PUTTING A SACRED COW OUT TO PASTURE:
ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF REMOVING FINES
& REDUCING BARRIERS AT AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY

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What Did We Change?

- Fines
- Collections
- Borrowing Times/Limits
Why Did We Do It?
1997 - 2012

- Overdue: 116,000
- Lost: 15,000
- Process: 7,500
- Replace: 11,000
- ROverdue: 11,000

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2010 - 2012

- Lost: 6,541
- Process: 3,400
- Replace: 10
- ROverdue: 2,400
- Overdue: 15,383
Question 1: Increase in overdues?
Caution!
Archive your ILS data!
Question 2: Students ‘sitting on’ books?
Renewals as a % of Circulation

October
- 2011-12: 47.8%
- 2012-13: 23.7%

March
- 2011-12: 53%
- 2012-13: 24.7%
Question 3: What do users think?
In my Library Record] there is a column that says, “As of now, you owe” and then it is blank! Too cool. I have a whole bunch of overdue books, so I will bring them in tomorrow.

I am sure I am one of many who are sending you emails with a big Thank You! This is brilliant, clever, excellent - all of the above. Very good news for the start of the term.

Good email! I rushed right over to borrow a book

Some pretty substantial changes. I guess I don’t have to worry about my fines from 1975 anymore!

Great job in the proactive response to the challenges/opportunities in Library processes and usage!

I literally jumped up and yelled Touchdown when I read the email. This has revolutionized things for me.

While I am not one the people who accumulated ‘infractions' of this nature ... I think what the library has done is wonderful. I used to hear a lot of disgruntled faculty and students not being happy with their ‘treatment' ... and this should do a lot to help!

Love it! Thanks for keeping VIU current. I am looking forward to using the employee loans in preparation for an upcoming exam.

I especially appreciate the new policies towards fines and blocking, as they relate to student borrowers. I’ve noticed a culture of fear around library use (in my community re: public libraries, and with students here) where users are hesitant to use library resources because of expected punitive action and disapproval if they don’t “follow the rules.” Now, when I encourage students to indulge in the pleasures and benefits of borrowing hard copy books, I can mention the new policies, which might relieve some of their hesitation about incurring fines or other penalties.
Feedback from users:
LibQUAL 2013

…I do also appreciate your recent policy changes regarding fines, etc. I find that they make the library usage experience to be much more friendly and accessible.

I would like fees for overdue books to not be so much, I think the charges are outrageous and should be lowered.
Question 4: What do staff think?
Circulation Staff Reactions: Changes to Fines

It feels really good not to have to charge people fines, and the relief on the students’ faces is great…

…a really positive experience…it’s reduced a lot of friction between clients and staff.

Students are pleasantly surprised, but still most aren’t aware. I’ve had some students mention to me that ‘oh I’ve got fines…” and they’re reluctant to come back to the library for that reason…

You keep finding special circumstances where we should punish people. And I don’t know how else we punish them. I don’t think fines are the way to go.

Anyone who’s using libraries, whether public or academic, you hate to charge people money for something like that, but especially students because they’re so damn poor. And they’re quite appreciative.
Circulation Staff Reflections: Changes to Loans

Video loans being longer made faculty happy.

It really feels good not to be hanging on to these books, when they’re hardly going out at all, you’re going to restrict them so much? It just feels like a better match for the way that physical books are being used.

The other piece - the periodicals being part of the loanable collection - I’ve heard positive feedback about that too. Not a lot of libraries have their print holdings available on loan, or not on some special loan, where you get one day to glance at it, so I think that’s really good for the library.

For myself, I don’t have to do the appeals I used to have to do. There’s a lot less of that. There’s probably slightly less cash handled, and definitely less conflict.
Circulation Staff Reflections: Interactions with Users

I’ve come away feeling a bit negative with some of my interactions with students [with reserves] because the fines are quite low, they’re like ‘well, I’m going to keep it anyways’ since it’s .25 cents an hour or $2/day, depending on what kind of loan it is.

Having been little mini policemen all our lives at the circulation desk, it’s really nice not to do that kind of punitive stuff.

I had a girl here today, and she was like ‘oh, I’ve got to get my photo ID so I’ll pay my library fine.’ And she didn’t have a fine - it had been forgiven in September, so she was really happy about that, and she left with a big stack of books. So it was really an awesome arc of the library experience, because she came in really negative and left really positive.

[At another institution] you’d have people who went to school in their 20s and didn’t return books, and they return it as a mature student and they have a fee of $54 waiting for them. It’s not really a welcoming thing!
Circulation Staff Reflections: Other Comments

I think this idea has traction. I just think circ staff all over the country would heave a collective sigh of relief. Because it was the worst part of the job, phoning overdues or telling people their privileges have been suspended and yet, back in the day that was our only weapon.

It makes the library a less punitive idea, a less restrictive idea, the gatekeeper idea - all that, and that’s really great to see us moving forward.

I think it’s really good for the library, and I don’t think it’s resulted in students misusing it. I don’t. I mean, there’s going to be a certain percentage that never returns books whether there’s a fine or not. But overall, I think most people return their books on time, or as close as they can under the circumstances…Sometimes you just need a couple extra days.

We’re saying we trust the students and we’re treating them like mature adults. We’re giving them the benefit of the doubt.
Conclusions

Cows are better suited to pastures than libraries.
thank you!