Circulation Policies in Academic Medical Libraries: A Comparative Study of Allocation Strategies, Demographic Analysis, Service Offerings, and Implications for Practice

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Circulation Policies in Academic Medical Libraries: A Comparative Study of Allocation Strategies, Demographic Analysis, Service Offerings, and Implications for Practice

Michele L. Whitehead, MLS, MA, Laura Gutierrez, MLS, and Melody Miller, MLS

Objective

The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of current academic medical library circulation policies, examine methods libraries utilize in determining the means of user satisfaction, and to evaluate policies and practices that libraries are implementing to improve the user experience and address the needs of patrons.

Method

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 population exposed to multiple treatments and index baselines. Data for comparison purposes is 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).

Significance

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 e-mail 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 open-ended responses (three free responses) based on their initial selection to gauge their ability for quantitative analysis and provide additional qualitative comment.

The research design was selected after consideration of the method of distribution and time commitment of participation in order to capture comprehensive quantitative data.

The researchers noted upon a convenience sample population as defined by Rabin and Babbie (2000).

Limitations

• Unique Sample: The sample size for the current study was restricted to a select group of libraries. While this was a purposeful decision made by the researchers, the findings may not reflect the practices or correlation 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.

• Sample Size: The study findings are limited to the time at which data was collected.

• Data Collection: The data collected was not meant for longitudinal data analyses.

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 URL for databases is considered controversial in some library circles, it appears to be a standard practice for health science libraries.

• The loan period for regular circulating books appears to have changed over time, based on the past 10 years, as depicted by the distribution of findings for the library services.

• While charging for lost books is common in the current study, not all libraries choose to use this method to ensure timely return of materials.

Future Study

• How does the same sample in the practices of other types of academic libraries and especially in special libraries differ?

• What is the adoption of online resources and e-books significantly impacted the use of the physical collection?

• If it has, how have the changes been necessary to adapt?

• How have space and time demands been made in the library services: are they working on or have they started implementing 24-hour access in the future? Is space utilization changing to suit user preferences or needs?

Financial Considerations

Library Services

Circulation Practices

Demographics

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<tr>
<th>Library Setting</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Medical</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
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Significant Findings

• More than 75% of libraries surveyed allow a two week check-out period for regular circulating books.

• More than 75% of the participating libraries have faculty longer checkout periods than students.

• More than half of the libraries surveyed do not allow recalls. Of those that do, the minimum use is two days.

• There is a 60/40 split between librarians who charge fines versus those who do not.

• Nearly 75% of participating libraries do not charge a processing fee for interlibrary loan (ILL). However, all libraries surveyed asked ILL requests for a processing fee.

• More than 75% of the participating libraries in this study did not allow 24-hour hours.

• There were statistically significant differences in the Circulation Practices of different geographic regions in the current study.