

**Just-In-Time: the value of online integrated interlibrary
loans to broaden access to information resources**

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Abstract

This research article will discuss a collaboration strategy used between eight postsecondary institutions in Puerto Rico which are part of the library consortia COBIMET. COBIMET is a non-profit organization that works collaboratively with its members to improve virtual library services and information skills in the digital era. The development of collaboration strategies for information sharing through interlibrary loans (ILL) services have become an important service to reduce the gap of information needed by researchers or scholars. These institutions implemented an automated online interlibrary loan system that was integrated to their electronic resources discovery system. The aim of this collaborative agreement was to reduce request time and to provide access to more information resources in a cost-effective manner. The article will present the rationale on implementing an automated ILL Request Process and project experiences.

Keywords: Interlibrary loan, ILL, Collaboration Strategies, academic libraries, automation

Introduction

The landscape of teaching, learning and research has changed, requiring the need for diverse information resources. Researchers and scholars need an information-rich environment that enables discovery and reflection in order to create new knowledge (Shrauger & Scharf, 2017). The budget for acquisition or subscriptions for information resources is limited and does not satisfy the demands of all researchers or scholars. Furthermore, the projected federal budget cuts to the Higher Education Act for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) could have an impact on the costs related to the acquisition or subscriptions of informational resources, and therefore in research (Schwartz, 2019). Given the current budgetary constraints and financial conditions prevailing in many universities, sharing of information resources has become a necessity. The development of collaboration strategies for information sharing through interlibrary loans (ILL) services have become an important service to reduce the gap of information needed by researchers or scholars. This viewpoint article will discuss a collaboration strategy used between eight postsecondary institutions in Puerto Rico which are part of the library consortia COBIMET. COBIMET is a non-profit organization that works collaboratively with its members to improve virtual library services and information skills in the digital era. Its mission is to provide equitable access to information, in accordance with the requirements of the knowledge age, through collaboration, research promotion . These institutions implemented an automated online interlibrary loan system that was integrated to their electronic resources discovery system. The aim of this collaborative agreement was to reduce request time and provide access to more information resources in a cost-effective manner.

Rationale on implementing an automated ILL Request Process

To improve efficiency and provide better services to patrons, libraries have systems that provide automation of staff tasks (Schmidt, 2017). Patron demands and emphasis on service have evolved over time and are often what drive improvement projects. According to Voyles (2009), the desire to fulfill patrons' needs has increased the demand of research, and, with the need to receive articles faster at the same time, libraries are seeking ways to reduce costs and improve overall services. Kenefick and DeVito (2013) have found that a library user's focus on "instant gratification, convenient tools, and exceptional customer service" (p. 160). This preference has made timeliness a primary goal of interlibrary loan services. Resource sharing and library collaboration has increased as the economic reality of libraries has changed, and the demand in services has coincided with an expectation of instant delivery (Pritting & Jones, 2015). To satisfy these demands many libraries have adopted collaborative agreements to reduce costs.

Bryant and Ye (2015) explain that a way to do this is by integrating ILL and consortia borrowing to discovery systems. In the past decade, many academic libraries have successfully integrated this strategy. This type of agreement provides an advantage to libraries because it simplifies the ILL request process and integrates the tools into the discovery experience to get rapidly what users really need.

COBIMET experiences implementing the project

On November 1, 2019, eight postsecondary institutions decided to collaborate through a library consortium agreement to move from a non-automated ILL process to an automated one, using an integrated library's electronic resources discovery system. The automation process allowed the indexation of non-subscribed content on the library's electronic resources discovery layer that was not locally held physically or electronically on these libraries' collections. As an

additional step, the ILL manager worked with their discovery system provider to create and enable an automated ILL form to allow users request documents that were not readily available through their regular library subscriptions.

Damelio (2011) states that before implementing changes in the way ILL are provided in a library, it is important to examine the actual process of the service or system used to make responsible modifications. Following Damelio's (2011) suggestions, the ILL manager analyzed the process used at that moment on participant libraries to provide ILL services and proposed a new one reflecting on the flaws of the process and focusing on efficiency. Image 1 shows a process map of how the libraries provided non-automated ILL services, and Image 2 presents the proposed automated ILL process. The proposed procedure was shared and approved by the consortia stakeholders and therefore implemented.

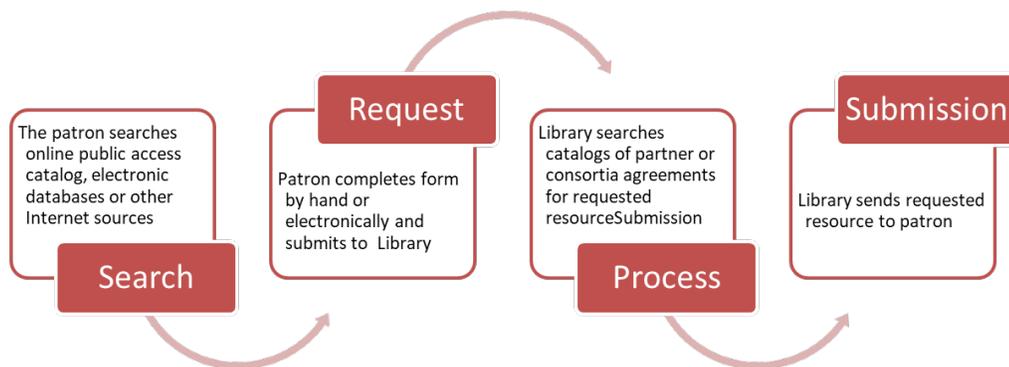


Image 1: Non-automated Interlibrary Loan Process

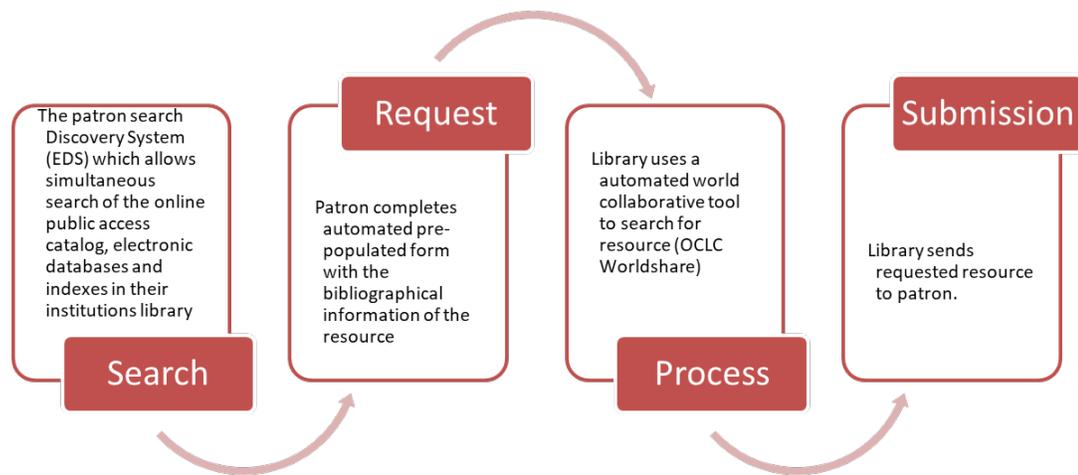


Image 2: Proposed automated Interlibrary Loan Process

Data Collection and Results

The data presented in this section are based on the initial results of the automated ILL consortia project. Statistical data was gathered in a five-month period that covered November 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020. Both the requested and processed interlibrary loans were entered in an Excel Spreadsheet. The data added to the spreadsheet from the ILL Automated form was: *Requestor Name, Requestor Institution, bibliographical information of document requested, date requested, and date processed*. In the first five months, 204 ILL requests were processed through the automated ILL system.

According to the data reported for the Academic Libraries Survey, in 2018 the eight postsecondary institutions that participated in this automated ILL collaborative effort reported 76 ILL in total. This represents an increase of 268% in just five months, compared to the reporting period of 2018. The average request per month is 41 and 3 requests per patron. Furthermore, the

processing time of an ILL was an average of just one day and with no additional institution investment of resources as it was all managed through a collaborative consortium agreement.

The implementation of the Automated ILL allowed content indexed in the library's electronic resources discovery system that was not locally available to be accessible. For a small investment in time and planning, the eight postsecondary participant institutions were able to promote ILL in discovery interfaces and created a bridge between resource discovery and access.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2019) of the U.S. Department of Education requires all postsecondary institutions to complete an Academic Libraries Survey as part of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). One of the elements considered in the Academic Libraries Survey relates to statistical data derived from the ILL service. According to the figures reported for the Academic Libraries Survey in 2018 IPEDS, 68% of the postsecondary institutions in Puerto Rico offered ILL services. There were a total 16,690 ILL loans for the reporting year; of those, 10,326 were provided, and 6,664 were received by postsecondary institutions libraries.

Considering this information, there is a great opportunity to develop ILL collaborative agreements between other higher education institutions in Puerto Rico. This collaboration will increase the services provided to the patrons of those institutions and expand the collection content of their libraries. Based on the results of the presented experience, and the national data provided by IPEDS (2018), if the automated ILL consortia agreement was able to increase the ILL services in 200 % within a five month period, it can be inferred that institutions who

actually provide the ILL services outside consortia agreements can benefit from a project like this and duplicate their numbers within a year.

Conclusions

The efforts of the libraries that decided to take a part in this ILL library consortia agreement are significant and will have an impact on the higher education system in Puerto Rico. Amongst all the benefits these institutions, the principal one is the satisfaction derived for their users who can easily retrieve what they need using the Discovery System and a pre-populated bibliographic information ILL form. This initiative has provided to participant libraries an opportunity to reduce considerably costs, manage ILL workload more efficiently and provide users the information they need in a shorter response time.

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