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# Traditional and Innovative Interlibrary Loan Services for Twenty-first Century Graduate Students

Beth Posner  
*CUNY Graduate Center*

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## CHAPTER 22

# TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATIVE INTERLIBRARY LOAN SERVICES FOR TWENTY-FIRST- CENTURY GRADUATE STUDENTS

*Beth Posner*

The information needs of master's degree students are far ranging, by design, and those of doctoral students are unique, by definition. Yet, no library can afford to purchase or license access to all of the information that all of its library users, especially its graduate students, may need; even the largest academic research library collections are inevitably incomplete. This is why librarians provide interlibrary loan (ILL) services. At libraries that support ILL as a core service, traditional and innovative library resource sharing ensures greater equity and access by sharing information with those who need it. ILL specialists also contribute to the shared mission of all libraries, enabling more learning and knowledge creation by putting more library information to use.

The services that well-supported ILL departments provide are of great value to graduate students.<sup>1</sup> For example, through traditional ILL, librarians request and supply loans and copies of digital and physical material, helping library users who need to consult more print, digital, audiovisual, and other information resources than their local libraries can afford to collect. Library users make millions of interlibrary loan requests annually, for all manner of locally unavailable information. These resources may come from a partner down the road, or they may be available only from a library in another country. They range from recently published books and articles that are not yet available in many, or any, libraries to obscure, out-of-print but in-copyright works held only in libraries, to all the material that their own library simply does not own or license. This is why, not surprisingly, graduate students are among the foremost regular users of ILL.<sup>2</sup>

ILL services have a long and impressive history,<sup>3</sup> but more importantly, they remain necessary because both librarians and graduate students know that not everything is online and that a lot of material that is online is behind a publisher paywall. There is certainly more discovery of resources through online searching, and so the discovery of locally inaccessible information is becoming increasingly common; although discovery is of value, it can lead to frustration rather than empowerment. Some discovery systems, and some librarians, may choose to limit results to what is immediately available in order to counteract this challenge. However, the better solution is to improve delivery, facilitated by well-run and well-budgeted ILL departments. All librarians who applaud advances in discovery should also support advances in delivery.

In addition to facilitating traditional ILL requests, library resource-sharing specialists today also offer many other services that help graduate students.<sup>4</sup> For example, ILL staff can

- purchase materials from booksellers or publishers
- make requests directly from authors
- arrange for the digitization of special collection items for which they receive lending requests
- regularly identify books that are already available at their library or online resources from full-text library databases or open access sources.
- instruct library users about how to discover and access these directly
- advocate that their libraries join groups, such as the Center for Research Libraries, that purchase and share material
- join consortia with shared delivery services or shared circulation systems that make it easier to request and receive library resources
- support the information needs of both distance education students and graduate students enrolled in newly created programs in areas in which their library has not previously collected

- initiate an ILL request for a book that is checked out, often getting it more quickly than by recalling it from another local user, thus better serving both members of their community
- efficiently scan locally held print material for local users, just as they already do for users at other libraries, so that people do not have to spend time making copies

In addition, while searching for lending and borrowing requests, they can identify cataloging records and electronic holdings that need correction, as well as help with stacks maintenance, identifying missing books and materials that need preservation attention.

Graduate students value ILL services, not only because they have highly specialized research agendas, but also because they tend to have complicated, stressful, busy lives, often struggling to balance work and family with study and classes. Many doctoral candidates who are traveling for their research welcome electronic delivery of information to wherever they are working. Other graduate students may not be able to afford the time or money needed to travel to other libraries for material. Nonetheless, they are also highly motivated, determined to achieve academic success, and accustomed to instant and easy access to material, so they truly value the convenience of information delivery, whether online or to their library. ILL services also enable them to spend more time reading, writing, and learning, rather than collecting the information they need to do so.

Like all library users, graduate students may appreciate the convenience and value of ILL, as evidenced by the gratitude expressed to ILL specialists in person, by email, and in written acknowledgments, but they are generally unaware of its costs.<sup>5</sup> Although it is difficult to quantify precisely because there are so many variables and possible efficiencies, both traditional and innovative ILL services have costs; these include mailing, copyright fees, lending charges, ILL software, consortial memberships, staff training, and staff salaries. These costs, along with the limits of ILL budgets, mean that some ILL departments cannot offer all possible services or use the most efficient software or hire enough staff. Others may choose to limit ILL requesting to graduate students and faculty or restrict the number of requests that people can make at once. In many libraries, some restrictions are necessary. However, this may also simply be the way things have always been done. Instead, since these are choices, they should be conscious choices, especially when there are so many ways to provide increasingly efficient and cost-effective ILL service and when graduate students may truly benefit from ILL services.

ILL librarians, while trying to meet expectations for quick, if not immediate, information access, must also manage reactions when this is not possible. Some ILL requests still take time. ILL staff may be able to place requests quickly,

or, through workflow automation, immediately, but staff in other libraries may not be able to respond quickly, and physical mail services may cause delays. It is also the case that just as no library holds all information, ILL cannot fill all requests. ILL specialists encourage the rethinking of circulating policies so that any material requested for use can be lent, rather than needlessly remain on shelves for potential local use. Still, some material is noncirculating or unable to be shared for legitimate reasons, such as that it is in use, on reserve, too fragile to be copied, or under copyright restrictions and not legally eligible to be digitized. Librarians should also negotiate licenses that permit the sharing of e-resources and advocate for copyright laws that support ILL so that librarians can share more. And ILL specialists who regret having to cancel any ILL request can also refer graduate students to other libraries or librarians at their own library or elsewhere as a next step instead of just saying that a request cannot be filled.

Many of the graduate students of today will become the academic authors of tomorrow. ILL staff who help them access information also have an opportunity to teach them about the existing scholarly communication system, as well as the value of newer models of information sharing, such as open access publishing or depositing theses in institutional repositories. When ILL cannot provide access to recent articles because of publisher embargoes, or when a fellow graduate student has embargoed his or her work, graduate students may realize the value of making their own work accessible. ILL specialists can also help graduate students to develop a working understanding of fair use and author rights and of the differences among the variety of information resources that they will encounter, such as articles, monographs, reports, and so on.

Of course, well-supported ILL departments serve all library users, not just graduate students. It is no longer true that all, or even most, faculty have full-time appointments and the time to travel to other libraries or the funds to hire research assistants; many are adjuncts with limited resources. It is also no longer true that ILL is too slow to help undergraduates. With the latest software, well-trained staff, and consortial agreements, article and chapter requests can be electronically accessible in minutes or hours, rather than days, which can help even the undergraduate whose paper is due tomorrow. It also remains the case that graduate students generally have longer-term projects and can wait for their book requests to arrive even if it takes longer to receive what they need from another library.

Librarians are also aware that graduate students sometimes find alternatives to ILL. These include legitimate avenues such as open access publishing, institutional repositories, the Internet Archive, or author sharing sites. Given that publisher paywalls remain high and access to library databases remains complicated, students may share passwords with friends at other universities that have more online resources, or they may turn to other sources. They may

not be aware, however, of either the illegality or the security and privacy dangers of using certain internet sites.<sup>6</sup> A related privacy issue is that, while many appreciate the convenience of accessing a list of their requests, there are also librarians and library users who are concerned about the security of this information and would prefer that libraries not keep completed request histories, preferring, instead, to keep track of their own requests offline.<sup>7</sup>

ILL users appreciate all of the ILL staff who give every request the attention it deserves and requires. The appreciation that many graduate students have for ILL also helps to make them excellent additions to ILL staff. They are quick learners, and doctoral students may stay for several years, and, because they are appreciative ILL users, they are likely to be attentive to making it work smoothly and feel rewarded by the work. ILL staff can not only rely on their demand for information, but also should cultivate and call on their support when advocating for more resources to serve their specific needs, as well as those of the entire library community. Library resource-sharing specialists should also develop and market ILL services specifically to graduate students.

It should give librarians pause when a graduate student graduates without having used ILL; hopefully, he or she will not have chosen to do without needed information or spent more time than necessary to access information when there is a library resource-sharing system and ILL staff at libraries around the world who want to and can help. From the point of view of ILL, the variety of information needs that ILL specialists are challenged to meet is what keeps their jobs interesting, and the success they have in helping meet information needs is what keeps the work rewarding. Graduate students, eager for the information that libraries can provide, represent our hopes for a positive future fueled by knowledge, and by offering access to the world of library resources, ILL services represent the value of libraries and librarians.

## Notes

1. David Gibbs et al., "Assessing the Research Needs of Graduate Students at Georgetown University," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 38, no. 5 (September 2012): 268–76, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2012.07.002>.
2. Shane Nackerud et al., "Analyzing Demographics: Assessing Library Use Across the Institution," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 13, no. 2 (April 2013): 131–45, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2013.0017>.
3. Joseph Straw, "When the Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Development of Cooperative Service and Resource Sharing in Libraries: 1876–2002," *Reference Librarian*, no. 83/84 (2003): 263–76, [https://doi.org/10.1300/J120v40n83\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1300/J120v40n83_21).
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5. Micquel Little and Lars Leon, "Assessing the Value of ILL to Our Users: A Comparative

- Study of Three US Libraries,” *Interlending and Document Supply* 43, no. 1 (2015): 34–40, <https://doi.org/10.1108/ILDS-10-2014-0051>.
6. Matthew B. Hoy, “Sci-Hub: What Librarians Should Know and Do about Article Piracy,” *Medical Reference Services Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (January–March 2017): 73–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02763869.2017.1259918>.
  7. Sam Thielman, “You Are Not What You Read: Librarians Purge User Data to Protect Privacy,” *Guardian*, January 12, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/13/us-library-records-purged-data-privacy>.

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