

Understanding the Pandemic's Impact on Content Accessibility Through Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery in North American Health Sciences Libraries: A Tale of Collaboration and Triangulation

Kristine Alpi*

Jenny Pierce**

Jessica Koos***

Margaret Hoogland****

Debra Rand*****

Abstract

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic placed libraries in the unique situation of providing services and resources in a primarily virtual environment and raised questions about the accessibility of non-digital content. A collaborative research group of library staff from hospitals, public and private universities convened in Summer 2020 to study the challenges of accessing content through interlibrary loan (ILL) and document delivery (DD) at North American health sciences libraries. The goal was to develop a multi-method approach to address these questions, as well as share findings through conferences and publications for audiences interested in collection access and ILL/DD.

Methods

The group used a starting list of research questions to divide into three teams around study designs that address those questions at the library level. The Secondary Data Analysis team planned to request and analyze aggregated data from interlibrary loan systems in order to answer questions about the age and subject matter of materials requested that could not be provided during the pandemic and be potential priorities for future digitization. The Survey team wanted to understand practice and policy decisions made by those providing ILL/DD services and staff perceptions of the impact of the pandemic on their work.

* Oregon Health & Science University, USA), alpi@ohsu.edu

** Temple University ; USA), piercejb@temple.edu

*** Stony Brook University , USA, jessica.koos@stonybrook.edu

**** University of Toledo, USA, margaret.hoogland@utoledo.edu

***** Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell, USA, drand@northwell.edu

In coordination these two teams chose to focus on a single point-in-time request that covered March-August 2020. The Primary Data Analysis team's research questions include both those that would not be addressed by the use of secondary ILL data or the survey, e.g. local document delivery of owned items not available digitally, and the need to triangulate findings by looking at data from additional or more diverse types of libraries or distinct time periods.

Results

As of January 2021, two research team proposals have been reviewed by the Oregon Health & Science University Institutional Review Board. The Secondary Data team's data request and analytic plan was deemed not human subjects research. Permission forms signed by 15 participating research team libraries in order to request data from the U.S. National Library of Medicine's DOCLINE system. The cross-sectional anonymous survey was designated exempt and distributed online in January 2021 to multiple email lists for health sciences librarians. The Primary Data Analysis team will finalize their proposal once they determine what local data may be needed to complement aggregated survey responses.

Discussion

While dividing into teams has allowed us to progress efficiently, teams have also collaborated. The timeframe and libraries to be studied were critical, and ultimately the use of shared systems and the timing of the pandemic led the teams to focus on North American libraries from March – August 2020. The permission form designed by the Secondary Data Analysis team will form the basis for the Primary Data Analysis requests; the two teams may work together to apply the methods for collection analysis to data collected by the Primary Data Analysis team. The results of these studies will be made openly available to encourage use of the findings and inform future research on ILL/DD and collection access.

Keywords: Document delivery; COVID-19, Access Services, Interlibrary Loan, Print Collections