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Consortial Circulation via Patron Placed Holds in the USMAI’s Shared Catalog and its Impact on Collection Development and ILL

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The University System of Maryland and Affiliated Institutions (USMAI) is made up of the fourteen campuses of the University of Maryland, as well as two independent state institutions, St. Mary’s College and Morgan State University, and shares one online Aleph catalog, catalogusmai. Among the USMAI school libraries are two law libraries, a medical library and the flagship University of Maryland Library at College Park. catalogusmai was brought up live in January 2003.

The previous CARL catalog had been shared by Morgan State University and all the USM (University System of Maryland) institutions with the exception of the Health Sciences and Human Services Library (HSHSL) at the University of Maryland at Baltimore. Patron Placed Holds (PPH) were easily done between campuses, with the exception of requests for or from the HSHSL, which all went through ILL.

Patrons are now able to search the combined catalogusmai and request books online from any institution in the consortium. One of the unique features of the USMAI holds process in Aleph is that patrons are able to place title level holds in the OPAC rather than item specific holds. When a patron finds a title they currently have available to place a request without having to determine which individual copy is available to fill their request. The system evaluates the hold group and places their hold on the best available copy, or recalls an item if no available copy can be found. Each library receives an “outstanding holds” (pull) list daily of materials requested for pick-up at other libraries. The books are located, discharged and marked by the system as “in transit” to the location where it was requested for pickup. Materials are mailed or transported to the appropriate institution, on various schedules. Depending upon mailing method used, some campuses may have to wait a week to receive their materials, while most campuses receive their materials within a few days.

Impact on Interlibrary Loan

While USMAI patrons may place holds on books through catalogusmai, articles are still requested through Interlibrary Loan. The advantage of this arrangement is that the ILL staff at UMBC (the University of Maryland Baltimore County) can spend time on these article requests and requests from other institutions, rather than dealing with the 13,000 hold requests filled by UMBC for other USMAI campuses, and the 7,000 USMAI requests filled for UMBC patrons. While these requests would certainly boost ILLs statistics, the ILL staff would be overwhelmed by more than double the number of filled requests processed for both lending and borrowing. These statistics, of course, don’t take into account the amount of time spent on processing the titles that weren’t sent but were searched in the stacks.

In addition to sharing an online catalog, the USMAI has many consortially purchased online databases, which serve the research needs of many USMAI patrons. Other more specialized databases are not necessary to some of the USMAI campuses, and so are consortially purchased only by campuses with those programs to support.

At UMBC, even with the many shared full-text databases and over 4,000 total paper and electronic subscriptions, we find that our continued on page 36

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