



ASERL Executive Summary

Benchmarking and Pondering ASERL Interlibrary Loan Operations, 2010 and 2013

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Abstract

In 2010 and 2013, members of the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) were surveyed to identify benchmarks and programs to support resource sharing. This study compared and contrasted the two surveys using mixed methods data analysis in assessing performance and identifying challenges and trends in interlibrary loan (ILL) operations.

We believe ASERL can use these issue areas as starting points to discuss programming, networking, or other program support to improve member resource sharing operations. Individual libraries can compare themselves to the operational benchmarks and use insights drawn from comment analysis to stimulate conversations regarding current and future roles for interlibrary loan.

Response rates varied: 2010 = 84%; 2013 = 74%. This report also uses ILL filled volume data collected annually by ASERL. This summary presents the following findings and implications:

- transaction volumes;
- staffing levels;
- campus document delivery;
- issues and challenges; and
- library reorganizations.

ILL Volume: More Ups than Downs

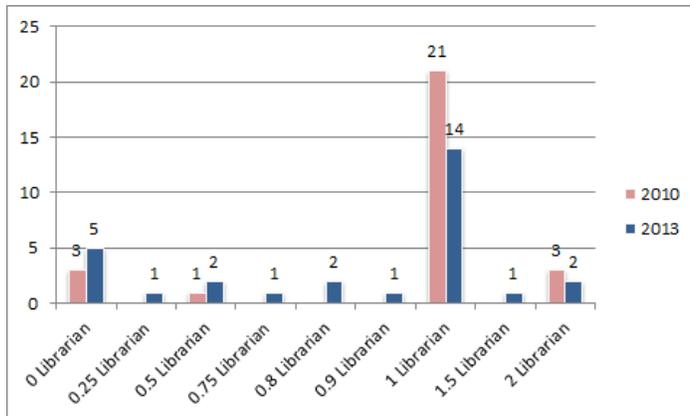
- Average Borrowing **Filled** Volume trends upwards (2007-2012 = +11%)
- Average Borrowing **Received** Up (+3%)
- Average Lending **Received** Down (-5%)
- Average **Fill Rates** Up: Borrowing (+13%) and Lending (+25%)
- Borrowing trends toward more Articles than Loans

Borrowing Filled Requests	2010	2013	change
Loan	50%	45%	-5%
Article	50%	55%	5%

Staffing: More Managed by Less

Fewer Librarian FTE devoted to ILL operations

- 2010: 24 libraries with 1 or more professional FTE
- 2013: 17 libraries with 1 or more professional FTE (-30%)



Fewer Library Staff and Student FTE: Average 1 FTE fewer

- Staff: 4.4 FTE Avg (-.5 FTE from 2010)
- Students: 3.5 FTE Avg (-.5 FTE from 2010)

ILL Technology and Networks

There is increased uniformity in technology and networks among ASERL libraries, facilitating operational efficiencies.

- ILLiad = 100% and RapidILL = 79%
- Decreased use of Ariel (-50%) for electronic document delivery, using ILLiad's Odyssey and OCLC Article Exchange instead.

Similar technologies facilities shared training. However there may not be an apparent demand. More on this topic in **Challenges** below.

Campus Document Delivery (CDD)

In 2013, 92% provide some Campus Document Delivery.

- Average 7,405 requests filled. 68% of the transactions are for loans.

Groups receiving CDD services

- Faculty = 100%, Graduate = 75%, Undergraduate = 46%
- To expand services, focus on student populations, on Distance Education support, and on leveraging print collections.

Challenges

2013 sees shifts in challenges from technical and workflow issues toward **e-resource access** and **staffing & equipment**.

Rated as "Challenge"	2010	2013	Change
Licensing E-Resources	10	22	120%
Staff and Equipment Costs	15	20	33%
Copyright /Royalties	13	12	-8%
Best Practices /Training	6	3	-50%
Item Discovery and ILL Ordering Systems	16	8	-50%
Purchase on Demand	4	2	-50%

For e-resources, respondents report embargo periods and licensing restriction on e-books as two key issues. Others see these e-resource complexities creating demands for new skills and capabilities.

One respondent commented: *“As we move to more pay as you go, how will licensing effect (sic) us as both a borrower and lender? Will we have to go to rights holders for every little thing?”*

Staffing is another major challenge: Above, libraries report a drop in FTE support at all levels. At the same time, Borrowing Volume, on average, increased. As fewer people are doing more work, staffing challenges should be expected. However a simple connection between decreased staffing and increased volume is only part of the picture. Respondents shared how the nature of ILL work changes, creating new challenges.

One respondent shared: *“I see increased complexity of requests due to discovery and permissions (in the case of e-resources) that will demand skilled leadership and a more expert workforce. The ILL department will not simply manage loans to and from other libraries, but will be the one stop shop for filling the patron's needs should the library collection not do so. This requires new relationships with other departments and knowledge of a wide array of resources in order to fulfill any given request.”*

Also changing is the need for **Best Practices and Training** (-50%). As libraries adopt similar technologies and workflows, and as these workflows are evolutionary and not revolutionary, the need for traditional ILL process training decreases. However, it may be supplanted with needs to redefine ILL skills in this e-resource rich world.

Library Reorganizations

To continue the exploration beyond technical metrics, the 2013 survey inquired into the impacts of library reorganizations on interlibrary loan operations.

- 12 out of 28 (43%) interlibrary loan departments have or will soon be a part of a library reorganization.
- Two libraries' ILL departments merged with other operations and reassigned tasks. One library's experience outlined a realignment with other library departments: *“The ILL department was brought together with Circulation and Reserves staff, as part of an Access Services department. This provided more opportunities for cross-training and for staffs from the various units to work together.”*
- The second library shared cautionary lessons learned in reassigning staff: *“Reorganizing, but then leaving everyone doing exactly what they did before negates any positive impact of the reorganization.”*
- Reorganizations vary, involving Access Services, or Reference, or Acquisitions. Some are spurred by retirements and similar opportunities.
- While much of ILL is technical in nature, its role as a public service remains a recurring theme. One respondent wrote: *“Can ILL and Acquisitions come together? ILL is a public service. Can it retain its 'up front role' even expanded with purchase on demand and increased 'back end' status?”*
- As a technical/public service, interlibrary loan requires skilled staff, support from other public services, and two-way connections with patrons.

Some Conclusions

Overall, ASERL interlibrary loan and document delivery departments are doing more with less. Transaction volumes for Lending remained stable while Borrowing increased. At the same time, full and part-time staff resources for ILL declined. ASERL libraries used a common suite of networks and technologies to manage workflows. These technologies bring efficiencies to workflows enabling libraries to handle more requests with fewer FTE. While ILL volume increased and staffing decreased, some libraries added campus document delivery services **to** their operations. However, as comments illustrate, there is a limit to how much more can be done with less.

The changing nature of e-resource access and licensing and declining staff resources supplants operational workflows as major concerns. A number of ILL departments have participated or will soon participate in reorganizations. Interlibrary loan partners with either technical or public services; some of these partnerships are successful, some not as successful.

Opportunities are the reverse side of challenges. Without good lending, there is no good borrowing. ASERL can turn to high-performing lending operations for insights on how to improve lending. ASERL libraries use many of the same technologies which facilitates the adoption of operational workflow changes. For campus document delivery, undergraduates could be a potential, new clientele.

Accessing and licensing electronic resources is now foremost on the minds of ASERL ILL practitioners. Consortial purchasing in support of resource sharing as well as workshops on e-resource licensing could address some of ASERL's challenges. As respondents see changes in their ILL operations and in their place within libraries, support for change management emerges as an opportunity. ASERL could foster informal or formal gathering of librarians to share experiences and cultivate networks in support of programmatic changes. One respondent sees interlibrary loan at a crossroads: *"Resource sharing will either become the most important part of the library (due to shrinking collections budgets, and (difficulty) in building (interdisciplinary) collections) or the least important (digitization of everything)."*

Changes -- from workflow to licensing, from borrowing to acquiring, from public services to technical services -- all combine to challenge not just the daily job of interlibrary loan librarians but also their professional identity. If we are what we do, and if we don't know what we are going to be doing, the future can seem daunting. As interlibrary loan is a collective enterprise, collectively understanding the nature of change serves as the first step in understanding where interlibrary loan is headed.

The 2013 ASERL Survey Group submitted their complete analysis in a manuscript to *Interlending and Document Supply*, the international journal for interlibrary loan and resource sharing.

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