ABSTRACT

The interlibrary loan process at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale has undergone a major redesign. Central to the redesign has been a move toward empowering patrons by providing them with choice and responsibility. In 1994 the library began facilitating unmediated borrowing from 48 members of a statewide library consortium via a shared online union catalog and circulation system to enhance service to its users. The elimination of intermediary steps has reduced turnaround time significantly and contributed to increased patron satisfaction. The authors will explain the forces that prompted the redesign, the use of technology, and the impact on staffing.

Introduction

Interlibrary loan is a phenomenon of the twentieth century, with the majority of its growth and development as a legitimate library service occurring within the last thirty years. Until recently, traditionalists believed that a library should provide materials for its clientele through purchase, if possible, resorting to borrowing from neighboring libraries only as a last resort. The National Interlibrary Loan Code (1940) reflects this less-than-liberal approach to borrowing, referring to interlibrary loan as a privilege and limiting it to researchers and scholars. This approach prevailed until changing methods and ideologies finally brought ratification of a liberalized code in 1980, which was further liberalized in 1993.(1)

Several factors together influenced libraries to make this change in ideology. The first was a substantial increase in the volume of publishing that occurred at a time when library funding could not keep pace. Libraries could no longer afford to purchase everything that their patrons wanted or needed. A second factor was the introduction of technology to the interlibrary loan process that made borrowing feasible and reduced turnaround time to an acceptable level. The introduction of end-user searching of online catalogs, full-text databases, electronic journals, and the growth of commercial document supply services has made literature more accessible than ever before.

Morris Library at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIUC) is representative of hundreds of libraries that have experienced phenomenal growth in interlibrary loan and document supply in recent years. Morris Library is a comprehensive research facility organized into five divisional libraries. It contains more than 2,000,000 volumes and over 12,000 current journal subscriptions, with access to numerous CD-ROM and online resources, multiple points of access to the Internet, and state-of-the-art projects in document imaging and distance learning.

Statistics show the phenomenal growth in interlibrary loan (ILL) at Morris Library in just 32 years. In FY64 (the first year that ILL records were kept), Morris Library processed 399 interlibrary loan requests, including both lending and borrowing. The function was performed by the director's secretary. By FY96, the number
had risen to 88,521 filled requests, lending and borrowing. Staff had grown to one professional, five paraprofessionals, and 200 hours of student help. How has Morris Library coped with these phenomenal increases? Certainly, an increase in staff has helped, but other significant changes have had to be made as well. In the 1960s the TWX was the newest technology, and ILL departments across the nation adopted it as their own. In the early 1980s, OCLC’s ILL subsystem revolutionized ILL, followed soon by FAX and ARIEL. Today remote access to other libraries' OPACs is being used by a growing number of libraries to speed the interlibrary loan process and deal effectively with the growing volume of borrowing. Ironically, as each improvement in ILL access is made, ILL volume increases to negate any relief.

NAILDD Project

The North American Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery (NAILDD) Project,(2) established in 1993, addressed the issue of maximizing access to resources while minimizing costs. More specifically, it called for libraries to redesign their interlibrary loan and document delivery services by improving their mediated services and introducing unmediated services in a networked environment. Libraries can achieve this goal by:

1. Developing an environment in which users may exercise choice and responsibility.
2. Serving as a resource for comprehensive collections.
3. Providing a gateway to services of other libraries and information providers.

They realized that technical assistance was needed to support this environment, and that a comprehensive interlibrary loan package designed to serve many libraries was needed. Many libraries began to review their local interlibrary loan processes by asking their staffs to envision the "ideal" interlibrary loan environment. By identifying the elements in this scenario, libraries began to successfully reengineer the interlibrary loan process.

Redesign

SIUC's Morris Library realized that a redesign was necessary. What factors prompted the redesign? Certainly, increased patron demand for resources had a major impact. In 1990, SIUC borrowed 9,896 items for its patrons, by 1993 that number rose to 12,027 an increase of 22% in three years. Another factor was the Library's Mission Statement, adopted in 1992, that reflects a shift in resources to promote access:

. . . Library Affairs will assume a leadership role in providing intellectual, bibliographic, instructional, and physical access to information resources. Service to users is the first priority of the library. (3)

As a member of a number of statewide and regional consortia, the Library realized the vital importance of sharing resources among consortia members, especially in a networked environment. SIUC plays an active role in the Illinois Library and Information Network (ILLINET), the Illinois Library Computer Systems Organization (ILCSO), and the Big Twelve Plus (BTP). (4) Finally, the Library is committed to its use of technology in optimizing access to a variety of information resources for its patrons.

Networks and commitment provide a solid base for interlibrary loan, but they alone are not enough. Heeding the call by the NAILDD Project, and mindful of the library's commitment to its patrons, SIUC's Access Services staff began to investigate ways to:

1. Respond to the increased demand for access.
2. Provide the service in a timely and cost effective manner.
3. Empower their patrons. (5)
Two questions asked of the staff in the redesign process were:

1. How can we remove barriers to make it easier for the patron to request materials?
2. How can internal procedures be streamlined?

Rather than focusing on the processing of requests, the staff were asked to review the interlibrary loan procedures from both the view of the external and internal customer. The first project implemented in our redesign efforts, and the one that forms the basis of this paper is the introduction of unmediated patron borrowing from the 49 Illinois libraries that share a common circulation system. While other projects were also implemented successfully, including the use of the interlibrary loan component in FirstSearch and the in-house development of interlibrary loan web-based forms, the use of ILLINET Online (IO) as a source for unmediated borrowing serves as the cornerstone for the redesign effort.

**Patron-Initiated Borrowing**

IO serves as the statewide online catalog for over 800 Illinois libraries that subscribe to OCLC's cataloging services. It contains over 10 million bibliographic records held by those 800 libraries, and serves as an online catalog for the State of Illinois. It also serves as the circulation system for 49 of these libraries that are members of ILLINET and the Illinois Library Computer Systems Organization (ILCSO). This group includes all of the state-supported universities in Illinois, several private universities and colleges, five community colleges, a state-supported high school for gifted students in mathematics and the sciences, and the Illinois State Library. The IO circulation module also serves as an interlibrary loan system for ILCSO members, the regional library systems, and other ILLINET member libraries. IO serves as a central part of the state's resource sharing initiative. In 1995, over 600,000 interlibrary loan transactions took place over IO.

While all ILCSO members have the option of letting their patrons use IO as a source of unmediated borrowing, only five libraries have elected to invoke this option. SIUC implemented the unmediated borrowing option in fall 1993. The use of this service clearly supports three of the objectives of the NAILDD "Overview and Vision Statement" to enable libraries to:

1. Search a variety of local and remote catalogs.
2. Transfer a citation into an electronic request or order.
3. Direct a request or order to . . . a local or remote library ILL/document delivery department. (6)

This service allows patrons to borrow materials from other ILCSO libraries on a "self-serve" basis. They are free to select the library from which to borrow, and to check-out materials from that library's circulating collection. They are also responsible for monitoring the request's progress and paying any fines or processing fees incurred if the item is not returned in a timely manner.

When the service was implemented in 1993, the Library mounted a publicity campaign. Workshops, handouts, and notices in the university's newspaper announced implementation of the service. While a workshop dedicated exclusively to the self-serve feature is no longer offered, it is one component of the "Interlibrary Loan Workshop" that is offered regularly as part of the Library Affairs Seminar Series.

Patrons can access IO on computers located in SIUC's Morris Library or from personal computers in their home, office, or dorm room, as long as they have a telnet connection. Anyone affiliated with SIUC, including students, faculty, and staff can self-charge materials, renew or recall items. An easy-to-use pop-up box facilitates the charge. The SIUC Library's web page provides a link to IO and instructions on how to charge
items from IO. If a patron submits a paper ILL request or a web-based ILL form for an item located in another ILCSO library, an Access Services staff member charges the item to the patron's identification number. The patron is notified of the charge and also receives a brochure explaining the self-charge option.

Once a charge is initiated, the lending library receives a computer generated page slip indicating that the item has been requested for an individual at a remote site. The library then pages the item and sends it by the statewide delivery system, to the borrower's home library. If the item cannot be provided, it is discharged and notification is sent to the patron's home library.

Since the system does not generate notification letters, the SIUC staff developed a program using Microsoft Word(TM) that produces a notification letter and a book band. It also serves as a record of items received from other ILCSO libraries.

This service had a significant impact on the number of interlibrary loan transactions. In 1993, the Library borrowed 3,048 returnables from other ILCSO libraries. That number rose to 6,430 returnables in FY94, an increase of 111%. Total filled requests also rose 50% during that time period. The number of items self-charged increased again in FY95, but not to the extent that it had previously. This time the increase was by 38%, and by FY96 the increase had slowed significantly to 19%, with 10,642 returnables received from ILCSO libraries. However, one must note that the number of returnables borrowed from ILCSO libraries in 1996 exceeds the total number of requests filled in 1993 by 393 items. Furthermore, the total number of items borrowed (returnables and non-returnables) rose 125% between 1993 and 1996. This increase was of course, fueled by the number of self-serve requests generated by SIUC patrons.

Other Redesign Efforts

Two other patron-directed projects that were initiated in response to the NAILDD Project and the Library's emphasis on better service to its patrons also contributed to the increase in ILL activity. OCLC's FirstSearch ILL option was activated in the fall of 1994. While the number of requests received by this option are few when compared to items direct charged by our patrons, it does provide patrons an option of initiating a request from a catalog and sending it directly to the Access Services Department.

The Library also initiated a project called, "Interlibrary Loan on the Web," in the fall of 1994. It allows patrons who have access to a personal computer and a web browser to submit interlibrary loan requests from any location, day or night. This program began initially as an e-mail message system, but has been revised to include web forms that can be easily edited and transmitted to OCLC's ILL system.

Staffing Issues

How did the increase in filled requests impact staffing? In 1993, borrowing staff consisted of one librarian, two FTE paraprofessionals and 75 hours of student help. At that time the divisional librarians did the preliminary processing of requests and the ILL librarian reviewed and approved each request before it was sent. By 1996, the number of staff in borrowing has changed significantly. It now consists of 3.5 FTE paraprofessionals and 103 hours of student help (that includes 50 hours of graduate assistant help). The Assistant Access Services Librarian and librarians in the five divisional libraries now devote fewer hours to the ILL process. It is clear that the increase in self-serve interlibrary loans has increased the number of items borrowed, but it is also clear that the self-serve option does not require the extensive amount of professional time required previously to process requests. The emphasis on questioning procedures, streamlining operations, and reallocating resources has resulted in an operation that requires less staff time but results in better service. It is the question of better service that prompted the authors to study turnaround time as it applied to the various parts of its operation.
The Study

What was the turnaround time for patron initiated interlibrary loans? This question of course has many variables:

1. Which library did the patron select as the lending library?
2. What was the type of material requested?
3. Was the request ever filled?

Since the system is a circulation module of an OPAC, it does not provide the statistics that could have answered these questions. We were able to determine the length of time it took to fill a request once a patron initiated it. And, it also showed what type of monographic formats were being direct charged (non-returnables cannot be requested through the online catalog). The study began on August 20, 1996, and concluded on December 24, 1996. Each request that was filled during that time period was counted and classified according to the following criteria:

1. Method of submission.
2. Format.
3. Turnaround time.

This was done easily for the requests submitted through FirstSearch, the Web form, and cards. Items received as the result of patron initiated requests were considered submitted on the day the circulation record showed that the item was charged.

A total of 7,325 returnables were received during the test period including 5,464 items received from ILCSO libraries as a result of the self-serve option. The data clearly show that items received through patron initiated requests were received more quickly than items submitted through typical interlibrary loan methods. Patrons who direct charged items received the returnables in an average of 8.4 days. Patrons who submitted the request through the web, card, or through FirstSearch had to wait closer to three weeks for their materials.

Patron Satisfaction

A second part of the study was a survey of patrons who used the self-serve system during a three week period. Surveys were distributed to 200 patrons when they picked up interlibrary loans at the service desk. Only 40 surveys have been returned by this writing. Despite the small return, the results give an indication of the use of the self-charge feature and patron satisfaction with it. The questions inquired about the location of the computer used to requests materials (library, home, or office), frequency of requests, and satisfaction with turnaround time, notification, appropriateness of the materials received, and user-friendliness of the system. A final question provided an opportunity for comments. Fifty-three percent of the respondents indicated that they used computers in the library to charge material, leaving the other forty-seven percent of the respondents divided about equally between home use (25%) and office use (22%). The significance of these data is the fact that almost half of the respondents using the self-serve interlibrary loan service do their work someplace other than the library.

A question concerning frequency of use indicates a group of long-term, consistent users. Eighty-three percent of the respondents indicated that they use IO to charge materials from other libraries at least once a week. Twelve percent indicated that they use it once a month, while only five percent indicated that this was a first-time use.
In general, patron satisfaction was high. Seventy-five percent indicated that they received the requested materials in an acceptable period of time; 95 percent indicated that they were notified promptly of its arrival; and the correct item was received 98 percent of the time. Everyone (100% of the respondents) agreed that the system was user-friendly and easily manipulated.

Conclusion

While this survey was directed toward a subset of patrons, it is important to note that patrons indicated overwhelmingly that they were satisfied with initiating their own interlibrary loans. In fact the popularity of this service is clear from the number of items borrowed. More importantly, by cutting out the middle, we have empowered the user.

An added benefit is the reduction in time required of the Assistant Access Services Librarian in processing routine requests. More time can now be devoted to planning, review, and other management responsibilities and to resolving problematic interlibrary loan requests.

As user expectations change, individuals want more materials in a more timely manner and perceive that they can get what they want more quickly by doing it themselves. The self-charge option helps remove many of the barriers and negative perceptions that pervaded interlibrary loan arenas for many years. Optimized technology, system interoperability, and locally developed programs have heightened patron awareness of available resources. By strengthening our existing alliances, as with ILLINET Online, ILCSO, and BTP, and by redesigning our interlibrary loan operations, we can provide better access to the resources that our patrons need.

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NOTES

4. ILLINET is a network of 800 Illinois OCLC--based libraries that share a statewide online catalog, ILLINET Online. ILCSO is a group of 49 libraries that use the ILLINET Online for local circulation and interlibrary loan operations. BTP is a group of 18 Midwestern libraries that are committed to sharing resources.