Rethinking Fines: Considering Equity, Inclusion, and Retention

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Oberlin College Libraries
Salt Lake City libraries do away with late fees

Baltimore's Pratt Library goes fine free for overdue books

“Overdue fines were intended to encourage the return of materials. Instead, in practice, they all too often foster an adversarial relationship in key library/patron interactions.

Removing this barrier puts access first.”

Curious Librarian:
“So what happens when a patron habitually, consistently returns his/materials late? When there's no "incentive" to bring them back on time, what motivates them to follow the policy? Also, how are lost items handled? Are the fines eliminated too? Everyone talk about equitable access, but a lost public property has to be recovered by someone, the items has to be replaced and put back on the shelf.”
JUSTIFICATIONS FOR FINES

REVENUE

TEACH RESPONSIBILITY

ENFORCE LOAN PERIODS
OUR ENVIRONMENT

Extended loans and no fines for students & employees for “regular” circulation
• placing a hold on enrollment for overdue materials from students
• billing for replacement for non-response to multiple overdue notifications

Shorter loan periods and fines for materials that are known to be in high demand, for example
  Recalls: $10.00/day  Journals: $1.00/day
  Reserves: $2.00/hour  OhioLINK: $0.50/day
  Laptops: $5.00/hour
HANDLING NON-COMPLIANCE

• Suspending privileges when the money owed exceeds $150
• Placing enrollment holds for unpaid fines over $5
• Billing for unpaid fines upon departure from the college (leave or graduation)

HANDLING APPEALS

• Offering half-off the accrued fine if paid within 2 weeks of posting
• Routinely waiving a first fine as a learning experience
• Reducing or waiving fines when requested by student support staff because of financial or other stressors
• Offering amnesty periods for the return of overdue materials
• Offering a “food for fines” program
PROBLEMS WITH THESE APPROACHES

• Creates inequities between people who pursue a remedy and those who don’t
• Forces students already under stress to take on additional work to get relief
• Requiring library staff to justify apparently arbitrary loan periods, especially when the item is renewable

Worst of all, the students who need our services the most are the ones most a risk of accruing the fines and losing library privileges either because of suspension or because of shame and anxiety.
PERIODICALS

2006-2007: 830 circulations in the Main Library
2016-2017: 83 circulations in the Main Library

1 week loan period with $1/day fines based on the assumptions that
People expect to find journals on the shelves
Volumes of journals are hard to replace

Constant requests for extended loans or renewals that seemed reasonable

Changed to a semester loan for journals, with no daily fines and a bill for replacement if the item is 2 weeks overdue

2017-2018: 134 circulations in the Main Library
LAPTOPS

2017-2018: 35 laptops, 10041 circulations in the Main Library
4 hour loan period with $5/hour fines
Constant requests for extended loans or renewals that we couldn’t support, given the demand on the service
100-200 students with limited resources trying to use this service to be a personal laptop

In partnership with the Center for Student Success, identify borrowers needing extended use of a laptop
Various campus offices help pay for the collection (currently 9)
We serve as the record keepers
Desk staff also refers students when they become aware of a need
RESERVE

2017-2018: nearly 4000 items on reserve, almost 7000 circulations in the Main Library
3 hour loan period with $2/hour fines
Disability Resources staff alerted us to the barrier this was to students with print disabilities

In partnership with the Center for Student Success, identify borrowers needing extended loan periods for print reserve
Created a new itype and loan rules to automate the process and minimize the revealing of personal details
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Central Item Level Holds: 1
Central Due Date: Wed Aug 29 2018

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Title: The intimacies of four continents / Lisa Lowe
Call Number: JC574 .L688 2015
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Central Status: @
Central Item Level Holds: 1
Central Due Date: Thu Sep 20 2018

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Call Number: PN1992.77 .F374 2017
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BILLING BUT NOT FINING

One day loan period
Billed if not returned after two overdue notices

Due at the end of the day
Billed if not returned after two overdue notices
TO WRAP UP

EQUAL ISN’T THE SAME AS EQUITABLE

LOOK FOR POLICIES THAT OFFER EQUITABLE ACCESS FOR EACH STUDENT

SPEND YOUR TIME ON THE MATERIALS FOR WHICH THERE’S COMPETITION
QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, AND DISCUSSION

Thank you!
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