Examining Electronic Resource Access Policies for Unaffiliated Patrons at ARL Libraries

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Abstract

This study investigates the posted policies of publicly funded Association of Research Libraries (ARL) to determine if and how research libraries moderate unaffiliated users' access to digital collections. This study compares unaffiliated users' access to print collections as a baseline to illustrate how access to electronic resources for this user group is impacted. The study's analysis indicates that the majority of ARL libraries policies provide access to electronic resources, but use a variety of methods to moderate and control how unaffiliated patrons can access e-resources. It found four common methods that ARL libraries apply to moderate access: content, user affiliation, time limits, and authentication. This study has significance for libraries that would like to craft or refine similar policies.

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Introduction

During the decades prior to the Internet, accessing research library collections was as easy, or as difficult, as gaining access to a library's stacks, locating the desired items, and pulling them off the shelf. Libraries were able to provide this access because of the legal doctrine of "first sale" which allows the owner of a copyrighted work to redistribute that physical object without violating copyright law. This doctrine is the legal foundation that allows libraries to provide many of their services (Ou, 2003). When dealing with a physical collection, the patrons' ability to access is moderated primarily by their access to the physical materials. Applying first sale doctrine to library collections becomes more complicated with digital objects. Providing access to digital materials is likely to involve the reproduction and redistribution rights which tend to reside with the copyright holder. Instead of relying on first sale increasingly, access to these same resources is negotiated through license agreements with publishers and other vendors. While the shift to electronic access and distribution has many advantages, it also provides new challenges for publicly funded research libraries, particularly to unaffiliated patrons.

Unaffiliated members of the public have many reasons for seeking access to research-intensive collections held by Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member institutions. Accordingly, this study investigates the electronic access resource policies of 66 publicly-funded ARL member libraries to determine if and how they moderate unaffiliated users' access to the digital collections that they license from vendors. Examining these policies provides insight into ARL library values, policy models for libraries contemplating digital access issues to unaffiliated patrons and services to the community, and provides a baseline for beginning to identify how much access unaffiliated users have to research libraries' digital collections of scholarly resources.

The Shift to Electronic Resources

The rise of the Internet and the production of digital resources has necessitated dramatic changes for libraries. Globally, libraries have transitioned from an access paradigm concerned with providing access to physical resources to a connected paradigm that incorporates technology and connects patrons with remotely located digital resources (Byrne, 2007, pp. 30–32). This technological shift has also transformed the nature of publishing, and librarians have developed an extensive body of scholarly communications literature that articulates the role of the library in facilitating broad public access to information (Bailey, 2007). Many libraries

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have begun to take a proactive stance by advocating for changes to scholarly publishing that make information more accessible, and with fewer copyright restrictions, for the benefit of both researchers and the general public. Meanwhile, there has been a rise of the "citizen-scientist" and increased acceptance by professional researchers of the value of research being performed by nonprofessionals (Cohn, 2008). The emergence of citizen-scientists illustrates how the role and audience for research libraries continues to evolve. Through open access publications, scholarly information is, arguably, more accessible than ever before, while library materials that were previously accessible physically are now tied to licensing agreements that have the potential to limit access.

License agreements between publishers and academic libraries stipulate limits on the distribution and accessibility of digital resources, such as e-journals and scholarly databases. These licenses are growing in prevalence and play an increasingly large role in how library collections are developed and managed (Wyatt, 2005). For many library patrons, electronic resources increase the value of the library. For affiliated patrons, digital collections can often be accessed more easily than print collections and many express a preference for accessing resources in digital formats (Pedersen, 2010). As a result, libraries are increasingly facilitating digital access as a way to provide value and respond to user expectations and information-seeking norms, while building digital collections (Hazen, 2010). Concurrently, many academic libraries are cancelling subscriptions to print resources in favor of purchasing their electronic counterparts to save on space (Tonkery, 2009). In many ways, electronic resources provide affiliated patrons with greater accessibility and convenience.

To purchase and provide access to digital resources, libraries are often required to sign licensing agreements that protect copyright and restrict electronic access to those affiliated with the institution (for instance university employees and students). These limitations typically do not apply to patrons who are using computers within the library to access electronic resources regardless of their affiliation. Thus, unaffiliated patrons (such as local residents and members of the community) have, theoretically, the same level of access as they have to the printed equivalents. But digital resources introduce new access barriers.

The technological and policy challenges of authenticating public users on library workstations has been a significant enough problem to merit more than one Association of Research Libraries SPEC kit (Cook & Shelton, 2007; Driscoll, 2003; Plum & Bleiler, 2001). Moreover, the very thing that makes electronic resources so convenient, the fact that they can be accessed on common devices, also complicates providing access to unaffiliated patrons. Computer access has the potential to limit unaffiliated usage of electronic materials since they

must have access to a computer in the library. The same computer that provides access to the unique resources of the research library also provides access to e-mail, social networking sites, and other Internet-based resources. This means that computers available to unaffiliated users can attract a wide variety of users. This has the potential to create conflicts where libraries feel obligated to regulate their usage and determine methods for prioritizing use.

Weber and Lawrence used a survey to understand how ARL libraries were providing and managing public access to computer workstations. Their research found that in 2008 the majority of ARL libraries either did not require any form of authentication (48%) or provided a method for guests to log on to workstations (72% of the remaining libraries). For instance, 15 of the libraries they surveyed had policies to enable the patrons to obtain a username and password while another six required identification before logging the patrons in (Weber & Lawrence, 2010). When compared to an earlier study by Cook and Shelton (2007), this indicates a decrease in the difficulty level of authentication requirements, but an increase in the overall number of libraries requiring authentication. This difference highlights both the rapid evolution of guest access policies, and the difficulty of comparing two studies of such a small sample with different response rates (both studies involved over 60 libraries, but only had an overlap of 34 ARL members).

In 2010, Lenker and Kocevar-Weidinger expanded the scope of inquiry on public access and authentication within research libraries to include ethical and practical dimensions of access. The authors utilized W.D. Ross's Ethical Pluralism framework to help identify how libraries should moderate access through their policies and concluded that successful policies would, among other things, need to "be conducive to consistent enforcement", be "consistent with the library's mission", "alleviate staff discomfort" and "provide some level of access for community members whenever possible". These factors allow the library policy to fulfill Ross's ethical concepts of fidelity, beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, gratitude and beneficence (Lenker & Kocevar-Weidinger, 2010).

Methodology

In order to better understand the accessibility to electronic resources that public patrons have through public research institutions' academic libraries in the United States, this study analyzed the electronic resource access policies of 61 publicly-funded ARL libraries (see appendix for a list of libraries and policies). Public institutions have a different relationship and

set of perceived obligations to their communities than do privately funded institutions. For instance, public access to taxpayer-funded research has been one of the primary frames that the popular media has used when reporting on open access (Davis, 2009). If the state and its tax-payers fund an institution then, rhetorically at least, the public often feels entitled to question how that institution is contributing to the public (Whitney, 2006). Because they receive their funding from the public, the libraries included in this study are a resource for local residents and unaffiliated researchers to seek access to research materials. This sample size of 61 ARL libraries in this study was generated using the 2010 ARL membership listing. Data collection and analysis was completed during 2012.

The author located each library's website and attempted to locate its policy for unaffiliated patrons and electronic access to library resources. If the policy could not be located online, the libraries were contacted, either by chat or e-mail, and asked to identify an online version of their policy, which was then included in the study. Five ARL libraries were eliminated from the study because they did not have policies posted online, and therefore could not be accurately compared against libraries that did. The university where the researcher is employed was also excluded from the study.

Policies were analyzed to determine if they stated access specifically to unaffiliated patrons, and then coded. To be coded as "yes" and included in this study, the policy provided publically accessible computers on site without cost to the user. The requirement for free access excluded examination of policies that required users to provide their own computer. Policies that were coded as "no" were included in the study sample size, but excluded from further analysis.

All policies coded as "yes" were then further analyzed for common methods of limiting access to electronic resources vis-à-vis public computing. Four categories that limit public computing access in these policies emerged . They include:

- Content
- Affiliation
- Time limits, and
- Authentication

These categories were then coded as binary "yes/no" questions in order to determine the level of access to electronic resource materials provided to unaffiliated patrons based on the categories defined by the content analysis framework below.

Content

Does the policy prioritize or limit access based on the nature of the content being accessed by unaffiliated users?

Policies coded as "yes" limited or prioritized access to public access computers based on the type, purpose, or content of the material being accessed. Statements about providing access that pertained only to government documents, which can involve special policies, were ignored. Policies that simply stated what the computers were intended for, without stating a priority or mentioning any enforcement mechanism, were categorized as "no."

Patron Affiliation

Does the policy prioritize access based on user type?

Policies coded as "yes" prioritized access based on the affiliation of the user. For instance, if a policy prioritized students over unaffiliated patrons, it was categorized as "yes." All policies of this type provided some level of access to the public.

Time

Does the policy place restrictions on the amount of time unaffiliated members may access materials?

Policies coded as "yes" limited the amount of time unaffiliated users could access resources. No distinction was made between policies based on the length of time allowed. If the time limit was renewable, then it was coded as "no."

Authentication

Does the policy specify that unaffiliated users must provide some form of identification or be screened before being permitted to access computers?

Policies coded as "yes" required some form of check-in or login procedure before

accessing electronic resources. Any form of pre-screening that was identified in the policy was included in this category, regardless of its complexity.

Results

Of the 61 electronic resource access policies analyzed, 59 ARL libraries ensured unaffiliated users access to their electronic resources. Two policies, however, did not provide free electronic access. One required the purchase of a "courtesy card", while another allowed access to computers, but did not allow unaffiliated access to paid electronic resources.

The 59 policies (97%) that provide unaffiliated patrons access to electronic collections indicate that, on the whole, publicly-supported ARL libraries are dedicated to ensuring public access to their digital resources.

Of these libraries, 15 (25%) of the policies include restrictive language relating to content. This ranged from technological barriers that prevented unaffiliated patrons from accessing web-based email or websites to more subtle statements that simply stated that users may be asked to relinquish their computers based on the content they were accessing. Neutral statements that mentioned a preference for some types of content, or simply stated that the computers were intended for certain uses, were categorized with policies that made no mention of content. Without any mention of enforcement it was impossible to determine if these policy statements were philosophical statements or practical means of resource moderation.

There is intuitive appeal to this type of moderation for research libraries. Restricting computing access to research allows patrons to access electronic resources that are difficult to obtain elsewhere, while making the computers less available for non-academic uses. Despite this, ARL libraries' policies do not make judgments about what constitutes research, or use those judgments to moderate access. It is impossible to evaluate electronic access in this regard in comparison to the equivalent print collection because ARL print collections also contain a mixture of "research" and "popular" materials; any analysis would be inherently subjective without the use of a scientifically valid instrument.

The next most common limitation to access of electronic resources was that of time. Twelve (20%) policies identified some restriction based on the amount of time that unaffiliated users could utilize library resources via its public computers. This includes concrete time limits, as well as references to "time limits" without mention of what they were. By restricting usage based on time, libraries are able to moderate the amount of unaffiliated usage without making any

other judgments about the users. It also gives priority to affiliated users, who do not encounter these restrictions. While moderating access to electronic resources based on time limits has the advantage of being relatively easy to enforce, it represents a step backwards from equivalency with print materials usage and accessibility among public patrons.

Only nine (15%) of library policies explicitly prioritize access based on the patron's affiliation with the library. These policies allow unaffiliated users access to resources, but give priority to users in times of high use based on patron affiliation. The practical implications on access with this type of policy statement would vary highly depending upon the number of public access computers available relative to the general need. In this context, many libraries may not have any need for this kind of policy clause if they rarely experience overcrowding. This type of verbiage in a policy has the advantage of providing access to the library's core users in times of high demand. It does require active enforcement, however, which may contribute to its relative rarity of mention. It also highlights the different dynamics that are created with electronic access when compared to print. Both electronic and print materials are can be limited by the number of copies of each item. However, using this policy, unaffiliated patrons can be cut off from the entire electronic collection due to the computer needs of other patrons.

The most common method of moderating access to electronic resources and computers was also the least clearly defined. Seventeen (29%) of the policies required some form of public user authentication. The definition of "authentication" varied widely in the policies from automated self-check machines, to showing identification to a member of the library staff, to requiring that the public users' first point of contact be their local public library.

In some cases, automated systems may be so routine that they do not merit being mentioned in an access policy. This possibility is given some credence by the decrease in authentication found in the examined policies of publicly funded ARL libraries (29%) when compared to the 2008 survey results of all ARL libraries (52%) (Weber & Lawrence, 2010). When authentication is mentioned in the policies analyzed in this study, their requirements are often vague. Some institutions may simply be complying with their information technology (IT) requirements, while others may be engaging in more active moderation. This suggests that libraries wish to convey that computer usage will be moderated, but it is difficult to draw more meaningful conclusions from this data or to separate it entirely from modern IT systems and security. The difficulty of the authentication process when compared to print access to the same materials is determined by the details of each process. While it is possible to require authentication before allowing access to print collections, it is often a more burdensome process when compared to authentication to computers.

Conclusion

Using the electronic resource access policy as the unit of analysis to assess non-affiliated users' access to electronic resources compared to print materials in publicly-funded ARL libraries has both strengths and limitations. Limitations include the policy being out of date for current practices and difficulty determining the extent to which that policy is enforced. This method also cannot evaluate other barriers to access for nonaffiliated users: parking, travel expenses, availability of computers within the library, and any other hidden barriers not outlined in the library's written policy.

Two important methods, moderating access based on patron behavior and moderating the numbers of computers made available relative to demand, are also not reflected in this study. A few policies mentioned behavior, but such policies would not necessarily be included within the policy statement for computer access and might apply to the entire library or institution more generally. To study these dynamics would require a metric that quantified actual level of enforcement. Similarly, to gain a fuller picture of accessibility, more data would need to be gathered not just about the number of publically accessible computers available, but also the demand for those computers. These are topics for future study.

Focusing on the written policy as the unit of analysis does have significant advantages. It enables broad comparisons and establishes a baseline across many institutions. These policies reflect what a potential unaffiliated user may encounter before deciding to visit the library. More importantly, the written policy is the statement the institution is publically making to the outside world. It represents an ideal version of how the institution attempts to regulate its access to electronic materials.

Implicit throughout this analysis has been a comparison between the level of access unaffiliated users have to print resources and the access they have to the electronic equivalent. Using print access as a baseline can be a useful tool, but it is not necessarily the best conceptual model. Demand has always been a limiting factor in accessing the collection, but when resources are electronic, the accessibility framework is radically altered. New possibilities for sharing and searching for information are suddenly possible even as new accessibility issues arise. New paradigms for access are now emerging, and the obligation libraries have to unaffiliated patrons will undoubtedly continue to evolve.

How institutions implement electronic resource access policies in the future will need to take into consideration their local conditions and values, as well as evolution

with copyright law and first sale doctrine with regard to digital works. This study provides a baseline for understanding how publicly-funded ARL libraries are responding to the associated challenges.

Overall, 26 of the 59 policies examined (44%) limited or prioritized access based on content, time or patron status. That number increases to 32 (56%) when the more ambiguous category of authentication is included. On average, 97% of the ARL libraries in this study allow unaffiliated users to access their electronic resources, and the majority regulated that access in some way. Significantly however, nearly 27 (46%) have policies that do not mention any restrictions, indicating either a strong commitment to allowing public access or a relative lack of issues necessitating such policies.

The lack of consensus on how to respond to this challenge implies the complexity associated with unaffiliated access to electronic resources. Publicly funded ARL libraries use a wide variety of techniques to moderate and control how unaffiliated patrons can access their electronic resources. ARL libraries who are grappling with this challenge can note that the exact mechanism of that moderation can vary from the highly subjective to the automated. While there is no widespread consensus on the best methods, the issue of providing access to electronic collections for unaffiliated users is important to many ARL libraries. As a practical matter, it would clearly be easier to simply ban unaffiliated users from having access to the computers, as a few institutions have done. Instead, this study uncovered a strong commitment to the public-serving mission of a public ARL institution. Yet, for the unaffiliated user, barriers remain to accessing electronic scholarly information. The transition to digital collections creates new challenges for libraries to address.

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Appendix

ARL US Public Universities	Public Access Policy URL
Alabama	http://www.lib.ua.edu/policies/libs_acceptable_use.htm
Arizona State	http://lib.asu.edu/services/visitors
Arizona	http://www.library.arizona.edu/about/policies/computers/public
Auburn	http://www.lib.auburn.edu/disclaim/
Berkeley, California	http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/kb/?View=entry&EntryID=28
California, Davis	http://www.lib.ucdavis.edu/ul/services/computers/computer-use-policies.php
California, Irvine	http://www.lib.uci.edu/services/computing/computing-in-the-libraries.html
California, Los Angeles	http://www.library.ucla.edu/service/lcs/12601.cfm
California, Riverside	http://library.ucr.edu/view/help/tech0logy/software.html
California, San Diego	http://libraries.ucsd.edu/services/computing/
California, Santa Barbara	http://www.library.ucsb.edu/computer-use-policy
Cincinnati	http://libraries.uc.edu/services/tech_services/index.html
Colorado	http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/about/computersPolicy.htm
Colorado State	http://lib.colostate.edu/services/computers/lab
Connecticut	http://guestreghelp.uconn.edu/guests.html
Delaware	http://www.lib.udel.edu/info/index.html
Florida	http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/computeruse.html
Florida State	http://www.lib.fsu.edu/services/tech/workstations.html
Georgia	http://www.libs.uga.edu/visitors/index.html
Georgia Tech	http://www.library.gatech.edu/about/visitors.php

ARL US Public Universities	Public Access Policy URL
Hawaii	http://library.ma0a.hawaii.edu/about/computing/pub_computer_policy.html
Houston	http://info.lib.uh.edu/services/computers-printing/desktop-computers
Illinois, Chicago	http://library.uic.edu/home/services/computing/computing-at-daley-library#DaleyComputersAndApplications
Illinois, Urbana	http://www.library.illi0is.edu/learn/users/visitors.html
Indiana	http://www.libraries.iub.edu/index.php?pageId=7551
Iowa	http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/help/faq/faq-connect.html#email
Iowa State	http://www.lib.iastate.edu/info/6276
Kansas	http://www.lib.ku.edu/AccServices/Conduct/CommunityAccessWorkstations.shtml
Kent State	http://www.library.kent.edu/page/10509
Kentucky	http://libguides.uky.edu/content.php?pid=201463&sid=1684126
Louisiana State	http://faq.blogs.lib.lsu.edu/?p=953
Louisville	http://louisville.edu/library/olt/facilities.html
Maryland	http://www.lib.umd.edu/visitors.html
Massachusetts	http://www.library.umass.edu/services/computers/
Michigan	http://www.lib.umich.edu/computing-library
Michigan State	http://www.lib.msu.edu/computer/computers.jsp
Minnesota	http://www.lib.umn.edu/services/visitors
Missouri	http://mulibraries.missouri.edu/about/computers/authenticate.htm
Nebraska	http://libraries.unl.edu/starting#accessing
New Mexico	http://elibrary.unm.edu/services/public.php
North Carolina	http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruct/visitors
North Carolina State	http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/faq/faq.php?id=96
Ohio	No Posted Policy Available

ARL US Public Universities	Public Access Policy URL
Ohio State	http://library.osu.edu/about/policies-procedures/circulation-services-and-policies/services-for-0n-osu-patrons-2/
Oklahoma	http://libraries.ou.edu/cms/default.aspx?id=46
Oklahoma State	http://www.library.okstate.edu/services/pubcomp.htm
Oregon	No Posted Policy Available
Pennsylvania State	http://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/infosvcs/computers.html#openpar_anchorname_psul_9
Pittsburgh	http://www.library.pitt.edu/use/community.html
Purdue	No Posted Policy Available
Rutgers	http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/pc_availability/pc_availability.shtml#guest_pcs
South Carolina	http://library.sc.edu/visitor_computerUse.html
Southern Illinois	http://www.lib.siu.edu/footer-portlets/services/courtesy-cards
SUNY-Albany	No Posted Policy Available
SUNY-Buffalo	http://library.buffalo.edu/gethelp/servicesforalumni/
SUNY-Stony Brook	http://www.library.stonybrook.edu/electronic-resources
Temple	http://guides.temple.edu/computers
Texas	http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/computing/
Texas A&M	http://asktamulib.altarama.com/reft297.aspx?pmi=KwO7UWjuop
Texas Tech	http://library.ttu.edu/services/tech0logy/computing_resources.php
Utah	http://www.lib.utah.edu/services/guest-passes.php
Virginia	http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/equipment/scanning.html
Virginia Tech	http://www.lib.vt.edu/about/public-computers.html
Washington	http://www.lib.washington.edu/services/computers/visitors
Washington State	http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/general/pubcomputers.html
Wayne State	No Posted Policy Available