

# Interlibrary Loans from the College Viewpoint<sup>1</sup>

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ALMOST NINE eventful years have passed since the A.L.A. Council approved, at the meeting in Cincinnati, the Interlibrary Loan Code in its present form.<sup>2</sup> During these years of unending emergencies and readjustments, most college librarians were so busy with their daily tasks, that little leisure remained for rethinking the whole interlibrary loan problem in the light of the postwar situation. The literature on the subject almost dried out, if we except the judicious comments found in the general works by Lyle and by Wilson and Tauber and in a few scattered periodical articles.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the time is ripe for a critical reappraisal. Two basic questions are to be answered: Is the Interlibrary Loan Code of 1940 flexible and liberal enough to meet the needs of 1949? Are college libraries doing their full share to facilitate the exchange of books between academic libraries? I say *college* libraries, since it is evident that most university and research libraries have contributed nobly to the cause of interlibrary cooperation.

The administrators of 18 college libraries

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the meeting of the College Libraries Section, A.C.R.L., Jan. 21, 1949, Chicago.

<sup>2</sup> See its full text in *College and Research Libraries* 2:318-319, September 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Lyle, Guy R. *The Administration of the College Library*. H. W. Wilson, 1944, p. 180-184; and Wilson, Louis R. and Tauber, Maurice F. *The University Library*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1945, p. 404-413. The most valuable recent article is that by Robert H. Haynes on "Interlibrary Loans" in *Harvard Library Bulletin* 2:127-129, Winter 1948.

were asked for a frank expression of their opinions. All of them responded immediately and, with one exception, extensively. These 18 libraries<sup>4</sup> are of different sizes, varying from less than 30,000 to almost 350,000 volumes. Some have generous appropriations; others are struggling with inadequate budgets. Several are close to metropolitan book centers; others are located in rural areas far from the conveniences of a union catalog. A number of the institutions chosen follow a rather conservative philosophy of education, while a few hold very progressive ideas. I believe that these 18 libraries (plus the Bard Library) represent a fair cross section, even though this paper does not claim by any means to be as exhaustive as Kenneth J. Boyer's survey of an earlier period.<sup>5</sup>

There is no full agreement on the question of whether or not the Interlibrary Loan Code of 1940 is liberal enough for our times. All of us admit that it was a real achievement when it was formulated. Several college librarians are still perfectly satisfied with it. Some think it is fine, if its provisions are generously interpreted; others would like to see certain phrases reworded. A few go much further in their criticism. The librarian of Franklin and Marshall feels that the A.L.A. code "lacks liberality in that it fails to meet college

<sup>4</sup> Allegheny, Antioch, Bennington, Bowdoin, Bryn Mawr, Earlham, Franklin and Marshall, Hamilton, Kenyon, Middlebury, Reed, Sarah Lawrence, Smith, Union, Vassar, Wellesley, Wells and Williams.

<sup>5</sup> Boyer, Kenneth J. "Interlibrary Loans in College and University Libraries." *Library Quarterly* 2:113-134, April 1932.

library needs adequately." The same opinion is expressed by Sarah Lawrence and Wells. I, for one, wish that some of the truly liberal spirit of the Philadelphia Interlibrary Loan Code could be infused in the A.L.A. Code.

#### *Only Aid to Research?*

The general criticism of the A.L.A. code is based on a number of specific complaints. One is directed against the definition that "the primary purpose of the interlibrary loan services is to aid research calculated to advance the boundaries of knowledge by the loan of unusual books." The librarian of Wellesley and the acting librarian of Smith College believe that, as Miss King puts it, "the service has secondary purposes, namely to aid the upperclass student carrying an honors program or doing such independent investigative work and study that the library's resources must be supplemented by outside aid." Miss Stone of Sarah Lawrence goes even further: "We in Westchester County believe the primary purpose of interlibrary loan is to make all the books in the county available to all the readers." It is a matter of course that no conscientious college librarian will encourage any senior project, thesis or honors paper for which his own library cannot supply the basic material, but he cannot buy all the expensive monographs which might be used once by one exceptional student. No harm will be done by securing some of them—or all of them—by interlibrary loan. Miss King also suggests dropping, as somewhat misleading, the last sentence under "Purpose," that transactions for other than research purposes "should be considered as part of an extension service rather than as interlibrary loans."

The second major criticism is directed against point 3 of the code, that "no

material of any kind may be borrowed for class use." Few college librarians would wish to encourage borrowing for class use as a regular practice; it plainly would not be fair. You would not like to expose an irreplaceable work, belonging to another library, to a rather rough treatment by 20 freshmen. The present inadequacies of the international book trade make exceptions inevitable. A Dante course was given at Bard for which certain volumes of his works in the Temple Classics edition were considered indispensable by the instructor. In spite of early ordering from England we were unable to secure the copies in time. An explanatory letter to Miss Stone quickly produced these coveted volumes from Sarah Lawrence on an unlimited loan, and the instructor was able to teach the course as planned. Would it not be better to follow the suggestion from Wellesley that the code should be liberalized in this point and read: "Material needed for class use should be requested only in exceptional cases."? Where only a few responsible students would use a book, no harm would be done. While nobody wishes to infringe on the rights of the lending library, it should not use too much discretion. To give an example of how not to proceed: In the early fall of 1947 we asked a large university library, with which we had long-established close contacts, for a book to be used by an undergraduate. The answer was that a policy decision would have to be made about it. In spite of some reminders, that policy has not been made.

#### *Lack of Liberality*

Various college librarians feel that the code is not liberal enough in suggesting two weeks as an average loan period. It would save a lot of nervous tension and unnecessary correspondence if the average

period were at least three, or preferably four weeks. Of course books no longer needed should be returned immediately by the borrowing library. Two other criticisms are directed not so much against the code as against its rigid application. Several librarians strongly object to the enforced use of express where regular mail would be as safe and almost as fast. The librarian of Earlham claims that several times he received on the same day two interlibrary loan books, the larger by parcel post costing four cents, and the smaller by express collect costing 94 cents. He adds: "I suspect that shipping by express is an indirect way of discouraging borrowing, and I would infinitely prefer an outright refusal."

Many college librarians also dislike the frequently imposed condition that books lent should be used only in the borrower's library building. In most cases this seems like so much red tape. Books borrowed by interlibrary loan are very rarely lost. Miss Stone remembers two losses during her librarianship at Sarah Lawrence, and only one volume has disappeared in my more than 12 years at Bard. The librarian of Williams College sees a technical inconvenience in such a requirement and adds: "I believe that the responsibility assumed by the borrowing library is sufficient guarantee for the safety of materials lent." Finally, the librarian of Antioch suggests that a revision of the A.L.A. code should take full account of the revolutionary changes brought about by microfilm and microcards.

#### *For Whom Should We Borrow?*

Inasmuch as colleges are not primarily research institutions, for whom may we justly borrow books? The overwhelming majority of the college librarians consulted feels that borrowing for undergraduates, especially seniors, is legitimate if every request is carefully screened by the bor-

rowing librarian. If the library does not own the book which the student needs, or its equivalent, and if the purpose seems serious enough, an interlibrary loan would certainly be advisable. That holds especially true when an advanced student works in a field new in the curriculum, in which the collection has not yet been built up to a satisfactory extent. This point was raised by the librarian of Hamilton College. If the librarian doubts the validity of the request, he can easily consult the instructor.

For many years we have been doing a large amount of work along these lines at Bard and have never regretted the effort involved. Sarah Lawrence, which practices the same method of individualized education as Bard does, has gone even further in this direction. For a student body of 340 Miss Stone borrowed about 900 volumes last year. She puts it very convincingly: "I can only say, if other colleges had the same interest of instruction we have, and the same inordinate interest in reading that our students show, they probably would find themselves resorting to the same tactics." The college libraries around Philadelphia have extended the system of interlibrary loans for undergraduates to the ideal point. Bryn Mawr Library furnishes printed letters of introduction to the libraries of Haverford and the University of Pennsylvania. This system enables the students of Bryn Mawr and Haverford to borrow books in the cooperating libraries without red tape. There are close ties also between Swarthmore and the libraries of the other two Philadelphia Quaker colleges, and a station wagon has facilitated borrowing between them.

While many college librarians are cautious regarding interlibrary loans for students, few will want to restrict faculty members. Any librarian who tries to scrutinize their requests will find himself in a rather unpleasant spot. With all his

tact and all his bibliographic knowledge, how can he prove to them that the books available in his library are just as good, if not better than those to be secured from the Library of Congress or Harvard? The professors will never believe him. Therefore it is much better to meet all requests coming from faculty members, except for obviously excessive demands. I can see no harm in borrowing for the personal research purposes of faculty members. This is one way of creating good will among our constituents. Why should we not help the struggling Ph.D. candidate and save him an expensive trip to some distant university library? Why should we not furnish the active scholars on our faculty with important research material for their next books or articles?<sup>6</sup> The librarian of Vassar seems correct in saying: "I think the more faculty must depend on inter-library loans to use scholarly materials, the more the library ought to feel some obligation to help those faculty members." The librarian of Reed adds sympathetically: "A man doing research here, so far away from the great library centers, is greatly handicapped. I am amazed that they accomplish as much as they do." Of course, our liberality may be occasionally abused, but we should take that with good humor. The librarian of a New England college, for instance, found it somewhat hard to swallow when a professor of chemistry requested the loan of a pamphlet on phonograph records from the Library of Congress, and the pamphlet arrived by express at the cost of ninety cents. . . .

Should the professor pay for it? He was willing to do so, but the Library Committee at that institution had adopted the principle that the library was to assume all such charges. I think the principle is

<sup>6</sup> See the comments of Professor Alan Holske and Karl H. Koopman on this issue in *College and Research Libraries* 7:74-77, January 1946, and 8:157-160, April 1947. Both writers have some good arguments to offer for their different viewpoints.

good even though its application here looks bad. Procuring important books from other libraries for our community is just as much the moral obligation of a college library as subscribing to periodicals and having a reserve book collection. In fact we should be happy that by borrowing books which are costly and hard to obtain, we save ourselves a lot of trouble and money. Therefore quite a few college libraries, among them Bard, do not charge postage or any other fee. We talk so much about public relations. Here is a golden opportunity to improve them from our petty cash funds.

### *Usefulness of Union Catalogs*

Now I come to my second major point. I believe that, generally speaking, college libraries have not yet developed the system of interlibrary cooperation to its fullest desirable extent. Comparatively few seem to visualize its potentialities. These few are usually those connected with a bibliographic center or a union catalog. I have testimony from various college librarians for the revolutionizing effects of the Philadelphia and the Pacific Northwest Bibliographic Centers. Says the librarian of Reed about the latter: "Any praise that might be given to the center would never be too high in my estimation. They do a remarkable service to the libraries in this area. We could not carry on the work that we do without them."

Local or regional union catalogs have also served to spur the spirit of cooperation. An outstanding example is the Westchester Library Association Union Catalog with which Sarah Lawrence Library has been collaborating so effectively. Bennington and Bard are also loosely affiliated with it. We at Bard rarely borrow, but frequently lend through this union catalog which includes our accession cards, and I feel very cheerful about the opportunity to

help other libraries. The requests are usually for monographs which are not urgently needed by our clientele. I would rather see a volume on Italian history or on psychiatry read in another library than gathering dust on our shelves. Other union catalogs operate, for instance, in Vermont, southeastern Michigan and Ohio (at Western Reserve). According to the librarian of Allegheny, tentative studies are under way for a similar establishment, at first probably limited to periodical collections to serve the Pittsburgh area. The librarian of Hamilton suggests a union catalog for upstate New York. Above all the local and regional union catalogs, we have the nationwide union catalog in the Library of Congress from which all of us have received valuable help on occasion. But that catalog cannot solve the day-to-day problems of interlibrary cooperation with which college librarians are faced.<sup>7</sup>

### *Selfhelp, Not Begging!*

A few of us feel that neither union catalogs nor bibliographic centers can furnish the final answer to our basic problem. We want to expand the collaboration between libraries. We want to bring costly and unusual books to our constituency at the lowest possible expense with the greatest speed and with a minimum of red tape. In other words we want to extend the material accessible to our faculty and students beyond the walls of our own college library, and we would like to help our colleagues in other libraries toward accomplishing the same goal. The one thing college librarians definitively do not wish to do is to ask the large research libraries for more help. Harvard, Yale, New York State, Cornell, the University of Pennsylvania and University of Chicago Libraries, to mention but six examples from a much

longer list, have done all that can be expected of them. We hardly dare to approach them for more. Instead of asking more favors from big libraries for which we have rarely an opportunity to do an appreciable service in return, we should think in terms of selfhelp.

Some sceptics probably will object that selfhelp is just a noble illusion and that there is no satisfactory alternative to relying on the big research libraries. I am convinced that we may be able to do a constructive job if we develop a policy of collaboration among ourselves, provided we have enough good will, ingenuity and patience. In some cases such a system can be easily established, due to the closeness of similar institutions. Amherst, Mount Holyoke and Smith have built up a very effective cooperation which goes far beyond the normal interlibrary loan and permits faculty members of each institution to draw freely on the resources of the other two.<sup>8</sup>

Where the impediment of distance is to be overcome, collaboration between libraries of similar size and type remains feasible and is very effective. The Sarah Lawrence and Bard College Libraries, both of approximately the same size and character, exchange all kinds of materials freely and rapidly. The fact that they are 80 miles apart has never made any difference. At present we are beginning to develop a similar informal exchange with the Wells College Library, which is more than 200 miles away. Again here are two libraries of similar character, though somewhat different size, which can supplement each other

<sup>8</sup>Two characteristic passages from their Interlibrary Loan Agreement of May 7, 1948 read: "The cooperating libraries agree to lend any material not currently needed by its own borrowers or staff, unless use of such material is restricted by special conditions, or unless its rarity, fragile condition, or size make it unwise to risk it to the hazards of transportation. . . . Faculty members who wish to obtain loans in person from cooperating libraries need not present letters of introduction. Students wishing to avail themselves of this privilege should obtain letters of introduction from their librarians. Such letters should specify, if possible, the material wanted and should be presented promptly."

<sup>7</sup>For the whole topic of regional library centers today see the symposium in *College and Research Libraries* 8:54-69, January 1947.

very well as we get more familiar with each other's strong and weak points. It is gratefully acknowledged that our good neighbor Vassar has been a great help to Bard, both by freely lending materials and by admitting properly introduced Bard students temporarily to its rich library facilities, but it has sometimes worried me that we cannot reciprocate to a sufficient extent. I am not stopping with these three institutions, but hope that eventually we will be able to work out an informal collaboration with the various college libraries in the Albany-Schenectady area and beyond.

### *Substitutes for Union Catalogs*

Such an exchange presupposes a fairly thorough acquaintance with the collections of the cooperating libraries. One should know enough about them to guess correctly when asking for books. Otherwise the process of borrowing would become tedious and slow. Since the costs of building up union catalogs for such college libraries usually are forbidding, at least a regular exchange of accession lists (as practiced between Vassar and Wells on the one hand and Bard on the other) is highly desirable. If one studies these lists over a longer period, he knows what kind of materials to expect in a given library. Also lists of periodical holdings (in addition to what may be found in the *Union List of Serials*) and any other lists or catalogs of collections should be exchanged. I could think of still another effective device. At Bard we have checked our holdings of the Shaw list and its supplement. I am sure many other college libraries will have done likewise. Why, then, don't we note by some symbols in our copies of the Shaw list the titles which we lack, but which are available in cooperating college libraries of similar character? This would be the next best thing to a union catalog, since the Shaw list and its supplement contain so

much of the scholarly material needed in a good college library. The job involved in this notation could be handled by a reliable clerical worker or a student assistant in a comparatively short time. The compilation sponsored by the International Relations Board of the A.L.A. under the title *Books published in the United States 1939-1945* and currently the *United States Quarterly Booklist* could be jointly checked in the same manner.

Two proposals coming from other college librarians go in similar directions and deserve earnest consideration. Union College suggests round robin request blanks within a group of cooperating libraries, and Franklin and Marshall propounds the compilation of a subject guide to outstanding or strong collections for similar college libraries in a given area. Mr. Anstaett adds: "I am visualizing a sort of union subject guide, each library listing its very strongest subject holding. We, for example, are very strong in Pennsylvania German material, and we have just acquired a hospital library containing many medical journals. When these are cataloged our collection of this kind of material will be outstanding, at least for a college library." Such collections could be made more accessible by a new detailed regional subject guide. Along the same lines, the librarian of Allegheny expresses his willingness to make the famous Lincoln collection which Ida Tarbell gave to his institution, available for wider use in the Pittsburgh area.

These are just a few suggestions which I am sure could be greatly enlarged and improved upon. But while we think of these details, let us not lose sight of the fundamental problem which is to overcome institutional narrowness and inertia. If the college libraries of a given area learn to collaborate closely with each other, they

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Total circulation for the first academic year with a maximum book stock of 30,000 volumes was approximately 84,000, of which 38,000 was nonreserve. Maximum enrolment for any length of time during this period was 4500.

Figures for the second year are perhaps more significant in that they represent one phase of the productivity of a fairly well organized though still rapidly expanding collection. Also the second year reflects the full curricula offerings to both freshmen and sophomores. For this period total circulation was approximately 300,000, of which 82,000 was nonreserve (two-week period) and 218,000 was reserve (one hour and overnight). During the second year the maximum book stock was approximately 44,000 and the top enrolment 8500.

It is perhaps significant that the relatively small book collections, 13,000-16,000 volumes per campus, did sustain the gross use reflected in the foregoing. These figures compare favorably with institutions having many times the book stock available to our students. This experience would seem to confirm to some extent the belief held by many librarians that great numbers of books

are not required to fulfill the needs of any present undergraduate academic program. Indeed, the writer feels that the relatively small but highly select book collections available to ACUNY students facilitated their use.

### *What of the Future?*

The writer is frequently asked about the future disposition of these libraries. At this time he does not know. When Mohawk was closed, its library was consolidated with the Champlain and Sampson collections. Sampson closed in June and plans are now under way to consolidate its collection with the Champlain library. At this time it appears altogether possible that some sort of educational institution will remain permanently at Champlain. Presumably the present library will be inherited by whatever agency directs the permanent establishment.

Champlain is scheduled for operation again next year under its present organization. For at least that far ahead its main library problem will be the intelligent use of the considerable number of duplicate titles it will have.

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will be surprised to find out how many important scholarly titles they hold among themselves and that they can stand on their own feet instead of being beggars. This will encourage interlibrary loans on a much larger scale. I hope all of us will eventually rival with Sarah Lawrence's 950 books lent and borrowed per year.

### *Another Farmington Plan*

Beyond the closer cooperation in interlibrary loans, I foresee in the more distant future some kind of a Farmington plan for

college libraries. That is, college libraries of a given area will agree which subjects they wish to develop more strongly, leaving the special care of others to their neighbors. By the system of free interchange they will be just as able to have these books available to their own clientele, when needed, as if they had acquired them themselves. This will bring about a much more reasonable and effective use of our book budgets. I hope I will still live to see the day when the last trace of institutional isolationism disappears from our college libraries.