



Flyer 245

Electronic Reserves Operations in ARL Libraries

May 1999

INTRODUCTION

Electronic reserves is a collection of digital course materials made available over one or more computer networks. In 1993, San Diego State University's library was the first to report an experiment with delivering course reading materials through such a network. In 1996, the premier issue of *Transforming Libraries, Issues and Innovations in Electronic Resources*, detailed a handful of similar experiments in academic institutions across the United States. The goal of this survey was to assess the current state of electronic reserves services in ARL libraries; define common practices, successes, and benefits of electronic reserves; and identify problematic areas.

The questions fell into five main categories: 1) the extent of service offered; 2) staffing; 3) hardware and software systems; 4) evaluation; and 5) copyright concerns. It was hoped that the survey results might assist libraries planning their own services.

Of the 122 ARL institutions surveyed, responses were received from 61 (50%). Six of these responses were from nondegree-granting institutions that do not provide services for enrolled students (national and museum libraries, etc.), so these responses were not included in the survey results. Of the 55 responses from degree-granting institutions, 6 were from Canada and 49 from the United States. Because one institution provided two responses for separate campus libraries' operations, the total number of responses analyzed is 56.

SURVEY RESULTS

Extent of Service. The majority of responding ARL libraries currently offer electronic reserves to some extent. Thirty libraries (54%) offer both electronic and nonelectronic reserves, of which 18 are pilot programs, while 23 libraries are in the research/planning stage.

Pilot projects began quite recently with one in 1992 and increased a few in number each year, until a surge in 1997 when 16 libraries launched projects. Two of these libraries are back to the research/planning stage, and one no longer offers electronic reserves.

Twenty-five libraries (including two libraries with operational systems) shared the issues that they felt were holding them back from offering electronic reserves services. Copyright was the most commonly cited concern. Some libraries were in the process of planning, acquiring, and/or installing new or integrated library systems.

Financial and staffing concerns were listed as well. More infrequently, faculty creating their own web pages for courses was cited as making library-initiated electronic reserves less of a priority.

The five most common types of material placed in electronic reserves systems were instructors' course notes and sample tests (94%); instructors' exercises/problem sets (88%); journal articles (69%); and book chapters (59%). Materials such as links to web pages, syllabi, homework solutions, and student materials were also mentioned. Four libraries specified that they place only public domain materials on their systems. The number of items or files that libraries had in electronic reserves varied widely, from zero to 60,000. Science, technology, and engineering courses accounted for the largest percentage of materials, followed by social sciences, arts/humanities, business, health sciences, and law.

Staffing. Eleven libraries reported start-up costs for staff. The average was \$11,423. Only 7 of the libraries added staff, averaging .88 FTE each. On average, responding libraries have 1 professional librarian, 2 support staff, and 5 student assistants spending 22%, 34%, and 57% of their time, respectively, on electronic reserves. In 75% of libraries, at least some staff devoted to "traditional" reserves are also functioning as electronic reserves staff. One library commented, "E-reserves is an add-on without additional funding or staffing."

Hardware and Software. By far the most popular electronic reserves management software package in use was not a "package" at all: 23 libraries (59%) were using their own "home-grown" web-based systems. The ERes system was a distant second at 5 (18%). Most of the responding libraries (26 or 70%) indicated that their electronic reserves operation is separate from their library's digital library efforts. Only nine indicated that their project is scalable to a larger digital library effort, while eight indicated that their system was linked to a generic digital library project.

The most popular scanning software was the Adobe Acrobat suite, including Capture, Distiller, Exchange, etc., followed by Adobe Photoshop and OmniPage. The five most popular file types include PDF (84%), HTML (62%), GIF (54%), JPEG (46%), and plain text (35%).

Money spent on start-up costs for hardware and

software varied widely. Several libraries indicated that they spent nothing. The 16 libraries that developed their own "home-grown" web-based system spent an average of \$7,989 on hardware and \$969 on software, compared to an average of \$13,477 for hardware and \$14,364 for software by libraries who purchased a commercial system. Most of the responding libraries do not have a separate budget for e-reserves, nor are they recovering costs, or even trying to.

Surprisingly, cost was not the main consideration when choosing electronic reserves management or scanning software; rather, functionality came in first, followed by compatibility with existing software and/or hardware. Cost ranked third. Other factors mentioned were Internet/web accessibility and compatibility, integration with the OPAC, intellectual property component within the system, and references from other users.

Evaluation. Just under half of the responding libraries (17 or 47%) have an evaluation process. The most popular methodologies are paper and online/web surveys. All evaluations solicit responses from students, while 14 solicit faculty input, and seven seek library staff input as well.

Advantages cited by respondents include remote and 24-hour access, savings in staff time at service desks, and never having to replace missing, stolen, lost, or vandalized reserve materials. Overall, electronic reserves are very popular with students and faculty alike. One library commented, "Faculty and staff love it. It has given us visibility, credibility, and great overall PR." Another library indicated that their electronic reserves system has "created an extraordinary shift in use patterns to remote access. Ninety-five percent (!!) of access is via electronic reserves. Only 5% of use is checkout of hardcopy and books. This is quite a shift in only three years of existence of electronic reserves."

Problems encountered include the slow speed of scanning, printing, or downloading due to large files; lack of adequate staffing; copyright concerns; user education; or lack of system integration. None of the responding libraries felt that electronic reserves would ever completely replace traditional reserves in their library, mostly due to the technical difficulties and copyright limitations surrounding digitization of entire books and unsuitable media such as films.

Copyright. Twenty-two libraries (55%) have a copyright policy for electronic reserves. There is some variation in whether library staff or faculty members have responsibility for obtaining copyright permission. Thirteen libraries indicated that they pay the costs of obtaining copyright permissions for items used in their systems. Fourteen libraries use the services of the Copyright Clearance

Center. Two indicated that they work directly with publishers. All Canadian respondents referred to their libraries' CANCOPY license.

Almost all libraries placing copyrighted materials on their systems limit access through password and/or IP protection. However, it is clear that several libraries are seeking to avoid potential copyright issues by placing only public domain materials on their systems.

CONCLUSION

Many ARL libraries offer some level of electronic reserves services. Although the responding libraries' systems are at different developmental stages, most felt that electronic reserves was an important service to provide. Almost all of those who do not are planning to do so. Electronic reserves systems provide greatly extended access to reserve materials, save time for both users and staff, and prevent damage to materials.

Surprisingly, this survey found that most libraries chose to develop their own "home-grown" systems rather than purchase a commercial product. The reasons for this were not completely explored in the survey, but may include the desire to have a highly customized system, combined with budgetary considerations. Many libraries indicated a desire for an integrated electronic reserves system that would be an extension of the library OPAC and have patron authentication, copyright tracking, and other features. Improvements in technology will likely reduce many of the problems currently encountered, such as slowness of scanning and transmitting large files.

Has electronic reserves initiated campus discussions of intellectual property issues? It has played at least a small part in most discussions, and, in some cases, discussions have led to the development of university-wide copyright statements or policies. Electronic reserves copyright issues, however, await resolution.

Although trends in libraries toward electronic texts and user-initiated document delivery will have an unknown impact on electronic reserves, it is possible to say now that electronic reserves has been a popular, successful initiative at ARL libraries and its development is expected to continue.

This SPEC Flyer and Kit were prepared by Cindy Kristof, Kent State University, as part of the OLMS Collaborative Research/Writing Program.

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