

Staffing of Interlibrary Loan Service

Questionnaires were sent to forty-five college and university libraries. Information asked for was as follows: place of interlibrary loan work in the library organization; statistics of interlibrary borrowing and lending; staff now being devoted to interlibrary loan work, including a statement about related work done by others; a statement as to whether present staff is ample, barely adequate, or inadequate.

Data collected are presented in three tables: staff adequate for interlibrary loan; staff barely adequate for interlibrary loan; staff inadequate for interlibrary loan.

The replies show surprisingly little consensus, and additional investigation is clearly warranted.

HOW MUCH STAFF TIME is required for interlibrary loan work? What is the best proportion of professional to nonprofessional staff? Is there a point in the growth of this service when it ceases to be economical to include this service in the reference department?

The need to know how other librarians answer questions such as these prompted the writer to send questionnaires to the persons in charge of interlibrary loan in forty-five college and university libraries.

The following information was requested: place of interlibrary loan work in the library organization; statistics of interlibrary borrowing and lending; staff now being devoted to the work, including a statement about related work done by others; a statement as to whether present staff is ample, barely adequate, or inadequate. Substantiation of the judgment of inadequacy was asked for in terms of staff working under too much pressure, staff working overtime, interlibrary loan work being in arrears, or other work being neglected.

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Replies were received from forty of the forty-five libraries; thirty-five are used in this report.

The place of interlibrary loan in the organization of the thirty-five libraries is as follows: part of reference, seventeen; part of circulation, eight; separate unit, three; dispersed among divisions, two; borrowing in reference, lending in circulation, one; information desk, one; librarian's office, one; science division, one; and state library service, one.

In the three tables which follow, information has been tabulated according to whether the respondent considers the staff adequate, barely adequate (need of additions anticipated in the near future), or inadequate. The libraries have arbitrarily been listed in order of the number of items borrowed.

It is obvious that local situations vary greatly and that the questionnaire did not bring out sufficient information to be conclusive. A few observations, however, can be made on the basis of this incomplete information.

The fact that 89 per cent of the questionnaires were returned and that most

Staffing of Interlibrary Loan Service / 319

of the respondents indicated interest in and the many unanswered questions suggesting the results indicates that this is an area of concern to many librarians, and the many unanswered questions suggest areas where further research is needed.

TABLE 1
STAFF ADEQUATE FOR INTERLIBRARY LOAN

	STATISTICS		STAFF HOURS PER WEEK				WORK DONE BY OTHER STAFF
	Borrow	Loan	Profes- sional	Subpro- fessional	Clerical	Student	
1	184	3,229	30		60		None
2	261	230	20			4	None
3	308	1,715	39	39	10		Verification, paging
4	386	911	7		3	10	Paging, photocopying
5	428	1,131	20			3	Paging, photocopying
6	518	618	4		8	16	Packaging
7	581	445	3	3	20		None
8	809	512	32		10	25	None
9	917	1,147	30	10	16		Packaging
10	932	7,965	39		39	39	Packages, part of verifying
11	1,102	576	30		30		Paging, packages
12	1,182	2,282	28		40		None
13	1,419	2,445	35		39		Packaging
14	2,519	3,459		39	39		Packaging, photocopying

Library 1: Loans include 1,107 articles photocopied.
 Library 3: Loans include 389 local loans, telephone requests.
 Library 5: Loans include 645 local loans.
 Library 6: Sends all requests to one large university library. Ordinarily makes no further effort if this library cannot lend.
 Library 7: Reports unusual success with insisting upon all borrowers giving bibliographically correct and complete references. This drastically reduces the part of borrowing that consumes the most professional time.
 Library 10: Loans include 5,288 local loans and 1,346 local photocopies.
 Library 14: About 30 per cent of volumes borrowed come by messenger; about 5 per cent of loans by messenger.

TABLE 2
STAFF BARELY ADEQUATE FOR INTERLIBRARY LOAN

	STATISTICS		STAFF HOURS PER WEEK				WORK DONE BY OTHER STAFF
	Borrow	Loan	Profes- sional	Subpro- fessional	Clerical	Student	
1	104	361	4	10			Paging, packages, teaching borrowers to verify
2	549	1,022	13		25		Part of paging
3	750	1,652	20		80		Packaging
4	841	129	39	39			Part of verifying, packaging
5	1,128	1,963	39	39	39	20	None
6	1,131	1,833	4	36			Occasional help with packages and verifying
7	1,233	675	14		39	15	Verification, packages
8	1,237	1,328	Super- vision		39	46	Part of verification
9	1,308	7,794	39	10	20		None
10	1,459	1,557	26			20	None
11	1,446	1,902	30		61	10	None

Library 5: Remarks suggest that this library may be doing what amounts to regional reference service, rather than pure interlibrary lending.
 Library 6: Remarks that this library particularly fortunate in having an unusually capable full time clerical assistant who does most of the work with only supervision by the professional.
 Library 9: Lending figure includes unknown number of local loans.
 Library 11: Borrowing and lending are separate operations. Lending required only twenty-one clerical hours per week. The remainder is for borrowing, and it is borrowing that is in the barely adequate category. Remarks indicate difficulty of getting borrowers to verify and give complete references.

TABLE 3
STAFF INADEQUATE FOR INTERLIBRARY LOAN

	STATISTICS		STAFF HOURS PER WEEK				WORK DONE BY OTHER STAFF
	Borrow	Loan	Profes- sional	Subpro- fessional	Clerical	Student	
1	586	1,074	9	3		7	Books not originally found in stacks searched by Circ. Dept.
2	968	9,798	10		40	12	None
3	1,021	1,303	13	20	10	10	None
4	1,070	811	39				Packages, photocopying, occasional help with typing, verifying
5	1,144	751	30		39		Paging, packages, part of verifying
6	1,202	425	10		30	20	Part of reference work by divisions; paging by divisions
7	1,262	2,138	39			50	None
8	1,289	474	15	25		4	None
9	1,640	1,009	26	39	39	15	None
10	2,956	872	20	39	39	4	Packages

Library 2: Loan figures includes 3,264 local loans.

Library 5: Same staff does photocopy work. In same period: 67 microfilms, 1,000 Xerox copies; and 50 microfilm printer copies; received 11 microfilms, 196 Xerox copies and 217 photostats.

Library 7: Frequent overtime work; nevertheless reference work and book selection duties neglected.

Library 8: Frequent overtime work, but other work sometimes neglected.

Library 9: Some overtime work, but service sometimes suffers in spite of it.

Library 10: Much of borrowing is from largest library in state university system, including 1,210 free photocopies. Books from this library by messenger without wrapping, but using standard forms.

There is evidence that in many libraries the demand for interlibrary loan service has outgrown the facilities provided for it. It appears that many administrators are still thinking of interlibrary loans as work that can be done in odd moments as a part of the work of the reference department or some other department. This no doubt is satisfactory when the volume of work is small. It is questionable whether this is an economical way to handle it when the actual time required equals that of one or more full-time persons.

There is no consensus as to the desirable division of time between professional and nonprofessional personnel. It is likely that the largest single factor contributing to the differences here is the variation in local situations as to how much of the bibliographical work borrowers can be induced to do for themselves and how much a librarian must do for them. And this depends upon the

philosophy and administrative policy, not only of the library, but of the university as a whole.

Among the areas for further research that suggest themselves are the following:

A study that would get exact job descriptions of a large enough sample of persons engaged in interlibrary loan work to identify definitely the professional and nonprofessional elements.

A study of the extent to which professional staff can be cut down by adding nonprofessional help. The above data do not show that this automatically happens. Does this mean that training and supervision necessarily require a great deal of professional time?

A time study comparing situations where interlibrary loan work is "worked in" with other work (if time could be measured under these circumstances) and situations where it is done separately in quarters of its own. ■■