



Evidence Summary

Open Access Complements Interlibrary Loan Services, but Additional User Education is Needed

A Review of:

Baich, T. (2015). Open access: Help or hindrance to resource sharing? *Interlending & Document Supply*, 43(2), 68-75. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ILDS-01-2015-0003>

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Abstract

Objective – To examine interlibrary loan (ILL) request rates for open access (OA) materials and determine how OA may affect resource sharing. This research updates the author's previous study.

Design – Quantitative analysis.

Setting – A large, urban, public research university library system in the United States of America.

Subjects – 1,557 open access ILL material requests among 23,531 total ILL requests submitted during the 2012 and 2013 fiscal years (July 2011-June 2013).

Methods – The library has tracked and recorded OA requests that appear among ILL material requests since 2009. Using OCLC's ILLiad software to manage ILL requests, they have implemented two custom routines. One routine is for open access searching on standard items, and uses software plugins to search across various open resources. All materials published prior to 1923 are treated as being in the public domain, so requests for these materials are automatically routed to this queue. The second custom routine is used for searching for OA electronic theses and dissertations, and is employed when the requested resource is not found in the library's subscription resources. Other article requests are routed to the RapidILL service for open access availability.

Main Results – The research presented reveals that ILL requests for OA materials exhibited a steady increase year over year, while overall ILL requests decreased slightly. This finding is true both for the fiscal years reported in this study and also the years since the author's original study in 2011 (Baich, 2012). Of the 1,557 OA requests examined, 72% (n=1,135) were for journal articles, 8% (n=125) were for books or book chapters, 9% (n=140) were for theses or dissertations, 3% (n=54) were for conference papers, and 7% (n=105) were for reports.

Library staff typically fill these article requests using gold OA or green OA sources. The researcher notes the difficulty in refining by source, though confirmed that 15% of articles requested (n=170) were filled using a gold OA source, and that another 30 article requests (~2.6%) were filled with materials available in the public domain. This leads to the conclusion that the majority of article requests are filled using green OA sources. As the library also includes OA collections within its electronic resources, staff filled 13% of ILL article requests (n=152) using journals and repositories from these sources. Another 16% of article requests were filled using a combination of various online open repositories, including subject repositories (n=83), institutional repositories (n=84), or national or consortial repositories (n=16).

The author includes a similar breakdown of fulfillment rates and sources for the other main categories explored – books and book chapters, theses and dissertations, conference papers, and reports – representing a combined 27% of all OA ILL requests. Regarding this content, it is noteworthy that overall open access requests for these material categories has dropped across each category when compared to the author's previous study, with the exception of report requests, which more than doubled compared to that previous study.

The study includes a brief overview of the user status for users making the various open access requests, with undergraduate students (n=283) and graduate students (n=807) combined making 70% of all requests. Subject

areas are also briefly examined, with ILL requests coming from 63 different schools or departments across the library system. The top 15 are reported, with Psychology being the top requester (n=198), followed closely by Engineering & Technology (n=182). The author notes that 7 of the top 15 are STEM or health science disciplines.

Conclusion – The rate of ILL requests for OA materials shows that library users continue to struggle with information retrieval. The researcher concludes that in many cases, making an ILL request is easier for the user than completing a thorough search. Since staff resources are being redirected to fill user requests for materials that are readily available through open access, this use of staff time may have impacts on resource sharing and the library's ability to fill ILL requests. The author identifies benefits of using OA resources, including an increased ability of staff to fulfill ILL requests, especially when providing grey literature, theses and dissertations, and conference papers and reports. Another identified benefit was the decreased turnaround time for securing materials, with immediate availability via OA saving 1.15 days to deliver materials to the user. Finally, the library estimates cost savings of over \$27,000 (USD), based on estimated traditional per unit ILL costs.

Commentary

This research reinforces the need for additional user training around locating OA materials. In particular, the results reveal that information literacy education that includes the use of open access materials might be of particular use to undergraduate or graduate students, especially since the majority of OA ILL requests identified in this study came from those user groups. Keane (2012) revealed that while approximately 70% of surveyed academic librarians believe it is important to educate students about OA, nearly 60% of respondents indicated their institutions "do not do any promotion, much less education" around OA (p. 348). More recently, Allen and Weber (2014) identified the need for instruction librarians to teach open access

searching just as they teach traditional library search sources. The researcher does indicate that ILL practitioners may have a role to play in enhancing instruction efforts that improve user skills for finding OA materials.

Much of this report is dedicated to explaining operational considerations and workflow processes aligned for the library setting. This information might be significant for understanding project background, but does not contribute much to the overall discussion of the research. Moving beyond these sections reveals insights that make the study useful. Using Glynn's (2006) critical appraisal tool to test for validity, the use of a large, localized dataset is appropriate for this study's outcomes, as are the inclusion criteria and overall methods used. It is worth noting that the data collection relies on the library's vendor products and applications alongside locally customized ILL routines, potentially limiting the opportunity for other institutions to conduct similar research using their own ILL request data, at least not without some modification to the methods. The study is strengthened by the author's previous research, allowing for the use of a previously tested method and for an informed comparative analysis.

This research has implications for understanding and enhancing a library's ILL user services and overall customer service goals. Filling requests for OA materials using ILL staff may seem a misallocation of resources, but the opportunity to assist users with their information needs, and in a timely manner compared to traditional ILL, has a direct benefit for the user and indirectly may benefit the library's image as being helpful and user-focused. Until such time as users are knowledgeable about finding and accessing

OA materials, to the point where ILL requests for OA sources significantly decline, individual libraries can use this research to help determine whether the benefits to end-users outweigh the potential local resource impacts. There is opportunity for future and ongoing research to understand trends and developments regarding OA material ILL requests, user satisfaction, and budget and resource sharing, as well as room for research on improving user OA search skills and the resulting impact on ILL and document delivery services.

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