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An Examination of Lending Fees at Thirty Academic Libraries in the Southeast

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ABSTRACT

Current fiscal shortfalls are projected to bring deep and long lasting budget cuts to libraries. With every budget dollar under close scrutiny, the urgency of filling patron information needs efficiently and cost-effectively increases. Interlibrary loan plays an important role in filling in gaps in library collections, yet as significant budget cuts are made at libraries of all sizes, materials will be available from fewer and fewer lenders. Libraries unable to find items from those with whom they have reciprocal arrangements will be will be forced to use lenders who charge. This article examines fees associated with interlibrary lending in 30 academic libraries in the southeast from 1995 and 2008.

It has been more than two decades since Cline (1987) declared “free interlibrary loan…a thing of the past” and bemoaned that “ILL fees are out of control” (p. 80). Her study, which examined lending charges and photocopying fees at sixteen large U.S. universities, found that by 1984, the average fee levied to borrow a book or procure a journal article via interlibrary loan (ILL) was roughly $5.00, which would equal approximately $10.00 in 2008, when adjusted for inflation (Bureau, 2008). In the twentyone years since Cline's article appeared, much has changed in the library profession, but ILL fees appear here to stay. In describing the purpose of these fees, Beaubien (2007) writes:

> Since ILL services are costly to operate, libraries attempt to control the volume of lending requests that they handle. Research and academic libraries set up reciprocal arrangements with very specific and limited numbers of partner libraries. Fees are charged to libraries not in those consortial arrangements to set up a barrier for non-reciprocal sites and discourage use of interlibrary loan. The majority of ILL work is reciprocal; charges are made for only a small percentage of requests. (p. 1)

There are several reasons why libraries might charge for lending. For example, some libraries charge fees to recover the costs associated with providing materials and to generate revenue. Other libraries charge only when others would charge them. However, it is widely accepted that the primary purpose of these fees is to serve as a deterrent to would-be borrowers who fall outside of an institution's reciprocal agreements.

The question of whether or not this system is just or ideal is beyond the scope of this paper. What is of interest are the actual fees themselves. As Waldhart (1985) noted some time ago, "no concerted effort has been mounted within the library community to establish standard fees for interlibrary loan at the national level" (p. 225). This holds true today. Libraries generally have the autonomy to set their own fees, and potential borrowers are free to "shop around" to find the lowest cost supplier. So why, if charges are levied only on a fraction of ILL requests, do lending fees warrant further scrutiny? After all, if a library can obtain needed items from institutions with which it has reciprocal agreements, these fees are not a factor. The answer lies mainly in the fact that all libraries' materials budgets have been under stresses for some time now. First, these budgets have struggled to keep up with the rising costs of books, journals and other resources. For example, since 1986, median expenditures for serials at institutions that are members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) have increased 340%, while median monograph unit prices increased 85% (ARL 2008c). Meanwhile in just the last five years, colleges and universities have seen the average annual cost of a journal subscription increase by 39% (EBSCO). Second, these budgets have struggled to keep up with the growth in published information. Since 1997, for example, the number of titles treated by YBP Library Services for its approval program, which is a measure of the number of books considered to be of interest to academic and research libraries, has increased 31% (Yankee, 2008). In addition, *Ulrich's Periodicals Directory* currently lists more than 21,000 titles when filtered for just those marked as "Active," "Refereed," "Abstracted/Indexed" and "Academic/Scholarly" (2008). As Suber states, "We've already (long since) reached the point at which even affluent research institutions cannot afford access to the full range of research literature" (2007). This fact appears to be reflected in ILL statistics. Although the trend has leveled off somewhat in recent years, the number of items borrowed annually by ARL libraries has increased 280% since 1986 (ARL 2008a). Lending fees are worthy of consideration because these budget pressures will, almost certainly, continue. As fewer libraries are able to purchase lesser used but needed items, the chances that borrowers may need to rely on lenders outside of their reciprocal arrangements will increase.

Over the years, much has been written about the costs associated with interlibrary lending. Notable examples include: Jackson (2004), whose well-known study—the third in a series sponsored by ARL over the course of more than a decade—looked at, among other things, unit costs for traditional ILL borrowing and lending compared to those for five services that are described as being user-initiated; Lor (1992), who presented an in-depth analysis of ILL expenses and broke these down by role, such as borrower, supplier and administrator; Chambers (1997) and Jackson (1997), who each used national surveys to gather information about costs incurred by libraries for ILL; Sweetland and Weingand (1990), who looked at the effect a newly implemented lending fee had on borrowing requests at a historical society library; Alexander (1985), Stuart-Stubbs and Richardson (1984) and Linford (1977), who discussed issues associated with passing ILL borrowing costs to their patrons, as well as Murphy and Lin (1996), who explored patrons' willingness to pay these costs; and Jackson (1993), Budd, Zink and Voyles (1991), Watson (1978) and Line (1976), all of whom explored the desirability of creating more uniform systems of charging for ILL lending. However, a review of the literature finds no study which examines changes in lending fees at specific libraries published since Cine's article appeared in 1987. This study attempts to address this gap by reporting on lending fees at thirty libraries in the southeastern United States and examining changes in those fees since 1995.

METHODOLOGY

All libraries selected were required to be interlibrary loan suppliers who were members of SOLINET, the Southeast regional OCLC provider, in 2008 (SOLINET, 2008). (Note that SOLINET merged with PALINET on April 1, 2009 to form Lyrasis.) In addition, each library's institution had to be accredited by, and in good standing with, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Only libraries from public institutions ranked at Level 4 or above (Commission on Colleges [CoC], 2007) were considered. Institutions were divided by size according to their Integrated Postsecondary Education Data (IPEDS) statistics (Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2008) into three groups: Large (15,000 or more enrolled students), Medium (between 4,000 and 15,000 enrolled students) and Small (4,000 or fewer enrolled students). Institutions in the Large category were also required to be members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL, 2008b). Once ten institutions in each size category were selected, the OCLC policies directory was consulted (Online, 2008) to determine what, if anything, the library at each institution charged for lending. For clarity, the OCLC symbols of these libraries are listed in Table 1. When no details on charges were available in the online directory, the libraries' interlibrary loan units were contacted by phone to determine lending rates. Lending charges for selected libraries in 1995 were determined by consulting the 5th edition of the *Interlibrary Loan Policies Directory* (Morris, 1995).

The 5th edition of the *Policies Directory* was selected because using 1995 as the base year continued the approximate ten year intervals established by Cline. Charges for both 2008 and 1995 were then broken out by the price a library charged to loan a book and its charge to deliver a ten page journal article. For purposes of this study, it is assumed the requesting library is part of an out-of-state public institution of higher education with no reciprocal agreement with the lender. Additional charges, such as fees for rush requests, were not considered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are presented in Table 2. In 2008, every library in the Large group charges lending fees for books and articles. The average costs from this group are $14.20 for a book and $13.70 for an article. Across institutions, these fees are fairly uniform. Other than Louisiana State University, each Large library charges the same amount for books as it does for articles. And only the University of North Carolina and the University of Virginia charge an amount other than $10.00 or $15.00 for either. For the most part, these fees have risen significantly since 1995. The cost to borrow a book from the University of Alabama, for example, has risen 233% in that time. Also during this period, the cost to obtain an article from the University of North Carolina has gone up 200%, while the cost for an article from the University of Virginia is up 495%. Meanwhile, the University of Tennessee has moved from a "charge as charged" model, where they would charge what a requesting library would charge them, for books in 1995 to a flat fee of $10.00 in 2008. All of these changes could provide multiple benefits to the lending libraries. For example, staff time formerly spent ascertaining what to charge borrowers for loans is saved with a flat rate, while the relatively high fees serve both to generate revenue and provide a greater deterrent to those who cannot or will not pay for these services.

In the Medium group, only two out of ten libraries regularly charge lending fees for books, while seven out of ten regularly do so for articles. Seven of these libraries charge nothing for books and two charge nothing for articles. One library, Jackson State University, uses the "charge as charged" model. For those libraries where cost can be determined, the average fees from this group are $2.22 for a book and $7.17 for an article. The average fee for books is 84% less than that charged by the libraries in the Large group, while the average fee for articles is 48% cheaper. Article fees for the Medium group run from a low of $1.50 at Jacksonville State University, which charges by the page, to a high of $20.00 at the University of West Florida, which charges a flat rate that is higher than that charged by all but one library from the Large group. Where a rate of increase can be determined, fees have not risen as uniformly in the Medium group as they have in the Large group. For example, since 1995, the cost for an article from the University of West Florida has increased 567%, while the cost for an article from Morehead State University has remained the same.

In the Small group, only three out of ten libraries regularly charge for books, while four out of ten regularly charge for articles. Five libraries charge nothing for books and four libraries charge nothing for articles. Two libraries, Alcorn State University and The Citadel, use the "charge as charged" model. The average costs for this group, for those libraries where pricing can be determined, are $4.13 for a book and $4.56 for an article. The average fee for books is 71% less than that charged by the libraries in the Large group and 86% more than that charged by the libraries in the Medium Group. The average fee for articles is 67% less than that charged by libraries in the Large group and 36% less than that charged by libraries in the Medium group. However, it should be noted that in 2008, only three of the seven non-medical libraries from this group charge any fees at all. These three medical libraries all charge $11.00 for books and articles, an amount and a homogeneousness more similar to the fees charged by those libraries in the Large group. In addition, since 1995, the fees charged by the medical libraries have risen markedly, though at a pace closer to the rate of inflation. The Medical University of South Carolina, for example, has raised its fees on both books and articles 57%, while the Medical College of Georgia has raised its fee on books 38%. The similarities in the kinds of fees charged by the medical libraries to the fees charged by libraries in the Large group are likely related to the kinds of materials held by these highly specialized libraries, which may give them an added incentive to discourage borrowing from those outside of their reciprocal arrangements .

Table 3 shows the total number of items loaned by the ARL libraries in the Large group in 2006-2007 and in 1994-1995 (similar statistics were not available for the libraries in the Medium and Small groups). Six of ten libraries show a decrease in lending in 2006-2007 when compared to 1994-1995, with an average decrease in items loaned of 22%. Four libraries show an increase for this same period, with an average increase in items loaned of 44%. Thus, unlike Cline's (1987) findings for the period between 1975 and 1984, but like Sweetland and Weingand's (1990) findings for the period between 1984 and 1985, there appears to be no direct correlation between an increase in lending fees and a drop in the number of items loaned for these specific libraries for the period between 1995 and 2007. While the University of Alabama, for example, which has raised its lending fees on books by 233% and its fees on articles by 300% during this period, reported a 23% drop in their lending, the University of Georgia, which has raised its fees on books from $0 to $15.00 and raised its fees on articles by 173%, reported a 31% increase in the number of items loaned. Note, however, that four of the libraries in this group: Georgia Tech, Louisiana State University, University of South Carolina and University of Tennessee, also participate in RapidILL, a system designed to allow expedited article requesting and delivery via ILL among participating libraries. It is quite probable that libraries taking part in RapidILL would see an increase in their total number of loan requests. That said, based on the available data, it does seem clear that increasing one's lending fees does not necessarily lead to a decrease in the number of items loaned.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE SUDY

Early in 2009, the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) released a statement on the current economic crisis which stated, in part:

> We expect significant and widespread cuts in budget levels for libraries and consortia: reductions unlike the sporadic or regional episodes experienced from year to year, with real and permanent reductions to base budgets. It may not be uncommon for library and consortia budgets to decline by double digits year over year…These cuts will be prolonged. The public and education sectors will likely lag in funding recovery. Once funding is withdrawn over multiple years, it will be years before budgets climb back toward pre-crisis levels. (2009)

Libraries have been struggling with budget pressures for as long as most people can remember. And far too many are familiar with the sometimes annual process of having to participate in a serials cancellation project. But there are some signs that the current situation may be worse than anything previously encountered. In their FAQ outlining the need to cut $650,000 worth of journal subscriptions from its 2008-2009 budget, the Oregon State University Libraries acknowledge, “that we will continue to confront a loss of purchasing power in the next biennium and beyond” (2008). A bleak economic outlook coupled with even moderate annual inflation on continuing resources, combined with the fact that many libraries have exhausted standard strategies (e.g., eliminating duplicate or multi-format journal subscriptions, reducing the number of monographs purchased, utilizing one-time funds) for trying to stretch their materials budgets, means that we could be facing several years in which libraries of all sizes are forced to adopt more drastic measures to cut back on collections spending. As fewer libraries own a needed item, it is likely that more and more borrowers will need to depend on ILL lenders outside of their current reciprocal arrangements. In this climate, lending fees, like all expenses, deserve close scrutiny.

While this study did not find a direct relationship between an increase in lending fees and a drop in lending, there are some limitations to acknowledge. It is not possible to know from these data when, precisely, during this period changes were made to these libraries' fee policies. Nor can the reason for the changes in these policies be determined. Future studies could explore the specific circumstances under which the determination to raise ILL fees are made. Also, since this study did not gather information on number of items lent over time for the libraries in the small and medium groups, a future study could gather these data to fill in this gap. In addition, a future study could focus on different types of libraries, such as public, private academic or special. Finally, a future study could draw a larger sample size by on focusing on another region (or regions) of the U.S. or abroad.

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Table 1
OCLC symbols of libraries selected

Institution	OCLC symbol		OCLC symbol
Univ. of Alabama	ALM	Medical College of Georgia	GXM
Albany State Univ.	ALQ	Medical Univ. of South Carolina	SMC
Alcorn State Univ.	MLU	Univ. of Mississippi Medical Center	MRM
The Citadel	SCN	Univ. of Montevallo	AMN
Fayetteville State Univ.	NFS	Morehead State Univ.	KMM
Univ. of Florida	FUG	Univ. of North Alabama	ANO
Univ. of Georgia	GUA	Univ. of North Carolina	NOC
Georgia College & State Univ.	GGC	Univ. of South Carolina	SUC
Georgia Southwestern State Univ.	GHA	South Carolina State Univ.	SGW
Georgia Tech	GAT	Univ. of Tennessee	TKN
Jackson State Univ.	MJU	Tennessee Technological Univ.	TTU
Jacksonville State Univ.	AJB	Univ. of Virginia	VA@
Univ. of Kentucky	KUK	Univ. of West Alabama	ALT
Kentucky State Univ.	KYS	Univ. of West Florida	FWA
Louisiana State Univ.	LUU	Western Carolina Univ.	NMW

Table 2

Charges for lending in selected libraries in 2008 and 1995

Institution	Charges in 2008†		Charges in 1995	
	Book	Article	Book	Article
Large				
Univ. of Alabama	$10.00 (233%)	$10.00 (300%)	$3.00	$2.50
Univ. of Florida	$15.00	$15.00	N/L	N/L
Univ. of Georgia	$15.00	$15.00 (173%)	$0.00	$5.50
Georgia Tech	$10.00	$10.00	$0.00	$0.00
Univ. of Kentucky	$15.00	$15.00	N/L	N/L
Louisiana State Univ.	$15.00 (50%)	$10.00 (67%)	$10.00	$6.00
Univ. of North Carolina	$12.00	$12.00 (200%)	$0.00	$4.00
Univ. of South Carolina	$15.00 (114%)	$15.00 (114%)	$7.00	$7.00
Univ. of Tennessee	$10.00	$10.00	*	N/A
Univ. of Virginia	$25.00	$25.00 (495%)	$0.00	$4.20
Medium				
Fayetteville State Univ.	$0.00	$0.00	N/L	N/L
Georgia College & State Univ.	$10.00	$10.00	N/L	N/L
Jackson State Univ.	*	*	N/L	N/L
Jacksonville State Univ.	$0.00	$1.50 (-40%)	$0.00	$2.50
Morehead State Univ.	$0.00	$8.00 (0%)	$0.00	$8.00
Univ. of North Alabama	$0.00	$5.00 (22%)	$0.00	$4.10
South Carolina State Univ.	$0.00	$0.00	N/L	N/L
Tennessee Technological Univ.	$0.00	$10.00	N/L	N/L
Univ. of West Florida	$0.00	$20.00 (567%)	$0.00	$3.00
Western Carolina Univ.	$10.00	$10.00 (400%)	$0.00	$2.00
Small				
Albany State Univ.	$0.00	$0.00	N/L	N/L
Alcorn State Univ.	*	*	N/L	N/L

The Citadel	*	*	$0.00	$4.00
Georgia Southwestern State Univ.	$0.00	$0.00	N/L	N/L
Kentucky State Univ.	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Medical College of Georgia	$11.00 (38%)	$11.00	$8.00	$0.00
Medical Univ. of South Carolina	$11.00 (57%)	$11.00 (57%)	$7.00	$7.00
Univ. of Mississippi Medical Center	$11.00	$11.00 (22%)	$0.00	$9.00
Univ. of Montevallo	$0.00	$0.00	N/L	N/L
Univ. of West Alabama	$0.00	$3.50	N/L	N/L

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†Percentage change since 1995 in parenthesis, where applicable. Note that the consumer price index rose 41% during this period (i.e., $1.00 in 1995 has the same buying power as $1.41 in 2008).
* = Charges what borrowing library would charge, N/A = Service not available, N/L = Not listed

Table 3

Total number of items loaned in selected ARL libraries in 2006-2007 and 1994-1995

Institution	Number of items loaned in 2006-2007	Number of items loaned in 1994-1995
Univ. of Alabama	11,332	14,749
Univ. of Florida	43,860	61,965
Univ. of Georgia	45,237	34,544
Georgia Tech	10,275	11,967
Univ. of Kentucky	30,282	33,782
Louisiana State Univ.	7,496	13,345
Univ. of North Carolina	54,913	45,312
Univ. of South Carolina	19,481	14,659
Univ. of Tennessee	36,920	19,233
Univ. of Virginia	41,950	46,276

Source: *ARL Statistics* (2008,1996)