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A Day in the Life of the Interlibrary Loan Supervisor

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As I began to think about a “day in the life” of my position at Oregon State University (OSU), it was difficult to pick a typical day. My days are hectic and at times a bit unruly; each day involves a different adventure. When things are going well, I affectionately think of it as an exercise in chaos theory. As I considered which day to pick and looked at an overview of a month, I could see a rhythm, so in turn that should mean that individual days also have rhythm. As I looked closely, I began to see the organization in the mayhem. I start each day with an ambitious plan, but it is adjusted frequently and requires flexibility.

Oregon State University Libraries include one main library and two branches. Interlibrary Loan (ILL) is a unit in Access Services. Interlibrary Loan is responsible for coordinating lending and borrowing activities for traditional ILL, Orbis Cascade Alliance, and branch and remote services. During fiscal year 2004/05, OSU Libraries received a grand total of 104,600 requests. This averages out to about 400 requests per working day. This is accomplished by the amazing staff at the Valley and Guin Libraries. I supervise 6.0 full time employees (one works .5 FTE in Circulation) and about 2 FTE of student labor; I also coordinate with staff at the Guin Library, the

branch library in Newport.

In the Valley Library, the largest of the OSU libraries, ILL is fully integrated into Access Services. Circulation is the public services point for Access Services; ILL does not have a separate public service desk. Distribution of ILL materials and requests for appeals of fines related to ILL are handled at Circulation. Collection Maintenance assists with training pagers, serves as paging backup, and handles checking in ILL and Summit materials in Millennium. Overdue notices, renewal notices, pick up your item notices, etc. are sent via e-mail. In addition, all routine ILL questions from patrons are handled by Reference in the Information Commons.

My day is ultimately escorted along by MS Outlook, partially because it is my favorite tool for managing due dates for pending tasks, and partially because it contains my calendar and e-mail. Outlook is my first stop of the day. I start every day by checking for meetings, deadlines, and my “hope I can get this done” list, which today includes implementing RAPID, a fast, cost-effective, innovative resource sharing system designed and implemented by Colorado State University, providing input on a “Quick Guide for ILL” from Reference, responding to a request to change e-mail notices in the circulation module, and of course that in box full of e-mail. Since e-mail is a very popular form of communication used by many of my colleagues, the day starts with e-mail, e-mail and more e-mail.

I start with all the easy e-mails so it doesn't look like I have so many. The easy ones are the e-mails that don't require any follow-up; these are the short e-mails that only require filing, deleting or forwarding. Next I check for staff absences and make sure all the coverage for the day is in place; luckily the wonderful staff in ILL provide any coverage that is needed. Next, I look for messages from patrons or people who seem upset, and respond or delegate the responses. Next, on to questions from colleagues in the library usually asking for



leave time, statistics, input on Web pages or brochures, committee assignments, policies, and the occasional random request (which by the way, was not in my well-thought-out plan for the day). Luckily, some can wait, so I flag them for later. Usually about this time all the flagged items from the day before begin appearing, with me wondering what I was thinking setting all these reminders for this morning! I check the reminders for deadlines or emergencies; none due now so “snooze” those for later.

Now on to those messages about what is happening in the library: the new Central Oregon Community College Librarian and the Associate University Librarian for public services both start soon; we are on target with the strategic plan; someone will be replacing panels in the study rooms, and one of the elevators is not consistently working properly (make mental note to take the stairs today). It’s after 10:00 a.m. already, and I still need to read the various listserv e-mails, including ILLiad-L listserv, RAPID listserv, BTPILL-L, NWILL, and any messages my staff forwarded from the ILL-L and Alliance listservs. Now, I’m quickly skimming the e-mails for additional information that will help me with the problem with the ILLiad user manager and looking for any information that should be sent to staff. The other e-mails, including the ten reports from those who went to the ALA, the information on endeavors in our digital libraries, and the latest issue of LJ Academic Newswire will have to wait for another time. I file these e-mails for later reading. It is noon now and I need a break. (It’s Thursday so I’m off for rousing hands of Pinochle with other card playing enthusiasts throughout the library; no score keeping so the stress levels stay low.)

Back from lunch and tired of e-mail, I decide to try and get something from my carefully planned list done. I review the Quick Reference Guide given to me last week for comment by one of the Reference Librarians, but soon discover I would like to make more than just cosmetic changes

so I create a draft to discuss with ILL staff and my supervisor. I review a draft for standardized e-mails to be used for notifying patrons of the outcome of their ILL loan renewals. I get interrupted because the Summit computer’s keyboard is not working; I call support and ask them to fix it—only to find out that others are having this problem and it can’t be fixed until the new computers arrive later this summer. The good news is there is a work-around, so I delegate learning of that work-around to the staff member using the computer most; then back to my desk. There are those pesky e-mail reminders again; I make a mental note to be more realistic in my estimates on follow-up times. I notice more e-mail has arrived and quickly read/delete/reply to as many as possible until the fifteen minute meeting reminder activates.

It’s meeting time, so I’d better print the agenda and read any supporting documents so I don’t seem too scattered in the discussions. Which meeting is it today? Could it be one of the weekly meetings like the Access Managers’ meeting, the progress report to the Head of Access, or the Public Services supervisors’ meeting/coffee time? Or is it one of the monthly meetings like the Access Department meeting, the ILL meeting, the Library Social Committee, or the Communication Task Force? Hooray, it’s a panel discussion on women in Tunisia, so I rush to the learning experience, a little stressed about what isn’t done in ILL. However, I’m quickly distracted because the panel is really interesting; I’m amazed at the parallels between the experiences of women in Tunisia and the US.

Once I return to my office, I realize I forgot to check in with staff who were doing RAPID lending for the first time today, but quickly remember that I have the best staff ever, who handled the change flawlessly. I look at e-mails now flashing at me again on the screen, pick items with real deadlines, and leave the others for another day. I add new items to my list including *See A Day in the Life* page 24



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an employee evaluation, my self evaluation, and a reminder to send out an agenda for the ILL meeting. I go to shut down my computer and realize I never finished reviewing the e-mails for our courtesy renewal messages, which will have to wait for another day.

As I reflect on the day, I think about how exciting it is to work on a vibrant, thriving campus. I consider how fortunate I am to have such competent colleagues in the faculty and staff at OSU and around the state. I think about the challenges ahead and am thankful that my work is never boring.

Mostly, I think about what should be on my list for the next day and remember the old adage—time flies when you're having fun.


About the Author

Lisa Conaster is currently the Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery Supervisor at Oregon State University Valley Library. She received her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. She has served libraries in Oregon, Florida, and Arkansas, and asserts that few endeavors are more rewarding than a day in the life at the library. 

Accidental Library Tourist

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me, too. I saw books the likes of which I'd never seen. We had flat picture books with spines frayed backwards like a crooked finger, embrittled law tomes that had burst their bindings, atlases the size of end tables, and innumerable copies of the first volume of Harry Potter, each one split open exactly between pages 42 and 43. Collective agreement would encircle the room about wear and tear on middle-school textbooks, paperback mystery novels and baby books printed on stiff cardboard pages, while I strove to keep up and think fast, applying what had worked for me for years on university hardcovers. Our worktables filled up with books, rolls of cloth, and scrap paper as we began cutting and gluing, and for the first time since working the Circulation desk at the Woodstock branch I tasted the hectic pace that is business as usual for many library staff. Every class was my continuing education on the library's role as a community hub—and how to set up what one woman called a “M*A*S*H unit” for books within a usually crowded and very active multi-use work area.

It's been five-and-a-half years since Kris and I first presented on book repair and collection maintenance at the 2000 OLA conference. Since then we've taught five or six full-day classes each year, April through October, without yet putting the caravan up on blocks. The way the word has spread is a wonderful thing, as experience has convinced me we're offering reliable do-it-yourself remedies—not snake oil! I never knew I had any wanderlust, but now I can't imagine a summer spent entirely at one workbench, without a day on the road. 

About the Author

Carolee Harrison has spent the past seven years mending thousands of volumes in the Portland State University Library's circulating collection. She found herself on the workshop circuit quite by accident after confessing her fantasy of becoming the Iron Chef of books. Since the turn of the century, Carolee and Kris Kern, PSU's preservation librarian, have toured Oregon each spring and summer teaching book repair and conservation to library staff and volunteers.

