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### Local Connections to Global Collections: The Power of Interlibrary Loan Services

Beth Posner  
*CUNY Graduate Center*

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## **Local Connections to Global Collections: The Power of Interlibrary Loan Services**

### ***Introduction: Doing Good by Doing “ILL”***

*I remember the joy as a small child...of the interlibrary loan. I'd wanted to read a W.S. Gilbert play, and they didn't have the plays of W.S. Gilbert, and the librarian explained to me they could do an interlibrary loan...And the amount of power was so exciting. And after that I started doing interlibrary loans all the time, because—it was like nothing could stop me.*

Neil Gaiman

Surely, the legendary libraries of history (e.g., the Library of Alexandria) and literature (e.g., Borges' Library of Babel) represent compelling symbols of unlimited access to global information, as does the Internet. However, in reality, neither the Internet, nor any great library, encompasses a truly universal collection. Still, it is in order to meet the needs and expectations of contemporary library users, attract more of them, and preserve information for the future, that librarians collect, organize and facilitate access to information no matter its origin or format, or source - be it another library, bookseller, publisher, database vendor, or author. They maintain their stacks, and they continue to buy material through collection development policies and patron driven acquisitions. They also license access to full text databases, and when information – print, digital, domestic or international - is unavailable locally, they borrow it from other libraries, through what is variously called library resource sharing, interloan, document supply interlibrary loan, or more easily, but a bit unfortunately, “ILL” services. (Neal, et. al., 2011)

Librarians are using innovative technology and rethinking policies and procedures to provide increasingly efficient, effective and global services. Sharing information across time, space, and other boundaries is not magic though. It requires time, money and negotiation, and always has. The labor-intensive work of ILL librarians and staff members helps innumerable people to actualize the promise, premise and potential of libraries and librarians as they open up the world and expand people's horizons and opportunities. This benefits lending librarians, by demonstrating the continued value of their collections. Borrowing librarians who provide ILL as a core service can meet many

more of the information needs of their patrons. And, ILL users, as well as society as a whole, also clearly benefit from access to more information, as they learn from posterity and contribute to the world and its future.

In today's global society, information needs are also global, and opening up the world is a particularly descriptive metaphor for what ILL librarians do. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) states that borrowing material from, and sharing holdings with, libraries in other countries, is "a valuable and necessary part of the interlibrary loan process" and in order for libraries to achieve this, "each country has a special responsibility to supply its own national imprints to libraries in other countries." (IFLA, 2009, <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/docdel/documents/international-lending-en.pdf>) Academic librarians help advanced students, faculty and researchers collaborating with contemporary scholars in their field and undergraduates enrolled at universities in other countries. Public librarians work with immigrants and second language learners and speakers. Businesses are multinational, as is medical research. With information now so easily discoverable online, librarians working to support the local communities they directly serve – and who they need support from – are pressed to provide access to global information, regardless of provenance or geography. (Simon, 2013) And, as user expectations and demand grows, librarians can also more successfully campaign for the resources that are essential if libraries are to transcend the barriers to and costs of providing both domestic and international ILLs.

The same diversity that defines the contemporary world and enlivens and enlightens us all as global citizens also creates challenges for information access. ILL librarians, today, negotiate a variety of national, cultural, legal, technological and economic boundaries in order to connect people and information. They decipher citations with misspellings or idiosyncratic transliterations. They track down holdings in online catalogs or via emails with other helpful librarians in the relevant country's national, special and research libraries. They arrange loans, payments, shipping, and enforce user requirements, transcending time and space, all in order to successfully connect people and information.

Thus, their work reflects the interconnectness and interdependence of the world, as well as strengthens it. Certainly, some people remain solely interested in no more than what is readily available on the Internet, or their local library's shelves. However, if we are serious about strengthening the global community, then we must share information globally, accept different ways of seeing and understanding the world, and humble ourselves before the vastness and variousness of the world's knowledge. If the education of global citizens is important to society, then global libraries, which in turn require global librarians, are clearly valuable and worthy of support.

By cultivating the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to successfully operate on a global scale, and striving towards the vision of ever increasing – or, ideally, universal - access, ILL librarians are truly “global librarians.” By sharing material with international, as well local, regional, and national partners, they are “librarians without borders.” And, by serving as a bridge - whether to distant library collections, online information, or other services within their own libraries - ILL departments connect their local community to the wider world of information and its potential power.

### ***International ILL: Providing Access to Global Information***

*The knowledge of different literatures frees one from the tyranny of a few.*  
José Martí

The precise number of international ILL transactions is difficult to determine. Much of it is done on an ad hoc basis, rather than through one integrated system. OCLC, the largest library cooperative in the world, facilitates over nine million ILL transactions annually, but most of these are domestic loans. Still, the potential of international ILL is evident. OCLC now has 72,000 library members, from 170 countries and territories. (<http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/statistics/default.htm>) Although English is the single most represented language, 60 percent of their WorldCat database's holdings are non-English (<http://www.oclc.org/news/publications/annualreports/2012/2012.pdf>)

encompassing over 470 languages.

(<http://www.oclc.org/US/EN/worldcat/catalog/default.htm>) In addition, fifty percent of the British Library's document supply service customers are based abroad.

(<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/atyourdesk/docsupply/about/ourcustomers/index.html>)

International ILL services are also a main topic of interest in library journals, such as *Interlending and Document Supply*. IFLA sponsors biennial Interlending and Document Supply Conferences (<http://www.ifla.org/events/12th-interlending-and-document-supply-conference>) and their Document Delivery and Resource Sharing Section holds programs at IFLA World Congresses.

(<http://conference.ifla.org/ifla79/calls-for-papers/strengthening-access-to-information-the-future-of-resource-sharing>) The Rethinking Resource Sharing Initiative is another group working to improve ILL services in all types of libraries all around the world (<http://www.rethinkingresourcesharing.org>), as is the International ILL committee of the American Library Association's RUSA STARS section. (<http://www.ala.org/rusa/contact/rosters/stars/rus-stainter>)

Despite many longstanding barriers of time, space, technology, law, etc., the mutual respect, cooperation, technological innovations, and policy and procedural improvements of librarians working together enables the success and efficiency of both domestic and international ILL, today. However, equally enduring concerns about preservation, safety and local access also remain as barriers to increased sharing of information among libraries and their patrons. One of the earliest stories of international ILL also provides one of the earliest examples of sharing gone wrong. In a transaction that has created quite a lingering negative precedent, Egyptian king Ptolemy III, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., borrowed the collected works of Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus from the Athenians. However, only copies were returned, the originals being kept for the Great Library of Alexandria; while he lost his hefty deposit, the broader effects and concerns of this transaction for

international ILL linger even today.

(<http://www.attalus.org/translate/extracts.html>)

In fact, for much of history, libraries and librarians focused primarily on preservation, providing only onsite access to those they directly served. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, along with the general professionalization of librarianship, the importance - and challenges - of sharing information resources among libraries was recognized. Among other things, this led to the creation of IFLA, in 1927. IFLA, in turn, created regulations governing international ILL, in 1936. Although much of this activity was halted because of World War II, in 1959 delegates accepted “International Resource Sharing and Document Delivery: Principles and Guidelines for Procedure” in order to rationalize the process and address concerns. (Miguel, 2007) These guidelines, last updated in 2009, continue to inform international ILL practice today. (<http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/docdel/documents/international-lending-en.pdf>)

Many surveys have identified forces that continue to complicate and limit access to international information. (Atkins, 2010; Massie, 2000; Bradford, 2008; Baich, Zou, Weltin, and Yang, 2009; <http://www.ala.org/rusa/sites/ala.org.rusa/files/content/sections/stars/section/internationalill/2011ExecutiveSummary.pdf>; <http://publications.arl.org/rli275/2.2011>) Variations in professional attitudes and cultural norms, high costs of digitization, staff, and shipping, and language barriers can all make discovering, requesting, filling and communicating difficult. (Bradbury & Cornish, 1992; Seal, 2002; Street, 2003; Gatenby & Goldner, 2005) On the other hand, online searching makes the discovery of international information easier, demand is growing, and safe physical and quick electronic delivery of information is now possible. Many libraries around the world have online websites with contact information, online catalogs and even mirror websites in English. Fears of loss, damage, or long loan periods associated with physical delivery have lessened with the tracking, insurance and express services now available and the ease of verifying addresses online or

with a quick email. Translation services, of varying quality, exist, as do software programs that can recognize different language characters.

So, ILL librarians are increasingly asked to do international ILLs, and are becoming increasingly conversant with overcoming the challenges and complexities involved in tracking down holdings and arranging for loans as they do them. (Bruno, 2010; Weible & Janke, 2011) There is a recognition that international interlibrary loan can benefit from proven and established best practices in domestic library resource sharing. (Neal, et. al., 2011) For instance, ILL librarians are already trained to be aware of, respectful, and sensitive to, the rules and conditions of the other libraries that they work with, so they are primed to be culturally sensitive to issues of language or procedural differences. Cultural differences can exist in everything from the ideal of open access to information, to the practicalities of mail delivery, to understandings of time itself. The effort of negotiating barriers and coming to mutually acceptable terms with all stakeholders is undeniable. Creativity, responsibility, and considered optimism in the face of real obstacles are required. However, by meeting the challenges of doing international ILL, both lending and borrowing librarians can successfully serve appreciative patrons, while enjoying and benefiting from the collegiality of an international network of supportive partners.

Technology has made the greatest difference in the ability of librarians to break down traditional barriers of both time and space, as they can now share digital copies of information electronically when copyright and contract law permit. Globalization, along with technology, has also heightened expectations of 24-7 service; conveniently, the time differences between the US and Australia mean that service can be provided around the clock. Many libraries also now use the technology of OCLC's WorldCat system, which offers an automated, unmediated, integrated system for requesting, tracking, paying and otherwise managing their transactions. However, there are also many libraries that are not OCLC members, or do not use them for ILLs, or do not use their

payment system, and there is a lack of interoperability with OCLC and among the many other systems that they do use.

Cost remains another major issue. There is a dangerous, and incorrect, perception that all information is online, or will be soon, so the money used to support ILL, or even libraries, would be better used for other purposes. One example of the serious ramifications of cost concerns can be seen in a recent decision by Canada's national library, the Library and Archives Canada. As of November 13, 2012, and despite controversy and continued protests (<http://www.savelibraryarchives.ca/>), they have completely stopped providing international loans.

(<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/ill/index-e.html>) This offers a cautionary tale about how international ILL is – or is not - valued and supported. National libraries are an essential part of international ILL, and in fact the more libraries of any size that participate, the better the system will work, so while efficiencies and improvements must be continually instituted service cuts in all libraries, from the largest to the smallest, must be continually resisted.

Still, whether physically transporting items through the mail, or digitally transmitting them, international ILL, like domestic ILL, has costs that must be absorbed or recouped by libraries in order to continue participating. Ad hoc arrangements, in particular, add to staff costs. However, costs can be managed through reciprocal arrangements or charging necessary and reasonable processing fees. OCLC offers "IFM", a fee system that adds credits and subtracts debits on a library's OCLC bill as they lend and borrow. (<https://www.oclc.org/resource-sharing/features/feemanagement.en.html>) There are also IFLA vouchers (<http://www.ifla.org/voucher-scheme>). Librarians can purchase these in their own currency and then trade them for loans and copies of library material. (Gould & Cornish, 1996) Some international libraries accept credit cards, although not all ILL departments have access to one. Larger libraries, or specialized ones, can sign reciprocal agreements so that they do not charge each other at all. For some libraries, invoicing and payment in foreign currencies are required, and some – e.g.



Bibliothèque Nationale de France – offer reproduction services directly to patrons, rather than only traditional library-to-library transactions.

Beyond attitudes, knowledge and skills, librarians today must also focus on legal issues that restrict the sharing of information. (Davidson, 2009) These can include government censorship that makes people unwilling to make certain requests, or even scholarly embargos where information is kept from people in certain nations. However, even when there are willing patrons, borrowing librarians and lenders, and the physical or digital transfer of the material is possible, there are legal issues to deal with. In fact, these can threaten the very existence of library resource sharing through the acceptance of full text database licenses, contracts and copyright laws that limit the rights of librarians to share information.

The copyright laws of one's own country, as well as others, regulate the sharing of both print and digital material. Exceptions for educational and research purposes, such as fair use or fair dealing (in the US and Canada, respectively) need to be accepted more broadly, liberally and widely by all nations.

(<http://copyright.columbia.edu/copyright/special-topics/international-copyright/>)

There are also relevant international treaties, such as those of WIPO (the World Intellectual Property Organization, <http://www.wipo.int/portal/index.html.en>) and the Berne Convention.

([http://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/berne/trtdocs\\_wo001.html](http://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/berne/trtdocs_wo001.html)) There are also customs requirements (forms and fees) for goods shipped over national borders, even though there is no direct commercial value to libraries that share information for the use of students or scholars. (Public or special libraries that serve business information needs and charge fees for copyrighted information do operate under different contract terms and areas of copyright law.) Contract law takes precedence over copyright law when libraries sign limiting license agreements with publishers for access to electronic resources. With the rise of digital information, publishers are increasingly licensing information to libraries, for the use of their patrons, rather than selling it to them. This has broad implications for the preservation, as well as

for the sharing, of information, both of which libraries exist to do, and have long done, with profoundly positive results. Some licenses dictate different rules for sharing within a country versus internationally. Others restrict ILL completely, or require unduly cumbersome procedures, like printing, rather than using electronic transmission.

However, continued education and advocacy, working through consortia, professional associations, and license-by-license can have positive results. Publishers depend on library purchases and must negotiate terms with them, so librarians must demand rights to share digital information, within copyright guidelines, as they have always done in the print world. This applies to both e-journal articles, as well as portions of e-books, although technical provisions for the time limited sharing of e-books is more complicated. Many licenses already do cover international ILL, but standard practices and license language would ensure this and simplify understanding of both rights and limits. (Neal, et. al., 2011) ILL librarians generally do not directly negotiate contracts, so they need to work with those that do to affirm the right to lend and borrow both print and digital information, internationally, as well as domestically. (Mueller, 2008) They also need to advocate for more liberal copyright laws in order to encourage the sharing of information that properly attributes and rewards knowledge producers, while also encouraging the continued production of even more information and knowledge.

These challenges also represent opportunities for librarians who want to make positive changes. While they will not immediately or always succeed, if nothing else, their efforts send an inspirational message about how librarians are working to help people navigate and access the wide world of information, ideas and knowledge. Libraries and their ILL departments still offer one of the best ways to access information; the only way to access some, and often the least expensive, if not the only way, to access other information. This is why ILL librarians continue to break down boundaries, be they geographical, functional, or ones of policy restrictions.

## ***Conclusion: Providing Global Library Service to Local Patrons***

*It is a very sad thing that nowadays there is so little useless information.*

*Oscar Wilde*

The ILL system is a holistic one, based on reciprocity, trust and service. It works precisely because of librarians who are motivated and willing to responsibly and effectively participate as both borrowers and lenders. One could even argue that the norms, values and terms of international ILL represent a healthy model for globalization, itself. A similar holistic – or global – outlook serves as the impulse for ILL librarians to act as a conduit between patrons and other library services. When fully staffed and well trained, they can – and do - connect people and information by offering integrated library assistance, in addition to helping them access locally unavailable information. (Egan, 2007; Johnson et. al, 2011; Ta- Moore & Manino, 2012)

For instance, when someone makes an ILL request for something that *is* available locally, or freely available online, ILL staff can teach patrons how to find it at their point of need, when they are especially receptive to learning. This helps people get information more quickly, while also learning how to better navigate library and other information sources. They can come to see just what it is that libraries are paying for as well as why open access (OA) publishing makes sense for authors who want to share information. ILL staff can also determine when it is preferable – quicker or less expensive - to buy something, rather than to borrow it. This, too, gives people quicker access to information, while also enabling libraries to save money and build useful collections. ILL staff can identify catalog and serials holdings errors, so that people will discover what really is available. They can work with special collections departments to fast track the digitization of requested material (if it is within copyright regulations and can be digitized.) They can educate both authors and the public, as they advocate for open access publishing, institutional repositories, creative commons licensing, copyright laws, licensing/contract

language and terms, and other initiatives that support the rights of libraries to share - and of people to freely access and use - information.

Even when an interlibrary loan request cannot be fulfilled, ILL librarians and staff members who explain why not are educating people about issues like copyright, publisher restrictions and the real costs of information. They can help further by referring them to other libraries or their own reference colleagues, or following up themselves with instructions on how to use local resources to find alternative sources. While many international requests remain difficult, or impossible, to fill, this is not inevitable. Librarians, with appropriate support, would much prefer to satisfy all information needs. While the mere existence of ILL departments can serve as an inspirational symbol of unlimited access to information, it is how well they are supported and whether their policies and procedures encourage – or discourage - patrons requests for ILLs that really defines their value. Libraries can limit patrons to a small number of requests, they can charge fees, they can refuse renewals of books, they can choose to not even try to facilitate international ILLS; or, they can do much more in terms both service and access.

Neither the world of information, nor the human desire for it, has a limit, although it is important to remember that a commitment to universal and open information access is not, itself, universal. Still, IFLA's international ILL Guidelines do include the "universal availability of published material" as an ideal (IFLA, 2009, <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/docdel/documents/international-lending-en.pdf>), and global librarians, curious and interested in the world, are inspired by a vision of information access that supports individuals and cultures and real progress for all. To those who do believe that everyone has an equal right to knowledge, learning and self-development, information is a common good, like clean air. It is the fuel required to solve global problems and to improve life for everyone. Solutions can come from anywhere, so librarians who help provide information access empower everyone to contribute. Of course, there remains information scarcity for billions of people who have neither reliable, affordable library, nor Internet, access. When

there is a cost to information, choices must be made. However, those for whom the ideal of full egalitarian access is seen as crucial in a global society, the hoarding of knowledge or privileging of access is not the way forward.

Thus, the needs that ILL librarians meet are inspiring and poetic, and the volume and breadth of transactions they facilitate is impressive. Of course, ILL is as practical a library service, as any, with the mechanics of keeping track of each transaction admittedly prosaic – sometimes, even plodding. However, those ILL staff members and librarians who consider each request to borrow or lend a book or article as a mission of direct benefit to individuals - and by extension to our global society - will be those most satisfied by their work. Those people who believe that they can access any information, from anywhere, will be those most empowered and inspired to do great things. Therefore, for people craving local, customizable and personal service in an increasingly globalized and technological world, it is not overstating the case to say that access to well-supported global ILL services is essential.

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