From Fee to Free

How our library moved from a paid to a free ILL service

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LIÈGE université
Library

Abstract

Since summer 2022, our interlibrary loan service has become free of charge for ULiège students, faculty, and staff members. A feasibility study, started in 2019, was completed 3 years later. In March 2020, because of COVID-19, ILL service had become temporarily free for the ULiège community. This was a great opportunity for a real two-year pilot phase. Thanks to the length of the pilot, solid statistics and usage data were obtained and the ILL operators had two years' experience in a free context. Additionally, changes in our workflows such a new subscription to RapidILL, peer-to-peer resource sharing between Alma institutions and more automation in some tasks have reduced our ILL charges. As a result of the feasibility study, the two-year pilot, some changes in our workflows, and based on reactions of users and ILL staff, it was decided to keep a free ILL service for the ULiège community, with some safeguards to prevent abuses and avoid uncontrolled costs.

Context and Facts

LIÈGE université

A multisite university in Wallonia

3 CITIES
4 CAMPUSES

- Liège town-centre
- Liège Sart Tilman
- Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech
- Arlon Campus Environment

11 Faculties

▶ Philosophy and Letters

▶ Medicine
in association with Liège University Hospital

▶ Psychology, Speech Therapy and Education Sciences

▶ Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech

▶ Law, Political science & Criminology

▶ Applied sciences

▶ HEC Liège, Management School

▶ Architecture

▶ Sciences

▶ Veterinary medicine
in association with Liège University Veterinary Clinic

▶ Social Sciences

One of the broadest selection of courses in Belgium

37
BACHELOR'S
degree courses

207
MASTER'S
degree courses

65
Specialised
MASTER'S
degree courses

24,520
STUDENTS

2,120
DOCTORAL STUDENTS

1,400
TEACHERS

4

University of Liège Library

- One library
  - composed of 15 branches
- Staff: ca 100 people
- Current situation for ILL:
  - Staff: 1 FTE (6 operators)
  - Coordinator: 0,1 FTE
- Systems for ILL:
  - myDelivery (homemade, until 2015)
  - Alma (since 2015)
  - RapidILL (since 2020)
  - Impala (since 90s), national broker ILL system
  - Subito (since 90s)
- Paid service (until Spring 2020)

ILL Requests in 2022

Borrowing requests: 5090
Lending requests: 2608
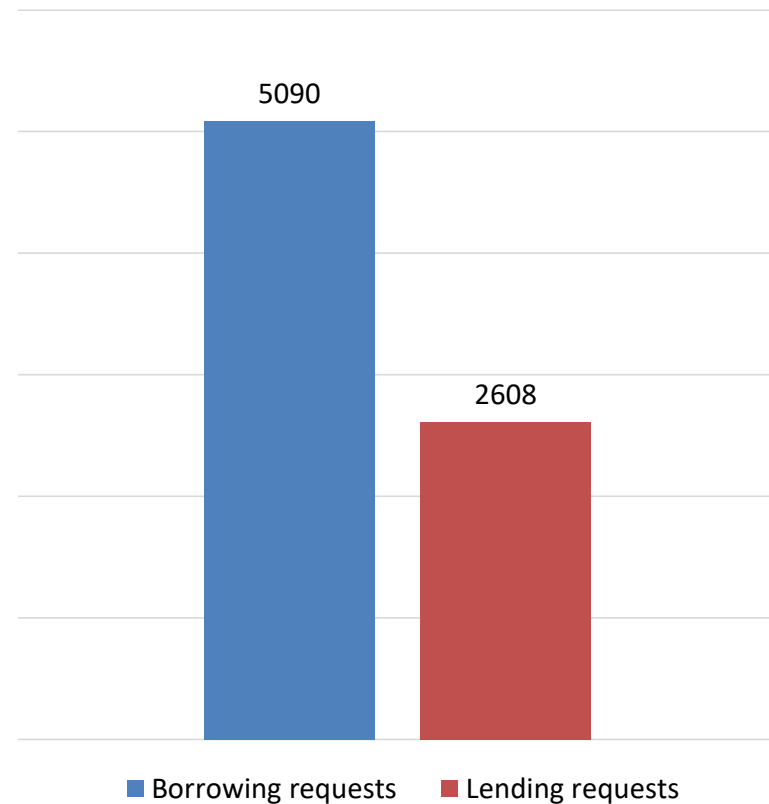
ILL - Major changes at ULiège Library since 2014 (1)

1) **> 2014**: 8 different ILL units (15 operators)

2) **2015**: 5 different ILL units (10 operators)

3) **2018**: 1 single ILL unit (6 operators)

 – Alma Resource Sharing Library

 – More collaboration between ILL operators

 – Harmonization of practices between operators

 – Operators take turns the ILL tasks (shared calendar)

 – Change was not easily accepted by everyone

   • Transparency is not always accepted

   • ILL work = preserve of some ILL operators

   • Cost and profit sharing (pooling of HR, revenues and costs)
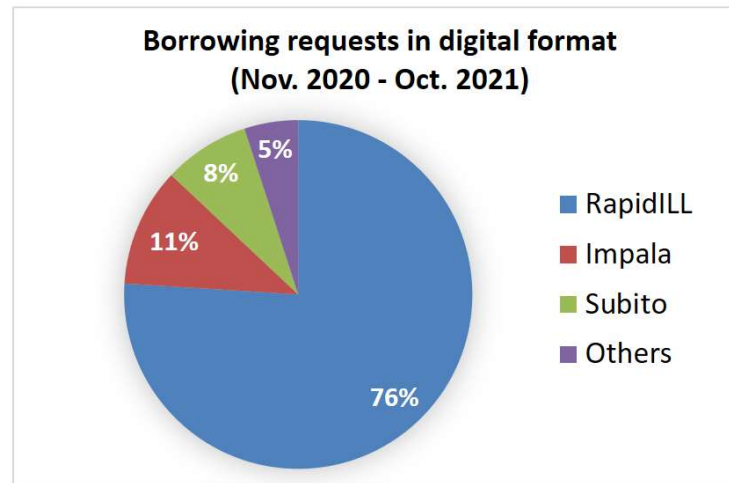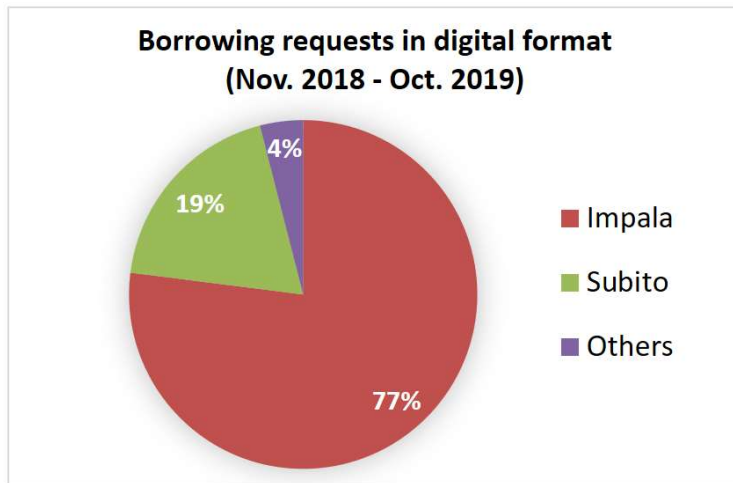
> Successful results, although change was underprepared

More info in *One Resource Sharing Library to Rule Them All*

ILL - Major changes at ULiège Library since 2014 (2)

4) 2020: Subscription to RapidILL for article and chapter delivery

- Partially integrated with Alma
- RapidILL = main supplier

Borrowing requests in digital format (Nov. 2018 - Oct. 2019)

- Impala: 77%
- Subito: 19%
- Others: 4%

Borrowing requests in digital format (Nov. 2020 - Oct. 2021)

- RapidILL: 76%
- Impala: 11%
- Subito: 8%
- Others: 5%

ILL - Major changes at ULiège Library since 2014 (3)

5) **2022**: Full integration of RapidILL with Alma
   - If the request is accepted and processed in RapidILL, the scanned file is directly emailed from Alma to the requester (without any intervention of an operator)

6) **2022**: Start of P2P resource sharing between Alma institutions in Belgium for physical items
   - Effective with the Free University of Brussels (ULB)
   - Test underway with other partners

Towards a Free ILL Service

How it began…

- 2014: Outdoor activity of the Library Board members
  - To rethink the Library's goals, missions and future
  - Towards "Library as a Service" (LaaS)

- 2018: Mandate from the Board to carry out a **feasibility study**
  - Also a social aspect (students with low-income)

- 2019: Start of the study (completed only in 2022)

- 2020: Because of Covid-19 (and in parallel to the study), ILL service has become <u>temporarily free of charge for ULiège</u> students and faculty members
  - Great opportunity for a real **pilot**

(A) Feasibility study

1) Internal context
2) External context
3) Stakeholders
4) SWOT analysis

1) Internal context

- Current organization of the ILL service
- History and recent milestones
  - Recent major changes
  - ILL tools used so far
- Facts and figures, statistics (since 2018)
  - Borrowing requests by format
  - Borrowing requests by Faculty
  - Requesters' profile
  - Partners
  - Costs and revenues

2) External context

- Survey among Belgian academic libraries
  - Paid or free service?
- Literature review
- Chronic subscription cost increases of many scholarly journals
- Factors at that time:
  - Covid-19 crisis:
    - no physical delivery (for some months)
    - increase of digital delivery
 - RapidILL trial/subscription

3) Stakeholders

- **Stakeholder Analysis**
  - Primary stakeholders: most affected, either positively or negatively
  - Secondary stakeholders: indirectly affected
  - Tertiary stakeholders: impacted the least
- **And power-interest grid to identify**
  - Stakeholders' interests
  - Potential risks and misunderstandings ("me issues")
  - Mechanisms to positively influence other stakeholders and the project
  - Negative stakeholders as well as their adverse effects on the project
    - Major risk at the level of the sponsor itself (until 2021)
- **Personal interviews with 8 key stakeholders**
  - Min. 1 hour + recorded + transcribed + approved

Transparent process!

Key stakeholders (mainly ILL operators) were in favor of a free ILL service!

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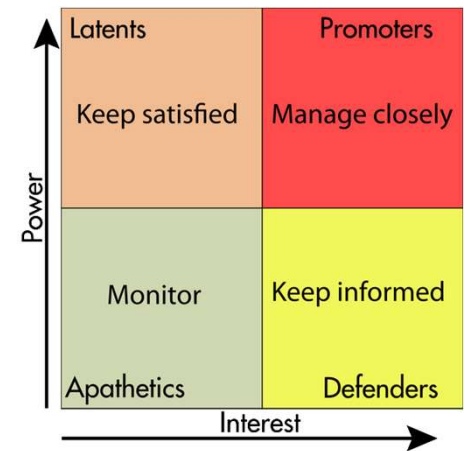
4) SWOT Analysis

■ All internal and externals factors summarized in a SWOT analysis

= compilation of a project's **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

(B) Pilot during Covid19

- From Spring 2020 (1st lockdown) to Spring 2022

1) Real statistics and usage data collected

2) First reactions and observations:
   - ILL operators could have an overview of what ILL would look like if it remains free
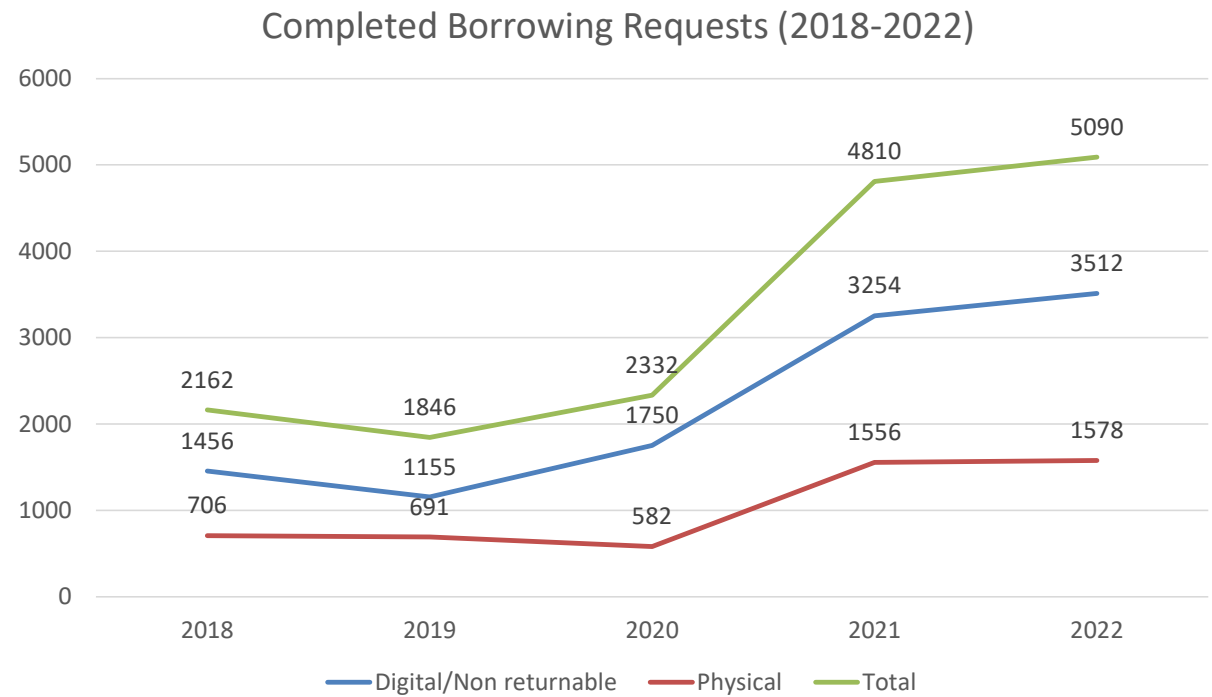   - Patrons started to get used to a free ILL service

1) Usage data (1)

- **Factors**
  - Pre-Covid *vs* Covid *vs* post-Covid
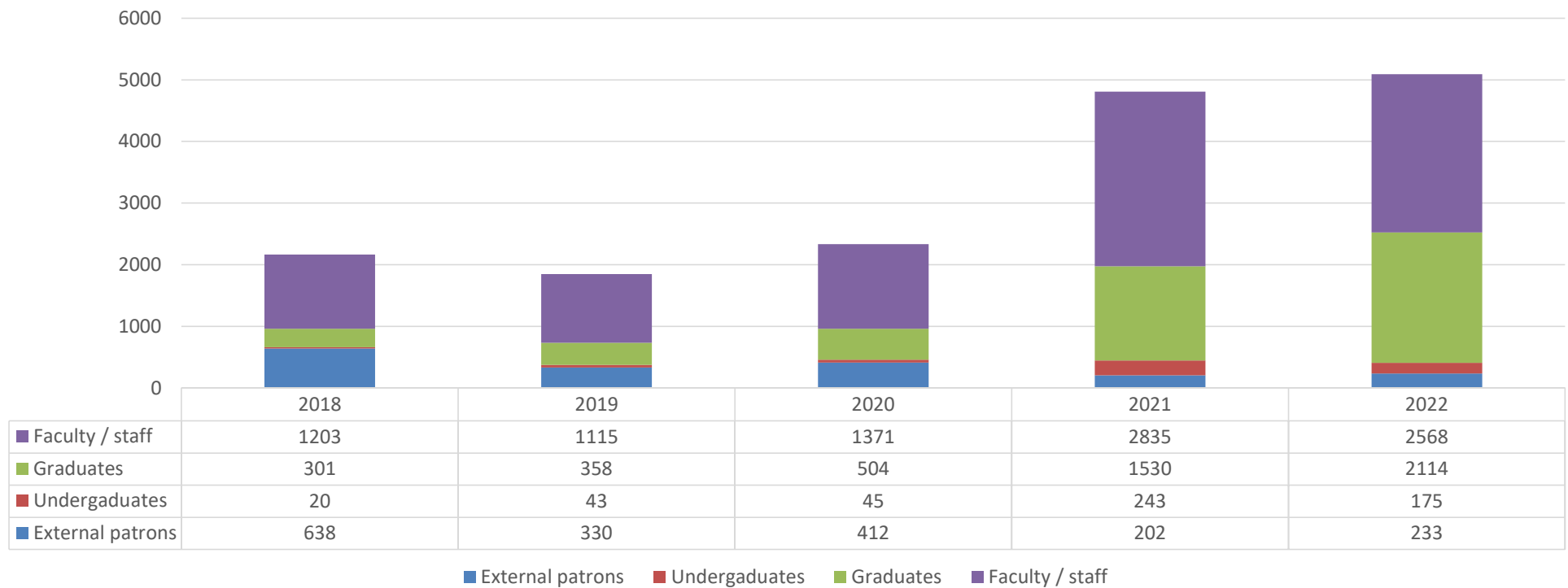 - Pre-RapidILL *vs* RapidILL
  - Paid *vs* Free

Completed Borrowing Requests (2018-2022)

Legend: Digital/Non returnable — Physical — Total

1) Usage data (2)

By Patron types (2018-2022)

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
■ Faculty / staff	1203	1115	1371	2835	2568
■ Graduates	301	358	504	1530	2114
■ Undergaduates	20	43	45	243	175
■ External patrons	638	330	412	202	233

■ External patrons ■ Undergaduates ■ Graduates ■ Faculty / staff

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2) First reactions and observations (1)

- Satisfaction of the end-users
  - Why should they pay for materials they need, but that the library doesn't hold?
- Request increase seems to meet a need
- <u>Time saving</u> for operators and secretaries in administrative tasks:
  - Operators should no longer
    - Care about how to invoice ULiège researchers and teachers
    - Add and manage the ILL fees for students in Alma
  - Secretaries should no longer produce invoices for researchers and teachers
  - No longer necessary to check if ILL fees have been paid

2) First reactions and observations (2) (B) Pilot during Covid19

- Some requests for books in physical format are very expensive because of the shipping costs (which can be very high if from abroad or outside the EU)

- Since the service is free, a few students/faculty members request many books (several dozens) in physical format in a year

- A few students/faculty members do not consult/loan the books they have requested

- More requests to complete, but <u>more automation</u> (RapidILL and Alma 2P2)
  - Automation helps to balance the overload
  - The more automated, the cheaper!

Recommendations to the Board

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- Free ILL should be considered as a priority within the Library as a Service model
- Free ILL service should be maintained for the ULiège community
  - With no limit for digital articles and chapters delivered via RapidILL
  - With an increased library budget for postal charges
  - With no symbolic contribution to the costs
  - And Alma P2P for physical delivery should be encouraged

With some safeguards

- ILL fees increased for some external patrons
- Charging a contribution to the costs for physical item requests from abroad (from the 4th request) and for frequent requests in journals that are not in RapidILL holdings
  - Monitoring via Analytics
- Purchasing a print copy or the ebook version (if any) in case of too high costs for delivery or item frequently requested
  - Monitoring via Analytics
  - From ILL to DDA (+ budget)
- Raising awareness among patrons that there are always hidden costs (for the University)
  - In Alma letters

> Free service is not a pipe dream as long as costs remain under control

References

Prosmans, F., & Renaville, F. (2022). *Gratuité du service du prêt interbibliothèques à ULiège Library ━ étude de faisabilité*. ULiège Library.
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Thank you!

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