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2013-07-15

Reenvisioning Access Services: A Survey of Access Services Departments in ARL Libraries

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Original Publication Citation

Duane Wilson (2013) Reenvisioning Access Services: A Survey of Access Services Departments in ARL Libraries, *Journal of Access Services*, 10:3, 153-171, DOI: 10.1080/15367967.2013.795430

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Wilson, Duane E, "Reenvisioning Access Services: A Survey of Access Services Departments in ARL Libraries" (2013). *All Faculty Publications*. 1599.

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Title: Re-envisioning Access Services: A Survey of Access Services Departments in ARL Libraries

Abstract

In spring 2012 a study was undertaken to investigate the current structure of Access Services in ARL Libraries and to understand current and future trends in departmental organization and cross-training. The survey determined that Access Services Departments in ARL Libraries typically contain a core set of services, though their structure is based on local needs. Most ARL Libraries have not experimented with combining reference and circulation functions and have only begun to consolidate traditional Access Services areas single service points. The author recommends that Access Services be organized around a public services point instead of organizing the department around areas that provide some kind of access to library materials.

Introduction

Like many areas in the library, the Access Services Department has changed dramatically since it began to be established in libraries in the 1980s. New technologies and changing usage patterns have required adjustment to the department over the last 30 years. Though studies have been done to determine trends for the department, little formal study has been done since the 2005 ARL Spec Kit. In addition, the library literature has regularly discussed combining different public services areas, including reference with Access Services, to create a single public service point. Studies have not been done to determine if this recommendation in the literature has been implemented. This study was undertaken to investigate the current composition of Access Services in ARL Libraries and to determine if libraries have explored the idea of combining circulation and reference. ARL libraries were chosen as a result of their previous study in the 1991 and 2005 spec kits. Also, these larger libraries represented a sample closer to the composition of the authors own library.

Terms

It is important to disambiguate some of the terms that will be referred to in this paper. In some libraries, the interlibrary loan and document delivery areas are a single department and the two terms are used interchangeably. In other libraries, interlibrary loan is relates to materials borrowed from or lent to other libraries while document delivery refers to delivery to local patrons through either physical, mail, or electronic service. In most libraries cross-training means that certain staff members are trained to help with a few core functions in addition to their normal duties. The most common practice is for various people to be trained to help out with circulation desk functions. Integrated workflow refers to a practice in some libraries where traditional boundaries between areas have been eliminated. For example, instead of having each area retrieve their own books, a department might establish a centralized retrieval service with stacks management getting the books for all areas. In this case they have truly merged previously distinct areas.

Related Literature

The literature about Access Services organization began in 1991 with Steel's foundational spec kit on Access Services Departments in ARL libraries. She reported that a little less than half of the responding libraries had an Access Services Department. For most of these libraries the department had existed for less than ten years. Steel reported that the circulation area was the core of Access Services along with stacks maintenance, course reserves, and library security. Interlibrary loan and document delivery were occasionally included as part of the department, but were far less common than some other areas.

Access Services organization was not addressed again until the inaugural issue of *The Journal of Access Services* in 2002. In this issue Schneiter discussed the history and composition of the department and discussed the various technological and situational factors that led to its formation. He also

speculated about future trends for departmental focus and organization, expressing that the department would continue to evolve and that its focus might become more virtual than physical.

In the same issue Thornton and Warman (2002) reviewed previous literature about Access Services and commented on the departmental structure and future. They mentioned the paucity of writings about Access Services as a department even though that the literature about individual components of the department was abundant. In their opinion Access Services needed to improve coordination in order to better serve the library patrons.

In a detailed survey in 2004, Tolppanen investigated the individual tasks associated with the Access Services Department instead of focusing on overall departmental structure like other studies. He found that the tasks could be divided into two parts, those that made information available to the user and those that dealt with the library building. He speculated that usage statistics would remain the same or increase in the department over the next five years.

In 2005 Dawes, Sweetman, and Von Elm updated the 1991 spec kit. They found that there was a strong trend in ARL Libraries toward changing the name of the Circulation Department to Access Services. They designated Access Services as an umbrella that enveloped many different areas in the library and stated that the core services had not changed since 1991. Several areas were increasingly becoming part of Access Services including current periodicals, microforms, information desk, and interlibrary loan . Another trend they mentioned was consolidation of services points, primarily combining service points within the different areas of Access Services. They found that the number of support staff had decreased in 37 libraries and increased in 21 libraries. The number of student assistants, librarians, and other professionals had increased in the majority of libraries.

Frederiksen (2005) did an analysis of Access Services job announcements from 1977-2004. She said that Access Services “continues to be characterized as multifaceted unit that combines several functional areas under one umbrella” (p. 22). She commented that stacks maintenance seems to be less

common in Access Services Departments than in the past. She also mentioned that, in many libraries, the Access Services Department was created by combining previously separate units into a larger department with more services.

Many of the above articles identified what they considered to be the typical composition or core units of Access Services (See Table 1). Typically circulation, reserves, stacks maintenance, and interlibrary loan were the most common areas included. Interlibrary loan was increasingly mentioned in later years, while stacks maintenance was less frequently included in later articles.

Table 1: Units in Access Services by Author

Author	Date	Circulation	Reserves	Stacks	Interlibrary Loan	Document Delivery	Security	Billing
Steel	1991	x	x	x			x	
Schneiter	2002	x		x	x	x		x
Thornton and Warman	2002	x	x		x			
Dawes, Sweetman, Von Elm	2005	x	x	x			x	x
Hersey	2005	x	x			x		
Frederiksen	2005	x	x	x	x			
Su	2008	x	x		x	x		

Several authors have written about consolidating service points, particularly in regards to combining reference and circulation. Flanigan and Horowitz (2000) discussed the consolidation of library service points at one of MIT's libraries. They experimented with circulation and reference staff working together at a single service point. They concluded that the experiment was successful, but that a combined model would have to be modified for every library that wanted to implement it.

A few years later, Naismith (2004) did an informal survey of relevant listservs to determine how combined service desks were working at different libraries. She commented that the combined model

was effective in many cases, though there were some concerns about the difficulty of training staff in multiple areas.

Crane and Pavy (2008) discussed a specific instance of combining service areas into a single service point in the University of New Orleans Library. Declining statistics and staff attrition were the primary motivations for this combination. They commented on the problems of cross-training and merging cultures along with the strong benefit of one service point for the patrons.

Also in 2008, Su gave an introduction and overview of the Access Services Department for reference librarians. In it she discussed several models of collaboration between reference and circulation, including the combination of the reference and circulation desks, the combination of reference and interlibrary loan, and the combination of all Access Services service points. Though the article included a good summary of some of the literature relating to combining different areas, the article focused on reference librarians and how they could work in or with Access Services.

Most of the articles were positive about combining service desks, though differing cultures between the combined areas was often directly or indirectly mentioned. The difficulty of cross-training staff to provide multiple services was also mentioned.

More recently, several authors have begun to comment on how Access Services should integrate their workflows rather than remain separate. In 2005 Hersey wrote an article that emphasized how Access Services Departments are a non-integrated grouping of areas. He encouraged libraries to integrate the workflows of interlibrary loan, circulation, and document delivery rather than allowing them to function separately.

Alarid and Sullivan (2009) gave an actual example of integrating the workflow of interlibrary loan into the rest of the Access Services' workflow at the University of Denver. Things such as centralizing department retrieval and cross-training staff in all the different functions were undertaken. Despite challenges, the staff felt that the integration improved their ability to work together.

Austin (2010) argued that Access Services should integrate workflows rather than remaining in traditional areas. He described the entire restructuring of Access Services around workflows at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Though the change was difficult, they felt that the change made the organization more flexible.

Similarly, Chang and Davis (2010) discussed the evolution of Access Services over time. They describe the change from individual service units to a more single service location mode. They argued that Access Services should be integrated and consolidated so that processes were seamless for users.

From these articles, several themes emerge. First, that Access Services is a department of administrative convenience. The overall makeup is determined by the needs of individual institutions, though there are some commonalities between libraries. Several recent articles have discussed breaking down the barriers between the units in Access Services by combining and integrating workflows. Some libraries have also experimented with combining reference and Access Services with positive results.

Methodology

After reviewing the 1991 and 2005 spec kits, the author developed a survey related to the organization of the Access Services Department. The guiding principles behind the questions were to discover the current composition and trends in Access Services Departments and to determine how prevalent a combined circulation and reference department was in ARL Libraries. This survey was developed using the Qualtrics survey tool and emailed in April 2012 to one hundred identifiable heads of an Access Services or equivalent department in ARL Libraries in the United States. Seventy of them responded, though only sixty-three completed the full survey.

Access Services Department Naming

Respondents were first asked if they had an Access Services or comparable department to which 94% (61/65) responded affirmatively. Those taking the survey were given the option to share the name of

the department. Seventy percent of respondents reported that the words Access and Services were part of the title of their department, with 54% of respondents simply calling their department Access Services (See Table 2).

Table 2: Title of Access Services or Equivalent Department (n=46)

Department Naming	Number of Libraries	% of responses
Access Services	25	54%
Access Services somewhere in title	32	70%
Access in the title	33	72%
Circulation in title	8	17%
Technical services	2	4%
Reference	0	0%

Areas in Access Services

Not surprisingly, this survey determined that circulation was still the most common area in Access Services with 97% of respondents including it in the department (See Table 3). The reserves area was in 90% of the Access Services Departments, with circulation occurring in every Access Services Department that included reserves (See Table 4). The interlibrary loan area was present in 82% of the Access Services Departments, with the same 82% of libraries containing circulation, reserves, and interlibrary loan. The document delivery and stacks maintenance areas were also frequent combinations, with the coupling of circulation, reserves, interlibrary loan, document delivery, and stacks maintenance occurring in 70% of the libraries surveyed. The billing area was common, though it was only combined with other core Access Services areas in 54% of responding libraries (See Table 3 and Table 4). Areas such as multimedia, security, and periodicals were much less prevalent (especially in combination with the core services mentioned above), but were still common in many of the surveyed Access Services Departments. From these results, it is clear that circulation, interlibrary loan, reserves, document delivery, and stacks maintenance are the core areas of Access Services in most ARL Libraries.

Table 3: Supervisory Areas within Access Services (n=61)

Area	Number of Libraries	% of Respondents
Circulation	59	97%
Reserves	55	90%
Interlibrary Loan	51	84%
Document Delivery	51	84%
Stacks Maintenance	50	82%
Billing	47	77%
Multimedia	33	54%
Other	32	53%
Library Security	28	50%
Periodicals	19	31%
Storage or robotic retrieval	14	23%
Reference Services	5	8%

Table 4: Services Included Together in Access Services (n=61)

Area	Number of Libraries	% of Respondents
Circulation, Reserve	55	90%
Circulation, ILL	50	82%
Circulation, Document Delivery	50	82%
Reserve, ILL	50	82%
Circulation, ILL, Reserve	50	82%
Circulation, ILL, Reserve, Document Delivery	48	79%
Circulation, ILL, Stacks	45	72%
Circulation, ILL, Stacks, Reserve	45	72%
Circulation, ILL, Stacks, Reserve, Document Delivery	43	71%
Circulation, ILL, Stacks, Billing	36	59%
Circulation, ILL, Stacks, Billing, Reserves, Document Delivery	33	54%

This compares with other authors' findings of the core components of Access Services as seen in Table 5. From these findings it appears that areas such as security and billing may be less common in Access Services than reported in the past. Also, the previous two studies of Access Services in ARL

Libraries (Steel, 1991 and Dawes, Sweetman, & Von Elm, 2005) excluded ILL and document delivery from the Access Services core. Whether these changes represent a shift in ARL Libraries or a difference in methodology would have to be examined further.

Table 5: Core Services in Access Services by Author Updated:

Author	Date	Circulation	Reserves	Stacks	Interlibrary Loan	Document Delivery	Security	Billing
Steel	1991	x	x	x			x	
Schneiter	2002	x		x	x	x		x
Thornton and Warman	2002	x	x		x			
Dawes, Sweetman, Von Elm	2005	x	x	x			x	x
Hersey	2005	x	x			x		
Frederiksen	2005	x	x	x	x			
Su	2008	x	x		x	x		
Wilson	2013	x	x	x	x	x		

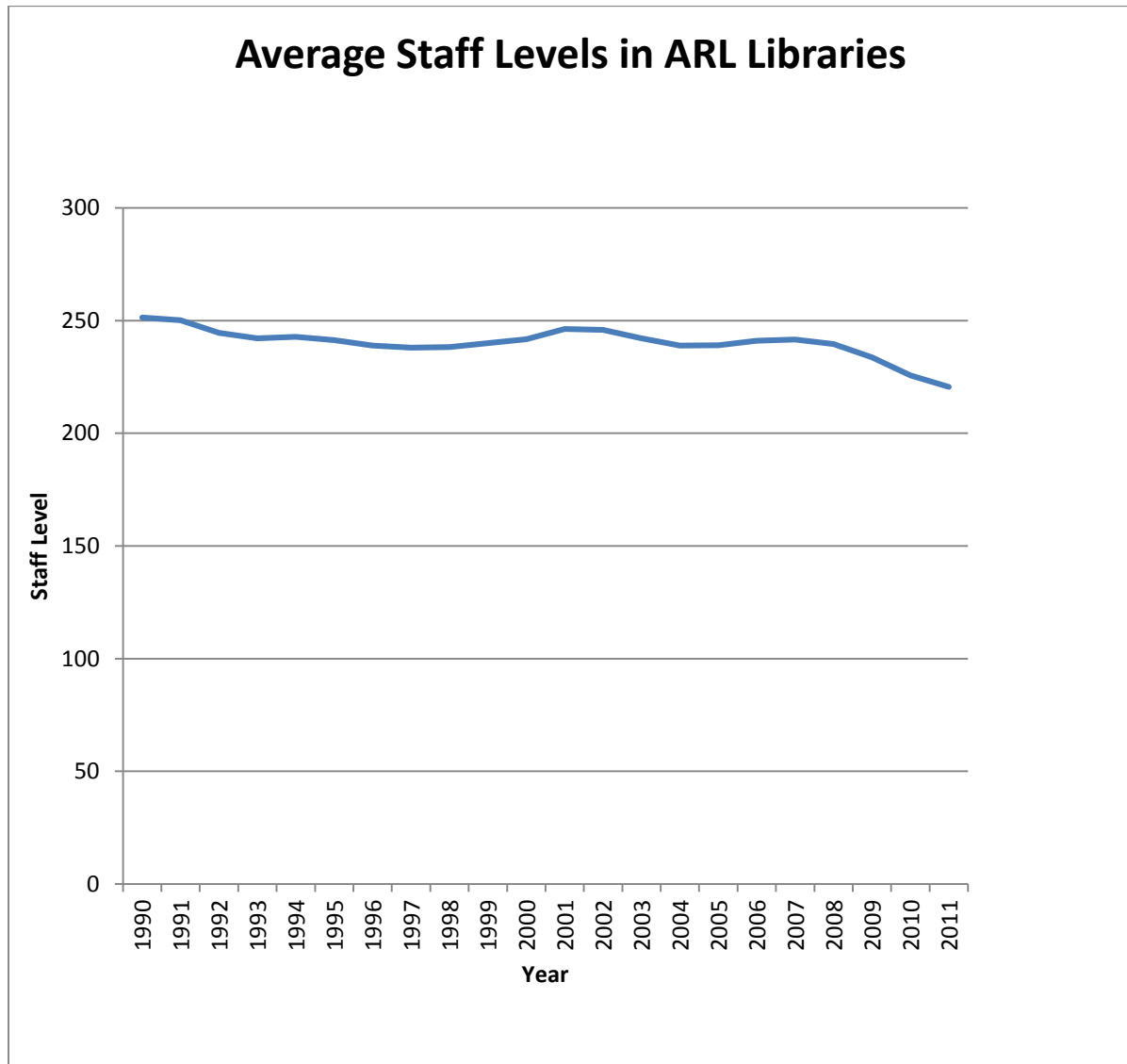
Interestingly, only 8% (5/61) of respondents mentioned that reference was part of their department. Despite calls from and examples in the literature, the idea of combining reference with the Access Services organization is not prevalent in ARL Libraries.

Staff Trends

A few questions were asked about staffing trends in the past five years. Of those that responded, 63% (37/59) said their staff levels had declined, 19% (11/59) said that they had increased, and 19% (11/59) said that they stayed the same. This is comparable to the results of the 2005 Spec Kit, which found that support staff had decreased (Dawes, Sweetman, & Von Elm, 2005), though this survey did not ask for the level of detail that the Spec Kit did. More study would be needed to verify if there is an overall staffing decline in Access Services Departments, though the combination of these two studies

makes such a decline seem likely. Average staffing levels in ARL libraries have been declining, and Access Services may simply be following this trend (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Average Staff Levels in ARL Libraries



Respondents were given the opportunity to select the reasons behind staffing changes. Interestingly, adjustments to organization, workflow, and general restructuring were listed as the most common reasons ahead of decreased funding (See Table 6). A further analysis of these changes showed that 20 of the 37 (54%) who stated that staff levels had declined mentioned decreased funding as one of the culprits. However, approximately the same number mentioned adjustments to departmental workflow (21/37; 57%) and restructuring (18/37; 49%) as reasons for this change (See Table 7). This implies that economics was only one reason and not necessarily the primary factor driving the decrease in staff. Interestingly, in the comments, several libraries mentioned retirement as a major reason behind changes to structure. This implies that attrition is one of the tools used to restructure departments and decrease staff. Unfortunately, this survey did not ask specifically about declining usage as a driving factor behind staffing changes. This would be a useful item for further study.

Table 6: Reasons for Change in Department Staffing Levels (n=59)

Answer	Number of Libraries	% of Respondents
Adjustments to departmental organization or work flow	30	51%
Restructuring, adding, or removing units within this department	28	48%
Increased departmental funding	1	2%
Decreased departmental funding	21	36%
The number of staff positions stayed the same	9	15%
Other factors -- (Please indicate)	16	27%

Table 7: Reasons for Departmental Change by Staff Increase/Decrease

	Adjustments to departmental organization or work flow	Restructuring, adding, or removing units within this department	Increased departmental funding	Decreased departmental funding	The number of staff positions stayed the same	Other factors
Staff Increased	9	10	1	1	0	1
Staff Decreased	21	18	0	20	0	13
Staff Same	0	0	0	0	9	2

Cross Training

Cross-training was very prevalent in surveyed libraries, with 90% of respondents stating that they implemented some kind of cross-training. When asked whether the cross-training was within a specific area or spanned service units, libraries overwhelmingly responded that the training spanned service units (See Table 8). Though the majority of libraries say they cross-train, most of cross-training is done so that multiple areas can cover the circulation desk or so that areas with similar workflows can help each other. From statements made in the comments section it doesn't appear that workflow integration is occurring. It is clear that the majority of ARL Libraries have not responded to Austin (2010) and Chang and Davis' (2010) calls to integrate workflows.

Table 8: Cross Training Across Service Units (n=53)

Answer	Number of Libraries	% of Respondents
Accomplish multiple duties within a service unit (For example: Circulation staff trained to accomplish several tasks related to Circulation duties)	5	9%
Accomplish multiple duties that span across service units (For example: ILL staff trained to also assist at the Circulation desk with Circulation duties)	6	11%
Both A & B	41	77%
Other (please indicate)	1	2%

Shared Supervision

Respondents were asked to group areas (such as circulation, reserves, ILL, and document delivery) that were supervised by the same manager. The responding libraries had not combined these areas but left them with a distinct supervisor. The only aberration to this was with ILL and document delivery where 10% of respondents used the same manager for both areas. When asked a follow-up question as to why any units shared managers, 80% of respondents said that shared supervision was because of shared duties and/or collaboration. From these results, it is clear that the different units within Access Services remain truly distinct, with separate managers and workflows. In other words, Access Services continues to be a true umbrella; a grouping of semi-related, but separate areas.

Location of Access Services

When asked about which Access Services units shared physical space, only 17% of respondents had placed all units in the same location. Sixty-one percent had some of the units sharing space, and 10% said that all units were in different spaces (See Table 9). One library even said that there were 15 different locations for Access services (including the main library and other facilities). When asked which areas shared space, 7% of libraries had ILL and document delivery in the same location. There was no space sharing trend for any other services. For units that did share space, 85% of libraries said

that they did so because of shared duties while 66% did so in order to improve patron service (See Table 10).

Table 9: Location Departmental Units

Answer	Number of Libraries	% of Respondents
All units in this department are located in the same part of the library	10	17%
Only some of the units in this department share space; different units are housed in different parts of the library	36	61%
Each of the units included in this department have their own separate work space	6	10%
Other -- (Please explain)	7	12%

Table 10: Reasons for Shared Space (n=59)

Answer	Number of Libraries	% of Respondents
The units share duties; collaboration	53	85%
To improve patron service	41	66%
Shortage of library space	21	34%
The library is in the process of renovating/ moving one or more units	8	13%
Increased departmental funding	0	0%
Decreased departmental funding	1	2%
Other	8	13%

Future Plans

When asked to pick from a list of potential changes that might take place within the next five years, a variety of responses were received (See Table 11). Several libraries talked about the possibility of doing something different with interlibrary loan. A few of them were moving ILL to other departments

within the library, while others were combining ILL with circulation. Two libraries talked about the possibility of combining reference and circulation.

Table 11: Plans to Change Your Department within the Next Five Years

Answer	Number of Libraries	% of Respondents
Adding or combining units in this department	20	34%
Removing units from this department	6	10%
Changing the location/space of this department	20	34%
Reorganizing the leadership/organization of this department	15	25%
None of these changes as of yet will be made	20	34%
Other changes (Please explain further in the following question)	8	14%

Combined Services

The survey asked if libraries had experimented with combining services such as circulation, reference, or other units. Thirty-four percent of respondents (22/64) said they have a combined information/service desk and 19% (12/64) said that they plan to create a combined service desk in the next five years. Upon further examination, it was clear that many of the services they combined were areas already within the Access Services Department such as circulation and reserves.

Those that said they had a combined desk were asked what areas shared space. Forty five percent of respondents (9/20 total) mentioned circulation and reference. For those that intended to combine services but have not yet done so, 36% of respondents (4/11) said circulation and reference would be in the same location. This implies that 9 out of the 64 libraries (14%) that answered the original question currently combine their reference and circulation desks. If the libraries that intend to combine services actually do so then 13 out of the 64 respondents (20%) would have a desk combined with reference within the next five years. It therefore seems like there may be a small trend for combining with circulation with

reference. However, given the fact that only 5 of these libraries included reference into their Access Services Department (See Table 3), it appears that libraries may be combining services without merging departments.

ARL Libraries are still beginning to combine areas within the Access Services Department and have not yet turned their focus to combining with non-traditional areas such as reference. It would be interesting to do more research to find out if combining reference with Access Services areas is more common in non-ARL Libraries. Also, it would be interesting to do further study into the reasoning behind combining or not combining the reference and circulation areas into one department.

Those libraries that created a combined desk were asked what changes they made during the process. Of those that responded 74% (17/23) created a new desk and/or renovated to accommodate the new services, 61% (14/23) removed a previous desk, 39% (9/23) created new positions, 70% (16/23) created new combinations of staff from different units, and 87% (20/23) cross-trained staff.

Summary and Discussion

From this survey, it is clear that the Access Services name and a core set of areas are common in ARL Libraries. These core areas are circulation, reserves, document delivery, interlibrary loan, and stacks maintenance. Billing is slightly less common, but still prevalent in many ARL Library Access Services Departments. Despite the presence of this core group of services, it is clear that Access Services continues to be a department assembled based on the needs of individual institutions. As a result, though there is a core set of areas in most ARL libraries, the makeup of Access Services still varies wildly from institution to institution.

It appears that staffing levels in ARL Access Services Departments are experiencing a general decline. This decline seems to have been a trend at least since 2005 when it was discussed by Dawes, Sweetman, and Von Elm. More study would be needed to determine the cause of this decline, though decreasing use for some areas of the department might be a culprit. An examination of ARL library

statistics shows that circulation statistics have been regularly declining since 1996, with continuous decline since 2004 (See Figure 2). Interlibrary loan volume has only recently begun to decline, with lending decreasing since 2006 and borrowing decreasing since 2009 (See Figure 3). The decrease in ILL borrowing is new enough that it can't yet be called a trend. However, the decrease in ILL lending has persisted long enough that staffing levels might be affected. The declining usage in circulation and ILL lending imply that declining usage could be one of the major reasons for the decline in Access Services staff levels.

Figure 2: Total Circulation in ARL Libraries 1995-2011

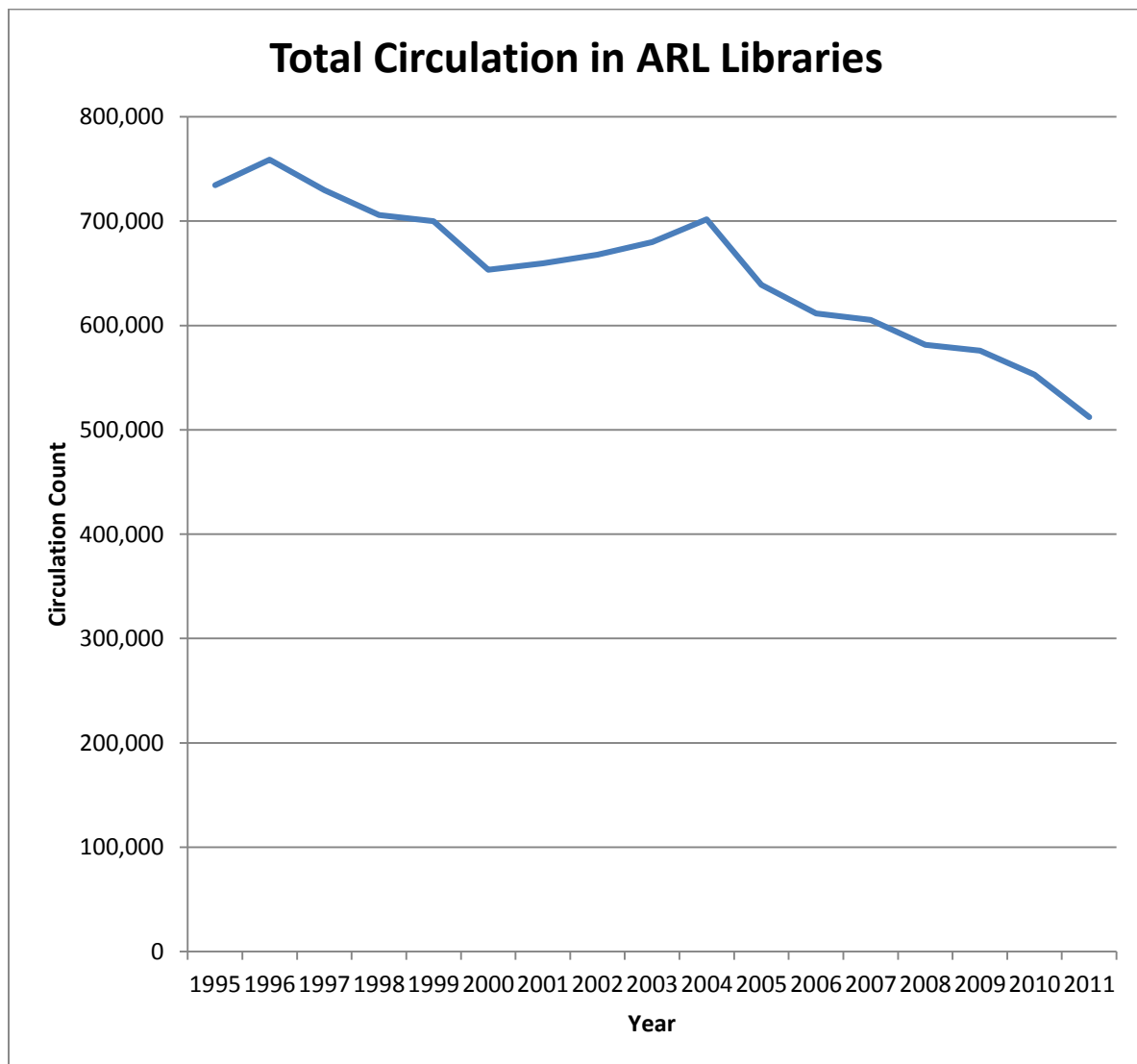
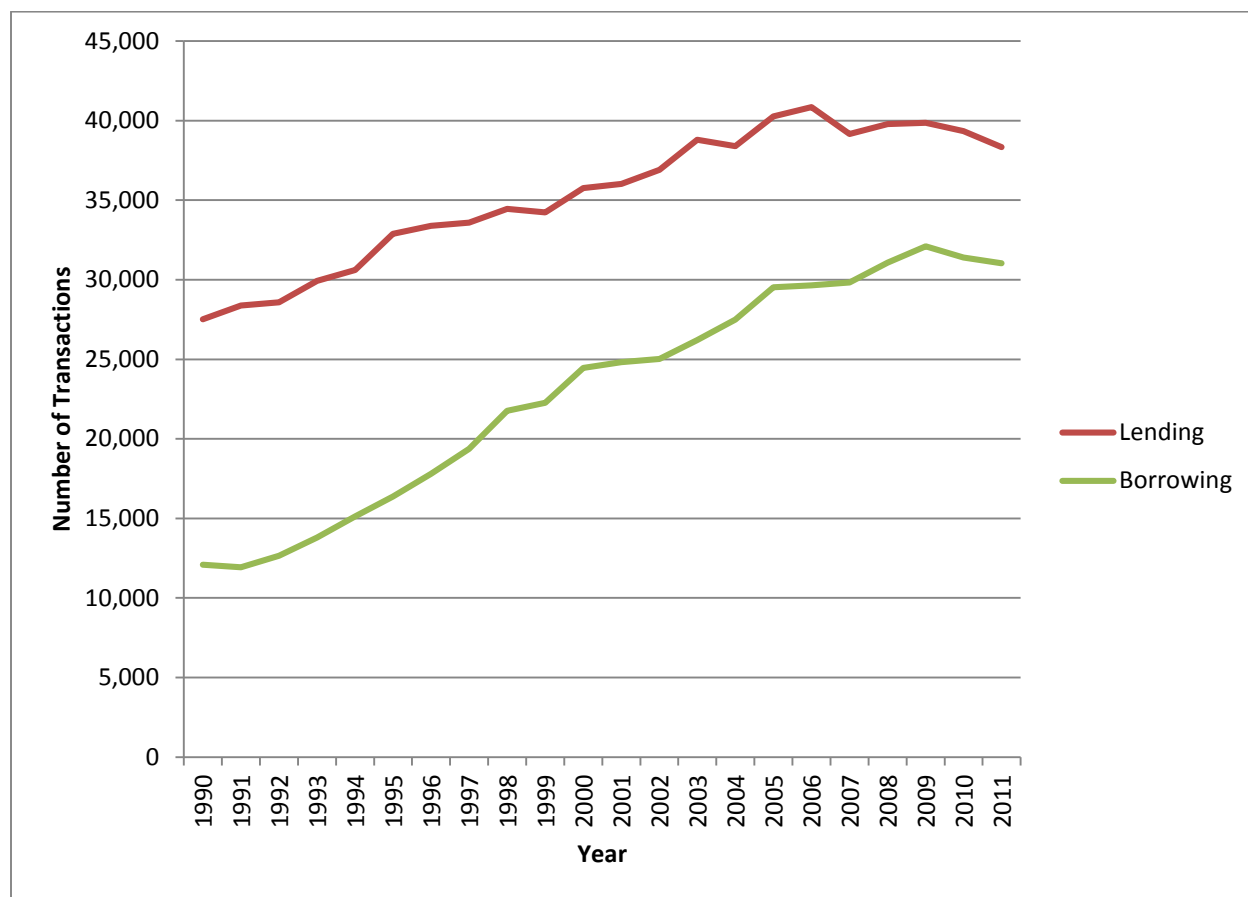


Figure 3: Lending and Borrowing in ARL Libraries since 1990

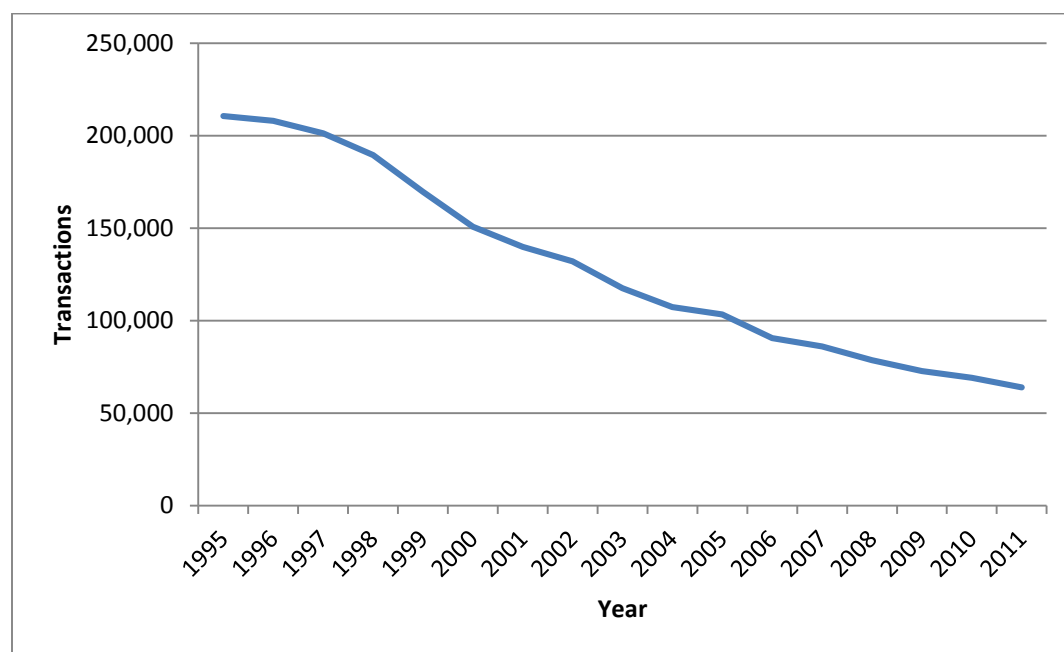


In recent years some traditional units within Access Services have begun to share service desks. There has also been a lot of cross-training to improve workflow and service. However, this cross training typically means that employees from different areas are trained to cover the circulation desk rather than having staff members trained on the duties of multiple areas. Also, there has been little integration of workflow and combining of units within Access Services. In other words, though cross-training exists, the various functions within each area of Access Services typically remain within traditional silos.

Though Austin (2010) and Chang and Davis (2010) have called for the department to integrate different units, ARL libraries have not experimented with this suggestion. Additionally, though the idea of combining circulation and reference has been discussed and even encouraged in the literature, most ARL Libraries have not followed this trend. More study is needed to determine the reasons behind this

reticence to combine, but it is still possible to speculate about possible causes. In ARL libraries, Access Services is typically a complicated department with multiple facets across multiple areas. Based on the history as described in the literature, these different areas have evolved independently and developed their own culture and ideals. Multiple desks might have been developed around staff convenience—the nicety of having a separate public service desk for each area with the desk close to the offices of those who work there. Though it is focused on providing service, Access Services has a large number of detailed policies that drive its decisions and help maintain order. Reference has evolved separately, with a culture of providing information for the patron wherever it can be found. This different between a multiple policies and a drive to provide information is something that should be examined to determine if it is indeed part of the reason why the two areas are not being merged. Also, reference statistics in ARL libraries have been declining at least since 1995 when they began keeping statistics (See Figure 4) and many libraries have already made dramatic changes to their reference services as a result. Perhaps the more recent decline of statistics in some areas of Access Services is one of the reasons that consolidated service points in the department are just beginning to be explored.

Figure 4: Reference Transactions in ARL Libraries since 1995



Should Access Services Endure?

ARL statistics show that some of the traditional areas of Access Services have declining use. If areas remain distinct while usage and staffing continue to decline, one can't help but wonder if the justification for having an Access Services Department will be challenged. With a smaller staff and less work, it might be convenient or make organizational sense to move traditional Access Services units to other departments in the library.

In most libraries there is no administrative or functional requirement for traditional Access Services areas to be combined. Circulation could function by itself or be combined with reference to provide a single service point. Though it is convenient to have patrons pick up reserves and ILL at the circulation desk, these areas could function in other departments while still providing services at one desk. Though it is usually part of Access Services in ARL Libraries, ILL is sometimes paired with Collection Development and could function as part of Technical Services. In many cases, other areas in Access Services could be placed in different departments just as easily as left where they are.

If Access Services units are vulnerable to being removed then Access Services staff members need to be prepared to justify the value of having these disparate areas remain part of a single department. Since it has remained a department of administrative convenience throughout the history of its existence, is there some reason to fight for and preserve the department as it is currently constituted? Would it be better to allow the department to morph or be dissolved as other factors (declining use, staffing, etc.) continue to apply pressure?

To analyze whether or not the department should persist, perhaps it would be useful to discuss the reasons why the department might have been assembled in the first place. Areas that have traditionally been included in an Access Services Department are those that provide physical access to some resource that the library offers. Other areas that relate to the core functions are sometimes included in the department as well. This provides a convenient administrative umbrella for certain physical patron-based

services. Unfortunately, in ARL libraries there has been little connection between these disparate areas in regards to physical location or workflow integration.

Rather than focusing on access as a unifying purpose behind the department, perhaps we should analyze the current needs and wants for library services. Current library users typically want to receive quick service and are loathe to ask questions unless absolutely necessary. Since these attitudes tend to keep patrons from asking questions at a desk, the proliferation of service desks in libraries only serves to confuse patrons and lessen the likelihood that they will seek for help. Putting all Access Services functions together mitigates this concern, making it easier for a patron to know where to go for their questions. In some cases changing the traditional Access Services organization would only require a consolidation of physical space. It may or may not make sense to integrate workflows, but centralizing service is in the best interest of the patron and therefore in the best interest of those serving the patron.

Thus the new Access Services would be focused on service at a central point in the library rather than including disparate departments regardless of location. Since the circulation desk can checkout materials, provide print reserves, and provide a location for ILL pickup it also becomes a natural location for resolving patron issues relating to circulation, reserves, and ILL. This physical component of the department could serve as a stronger connection to bind the department together. In addition, the central physical location serves as a natural point from which common workflows and services could be integrated. Even though these areas could be divided and still function, if they provide a central service point, it becomes increasingly difficult to divide these areas administratively. Libraries should continue to experiment with the possibility of combining reference with Access Services. This would further consolidate service desks, thus providing the patron with a one stop service option rather than the multiple service option of the past.

Conclusion

Access Services is and will continue to remain a department of administrative convenience. As work levels decrease along with staffing, Access Services administrators will need to seek creative solutions to these issues. Rather than focusing on preserving the traditional Access Services structure, libraries should experiment with creative options that will benefit the library as a whole. Instead of focusing the organization around areas that provide access to the library, the new Access Services could be organized around a central service point. This would provide a stronger patron focus for the department and provide a stronger justification for its continued existence. If the differences in culture can be bridged, it may make sense to include reference services at the new, centralized Access Services desk.

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