

Library Practitioners' Use of Library Literature

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THIS STUDY WAS UNDERTAKEN to examine the way in which professional librarians and upper-level support staff (paraprofessionals) gain access to and use the literature of librarianship. It focuses on use patterns for those subjects within the field which are most widely requested for interlibrary loan. While there have been studies such as Olsgaard and Olsgaard (1980)¹ and Adamson and Zamora (1981)² which have investigated the authorship of articles in library and information science, and Peritz (1977)³ and Atkins (1988)⁴ which have reported on the content of the literature, there has been no substantive research on what is read by librarians. Indeed, it has been assumed to be difficult to conduct a study on what librarians actually read (Bloomfield, 1979).⁵ Surveys, such as those reported by Shields and Lynam, have been used to assess the reading habits of librarians. However, these efforts have tended to focus on the type (book, journal, research report, etc.) of material read, not the subject content of the material. In addition, such surveys are prone to biases in the responses received which affect the accuracy of the data. Kidston points out that the answer by a respondent may not be the question asked by the surveyor,⁶ and Phillips suggests that people respond to questionnaires by giving what they believe to be socially acceptable answers.⁷ It is a rare individual who will admit that they read

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only what their director writes or that they have no interests at all in the professional literature.

This article will examine the way librarians actually use library literature as reflected by interlibrary loan requests. There are advantages to using interlibrary loans as a gauge of reading activity. First, the use of the interlibrary loan request eliminates the self-report bias found in survey literature. Second, it provides built-in participation of all library types and library literature users. And finally, interlibrary loan is used to supplement in-house resources, therefore interlibrary loan activity represents a real interest in a given topic: first, because each request can be assumed to represent more than a single article in terms of actual reading, and second, because interlibrary loans represent active interests. An interlibrary loan is a result of a person's selecting specific articles relevant to his or her needs or interests. Submitting an interlibrary loan request is an active choice rather than a result of convenience (as with journal routing).

Studies such as those by Ali⁸ and Lynam⁹ concerning the results of the dissemination and utilization of library science research have indicated that the journal article is a major source for obtaining information on current research. Therefore, it was decided that only journal article requests would be included in the study. Individual articles are clearer indicators of the subject desired than would be books or research reports. Further, article literature includes a much broader range of topics and would cover those topics of current interest which had not yet reached monographic form.

At the onset of the research it was recognized that certain titles would not appear as interlibrary loan requests. Titles such as *American Libraries*, *College & Research Libraries*, and *Library Journal*, all of which were shown by Swisher and Smith¹⁰ to be the most frequently read journals by academic librarians, were expected to be available locally. Based on an article in the 1972 *CALL* (Current Awareness—Library Literature) it was also anticipated that *Wilson Library Bulletin* would not appear in this list.¹¹ Because the study focuses on subject content and not journal title it was expected that the lack of requests for these journals would have no effect on the results.

Interlibrary loan requests received by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) are assumed to be a representative sample of the larger population because UIUC is one of four Illinois Research and Reference Centers (IRRC) in the ILLINET network. This network links the eighteen regional library systems within Illinois for resource sharing. In addition, UIUC IRRC is the only center located at an

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institution with a library and information science library. As Joel M. Lee reports in the July 1979 *Drexel Library Quarterly*, the Library Science Library at the University of Illinois contains an outstanding research collection.¹² It was anticipated that all requests for library and information science materials which could not be supplied in house would be routed through the interlibrary loan network to the University of Illinois where they could be filled or routed to another appropriate source.

It was hypothesized that the subjects requested would be practical/technical types of articles, especially emphasizing new technology and automation no matter what other focus the article might contain; that the journals requested in interlibrary loan would not include any of the most popularly held journals; and finally, that borrowers from academic libraries would be more common than from other types of libraries.

Methodology

A total sample of 594 interlibrary loan requests made to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library, Illinois Research and Reference Center between 1 July and 30 December 1986 provided the data for this research. Those requests, whether filled or unfilled, were included which were identified as journal articles in the field of library and information science. Of these requests, forty-two (7 percent) were rejected from the study because the article did not pertain to the literature of library and information science or was identified as replacement pages for binding purposes. Fifteen book reviews (2.5 percent) were not included in further analysis. This left 537 interlibrary loan requests which were analyzed by their subject content, the journal title, the year of publication, the type of library from which the request was received, the type of patron (if that information was available), and, if provided, the type of citation. The articles were first sorted into categories using natural language headings derived from the article titles themselves. Each article was then assigned up to three subject headings using a list of subject headings derived from the ERIC thesaurus of terms.¹³ For those articles where the title did not define the subject, the article itself was examined to determine subject. The data were then entered into the SAS¹⁴ programs for analysis of frequency and for cross products of selected classifications.

Results

Of the eighty-one possible subject headings provided by the thesaurus, only forty-four were actually chosen as primary subjects for the articles requested on interlibrary loan. Only twenty of these forty-four were used ten or more times accounting for 448 of the articles or 83.4 percent. The frequency of each of the primary subjects is given in table 1. Collection development was by far the most popularly requested subject with online searching a somewhat distant second. Many of the topics which received primary subject status are subjects relating to new technology, automation, and related fields. One hundred (29.8 percent) of the primary subjects concerned technology and its applications. The same list of subject headings was used to determine secondary subjects. Although sixty-four of the subject headings were applied, only sixteen of them were used ten or more times. Sixty-six items (12 percent) contained no secondary subject. Subjects related to new technologies and the theory, standards, planning, and evaluation of such services (99 requests or 18.4 percent) seem to be the most popular secondary topics (see table 2). Finally, for tertiary subjects, although thirty-two topics

TABLE 1
PRIMARY SUBJECTS REQUESTED TEN TIMES OR MORE

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Collection Development	56	10.4
Online Searching	35	6.5
Bibliographic Instruction	30	5.6
Library Service	30	5.6
Cataloging	29	5.4
Library Administration	29	5.4
Library Research	28	5.2
Reference Services	24	4.5
Librarians	23	4.3
Information Storage	20	3.7
Censorship	18	3.4
Software	18	3.4
Indexing	17	3.2
Library Facilities	17	3.2
Microcomputers	16	3.2
Library Automation	15	2.8
Interlibrary Loan	11	2.0
Online Catalog	11	2.0
Videodisk/Optical Disk Technology	11	2.0
Electronic Publishing	10	1.9
Total	448	83.4

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TABLE 2
SECONDARY SUBJECTS REQUESTED TEN TIMES OR MORE

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Evaluation	33	6.1
Automation	28	5.2
Theory	27	5.0
Design	22	4.1
Services for Groups	22	4.1
Programs	22	4.1
Methodology	20	3.7
Audiovisual	14	2.6
Databases	14	2.6
Reviews	12	2.2
Software	12	2.2
Standards	12	2.2
Planning	12	2.2
Microcomputers	11	2.0
Collection Development	10	1.9
End Users	10	1.9
No Secondary Subject	66	12.3
Total	281	52.0

were assigned, only two (evaluation and programming) received more than ten uses and 415 (77.3 percent) of the articles were considered to have no third subject.

The 537 articles were taken from 153 separately titled library journals. Most of these journal titles included only one or two of the requested articles. However, as can be seen in table 3, nineteen journals accounted for 41.5 percent of all the articles requested. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, *Library Hi-Tech*, and *Catholic Library World* account for 11.2 percent of all articles requested. The large number of requests for *Journal of Academic Librarianship* was surprising. Swisher and Smith¹⁵ reported it to be read by 44 percent of academic librarians.

The years from which articles were requested ranged from 1950 through 1986 with 56 percent from journals with 1984 and 1985 imprint dates (see table 4). When one considers the time at which the data were gathered (the second half of 1986) and the time lag between the publication of an article in a journal and the appearance of that article in paper and online indexes, it is not surprising that most of the articles were one to two years old. It is also interesting to note that after eight or ten years

TABLE 3
JOURNALS REQUESTED SEVEN TIMES OR MORE

<i>Journal</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Journal of Academic Librarianship</i>	23	4.3
<i>Library Hi-Tech</i>	20	3.7
<i>Catholic Library World</i>	17	3.2
<i>Library Association Record</i>	15	2.8
<i>Research Strategies</i>	15	2.8
<i>Technicalities</i>	15	2.8
<i>Audio Visual Librarian</i>	12	2.2
<i>Library Acquisitions</i>	12	2.2
<i>Microcomputers for Information Management</i>	12	2.2
<i>Medical Reference Services Quarterly</i>	11	2.0
<i>Colorado Libraries</i>	9	1.7
<i>Drexel Library Quarterly</i>	8	1.5
<i>Journal of Information Science Program</i>	8	1.5
<i>Special Libraries</i>	8	1.5
<i>CLIC Quarterly</i>	7	1.3
<i>Database</i>	7	1.3
<i>Emergency Librarian</i>	7	1.3
Total	223	41.5

the requests for materials drop off dramatically, suggesting that a journal's "half life" is somewhere between seven and ten years.

Finally, 207 (38.5 percent) of the libraries engaging in interlibrary loan were academic libraries. Library systems and medical libraries each accounted for 105 (19.6 percent) of the requests, with public libraries accounting for 58 (10.8 percent) of the requests (see table 5). Requests from library systems may have been originated by any type of library choosing to go through their system for loans or by request of system staff for internal use.

For 41.3 percent (222) of the items, the patron information was not available. Of the remainder, 40.8 percent of the requests came from library staff, 11.5 percent from faculty, 3.5 percent were requests from students, and 2.8 percent were requests from businesses (see table 6).

In almost half of the cases (48.6 percent), the source of the original citation was not available. However, for the remaining 51.4 percent of the requests, the citation was derived from a paper index in 199 cases (37.1 percent). For 8 percent of the requests (forty-three), the citation

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TABLE 4
YEARS REQUESTED

<i>Year</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1950	1	.2
1954	1	.2
1960	1	.2
1961	1	.2
1962	1	.2
1963	1	.2
1965	2	.4
1967	1	.2
1969	2	.4
1970	2	.4
1971	2	.4
1972	3	.6
1973	3	.6
1974	4	.7
1975	3	.6
1976	5	.9
1977	7	1.3
1978	10	1.9
1979	17	3.2
1980	26	4.8
1981	30	5.6
1982	40	7.4
1983	61	11.4
1984	162	30.2
1985	139	25.9
1986	12	2.2
Total	537	100.0

TABLE 5
TYPE OF LIBRARY

<i>Library</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Academic	207	38.5
Library System	105	19.6
Medical	105	19.6
Public	58	10.8
Corporate	22	4.1
School	15	2.8
Government	13	2.4
Law	11	2.0
Prison	1	.02
Total	537	100.0

came from a journal article and in only 6.3 percent of the cases (thirty-four) was an online search given as the source of the citation being requested (see table 7).

Cross-tabulation of subjects with journal, library type, patron type, or source of citation was restricted to those subjects which had a request frequency of at least ten. It was believed that no meaningful interpretations would be drawn from smaller samples. A cross tabulation of primary subjects with secondary subjects revealed some interesting patterns. In comparing the interactions between primary subjects and secondary subjects very few appeared in both categories. Only collection development and information storage appear as both primary and secondary subjects. As can be seen in table 8, the articles requested on collection development topics tended to focus on the theory of collection development, collection of library materials, the provision of services to groups, the automation of collection development, and the evaluation of collection development. Collection development also appears with censorship, although censorship was taken to be the

TABLE 6
TYPE OF PATRON MAKING REQUEST

<i>Patron</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Library Staff	219	40.8
Faculty	62	11.5
Student	19	3.5
Business	15	2.8
Unknown	222	41.3
Total	537	100.0

TABLE 7
SOURCE OF CITATION

<i>Source</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Paper Index	199	37.1
Journal Citation	43	8.0
Online Index	34	6.3
Not Given	261	48.6
Total	537	100.0

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primary subject of the articles on collection building. It is not surprising to find that subjects such as end user searching, methodology, and evaluation are the topics most frequently found with online searching. In all cases, the secondary subjects appear to be the logical outgrowths of the focuses that are currently important in the field of librarianship—i.e., methodology for library research, stress in libraries, the design of library facilities, and the planning of library automation are all logical combinations.

It was surprising to find no secondary subjects for reference services. One would have expected to find an interaction between reference services and online searching, end user searching, or video disc technology. Perhaps some of these combinations are of such recent interest that they have not yet appeared in the literature. It is interesting to note that Stephen Atkins (elsewhere in this *Library Trends* issue) has reported that very few articles pertaining to reference services have been written in the last several years. However, as tables 1 and 8 indicate, reference services was a topic which drew a reasonably high number of interlibrary loan requests.

Examination of the popularity of certain subjects over time suggests that some topics were such that the age of the original citation does not affect their popularity (see table 9). Topics such as library service, library research, and librarians all have had journal articles requested going back into the very early 1970s. Other topics such as cataloging, censorship, software, online catalogs, optical discs, video discs, and electronic publishing (only articles written since 1982) appear to be in high demand as interlibrary loan items. It is possible to speculate that this difference is caused by very slow changes to the basic literature of the field for such topics as library service or library research. Alternately, this may be attributed to recent changes or the development of new processes for which no data could possibly exist in earlier periods. For fields like information storage, library automation, and interlibrary loan it is very possible that, in spite of requests for many recent articles, requests for older articles represent an interest in landmarks in the field which otherwise would be ignored.

Analysis of subject interest by library type shows that, generally, the subjects were requested by each library type in rough proportion to their total presence in the sample population (see table 10). There were, however, some interesting exceptions to this finding. Academic librarians' interests seem to be spread evenly across all subjects with the exception of library services and censorship. Both topics were requested by academic libraries less frequently than would be expected. Library

TABLE 8
INTERACTION OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SUBJECTS

<i>Primary Subject</i>	<i>Secondary Subject</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Collection Development	Theory	12	2.23
	Library Materials	9	1.68
	Selection		
	Services to Groups	7	1.30
	Automation	5	.93
Online Searching	Evaluation	4	.74
	Methodology	8	1.49
	End Users	7	1.30
Bibliographic Instruction	Evaluation	4	.74
	Evaluation	6	1.12
Library Services	Program	6	1.12
	Audiovisual	5	.93
	Services for Groups	13	2.42
Cataloging	Library Instruction	4	.74
	Literacy	4	.74
	Standards	5	.93
Library Administration	Theory	4	.74
Library Research	Library Technicians	4	.74
Reference Services	Methodology	11	2.05
Librarians	—		
	Stress	7	1.30
	Automation	6	1.12
Information Storage	Faculty Status	5	.93
	Automation	7	1.30
Censorship	Design	5	.93
	Collection Development	4	.74
Software	Reviews	6	1.12
	Design	4	.74
Indexing	Databases	8	1.49
Library Facilities	Design	8	1.49
Microcomputers	—		
Library Automation	Planning	4	.74
Interlibrary Loan	Library Networks	4	.74
Online Catalog	—		
Videodisk/Optical Disk Technology	Information Storage	4	.74
Electronic Publishing	—		

TABLE 9
OCCURRENCE OF SUBJECT BY YEAR

<i>Subject/Year</i>	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981
Collection Development			2	3	2	11
Online Searching					4	1
Bibliographic Instruction					1	3
Library Service	1	1	1	1	1	3
Cataloging						
Library Administration		1	1	0	3	2
Library Research	1	0	1	2	1	0
Reference Service	1	1	0	0	0	2
Librarians		1	0	2	1	0
Information Storage			2	0	0	0
Censorship						2
Software						1
Indexing				1	4	0
Library Facilities				1	1	1
Microcomputers					2	0
Library Automation			1	0	0	0
Interlibrary Loan				2	0	0
Online Catalog						
Optical Disk/Video Disk						
Electronic Publishing						

systems, the second largest requestors of material, showed greater interest in articles on library services, library research, reference service, information storage, and censorship—all topics which would be of interest both to the system and to the affiliated groups for which the system supplies an interlibrary loan conduit. Library systems, in contrast, made few or no requests for articles on library instruction, librarians, and software. Medical libraries, which were represented in the sample at the same level as library systems, showed a disproportionate interest in those fields considered to be technical such as information storage and software but also focused on services—i.e., library service, reference service, and the impact of censorship as well as information about librarians. However, medical libraries requested no information concerning cataloging or indexing. Finally, public libraries, the fourth largest group in the sample, showed high interest in library services and electronic publishing but surprisingly little interest in reference services, censorship, library automation, or online searching. It is speculated that the interest in online searching is so low because—at least in Illinois—the library system office frequently does online searching for its member libraries.

There are some interesting relationships between the subjects and the patrons who requested them (see table 11). In looking at the types of material requested by library school faculty, it was not surprising that library school faculty would request materials on library research and censorship or indexing. It is somewhat more surprising to find a disproportionate number of requests from faculty for articles containing information about bibliographic instruction. Conversely, library school faculty asked for information about collection development, cataloging, and information storage at a much lower rate than their requests show in the general population. Library staff, while asking for most topics in proportion to their presence in the population, asked for information about censorship and indexing to a much lesser degree than did library faculty. This is particularly surprising because both indexing—the organization of knowledge—and censorship—the protection of access to that information—are topics in which the authors would have expected library staff to be actively interested. In looking at the much smaller number of requests from students and business librarians, the emphasis in their requests all seems to be toward articles pertaining to technology and its impact.

If one examines the source of the citation for each of the twenty primary subjects, a few interesting phenomena appear (see table 12). As has already been stated, paper indexes are by far the most prevalent

TABLE 10
INTERACTION OF SUBJECT BY LIBRARY TYPE

<i>Subject/ Library Type</i>	<i>Library</i>					
	<i>Academic</i>	<i>System</i>	<i>Medical</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>Corporate</i>	<i>Sch</i>
Collection Development	22	14	7	6	3	0
Online Searching	19	10	3	1	1	1
Bibliographic Instruction	19	3	1	4	1	1
Library Service	5	7	5	9	0	2
Cataloging	15	8	0	1	4	1
Library Administration	13	5	5	3	0	0
Library Research	8	6	9	0	1	0
Reference Service	9	6	9	0	0	0
Librarians	12	1	9	0	1	0
Information Storage	5	4	8	1	1	0
Censorship	1	4	5	0	1	6
Software	5	0	8	3	2	0
Indexing	7	5	0	1	1	0
Library Facilities	10	5	0	2	0	0
Microcomputers	6	2	5	1	0	2
Library Automation	9	3	3	0	0	0
Interlibrary Loan	4	2	1	1	1	0
Online Catalog	4	2	3	0	0	1
Optical Disk/Video Disk	2	2	5	2	0	0
Electronic Publishing	3	1	1	4	1	0

TABLE 11
INTERACTION OF SUBJECT BY PATRON TYPE

<i>Subject/ Patron</i>	<i>Library Staff</i>	<i>Faculty</i>	<i>Student</i>
Collection Development	21	2	0
Online Searching	9	4	3
Bibliographic Instruction	11	12	0
Library Service	16	0	1
Cataloging	17	0	1
Library Administration	19	1	0
Library Research	13	8	0
Reference Service	10	5	0
Librarians	14	4	0
Information Storage	12	1	0
Censorship	2	6	0
Software	12	1	1
Indexing	0	3	0
Library Facilities	4	1	1
Microcomputers	4	1	2
Library Automation	7	1	1
Interlibrary Loan	4	0	0
Online Catalog	3	2	2
Optical Disk/ Video Disk	5	0	0
Electronic Publishing	4	1	0

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source of citations for requests, and this holds true across most of the subjects requested. However, in the area of bibliographic instruction and video and optical disc technology, the journal citation is actually more prevalent than either paper citations or online searching. In the case of video and optical discs this may be explained by the fact that this topic is of such recent popularity that the citations have not yet gotten into online or paper formats. For bibliographic instruction one may speculate that the individuals doing research in this area are only looking for the most up-to-date information and, therefore, rely more on journal citations than other indexing forms which have the automatic effect of aging the information. In spite of the fact that online searching was the second most popular subject for interlibrary loan requests, online searching appears to be rarely used as a source of citations for interlibrary loan. Only in the cases of the subjects microcomputers and library automation were there more citations from online sources than there were from either paper indexes or journals.

Discussion

As was hypothesized at the beginning of this research, those subjects pertaining to the practical and technical aspects of librarianship were found to be the most popularly requested topics. Other authors, such as Lynam¹⁶ and Ali,¹⁷ who looked at the dissemination of research, had proposed or suspected that the important material for dissemination would be that research which directly supported the practical aspects of librarianship. These expectations by Ali and Lynam are at some contrast to Nancy Jean Melin's¹⁸ conclusion that journal editors actually view their journals not as dissemination tools for practical application of information and continuing education, but rather as sources of more leisurely and informal reading for librarians. The results of the present study would support the hypothesis that librarians use the library literature to obtain practical and technical assistance. In fact, of the possible eighty-one subject headings, only those which had practical application drew any substantial number of interlibrary loan requests with two exceptions—library research and librarians. It is the authors' speculation that even these two topics take on a practical bent if librarians are using information about library research to improve the techniques they use to evaluate changes in the library profession and the implementation of technology in their libraries. Even the subject "librarianship" has some practical application since topics such as stress in librarianship or faculty status for librarians may have direct application for day-to-day lives of the librarians making such requests.

TABLE 12
INTERACTION OF SUBJECT WITH CITATION SOURCE

<i>Subject/Source</i>	<i>Paper Index</i>	<i>Journal Citation</i>
Collection Development	25	5
Online Searching	11	5
Bibliographic Instruction	3	5
Library Service	19	1
Cataloging	25	0
Library Administration	11	2
Library Research	10	3
Reference Service	5	3
Librarians	7	1
Information Storage	10	0
Censorship	12	1
Software	6	2
Indexing	3	2
Library Facilities	2	0
Microcomputers	2	0
Library Automation	5	0
Interlibrary Loan	2	1
Online Catalog	5	0
Optical Disk/ Video Disk	1	5
Electronic Publishing	0	1

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If the subject requests from the present study are compared with recent analyses of the journal literature, such as that by Stephen Atkins¹⁹ or by Feehan et al. in *Library and Information Science Research*,²⁰ it becomes clear that the match between what is written and what is read could be better. Although both studies did find that the bulk of the literature does pertain to applied subjects (much as the present authors found), the ranking of subjects within the applied category is very different. Atkins²¹ found that by far the single largest subject written about was library management. However, only 5.4 percent of the requests coming through interlibrary loan were on subjects pertaining to library administration. And, although both the Feehan et al. study²² and the present research found high interest in collection development or library materials, Atkins²³ found a much lower level of writing about this subject. There does seem to be a reasonably good match between the availability of information on information retrieval, online searching, and cataloging with the levels of request found in the present study. Finally, some subjects which appear preeminently in the literature—such as futuristic studies, library education, and circulation—were not requested in the interlibrary loan sample in any significant numbers.

It was also hypothesized that the journals requested for interlibrary loan would not include any of the most popularly held journals. This expectation was generally supported with one exception. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, which was the journal from which articles were most frequently requested, was reported by Swisher and Smith²⁴ to be read by 44 percent of the academic librarians responding to their study. Since Bobinski²⁵ reports that this journal is in the 1000 to 4999 category for subscriptions, it is possible that academic librarians who report reading *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* are doing so through interlibrary loan or that the articles it contains are of interest to a wider library reading public.

Finally, it was not surprising to report that the great majority of requests for interlibrary loans come from academic libraries. Such libraries represented a population, both of professional librarians and library school faculty, that were assumed to have significant interests in the literature of librarianship and in the research potential of the field. In addition, academic libraries should be able to provide both paper and online indexes for access to the materials and, at least in Illinois, excellent availability of interlibrary loan services. Although academic libraries were the major source of interlibrary loan requests, there was a substantial body of requests from library systems borrowing for the system staff or for patrons at member libraries; medical libraries which

appear to have a great interest in new technologies and interest in obtaining materials pertaining to them; and public libraries who, despite greater obstacles, still manage to find interlibrary loan a helpful resource. It was somewhat surprising and perhaps disappointing to discover that there was no interest at all in service to specialized groups such as minorities or the handicapped, and relatively little interest, particularly in public libraries, in questions pertaining to censorship and literacy.

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