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Library Express Delivery Service: The Evolution of a Campus Delivery Service at Florida State University

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INTRODUCTION

Back in 1976, the Journal of Academic Librarianship reported that Ohio State and the University of California at Berkeley had each developed campus book delivery services (Journal of Academic Librarianship, 1976). Ohio State delivered requested materials through their campus mail system, and Berkeley delivered items with a minitruck. Berkeley also photocopied single journal articles for a charge.

So while the idea is not new, a review of both current literature and library websites indicate that the number of libraries implementing some sort of campus delivery service is increasing. Leon and Kress make a case that demands for faster delivery of physical materials is a result of immediate access to electronic materials at the point of need (2012). In addition, Google, Amazon, Netflix, and Kindle have all contributed to a cultural expectation of immediate access to information.

In 2007, the Florida State University (FSU) Libraries implemented a delivery service to its faculty members, and has since grown the service to include Post-Docs and Teaching Assistants. Patrons request materials through an online form, which is routed to an email account. Books are delivered to department offices and articles are scanned and emailed directly to the requestor. Materials not owned by FSU are immediately routed to Interlibrary Loan.

This article begins with a literature and website review, describing both the development of campus delivery services as well as current practices around the country. We then describe the establishment of the campus delivery service at FSU and how that service has evolved from delivering materials to faculty members to including Graduate and Teaching Assistants. We share our procedures and best practices, as well as struggles and lessons learned. Agreeing with Leon and Kress about rising expectations, it is our conviction that academic libraries must
provide access to information that is broader, faster, and increasingly more convenient; therefore, it is our goal that this article will positively contribute to other libraries as they seek to implement similar delivery services or evaluate and improve existing programs.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

A review of the literature shows several models of campus delivery services currently in operation throughout North America. Requests tend to be submitted by one of three ways: by filling out an online form, by clicking a request link in the OPAC, or by submitting an ILLiad request form. And physical deliveries are either made exclusively to branch libraries or to both branch libraries and academic department offices. A common element among all examples is that they developed their delivery services in stages, adding patron groups, requestable materials, and drop-off locations incrementally.

Auburn University began delivering books to faculty offices in 1998. Patrons make requests through an online form, which are routed to an email account. Faculty offices or branch libraries are selected as pickup locations, and materials are delivered by a cargo van and an electric motorcar (King & Pendleton, 2009). In 2006, the University of Oklahoma expanded its document delivery service by adding a link in their OPAC for requesting items to be delivered to a branch library or to department offices via campus mail (Murphy, Franklin & Raia, 2008). Like Auburn, requests are routed to an email account where they are manually sorted into appropriate folders, but they hope to convert to an automated request hold system in the future (Murphy, Franklin & Raia, 2008). Indiana University provides book deliveries between the libraries on their eight campuses. Patron requests are placed through the OPAC, and are processed as a circulation function in the library management system. In 2006, Indiana University began an article delivery service for all students, faculty, and staff on the
Bloomington campus. Article requests, unlike the books, are placed through ILLiad (Michaels, 2008). Finally, both North Carolina at Wilmington and Texas A&M process their delivery requests through the ILLiad system. Randall Library at UNC Wilmington began delivering photocopies of journal articles to faculty member’s offices in 1998, and eventually added books and media (Bombeld, 2008). In 2003, they expanded the service to graduate students, beginning first with article delivery and then adding books. Books and media are currently delivered with a golf cart to department offices, and all requests are now submitted through ILLiad (Bombeld, 2008). Texas A&M University offers a robust delivery service to all their patrons through the ILLiad interface, branded as “Get it for me” (Yang, 2008). Their philosophy is “to get material for our patrons, no matter where the material resides, either in the Texas A&M University Libraries or anywhere in the world” (Yang, 2008). Books are routed to a selected library on campus and articles are scanned and delivered within two business days. Faculty members also have the option to have physical materials delivered to their department offices via campus mail (Yang, 2006).

WEBSITE REVIEW

The review of several policies located on academic library websites has also yielded information about different delivery service models used by various institutions around the country. While the use of a book delivery system is still a relatively new concept there are several academic libraries that have adopted a delivery service for their patrons. Each of the websites reviewed show unique details for individual service models tailored specifically to meet the needs of their patron base. There appears to be two general models that most library delivery services have adopted: library paging services and office delivery services.
Academic libraries that use a paging service provide their patrons the ability to have materials delivered to various libraries located around their campuses. There are various systems that these libraries use to have patrons request these books for delivery to the various library campuses, however a common way can be illustrated by the “Get It” system used for Regents University in Minnesota. The “Get It” system allows patrons to request to have books picked up at various campus libraries by using a “Get It” button located on each item record (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2011). This system does allow for all patron types (students, staff and faculty) to use this paging system however there is no specified time it will take for materials to be delivered to patrons located on their website (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2011). Other libraries that have adopted similar paging models include University of South Carolina, Villanova University, and the University of Wisconsin.

The second general delivery model adopted by academic institutions is an office delivery system. This system does share some similarities to the previous model by offering patrons an online mechanism for placing requests. For example, Boise State University provides a button located in the online holdings record to place requests (Boise State University, 2012). Where this model diverges is that patrons have the ability to choose to have library materials delivered either directly to a campus office or to the mail rooms of academic buildings. The group of universities using this service model does have a wide range of variance on what department handles these requests and how these requests are delivered to patrons. For example at Boise State University all requests for delivery of library materials are processed by the interlibrary loan staff (Boise State University, 2012). Texas A&M University, however, has created an independent delivery unite to process and deliver all delivery requests made by patrons (Texas A&M University Libraries, 2013). The office delivery model appears to be more widely used by
the academic libraries surveyed. Libraries that have adopted this delivery model include: Pennsylvania State University, Boise State University, Texas A&M University, Purdue University, University of Washington, Cornell University, and Northwestern University.

BACKGROUND

Florida State University is a research university with approximately 40,000 students and 2,300 faculty members. The university is academically diverse with 16 colleges, 110 centers, and 275 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degree programs (Florida State University, 2013). With 3 million volumes, the University Libraries includes the Engineering Library, The Dirac Science Library, Strozier Library, as well as the branch library in Panama City and the Ringling Art Library in Sarasota. In addition, there are four other dean-directed libraries on campus that are independent of the University Libraries, but yet all seven libraries collaborate closely and share a single catalog.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW SERVICE

FSU launched the Faculty Express Delivery Service (FedS) in 2007 as an added service of the Scholars Commons, a newly formed division within Public Services that was to be uniquely devoted to serving faculty members and graduate students. The delivery service was headed by a Scholars Commons librarian and managed by two full time staff members.

Available to only faculty members, delivery requests were made by submitting an online form located on the Libraries’ website. The form required new users to register for the service, which included contact and department information, acknowledgement of the circulation policies, and permission for the Libraries to check materials out to their accounts.

The submitted request forms were then routed to a ticketing system called RT (Request Tracker), which enabled the staff to sort the requests by material type and campus library, and to
communicate easily with faculty members about their requests. Print article and microform requests were scanned and emailed directly to the requestor, and links to electronically owned articles were copied and emailed as well. Book and media requests were delivered to academic department offices by using a golf cart with an enclosed cab attached to the back. Requested items that were checked out to another user, or not owned by the FSU Libraries, were immediately routed to Interlibrary Loan or to a subject specialist for purchase. The online form also allowed for faculty members to request that their materials be picked up and returned to the library - especially popular at the end of each semester.

As part of the original service philosophy, faculty members could use the online form to request any materials, regardless of whether it was owned by FSU or not. As a result, FedS provided faculty members with a single request point for books, articles, media, and Interlibrary Loan.

The other half of the service philosophy was speed and convenience. FedS advertised delivery within two business days, but in actuality, both books and articles were delivered in less than 24 hours. Two to three hours, however, was not uncommon for delivery, nor was it uncommon for a book or video to be rushed immediately to a classroom for use in an upcoming lecture.

The new delivery service was an immediate success, and library administration received an influx of messages from grateful faculty members. 241 faculty members registered for the service in the first year (2007) and submitted 1,211 requests. In 2008, another 243 faculty members registered and 4,874 total requests were placed for a 75% increase. For the next four years (2008 to 2012), the delivery service saw an increase of 45% in requests and the number of registered users nearly doubled.
TABLE 1: New registrations and requests in the first 6 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Registrations</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Requests</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>4,060</td>
<td>5,135</td>
<td>5,238</td>
<td>6,195</td>
<td>7,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Requests</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>2,212</td>
<td>1,557</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Requests</td>
<td>1,211</td>
<td>4,874</td>
<td>5,609</td>
<td>7,518</td>
<td>7,948</td>
<td>8,360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By 2012, registered users represented 158 different academic departments and centers. 86% of registrants came from the humanities and social sciences, with only 14% of registrants coming from the STEM disciplines. 65% of all total requests were submitted by faculty members in just six of the humanities’ departments: English, Modern Languages, History, Art History, Classics, and Religion. Only 3% of the total requests were submitted by STEM faculty.

EXPANDING THE SERVICE

Toward the end of 2011, the Associate Dean for Public Services asked the delivery unit to consider expanding the service to Teaching Assistants (TA’s). With teaching responsibilities on top of their demanding academic work, it seemed that providing delivery services to this patron group would be a significant contribution to the university, as well as a strategic way to foster positive relationships across the campus. The expanded service would address certain objectives laid out in both our LibQual survey results and our newly adopted Balance Scorecard: to expand and improve access to resources.
We discovered that there are approximately 1,700 TA’s on campus. We also learned that TA’s borrowed more than twice the amount of library materials as faculty members, graduate students, and undergraduates. Local circulation reports, remote storage requests, and Uborrow use (the unmediated borrowing service among Florida’s public universities) all consistently show twice the amount of use among TA’s as with other patron groups on campus.

We also wanted to create more space on our hold shelves, and we estimated that a third of the material (i.e., recalled items, storage requests, Uborrow requests, and Interlibrary Loan) were waiting to be picked up by Teaching Assistants.

To begin with, we sent out an email to our registered departments and asked for feedback regarding their Teaching Assistants. Specifically, we wanted to know if they supported the Library’s expansion of the delivery service to their TA’s and if they had space in their department offices to receive TA requests. The results were tremendously positive. Every response was supportive of the new service, and many commented on the added value and appreciation the service would give to the TA’s. Several departments cautioned that their TA’s would overwhelm the service.

Expecting our work to double, we recognized the need for additional staff and resources. The Collections Access department promoted a supervisor from within and restructured several staff positions to create a new delivery unit (Library Express Delivery Service or LEDS) without having to hire new personnel. In addition to the newly appointed manager, LEDS was staffed with four full time employees and three student assistants. Five other staff members from Collections Access were also trained to assist the delivery unit on busy days or when people were out. Because of our commitment to making quick deliveries, the entire Collections Access department is dedicated to fulfilling the mission of the Library Express Delivery Service.
The reorganization was completed a full semester before advertising the service to the Teaching Assistants. This allowed time for the staff to begin working with each other as a new unit, to experiment with different workflows, and to think through possible scenarios that an increased workload might create. The LEDS manager was also able to speak with the academic department office managers about the anticipated needs and challenges of delivering to the Teaching Assistants. We actually had too many staff in place during this time, but it was an invaluable period as we prepared for growth.

Additionally, we were told that the server for the RT (Request Tracker) was being retired and we had to make a decision regarding the request mechanism. The options in front of us were to use ILLiad or an online form that would be routed to an Outlook email account.

After briefly considering the document delivery module within ILLiad, we decided to use an online form with an Outlook email account. This allowed us to launch the service sooner with minimal adjustments or training. Everyone was already familiar with Outlook; we simply needed to create several folders and routing rules, which is easily done in Outlook. Using Outlook also allowed for other Collections Access staff to assist the delivery unit without additional training. Outlook would also provide an easy method of communicating with patrons. Finally, the online form would allow for us to continue with our service model of providing a single request mechanism for any item regardless of where that item is located. As with our staffing structure, we began using the Outlook email account to receive requests a full semester before we expanded the service to the Teaching Assistants. This allowed plenty of time to experiment with folders, email templates, and routing rules.

While we were reorganizing staff and experimenting with online forms, we also purchased an additional golf cart and developed several models for making the physical
deliveries. The goal was to deliver out from the libraries in concentric circles, first by foot, then by golf cart, and finally, the library van for off campus sites. As with the staff reorganization, the delivery routes have been under constant review and improvement.

Finally, as we neared the launch of the service to the Teaching Assistants, we purchased two new desktop scanners, edited the website and the request forms, and developed promotional materials. We passed information on to our faculty users and to our department contacts, and the Graduate School promoted the service at the new Teaching Assistant’s orientation.

RESULTS

In order to not be overwhelmed, we marketed the service to the Teaching Assistants incrementally. Registration slowly began to increase, and within one year, 414 Teaching Assistants were registered for the service (about 20% of the TA population). Similar to the faculty members, the majority of TA registrants came from the humanities, with 60% of all requests coming from English, Modern Languages, Classics, History, Art History, and Religion. Only 8% of the TA registrants were affiliated with a STEM department, submitting just 5% of the total requests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2: 2013 faculty and TA registrations and requests per department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent of registrants from STEM departments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within the first three months of the newly expanded service, the number of requests increased by 33%, and true to our prediction, within a year the requests doubled. A comparison of the 2012 and 2013 fall semesters is shown below:

**TABLE 3:** Comparison of 2012 – 2013 requests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1,586</td>
<td>1,897</td>
<td>1,954</td>
<td>1,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To help evaluate the success of the expanded service, we distributed a satisfaction survey to all registered users 11 months after opening the service to the TA’s. The results were positive. It appears that we have been able to expand the service to the TA’s, doubling our workload, but not diminishing the quality and speed of the service. 95% of the survey respondents said that they receive their materials quickly, and 91% said that they accurately receive all the materials requested. 97% said that they plan to use the service again, while 3% said “Maybe.” Of the additional comments submitted by the respondents, several notable statements from Teaching Assistants confirmed our beliefs that expanding the service would add value to the university:

*I believe that this service has improved my research and work.*

*This service is awesome; am so glad the library began LEDs for TAs. It makes both my job as an instructor and my role as a graduate student much easier. Thanks.*

*...proving this service has been a very important aid in my research.*

*I often just do not have time to get over to the library but the materials that are delivered to me through LEDS from the library, I absolutely need to complete my research and manuscripts.*
We also learned that one academic department is including Library Express Delivery in its list of talking points to recruit new faculty members to the university. While the survey highlights several areas for us to improve, the service has certainly been judged as a success and a valuable part of the research community at FSU.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Like the majority of the libraries in our literature and website reviews, we developed the service in stages. We learned that we could start with one patron group and add subsequent groups at later intervals, and that we could even launch a new addition to the service while still testing the request platform and staff workflows. Like Robert Quinn’s book on leading change, we “built the bridge as we walked on it” (2004).

2. It was helpful to experiment with a new staffing model, a new request platform, and new delivery routes before everything was perfected, and before we actually expanded the service. In other words, the process of assessment and revision was written into the plan. In *Think Like a Startup: a white paper to inspire library entrepreneurialism*, Brian Mathews suggests we build failure and adjustment into the process, validating our ideas early on and then expanding and revising along the way (2012). We learned that this approach, as well as using the word “experiment,” helped to create an organizational culture that was open to risk. It took some time, and a lot of attention, but eventually the staff began to realize that if something didn’t work, it was OK, we could change it.

3. We learned that workflows need to remain dynamic and they need to be regularly reviewed for efficiency. Some staff members, however, struggle with constant change and need regular encouragement. Consistent meetings are important, and overall, staff have remained flexible.
4. We learned that proactive, engaging conversation with faculty members and academic department office administrators is critical. The LEDS manager spent considerable time visiting academic department offices, discussing procedures with office administrators, promoting the service, and distributing his business card. As a result of that effort, administrators and faculty members have a *relationship* with LEDS, which noticeably improves communication and problem solving.

5. Consistent with faculty use, very few TA’s registered for the service from the science, math, and engineering departments. This might be due to poor marketing or because researchers in the STEM disciplines do not have as great of a need for physical materials.

6. Some TA’s prefer to pick up their materials in the libraries. We received reports that some enjoy doing their research in the library or that they hold office hours in the library, and would prefer to pick up their materials themselves.

7. Good, durable equipment is critical. We learned that regular maintenance on the golf carts is important, as well as keeping a few spare tires, and that weather flaps for the carts helps with the rain and cold weather. For walking to nearby buildings, collapsible carts on wheels are helpful for transporting books.

**CHALLENGES**

1. With the single request form, patrons currently submit requests regardless of whether those items are available, or where those items might be owned or located. LEDS provides the service of locating those materials, and if needed, placing subsequent requests on behalf of the requesting patrons. Upon receiving a newly submitted request, the staff workflow is to first search the FSU catalog. If the item is owned by FSU, and
available, the request is printed and the item pulled from the stacks and delivered. If the item is not available at FSU, then the procedure is to search the union catalog of Florida’s public universities. If the item is available, then a Uborrow request is submitted on behalf of the requestor. If the item is not available in the state, then WorldCat is searched and an ILLiad request submitted for the patron. It is not uncommon for staff members to email patrons for additional information throughout the process. So, it is possible for a single request to be “touched” a dozen times before it is successfully filled. This service is certainly convenient for patrons, and it gives staff members a sense of partnership with the research process; however, it consumes the bulk of our workflow and is not sustainable.

2. The process of verifying the current status of requestors is time consuming and needs improvement. Not all departments classify their TA’s in the same way; therefore, they do not all show up in the library management system with the appropriate code. Currently, we maintain a spreadsheet of all registered users, and we cross-check individual requests with that spreadsheet and the current patron status in the library system. Occasionally, further communication with the patron, or even the patron’s academic department, is necessary for verification.

**FUTURE WORK**

1. Our immediate goal is to now open the delivery service to Graduate Assistants (GA’s) with research appointments. The additional 1,500 GA’s would then be offered the same delivery service to all Graduate Assistants - both those with teaching assignments and those with research assignments. But with our service model of having a single request form, our staff have reached their capacity, and are unable to expand the same service to
additional user groups. We are currently experimenting with a new service model: to eliminate the single request form and require patrons to place their own requests through the appropriate platforms. Potentially, patrons will request FSU owned materials by clicking on a “request” link next to available items in the FSU catalog, which would automatically populate an online form. For items not available at FSU, patrons will search the state university system’s union catalog and place a Uborrow request, or submit an ILLiad request if the item is not available in Florida. This model will provide less assistance to researchers, but will create the capacity to open the service to additional patron groups. Ideally, a single search would automatically locate, and place the appropriate request, whether through the local OPAC, the union catalog, or WorldCat and ILLiad.

2. It is our goal in the next year to conduct further development and testing with ILLiad, and to look closely at institutions that provide campus delivery services with ILLiad as their primary request platform (i.e., Texas A&M and the University of Arizona). While we are comfortable using Microsoft Outlook as our request tracking system, we recognize that there might be more efficient systems available.

3. Additional research needs to be conducted on the patrons who are not using the delivery service. At this point, 20% of the TA population is currently registered with FEDS. What about the remaining 80%? Are they aware of the service? Do we need to explore different marketing techniques? Do they even have a need for the delivery of physical materials? How many of them choose instead to come to the libraries to retrieve their materials? Furthermore, about 5% of all requests are coming from the STEM
departments. Again, is this due to inadequate promotion of the service or simply a lack of need?

CONCLUSION

Twenty-first century researchers expect immediate access to information at the point of need, and academic libraries are responding. Campus delivery services are providing faster and more convenient access to library materials. At Florida State University Libraries, the Library Express Delivery Service has evolved in incremental stages, and has proven to be a valuable component of the research community.
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