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Interlibrary Service Requests For Locally and Electronically Available Items: Patterns of Use, Users, and Canceled Requests

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Jessica R. Page and Jennifer Kuehn

abstract: As the use of the Ohio State University Libraries interlibrary services has increased, there have been more requests to borrow items that are already available to patrons locally, often in electronic format. Patterns relating to why patrons could not find locally available materials were identified in the record of canceled interlibrary requests for calendar year 2007. These requests originated more frequently from certain academic departments, occurred more often for articles than books, and were most common for items published one to six years earlier. These requests were also associated with problematic OpenURL links to publisher or content provider Web pages.

Beginning in 2006, the Ohio State University (OSU) Libraries expanded its document delivery services in stages in order to meet patrons' needs during the renovation and closure of the main library on campus. The OSU Libraries' free document delivery service uses ILLiad to provide our own users with scanned copies of materials that are held locally in print only. ILLiad is used for traditional borrowing services as well. The article express form within ILLiad is used for article requests that may be either scanned locally or obtained from elsewhere.

A long-standing problem with interlibrary services is that patrons often make requests for materials that are locally available, although OSU Libraries offers multiple ways to find known items: the catalog, the Serials Solutions A–Z list of online serials, and an OpenURL resolver. Interlibrary loan requests for journal articles that are locally available in print form are now simply fulfilled through document delivery; but requests for articles available electronically are canceled, and an e-mail notice is sent to

the patron stating that the article is available electronically and without charge. With electronic resources and our document delivery service, patrons may not seek out in-library help with finding journals. Some traditional reference assistance might now fall to the Interlibrary Services Department.

The intent of this study was to identify patterns within the record of canceled interlibrary requests that could indicate reasons why OSU Libraries' patrons request interlibrary services for documents that are already available to them. To do this, we first looked for patterns among groups of users, the items requested, and the citations used and then for patterns due to the relative ease of navigating searches and following links to the desired items. Identifying such patterns might suggest ways to change library instruction or to offer better materials to help patrons find the items they need.

Literature Review

The use of interlibrary borrowing and lending services by academic patrons is increasing. This is due, in part, to a change in the way patrons seek materials. Faculty and students today are more self-reliant in their research and use tools other than the library catalog that allow them to discover a greater number of items and newer items than past users would have been aware of.[1] The advent of electronic indexes and the integration of these indexes with library catalogs allow users to easily locate a greater number of items, including articles from periodicals that may not be in a particular library's collection.[2] Examples of these newer tools that expose patrons to titles that their own libraries may not hold include Open WorldCat, WorldCat Local, Google Scholar, and Google Books.[3] Even as user awareness of and demand for a broader range of materials has increased, the increasing costs of books and journal subscrip-

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tions coupled with stagnant or decreasing budgets have led libraries to place greater reliance on consortia and lending partners to fill patrons' needs.[4] Because of the strain this increased usage can put on the limited staff of interlibrary services departments, it is increasingly important for libraries to make interlibrary services as efficient and as easy to use as possible.

Reasons for Difficulty Locating Locally Held Items

There are several potential causes of difficulty for OSU library patrons in locating locally held items. These include difficulty using the catalog, navigating between various research databases and catalogs, and erroneous or missing links to catalog records for or electronic copies of locally held materials from OhioLINK's OpenURL resolver, OLinks. Further problems locating items arise when patrons rely on incomplete or inaccurate citations obtained from other individuals or even from published works.[5] Scott Seaman's

study of interlibrary loan requests made at OSU from 1988–89 showed that patron difficulty with the online catalog's structure and interface resulted in patrons being unable to find locally available items.[6]

It has been suggested that library patrons will take the path of least resistance when searching for library materials.[7] OSU's library users, like any others, when faced with an item that does not have a direct link from a database record to online content, might choose to click a single link to reach the interlibrary loan login form rather than undertaking the more laborious process of searching the catalog and/or Serials Solutions E-Journals list.

OLinks is the OhioLINK consortium's OpenURL resolver, which allows patrons at member institutions, including OSU, to connect directly from an online citation to full-text articles. If no electronic content is resolved, a link to make an ILL request is given, as well as catalog information on local holdings.[8] Although this system is a great boon to users and can save a tremendous amount of time, inconsistencies among and changes made by publishers and other content providers mean that OLinks does not always work consistently or in the way that users expect.[9] Links to the full text of articles held in OhioLINK's Electronic Journal Center are occasionally faulty, as are links to publishers' and content providers' Web sites. Furthermore, links to OSU's electronic full-text holdings do not always appear in the OLinks window, requiring users to click further to ascertain whether they can access the full-text article. In some cases, complicated print holding displays hide the link to OSU's catalog, requiring the user to scroll down within a sub-window, with the result that the only visible link is the one to interlibrary loan (see figure 1).

If online content is not found, an interlibrary loan option is offered that links from OLinks to ILLiad and populates the request form. As Karen Williams found, the existence of finding aids for full-text articles, such as the Serials Solutions E-Journal portal used by OSU, may not assist patrons in locating articles if they first encounter a link to interlibrary loan services rather than a link to the finding aid.[10]

Reasons for Cancellation of Interlibrary Requests

Tracking of canceled interlibrary loan requests at a number of institutions has shown that the reason for cancellation is often that the library already owns the item requested. In a study of the University of Florida's interlibrary loan system, Elaine Yontz, Priscilla Williams, and Jane Anne Carey reported that the most frequent reason for cancelling interlibrary loan requests (41 percent in 1998) was that the library owned the item.[11] A study conducted at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) Library of the Health Sciences over a three-month period in 2003, found that, among interlibrary loan requests that were canceled, 45 percent were canceled because the library owned a print copy of the item (including 4 percent canceled requests for items available at other UIC locations), and 20 percent were canceled because the item was available through an electronic subscription. This amounted to a total of 65 percent of the canceled interlibrary loan requests being canceled due to local availability.[12] An estimated 30 percent of interlibrary loan requests at the University of North Florida were canceled because they were locally available.[13]

Harrison, WD. "Reflective practice in social care." *Social service review*, v. 61 issue 3, 1987, p. 393.   OLinks ✎

Copies in your library:

Ohio State University has:

SUL-Sullivant Library: HV1S672 v.1(1927)-v.81(2007)
FILM
MANS-OSU Mansfield Lib.: Shelved by title.
v.60(1986)-v.79(2005)
OSU Book Depository: HV1S672 v.1(1927)-v.27(1953)
LibHas

Other information about this article:
  ISSN: 00377961
  Citation source: google

Save or print all citation information to assist in finding this
citation again in the future.

Get a copy via Interlibrary Loan

Find similar items at
[Electronic Journal Center ▾] [Go]

Format citation as:
[APA ▾] [Go]

Persistent link to this page

Figure 1.

     Yontz and collaborators found that 11 percent of patrons knew that the item they requested was locally available but chose to make an interlibrary loan request anyway, either to obtain the document in a preferred format or to avoid having to search the library's stacks.[14] Other patrons in this study were unable to locate the items they were looking for in the library catalog.

     In 2005, the Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis Library canceled 24 percent of its interlibrary loan requests because the materials requested were locally available. A survey of users whose requests were canceled showed that, in many cases, users were unaware of the need to search the library catalog (IUCAT) or were unaware of how to do so correctly. Sixteen percent of users believed they had made an error in searching IUCAT; 15 percent of the users responded that they were unaware of IUCAT; and 27 percent were unaware of the ability to search IUCAT for all holdings in the Indiana University system. When users were asked why they submitted their article request to interlibrary services, 50 percent responded that they had a problem searching IUCAT, 14 percent responded that interlibrary loan was the easiest option, 7 percent believed that their request was for document delivery service, and 5 percent had problems accessing electronic journals. Users commented that they found it inconvenient and time consuming to have to check the catalog and that choosing interlibrary loan saved them time and effort.[15]

Interlibrary Requests at the OSU Libraries

At the OSU Libraries, interlibrary data collected throughout the year 2007 show that many of the canceled interlibrary requests were for materials already available to patrons. Of the 33,979 total interlibrary requests (22,215 borrowing and 11,764 document delivery requests) that the OSU Libraries received in 2007, 20.5 percent were canceled.[16] Of those,

32 percent were canceled because they were held by the OSU Libraries or the OhioLINK consortium. Additionally, the most typical reason local document delivery requests were canceled (55 percent) was that there was already electronic access to material.

The expansion of document delivery at the OSU Libraries has made moot the issue of users knowingly requesting locally available items through interlibrary loan. Since June 2007, the libraries will scan and deliver articles from the paper collection for free. If an item is not available electronically in our own collection, we will get it and deliver it electronically; we do not make the patrons distinguish whether the item is locally available or must be requested from another institution. Requests for articles or chapters held locally in print are simply rolled over to the document delivery scanning work-flow. Books available locally or at an OhioLINK institution can be requested through the circulation system and delivered to faculty offices or student dorms. One of the first libraries to implement this type of free document delivery service was Texas A&M University Library.[17] Notably, many of OSU's Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) partners now also have similar free local document delivery services.

The intent of the current study was to identify patterns among patrons (including status and department), items, and search strategies that can cause patrons to have difficulty locating locally or electronically held items. Recognition of these patterns might contribute to new, targeted ideas for library instruction, both in the classroom setting and as tips and links on the OSU Libraries' Web pages.

Method

The current study was conducted using data compiled by the OSU Libraries' Department of Interlibrary Services for the year 2007.[18] The dataset included all interlibrary loan and document delivery transactions from all library users for the year and included the users' departments, locations, and status but no names or identifying numbers. Two analyses were made. First, to look at the patterns among users, item types, and citations, we reviewed a 10 percent sample of the 33,979 requests. A more targeted analysis comparing the patterns among searches was done using a subset of the larger dataset to begin to explore the kinds of problems users encountered.

Identification of Patterns Among Users, Items, and Citations

We wanted to determine whether there were patterns among users, item types, and citations that influence the frequency of interlibrary services requests for materials that are locally or electronically available. Data were analyzed using SPSS 16.0 statistical software. Frequency distributions were calculated for user status, user department, user location, item type, item publication year, and citation source both for the entire set of requests and within the subset of requests that were canceled due to local or electronic availability. Item publication years were grouped into six age ranges representing equal percentiles of the entire sample using visual binning in SPSS. The ranges of publication years were: 2006–2008, 2001–2005, 1995–2000, 1989–1994, 1976–1988, and 1975 and earlier. Because the "cited in" field was often filled out by hand by the patron, as opposed to being automatically populated by OLinks, it was necessary to group the information in this field into meaningful categories. The citation source field was coded into broad

categories: advertisement, bibliography, colleague or professor, database, Internet search, OSU catalog, other library catalog, Web site, and unclear.

The effects of user status, user department, user location, item type, item publication year, cited work, and citing database were tested for significance at the .05 level using chi-square tests. A random sample of approximately 10 percent of the records (N = 3,427) was selected for the test from the complete set of records (N = 33,979). Within this sample, those requests that were canceled due to local or electronic availability were compared to those requests completed or canceled for other reasons.

Reproduction of Searches and Identification of Patterns in Searches

In order to determine whether patterns in the ease of navigation and the status of links influenced the frequency of interlibrary requests for materials that were locally/electronically available, patron searches were reproduced, approximating the availability of the article from the original search. We searched each requested title and identified missing or confusing links, as well as errors in the system that could have contributed to an unnecessary interlibrary services request. Because identifying information about the specific articles requested was stripped from the records to maintain patron privacy, article titles and authors were not known. Therefore, our searches were based on the source publication and publication year.

Requests for which a database source was provided (which accounted for 55 percent of requests) were selected in SPSS to form a separate database for analysis. From this set of records, a subset of 36 of those requests that were canceled due to local or electronic availability were randomly selected in SPSS to be analyzed in detail. A set of 47 records representing requests that were not canceled due to local or electronic availability was randomly selected as a control group. The canceled request and control groups were compared to determine whether databases and journals with missing or erroneous links or difficult navigation were more likely to result in interlibrary requests for locally/electronically available items. The reproduced searches were coded according to the ease of navigation (number of clicks to the desired item from the citation via OLinks) and link status (presence or absence of and correctness of links).

The effects of ease of navigation and link status were tested for significance at the .05 level using chi-square tests. To determine the likelihood of a request being canceled due to local or electronic availability, this subset of requests was compared to those requests canceled for other reasons, and these were selected at random from the entire set of requests for which an electronic citation source was provided.

Results

Patterns Among Users, Items, and Citation Sources

Patterns in the frequency distributions of patron status, department, and location; item type and publication year; and type of citation source were similar between those requests canceled because of local or electronic availability and those canceled for other reasons or not canceled. Among these variables, patron department ($X^2 < 0.001$, df = 50, N = 3,427 cases with non-missing values) and item publication year ($X^2 = 0.007$, df = 5, N = 3,227 cases with non-missing values) had significant Pearson chi-square values.

Overall, 6.5 percent of the requests in the sample resulted in cancellation due to local or electronic availability. Because many departments were represented by very few requests within the sample (see table 1), those departments with the largest numbers of requests overall were analyzed further. The actual and expected counts for each department were compared, along with the difference between these counts (residual). Among the 10 departments from which the most interlibrary requests were received, the proportion of requests canceled due to local or electronic availability was lower than expected for history and slightly higher than expected for agriculture/FAES/extension (food, agricultural, and environmental sciences), anthropology, art/art history/art education, biological sciences, education, engineering, and English (see figure 2).

The majority, and a higher than expected number, of requests that were canceled due to local or electronic availability were items published recently—between 2001–2005 (see figure 3). Fewer requests than expected were canceled due to local or electronic availability that were for items published during the current or upcoming year (likely due to publisher embargoes) or prior to 2001 (see table 2).

Patterns in Searches

The sample of searches reproduced contained significantly more articles than loaned books that were canceled due to local or electronic availability ($X^2 < 0.001$, df = 1, $N = 79$), whereas the sample of requests canceled for other reasons contained more loaned books than articles. Missing links to the full-text item or its place in the OSU catalog were significantly more prevalent among those requests canceled due to local or electronic availability than for other reasons ($X^2 < 0.001$, df = 2, $N = 79$; see figure 4).

In those cases in which links were present, it was significantly more likely that there would be a problem with those links leading to requests canceled due to local or electronic availability than those canceled for other reasons ($X^2 < 0.001$, df = 1, $N = 79$; see figure 5). The types of problems that were found are listed in table 3. There was no significant difference in the number of links needed to reach the desired item between those requests canceled because of local or electronic availability and those canceled for other reasons.

> **There was no significant difference in the number of links needed to reach the desired item between those requests canceled because of local or electronic availability and those canceled for other reasons.**

Discussion

The lower-than-expected number of interlibrary requests canceled due to local or electronic availability from departments such as history might reflect the influence of a different emphasis or method of library instruction than is provided to other departments. Alternatively, it might reflect a research approach within the fields, in which one relies more on older, primary literature than on the recently published articles that make up the majority of interlibrary requests canceled due to local or electronic availability.

Table 1.

Actual and Expected Counts of Patron Departments for Requests Canceled Due to Local or Electronic Availability

Department	Canceled due to local/electronic availability		
	Count	Expected Count	Residual
History	7	20.7	-13.7
Germanic Lang/Lit	3	7.9	-4.9
Art/Art History/Art Education	3	6.9	-3.9
Libraries	2	5.9	-3.9
Agriculture/FAES/Extension	5	8.7	-3.7
Greek/Latin	1	4.6	-3.6
Philosophy	0	3.2	-3.2
Political Science	2	4.2	-2.2
Spanish/Portuguese	4	6.1	-2.1
French/Italian	1	2.9	-1.9
Biological Sciences	8	9.2	-1.2
Human Ecology	2	3.2	-1.2
East Asian Lang/Lit	0	0.9	-0.9
Music	8	8.9	-0.9
Near Eastern Lang/Cultures	1	1.9	-0.9
Comparative Studies	0	0.7	-0.7
Linguistics	3	3.7	-0.7
Women's Studies	0	0.7	-0.7
Physics	1	1.6	-0.6
Industrial/Interior/ Visual Communication	0	0.3	-0.3
Jewish Studies	0	0.3	-0.3
Kent State SLIS	0	0.3	-0.3
Animal Sciences	0	0.1	-0.1
Speech and Hearing Science	1	1.1	-0.1
Sport and Exercise Sciences	0	0.1	-0.1
Chemistry	4	4	0
Law	1	0.7	0.3
Dance	1	0.5	0.5
Theatre	2	1.5	0.5
Slavic and East European Lang/Lit	1	0.3	0.7
Economics	1	0.2	0.8
Engineering	21	20.1	0.9
Public Affairs (John Glenn Institute)	1	0.1	0.9
African-American/ African Studies	4	2.9	1.1
Architecture	2	0.9	1.1

Department	Canceled due to local/electronic availability		
	Count	Expected Count	Residual
Communication	2	0.9	1.1
Psychology	7	5.9	1.1
Geology	3	1.8	1.2
Mathematics	3	1.8	1.2
Business	3	1.4	1.6
Statistics	2	0.3	1.7
Other	16	14.1	1.9
Veterinary Medicine	6	3.6	2.4
Anthropology	10	7.5	2.5
Social Work	7	4.3	2.7
Pharmacy	8	4.8	3.2
Sociology	5	1.6	3.4
English	15	11.3	3.7
Geography	11	4.2	6.8
Education	36	25.2	10.8
Total	224		

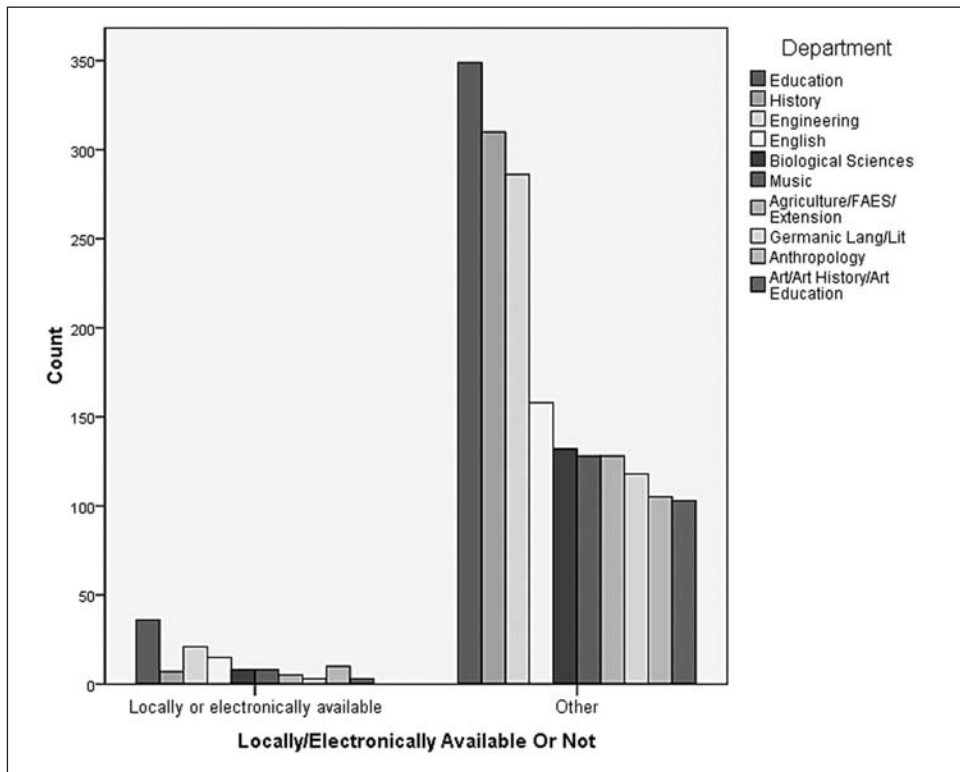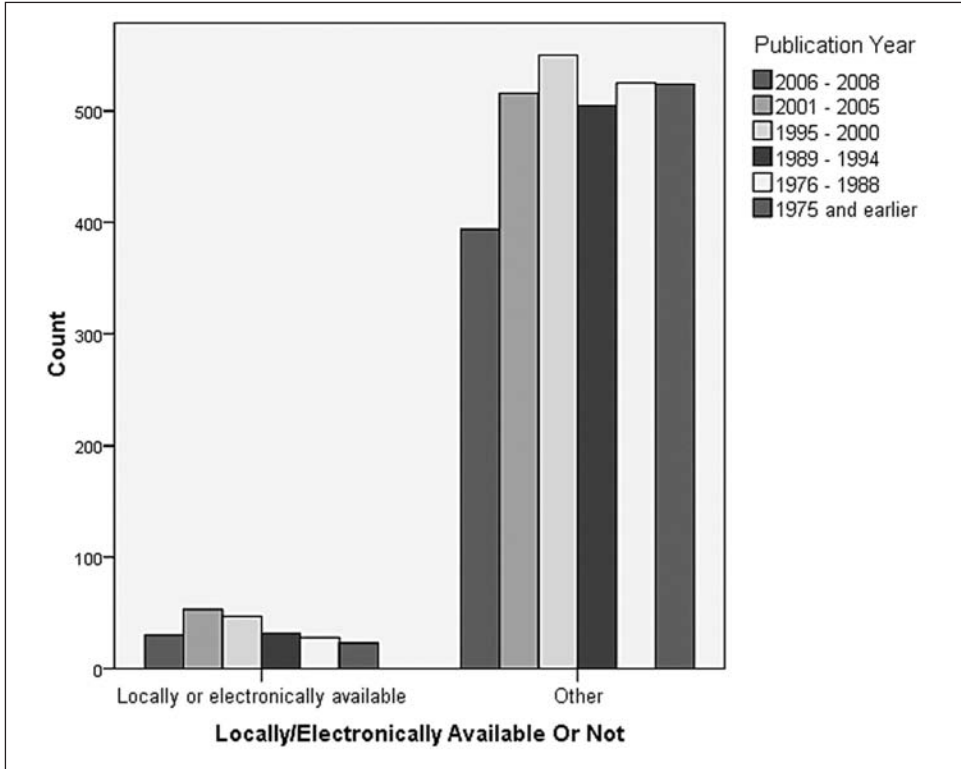Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Table 2.

Actual and Expected Counts of Item Publication Years for Requests Canceled Due to Local or Electronic Availability

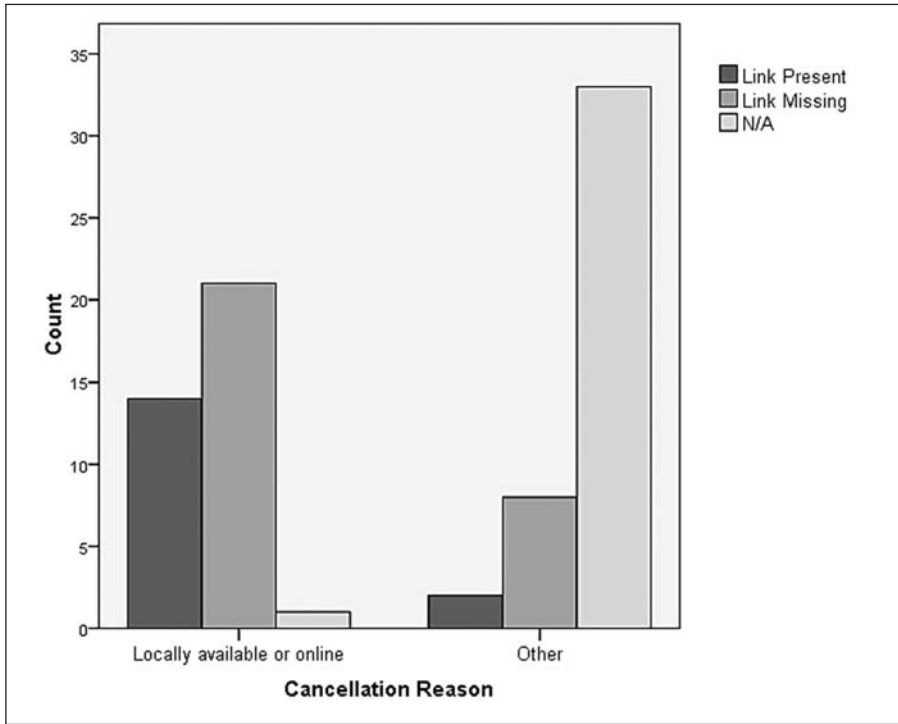|	1975 and earlier	1976-1988	1989–1994	1995–2000	2001–2005	2006–2008	Total
Count	23	28	32	47	53	30	213
Expected Count	36.1	36.5	35.4	39.4	37.6	28.0	213.0
% within Canceled Requests Locally or Electronically Available	10.8%	13.1%	15.0%	22.1%	24.9%	14.1%	100.0%

Figure 4.
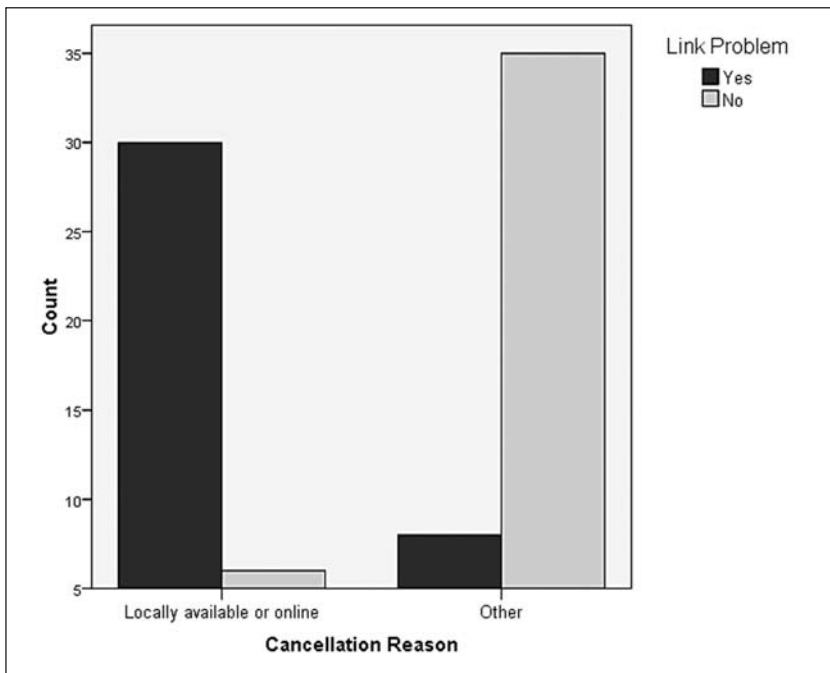

Figure 5.

Table 3.

Problems With Links to Desired Items From OLinks to Full Text or Catalog Records

Linking Option	Error Type
Patrons offered linking option	Patron did not find year in first link and did not pursue other link(s).
	Link went to incorrect issue.
	Year not found in title with electronic content.
	Linked to aggregator, but title no longer there.
	Linked to aggregator but not deep-linked to title.
	Link takes patron to Dissertation Abstracts rather than full-text dissertation source.
Patrons offered no linking option, just ILL link (ISSN not in OLinks)	Journal freely available on internet.
	Access to online available we're not supposed to have.
	Article available at other source like Institutional Repository.

David Lincove, the subject librarian for history, philosophy, and political science at the OSU Libraries, suspects that the fact that relatively few such requests come from these three departments can be attributed to the researchers within these fields.[19] Lincove conjectures that researchers in the departments he serves are especially tenacious in their search for library materials. He feels that these researchers, especially in the field of history, are more book oriented and are more likely than those in other fields to check the library catalog rather than relying solely on OLinks and ILLiad to locate items. By contrast, researchers in those departments that have a greater than expected number of interlibrary requests canceled due to local or electronic availability could be relying on particular databases or aggregators that have fewer direct links to electronic content or that integrate relatively poorly with OLinks.

Requests that were canceled due to local or electronic availability typically were for items that were published between 2001 and 2006, as more content from those years tends to be online. The catalog records for items published within this time frame could have caused confusion for patrons. Journals of this age are most likely to have been recently released from publishers' or JSTOR's full-text embargoes; and there is sometimes a period of time when articles are available, but the list of available publication dates in the catalog does not reflect their availability. This catalog maintenance issue reflects the

dynamic electronic environment. Conversely, articles more than six years old, which had fewer cancellations due to local or electronic availability, might have more stable full-text availability and be correctly described in the catalog. Even older items are less likely to be available electronically in full text, and the interlibrary services requests for these items were, therefore, less likely to be canceled for that reason. Items requested that were published more recently than 2006 were more likely to be canceled for other reasons, such as being too new. For example, patrons requested books that were not yet published. Significantly more requests for articles than for loans (books) were canceled due to local or electronic availability, typically because articles are more often available electronically than books.

It was interesting to note that there was no significant effect of patron status or campus on the frequency of interlibrary requests canceled due to local or electronic availability. We initially expected that a greater proportion of canceled requests made by students would be canceled due to local or electronic availability than those made by faculty due to their relative inexperience as researchers. Alternatively, one might have expected fewer such canceled requests from students because they are more likely to have had recent library instruction and might be more comfortable with electronic resources than older members of the faculty. That there was no significant difference among patron types suggests that difficulty locating locally or electronically available resources is a problem that affects experienced and inexperienced researchers alike. It also indicates that further instruction may be needed, targeting both students and faculty and, further, that Web instructions and navigation must be made clearer to allow patrons to become more self-reliant.

> That there was no significant difference among patron types suggests that difficulty locating locally or electronically available resources is a problem that affects experienced and inexperienced researchers alike.

Patron campus was also found to have a non-significant effect on the proportion of canceled requests that were canceled due to local or electronic availability. We initially expected that patrons at regional campuses and patrons who are professional veterinarians would have proportionally more of these canceled requests than patrons at the Columbus campus, due to their more limited access to electronic library materials. That this was not the case could be attributable to skillful library instruction by regional campus librarians and thorough outreach by the veterinary medicine librarian.

Missing or problematic links occurred more frequently for the publications for which interlibrary requests were canceled due to local or electronic availability than for the control group. This would have increased the difficulty patrons had locating the items for which they were searching. Patrons are likely to click a visible interlibrary loan link (the "easy button") at this point rather than sort through detailed catalog options that have more links.

This was an initial exploration with a small sample size. Additional study with a larger sample may be warranted and would produce additional significant results.

Conclusion

At the outset of this investigation, it was hoped that patterns identified as leading to difficulty for users might result in new ideas for library instruction, both in the classroom setting and as tips and links on the OSU Libraries' Web pages. The identification of significantly more requests for locally or electronically available items from certain departments can be used by the librarians specializing in those fields to improve and focus library instruction, department-specific library Web pages, and finding aids to assist the members of those departments in locating OSU's holdings.

It is striking that, at least six months after these canceled interlibrary requests were made, there are still noticeable problems with the OLinks pages in most of the cases in which the patron failed to locate a locally or electronically available item from a database search. Maintenance of catalog and ISSN data are essential to ensure our patrons are successful in finding the items they need.

This serves as evidence that, although OLinks is a powerful tool that in many cases helps to quickly deliver full-text content (or the location of a hard copy in the absence of full text) to patrons, the system is not without flaws. Indeed, because the OLinks system relies on connections to many publishers, aggregated databases, and other full-text content providers, it may be unrealistic to expect it to be completely seamless.[20] However, OSU librarians may be able to compensate for the failings of the system by ensuring that library instruction includes informing students that they need to go beyond OLinks to find the items they need, demonstrating how to do this, and explaining that this will allow them to find materials immediately rather than resorting to an interlibrary request. For example, the OSU ILLiad article request form now asks patrons to search the Serials Solutions A–Z list because additional electronic content can be found using that tool. Because faculty and staff—who do not receive library instruction—are no less likely to make these kinds of requests, better Web instructions and clearer navigation can help all patrons find the resources they need more quickly and with less frustration.

Though the current study only reproduced database searches, a surprising number of interlibrary requests came not from database searches but rather from the bibliographies of other works and the recommendations of colleagues and professors. The fact that these citations, rather than those found in a database, were often too incomplete or inaccurate to be used to get the item also suggests that further instruction on the proper creation of citations may be needed as part of information literacy instruction.

Even the non-significant results of this study, such as patron status and campus location, proved interesting. The fact that there was no significant difference between students and faculty, for example, or between main and regional campuses supports the idea that there are broad usability problems that affect patrons regardless of their research experience or accessibility issues at locations other than the Columbus campus.

An inquiry into the association between citation source and interlibrary requests canceled because of local or electronic availability would benefit from additional study using larger samples for greater statistical power. Furthermore, because this study relied entirely on existing data, the inferences that can be made about the reasons why patrons were unable to find locally or electronically held items are limited. Future study that includes patron surveys and observation (think aloud / talk aloud) might yield further insight into the causes of interlibrary requests for locally or electronically held items. It would be especially helpful to discover whether there are any unique or particularly

pressing issues contributing to this problem at OSU when compared to similar studies at other institutions. This study did identify problems with specific catalog records that have been corrected to aid patrons in locating the items they need.

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18. Kuehn.
19. David Lincove (subject librarian for history, philosophy, and political science, Ohio State University Libraries), in discussion with author, Jessica Page, October 28, 2008.
20. Pearson, discussion.