Australia, Denmark, Japan, and South Africa as the most frequent international ILL participants. However, for non-English language publications, helpful tools need to be identified and widely publicized.
2. Standards and guidelines that advise how to negotiate with an international holding library are desirable.
3. Encourage international and U.S. libraries to keep their profile current in the OCLC ILL Policies Directory.
4. Libraries are discouraged by the complexity of cross-border payments as borrowers and as lenders. Payment methods used by non-commercial document delivery services are limited and not necessarily efficient. While OCLC and DOCLINE have been highly successful and popular among U.S. libraries, they are not used as frequently by international libraries and thus are not as helpful as tools for international lending and borrowing.
5. Many respondents preferred providing or requesting only non-returnables because of international shipping and handling costs and the risks associated with lending materials overseas.

6. Electronic delivery of non-returnables could improve turnaround time and remove cost and payment barriers that some libraries experience.
7. Digitization of materials that are in the public domain could be an effective way to eliminate preservation and conservation concerns.
8. A website that lists major national bibliographic discovery tools as well as international fee-based document delivery services will help libraries borrow more effectively.

References

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