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Interlibrary Loan of Media Materials— The Tennessee Tech Volpe Library Experience: A Model for Change

Patricia B. McGee
Tennessee Technological University, PMcGee@tntech.edu

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Patricia B. McGee is the Coordinator of Media Services for the Volpe Library & Media Center at Tennessee Technological University and can be reached at PMcGee@tntech.edu.

The sending of media materials via interlibrary loan is a practice in the library world that is fraught with controversy. On the one hand, the American Library Association's *Guidelines for the Interlibrary Loan of Audiovisual Formats* makes a clear case for sharing audiovisual material in all formats. According to the guidelines:

> 1.1 Audiovisual materials should be lent to other libraries and agencies as freely as possible and in a manner that insures that they are protected from loss and damage.

> 1.2 The library or agency that lends the material can decide whether or not to loan the requested item, but the decision should be based on an item by item basis and not restricted by broad categories (e.g. time in the collection, format, date of the production, price, etc.)[1]

The reality, on the other hand, is more in line with the statement posted by the University of Oregon Libraries on their Interlibrary Loan webpage.

> Most libraries will not lend their media materials. If the material you need is available at the local library or at nearby video rental stores, you can probably obtain it there much more quickly than through Interlibrary Loan. However, we are always willing to try to obtain media, and have an approximately 10% success rate.[2]

In some instances libraries have adopted half-way reciprocal measures. They will loan only to those institutions that will also lend to them, or who are members of a regional or consortial system. While resources are being shared somewhat under these policies, they are still not in compliance with ALA Guidelines. An examination of several randomly selected libraries in the southeastern region revealed policies that ranged from generous to restrictive. Two libraries in Kentucky, Berea College's Hutchins Library[3] and the University of Kentucky's William T. Young Library[4] actually make reference to the ILL guidelines of the American Library Association in their policy statements.

Far more common, however, are restrictive statements such as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's policy that videos, CDs, DVDs are non-circulating;[5] the University of Tennessee's blanket restriction that "A/V materials (videos, CDs, etc.) and many special collections materials are Non-Circulating;"[6] or the University of Georgia's inclusion of audiovisual materials in the category of "material which generally does not circulate."[7] The Jessie Ball DuPont Library, University of the South, points out that because "Many libraries do not loan these forms of materials and because of the time and extra effort involved in locating a library which will loan them, there is a limit of two per semester for students for class use or research. There is no limit for faculty."[8] Vanderbilt University's Jean and Alexander Heard Library loans videos with restrictions, while the web pages of others simply make no mention of their policy about ILL of audiovisual materials.

As borrowers, on the other hand, university

libraries aim high. North Carolina State University vows it "will attempt to obtain any type of library material"[9] The University of Georgia Libraries also promised to "attempt to borrow most anything you need."[10] The later statement is most perplexing in view of the library's policy against loaning *their* materials.

How then can the disconnect between what libraries are willing to do for their own patrons and what they are willing to share with outsider patrons be explained? The question of whether or not to loan periodically arises on the Video Librarian discussion list. Gary Handman, of the University of California Berkeley, has argued most cogently for a restrictive policy:

The bottom line for most academic library video collections, however, is that

1. Most oftentimes we're there first and foremost to support curricula

2. We often only have single copies of titles in the collection

3. Outside of features, many of the titles in the collection are expensive and/or rare (or at least difficult to replace)

4. Feature titles (and none feature, too —thank you very much PBS) seem to be going out of distribution at an alarmingly rapid rate...no DVD in sight.

4 [sic]. Faculty are pathologically incapable in most cases of reserving materials in advance.

In light of the above, a liberal ILL policy runs the very definite risk of taking stuff needed for classroom showing or for use by classes out of circulation.[11]

Barb Bergman, Media Services Librarian Minnesota State University-Mankato, presented the case for sharing in the following response:

We've had a very good experience in allowing the ILL of the video collection. Our patrons have benefited greatly, consistently borrowing 2-to-1 compared to the number of videos we lend… I

allow the lending of any title not booked for use during the emester… We just list ILL as yet another reason to book ahead. I find the pathological inability (as Gary described the syndrome) to book videos in advance puzzling. It's not like booking AV is a new concept. Everyone remember the days of requesting the film, the film projector, and perhaps a tech to set it up? … Don't worry about how much a video cost. ILL doesn't deny loans because a book cost too much. ILL custom is that if something happens to a borrowed item, the borrower pays.[12]

While it would be easiest to explain the variations in policy to the vagaries of human nature, this is a complex problem without a straightforward answer. In the beginning of media librarianship, videotapes and the equipment to play them were indeed very expensive. Media materials are more physically vulnerable to damage than print materials, while the problem of out-of-print titles is of course endemic to all segments of the publishing industry. While it is undeniable that academic libraries do have a unique mission to support the curricula of their parent institutions, this paper hopes to suggest that perhaps it is time to reconsider restrictive policies about loaning media materials. Perhaps there is a way to continue to support academic curricula and at the same time share media resources.

Tennessee Technological University's Angelo and Jennette Volpe Library, like many academic libraries, had a policy against loaning audiovisual material. In January 2002 Volpe Library's Interlibrary Loan Office received a request from a university in South Dakota that tested our policy. This university asked to borrow our VHS copy of *Reproductive Behavior of the Brook Trout, Salvelinus Fontinali.* According to the online catalog record, this 1971 video had not circulated in the past ten years, so there seemed to be no justification for refusing the request. Why not let it go to another library? Loaning this VHS tape was the first step in what would become a pilot program involving the loaning of media materials and the statistical evaluation of the resulting data. The Library Media Center

decided to loan audiovisual materials on a case-by-case basis and as accurately as possible track the results statistically. Eventually the pilot program led to a change in the library's policy about loaning media and in the library's ILL-OCLC lender's profile in July 2003.

In establishing the pilot program, the Media Center, following ALA guidelines, decided to neither loan fragile materials, such as phonograph records, materials with restrictive license agreements, nor would it loan materials known to be heavily used by Tech's students or placed on reserve by faculty. In addition to the reserve media option, the Center's advanced booking system allows faculty and students to insure materials will be available on a specific future date. Materials with advanced bookings are not loaned.
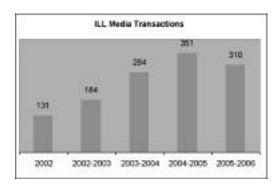
We were especially interested in tracking the following data categories: how long was material borrowed? Who was borrowing? What materials were being borrowed?

The first six months of the experiment were a genuine learning experience with the Media Center having to create procedures from whole cloth. Media staff set up a dummy borrower account with faculty status for Inter Library Loan in order to track the flow of materials from the department. Materials would be checked out to this patron and then delivered to the Interlibrary Loan Office for processing and shipping. Statistics were tracked as accurately as possible, but occasionally materials would be returned, checked in and reshelved resulting in a transaction for which we would have no data. For the purposes of data collection, the Media Center counted transactions not items sent. A multipart series requested by a single individual would count as a single transaction.

The Center's staff learned from painful experience to keep a paper copy of the ILL request, because when an item was returned to the Volpe Library's ILL office it would be checked in and removed from the OCLC system. When a VHS tape was returned and checked in without its accompanying paper guide, staff had no idea who the borrower was. Fortunately the
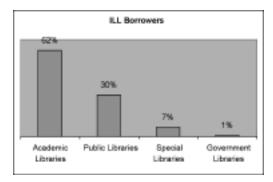
Media Center was able to depend on the kindness of strangers; the guide that left on February 7th, 2002 was returned on September 19th, 2002. Now guides are bundled with their tapes in snap lock plastic bags, and paper copies of loan requests are kept on file. The copy of the original ILL request on file allows the Media Center to check on the status of the loan without having to interrupt the workflow in the ILL department. We can check to see if items have been returned, or if they need to be recalled.

In July 2003, the Media Center asked to have the Library's OCLC profile changed to reflect the change in the library's policy about loaning media. While there was an increase in the number of requests, it was not a dramatic one. Prior to the policy change the Media Center was averaging 17.5 ILL transactions per month. After the change the number increased to an average of 24 transactions per month. Demand rose steadily during the early years of the program but appears now to have leveled off. This may also reflect the increasing number of libraries willing to loan media materials, a change in patron's preferences, or changes in the use of media in the classroom.
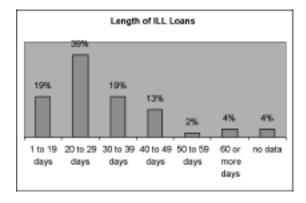

Who borrows media materials via interlibrary loan? Not surprisingly the majority of the borrowers are associated with academic libraries, but public libraries also have a strong demand. Special libraries were primarily medical libraries plus one public school, while the majority of the government libraries were associated with the federal government. It was also no surprise to discover that the greatest percentage of materials (74%) were visual materials—VHS or DVDs. Audio materials, almost evenly divided between

CDs and audiotapes, made up 24% of the loans, while the remaining 2% consisted of kits, CD-ROMs and computer discs.

Of course one of the major concerns is the length of the loan, because that represents the time the material would be unavailable to Volpe Library's primary borrower group. Over half the items, 58%, are back in 29 days or less. The majority of items, 77%, are returned in 39 days or less, with 80% returned in 49 days or less. Problematic loans of an excessive length comprise only 6% of the transactions. This percentage compares favorably with numbers of problematic loans or losses incurred by our own patrons.

In three years time losses consist of the following: one library returned our tape without its barcode; one library removed our barcode and substituted theirs on the case instead; one library returned a tape that was not ours; one library lost the item when the patron vanished, and one library had the shipper lose the item. In the latter two instances the borrowing library paid for a replacement and the shipper reimbursed our library for the loss.

Volpe Library Media Center's experience with ILL of media has been a very positive one. We are able to share the resources of the collection while at the same time we've experienced minimal damages. While it may appear to some that the loan periods are lengthy, the shipping and processing times for outgoing and incoming mail are a significant factor in the length of the loan, and that is just simply a factor of the interlibrary loan process. We encourage libraries to rethink their policies on interlibrary loan of media materials, if only to start on a small case-by-case basis. Frankly we would prefer to have our media materials used by patrons of other libraries rather than have them crumble into dust on our shelves or, more likely, silently fade into obsolescence as their format renders them unviewable.

Our experience has demonstrated the validity of the ALA Video Round Table guidelines for ILL of audiovisual materials. Yes, we have excluded some materials from loan but there truly is no reason to exclude all media formats from interlibrary loan.[13]

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