

eBooks, Interlibrary Loan and an Uncertain Future

Elizabeth Siler*, Amanda Binder, Christine Beardsley

^{a,b,c}J.Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina Charlotte, Charlotte, USA;

Amanda Binder, University of North Carolina Charlotte, abinder3@charlotte.edu

Christine Beardsley, University of North Carolina Charlotte, cbeards2@charlott.edu

Elizabeth Siler – University of North Carolina Charlotte, esiler3@charlotte.edu

eBooks, Interlibrary Loan and an Uncertain Future

Academic libraries are entering a new reality for collections and resource sharing due to the increased acquisition of electronic books, or ebooks, during the last decade. The need to interlibrary loan (ILL) ebooks will likely increase based on current purchasing trends, but how well are we prepared for this future? Important advancements are underway, but ILL for ebooks is hampered by restrictive licensing models, resource sharing systems, and current practices. This study provides an environmental scan of the current acquisitions and ILL practices of academic libraries. This paper guides academic libraries through these conversations so that they can support the borrowing and lending of ebooks into the future.

Keywords: word: interlibrary loan, resource sharing, ebook, acquisitions, electronic resources

Subject classification codes: include these here if the journal requires them

Introduction

Academic libraries are entering a new era for collections and resource sharing that can be attributed to the increased acquisition of ebooks over the last decade. Ebooks serve many different needs of academic libraries and their users, including greater accessibility, no space requirement, and for some models, reduced costs, but they do not currently meet the long-standing commitment of libraries to provide resource sharing across institutions. This is due to the current terms in licensing contracts for ebooks and the lack of established systems and workflows to support the sharing of whole ebooks through resource sharing services. Some consortiums and vendors are currently creating new practices and systems that allow ebooks to be included in the resource sharing ecosystem. Naturally, these groundbreaking projects cannot account for all institutions' unique-circumstances. While these models are in development, conversations are needed among academic librarians (in areas such as collections, interlibrary loan, and research and instruction) to further challenge and improve existing practices and systems. This research project seeks to facilitate those conversations. We hope this survey's findings contribute to a roadmap for preserving resource sharing of books among academic libraries in the future. Print books may serve our

users' needs now, but as academic library acquisition practices trend toward a preference for ebooks (e-preferred) and publishers offer more options for ebooks, we will likely reach a point where print copies of certain books will not be available from other institutions. It is this future that we must prepare for now and that brings urgency to this discussion.

This study was inspired by a series of conversations among three librarians working in different areas at Atkins Library at UNC Charlotte. Humanities disciplines and scholars are known for having a great affinity for the print book so when informal conversations with these scholars during the pandemic seemed to confirm greater acceptance of ebooks, many thoughts came to mind. How would this impact our users at UNC Charlotte in the future? The greatest number of requests for books via Interlibrary Loan at UNC Charlotte come from scholars in the humanities. This shift in thinking provides a glimpse of what a future of library monograph collections consisting mostly of ebooks would mean for academic libraries and humanities scholars. With major collecting libraries moving to e-preferred approval plans for book purchases¹, and many ebooks not made available through interlibrary loan due to licensing restrictions or lack of systems to operationalize this process, how would this impact the smaller libraries in their network that rely on them for access to materials via resource sharing? How many libraries have considered discarding print books that can be bought ~~purchased~~ in ebook format as part of rightsizing projects and greater demand for reducing the print book footprint in library buildings? Libraries experienced the benefits of ebook purchasing during the Covid-19 pandemic and may use those experiences to move forward with more ebook acquisitions. This study seeks to understand what this changing practice could mean for libraries that rely heavily on interlibrary loan and other resource sharing practices to serve the need for books among their users. The findings reveal not only the trajectory of this practice in academic libraries, and the consequences for interlibrary loan, but how discussions around resource sharing and collection development need to be happening together. We cannot make decisions about collection development without understanding the implications it has for resource sharing. Planning for the future will require academic libraries to consider these practices together in order to support the larger ecosystem of collections. The recently released *Pan-European Statement on eBooks*² addresses this issue internationally. This study focuses primarily on institutions in the United States although we recognize that interlibrary loan of ebooks is a global concern. We surveyed 70 libraries in Spring 2022 to learn about their book purchasing practices, preferences, and budgets and their ability to fill ILL requests for

¹ For the purposes of this study, "purchases", "purchasing" of ebooks refers to the licensing of ebooks to access on vendor-provided platforms.

² Pan-European Statement on eBooks: <https://www.knowledgerights21.org/news-story/library-associations-across-europe-joint-call-for-action-on-ebooks/>

ebooks. Some libraries moved to e-preferred or e-only purchasing of books during the Covid-19 pandemic, and this research suggests that many libraries will continue with this model moving forward. Obvious benefits to ebook purchasing for individual libraries include increased access for those library users and a reduced footprint of books in the physical library space. Fewer print books in libraries satisfies an increasing pressure on academic libraries to serve as student study centers for their campuses as well as space for technology and other services. While libraries are increasingly moving to e-preferred, and monograph budgets for most libraries are shrinking, ILL is simultaneously touted as the solution to access research materials that are unavailable through their own collections. However, robust ILL services rely upon print books being available to borrow. In the US, the copyright laws supporting sharing physical books do not apply to ebooks, instead the use of ebooks is bound by the conditions of licenses.

Gaining great attention in the U.S. courts are cases regarding controlled digital lending (CDL) which refers to sharing a digitized copy of a print book in a library collection. There has been support for CDL by several organizations including the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions and the U.S. nonprofit organization, Library Futures. In October 2023, Library Futures issued *Principles on Library Ownership of Digital Books*³ in an effort to establish trust between libraries and publishers so that the dynamic shifts from licensing to ownership of ebooks and with that shift, the rights for libraries to lend and borrow ebooks with restrictions (following the same principles as CDL). With broader definitions of e-books or digital books, to include books sold as e-books and books sold as print books and later digitized, developments with CDL could benefit the rights of libraries to lend and borrow the type of e-books discussed in this survey.

¶If many libraries stop purchasing books in print format and publishers continue restrictions on the lending of ebooks across institutions, libraries may find themselves in a landscape where they cannot offer access to what their patrons need. Libraries will either be forced to purchase more books, burdening shrinking monographs budgets, or determine a way to interlibrary loan ebooks. This could also result in a disproportionate demand for ILL lending on the shrinking number of institutions buying books in print, or for whole ebook lending from the few libraries that do negotiate better ebook contracts with publishers and develop systems to make them shareable.

³ Principles on Library Ownership of Digital Books: https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5f308d0beb0dcb479f2d2b7c/6670aa1914075ed9d3b0d210_Principles%20on%20Library%20Ownership%20of%20Digital%20Books%202024.pdf

Literature Review

There is growing research about ebook acquisition models and user attitudes toward ebooks and format preferences¹ but not much scholarly research published on whole ebook lending. Julie A. Murphy (2019)² offers a good overview of existing research in “Ebook sharing models in academic libraries.” One of the first programs to experiment with ebook ILL was developed in 2007 between the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (CISTI) and Ingram’s MyiLibrary division³ Some consortia have been able to establish ebook sharing among their member libraries through Demand Driven Acquisition (DDA)⁴ programs but this does not offer solutions for non-member libraries.

Several surveys have been distributed to academic libraries in the last 15 years to gather data on their lending and borrowing practices and policies related to ebooks, as well as perceived obstacles to and perceptions of ebook lending and the future of resource sharing. Frederiksen et al. (2011)⁴ conducted a survey of the ILL community in 2010 (via discussion forum ILL-L) to better understand the implications of ebook licensing and interlibrary loan use. Eighty percent of the respondents were from academic institutions. Thirty percent of respondents indicated that no ebook licenses permitted ILL while 40% did not know or had not considered this question. The authors conclude that a major barrier to the ILL of ebook chapters and whole ebooks would be the lack of knowledge about ebook licenses. “This gap, combined with technical and platform issues and a lack of internal workflow, signifies the need for discussion to be held in libraries and with publishers to accommodate emerging ebook formats”⁵. Improved and increasing communication within libraries and among libraries are proposed as possible solutions, as well as pressure on ebook vendors to create fewer restrictions on ebook use⁶.

Zhu and Shen (2014)⁷ began research on this topic in 2013 and reported on their findings in “A survey of e-book interlibrary loan policy in US academic libraries”. The survey responses revealed that the majority of academic libraries did not have ILL policies relating to ebooks, and of those that did and posted them online, most did not allow ebooks to be loaned via ILL. These findings are echoed by the research of Percy (2013)⁸. A majority of the respondents also indicated that they would not allow for the ILL of whole ebooks. The top reasons for rejecting such requests were licensing restrictions and technical obstacles. The majority of respondents also indicated that their library did not request whole ebooks from other libraries which suggests that they would not expect them to be accepted. The authors note that lack of knowledge among those working in ILL regarding the different licensing terms for ebooks and ebook

⁴ DDA is where a patron would identify a book in the library catalog and could automatically activate a library purchase. DDA is sometimes called Patron Driven Acquisition (PDA).

packages could also contribute to these practices and policies. Patron Driven Acquisition (PDA) is introduced as a popular solution to the challenges presented by ebook ILL. The authors also suggest that any efforts to move forward with ebook ILL would require libraries to share their ILL lending policies and ebook holdings. They conclude by saying, “Given that few, if any, people could predict the popularity of using e-journal ILL ten years ago, we have sufficient reason to be optimistic about the future development of e-book ILL in the next ten years”.⁹ This research by Zhu was followed up in 2018 with the publication of a three-year trend report on ebook ILL in academic libraries.¹⁰ This study partially explains why there has not been much progress with the widespread adoption of ebook ILL. Zhu compares survey data from 2013 and 2016 to determine if any changes occurred with regard to ebook ILL practices, perceived obstacles, and attitudes and perceptions among academic librarians.

Beyond the scholarly literature, various webinars, presentations, and essays document the progression of conversations in the field of library and information science related to ebooks and resource sharing. Early predictions about the impact of ebooks on interlibrary loan are discussed by Interlibrary Loan Librarian, William Gee, in the April 2007 issue of *Against the Grain*.

If libraries and their interlibrary loan staff do not work to alter the current trajectory, eBooks could easily continue to follow the path of e-journals to where some titles have no print edition produced and the only version in existence is prohibited by technology and licenses from being copied or loaned. At present, this is rare with eBooks, but it is a definite concern for the future.¹¹

A discussion at the 2011 Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA) annual meeting is documented as the impetus for the creation of Occam’s Reader. Noting the increase in e-book acquisitions, ILL colleagues questioned, “How could the tradition of ILL be maintained when increasing numbers of requested titles are locked behind local authentication barriers?”¹² Three member-libraries from the Alliance formed a committee to investigate a way to make the ILL of e-books a possibility, resulting in a library-developed solution – Occam’s Reader. The system was developed to integrate with ILLiad and was piloted with the GWLA consortium. Occam’s Reader allows a library to share a link to an ebook that provides limited access. As of August 2023, there are 30 university libraries subscribing to the service¹³ Occam’s Reader continues to be explored in the library arena in discussions related to ebooks and ILL.

Discussions of the problem of resource sharing and ebooks among academic libraries also appeared in issues of the scholarly journal, *Collaborative Librarianship*, in 2011. Michael Levine-Clark suggests that interlibrary loan is not the best option for providing users quick access to digital resources such as

ebooks.¹⁴ Levine-Clark aptly describes some of the challenges with applying the traditional ILL model used for print books to ebooks saying, “It involves multiple steps, all with costs involved... primarily salary and lost opportunity for staff to be doing something else¹⁵. He proposes instead that publishers work with vendors to create an at-cost system for the short-term lending of ebooks not owned by an institution. “If publishers would make e-books available to vendors and could agree to a reasonable cost for a short-term lease—a cost somewhere below the costs involved in traditional ILL— we could greatly improve efficiency and get the book to the user almost immediately”¹⁶.

Heather Wicht from University of Colorado Boulder further explores alternative models to traditional ILL for ebook requests in a later issue of *Collaborative Librarianship*; these models include short term lending, purchase on demand, and print on demand¹⁷.⁵ A 2020 study by Downey and Zhang¹⁸ compares DDA (Demand-Driven Acquisition) programs including those that integrate short-term loans (STL): “The STL model is structured to trigger an ebook purchase only after a set number of STLs have been triggered. The final purchase cost for an ebook in the STL model is the sum of each rental fee plus the list price of the ebook”¹⁹. Their findings suggest that DDA models that do not include short-term loans offer libraries a better return on investment (ROI). While some ebook vendors experimented with short term lending for libraries, which continue to be an option in some DDA models, we would not be continuing to pursue ILL as an option for sharing ebooks had this model been widely adopted by academic libraries.

The landscape of academic libraries regarding ebook collections and resource sharing described by Wicht in 2011 has remained largely the same:

Most e-books are licensed rather than sold to libraries, and it is common for publishers and vendors to prohibit in their license agreements the use of e-books to fulfill ILL requests. They believe that allowing ILL in this format would facilitate unlimited sharing of the digital copy and discourage libraries from purchasing their own copies, negatively impacting revenue... As a result, libraries have been adding an increasing body of content to their collections for which they may have no ILL privileges.²⁰

⁵ Short term loans are only an option through aggregators and not all ebooks are eligible for short term loans. They are also not a sustainable financial model for all libraries.

Alternatives to using traditional ILL⁶ methods for supplementing library collections have not delivered the promise some hoped they could achieve for libraries on a large scale⁷. Still, libraries carried on with the acquisition of ebooks. The number of ebooks in academic libraries increased by 32.7 million in a period of four years (2008-2012) according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)²¹. A 2020 Choice survey of academic libraries reveals that expenditures for ebooks had increased in three years and ebook budgets were anticipated to increase in the next year²². This data suggests that ebook acquisitions have been increasing and will continue to increase despite the lack of resources and systems available for whole ebook ILL for most academic libraries.

Certain libraries have experimented with options for filling ILL requests for books using short-term leasing. Articles published by Sewell and Link (2016 and 2017)²³ from The College of New Jersey Library in two parts describe how they were able to experiment with lending short-term loans of ebooks. This project was motivated by the desire to fulfill ILL book requests for their users as quickly as journal articles. In offering this option, they did ask users if they preferred print or ebook versions and surveys of those who opted for access to the short-term leased ebooks noted some of the frustrations with the platform and restrictions on use (limit on downloads) but they also received positive feedback. Large increases to the pricing of short-term leases by major publishers during the period when this study was taking place (by 300% in some cases) did not make this a viable long-term option²⁴.

In many ways, the potential of ebooks has been frustrated by the very factors that make them so promising. The ease with which they can be transmitted and reproduced have prompted efforts to monetize and control the medium—protecting the legitimate rights of the producers, but stifling benefits to users.²⁵

The dramatic price increase for short-term loans described by Sewell and Link (2017) is echoed in several other studies²⁶ and effectively seemed to diminish thinking of short-term loans as a long-term and affordable replacement for the resource sharing of ebooks across institutions.

Restrictions on the use of ebooks and the lack of solutions for sharing them across institutions largely remained into the next decade. In the September 2021 issue of *Against the Grain*, then Collections Strategist at UConn Library, Michael Rodriguez, states that “the licensing and interlibrary lending of

⁶ Traditional ILL refers to ILL that has been used for print and journal article lending.

⁷ Potential exception is the arrival of Occam’s Reader, particularly the most recent updates. However it involves limited time access and other restrictions and hasn’t been widely adopted.

whole eBooks is an essential next step in making eBooks more accessible, shareable, user-friendly, and truly viable as alternatives to print”²⁷. Rodriguez suggests that several conditions must be in place to make the sharing of ebooks a viable option for libraries, including standardizing ebooks as Digital Rights Management (DRM)-free and allowing for the one-click download of whole ebooks. Two models for whole ebook lending that Rodriguez discusses are link sharing via Occam’s Reader⁸ (link sharing time limited by DRM) or using existing ILL systems to share whole ebook files with one borrowing user. With the second model, requests can be processed similarly to article and book chapter requests, and the material is provided to an individual borrower without electronic restrictions.

Some library consortiums have been preparing for this future landscape by creating programs and negotiating licensing contracts for ILL rights with selected ebook publishers. Notably, the Virginia's Academic Library Consortium’s (VIVA) project for whole ebook lending established rights for ILL with four vendors through an RFP process in 2016.⁹ VIVA has developed examples of the open model of ebook lending. Their website provides recommendations for licensing²⁸, sharing contractual language²⁹ and strategies for use by others.

Another example is the University of Connecticut pilot program³⁰. UConn Libraries have been lending whole ebooks since 2019. They have negotiated licensing agreements and presented information on their strategies to other institutions. In a 2020 presentation at the Charleston Conference with Allen Jones, Michael Rodriguez mentioned “moving the Overton window” or changing perceptions of what is acceptable or normal among publishers and librarians³¹. The projects covered in this literature review are doing just this; ebook resource sharing is clearly possible, and libraries have begun wrestling with the details.

In 2021, the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA) task force on ebooks released a report of their findings following a year working toward the goals of, promoting consortial ebook sharing, establishing expectations and processes for both sides of ebook loans, and identifying possible barriers to success³². The report incorporated feedback from those working with ILL, electronic resources, accessibility and IT at BTAA institutions, an indication of the complexity of this work and number of stakeholders.

⁸ Occam’s Reader from Texas Tech, the University of Hawaii @ Manoa and the Great Western Library Alliance won the [2015 Rethinking Resource Sharing Award](https://today.ttu.edu/posts/2015/07/libraries-wins-innovation-award-for-occams-reader). <https://today.ttu.edu/posts/2015/07/libraries-wins-innovation-award-for-occams-reader>

⁹ VIVA’s whole ebook ILL project won the [2017 Rethinking Resource Sharing Award](#).

The Boston Library Consortium (BLC) E-Book Sharing Working Group released *E-Book ILL Roadmaps: Charting Pathways For Broader Adoption of E-Book Interlibrary Loan* in June 2024³³. They offer workflows for establishing ebook ILL programs, provide detailed questions and considerations for each stage of the highly iterative process, specific instructions for particular vendor tools and links to resources to supporting libraries doing this work. The introduction includes clear explanations of the larger context of tangled systems, practices and workflows contributing to the difficulty and complexity of developing ebook ILL.

Multiple organizations are working on various pilot projects for sharing ebooks, including UConn Libraries, PALCI (Partnership for Academic Library Collaboration and Innovation), IDS (Information Delivery Services), and Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries. The projects are on various scales and with different library service providers including ProQuest and OCLC. These programs can restrict access to a specific lending period, and are limited to specific publisher's titles. For example, the ProQuest pilot was limited to exchanges between libraries in several regional cohorts, used one content aggregator where links were accessible, and involved books that libraries purchased from publishers who agreed to ebook lending licenses³⁴. Another challenge emerging with the ability to loan ebooks is creating a way for borrowing libraries to discover the available titles. While these projects are exciting, they offer proof of concept of whole ebook lending rather than a complete solution.

Developing these pilots for the limited link lending approach within regional networks creates options with the potential to be scaled up. For smaller libraries who do not participate in large group buying or shared catalog networks, these solutions may not work. In regions and states without strong consortia, strategic cooperation, and funding, participation may not be possible.

Pilots and other programs for resource sharing of whole ebooks are limited and not yet released on a larger scale but they will continue to evolve and libraries should continue to monitor their progress.

Research Design

Our survey was designed to gather information from academic libraries without regard to location. The survey asked for two pieces of demographic content: type of library (Doctoral-Granting, Masters Level, Baccalaureate, Associate and Special) and full-time student enrollment. The survey did not ask about specific institution information in order to encourage more respondents who might feel uncomfortable sharing their college or university affiliation. Responses about type of and size of library were sufficient for us to identify trends of different types of libraries in the results.

The survey was posted to multiple regional, national, and international LIS-related listservs in mid-April 2022 and remained open for an eight-week period. The invitation was distributed to discussion lists covering collection services, licensing, and interlibrary loan to receive participation from the broadest possible group of respondents.

The survey was divided into two main sections: Collection Services and Interlibrary Loan. Respondents were asked to work together with colleagues from areas at their library to provide a comprehensive overview of the monograph purchasing and ILL practices at their institution. This was our attempt to avoid multiple submissions from libraries since responses were anonymous. We cannot guarantee that our survey wasn't completed more than once at an institution.

The Collection Services portion of the survey included questions related to how libraries are purchasing monographs, both print and electronic, and how ebooks are being licensed. To obtain information about how libraries were sustaining their current print collections, the survey asked respondents about participation in shared print retention programs and membership in HathiTrust. The survey then moved on to asking questions related to budget and expenditures, including total annual collection budget and how much of the budget was spent on ebooks and print books to understand if budget priorities had been placed on print or ebook format. Next, a good portion of the survey focused on how libraries were purchasing both print and electronic books asking if libraries received ebooks through consortial/statewide purchasing and subscriptions, participated in approval plans including direct ship and e-preferred approval plans, ebook subscription purchasing, demand driven acquisition (DDA) program participation, and evidence based selection program participation (EBS). With these questions we did ask which vendors or publishers libraries work with to purchase or subscribe to ebooks, including for DDA and EBS programs. Respondents were then asked with which vendors they were able to negotiate whole ebook lending within their licenses so these answers could be mapped to how and where they were buying ebooks in previous questions and to see which publishers and vendors were open to whole ebook lending. To get an overall view of the respondents' ebook practices, the survey asked if libraries had changed their monograph collection practices since the pandemic, if they preferred purchasing ebooks, and if they were replacing print books in their collection with ebooks. Finally respondents were asked what future challenges they see for monograph purchasing in academic libraries.

The Interlibrary Loan portion of the survey began with a question about the location of ILL in the administrative structure of the library. This was asked since ILL's place in organizational structures

affects interdepartmental communication, is sometimes discussed as part of innovative resource sharing operations, and is a topic of current research and discussion. The second question asks libraries to identify their main ILL management system. Answers to these first two questions were multiple choice questions including “other” options which were normalized but required some interpretation.

Certainly, asking for a single “main management system” was a clumsy attempt to get a picture of resource sharing systems, and responses likely oversimplify the arrangements at larger institutions or those with multiple networks and consortia. Many academic libraries use a variety of methods for different types of items and are likely using several systems in addition to a management system. Also, the highly configurable nature of resource sharing systems like ILLiad make it impossible to know exactly what each instance looks like, and might be combined with, from one institution to the next. Fully exploring the various systems and networks in resource sharing could certainly be the focus of a research project on its own. That being said, it was important to get a sense of the systems libraries are using for this work since their functionality, interoperability, and limitations are relevant.

To gauge the relative size of the ILL operations we asked about the average annual volume of returnable items borrowed and lent. In hindsight, clarifying how many years, or which specific year’s volumes to average would have strengthened the data collected. The fifth and sixth questions asked about past lending of portions of ebooks or entire ebooks. Next we asked if libraries have a borrowing request form specifically for ebooks and if/how they are tracking ebook borrowing requests from their users. While developing the survey we heard about some institutions that had created customized request forms for ebooks. The final question was open ended and asked them to predict future challenges related to ebooks and ILL.

Questions were reviewed by a few colleagues and refined with their feedback prior to circulation. There were some issues with the questions that became clear as the results came in and they have been noted above.

Results (responses/ analysis from survey)

Demographic Results

In total the survey had 70 respondents. Although this is a small percentage of the 1,533 research libraries¹⁰ that reported data for the 2021 ACRL survey, the results offered enough data to get an idea of current thinking in libraries related to ebook purchasing and interlibrary loan practices.

Figure 1: Breakdown of survey respondents

Collection Services Section Results

The average total collection spend for the respondents was \$1,388,223. We divided the data based on the average spend per research library type to get a better idea of what different types of libraries were spending on collections.

Figure 2.1 Average spend on library general collections vs. library type.

As you can see from Figure 2.1 the doctoral-granting university libraries have much larger budgets than the other libraries. From this you can deduce that they have more money to dedicate to monograph purchasing both in print and ebook, which means these are the libraries the smaller libraries would be relying on for borrowing.

Spending on ebooks and print books are similar in terms of the number of libraries spending patterns with most libraries spending between 5-10% of their budget on books, either print or electronic as shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Percentage of the general collections budget spent on ebooks.

Digging deeper into the data, purchasing among the smaller libraries including associate colleges and special libraries is very high. The associate college libraries in particular spend a large part of their budget on books spending, with 100% (n=70) of the respondents spending 10% or more on print books and 85%

¹⁰ <https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/25850/33784>

(n=60) of the respondents spending 10% or more on ebooks. However, when looking at average spending for this size library, it is about \$18,000, which likely does not yield a lot of books for resource sharing purposes considering the average list price of academic books in the U.S. is \$102 per the Gobi Annual Book Price Update³⁵.

Looking at the doctoral-granting university libraries, a third of them (n=12) do not spend more than 10% of their budget on both print or ebooks, with 50% (n=18) of the libraries spending 5% of their budget on print books. With their average budgets being \$5.16 million that means they are spending on average about \$400,000 on ebooks. However, we did have two respondents who are spending over 20% of their budget on books and also have \$14 million overall budget, but closer to 10% on print books. So overall the responding libraries are spending less on books but they are spending more of that amount on ebooks than on print books.

This is further shown in how libraries are purchasing or getting access to ebooks. Seventy-two percent (n=50) of the respondents are getting access to ebooks from titles purchased on their behalf by the state or are included in larger consortial deals. These deals can help add a significant number of titles to an ebook collection at low or no cost but can also create homogenous collections within a group, limiting the benefits of ILL.

The overall number of libraries participating in approval plans has decreased over time, as they focus more on a just-in-time book model rather than a just-in-case model, and as budgets continue to be stagnant or decrease. Approval or selection plans¹¹ were once a large source of print holdings in libraries. Only 35% (n=25) of our respondents currently have an approval plan. The majority of the libraries that have approval plans are doctoral-granting university libraries, with about 50% (n=18) of the doctoral-granting university respondents reporting they still have an approval plan. Of the 35% of respondents with approval plans, 36% (n=8) have an e-preferred approval plan, which means they are getting ebooks unless they are not available. Most of those who have e-preferred plans have had them for at least two years. This information shows that libraries are acquiring fewer print books without approval plans, and that some with approval plans are mostly getting ebooks.

¹¹ Approval or selection plans are plans established between libraries and their book vendors that operationalize the acquisition and shipment of books that fit specific parameters set by the library. Historically, they have served libraries in keeping up with acquisitions of relevant new materials without the manual process of selection by librarians.

Libraries responding to the survey did not necessarily favor a particular purchasing model between subscribing to ebooks versus purchasing ebooks. This is likely due to the variety of ways you can license ebooks.

When ebooks became a more common purchase for libraries, many libraries moved to instituting DDA or PDA ebook purchasing. This practice is still prevalent with 59% (n=41) of the libraries having at least one DDA program and 33% (n=23) of respondents participating in two or more programs. For the doctoral-granting university libraries, 70% (n=25) have at least one DDA program. With their large budgets, you can assume they are acquiring a significant number of books using the process. The most popular provider of DDA among the respondents is ProQuest with 41% (n=29) of the respondents using their service, and JSTOR and Ebsco following behind with 22% (n=15) and 14% (n=10) respectively.

A newer model, evidence based acquisitions (EBA), allows libraries to purchase ebooks based on user behavior. In an EBA, a library puts down an agreed upon amount of money and gets full access to some or all of a publisher's collection. After a certain amount of time (usually a year), libraries choose titles based on usage, or other factors, to purchase in perpetuity a selection of titles from a percentage or the full amount originally paid. This leads to libraries purchasing what is being used but still getting access to a significant number of titles. Fifty-six percent (n=39) of the survey respondents currently participate in an EBA of some kind and 37% (n=26) participate in two or more. The majority of the respondents who participate in these deals are from doctoral-granting, masters, and baccalaureate institutions, which indicates these are more high priced deals. Among the respondents, the most common publishers used in EBA programs are JSTOR (17), Taylor and Francis (19), and Wiley (18).

Along with purchasing ebooks through firm orders, approval plans, DDA, and EBAs, libraries also have many options to subscribe to big ebook packages that have thousands of titles but no ownership rights. Of the respondents, 87% of the libraries subscribe to ebook packages. These packages can provide a large amount of titles to a library, but they offer no protection from titles moving in and out of the collection and no ownership. These subscriptions can provide significant value to libraries, especially libraries with smaller budgets, but they diminish the long term ability for interlibrary loan of popular titles. The most common provider of these packages are Ebsco and Proquest and, overall, they take up much of the market share of the libraries surveyed.

With libraries spending money on purchasing or subscribing to ebooks, the ability to lend those ebooks would boost the access to content, especially for libraries that rely heavily on borrowing books from other

institutions. Unfortunately the standard licensing language for ebooks currently mirrors ejournals, which usually includes a clause that restricts lending to “a reasonable amount of the book” or “single chapters only.” Due to these licensing terms, many libraries cannot lend whole ebooks, which for many books is the best way to read them, especially in the humanities and social sciences. Libraries have started dipping their toes into whole ebook library lending, but with all the ebook purchasing happening these efforts need to be accelerated. According to the survey, only 14% (n=10) of the respondents have been able to negotiate whole ebook lending into their ebook purchasing contracts with just one vendor and 10% (n=7) with two or more vendors. The vendors that have agreed to whole ebook lending, according to the survey, include Brill, Oxford, Taylor & Francis, Wiley, Springer, Elsevier, and Cambridge, who are all big ebook publishers.

Based on the survey results, 56% (n=39) of the respondents noted that the pandemic did impact how they plan to order books in the future, although it is not noted what the changes are. We could infer that libraries are dedicating more funds to ebook purchasing to provide more off-campus access since some courses never returned to campus, and students and faculty have become more comfortable with using ebooks as opposed to print books. Forty percent of the respondents said they now prefer ebook purchasing over print purchasing. For the doctoral-granting universities, 70% (n=25) of the respondents prefer ebooks over print, which means these large collections might be unavailable for interlibrary loan-

The survey indicated that most libraries have not purchased ebooks to replace print books, with only 17% (n=12) of libraries participating in this practice. This means much of the back content that libraries purchased in print is still available for ILL. Also, 40% (n=28) of the respondents, including 50% (n=18) of the doctoral-granting university libraries are participating in shared print initiatives¹². This is especially important as libraries execute print monograph rightsizing projects to relieve shelf space.

ILL Service Section Results

As noted previously, responses about the ILL system in use were normalized. The question was not structured to fully capture the complexity of resource sharing operations at many academic libraries. Many libraries use multiple tools for ILL, and not all of them are management systems. Half of the respondents reported using ILLiad, WorldShare claimed 28.6%, Tipasa 11.4% and Rapido, Alma Resource Sharing and CLIO were each used by 2.9% of respondents and one library uses Docline.

¹² Shared print initiatives are when libraries agree to not deselect an agreed upon list of print books from their collection so it will be available for ILL for the foreseeable future.

Figure 3.1 Breakdown of the different interlibrary loan systems used by survey respondents.

The location of Interlibrary Loan departments in libraries was reported as being in Access Services by most respondents 67.2% (n=45), followed by Collections Services 19.4% (n=13). Other responses included libraries without departments 4.5% (n=3), but a few unique and specific arrangements were described (for example a split set up with borrowing in Technical Services and lending in Access Services and another library reported a separate resource sharing unit which also includes resource licensing).

As expected, 61% are sharing portions of ebooks, 61% are doing chapter sharing, 30% are not, and 8% aren't sure. An encouraging 21.4% (n=15) of the libraries surveyed reported lending whole ebooks through ILL (70% are not and the remaining 8.6% are not sure).

Of those that lend entire ebooks, most are doctoral-granting university libraries, but there were also 2 Bachelor's level, one Master's granting, a seminary, and an Associate's degree school. Whole ebook lending was reported by some institutions at each degree granting level, and also by institutions who reported using each of the major resource sharing systems.

We heard from institutions with different ILL volumes. For their average annual lending of returnable (physical items), half of the respondents 50.7% (n=35) loan less than 999 items each year, a third 33.3% (n=23) lend between 1,000 and 4,999 items annually, fewer institutions lend from 5,000 to 9,999 8.7% (n=6) and the smallest percent 7.2% (n=5) lend over 10,000 items. We can't be sure exactly how schools with multiple libraries and campuses responded to the survey - we asked for individual submissions from participants.

When looking at reported volumes and institution types, see table 3.2, there is a clear pattern of the highest volumes being handled at a small number of doctoral-granting university libraries, likely those with the largest budgets, in both the lending and in the borrowing questions.

Figure 3.2: Interlibrary volume based on type of university of survey respondents

On the borrowing side, 77.1% (n=54) reported not tracking fulfilled ebook borrowing requests. Of these, 4.3% (n=3) indicated interest or an intention to begin tracking these requests and whether they are filled.

7.1% (n=5) of libraries had created specific ebook request forms. Specific forms (when systems are

customizable) can clarify when users intend to request electronic material and aid in tracking statistics for reporting.

Discussion

Consortiums and other networks of resource sharing need to begin conversations around the topic of whole ebook lending and book acquisition practices. Interlibrary Loan units should begin talking with Collection Services units and working together to make decisions on behalf of their library *and* the larger library ecosystem. It may seem as if these decisions only impact their own campuses, but libraries cannot move forward with e-preferred and e-only book purchasing without considering the larger implications for ILL and the resource sharing ecosystem that libraries heavily rely on for providing access to user requests. The age-old justification for reducing monographs budgets and footprints is that we can always rely on ILL to meet user needs, but this is no longer viable when print books are not available for lending via ILL and the conditions for lending ebooks are restrictive, at best. The number of libraries that have developed options for lending whole ebooks will need to expand to meet the demand for ILL of ebooks into the future.

While studies on student preferences about book formats continue to emerge, they will not necessarily impact how libraries make decisions around the book formats they acquire. Academic libraries will continue to face pressure to reduce their physical footprint on their campuses, and they will continue to face strained collections budgets. Those conditions will ultimately weigh more heavily than student preferences for format types.

Future Considerations

Our review of the existing literature and programs developed to address whole ebook lending via interlibrary loan suggests that there are many challenges ahead for academic libraries.

Discoverability of ebooks available to borrow

With some libraries and consortiums developing and adopting methods allowing them to lend certain ebooks to other libraries, other interlibrary loan units will need ways to discover which of these items - if any - they are able to borrow. Building both the lending and the borrowing sides of the process requires significant work from collection, systems and ILL staff.

Technical systems and workflows

The existing technical programs/systems used by libraries to manage interlibrary loans were not designed for whole ebook lending. Can existing programs/systems be configured for this purpose, or would developing new systems offer a better solution? Creating sustainable workflows for staff will be an important consideration.

User preferences

Libraries need to consider user preferences and/or need for print. Despite the many advantages of ebooks for our libraries, they continue to present accessibility issues for faculty and students with needs/preferences for print books³⁶. Print books are shelf stable and are accessible without the use of technology for most readers.

Implications of a future without print books

What ~~happens~~ are the implications if the majority of libraries purchase books in ebook format only.-Could books go the way of academic journals? Would publishers stop printing books? The acquisitions decisions we make now with regard to books will certainly impact the availability of print books in the future. Are researchers prepared for this future? Should we begin preparing them for it? Liaison/subject librarians may want to begin discussing trends in acquisitions, publishing, and beyond with faculty as a starting point.

Costs

There will likely be costs associated with making whole ebook lending an option for academic libraries. Libraries may need to pay for new systems developed by vendors to accommodate the technical workflows that can handle whole ebook lending and borrowing. They may also incur new fees in the process of negotiating contracts with publishers and vendors to allow for this level of borrowing and lending. Additional costs to consider would be the time required of staff to incorporate this format into the resource sharing process.

Communication between interlibrary loan and collection services

Consider options that work best for your library and/or consortium in terms of systems, contracts, costs, staff capacity, and workflows. This will require regular and open communication between staff working in interlibrary loan and collection services if they are not already housed in the same department and/or unit. The survey suggests that they are often housed in different units of academic libraries.

Perpetuating inequalities

Even if library vendors negotiate for favorable licensing and technical solutions to allow for whole ebook lending, not all libraries could necessarily afford those solutions. What inequalities will academic libraries perpetuate if smaller and underfunded libraries can no longer rely on interlibrary loan for access to books. How might this impact the research capacity of faculty and students at those universities and colleges?

Responsibilities on large collecting institutions

The survey suggests that large doctoral-granting university libraries have the largest collections budgets for books. Smaller and underfunded libraries rely heavily upon these libraries to fulfill their interlibrary loan requests. Academic libraries with the largest collections budgets need to begin factoring interlibrary loan and the resource sharing ecosystem into their decisions. All libraries are struggling with budgetary and space constraints but thinking beyond the needs of our own users is essential to sustaining the resource sharing of whole books.

Developing solutions for all libraries (and not just those affiliated with consortiums)

Academic libraries that belong to consortiums with shared systems and resources are emerging as the first adopters of whole ebook lending options. Libraries that do not belong to such consortiums may face additional or different barriers to implementing such services. Technical solutions created for ebook lending need to be able to be implemented at all types and sizes of libraries.

Conclusion

Academic libraries are increasingly relying upon ebooks to serve the needs of their users. This trend will continue and more libraries and consortiums need to be discussing this trajectory and potential solutions for the resource sharing of ebooks to prepare for this future. The greatest burden for this preparation will need to fall on the academic libraries that have the largest budgets for book acquisitions, which seem to be doctoral-granting university libraries. However, all academic libraries can begin to participate in the solution by reviewing their existing ebook licenses and renegotiating whole ebook lending with ebook vendors. The pilot projects discussed in the literature review do offer some hope for paving a path forward. Libraries that are members of borrowing consortiums are best prepared for adopting the existing vendor-based solutions. This does not mean that libraries need to or can afford to adopt these solutions. There is still room for innovation in defining how we can integrate ebooks into the resource sharing ecosystem. What remains important is that we prioritize these efforts for the sake of future researchers at our institutions.

-
- ¹ Weijing Yuan, Marlene Van Ballegoie, and Jennifer Robertson, "Ebooks Versus Print Books: Format Preferences in an Academic Library," *Collection Management* 42, no. 1 (2018): 28-48, doi: 10.1080/01462679.2017.1365264.
- ² Julie A. Murphy, "Ebook Sharing Models in Academic Libraries," *Serials Review* 45, no. 3 (2019): 176-183, doi: 10.1080/00987913.2019.1644934.
- ³ Bronwen Woods and Michael Ireland, "Ebook Loans: An E-Twist on a Classic Interlending Service," *Interlending & Document Supply* 36, no. 2 (2008): 105-115, doi: 10.1108/02641610810878585.
- ⁴ Linda Frederiksen, Joel Cummings, Lara Cummings, and Diane Carroll, "Ebooks and Interlibrary Loan: Licensed to Fill?" *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery and Electronic Reserves* 21, no. 3 (2011): 117-131, doi: 10.1080/1072303X.2011.585102.
- ⁵ Frederiksen, Cummings, Cummings, Carroll, "Ebooks and Interlibrary Loan," 126.
- ⁶ Ibid., 126-127.
- ⁷ Xiaohua Zhu and Lan Shen, "A Survey of E-Book Interlibrary Loan Policy in US Academic Libraries," *Interlending & Document Supply* 42, no. 2/3 (2014): 57-63, doi: 10.1108/ILDS-05-2014-0025.
- ⁸ Joanne Percy, "E-book Lending: The Challenges Facing Interlibrary Loan," *Interlending & Document Supply* 41, no. 2 (2013): 43-47, doi: 10.1108/ILDS-02-2013-0006.
- ⁹ Zhu and Shen, "A Survey of E-Book Interlibrary Loan Policy," 62.
- ¹⁰ Xiaohua Zhu, "E-Book ILL in Academic Libraries: A Three-Year Trend Report," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 44, no. 3 (2018): 343-351, doi: 10.1016/j.acalib.2018.03.006.
- ¹¹ William Gee, "The Connundrum of eBooks and Interlibrary Loan," *Against the Grain* 19, no. 2 (2007): 25, doi: 10.7771/2380-176X.5047.
- ¹² Ryan Litsey, Kenny Ketner, Joni Blake and Anne McKee, "The Simplest Explanation: Occam's Reader and the Future of Interlibrary Loan and E-Books," in *Academic E-Books: Publishers, Librarians and Users*, ed. Suzanne M. Ward, Robert S. Freeman, and Judith M. Nixon (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2016), 160.
- ¹³ Occam's Reader (n.d.). *Subscribers*. Retrieved September 15, 2023, from <https://occamsreader.lib.ttu.edu/about/loans.php#subscribersModal>
- ¹⁴ Michael Levine-Clark, "Whither ILL? Wither ILL: The Changing Nature of Resource Sharing for E-Books," *Collaborative Librarianship* 3, no. 2 (2011): 71-72.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, 71.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, 71.
- ¹⁷ Heather Wicht, "The Evolution of E-Books and Interlibrary Loan in Academic Libraries," *Collaborative Librarianship* 3, no. 4 (2011): 205-211, doi: 10.29087/2011.3.4.06.
- ¹⁸ Kay Downey and Yin Zhang, "A Cross-Institutional Study of eBook Demand-Driven Acquisition (DDA) Use and Efficacy of Eight Large Academic Libraries," *College & Research Libraries (C&RL)* 81, no. 1 (2020): 27-42, doi: 10.5860/crl.81.1.27.
- ¹⁹ Ibid, 31.
- ²⁰ Wicht, "The Evolution of E-Books and Interlibrary Loan," 205.
- ²¹ Barbara Blummer and Jeffrey M. Kenton, "A Systematic Review of E-Books in Academic Libraries: Access, Advantages, and Usage," *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 26, no. 1 (2020): 79-109, doi: 10.1080/13614533.2018.1524390.
- ²² John Novak, L. Angie Ohler, and Annette Day, "Ebook collection development in academic libraries: Examining preference, management, and purchasing patterns" [White paper]. (ACRL/Choice, 2020), https://www.choice360.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Choice-White-Paper-Incorporating-Ebooks-into-Collection-Development_LO-RES_092820.pdf (accessed August 7, 2024).
- ²³ Bethany B. Sewell and Forrest E. Link, "Developing Workflows for Short-Term Loans of Ebooks as an Adjunct to ILL: Part One," *Technical Services Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2016): 240-250, doi: 10.1080/07317131.2016.1169779; Bethany B. Sewell and Forrest E. Link, "Developing Workflows for Short-Term Loans of Ebooks as an Adjunct to ILL: Part Two," *Technical Services Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2017): 34-39.
- ²⁴ Sewell and Link, "Developing Workflows for Short-Term Loans of Ebooks," 38.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 39.
- ²⁶ Sherri Brown, Lea Currie and Andi Back, "Boom or Bust: Short-Term Loans Five Years Later,"

Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference (2016): 264-266.

²⁷ Michael Rodriguez, "Licensing and Interlibrary Lending of Whole Ebooks" *Against the Grain* 33, no. 4 (2021): 17-18.

²⁸ "Whole Ebook Lending," VIVA, Virginia's Academic Library Consortium, (n.d.a)

<https://vivalib.org/va/wholeebooklending> (accessed August 7, 2024).

²⁹ "Whole Ebook Interlibrary Loan Recommendations," VIVA, Virginia's Academic Library Consortium, (n.d.b.) Whole Ebook Lending Task Force. <https://vivalib.org/va/wholeebooklending> (accessed August 7, 2024).

³⁰ Michael Rodriguez, Erika McNeil, and Stanley Huzarewicz (2020, March 9). *Interlibrary lending of whole ebooks* [Presentation slides]. UConn Library Presentations. 53.

https://opencommons.uconn.edu/libr_pres/53

³¹ Allen Jones and Michael Rodriguez, "Transformative Approaches to Whole Ebook Lending," presented at Charleston Library Conference (Charleston, SC. November 5, 2020) [Video on YouTube

<https://youtu.be/3bxJD8raRpc>.]

³² "Big Ten Academic Alliance Ebooks Task Force Report" (2021), https://btaa.org/docs/default-source/library/btaa-ill-ebooks-final-report-public-view.pdf?Status=Master&sfvrsn=95bb11e3_7 (accessed August 7, 2024).

³³ Boston Library Consortium (BLC) E-Book Sharing Working Group, "E-Book ILL Roadmaps: Charting Pathways for Broader Adoption of E-Book Interlibrary Loan," (June 2024), <https://blc.org/e-book-ill> (accessed August 7, 2024).

³⁴ ProQuest Ex Libris, Part of Clarivate, "The Key to Modern Resource Sharing: Whole Ebook Lending and More." [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRrJDRj13xs>

³⁵ Gobi, "New title reports - Publishers profiled in the U.S."

https://www.gobi3.com/StaticContent/GOBICContent/YBP/Private/Help/Pages/newtitlereport_us.html (accessed September 15, 2023).

³⁶ Nitza Davidovitch, Roman Yavich, and Eran Druckman, "Don't Throw Out Paper and Pens Yet: On the Reading Habits of Students," *Journal of International Education Research* 12, no. 4 (2016): 129-144, doi: 10.19030/jier.v12i4.9799; Darija Pešut and Daniela Živković, "Students' academic reading format preferences in Croatia," *New Library World* 117, no. 5/6 (2016): 392-406, doi: 10.1108/NLW-02-2016-0008; Carrie Spencer, "Research on Learners' Preferences for Reading from a Printed Text or from a Computer Screen," *Journal of Distance Education* 21, no. 1 (2006): 33-50.