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Kristin Calvert
Western Carolina University, kcalvert@wcu.edu

William Gee
East Carolina University, GEEC@ecu.edu

Janet Malliett
Winston-Salem State University, malliettmj@wssu.edu

Rachel Fleming
Western Carolina University, flemingrm@appstate.edu

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Is ILL Enough? Examining ILL Demand After Journal Cancellations at Three North Carolina Universities

Kristin Calvert, Electronic Resources Librarian, Western Carolina University

William Gee, ILL and Document Delivery Librarian, East Carolina University

Janet Malliet, Serials Librarian, Winston-Salem State University

Rachel Fleming, Serials Librarian, Western Carolina University

Library budget reductions often result in serials review projects to eliminate ongoing expenditures. A staple of these review projects is the promotion of interlibrary loan as a means of filling demand for canceled journals. However, additional load on interlibrary loan departments could mean greater costs and longer turnaround times for article requests. This study examines interlibrary loan requests following substantial budget reductions at several institutions in order to determine what effects journal cancellations had on interlibrary loan requests.

Literature suggests that concern about increased ILL demand has long been a concern following journal cancellation projects (see Hill, Calvert, & Fleming, 2013). Edward Warner's 1981 study showed that faculty considered ILL an effective method for cost control combined with access to content. Studies throughout the 1990s repeatedly showed that journal cancellation projects resulted in negligible increase in ILL demand both shortly after the cancellations and in the long term (Crump & Freund, 1995; Kilpatrick & Preece, 1996; Wilson & Alexander, 1999). No recent research was found, but anecdotal evidence suggests that increased ILL demand remains a concern when undertaking journal cancellation projects.

While concern is expressed about the possible increase in ILL demand, which could adversely affect ILL turnaround time, journal cancellation projects are generally structured to focus on journals with the lowest existing demands. The desire to maintain access to intellectual content contained in canceled titles is pressing when discussing cancellation projects with faculty,

with ILL as the alternate means of access. In order to claim that ILL is as useful as subscriptions, there is pressure to guarantee short turnaround times for requests, which, in turn, supposes the ability of ILL staff to handle the capacity of requests. A significant increase in the amount of requests means the ability to deliver requests in a timely manner is hindered. Cancellation criteria for journals have developed into a standard checklist, using availability in aggregator databases, cost per use statistics, curricular need, and format duplication (Chadwell, 2010). Given the past research and continued focus on low-demand titles for cancellation, it is somewhat surprising that concerns about ILL demand remain significant. However, all three schools and attendees at the session reported concern about increased ILL demand.

Three universities within the University of North Carolina system were involved in the current study. The universities represent a range of research intensiveness and enrollment levels. Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) is a Master's M (medium) institution with a small graduate enrollment base, Western Carolina University (WCU) is a Master's L (large) institution with a larger graduate enrollment located in a rural area, and East Carolina University (ECU) is a Doctoral Research institution with much larger graduate and undergraduate enrollments. Library expenditures as reported in the 2012 IPEDS and serials expenditures as reported by the study group also cover a broad range. It is hoped that the combined experiences of these three institutions represent a small, yet generalizable, sample from which to draw conclusions.

	WSSU	WCU	ECU
Carnegie Classification	Master's M	Master's Large	Doctoral/ Research
Enrollment	5,689	9,608	26,947
Undergraduate Enrollment	5,245	7,979	21,298
Graduate Enrollment	444	1,629	5,649
Library Budget	\$3.18M	\$4.28M	\$17.11M
Serials	\$0.25M	\$1.23M	\$3.96M

Table 1.

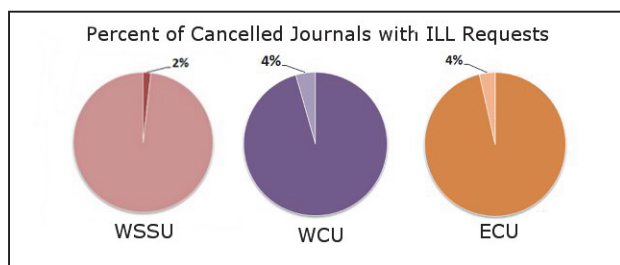


Figure 1. Percent of Canceled Journals with ILL Requests

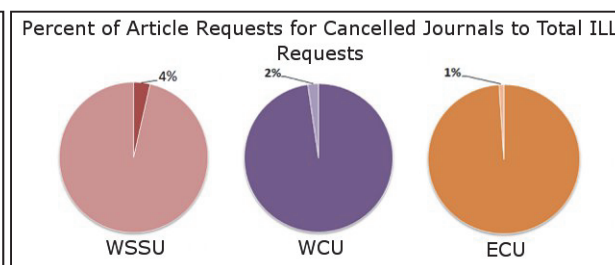


Figure 2. Percent of Article Request for Canceled Journals to Total ILL Requests

In 2010 and 2011, universities across North Carolina, and especially in the UNC system, experienced a sizeable budget reduction. Most libraries, in turn, received reductions to their budgets; however, the proportion of those cuts which were taken from collections budgets varied between institutions. Some libraries took the reductions almost entirely from collection whereas others defrayed cuts across other areas of the budget, such as personnel. WCU lost \$350,000 in collections; ECU lost \$205,000 from collections; but WSSU saw a collections budget increase of approximately \$250,000. Each library canceled between 100 and 800 subscriptions during this 2-year budget period. The criteria for canceling subscriptions were similar across institutions. They included eliminating duplicate format, canceling subscriptions when alternate electronic access was available (including access in aggregator databases), canceling low-use or high cost-per-use titles, and eliminating titles based on alignment with curricula. Additionally, ECU strove to retain uniquely held content.

The libraries reviewed interlibrary loan transactions for articles in ILLiad for the 12–18 month period after the journal cancellations went

into effect. The article request transactions were compared against the list of cancellations, and requests for canceled journals were tallied. Of the total number of journal titles canceled 2–4% were requested through interlibrary loan following the cancellation. Approximately 50% of the articles requested were for articles published within the last 3 years. Additionally, the libraries looked at the requested titles and reviewed the number of requests for those titles in previous years. Earlier requests might indicate some part of the journal backfiles were in use but not available through the library, although other reasons could explain the demand. For 75% of the requested titles, demand rose after cancellation. The remaining titles saw the same or fewer numbers of requests.

Total interlibrary loan transactions increased during this period, which lead some staff, especially at WCU, to believe the rise in demand was due to the large number of canceled journals. However, when compared against the total number of interlibrary loan article requests, the requests for canceled journals comprise only a very small percentage of the total annual workload of the departments.

	WSSU	WCU	ECU
Cancellations	110	626	348
Canceled Journals w/ ILL requests	2 1.8%	29 4.6%	13 3.7%
Number of requests	3	50	18
Percent of total requests	4%	2%	1%
Requests per journal	1.5	1.7	1.4
Journals with single requests	1	19	11

Table 2.

There are several factors that work which influence ILL demand positively or negatively. First, cancellation dates do not necessarily coincide with loss of access when publishers extend grace periods on online versions. Second, WCU implemented a discovery service around the time of the cut which could have led to an increased demand. Third, eliminating subscriptions in duplicate format does not reduce access to journal content. However, WCU canceled a number of “bridge” subscriptions for titles available through aggregators and saw an increase in ILL for articles published in those journals in the current years. This may create the need to consider which method of access (ILL or subscription) is better for the institution. Finally, it is true that you cannot rely on database full text as a persistent subscription to an individual title. However, if there is enough demand, you will be able to spot the titles that you need to resume subscriptions to. At WCU, the vast majority of requested titles received only one request, but there was one outlying journal which had 8 requests. The title had been available in an aggregator when it was canceled, but the publisher had later restricted aggregator access with a much longer embargo. Monitoring ILL demand allowed the library to spot individual titles to which it needed to resubscribe.

The data collected in this study reconfirm earlier research results, namely that focused journal cancellation projects do not significantly impact ILL demand even if those cancellations are large in scale. One could construe these results as a confirmation of review criteria; titles canceled had low enough demand that patrons and services were not adversely affected. Low “real” demand for journals canceled indicates that ILL will continue to be cost effective. This study also implies that cancellation criteria will result in many libraries holding a similar core set of journals. Among the schools in the study, only one had cancellation criteria which took uniqueness of content into consideration. Journal cancellation projects remain focused on the same criteria that were established during the serials crisis and have not adapted to the emerging models of scholarly communication.

The pattern of journal cancellations creates a number of interrelated stressors on the publications market. As small and medium schools eliminate journals with low demand and rely on ILL for patron access to these titles, research intensive universities are pressured to maintain subscriptions and lend the journals via ILL. At largely undergraduate institutions, use of journals can shift toward easily available full-text journals (satisficing demand), limiting discovery of applicable materials available through ILL and

reducing the demand for specific titles. Reliance on aggregator database providers for full-text content places pressure on publishers to include content in aggregator databases, and aggregator databases are increasingly being relied on as a main avenue of content in the library. While libraries have eliminated individual subscriptions for practical reasons, there are considerations of how individual decisions effect the publishing landscape. Increasing adoption of electronic journals with licensing restrictions could impact

the availability of ILL to fill user need. Collective action and advocacy as well as collaborative collection development can create a broader range of resources available to more institutions. The study suggests that individual article procurement is a sustainable alternative, and alternatives to traditional ILL have emerged; additional studies could examine the cost comparisons for ILL, subscription, and alternate methods of procurement.

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