

Circulation Polices in Academic Medical Libraries:

A Comparative Study of Allocation Strategies, Demographic Analysis, Service Offerings, and Implications for Practice

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Objective

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of current academic medical library circulation policies, examine methods libraries utilize in attempting to meet the needs of student populations, and to explore provision of access for in-demand items. This information is important as the environment in libraries has changed dramatically with the increasing prominence of electronic resources. At the same time, there is a dearth of recent literature documenting circulation practices in libraries. The results of this study are expected to be useful in enabling libraries to examine their own practices, especially in comparison with their peers.

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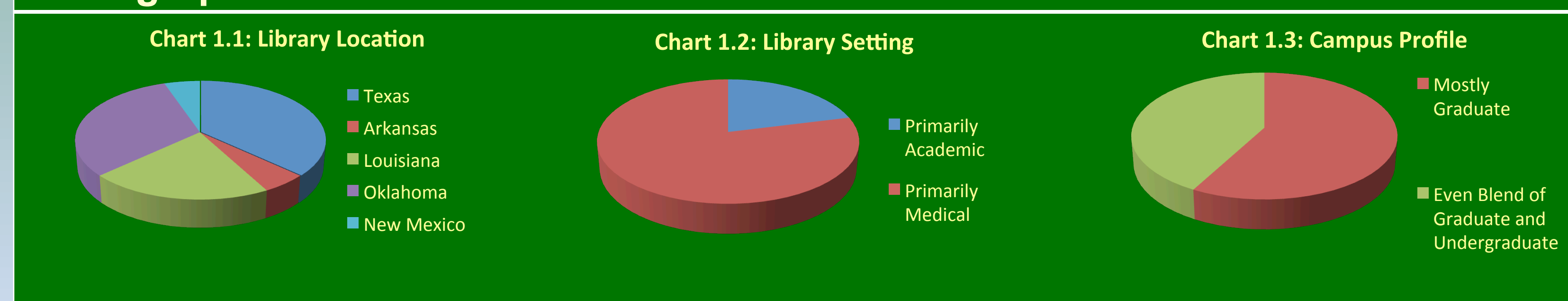
Literature Review

Area of Focus	Topic	Findings	References
Financial Considerations	Fines	Fines used as an inconvenience motivator, not designed to raise money but awareness. Noted concerns with charging patron groups (i.e. taxes or tuition), and then charging fines. Charging fines shown to encourage responsible behavior, transcript/diploma holds more effective.	Coady, 1986. Hartse & Lee, 1992. Mosley, 2004. Sung & Tolpanen, 2013.
	Lost processing	Wide variety in handling of lost books. More serious penalties like diploma/transcript holds, least serious like fines with waiver if item returned. Most frequently cited method: cost of book + lost processing fee, with lost processing fee applied even if book returned or replaced.	Hartse & Lee, 1992. Mosley, 2004. Sung & Tolpanen, 2013.
Library Users	Difference in service due to status	Status (faculty vs. student) handled in different ways. In general, policies most liberal for faculty. Different privileges cited in areas such as loan periods, numbers of renewals, and fines charged.	Glover, 2006. Hartse & Lee, 1992. Paul, 1985. Watkins & Coker, 1970.
	External users	Patrons typically required to gain affiliation to check out books; methods vary from showing state ID to buying library card. External users often receive reduced privileges. Noted tension in providing services to secondary patron groups at expense of primary patron group.	Hartse & Lee, 1992. Martin, 2003. Paul, 1985. Weare & Stevenson, 2012.
Library Services	Interlibrary Loan	Borrowing of textbooks via ILL falls into ALA's guidelines for acceptable borrowing but is controversial. ILL of textbooks not a widespread practice, fewer than 25% of students attempting. Most libraries do not systematically collect textbooks and half will not borrow them via ILL.	Blackburn, & Tiemeyer, 2013.
Library Space	Library hours	Very little data available. 24 hour access is atypical. Typical schedule involves closing at midnight, reduced hours on Sundays and during summer.	Watkins & Coker, 1970.
Circulation Practices	Renewals	Renewal control an attempt to meet the needs of different patrons groups (i.e. on campus, distance learners). Range of renewals vary by location but often around 2-3. Rate of renewal varies by patron status and discipline. Majority of resources returned within 2 week checkout period + 2 renewals.	Coady, 1986. Fried, & Hurlbaas, 1981. Glover, 2006. Hartse & Lee, 1992. Luzius, 2004. Martin, 2003.
	Loan periods	Wide range of loan periods, from 1 week to entire semester, with most around 3-4 weeks. Loan periods often based on status, with most restrictive for community patrons and least restrictive for faculty. Literature on HS libraries shows a typical loan period of 2 weeks, with more equality in patron privileges than in other types of libraries.	DuBois, 1986. Watkins & Coker, 1970.
	Recalls	Very little data available. Recall policies are normal in range of academic libraries. Noted that recall policies can be difficult to enforce.	DuBois, 1986.
	Reserves	Very little data available. 2 hour loan period is the norm for schools with a reserve section, with some permitting overnight use. Majority of schools have a reserve section. Privileges vary based on user status.	Blackburn, & Tiemeyer, 2013. DuBois, 1986. Watkins & Coker, 1970.

Survey Instrument and Study Design

- The authors employed a cross sectional research design in the form of a one-shot case study in order to control for concerns with subject populations exposed to multiple treatments and collect baseline data for comparison purposes in future study.
- This approach, as defined in Cohen's Power Sampling, is common in social science research in order to increase the ability to replicate the study in the future and does not require a large sample size (Cohen, 1988).
- Statistics regarding user experience, demographics, institution type, borrowing accounts, fines and fees, and library physical space access were collected via a survey instrument administered through and analyzed in Qualtrics.
- The survey instrument was limited to twenty (20) knowledge and library practice questions. Some portions of the selected multiple choice format prompted participants to enter supplemental information (free text responses) based on their initial selection to gain further ability for quantitative analysis and provide additional qualitative perspective.
- This research design was selected after consideration of the method of distribution and time commitment of participation in order to capture comprehensive quantifiable data.
- The researchers relied upon a convenience sample population as defined by Rubin and Babbie (2005).

Demographics



Financial Considerations

Table 2.1	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Late fines charged?		
Yes	9	50%
No	9	50%
Lost items charge?		
Yes; replacement cost only	2	11%
Yes; replacement cost + processing fee	16	89%
No	0	0%
Patron can replace lost item with exact duplicate?		
Yes; waives all charges	5	28%
Yes; processing fee still applies	6	33%
No	7	39%

Cross tabulations in the form of a Chi Square were performed for each Financial Consideration variable on the survey instrument. The commonly accepted standard probability (p < 0.05) was used.

- Library Location:** "Does your library charge fines for items returned late?" produced a **p-value of 0.05**. This was the only variable related to Financial Considerations that was close to statistical significance.

Library Users

Table 2.2	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Student check out: regular circulating books		
2 weeks	16	84%
4 weeks	1	5%
Semester	0	0%
Other	2	11%
Regular circulating books: same check out period for students and faculty?		
Yes	3	16%
No	16	84%
Can public patrons check out materials		
Yes; for a fee	2	11%
Yes; through state-wide reciprocal borrowing program (i.e. TexShare)	5	28%
No	5	28%
Other	6	33%

Cross tabulations in the form of a Chi Square were performed for each Library User variable on the survey instrument. The commonly accepted standard probability (p < 0.05) was used.

Library Services

Table 2.3	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Processing fee outside of copyright fees for Interlibrary Loan (ILL) services?		
Yes	5	28%
No	13	72%
Do you allow students to ILL textbooks?		
Yes	16	94%
No	1	6%
Does your library purchase textbooks for student use?		
Yes; as many as possible	5	28%
Sometimes; not systematically	10	56%
No	3	17%

Cross tabulations in the form of a Chi Square were performed for each Library Services variable on the survey instrument. The commonly accepted standard probability (p < 0.05) was used.

Circulation Practices

Table 2.4	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Does your library keep a reserves section?		
Yes	16	84%
No	3	16%
Does your library allow patrons to recall items early?		
Yes	6	33%
No	12	67%

Cross tabulations in the form of a Chi Square were performed for each Circulation Practice variable on the survey instrument. The commonly accepted standard probability (p < 0.05) was used.

- Library Setting:** There were no statistically significant results between mainly academic and mainly medical libraries related to Circulation Practice.
- Library Location:** "Does your library allow patrons to recall an item early?" produced a **p-value of 0.03**, which is statistically significant.
- Campus Profile:** There were no statistically significant results among the responses of libraries that serve mainly graduate student populations as opposed to those serving an equal blend of graduate and undergraduate students related to Circulation Practice.

Significant Findings

- More than 75% of libraries surveyed allow a **two week** checkout period for regular circulating books.
- More than 75% of the participant libraries grant faculty longer checkout periods than students.
- More than half of libraries surveyed **do not** allow recalls. Of those that do, the minimum use is two weeks.
- There is a 50/50 split between libraries who charge late fees and libraries who do not in the current study sample.
- Nearly 75% of participating libraries **do not** charge a processing fee for Interlibrary Loan (ILL).
- Almost all libraries surveyed allowed ILL requests for textbooks.
- More than 75% of the participating libraries in this study are **not** open 24 hours.
- There were statistically significant differences in the Circulation Practices of libraries in different geographic regions in the current study.

Limitations

- Unique Sample:** The sample size for the current study includes a special set of libraries. While this was a purposeful decision made by the researchers, the findings may not reflect the practices of or correlate with the broader academic library environment.
- Geographic Location:** The regional sample focus may not accurately reflect library practices in other geographic locations as well as national trends.
- Temporal Presence:** The study findings are limited to the time at which data was collected.
- Baseline Data:** Comparative data did not exist for longitudinal data analysis.

Conclusions

Circulation practices among surveyed libraries vary, but several common trends can be identified:

- A two hour loan period for reserve materials continues to be the norm.
- Although using ILL for textbooks is considered controversial in some library circles, it appears to be a regular practice for health science libraries.
- The loan period for regular circulating books appears to have changed very little over the past 30 years based on comparisons of the findings with the literature.
- While charging late fees has proven to be effective, not all libraries choose to use this method to ensure timely return of materials.

Future Study

- How does this data compare to the practices of other types of academic libraries and especially libraries in other geographic locations?
- Has the adoption of online resources and e-books significantly impacted usage of the physical collection? If it has, have policies changed to reflect the evolution?
- What space and time demands are users making of the library environment? Are libraries considering offering 24 hour access in the future? Is space utilization changing to suit user needs or preferences?

Setting

- Key informants in the current study include circulation managers, access services librarians, and other library professionals in academic medical libraries in the states of Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico.
- Approval for administration of the survey instrument was granted on May 14, 2013 by the University of North Texas Health Science Center's Institutional Review Board (IRB Protocol #2013-120).
- The survey instrument was administered to participants and available for responses from June to July 2013.
- A sample size of 19 participants (n=19) was obtained.

