

Fine Elimination & Borrowing Policies UX Study: Final Report

Rationale

The purpose of this study was to investigate Library users' perceptions and behaviours associated with library borrowing and fine policies.

Method

1. We began by interviewing general library users (June - July 2016) by approaching people who were already in the library. (8 users)

Interview questions:

- Have you ever checked out items from the Library?
 - How far in advance of an assignment/project do you usually check out books?
 - How long do you generally need books for?
 - Do you know how long you can borrow an item for?
 - Do you think that is sufficient?
 - Have you ever renewed an item? (Tell us about this)
 - Have you ever got a fine from the library?
 - Do you know how much a library fine is?
 - Would you change the amount?
 - Year of study? Discipline?
2. It was difficult to find anyone who had ever incurred a fine, much less checked out a book before (!). Next, we interviewed users in the process of checking out books at the self-checkout machines (Nov - Dec 2016). (7 users)

Interview questions:

- Have you ever checked out items from the Library?
 - How far in advance of an assignment/project do you usually check out books?
 - How long do you generally need books for?
 - Do you know how long you can borrow an item for?
 - Do you think that is sufficient?
 - Have you ever renewed an item? (Tell us about this)
 - Have you ever got a fine from the library?
 - Do you know how much a library fine is?
 - Would you change the amount?
 - Year of study? Discipline?
3. Finally, we interviewed users who had incurred library fines through a recruitment ad posted on the library website (Feb 2017). (2 users)

Interview questions:

- Tell us about your experience with your library fine.
 - How did it come about?
 - Do you remember getting a notice from the library that your item was coming due? Was this useful?
 - How did you become aware that you had a fine?
 - How did you end up paying the fine? What was this experience like?
 - What can we do to help you avoid a fine?
 - Have you had any other experiences getting library fines?
 - Do you know how much a library fine is?
 - Have you ever renewed an item? No - why not? Yes - how? (online, in person, phone)

- Have you ever requested a book from another location?
 - No - why not?
 - Yes - Tell us about that experience.
 - Do you know what the Annex is?
 - Have you used interlibrary loan/ RACER?

- Do you use ebooks as well as print books?
 - How do you choose which format to use?
 - How far in advance (of an assignment/project) do you usually check out book(s)?
 - How long do you generally need book(s) for?
 - How often do you check out books in a semester?

- Tell us how about your experience finding books.
 - Have you ever had any trouble finding what you wanted on the shelf?
 - How do you know where to go to find the books you want?

- Year of study? Discipline?

Limitations

In all, we spoke with 17 people. They include undergraduates and graduates in the arts, sciences, and social sciences . It was difficult to find active, heavy users of the print collection and we did not find anyone who had incurred fines over \$5.

Findings

- Most users are not aware of Library fine or borrowing policies.
- Most users were content with the current fine amount (when told what this is).

- Users' responses were mixed about the loan period policy (when told what it is). Some felt that two weeks for undergraduates was more than adequate; others thought it was not fair for graduates to have longer privileges.
- Users are indifferent or complacent about library fines.
 - Almost all the users we interviewed accept that the library imposes fines. This is a practice they are familiar with in many libraries and they are accustomed to it.
 - Many people we interviewed told us they do not check out physical books because they prefer electronic resources. Print books were a last resort.
- Most users expressed concern that if fines were eliminated there wouldn't be an incentive to return books. This included users who had incurred fines.* We heard:
 - "Fines keep you on top of it. I'd rather bring the book back than pay \$15. It's a way to ensure that people bring their books back, I guess".
 - "The fine price is manageable enough. It is the price of lunch and I think it forces you to respect the materials, respect the resources, and respect other students. It is a small price to pay. You shouldn't be sitting on a resource longer than you need it because you are taking that book away from somebody else".
 - "There should be a punishment for not bringing books back. After all, you can renew them online".

*We only spoke to users who had incurred fines of \$5.00 or less. Responses *may* have been different if we had found users who had incurred higher fines.

- Users told us that they keep books only as long as they need them for their research or assignment. As soon as they no longer need the book, they return it. The threat of a fine does not factor strongly into their decision to return a book. If they do not return an item, it is only because they forgot, and the fine does not work an incentive to return the item. They told us that a reminder message just before the item is due would be helpful so they could renew or return the book.
- We asked users if they knew what the library did with the money collected from fines. Users who believed fines supported worthwhile expenses had a more positive attitude towards fines.
 - "At first I was like 'Okay yeah, get rid of the fines', but also these fines will be put to better use, I'm assuming, to better infrastructure of the Library, for better resources, better books. So I don't know. I'd say fines are a small price to pay for bettering things at the Library".

Recommendations

- We were surprised by the prevailing sentiment of either indifference or acceptance of fines as a normal library practice. Most people are fine (pardon the pun) with the status quo, but would also be fine (again, pardon) if there were no fines. If the Library were to eliminate fines, users would accept-- and most likely not even notice--this policy change.
- If the status quo remains, communicate to users about what the library does with money collected from fines. Users are more likely to have a positive perception if they understand how the money is directed.

- If the status quo remains, improve the message of email communications about due and overdue books. We heard:
 - “I thought it was spam and deleted it. It wasn’t until I got a Library fine that I realized this was an important email.”
 - “Here it is [shows me the notification on their phone]. From TRELIS, like what is that? I mean you don’t find out it’s from the Library until you get to the subject line.”
 - Users suggested that the email would be more useful if it was sent closer to the book’s due date.
- Explore text message notifications.
- Improve the timing of email notifications. One user told us she renewed books online several times and claimed to not have received any email notifications of the book coming due which resulted in her getting fined multiple times.
- Users are not aware of borrowing policies. Improve communications about the policies.