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Non-Fee Based Interlibrary Loans: A Game-Changer in Israel

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ABSTRACT

A milestone occurred in Israeli Interlibrary loans when the Directors' Forum of the University Heads' Committee approved funding for a non-fee based ILL pilot in the eight universities, in an attempt to address the financial difficulties faced by humanities & social sciences students and researchers. The article reviews the literature on the ethics of fee charging, non-fee based ILL ventures, the financial burden on MA & PhD students, increased patron use and satisfaction, the costs and complications of fee charging and invoicing, and the global decline in ILL. It describes ILL services in 22 Israeli university libraries before and after implementation of a non-fee based pilot, and outlines the processes that led to the launching of the project. The purpose of the article is to present a model of project management, from its inception until its establishment as a permanent arrangement, and to show how the removal of fees was a game-changer, reviving Israeli ILL.

KEYWORDS

Academic libraries;
collaboration;
interlibrary loans;
project management

Introduction

Since the 1990s, Israeli university Interlibrary Loan services have been semi-standardized and fee-based. Although, all the libraries have a joint contract with a courier company, and uniform fees among themselves, they all had different policies regarding fee charging. Some libraries did not charge patrons at all, or charged a small sum, while others charged the same amount they paid other libraries, or more, in order to cover their costs. Some libraries did not charge specific user groups, such as researchers or BA students, or only charged for international requests. Two libraries charged MA & PhD students 50%, with the history departments subsidizing the other 50%.

Several libraries had reciprocal agreements, i.e., “formal or informal agreements between a borrower and a lender to provide a defined level of service, perhaps at no charge” (Jackson et al., 2004, p. 67). For example,

the university Law libraries, the 45 members of the Academic College Libraries' Consortium, and the University of Haifa's non-fee based ILL agreement with the Technion, and reduced-price agreement with eight academic colleges in Northern Israel. In addition, three universities had offsetting agreements, whereby they only issued annual invoices, if the total amounts differed by more than \$100.

The process toward standardization in the universities began in 2013 with the ILL Forum's Code of Practice, which determined borrowing and lending standards, such as turnaround times, response times, and scan quality. It continued in 2016 when Alma Resource Sharing necessitating standardized loan/renewal policies and flat rate fees.

However, the main impetus for change came in 2017, when the ILL Committee of the Israel Young Academy submitted a request to the Universities' ILL Forum asking for non-fee based ILL. This resulted in the writing of a position paper which the University Directors' Standing Committee chair presented to the Directors' Forum of the University Heads' Committee, and approval of a one-year non-fee based ILL pilot at the 22 libraries in the eight universities.

This article presents a model of project management based on the cooperation of the Israel Young Academy, the University Library Directors Standing Committee, and the ILL Forum, from its inception until its establishment as a permanent arrangement. As such, it aims to facilitate the process for other consortia who may be considering such a change. Ultimately, it shows how the removal of ILL fees was a game-changer, which revived ILL services in Israel.

Literature review

The main issues affecting the decision to offer a non-fee based service were: the ethics of fee charging, non-fee based ILL ventures, the financial burden on research students, the potential increase in patron use and satisfaction, the costs and complications of fee charging and invoicing, and the global decline in ILL.

The ethics of fee charging

The 'fee or free' ILL debate features extensively in the library literature, and is still relevant today. The basic question is "Should libraries charge the total cost of an interlibrary borrowing request, or should they consider interlibrary loans an integral part of library service and pay for it out of the acquisitions or operations budget?" (Boucher, 1997, p. 5). The argument against fee charging is: "It is discriminatory, because only patrons

who can afford to pay, benefit from the service” (Garrett, 1997, pp. 4–5), whereas the argument in favor of fee charging is: “It increases recognition of the value of the service, and limits requesting of non-essential items” (Murphy & Lin, 1997). In the *Interlibrary Loan Practices Handbook*, Kuehn (2011) recommends that libraries “Subsidize the cost of providing inter-library loan because of [their] philosophy that the service is a necessary extension of the collection to support users’ needs” (p. 74).

Non-fee based ILL

The United States has a long tradition of reciprocal agreements. Two examples are: OCLC’s LVIS (Libraries Very Interested in Sharing) which began in 1993 as the first global no-charge resource-sharing initiative, and currently has 2,700 members, and the Ivy League universities’ Borrow Direct, which began in 1999 in order to provide physical loans at no charge to patrons, and currently has 13 members.

The UK also has a tradition of non-fee based ILL. In a study on 110 university libraries, Clinton (1999) found that 35% did not charge for ILL (p. 18). In a recent Alma Resource Sharing Forum discussion, three libraries mentioned that they limit the number of free ILL requests: the University of Edinburgh allows an annual quota of five free requests for undergraduates and 30 for postgraduates, faculty and staff, and the University of Sussex allows 20 free requests for undergraduates and 100 for postgraduates, faculty and staff. While the University of South Wales allows a weekly quota of five free requests for undergraduates, and 10 for post graduates, faculty and staff (Craig, 2017). In 2018, the WHELP (Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum) began a reciprocal borrowing scheme among eight libraries, with significant cost savings in the first year (WHELP, 2018).

In South Africa, non-fee based ILL was implemented in 2001 by the 16 members of the GAELIC (Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium) following detailed analysis of their ILL transactions, and a plan to compensate net lenders (Visser, 2002).

Financial burden on research students

Students with financial difficulties are more likely to manage without essential resources. As the main users of ILL are humanities & social sciences MA & PhD students, who have little funding (George et al., 2006), they are more likely to be affected by cost, than students in other disciplines. The Council of Graduate Schools’ Exit Survey on doctoral completion rates showed that for” Eighty percent of respondents ...

financial support was the main factor that had enabled them to complete their doctoral programs...” (Gravois, 2007, para 16). Moreover, in their review of 163 empirical articles on doctoral education, Sverdlik et al. (2018) found that “access to financial support opportunities” was a major factor in students’ perception of success and satisfaction (p. 375).

In Israel, the lack of financial support for MA & PhD students is even more acute, particularly in the humanities & social sciences. In a newspaper interview, Professor Manuel Trajtenberg, former Head of the Council of Higher Education stated that “Studies in the humanities & social sciences are carried out without a structured framework, and students face more difficulties, such as lack of funding and scholarships, than in other fields” (Detel, 2014, para. 15). A survey conducted by the Israel Young Academy (Ayalon et al., 2018), showed that young researchers in the humanities & social sciences were at a disadvantage compared to researchers in other disciplines, due to lack of funds. And Katz’s (2018) study on doctoral students at five Israeli universities found that “significantly more social sciences & humanities students reported economic crises than science & engineering students” (p. 226).

Specifically concerning ILL, Porat’s (2008) doctoral research found that the cost of ILL was one of the most main reasons for nonuse of ILL, with 21% of PhD. students and researchers at the University of Haifa [a predominantly humanities & social sciences institution], and 19% at the Technion [a predominantly science & engineering], stating that cost deterred them from requesting. In addition, 35% said they would request ILL, if it were free (pp. 93-94). These findings suggest that cost is a deterrent in all disciplines, but even more in the humanities, probably due to the need for primary sources, which are often not available in electronic format.

Potential increase in patron use and satisfaction

Several studies have shown that there is a correlation between fee charging and patron use/satisfaction. Clinton’s (1999) survey showed that 67% of 57 UK university libraries that had recently began charging for ILL, saw a decrease in ILL requesting following the change, for some as much as 30% (p. 20). The Johns Hopkins University Medical Library abandoned fee charging in 2001 because “the amount collected was trivial and faculty hated paying for documents one by one” (Koehler & Harden, 2004, p. 101). Indiana University began offering a free article delivery service to more than 45,000 in 2006, a decision which very popular particularly among graduate students (Michaels, 2008, p. 364). More recently, the University of Sussex, UK implemented non-fee based ILL “we stopped

charging for Interlibrary Requests last August [2016] (although we still charge for renewals and International requests). After this happened, we saw a 61% rise in requests from our users” (Craig, 2017). And

We decided to make ILR [Inter Library Requesting] free to Sussex users after a great deal of deliberation. The cost was resented, particularly by students who have to pay very large fees to study, and it was felt that this would be a very popular move, as it has proved. ... The rise in requests appears to have levelled out in its second year, so we are getting comparable numbers of requests this year to last (E. Craig, personal communication, June 13, 2018).

A study at Texas A&M University Libraries (Yang, 2005), showed a more extreme trend with “a 180% increase in the use of Inter-library Services in the first year after it became free...and a 28.4% increase in the second year” (p. 50), with high patron satisfaction rates ten years later (Yang et al., 2012).

Costs and complications of fee charging and invoicing

Fee charging and invoicing are both labor-intensive and costly. In their case study on the cost of ILL transactions at Katholieke Universiteit, (Pernot et al., 2007), describe the inordinate amount of time and cost required for fee charging and invoicing. Michaels (2008) study notes that non-fee based ILL was offered largely as a result of the complications around fee charging and invoicing. Kuehn (2011) also discusses the complications of fee charging and invoicing, stating “that collecting fees is not without cost for the library, both in staff time to manage the process and in bank fees associated with credit card or check payments” (p. 74).

Decline in ILL requesting

During the past few decades, ILL requesting in the USA and UK has seen a steep decline. A study on statewide ILL in Illinois showed that there was a 26% decline in article requesting among the 26 largest libraries between 1999/00 and 2002/03 (Wiley & Chrzastowski, 2005), which they attribute to the increased availability of ejournals. McGrath’s (2012) analysis of BLDSC (British Library Document Supply Center) data showed a 63% decline between 1999 and 2011, and Grevatt’s (2015) study at Boise State University showed a decline of 34% between 2010 and 2015 (p. 122). In addition, a study on 20 members of the CONBLS (Consortium of Southern Biomedical Libraries) (Goolabsingh et al., 2019) showed a 19% decline between 2016 and 2018, attributed to “the proliferation of open access publications ... technologies that facilitate ease of information sharing, the availability of extensive digital back files, and more restrictive publishers’

licensing agreements” (para. 4). However, a recent study on Shadow ILL services in USA (Kehnemuyi & Larsen, 2019), suggests that there are other reasons for the decline, such as the “use of pre-print servers, better collection development, or an increase in the use of pirating or black market PDF websites” (p. 139).

The process toward non-fee based ILL in Israel

In 2017, members of the ILL Committee of the Israel Young Academy, who had returned from post-doctoral research in USA, approached the chair of the ILL Forum requesting non-fee based ILL, like Borrow Direct. After consulting with the chair of the University Library Directors’ Standing Committee, the ILL Forum began the process by analyzing the universities’ financial and statistical data. The data showed that humanities & social sciences students and researchers were the main users of ILL, and that the universities had spent \$100,000 in 2016, and \$93,000 in 2017 on ILL. In addition, the period 1997 to 2017 saw a 63% decline in ILL requesting (see Figure 1).

Next, members of the ILL Forum wrote a position paper, outlining the advantages of non-fee based ILL, calling it “an essential research support tool,” and emphasizing its importance for humanities’ students and researchers (Porat & Ben Ari, 2018, p. 1). The paper summarized the costs of ILL to patrons and libraries and requested \$100,000 to cover expenses, including increased demand, and lost income.

The Israel Young Academy, the ILL Forum, and the University Library Directors’ Standing Committee met several times to discuss the position

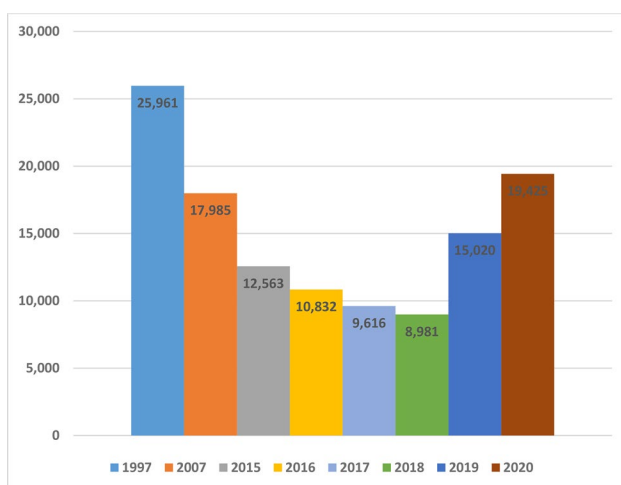


Figure 1. ILL requests 1997–2020 (ILL Forum data).

paper, and the benefits of non-fee based ILL to students and researchers. Although, there was general consent regarding its value, some library directors feared patron exploitation, increased demand, non-essential use, and lost income. However, the four years of non-fee based ILL at the Technion/University of Haifa, and the fifteen years among the college libraries, which had promoted considerable goodwill in the relevant institutions, with little patron exploitation, served to allay most of these misgivings. In addition, the Standing Committee convinced the library directors that increased demand and non-essential use were positive effects as they reflected previously unmet needs, and revived ILL services. The Committee also convinced the net lenders that the compensation they would receive for courier services, international requests, and the National Library of Israel requests, as well as increased patron satisfaction, improved service, reduced invoicing, and being part of a national cooperative project, were a sufficient tradeoff for lost income.

In July 2018, the Standing Committee sent the position paper to the Directors' Forum of the University Heads' Committee, along with a letter of support by the Israel Young Academy. The Directors' Forum responded by acknowledging the subject's importance and inviting the chairs of the ILL Forum and the Standing Committee to their next meeting. At the end of July, the chairs presented the paper, emphasizing the importance of ILL to research, and how nonuse of ILL due to fee charging, affects the quality of research. In addition, they outlined the advantages of Borrow Direct, the fact that ILL was the only fee-paying library service, and the positive experiences of libraries with reciprocal agreements. Following questioning and deliberation, the Directors agreed to allocate \$100,000 for a one-year pilot with the following aims:

1. To remove the financial burden on humanities & social sciences students and researchers
2. To encourage the use of ILL for research purposes
3. To promote goodwill within the institutions
4. To increase patron satisfaction
5. To further standardize and streamline ILL processes
6. To remove labor-intensive fee charging and invoicing

Beginning on 1 November 2018, all university libraries ceased charging one another, and the MALMAD (the Israeli Inter-University Center for Digital Information) consortium began paying invoices for courier services, OCLC subscriptions and borrowing requests, and requests supplied by NLI (the National Library of Israel and NLM (the National Library of

Medicine). As the medical libraries rarely used the courier service, it was important for MALMAD to cover the costs of NLM so that they would also benefit from the pilot.

In order to oversee the project, the Standing Committee formed a six-person ILL Pilot Steering Committee, consisting of two library directors, the chairs of the ILL Forum and the Standing Committee, one member of the ILL Forum, and the director of MALMAD. They defined the scope of the pilot as “To supply students and researchers with scans and loans from national and international libraries, for research and study purposes,” and assigned it the following roles:

1. To monitor the operation of the pilot
2. To create marketing materials, such as a flyer and a banner, for the library and Israel Young Academy websites, newsletters and Facebook pages, and to send as email announcements to staff and students (see Appendix for examples)
3. To provide regular updates to library staff, especially Reference and Circulation librarians
4. To assist with problems and dilemmas, such as dealing with the increase in complex/international requests, copyright/licensing issues, over-ordering, and very expensive requests
5. To write and distribute the ILL Pilot Guidelines, adapted from the Israeli ILL Code of Practice
6. To ensure that every library added a ‘Purpose of Use’ field to its ILL request form
7. To open three additional OCLC WorldShare ILL accounts
8. To process OCLC’s IFM (Interlibrary Loan Fee Management) lender credits
9. To open a joint NLM account
10. To check and approve invoices
11. To monitor the MALMAD budget
12. To collect monthly statistics from all libraries on the number of borrowing and lending requests broken down by format, user group and discipline on a joint file.
13. To monitor patron feedback on a joint file
14. To conduct a mini-survey on first impressions of the pilot
15. To track trends to ensure that the pilot’s aims of increased use by humanities & social sciences students and researchers were being met
16. To report on a quarterly basis to the ILL Forum, the University Library Directors’ Standing Committee, and the Directors’ Forum of the University Heads’ Committee

17. To conduct a mini-survey on the implications of the pilot

The ILL Forum presented the proposed change to the ILL librarians at each institution by emphasizing the benefits to their patrons, and the extra time they would have for professional tasks, by not dealing with fees and invoices. It also provided suggestions for dealing with over-ordering, such as charging for international requests, or charging above a certain quota. In addition, the ILL Forum reassured librarians that the increase would revive the ILL profession, and that requesting would probably level off in the second year.

Implications of the pilot

As expected, the first year saw a huge increase in requesting, with an additional increase in the second year, especially for international requests, requests by MA & PhD students, and requests in the humanities & social sciences (see [Table 1](#) and [Figures 1–4](#)).

Response of students, researchers and librarians to pilot

Students and researchers were, not surprisingly, very enthusiastic about non-fee based ILL, and expressed their gratitude verbally and in writing. In particular, they were extremely satisfied with the international service. Whereas in the past, they would travel abroad to obtain primary materials, or pay huge sums for ILL, they now received them free.

ILL librarians and directors largely embraced the project, although not without some initial resistance based on fear of change and the extra workload. At the end of the first semester (February 2019), the ILL Forum distributed a first impressions mini-survey to ILL librarians, which generated the following comments:

1. The pilot is great, but the extra workload with no additional staff, is difficult
2. Hopefully, the increase in requesting will level off by next year
3. There is a big increase in esoteric and international requests
4. We save time by not charging patrons or invoicing invoices
5. We supply requests faster, as we don't have to wait for payment

Table 1. Increase in ILL requests by international, academic status and discipline.

% Increase	Year 1 (2019)	Year 2 (2020)
All	67	29
International	196	214
MA & PhD students	67	29
Humanities & social sciences	65	23

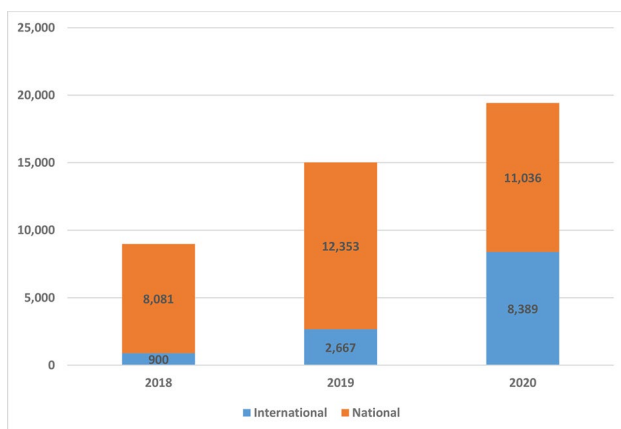


Figure 2. International and national requests 2018–2020 (ILL Forum data).

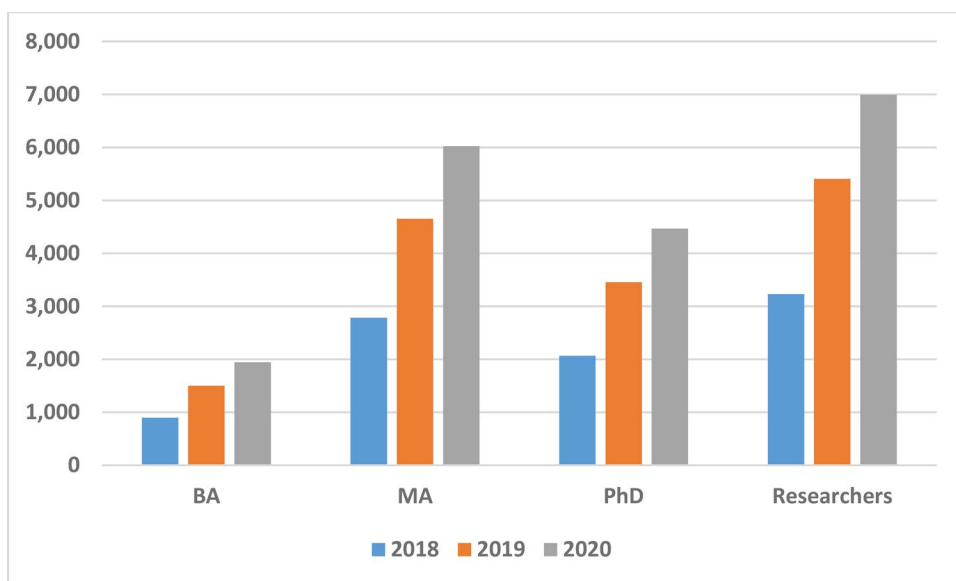


Figure 3. Requests by academic status 2018–2020 (ILL Forum data).

6. Statistics reporting is time-consuming
7. The positive feedback from patrons makes it all worthwhile
8. There is a ‘buzz’ about the pilot in the university

In September 2019, the chair of the Standing Committee received approval from the library directors to request an extension of the pilot. In addition to the written request, she, and the chairs of the ILL Forum and MALMAD, presented the first eleven months’ of statistical and financial data, gave examples of patron feedback, and referred to the Israel Young Academy’s letter of support. The Directors’ Forum of the University

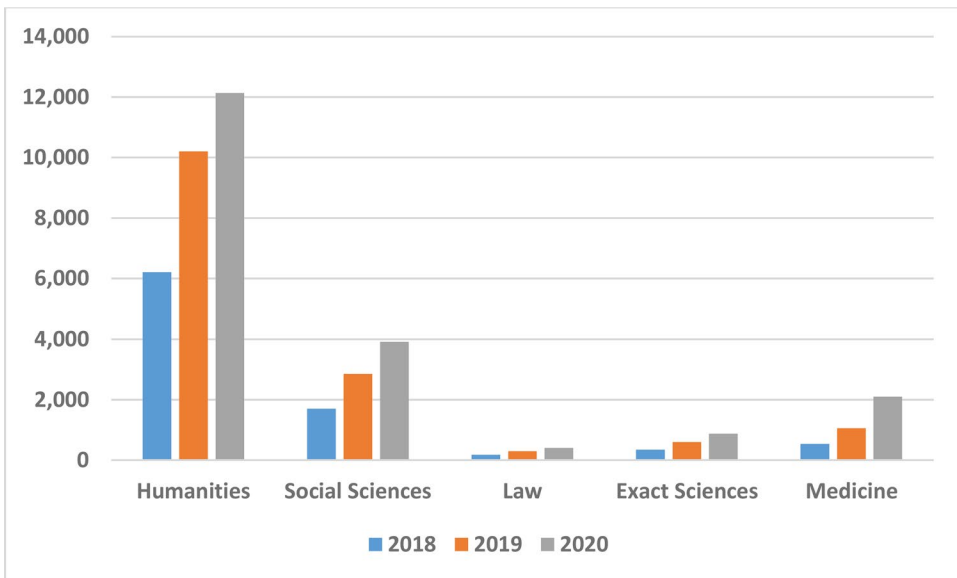


Figure 4. Requests by discipline 2018–2020 (ILL Forum data).

Heads' Committee approved the pilot for a second year, but allocated \$90,000, as \$10,000 remained from the first year.

In November 2019, another major enhancement took place when all the university libraries began a trial with RapidILL, with all but one subscribing to it in 2020, greatly improving document delivery services, and reducing the burden on Israeli libraries. RapidILL proved to be crucial during Covid-19, when many libraries worldwide ceased supplying ILL, and enabled Israeli libraries to provide ILL services throughout the crisis.

In June 2020, the ILL Forum distributed another mini-survey to ILL librarians on the implications of the pilot, which generated the following comments:

- i. We are very satisfied with the pilot and are managing with the increased demand
- j. We are receiving a lot of positive feedback from patrons
- k. An obstacle to requesting has been removed
- l. We process more complex and international requests
- m. We changed internal procedures due to new subscriptions to OCLC, NLM and RapidILL, e.g., delineation of borrowing/lending/national/international roles
- n. We now have another member of staff
- o. We replaced the scanner
- p. The overall quality of scans has improved
- q. Turnaround times and response times are faster
- r. The pilot reinforces the principle of reciprocity

- s. The libraries cooperate better now due to a mutual desire to provide good service
- t. We now spend more time on professional tasks, and less on administrative tasks
- u. The pilot has greatly upgraded Israeli ILL service, and as a direct result, the level of research in the country

In July 2020, the Standing Committee sent the Directors' Forum of the University Heads' Committee, the pilot's financial and statistical data, as well as glowing patron feedback to and requested to make the pilot permanent. This time, the directors approved the request immediately, allocating \$90,000 on an annual basis, and changing the project's name from 'ILL Pilot' to 'ILL Venture'. In addition, the Directors' Forum approved the inclusion in the venture of a ninth, newly recognized university.

Third year of the pilot

ILL requesting has continued to increase during the third year, largely due to Covid-19, when patrons and librarians were home-based, and the common practice of requesting scans for locally owned items, due to lack of access to the physical collection. Statistics from November 2020-February 2021 show an increase of 69% compared to November 2019-February 2020 (10,080 compared to 5,978).

Despite, the increase, the ILL Forum proposed to expand the ILL venture to include document delivery between the 50+ academic colleges and the universities, with the following aims:

- v. To promote goodwill between the colleges and the universities, especially during Covid-19
- w. To expand the pool of suppliers
- x. To reduce invoicing

As book lending is more expensive and labor-intensive than document delivery, it was not included in the proposal. After analyzing the 2020 data, and despite the universities supplying nearly five times the number of scans as the colleges (1,330 compared to 282), the University Library Directors' Standing Committee approved a one-semester pilot beginning in March 2021. In July 2021, the ILL Forum will analyze the data and decide whether to extend the arrangement for another semester.

Summary

Non-fee based ILL has proven to be a game-changer in Israel and has met all its original aims: humanities & social sciences students and researchers are no longer hindered from requesting, usage and satisfaction have increased, goodwill was promoted, internal processes have been standardized and streamlined, and fee charging and invoicing has ceased. The pilot demonstrates the successful management of a national library project, as well as contributing to the revival of ILL services in the university libraries.

Notes on contributors

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Appendix. ILL pilot flyers: Years 1-3

אנחנו שמחים להודיע כי
החל מחודש נובמבר
שירותי השאלה בינספרייתית
בכל האוניברסיטאות בישראל יהיו
ללא תשלום לתקופת ניסיון של שנה.

סטודנטים וסגל יוכלו להזמין
סריקות והשאלות
מהארץ ומחו"ל בחינם

לצרכי מחקר, הוראה ולימוד בלבד

We are pleased to announce
that from 1 November 2018
Interlibrary Loan services
from all Israeli universities
will be free of charge for
a trial period of one year.
Students and staff will be able
to order scans and loans from
Israel and abroad for free
**For research, teaching and
study purposes only**



הטכניון
מכון טכנולוגי
לישראל



האוניברסיטה
העברית
בירושלים
THE HEBREW
UNIVERSITY
OF JERUSALEM



מכון ויצמן למדע
WEIZMANN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE



אוניברסיטת תל אביב
UNIVERSITY
TEL AVIV



אוניברסיטת חיפה
University of Haifa
جامعة حيفا



אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון בנגב
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
جامعة بن غوريون في النقب

האוניברסיטה הפתוחה
The Open University of Israel
الجامعة المفتوحة



אנחנו שמחים לבשר כי גם השנה
שירותי השאלה בין-ספרייתית
מכל האוניברסיטאות בישראל
יהיו ללא תשלום.

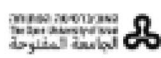
סטודנטים וסגל יוכלו להזמין סריקות והשאלות
מהארץ ומחו"ל בחינם

לצרכי מחקר, הוראה ולימוד בלבד.

We are pleased to announce
that Interlibrary Loan services
from all Israeli universities will be free
of charge for another year.

Students and staff will be able
to order scans and loans from Israel
and abroad for free

**For research, teaching and study
purposes only.**



אנחנו שמחים לבשר כי החל משנת תשפ"א שירותי השאלה בין-ספרייתית מכל האוניברסיטאות בישראל יינתנו ללא תשלום.

סטודנטים וסגל יוכלו להזמין סריקות והשאלות מהארץ ומחו"ל ללא עלות לצרכי מחקר, הוראה ולימוד בלבד.

We are pleased to announce that from 2020, Interlibrary Loan Services from all Israeli universities will be provided free of charge.

Students and faculty can order scans and loans from Israel and abroad at no cost **For research, teaching and study purposes only.**

בישראל אנחנו שמחים לבשר כי החל משנת תשפ"א שירותי השאלה בין-ספרייתית מכל האוניברסיטאות בישראל יינתנו ללא תשלום.

סטודנטים וסגל יוכלו להזמין סריקות והשאלות מהארץ ומחו"ל ללא עלות לצרכי מחקר, הוראה ולימוד בלבד.

الخدمة متاحة لأهداف البحث والتعليم والدراسة فقط.



האוניברסיטה
העברית
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