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# Characteristics of International Interlibrary Lending

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A Master's Capstone

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Of a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science

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# This Project

Every library is different in the way they approach interlibrary loaning, but as the number of participants in interlibrary loan systems increases, so does the complexity of the system itself. By the time one attempts to look at the current reality of international ILL, much of the information about the characteristics of international loaning patterns is obfuscated. ILL is complicated when looked at only across the United States, and each country manages their national ILL systems in different ways, including utilizing their own union catalogs and related software, so it holds that international ILL would be even more complex to try to evaluate on the whole. However, I believe that the characteristics of international ILL are important and worth studying in depth.

The purpose of this capstone project was to **determine the characteristics of materials shared internationally** by libraries' interlibrary loan (ILL) departments, focusing on libraries that support universities. This project also sought to **determine drivers behind such resource sharing and whether any patterns in the practice could be identified** that would be of interest or actionable when presented to various ILL departments.

As collection sizes shrink and more libraries are budgeting for a larger number of electronic materials, what can we learn from studying international ILL?

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# Methods

By contacting and interviewing five institutions who participate in international ILL at least in part through OCLC's Worldshare program, our goal was to obtain specific information we could use to draw parallels in lending trends and challenges faced across the world.

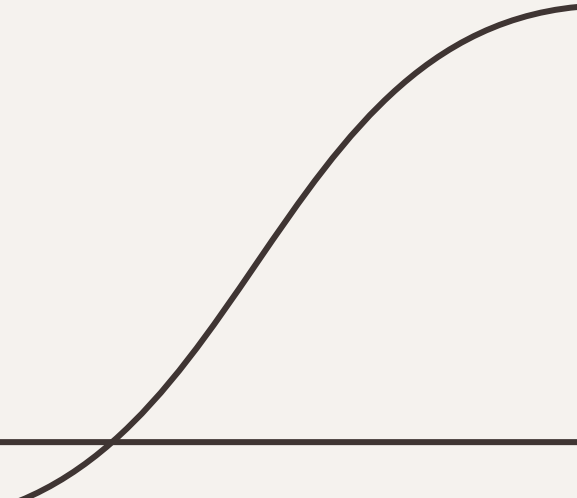
We chose to do this by:

- Selecting participating libraries
- Constructing and distributing surveys
- Conducting interviews with participating libraries' representatives
- Evaluating data

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# The Survey

The survey consisted of 42 questions in five sections. The first two questions were asking the participants' names and institutions and were the only questions that were required to have answers. The topics covered in the survey were as follows: OCLC Relationships, Characteristics of International ILL Traffic, International ILL Policies, and General Wrap-Up. Most of the questions (32 out of 42) were open-answer in an effort to obtain qualitative data about the experiences of the staff members conducting international ILL work. It was disseminated over email and all departments returned the survey within three weeks.



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# Participants in a nutshell

## **University of Bristol Library**

**Bristol, England, UK**

Int Loans in 2023: 7,913  
Int Borrows in 2023: 4,017

## **Stellenbosch University Library** **Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa**

Int Loans in 2023: 150  
Int Borrows in 2023: 822

## **University of Washington** **Seattle, Washington, USA**

Int Loans in 2023: 582  
Int Borrows in 2023: 1,263

## **The Royal Danish Library** **Copenhagen/Arhaus, Denmark**

Int Loans in 2023: 3,000  
Int Borrows in 2023: 1,400

## **Utrecht University Library**

**Utrecht, Netherlands**

Int Loans in 2023: 279  
Int Borrows in 2023: N/A

# Locations of Participants



University of  
Bristol



University of  
Washington



Royal Danish  
Library



Utrecht  
University



Stellenbosch  
University



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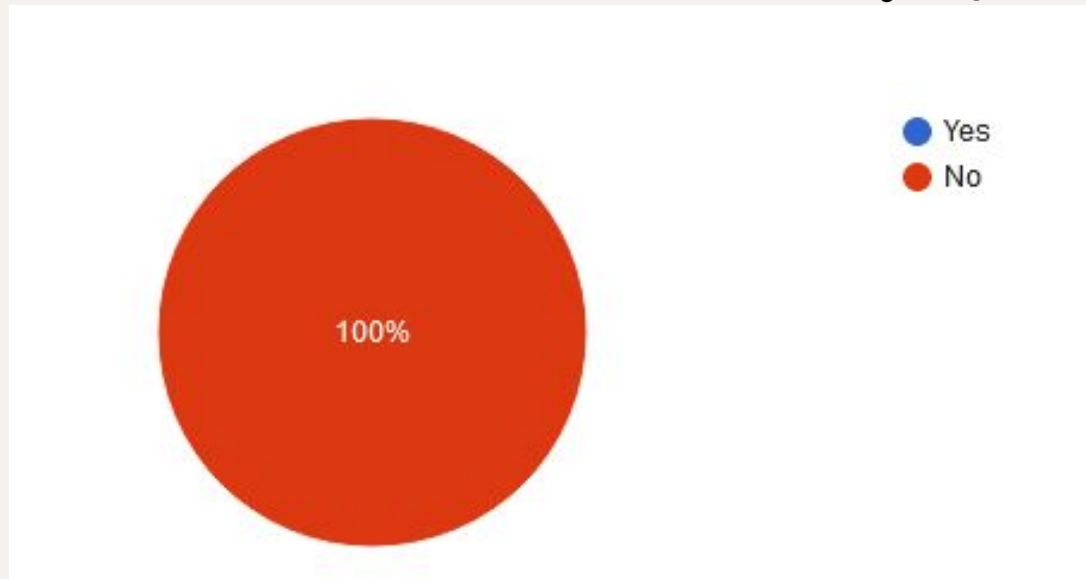
# Findings

Trends in Materials, Trends in Borrowing  
Partners, Current Challenges

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“Does your department have access to a breakdown of what subjects are being requested by specific organizations?”

## –Survey Question





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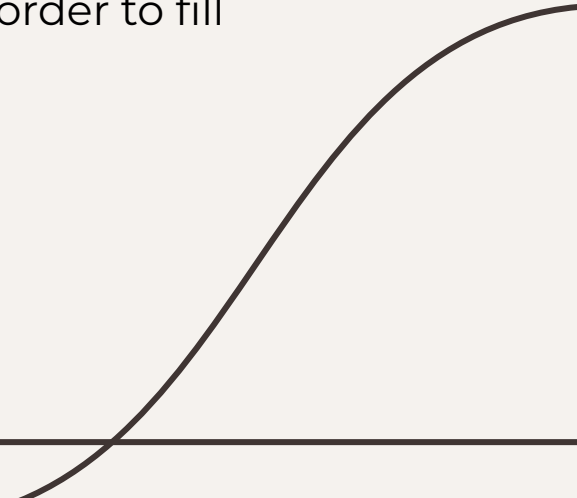
# Trends in Materials

**No organization was able to obtain information with the specific characteristics that this project intended to study** through OCLC software, however, the ILL representatives I spoke to gave me the impressions that their experience lent them.

- For university libraries, requests depended on **current curriculum**, which often reflected organizational specialties
  - **RDL has no trends** in materials, due to the organizations it supports
  - Materials most often loaned and borrowed internationally were **created after 1960**
  - Mostly, material created **after 1990 was sent digitally**
  - English was the most common language of materials
    - RDL loaned Danish-language materials most
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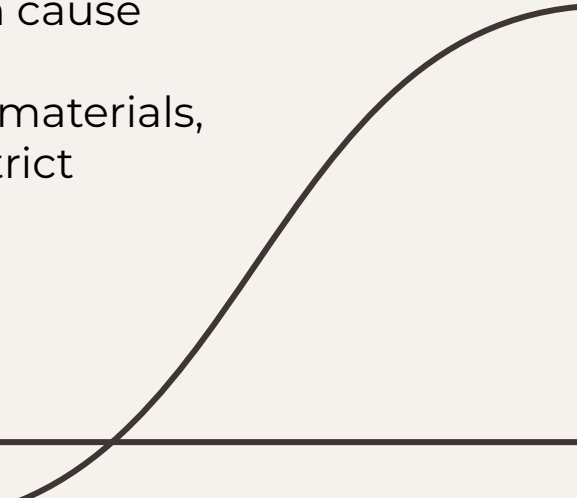
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# Trends in Borrowing Partners

- Geographical position is **a strong indicator** of number of physical item requests an organization can fill
  - **RDL loaned physical items** to organizations that are geographically close
  - Each library participating in this study receives and sends **email communication** to other organizations in order to fill requests by their users
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# Challenges Faced

- Funding affects the ability of ILL departments to work internationally regarding the **cost of shipping** physical parcels as well as **staffing concerns**
  - Obstacles regarding **customs agencies** when shipping items abroad
  - **Lack of integration** between programs used can cause frustration and lower filling rates
  - **Licensing restrictions**, specifically for electronic materials, are at times unclear and at others prohibitively strict
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# This project was able to:

- Construct a survey that can be used to evaluate not only an organization's relationship with a specific program (OCLC's WorldShare ILL, in this case), but also specific information about international ILL at that library
  - Determine that OCLC's WorldShare ILL program is lacking in its ability to report data that would provide useful data to both an organization's ILL department as well as its Collection Development, and made suggestions to improve this
  - Indicate future areas of study such as: how integration between various ILL programs would benefit staff as well as users and determining if a collection's language statistics affect what other organizations are likely to borrow from it, among others
  - Recognize challenges that affect all ILL departments participating in this study
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“Just as no library can be self-sufficient in meeting all the information needs of its users, so no country can be self-sufficient. **The supply of loans and copies between libraries in different countries is a valuable and necessary part of the Interlibrary loan process.**”

–IFLA, “International Resource Sharing and Document Delivery: Principles and Guidelines for Procedure”

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