Articles incoming: Interlibrary loan provides fast and easy access to research materials

K-State Libraries
At first glance, it seems like a simple process. A user submits an online request for a book, chapter or article that the Libraries doesn’t own, and another library lends them a copy. But behind the scenes, interlibrary loan staff are working hard to get the materials that students, faculty and staff need to complete their research. Interlibrary loan allows the Libraries to borrow from and lend to other institutions throughout the U.S. and abroad. K-State Libraries started providing interlibrary loan services in 1969.

In addition to hunting down the right materials, they frequently navigate intricate copyright laws. And boy, are they fast. Last spring, 65 percent of article requests were filled in less than 24 hours. Eighteen percent were delivered in less than one hour!

Marcia Eaton, library assistant III, said she loves seeing borrowed books come in from a variety of libraries throughout the United States and even abroad. Eaton has worked with the Libraries for 6 years.

Leah Hennes, (right) Hale Library help desk specialist, trains fellow student employee, Stacy Vars, (left) on the interlibrary loan system.
The interlibrary loan staff’s fast, detailed and friendly service has made them a beloved resource among K-State students and faculty. Their dedication was especially noticeable throughout the last three years as Hale Library’s physical collection was inaccessible due to a 2018 fire. Requests for physical items increased by 74 percent during this time.

Things became even more interesting when a global pandemic was added to the mix beginning the spring of 2020. Sara Luly, associate professor of German, said her teaching and research could not have continued during the pandemic without access to the service.

“Their speedy delivery is in large part due to advancements in automation and partnerships with other libraries. Marcia Eaton, library assistant III, said her favorite part of her role is analyzing unclear requests to best identify what a patron wants, and pinpointing ways to get around roadblocks such as copyright restrictions or unavailable items. “Problem solving is a large part of what I enjoy about my job,” Eaton said. “I like trying to figure out what exact materials patrons are seeking and making educated guesses if the information in a request is incomplete or incorrect. To me, it’s rewarding to help find what they need.”

Marcia Eaton, Linda Marston and Kathy Coleman dedicate a large part of their daily duties to making sure Libraries patrons get access to the research materials they need. Coleman herself has worked for the Libraries for 37 years.

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