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Going global: an international survey of lending and borrowing across borders

Tina Baich

University Library, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Heather Weltin

Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide preliminary results of the 2011 survey on international interlending conducted by the ALA RUSA STARS International Interlibrary Loan Committee.

Design/methodology/approach – An international survey was deployed using SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool, and distributed through various electronic resource sharing discussion lists and personal contacts with international libraries.

Findings – The 2011 survey aimed toward international libraries revealed similar results to those of the Committee's 2007 survey of US libraries. Most international interlending participants both borrow and lend materials internationally. Further analysis will be done focusing on barriers to as well as identification of common practices in international interlending.

Originality/value – This research provides the most recent survey of international interlending practices and will yield potential methods and activities for improving resource sharing globally.

Keywords – interlending, international, survey research

Paper type – Research paper

Introduction

The Sharing and Transforming Access to Resources Section (STARS) of the American Library Association's Reference and User Services Association is charged with the promotion and improvement of resource sharing [1]. The purpose of the STARS International Interlibrary Loan Committee is to evaluate trends in international interlending and resource sharing, to develop materials and resources for international ILL practitioners, and to promote international interlending resource sharing efforts [2]. In 2009 the Committee published the results of a survey of US libraries that participated in international lending and borrowing in an article titled "Lending and Borrowing Across Borders: Issues and Challenges with International Resource Sharing" (Baich, Weltin, Yang and Zou, 2009). In an effort to start a global dialogue, David Atkins, as a representative of the Committee, presented a paper at the 11th ILDS conference in Hannover, Germany. His presentation, titled "Going Global: Examining Issues and Seeking Collaboration for International Interlending," discussed the barriers to international ILL uncovered in the survey of US libraries (Atkins, 2009).

Building on these activities the committee conducted an international survey of libraries regarding international interlending issues in 2011. The international survey was created in SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool, and distributed through various electronic resource sharing discussion lists and personal contacts with international libraries. This paper presents the preliminary findings from that survey as well as areas of concern raised by international suppliers [3]. We will compare the 2007 and 2011 survey results and focus on similarities across the world for international interlibrary loan and ways to improve resource sharing globally.

Demographic Overview

The 2011 survey was open to participants from both US and international libraries. 632 respondents began the survey, while 404 (63.9%) fully completed the survey. Only the first question, which required acknowledgment of the consent document and voluntary agreement of participation in the survey, was required so the number of

respondents varies from question to question. The survey garnered responses from a wide variety of countries and from six of the seven continents (see Figure 1). In all, 60 countries are represented by 557 respondents. The United States had the greatest number of respondents (246), with Canada (47), Australia (37), Sweden (36), and Italy (29) rounding out the top five. Of 565 respondents, 377 (66.7%) represent college and university libraries. The majority of libraries (83.6%) answering the survey participate in one or more resource sharing networks.

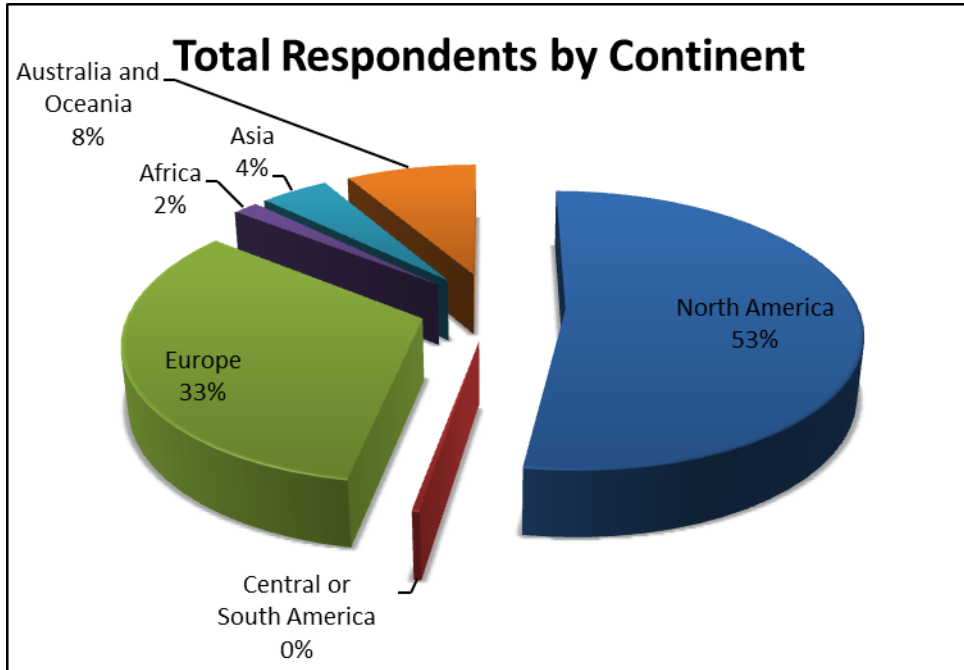


Figure 1 Total respondents by continent

Data gathered regarding total and international ILL volumes showed that international ILL transactions make up a small portion of the respondents' overall ILL activity. Over 75% of respondents receive fewer than 5,000 borrowing requests for returnables and 73.1% receive fewer than 5,000 borrowing requests for non-returnables in a twelve month period. In terms of lending, just over 70% receive fewer than 5,000 requests for returnables and 75% receive fewer than 5,000 requests for non-returnables. When asked "What is your 12-month international volume for all returnables and non-returnables?," 55.7% reported fewer than 100 borrowing requests and 63% reported the same for lending requests. Complete results of this question are shown in Figure 2.

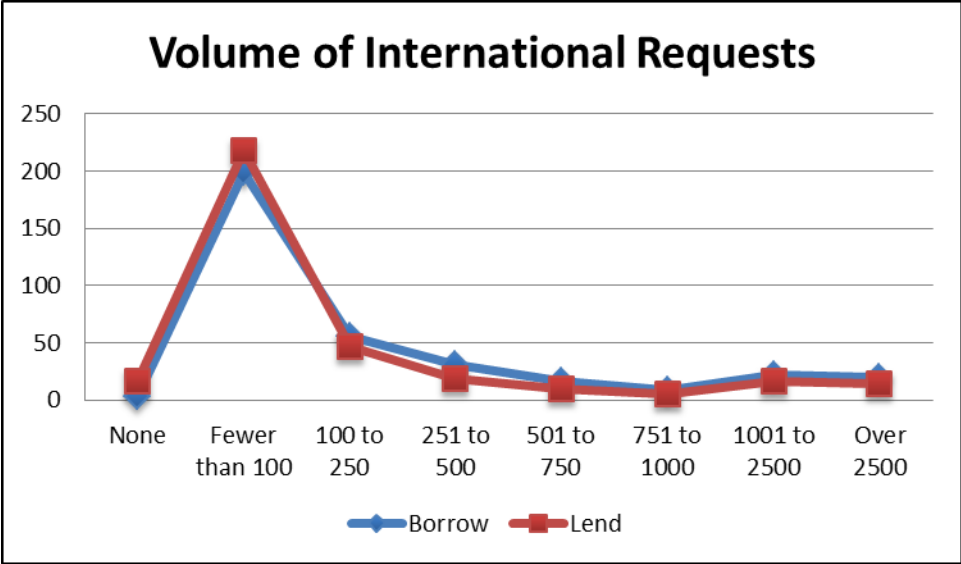


Figure 2 Volume of international ILL requests

International Borrowing Overview

Of the 481 responses to the question “Do you borrow internationally?,” an impressive 87.3% (420 respondents) borrow materials internationally. 82.2% (305 respondents) borrow both returnable and non-returnable materials from international suppliers. Libraries borrowing only returnables or non-returnables represented 7.8% and 10% of respondents, respectively (see Figure 3).

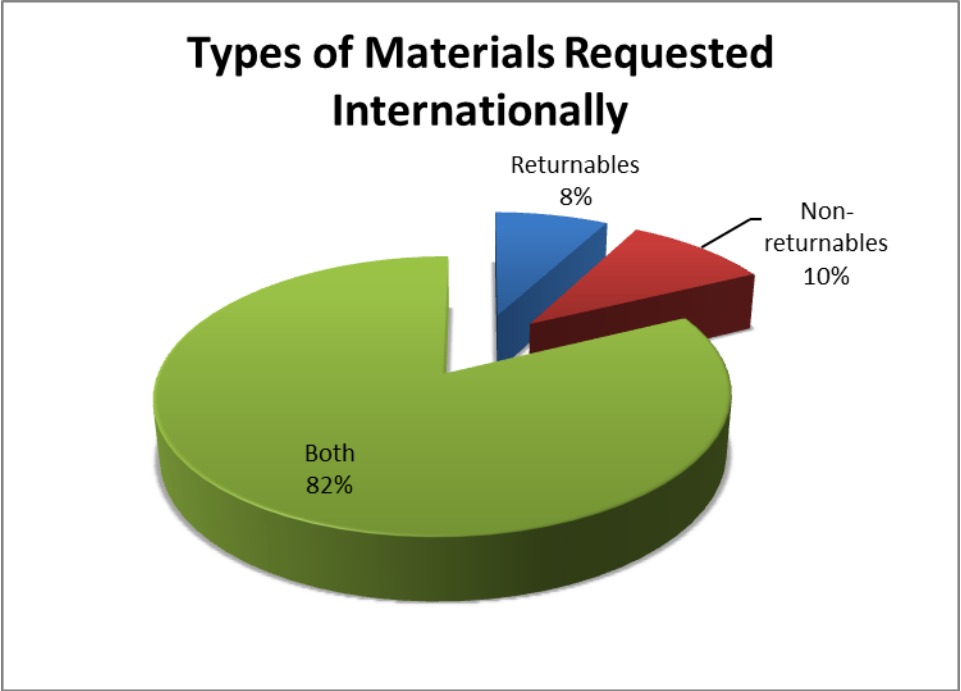


Figure 3 Types of materials requested internationally

When asked “What are the countries with the libraries you borrow from most heavily?,” responses varied widely. European countries were the most frequently cited as international borrowing partners with 61% reporting that they

borrow from within Europe. Preliminary analysis shows this is due both to heavy European borrowing by US libraries and borrowing between European countries. 84% of US respondents identified at least one European country. 95% of European respondents identified at least one other European country.

Within Europe the countries identified vary greatly, but the most heavily used were the United Kingdom (18%), Germany (16%), Denmark (6%), and France (4%). North America follows Europe as the next continent where libraries go to borrow materials (21%). Within North America both Canada and the United States are requested from by 10% of the respondents. Australia was also specified as a heavily used supplier by our respondents. 10% of respondents borrow materials from Australia specifically, while overall the continent of Australia and Oceania were used by 12% of respondents. The libraries on the remaining continents of Asia (5%), Africa (1%), and Central and South America (0.4%) were much less heavily used. Potential reasons for this are numerous, including language barriers and less visible holdings. With more extensive review, the committee may discover correlations that better explain the differences. Figure 4 shows the representation of continents in the respondents' answers for this question.

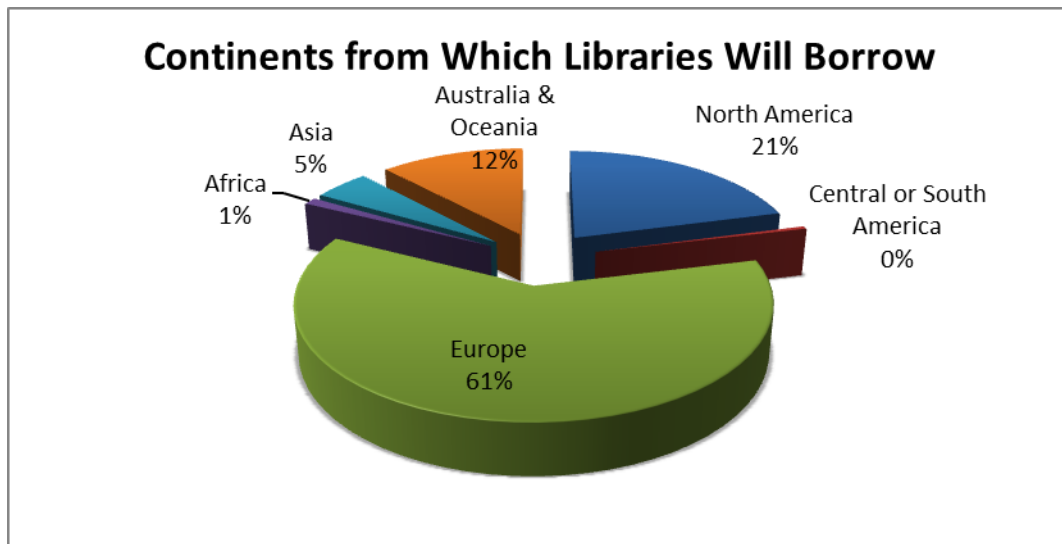


Figure 4 Continents from which libraries will borrow

Even though the survey responses show that many libraries borrow materials internationally, there was still a large percentage of material types identified as difficult to obtain from international resources. In order to gauge what types of materials people had difficulty acquiring, the survey asked “Which, if any, types of materials are especially hard to obtain from international collections?” This question allowed respondents to select as many options as appropriate. Copies of rare or older materials are by far the most difficult to get garnering 182 of 323 responses, followed by local dissertations (164 responses). CD/audio media materials (147), electronic books (146), and video/film media materials (141) were practically tied for third position in this ranking. Traditionally difficult to obtain, serials (bound volumes/issues) were identified by 114 respondents as one of their options. Finishing the list were microforms (67 responses) and music scores (63). Some write-in responses added that newer materials, conference proceedings, and technical reports are often difficult to obtain along with materials limited by copyright restrictions. Figure 5 shows the number of respondents who selected each material type.

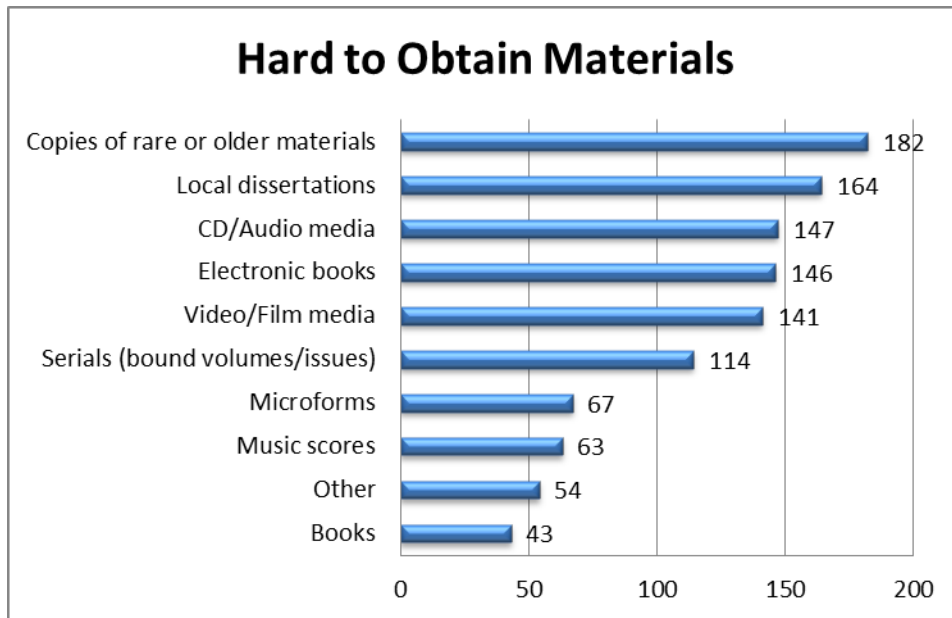


Figure 5 Hard to obtain materials

International Lending Overview

Of the 444 participants who responded to the question “Do you lend internationally?,” 86.9% replied yes. While some libraries lend only returnables (3.7% of respondents) or non-returnables (11.4%), the majority (84.9%) supply both. The percentage of libraries supplying both returnables and non-returnables is comparable to the number of borrowing libraries (87.3%).

The committee wanted to know whether libraries felt the volume of international lending requests received and filled had increased, decreased or stayed the same. The perceptions of requests received and requests filled were almost identical. Approximately 51% of 345 respondents believe international ILL requests received and filled have increased by at least ten per cent. Thirty-nine per cent think there has been no change, and fewer than 10% perceive a decrease of ten per cent or more in international ILL.

When asked “Why do you think the number of filled requests has changed?,” the top reason was the addition of non-US holdings to WorldCat (25%). It is safe to assume this response corresponds to an increase in international ILL. This question allowed respondents to select as many options as appropriate. Many libraries selected “Other” in addition to one of the other response options and entered free form comments. Most of these comments provided reasons for an increase in filled international ILL requests. Prominent themes that emerged supporting an increase were visibility of holdings through online tools, new membership in various resource sharing networks, and the ease and speed of electronic delivery. The reasons given for decreases in international ILL mirrored the barriers previously identified by the committee including copyright and licensing issues as well as payment and shipping options.

Respondents were asked to identify up to five countries they lend to most frequently as well as those to which they will not lend. 333 of 386 international lenders identified one or more countries to which they lend. The 69 countries identified are distributed across six of the seven continents with Europe (51%) and North America (23%) receiving the greatest representation. As in borrowing, the high percentage of US and European responding libraries accounts for the large number of libraries lending to European countries. The top five countries mentioned were Canada (138 respondents), Australia (112), United Kingdom (112), United States (99), and Denmark (91). Figure 6 shows countries mentioned ten or more times.

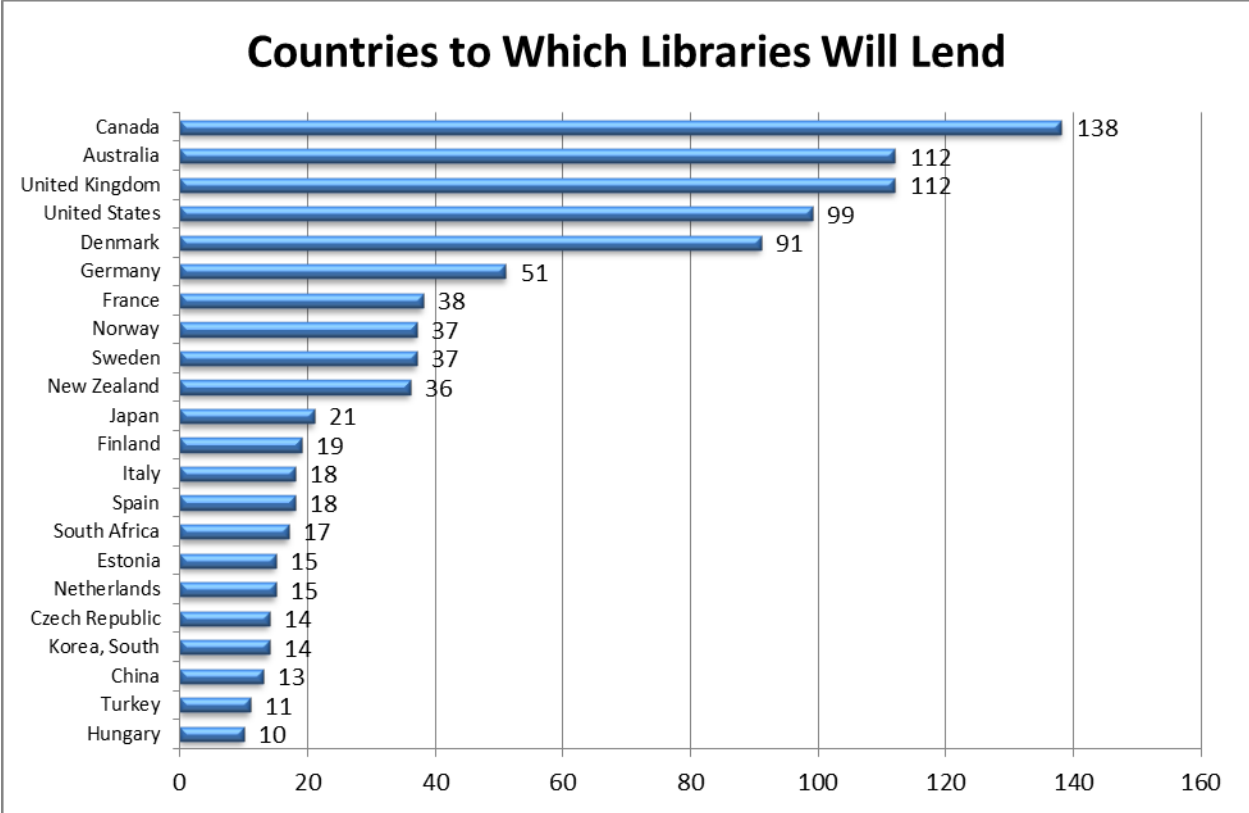


Figure 6 Countries to which libraries will lend

Interestingly, only 31 of 386 international lenders identified one or more countries to which they will not lend. The 35 countries identified are again representative of six of the seven continents, but with Asian (33%) and European (24%) countries mentioned the most. Figure 7 shows countries mentioned two or more times.

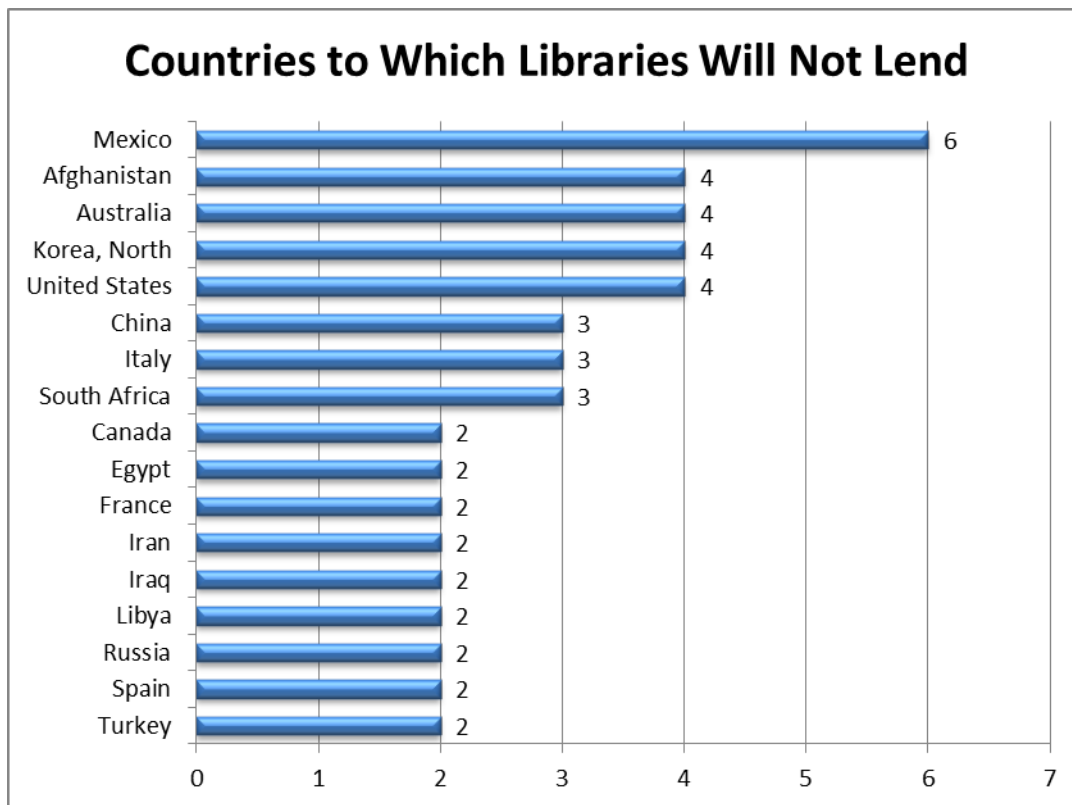


Figure 7 Countries to which libraries will not lend

A number of the survey questions were meant to address real or perceived barriers to international ILL uncovered in the committee’s 2007 US survey. Two such questions pertained to turnaround times and copyright restrictions. In response to the question “Do you deliver non-returns electronically to international libraries?,” 279 (79.7%) of 350 respondents chose “Yes, as allowed by license.” Of those respondents that do not deliver electronically, 4.9% are able to fax while 12.9% must send paper copies via mail. The high percentage of those that will deliver electronically is a positive step towards reducing one possible barrier to participation in international ILL: lengthy turnaround times.

The survey asked if “copyright restrictions keep you from supplying any non-returns to international borrowers.” Of 345 respondents, 146 (42.3%) answered yes indicating that copyright still exists as a barrier to international ILL. Part of the challenge of international copyright is the difficulty in understanding the restrictions and rights involved across borders. Currently, libraries may refer to the World Intellectual Property Organization’s (WIPO) 2008 “*Study on Copyright Limitations and Exceptions for Libraries and Archives*”, by Kenneth Crewes, but there have certainly been changes in the ensuing years (Crewes, 2008). Developing an up-to-date international copyright law resource may assist ILL practitioners in determining potential lenders.

Key Findings/Conclusion

Overall, it seems there are not great differences between US and non-US international interlibrary loan. The committee’s 2007 survey findings discovered great demand for and high participation in international ILL. The 2011 survey shows the same. In the 2007 survey of libraries within the United States, the results showed that 94% of respondents at that time both borrowed and lent internationally. Only 5% of 2007 respondents engaged in only lending, and no respondents indicated borrowing only. In the most recent survey, which was aimed at both US and non-US libraries, 87.3% borrow and 86.9% lend internationally, and over half of the survey respondents (55.8%), were libraries outside the US. The libraries typically used for borrowing international materials were also similar with both surveys having Europe, North America, and Australia listed towards the top.

Our findings show that items typically difficult to get through domestic ILL requesting are the same materials difficult to obtain from foreign suppliers. One respondent replied in the notes that “It’s more the place you try to get items from, rather than the type of item.” This is always the case in ILL. In the previous findings, it was discovered that US libraries rarely modify restrictions on material type for items based on where they are being sent. The challenge is to find a library willing to loan a particular material type rather than the material type itself. The materials designated as difficult to obtain internationally (older/rare materials, local dissertations, A/V, electronic books, etc.) are the same items causing challenges for national interlibrary loan. One can only hope that as collections are digitized or as online publications increase, libraries will have fewer obstructions in obtaining materials requested by their researchers. In addition, libraries also need to be aware of protecting their ability to supply internationally as more and more materials are available in only digital format where license terms take precedence over copyright law including provisions for ‘fair use’ or ‘fair dealing’ [4].

As noted above, 51% of respondents reported at least a 10% increase in international ILL activity. Many provided explanations for increased activity related to the visibility of their collections. It is heartening to see improvements in international ILL thanks to better communication and discovery methods. One relatively simple way to continue the improvement of international ILL is for libraries to post their lending policies online. Surprisingly, only 35.7% of respondents currently do this. The committee hopes that more libraries will post online policies in order to facilitate international ILL transactions.

The next step for the STARS International ILL Committee is to fully analyze the survey results and make a report to the ILL community. Further analysis will deal with questions regarding shipping methods, payment methods and fees charged, citation verification methods, and more in-depth looks at the issues raised in the preliminary analysis. The committee will also compare the results of the 2011 survey to those of the 2007 survey. This will include an assessment of the changes made to the actual survey instrument including the division of the questions into borrowing and lending sections and the streamlining of questions. The 2011 survey also gathered baseline ILL activity data, which may be helpful in drawing conclusions about the overall role of international ILL in ILL operations. Both surveys focused on questions related to real/perceived barriers to international ILL. The committee hopes to discover whether international libraries have similar perceptions of the barriers to international ILL participation and to use the data to further international resource sharing and create tools to assist ILL practitioners.

Notes

1. STARS “Our Section” (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/sections/stars/section/index.cfm>) (accessed 2 November 2011).
2. STARS International Interlibrary Loan Committee (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/sections/stars/section/internationalill/intill.cfm>) (accessed 2 November 2011).
3. This preliminary report could not have been created with the help of all STARS International Interlibrary Loan Committee Members: David Atkins (past), Marlayna Christensen (past), Poul Erlandsen (past), Jennifer Marjorie Jacobs, Karen L. Janke, Jennifer Block, Lee Anne Hooley, Paul Burton Drake, and LeEtta M. Schmidt.
4. For further reading we would suggest the following: The June 2011 *Research Library Issues* (Vol. 275) contains details regarding international ILL. The licensing section lists specific things to ask for within libraries’ licenses. Michael Kelly’s “Research Libraries, Publishers Stake out Positions on International ILL,” *Library Journal*, available at: http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/home/891002-264/research_libraries_publishers_stake_out.html.csp (posted 14 June 2011), and “ICOLC’s Response to the International Association of Scientific Technical and Medical (STM) Statement”, available at: <http://www.library.yale.edu/consortia/2011-stm-ill.htm> (issued 22 June 2011).

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Crewes, K. (2008), *Study on Copyright Limitations and Exceptions for Libraries and Archives*, WIPO, Geneva, available at: http://www.wipo.int/meetings/en/doc_details.jsp?doc_id=109192 (accessed 21 November 2011).

About the Authors

Tina Baich is an Assistant Librarian at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis' University Library where she has been the Interlibrary Loan Librarian since September 2006. Tina is a Member at Large on the ALA RUSA STARS Executive Committee and also serves as Chair of the ALA RUSA STARS International ILL Committee. She is especially interested in web-based interlibrary loan finding aids and the impact of open access on interlibrary loan. Tina is a graduate of the Indiana University Schools of Library & Information Science and Liberal Arts with master degrees in Library Science and Public History. Tina Baich can be contacted at cbaich@iupui.edu.

Heather Weltin is the new Facilitator for Cooperative Sharing & Storage at the University of Wisconsin Madison. Prior to that she was the Head of Access Services the University of Wisconsin Madison where her primary focus was interlibrary loan. She has been working in an ILL office since 1996 and received both her BA and MLS from UW-Madison. Heather is also the current chair of ALA RUSA STARS.