

CARLI Background Paper: Standardized Resource Sharing Policies

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The issue:

Since the first implementations some twenty five years ago of the legacy systems that have become I-Share, participating libraries have always been allowed to set their own circulation policies that apply not only to loans of their materials to their own patrons, but also to resource sharing transactions where their materials are lent to a borrower that is affiliated with another I-Share library. When an I-Share library patron (or staff member acting on their behalf) initiates a resource sharing transaction, the patron locates the title in the Universal Catalog and will be able to see if the title is owned by one or more than one library. If there are multiple owning libraries, Voyager does not provide an option for the patron to select one or more preferred lenders. Rather, Voyager's Universal Borrowing component randomly selects an owning library that will be targeted as the lender. If the patron places more than one request in their catalog session, the lending library for each title is selected randomly. There is currently no option in Universal Borrowing (UB) to change the randomization process, and randomization does have several positive aspects in terms of lender load leveling. However, the combination of diverse institutional UB, and randomly selected lending libraries presents I-Share users with a diverse and seemingly random set of circulation policies for materials that they have requested by one process, possibly even during the same computer session.

Impact on patrons and circulation/ILL staff:

The combination of diverse policies applying to Universal Borrowing (UB) transactions in tandem with the unpredictable turn-around times in our interlibrary delivery system combine to present a service that can appear capricious and be confusing to library users. A library user could place several requests in one catalog session, asking that all be delivered to a common pickup location. The items are likely to come from different libraries, arrive on different schedules, may have different loan periods, renewal allowances, and be subject to entirely different fine and fee policies. In fact, because I-Share includes the "request promotion" feature (an Endeavor customization for ILCSSO), a library user may place a request for an item in their own local library database, which, if it cannot be filled by their own library, could be automatically "promoted" to another I-Share library. In other words, a patron might think they are placing a request for their own library's material, under the local policies that may be familiar to them, and the outcome is that they receive the item from another library with entirely different policies. Certainly this diverse array of policies must also impact the productivity of the circulation and ILL desk staff that must become familiar with the policies and explain them to borrowers.

Options:

Voyager allows for a great amount of granularity in circulation policies that apply within one library or between libraries using Universal Borrowing. Variable settings include:

- Loan periods
- Renewal limits
- Maximum number of items charged/requested
- Fines
- Lost item intervals
- Thresholds for blocking patron privileges

While it is possible to set most of these policies at the patron type/item type/library location level, it is also possible for policies to be set consistently across the Universal Borrowing (UB) module, either uniformly for all patron types and item types, or at some middle ground such as one policy for print materials and another for non-print media.

It is possible for specific patron categories (e.g., community courtesy card holders, etc.) to be excluded from being eligible for Universal Borrowing. It is also possible for the consortium to adopt a shared set of policies that will apply to UB transactions, while allowing individual I-Share libraries to maintain their own policies for transactions that involve their patrons and their items. (Note that if a consortial UB policy was adopted, it would apply to UB transactions that happen as onsite loans when a patron from one I-Share library travels to another I-Share library to borrow the second library's materials onsite.)

Peer institution's policies:

An examination of the websites of several library resource sharing consortia shows that many have adopted a common loan period for resource sharing transactions. Policies for fines, renewals and recalls vary as do policies pertaining to non-print materials, but you can see that most have adopted a 3 or 4 week loan period for all resource sharing loans of print materials to any category of patron. Excerpts from several consortia's websites are provided as the appendix to this document.

Recommendation:

I-Share should strive to present a more predictable set of resource sharing policies for users by looking to standardize the circulation policies that apply to I-Share Universal Borrowing transactions. This should extend beyond loan periods to cover renewals, fines, fees and thresholds that would block a person from UB activity until the block is cleared. Institutions that wished to do so, could adopt the same set of policies to apply to circulation of their own materials to their own patrons as well, but this would be optional.

Additional recommendation:

A separate, slightly related recommendation is that a central pool of funds be established which could be used to reimburse institutions for items lost in UB transactions (either by the borrower or in transit.) While the patron's library would still work with the item's library to attempt to recover the item or a replacement fee from the borrower, this fund could be used when those efforts were unsuccessful. The establishment of this fund and policy could serve as an incentive to adopting the common UB policies.