Against the Grain

Volume 16 | Issue 2

November 2013

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Recommended Citation

DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4298

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Using Interlibrary Loan Data ...
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sertation research. Note of caution: patron-
use information could be skewed if student
assistants request in their own names ma-
terials through ILL that are actually intended
for a professor's research.

- **By borrowing costs.** Documented borrow-
ing costs are crucial when analyzing high-
volume requests of articles from specific
journals. Do the copyright and/or IFM fees
paid in a given year exceed the actual cost of
subscribing to the journal and maintaining
it on-site? If yes, is this cost level consistent
from year to year or did it spike during one
isolated year? And does the journal reflect
an active area of the curriculum?

- **By lender.** By examining aggregate ILL
data, it could be revealed, for example, that
the library has been borrowing a high vol-
ume of material on international law from a
nearby university that has recently started
to develop a strong collection in this area. Does
international law fit into the borrowing
library's own curriculum? Or do the requests
reflect concentrations of specialized research
needs beyond the level and scope of the bor-
rowing library? As the time arises for the
collaborative collection development agree-
ment with this institution to come under its
scheduled review, the possibility of formally
assigning international law as a topic to the
lending university could be addressed.

**What is being requested through interlibrary loan, and why?**

A trail of several years can provide enough data
to provide a history of what was being borrowed
across a broader spectrum of time. Being able
to sort ILL data by department/area of study and pa-
tent level provides insight into context of the
request. Bibliographers can glean from such "ILL
trails" evidence of areas not yet covered by exist-
ing library collections or research interests beyond
the scope of the collection.

**Example uses of overview statistics:**

- **For example, a three-year total count of ILL
requests (reflecting articles and mono-
graphs), broken down by academic area of
study, provides an at-a-glance overview of
total requests for each area.

- The quick overview points to areas of heavy
borrowing, which warrant further examina-
tion — either by detailed information within
the academic area, or a year-by-year com-
parison of borrowing volume by academic
area, or both.

- If an institutional program begun in the last
two years has an ILL trail of heavy borrow-
ing, then that academic area's requests should
be scrutinized in detail in order to determine
whether the requests reflect specialized re-
search beyond the program's scope or a core
component of the program not yet adequately
covered in the library's own collection.

**Example uses of detailed information — some
scenarios:**

- A given area's academic programs are chang-
ing and/or expanding. Professors are request-
ing titles for their research and course prepar-
ations while acquisitions efforts to address
these new curricular-support needs are al-
ready underway. In this case, these interli-
brary-loan requests provide a pool of further
titles to consider for purchase.

- A language professor is interested in re-
searching art and borrows a book cover-
ing an important artistic movement that the
library's current collection does not ad-
dress. From an acquisitions standpoint, if
it is known that this area is taught on cam-
pus, the book is pursued for the library's
own collection.

- A math professor at a primarily under-
graduate college is interested in research-
ing life of a perfume house for a spe-
cific project. Perfume-making is not
among the college's programs and adding
such a program is not on the horizon.
Moreover, the particular professor is the
only perfume researcher on campus. In
such a case, despite the library's desire to
accommodate the clientele, acquisitions
would not seek to buy books supporting
one person's one-time research area.

- Articles from a certain journal have been
borrowed to such an extent that the copy-
right fees exceed the actual cost of purchas-
ing and housing this journal. Questions to
ponder: Are these articles being ordered
mostly by the same person? What type of
library patron is requesting these journal
articles? (this helps identify what perspective
is driving the need for articles from this jour-
nal) Faculty member? Undergraduate stu-
dent? Graduate Student? Or are they being
ordered by numerous people from one or
several overlapping programs/departments?
Are these requests clustered around a spe-
cific semester or academic year, or are they
consistent over a period of several years? Are
these ILL article requests directly related to
the university's active academic programs?
Such a scenario warrants exploring whether
the repeat requestor needs for the library to
subscribe to this journal, especially if the
article requests consistently originate from
the academic area as a whole.

- If an institution is involved in collabora-
tive collection development with other
(usually nearby) institutions, ILL data
sorted by lender can reveal sustained heavy
borrowing in certain subject areas from a
fellow library of the cooperative collec-
tion development agreement. As this col-

erative agreement comes under its pe-

Detailed data therefore provide case-by-case
support for acquisitions decisions, especially in
cases where some context-specific further ex-
amination is necessary. Especially in smaller li-

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