

**Making Sense of the Lending Fill Rate in Interlibrary Loan:
Investigating Causes for Low Fill Rates and Developing Potential
Remedies**

Emy Nelson Decker – University of Alabama

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Making Sense of the Lending Fill Rate in Interlibrary Loan:

Investigating Causes for Low Fill Rates and Developing Potential Remedies

Abstract

The interlibrary loan (ILL) fill rate for lending is, arguably, the most important statistic used to evaluate the success and reliability of the lending service. This fill rate percentage, however, is actually heavily influenced by factors external to the academic library's ILL department. The fill rate metric, alone, does not tell the whole story. A deeper dive into lending practices and the associated data and statistics can help elucidate factors that are negatively impacting it. This information is essential for ILL practitioners as they can use it to institute measures to continuously improve the fill rate by implementing best practices.

Keywords: interlibrary loan, lending fill rates, local holding records, borrower behavior, deflections, lending strings

Introduction

When a university library's Interlibrary Loan (ILL) service is unable to fill a lending request from a borrowing library, it negatively impacts fill rate statistics. A desire to increase the ILL lending fill rate requires an investigation into the reasons why requests received from borrowing libraries go unfilled. A lending fill rate is most often influenced by factors such as; the borrowing institution making a request of a library that does not actually have access to the item, cataloging and Local Holding Records (LHR) not being in sync with OCLC/WorldCat, and the practices of the borrowing library.

In order to understand lending fill rates, ILL data and statistics need to be consulted to help answer questions such as, what are the main reasons that a request to borrow an item gets cancelled? What types of items are being requested and by which institutions? What is the

disparity between how LHR appear on the inside of the library (catalog) and to users making requests after consulting OCLC/WorldCat? Where is the library situated on any given institution's lending string? And, ultimately, what steps might be taken in order to reduce cancellations and unfilled requests that are negatively impacting the overall fill rate?

This study focuses on the Interlibrary Loan (ILL) fill rate, as it relates to lending at an R1 university library in the southeast of the United States which conducts its ILL lending through both OCLC's ILLiad and RapidILL. It is important to note that the "borrowing" half of the ILL service represents a separate investigation, not detailed at present. This article will describe the steps taken to understand the factors that negatively impact the lending fill rate and will detail best practices for improving it.

Literature Review

At its core, interlibrary loan as a service is intended to provide access to resources not available in owned or subscribed collections (Kim, Wiggins, & Sadusky, 2019). It has been said of ILL data and statistics, however, that they are notorious for seeming to only tell partial truths, to appear inconsistent, and to require a lot of context to understand shifting patterns and confusing outliers (Grevatt, 2015). This is due, in part, to ILL being a library service that is characterized by complex processes and interlinked systems that, while often "automated" in some capacity, are still labor-intensive for staff (Schmidt, 2017). Furthermore, staff working in ILL generally have limited training in formal data analysis and very few of their library colleagues even know how the processing work in the ILL department is accomplished (Grevatt, 2015; Schmidt, 2017).

In recent years, ILL practitioners have been working to reduce workloads on what are historically understaffed departments and to improve user satisfaction with quick turn-around

times on items requested (Michaels & Cohen, 2018). With changes in technology, the rise of e-formats, and user expectations shaped by Amazon.com, ILL practitioners have had to rethink their operations and approach them with a new spirit of creativity and collaboration (Pang & Maceira, 2019). Furthermore, eliminating processes that overly absorb ILL practitioners' time is crucial to streamlining processes and enhancing the service (Pritting & Jones, 2015). Although many technological advances have helped ILL departments from the standpoint of resource-sharing, no automated system yet can fulfill the basic need of determining availability of items for loan via ILL with any accuracy (Pritting & Jones, 2015). Additionally, with a goal of quality in mind, some sacrifices have to be made – ILL departments must ask themselves if it is more important to complete extra editing of scanned documents or if the greater goal is, in fact, an accelerated turn-around time of requests to the user (Schmidt, 2017). As is true in most complex processes, if one aspect of the ILL process is enhanced, another will be neglected based on the relationship between staff time, the aforementioned service priorities (unique to each library), cost, and a host of other interdependent relationships.

An investigation into ILL data in order to understand a trend, inform a financial decision such as continued access to a journal package, or to corroborate collections decisions, by its nature asserts the importance of the library in academic research (Scott & Barton, 2018). ILL becomes the most fundamental access service for users acquiring research materials. Furthermore, library users do not care whether an item has been purchased, borrowed from another library, recalled from off-site storage, or sourced from the local shelf (Rose & Jones, 2018). The particular location of origin does not matter, users simply want the item, and the sooner it is received, the better (Scott & Barton, 2018).

Users behave in predictable, though inscrutable, ways when it comes to requesting items via ILL. For example, when considering a borrowing transaction (i.e. user's home institution will borrow the item from another institution), requests received for resources that are available locally form a major portion of canceled requests (Kim, Wiggins, & Sandusky, 2019). In fact, these unnecessary requests may represent up to 30% of cancellations (Baich, 2015). There exists no single easily identifiable reason why a user would submit requests for items readily available in the local collection (Garner & Williams, 2018). Likely, the user simply could not find the desired item in the library's catalog and initiated an ILL request (Baich, 2015). Sometimes, users even appear to request ILL books when the home library owns the ebook, simply because they desire the opportunity to hold the physical book (Garner & Williams, 2018). Open Access creates another layer of unnecessary requests wherein users, particularly undergraduate students, submit ILL requests for Open Access materials that they can access directly via a link – difficulty with discovery, again, seems to be the issue in these cases (Baich, 2015).

Some interlibrary loan departments have benefitted from cross-departmental collaborations with reference, outreach, and instruction within the academic library as the collaborating departments can help educate and train users how to properly search the catalog and when it is appropriate to initiate an ILL request (Pang & Maceira, 2019). ILL has not traditionally held a very forward-facing role in helping patrons to find locally held electronic resources (Garner & Williams, 2018). Does ILL have a future in aiding patrons with discovery (Espe & Wisniewski, 2019)? It would be easy for an ILL department to create an instructional form letter to send to users who submit ILL requests for locally held items, but it is uncertain whether the user would modify their future requesting behavior (Connell & Connell, 2014).

This is due in part to the concept that the users' need for convenience and ease of access might be driving their reliance on ILL to locate an item (Baich, 2015). When these requests are filled via Document Delivery (i.e. a scan of a chapter in a book held by the library), it tends to result in contented users (Connell & Connell, 2014). It is unlikely that an academic library would desire to halt a popular service, but in some ways, the Document Delivery service seems to facilitate laziness on the part of the user. But, perhaps a combination of technical changes to increase discoverability coupled with patron education can help decrease unnecessary requests and lessen ILL practitioners' consternation (Garner & Williams, 2018). After all, as expert searchers, ILL practitioners are perfectly positioned to assist their library colleagues in improving the discoverability of material in the catalog (Baich, 2015). Indeed, some users resort to submitting unnecessary ILL request because of confusion surrounding accessing full-text, and book chapters in the catalog (Espe & Wisniewski, 2019). Cancelling locally available requests with an instructional email message may even be understood as a tool to help users on their path to information literacy (Connell & Connell, 2014).

As it pertains to ILL fill rates, if an electronic article, for example, is being requested by another library, ILL practitioners will either deliver the article to the library or cancel the request if local policy or license terms prohibit its lending (Lounsberry, 2020). Cancellations of any type negatively impact interlibrary loan data and statistics when considering the fill rate, even aspects outside of the library's control, such as license terms. In addition, ILL practitioners usually try to search their local resources before sending an ILL borrowing request out to other libraries for fulfillment, given the very real possibility that the item is available locally and the user simply did not discover it (Lounsberry, 2020; Baich, 2015).

Setting deflections, however, is one strategy to employ in order to essentially block other libraries from making requests on items that are non-circulating, are not actually owned by the library but remain visible in the catalog, or, in the case of journals, are presently within the embargo period. Deflected requests do not impact the ILL fill rate, as the requests never make it into the ILL software system to be cancelled. ILL lending abilities are routinely impacted by frequent changes to lending policies and material holdings related to the cancellations of journals, negotiations of electronic licenses, and management of print collections (Grevatt, 2015).

Deflections can also be set to deflect items that are consistently cancelled because the item is often in use locally (Pritting & Jones, 2015). Some institutions, for example, cancel requests on all ebooks, which negatively impacts the fill rate. At Albertsons Library at Boise State University, however, a deflection was set on all ebooks to remedy this issue and doing so dropped that aspect of the fill rate from 39% of all lending cancellations down to only 13% in following years – not only is the percentage significant, and favorable to increasing the fill rate overall, but it also represents staff time saved by eliminating requests that would have to be cancelled otherwise (Grevatt, 2015). Deflections are useful, too, for frequently requested titles that the library does not lend for any reason (Pritting & Jones, 2015).

At Louisiana State University (LSU), librarians undertook a project to troubleshoot lending issues and noted that, in many cases, automated bibliographic record loading is most likely responsible for erroneous records and false access points inserted into LSU's catalog (Lounsberry, 2020). Catalog records (specifically, Local Holding Records, LHR) have to be very clean in order for a user (or borrowing library) to interpret the information and send a request to

a library than can actually lend the title. And that, of course, requires that a borrowing library double-checks before sending a request to a lending library.

Much of the process of requesting items is automated and most institutions have pre-set lending strings that automatically query libraries until the request is filled. Even if a quick check initiated by an ILL practitioner reveals that the first institution in the lending string does not show the item as available in the catalog, automated lending strings will send a request anyway, thereby negatively impacting that institution's lending statistics when they inevitably cannot fill the request (Schmidt, 2017). Another issue is that some journal holdings are shown as available in LHR, but the record is incomplete and does not show that the particular volume or issue number may not be in the library's collection – or, the journal is hybrid format so the content is either subscribed content or Open Access content, so an item in question may be behind a paywall as it was not published by the journal in Open Access (Lounsberry, 2020). A minor detail, certainly, but one that can be particularly costly to the lending library's fill rate.

The University of Central Florida (UCF) Libraries studied ILL data in order to improve their lending fill rates. One of their key discoveries was that the LHRs were not consistent with OCLC's holdings. In fact, 19-21.2% of the requests they received were unfilled because items that OCLC showed they own, the library did not actually have on its shelves (Shrauger, Calabrese, & Spyers-Duran, 2016). This disparity caused a lot of frustration as lending requests continued to come in that the UCF Libraries could not fill (Spyers-Duran, Tiberii, & Shrauger, 2019). They undertook an aggressive project to bring the LHRs into better sync with OCLC by employing a team of student assistants, trained by the serials librarian, to edit journals and proceedings records in the catalog to reflect accurate holdings (Shrauger, Calabrese, & Spyers-Duran, 2016).

An 18-month period of this project saw the realization of 2,508 records updated, 2,031 records deleted, and another 1,700 created (Spyers-Duran, Tiberii, & Shrauger, 2019). Student assistants, under close supervision, were able to update these LHRs in ways that copy-cataloging staff never could, due to staffing levels and workflow constraints (Shrauger, Calabrese, & Spyers-Duran, 2016). While not every library would be comfortable with having student assistants edit LHRs even with the guidance of a manual and under tight library supervision, UCF libraries enjoyed success and supported the lending side of ILL, effectively letting borrowing institutions know what the institution could and could not supply thus reducing their need to cancel requests and positively impacting their fill rate with their records clean-up project (Spyers-Duran, Tiberii, & Shrauger, 2019).

Background

The University of Alabama (UA) Libraries in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, USA, are comprised of four campus branches and support a student community of over 38,000 undergraduates (as of 2017, 2018, and 2019). It has achieved R1 status, “very high research activity,” in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. UA is a four-year, doctoral-granting university, and offers more than 70 undergraduate programs in 12 colleges and schools. Holdings in the UA Libraries include over 4.1 million volumes and access to approximately 199,515 full text print and electronic journals. UA Libraries also provides access to over 596 major electronic resources via Springshare’s A-Z Database Management Tool. Current ebook holdings top more than 1.5 million titles.

The Interlibrary Loan unit is robust, featuring a Lending Coordinator, Borrowing Coordinator, a Billing Assistant, a Records Assistant (for RapidILL), and a weekend Lending Assistant. The unit is situated within the Access Services Department, which also oversees

Circulation, and is physically housed in Gorgas Library. Each semester, there are numerous student assistants who are tasked with locating and pulling books, scanning, preparing items to ship, and myriad other tasks. The COVID-19 pandemic - and associated gaps in coverage due to quarantining - necessitated the cross-training of students to cover any task necessary in any of the branches, so a training program was put into place during the summer of 2020 to ensure that student assistants were transferrable across the libraries. This also resulted in the ILL unit not having designated student assistants, which was an adjustment since having student assistants specifically assigned to the ILL unit was an arrangement they had enjoyed for years. The University of Alabama Libraries' Interlibrary loan processes between 26,000 to 30,000 lending requests per year (2017, 2018, 2019).

Understanding the Fill Rate

Since the ILL lending fill rate represents the culmination of numerous factors, it is important to first understand what these might be in addition to their impact on the percentage of items filled. It requires a detailed investigation of the nature of the requests being received in order to determine why some go unfilled. A process of triangulation and input from colleagues at institutions with higher fill-rate percentages can be instructive, as can input from professionals at establishments such as OCLC and RapidILL.

Collecting Fill Rate Data

In October 2019, the author investigated the current lending fill rate (as averaged through a 5-year period from 2014-19). ILLiad showed an average fill rate of 51.7%, and RapidILL showed an average fill rate of 72.7% for the University of Alabama Libraries ("ALM" - interlibrary loan symbol). When reviewing the reasons for cancellation in the ILL reports for January 2019-August 2019, the most frequently recurring reasons were: "lack volume/issue,"

“checked out,” and “non-circulating.” Following up on those reasons for cancellation more recently, between January 2020-December 2020, lack volume/issue accounted for 3471 cancellations (Illiad 2,763, Rapid 707), checked out accounted for 435 (Illiad 421, Rapid 14), and non-circulating accounted for 272 (Illiad 265, Rapid 4, LWeb 3). That represents a total of 4,178 requests that negatively impacted the fill rate due to LHR and OCLC not showing that the University of Alabama Libraries did not have the volume or issue number while subscribing to the specific journal, items that are owned, but were currently in use by another user, and items that are owned, but do not circulate outside the library. If one considers a year with 26,000 total lending requests, those 4,178 cancellations for those top 3 reasons - independent of the myriad other reasons - would represent a 16% negative fill rate against the overall total for the year.

In sifting through ILL data, information about how the University of Alabama compared statistically to other ASERL libraries came into focus, too. Specifically, the University of Georgia (UGA) had an average fill rate of 60.5% in ILLiad and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT) had an average of 59.4% in ILLiad. These institutions were considered “comparable libraries” in terms of size, holdings, and having ARL status. The University of Alabama reached out to Access, ILL, and Collections department heads at the aforementioned academic libraries to glean some information about their lending practices. These phone conversations (and their numerous follow-ups) took place in late Fall 2019 (see Appendix 1 for the questions asked of UGA and UT). While this attempt was made to survey similar institutions about their practices that led to a higher ILL fill rate, it turned out that the University of Tennessee receives twice as many ILL requests as does the University of Alabama and the University of Georgia’s ILL statistics are impacted by their robust circulating collection of Veterinary Medicine materials. Furthermore, neither institution differed very much from the

University of Alabama as it pertains to ILL workflow, practices, or policies, so the institutions were unable to offer any revolutionary “tips and tricks” that would potentially enhance the University of Alabama Libraries’ fill rate statistics. Both institutions, however, did note their attention to, and diligence in, ensuring that they keep their Local Holding Records (LHR) up-to-date and consistent with OCLC on a regular basis. Another major take-away from these phone conversations was the advice they offered to the University of Alabama Libraries to evaluate current practices for lost/missing items. Both pieces of advice were well received and will be addressed in more detail later in this article.

After speaking with UGA and UT, the University of Alabama’s contacts at RapidILL and OCLC agreed to phone conversations to provide strategies for increasing the lending fill rate. RapidILL was, at the time, in the midst of being purchased by ExLibris. Because RapidILL is based on “pods” of institutions, some practices are slightly different from “traditional” ILL (i.e. OCLC’s ILLiad). One example is that there is time-zone awareness so libraries in the same time zone are more likely to receive each other’s requests (this can facilitate a quicker turn-around of ILL fills based on requests). They also mediate the lending string with load-leveling algorithms so that institutions do not become overloaded with requests (based on alphabetical or similar features). Also, RapidILL is somewhat more “hands on” as it relates to holdings in that they match on volume and year; but not item level. The University of Alabama Libraries came away from the conversation understanding that it needed to default settings for holdings sent to RapidILL for “local only, lendable, blocked/no access” to reduce requests for items not owned or non-circulating. The aforementioned features and controls of Rapid ILL gave insight as to how the University of Alabama Libraries’ RapidILL fill rate remains consistently higher than that of OCLC’s ILLiad.

Subsequently, the University of Alabama Libraries also contacted OCLC (ILLiad) at the end of 2019 for advice as to how to improve the lending fill rate. At the University of Alabama Libraries, LHR are handled by catalogers. While the records have title level holdings, they do not universally include volume level holding information. In early 2020, the conversation continued; this time with members of the University of Alabama Leadership Executive Council, ILL unit, and the Resource Acquisition and Discovery (RAD) department meeting in a web conference with our OCLC contacts. During this meeting, the disparity between what is in the catalog (LHR) and what institutions see in OCLC was revealed. As is the case with most academic libraries, there has been inconsistency in how the University of Alabama Libraries has recorded holdings across the decades. So, the question becomes one of what to do that will have the best impact on ILL without negatively impacting workflow in the RAD Department.

Cleaning up the catalog, record-per-record is not feasible, so the University of Alabama sought advice from OCLC. One suggestion they made was to do a Reclamation Project. A Reclamation Project is essentially a “restart” of the catalog, replacing old records with updated ones, but in order for it to be worthwhile, the records would have to already be cleaned (i.e. records would need volume/issue data in them). Another suggestion from OCLC was to do smaller LHR clean-up projects; particularly on journals that tend to cause the most issues (ie. journals that we receive many requests for that we cannot fill – in our experience this relates to users targeting a title, and not being able to determine which volumes/issues we have). OCLC also emphasized the need for us to add deflections for embargoed titles. OCLC referred to these as small, manageable, “getting our feet wet” projects. The goal of which was to move the needle somewhat on increasing our lending fill rate.

What types of items are being requested?

As it pertains to embargoed journals, i.e. journals that are within the 24-36 month “sliding wall” access date, the University of Alabama receives an annual high volume of requests. As these cannot be loaned until the embargo date has passed, any requests for these items during this period are counted negatively against the fill rate. It is important to note that the University of Alabama Libraries also receives frequent requests for popular reading books for which there is not a robust in-house collection, nor are these titles being actively collected. For example, the University of Alabama receives many requests for popular reading, gardening, and general interest books that are not characteristic of holdings for an academic research library.

LHR versus OCLC

In February 2020, the Associate Dean for Research & User Services, the Senior Associate Dean (over Collections), the Head for RAD, and the Circulation Services Manager met for the first of what would become periodic meetings related to the small clean-up projects recommended by OCLC. ILL provided RAD with a list of the “top offenders” which are journal titles that continue to receive requests that cannot be filled. The fill rate statistics would improve if just those titles could have item-level metadata added. For example, in 2020, ILL received 50 requests for volume/issue numbers in the *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings* that we do not own. Previously, across 2014-19, ILL received 335 requests for the *Journal of Drugs in Dermatology* that the University of Alabama does not own at all. From January 2020-December 2020, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, ILL received another 64 requests for this particular journal. Adding the volume/issue information as in the previous example, or removing it altogether from the LHR and updating OCLC accordingly as in the case of the second example, stops ILL from receiving requests for something unavailable, which, taken together, have continued to count against the fill rate 449 times.

Lending strings

A “lending string” refers to the separate libraries that a borrowing institution lists, in order, of where to search for the items requested. Since the University of Alabama’s ILL symbol is “ALM,” it is, alphabetically, at the top of most lending strings. This means that the University of Alabama Libraries is often the first place a borrowing institution searches for an item. But, an example of a borrowing library’s lack of diligence or poor borrowing behavior may be to simply list ALM in the start of the lending string because it is an R1 library with a robust collection, without actually cross-checking to see if “ALM” actually owns the material. Many borrowing libraries set a default lending string of up to 15 institutions and rarely, if ever, modify it. These automated lending strings can result in the University of Alabama Libraries’ ILL continuing to receive requests from the same institution after related requests (i.e. requests for the same journal) have already been denied as they are not in the collection. This behavior on the part of borrowing institutions can negatively impact ILL fill rate statistics.

Continuous Improvement

Given these findings about the various aspects actively impacting the ILL lending fill rate, several solutions, implemented in tandem with one another, emerged as potential methods for increasing the University of Alabama Libraries’ ILL lending fill rate.

ILL Workflow Analysis and Cross-Training

Periodically, the Associate Dean for Research & User Services sits in to observe processing practices and workflow in the University of Alabama Libraries ILL unit. Both RapidILL and ILLiad borrowing and lending processes are observed and reviewed. Cross-training measures were also put into place to ensure continuous coverage with inevitable staff absences. Incoming ILL requests from institutions are processed by ILL lending staff checking

the catalog, online holdings, and when those sources do not yield results, going into the web to ensure that it cannot be found before a request is cancelled. One particular strength noted is the remarkably quick turn-around time on the University of Alabama's lending requests. The University of Alabama averages 9.8 hours, whereas, OCLC-system-wide, the average is 25.7 hours.

Lost/Missing Protocols

The University of Alabama Branch Libraries (Bruno, McLure, and Rodgers) had a lost/missing protocol in place. Such a protocol was oddly absent from the Gorgas Library where much of this investigation took place. The Director of Branch Libraries supplied the protocol which the Gorgas Library Circulation staff have adopted (see Appendix 2). Trace items from the past two years that have been searched for and not located will now move from missing to lost status. These will be sent to RAD for withdraw from the catalog (it is imperative that these items are withdrawn from both LHR and OCLC). Circulation will generate a lost/missing report monthly that will be sent to RAD so that lost items can be removed from both LHR and OCLC. (Each item on this list is one that has been searched for and deemed lost for at least a year.)

Deflections

The best method to halt requests for items that cannot be lent is a "deflection." Somewhat akin to the card game, "Go Fish," a "deflection" is a feature that allows ILLiad to refuse requests for items that the libraries do not own, that are not circulating, are embargoed, etc. Once a deflection is set, the request will skip the University of Alabama in the lending string, and move the request on to the next lender, without adding to the lending library's "unfilled" statistics. It is important to note that in RapidILL, a similar action would be controlled with the "Block Lend Report." Block Lends have already been set up in RapidILL for embargo-period journals by ILL

and Resource Acquisition and Discovery (RAD) staff. Out of the 2,717 unfilled requests by publication year, 1,216 of those were those journal years that fall within the 24-36-month embargo period. This means, the University of Alabama would experience fewer unfilled journals requested as understood by publication year embargoes.

While ILL staff have access to control the Block Lend reports in RapidILL, only RAD staff have access to setting up deflections for embargoed periods in OCLC's ILLiad. Currently, some deflections already in place are "zero max cost," certain media, and special collections. Deflections and block lend reports need to be updated on a regular basis (quarterly, at the minimum). One specific outcome of putting the "zero max cost" deflection in is that ILL is no longer receiving requests for popular titles. Prior to doing so, ILL was receiving popular title requests from small colleges as well as public libraries that did not want to pay for these items. They were also, notably, libraries that the University of Alabama does not have any type of consortia agreement with as it pertains to free lending. ILL can collaborate with RAD to supply information on items that need to have additional deflections set. This collaboration can also continue to help de-silo information and enhance staff awareness of critical procedures related to getting the user what they need when they need it.

LHR

It would be worthwhile to include local record holdings data (at the volume/issue level) for journal titles. This needs to be updated regularly to reflect what the University of Alabama actually has. While completing this action on every record would be too time-consuming, and inappropriate for student assistants in these Libraries' environment (even though another institution has successfully accomplished doing so), ILL will continue to furnish quarterly reports of top offenders in an attempt to give manageable projects to RAD. It is also important to sync

LHR and OCLC records when there is a cancellation for “title not owned” when OCLC says it is owned by the University of Alabama Libraries and it is not, and for “Not On Shelf” when a title is in the catalog but does not have a call number or it has been withdrawn (and was not withdrawn in OCLC).

Checked Out Status

When an item is “checked out,” the request goes unfilled and that, too, negatively impacts fill rate statistics. Unfortunately, ILLiad and Rapid cannot tell users if items are checked in/out, but only whether or not it is in the University of Alabama’s collection. This real-time deflection is not available yet in Tipasa (OCLC), either, but ILL is hoping that Project ReShare might be developed with this feature included. With the ExLibris purchase of Rapid ILL, there are likely to be changes coming in the future, and the University of Alabama has emphasized the interest in their adding a feature that lets users know that a copy of an item is checked out so perhaps that can be noted in the statistics in a way that does not negatively impact the fill rate, but rather shows an item’s popularity and current usage.

Communication

The Associate Dean for Research & User Services will continue to coordinate with OCLC, RapidILL, and ReShare contacts about updating holdings, enhancing current practices, and proceeding with best practices. As started in February 2020, meetings between RAD and ILL will continue less frequently than monthly, but more often than quarterly, in order to open communication and keep all parties aware of updated top offender reports, lost/missing reports of items to be removed from both our LHR and OCLC, as well as new titles that need to have deflections set up.

Conclusion

While the University of Alabama's ILL fill rate is about "mid-pack" as compared to the ASERL libraries, there is room for improvement. Increasing the ILL lending fill rate requires detailed study of the requests being received from the borrowing community to determine the specific reasons for failure to fill lending requests. This activity, along with measures to mitigate the negative impact to our fill rate statistics, has taken place. While it is well outside of the University of Alabama's control, borrowing libraries would be well-served to examine their requesting procedures to ensure that they are checking holdings records (when they exist) for any institution from whom they would like to borrow. Likewise, they should check their automated lending strings and exclude those institutions in the list that are known to not have the requested item. In our case, from the lending side, we need to improve our holdings records in OCLC in order to improve the effectiveness of the libraries in the borrowing community. We also need to better sync LHR and OCLC holdings with each other.

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Appendix 1

Phone questions for UGA and UT

1. How often do you update your e-resources/journal and print holdings for RapidILL?
2. How are your e-resources/journal and print holdings updated in OCLC? How often? Who updates your holdings?
3. What is your workflow for processing lending requests via ILLiad?
4. Do you have routing rules set up? If so what type of routing rules do you have for borrowing? For lending?
5. Do you have custom holdings group set up for borrowing? Do you choose which libraries to send your requests to manually or is it automated?
6. What Integrated Library System are you using?
7. Do you have an in-house Document Delivery service?
8. Do you purchase on demand for ILL (ILL and Acquisitions relationship)?

Follow up questions:

- a) Do you use Full Text Finder?
- b) Are you last in the lending string for RapidILL
- c) What is your collection size?

Appendix 2

Lost/Missing Protocols (abridged version of procedures written by Branch library librarians and staff)

Missing Books/CDs/Periodicals

When items cannot be found while shelf reading, attempting to fill an ILL or DD request, assisting a patron, or any other reason, the trace process is initiated either by filling out a trace form or informing the staff member in charge of traces. In Bruno and Rodgers Libraries, a paper form is used. In McLure Library a spreadsheet is used. The person responsible for traces will add any additional information to the form that may help in locating it such as size, date of last discharge, etc.

We initiate six (6) searches over the course of one year. The first search is very thorough, with staff and students looking in the area around the item's correct shelving location plus all the mostly likely spots where the item could be mis-shelved, including other locations. Often the book is found during the first search, however if not located the item is assigned the status MISSING in Voyager. On the second through fifth searches (every two months), only the correct location is checked. On the final search, after at least a year has passed, another thorough search is completed. If there are accompanying parts to the item, the parts that are on the shelf are pulled and the trace form is inserted in the item. For example, if a book we are tracing has an accompanying CD, we pull the CD. If a CD that we were tracing has an accompanying book, we pull the book.

If any item is found during the trace process, the staff member in charge removes the MISSING status (if assigned) and checks the item to see if there was a problem with the book that contributed to its being shelved incorrectly such as an incorrect call number.

The forms and accompanying pieces are then given to the appropriate selector for review for possible re-purchase. Accompanying pieces are reviewed to determine if there is value in retaining them without the missing piece or should they also be withdrawn. The selector records any titles they wish to replace, then OKs the withdrawals and gives them to branch database management person. Note: Even items that will be replaced need to be withdrawn. (When an item with an accompanying piece is withdrawn, but the accompanying piece is kept, the labeling on the pieces needs to be updated.)

If a withdrawn item is later found, the item should be given to branch database management person to be reinstated.

LOST ITEMS IN THE BRANCHES

When a book or CD is overdue by 60 days, the system assigns it the status Lost-System Applied. If the patron is one that is charged fines, the system charges the patron's account. The patron has 1 year to return the item for a refund of the replacement fee.

Each month, a report is run of items charged to students overdue by one year. Access Services reviews it so that the department can look for or ask the appropriate branch to look for the items before removing from the patrons' accounts. The status remains Lost-System Applied. If returned after one year, the patron is no longer eligible for a refund of the replacement fee, although it is still our book.

In the branches, we take this list and do one more through trace before handing off to the selectors for review before withdrawal.