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## A Progressive Approach to Reducing Barriers to Resource Sharing: A Canadian Example

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### Abstract:

*The University of Alberta Library (UAL) holds one of the largest collections in Western Canada and recently opened a storage facility with capacity for five million volumes. UAL's collection and staffing capacity make us a significant net lender of materials to other libraries. Being cognizant of this role, UAL is attempting, via consortial bodies at the local, provincial, regional, and national levels, to advance a progressive approach to resource sharing by reducing administrative burden and strategically working towards new ways of resource sharing via digital means. This presentation outlines our context and approach, offering a sense of adaptability and scalability that could be replicated in other contexts.*

*Scaling and extending the work UAL does at the provincial level to the regional and national level requires us to demonstrate a high degree of commitment to our partners. Often, net lenders can be hesitant to open the gates to their collections for fear of creating unmanageable demand. We accept that risk and, in general, are trying to develop a stronger sense of risk tolerance. One strategy we pursue is to remove barriers in resource sharing, via concrete actions such as the elimination of fees that generate*

*small amounts of income from lending, longer and more flexible loan periods, and controlled digital access to unique materials. UAL is developing digitization priorities in part to support this practice, facilitating greater access to our consortial partners and anyone needing access to materials we may uniquely hold. Within a complex global environment, UAL continues to look for ways to reduce barriers to information, and to share our resources widely in keeping with our University's raison d'être of "uplifting the whole people".*

**Keywords:** resource sharing, collaboration, interlibrary loan

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## Introduction

The University of Alberta Library (UAL) is a leading research library in Canada, serving approximately 38,000 students and 15,000 employees stretching over 5 campuses and 18 faculties. The Libraries have 10 locations that house library collections. We actively contribute to and help shape many initiatives that create research and scholarship and make them accessible, ensuring that access is available now and in ways that can be sustained for generations to come. UAL leverages its tremendous physical and digital collections, including rich special collections and archives, to provide learners of all levels, wherever they might be, the opportunity to grow and succeed.

UAL is the second largest research library in Canada, and serves a key role within Western Canada, given Canada's geographically dispersed population. The University of Alberta is located in the city of Edmonton, in the province of Alberta. Edmonton is Canada's fifth largest city, and the northernmost city in North America with a population of over one million. UAL is looked to as a leader within the region for advancing library initiatives that benefit others within the region as well. We frequently work with consortia in order to collaborate with other institutions on agreed upon initiatives of shared importance. We have a local consortium called NEOS which consists of 18 multi-type libraries that share a catalogue. Our other key consortia partners in Alberta are the Alberta Association of Academic Libraries (AAAL) and The Alberta Library (TAL), which is a multi-type library consortium with members throughout the province of Alberta. Regionally, we are members of the Council of Prairie and Pacific University Libraries (COPPUL), and nationally the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) and the Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN). We actively participate in all these consortia in areas such as resource sharing, licensing scholarly content, professional development, and collecting statistics.

## Moving resource sharing towards a more progressive approach

For the past several decades, or perhaps longer, the resource sharing landscape has tended to operate based on several key, if often unspoken, assumptions. First, some institutions, particularly those with large and rich collections, felt the need to limit demand for fear of being overwhelmed with requests for items. This is akin to fees elsewhere in the organization that were intended--again, whether explicitly stated or not--to limit usage of a particular service (Murphy and Lin 1997, 128). One example of this would be high fees and/or complex request procedures for reproductions of items in special collections, well in excess of the actual cost of delivery. Additionally, some libraries operated under the assumption that when they perform interlibrary lending on an outgoing basis they are not serving their own users, thus such a service must cover its costs. In fact, various rules and policies mandated that the borrowing library cover all costs (Line 1976, 81). Whether it ever did so is beside the point; it was more a question of mindset. Staffing levels for interlibrary loan have been shown to be quite erratic even among libraries of similar type, indicating perhaps a varying conception of the centrality of ILL within the organization's service portfolio (LaGaurdia and Dowell 1991, 373-374; Beckendorf 2007, 24-26). Lastly, interlibrary lending requires the use of third-party providers for shipping, which underscored and reinforced the notion that such a service needed to be cost recovery.

This brief description both oversimplifies the mindset and may unintentionally imply that these were conscious decisions on the part of individuals, rather than more subtle and instinctive responses to pressures and costs. In any event, these factors combined to place interlibrary lending outside of the realm in which we perform myriad other services without charging users. Libraries have routinely assessed fairly arbitrary fees to each other and have, in many instances, passed on these costs to users or at least explicitly made it clear to users the costs of such transactions, with the intent being to recover costs and/or reduce utilization. With the advent of digital content, many of the pressures that led to this mindset have decreased. We no longer see the volume of requests we once did (de Jong and Frederiksen 2015). Large digital collections and journal packages purchased via consortial and, in some instances, national licenses, have created broader access across a larger set of institutions (Koyama et al. 2011, 38).

At the University of Alberta, placing unnecessary restrictions on interlibrary lending fundamentally contradicts a founding principle of the institution and the substantial message of its current strategic plan, namely, that the university exists “for the public good” and should serve the cause of “uplifting the whole people” (<https://www.ualberta.ca/strategic-plan>, <https://www.ualberta.ca/promise>). While it is a university in and for the province of Alberta, these messages apply in spirit to all of humanity. As we will outline in some detail, this has led the University of Alberta to take a leading role in Canada in reducing the complexity and cost of interlibrary transactions, for example, by eliminating unnecessary fees that deter usage. By

creatively managing our resources and collections, we can sustain an active and generous lending program without incurring significant costs that would merit specific attention.

### **Examples of how the University of Alberta is leading resource sharing efforts**

In keeping with our goal to be more progressive within resource sharing and uplift the whole people, the following are examples of concrete actions the University of Alberta Library is taking to drive change.

#### ***Interlibrary Loan process***

UAL has a history of building resource sharing relationships. In the 1990s, UAL was key in the establishment of the NEOS consortium, focused on a shared ILS. In the early 2000s, UAL became the hub for all NEOS partners connecting the sharing of print collections, a role it still carries out to this day. The NEOS consortium members do not charge each other for the lending of print materials nor document delivery.

In 2012, members of the AAAL were hoping to extend reciprocal interlibrary loan and document delivery privileges to the members of this province wide association. The UAL provided its support for this initiative; fees charged were negligible to the overall budget of the UAL and the belief that charging libraries changes requesting behaviour of borrowing libraries was no longer seen as relevant. With the support of the UAL as the largest net lender in the province, AAAL was able to establish a pilot agreement in 2013. During the pilot years between 2013 and 2015, the members evaluated whether there would be any negative impacts on the net lenders. In 2015, it was determined that there was no significant change in requesting behaviour, which definitively proved to us that the argument that charges are required to curb the number of requests was unfounded.

In May of 2016, the University of Toronto Libraries (UTL), which is the largest research library in Canada, shared the news that they were stepping away from consortial agreements that had provided for free interlibrary loan and a nominal charge for document delivery to academic libraries outside of the province of Ontario. UTL implemented a \$15 charge for both loans and copies. If other institutions would have taken UTL's lead on dealing with the economic climate, this could have been seriously harmful to resource sharing across Canada. The UAL took this as an opportunity to reaffirm its belief in the resource sharing agreements across the country and removed any charges for document delivery, in addition to the already free interlibrary loan, for all academic libraries who are members to our consortial agreements. This news was welcomed by the resource sharing community and conversations were started about how institutions would reciprocate the generous offer by UAL.

Although UAL's approach was a matter of principle--it hoped to influence the resource sharing community to become stronger--UAL had to deal with the reality of what this would mean for their budget. Based on the experience with AAAL, there was no concern that request numbers would increase from borrowing libraries. Also, consortial agreements require institutions to borrow from local libraries first and UTL's change in fees did not impact institutions in Ontario. The loss of revenue from net lending activity also meant that we did not have to manage the indirect costs of charging academic libraries; invoicing, handling payment, follow ups, and errors are all indirect costs of charging fees. Considering that most institutions were charged up to a couple of hundred dollars, it was often not enough to recover the indirects costs. Many institutions offered to reciprocate UAL's no charge policy, which meant that UAL didn't have to handle their invoices and provide payment, further reducing expenses.

In early 2019, the various consortia of academic libraries across Canada came together to discuss the possibility of eliminating the charging of document delivery fees for all consortial members. In addition, various consortia brought forward additional recommendations that would improve resource sharing, such as increasing loan periods and allowing renewals. Members of the consortia worked together to provide evidence based recommendations that included these proposals to their boards of directors for each consortium. UAL is optimistic that each consortium will approve the recommendations that will result in no charges for document delivery--in addition to the already free interlibrary loans--and extended loan periods with renewals.

### ***Special Collections material***

Special Collections material has been restricted from resource sharing between institutions for many decades due to their uniqueness or high value. Hickerson & Kenney discussed the problem in a 1988 paper where they stated that “[b]ecoming active partners in shared resources programs is an essential step which will both strengthen the library as a whole and serve the interests of special collections themselves.” In recent years, this topic has seen more interest with the development of the ACRL/RBMS Guidelines for Interlibrary and Exhibition Loan of Special Collections Materials in 2012 (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/specialcollections#research>), the OCLC Research report named Tiers for Fears, Sensible Streamlined Sharing of Special Collections in 2013, (<https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/library/2013/2013-03.pdf>), and the Big Ten Alliance PRINCIPLES AND PROTOCOLS for Interlibrary Loan of Special Collections Materials of 2018 ([https://www.btaa.org/docs/default-source/library/btaa-principles-and-protocols-for-interlibrary-loan-of-special-collections.pdf?sfvrsn=9bbe4bf3\\_4](https://www.btaa.org/docs/default-source/library/btaa-principles-and-protocols-for-interlibrary-loan-of-special-collections.pdf?sfvrsn=9bbe4bf3_4)).

The UAL's Bruce Peel Special Collections (BPSC) has focused on making Special Collections items available through various digitization projects. One such project, was the digital exhibition named Tinctore's Foul Treatise

(<https://omeka.library.ualberta.ca/exhibits/show/tinctore/imagining>). As part of this digital exhibit, a fifteenth century manuscript of Johannes Tinctore's *Invectives contre la secte de vauderie* was digitized, making freely available to researchers worldwide a text that would otherwise see very limited exposure. UAL is also working closely with Internet Archive (IA), a nonprofit digital library, to make freely available BPSC material in a digital form through their platform, such as the digitized UAL Historical Postcard Collection (<https://archive.org/details/albertapostcards>). An upcoming project with IA will include the digitization of English Playbills. Using a digitization scribe located right beside the BPSC, the physical material will only be removed from its controlled environment for the duration of the scanning process. The digitized form will then be used to assign metadata to the objects. Making these objects discoverable and freely available in digitized form creates unprecedented access.

The UAL ILL department has worked closely with BPSC and the UofA Copyright Office to be able to fill requests for Special Collections items. A guideline has been established for providing controlled access to an out-of-print work for an approved purpose. As long as a requested item meets the criteria of the guideline, the ILL department may scan an entire work and provide controlled access to the work to the requesting library. The criteria include that the item must be out-of-print, non-circulating, part of BPSC, and an authorized digital version is not commercially available. The controlled access is created through uploading the scanned item to Google Drive as a PDF and restricting the item in the settings from being able to print or download the item, and assigning an expiration date to the document. The requesting library is then provided with a link that can be shared with the patron who requested the item. This enables the ILL department to satisfy more requests for materials from the BPSC.

### ***Controlled digital lending***

In January 2019, UAL began participating in the Internet Archive's (IA) controlled digital lending project. Controlled digital lending is the "digital equivalent of traditional library lending" (<https://controldigital.org/faq>), wherein a library can digitize a print book it owns, and lend a secure digital version in place of the print version, while maintaining an "owned to loan" ratio that does not exceed the number of print copies owned, and where the print copy does not circulate when the digital version is available for loan. UAL currently uses IA secure infrastructure to loan digitized version of books within our Wiedrick Historical Education Curriculum Collection, consisting of textbooks that were authorized for use in Alberta's elementary and secondary schools from 1885-1985, and were largely inaccessible in print format as part of a unique, non-circulating collection.

The decision to participate and pilot CDL was a relatively easy one in terms of it being a reasonable means to support our goals of removing barriers and enabling access to the collections that the university has invested in. In keeping with our goal of uplifting the whole people, we knew we could do better to share this important resource more widely. Our role and mission as a library at a public institution is to find ways to sensibly provide and manage access to those items of research and teaching value, while reducing barriers to access. For a non-circulating collection like Wiedrick, CDL allows us to responsibly and reasonably deliver books from our shelves to prospective readers.

As of August 2019, UAL's Wiedrick online collection holds a total of 3923 items, with 1367 available for borrowing using CDL, and another 2556 of them being openly available to read at any time because titles are in the public domain. Of the titles made available via CDL since January 2019, more than half have been loaned at least once, representing 1839 circulations. There are 118 titles that are currently in use and on the waitlist to be borrowed. This use has exceeded expectations, showing us that there is greater interest in this material than we might have imagined, and certainly a population beyond our UofA campus community using it now that it has been opened up beyond its previous print-only restricted access availability.

### ***Ebook lending***

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Digitization of UAL print collections will greatly improve access to scholars outside of the Edmonton region. However, while the shift in acquisition of books in print to digital format has improved access for our own users, it has created difficulty in sharing these resources beyond our own institution. Our Interlibrary Loan department provides chapters from digital books when permitted by licences; however, as digital collections increase, Interlibrary Loan departments must address the issue of sharing whole ebooks with other libraries. UAL has recently reviewed our licences for clauses that permit the sharing of a whole ebook and this work guides the Interlibrary Loan staff with filling requests for such items. Our Collection Strategies team continues to work with vendors to address this issue by requesting that interlibrary loan of whole ebooks is permitted in licenses. Similar work is being done by other libraries, for example, VIVA, Virginia's Academic Library Consortium (<https://vivalib.org/c.php?g=836990&p=6137355>). We are optimistic that as more libraries work with vendors on this issue, whole ebook lending could become the new standard.

### ***Shared print participation***

To facilitate the long term preservation and use of print materials, UAL has been an active partner in a number of shared print programs. We have entered into these arrangements in the



spirit of wanting to be one of the institutions regarded as an Archive Builder, an institution that will commit to retain and hold desired materials for a significant period of time. We believe it is beneficial to hold and then lend materials to our consortial partners. We have been very active with the COPPUL Shared Print Archive Network (SPAN), which began in 2012, as well as with HathiTrust where we have committed approximately 850,000 print items to match the existing digital surrogates within HathiTrust. We are currently involved with a national effort in Canada to form a national shared print model to cover Canadiana materials across the country, and a partnership with other consortia in the U.S. and Canada to align principles of such programs.

At the centre of our ability to do so much with shared print is our new Research and Collections Resource Facility building which opened in the spring of 2018. It is a state of the art climate controlled facility with capacity for 5 million items (<https://library.ualberta.ca/locations/rcrf>). By funding the construction of such a facility, the University has shown its commitment to the print materials we have acquired and will continue to acquire, as well as archives and materials that need special handling. We can translate this good fortune to help others reduce their own collections while knowing they can borrow from UAL. Key next steps in this space will be to align with digitization efforts and make better linkages between different formats, which is currently lacking to a large degree. Doing so will enable greater lending of existing digital copies for print books that we hold, and will help us determine what unique print materials we have, which can help determine future digitization priorities.

## **Conclusion**

As we have demonstrated in this paper, UAL's progressive approach to resource sharing is one that requires us to demonstrate a high degree of commitment to our partners. Often, net lender libraries such as ours can be hesitant to open the gates to their collections for fear of creating unmanageable demand. We accept that risk and, in general, are trying to develop a stronger sense of risk tolerance. By eliminating resource sharing fees for Canadian academic libraries, investing in digitizing collections through various partnerships, and participating in new structures for making available our materials, we are reducing barriers to access and promoting resource sharing. We also feel that this approach provides consistency by supporting many libraries in fostering an open, global scholarly environment where the principles of increased access take precedence over revenue generation. Libraries are collectively acting in many ways to bring about this change, for example setting up library-based publishing services for which we often do not charge the end users. We are working to apply these same principles of openness and service to resource sharing in order to reduce barriers to information, and share our resources widely, in keeping with our University's *raison d'être* of "uplifting the whole people".

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