



Faculty Senate
Library Advisory Committee

Report on Library Resource Shortages at LSU

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Summary of Report Results

In this report, we use the two departments World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (WLLC) as well as French to illustrate how a decade of low library budgets negatively affect research and teaching. The two departments are outliers, but the problems described here, likely represent the struggles of many faculty members and student researchers in other disciplines in the Humanities and Arts, possible also in other disciplines at LSU. Key findings are: Students and faculty members in WLLC and French do not get access to many important databases, although they are critically essential tools for scholarship and teaching. Substantial gaps in the library collections lead to heavy reliance on Inter Library Loan (ILL) which complicates project planning, significantly extends the duration of projects, and which is often not a feasible solution for making teaching resources available. The report identifies four workaround strategies that faculty members and students adopted in order to maintain an active research agenda and to offer training in research methodologies despite a lack of necessary resources. (1) Faculty members as well as graduate and undergraduate students regularly extend their work on research and teaching projects because they must plan around the availability of materials that they can only access via ILL. (2) Faculty members in particular rely to a significant extent on libraries at *other* universities. Many travel, sometimes long distances, and pay for access to libraries *elsewhere*, be this during conference trips or during visits to their old alma mater. (3) Many faculty members also use personal funds to enable their research and teaching, paying out of pocket for materials or database access, thus subsidizing their work at LSU. (4) Those who conduct research in these disciplines adapt their attitudes towards low expectations for research support from the libraries. They shy away from dissent or demands to avoid confrontations because they do not even perceive a chance of change.

Recommendations

Following these findings, the committee recommends the following steps to address the problems:

- A more **systematic needs analysis** than what this report can accomplish is necessary. Particular emphasis must be on the needs for access to databases and online resources that cannot be made up for with ILL.
- Following the needs analysis, **database subscriptions from the library should be expanded** to enable access to scholarship and online materials that are critical to the ongoing research and teaching at LSU. This is the most critical shortcoming that the report identifies in the libraries resource offerings.
- In close cooperation with the Dean of the Libraries, **a long-term strategy needs to be developed to ensure that the Libraries can rebuild and grow the collections in a comprehensive manner.** Investments in library collections must be reliable and constant over a long-term in order to build collections that are up-to-date and in sync with ongoing scholarship, that provide reliable access to scholarly editions or translations, and that can serve as repositories for engaging students not just in current debates, but also in the history of ideas, and not just in science, politics, business, and culture within the US, but from around the world.
- **More library staff needs to be hired, especially staff with discipline-specific expertise,** to process the acquisitions and maintain the added subscriptions.

1. Motivation and Method of Report

The Library Advisory Committee followed the recent success of the LSU Library administration in securing a new subscription deal with Elsevier. To minimize steep and rapidly increasing cost of a large subscription package which bundles about 2000 of all journals published by Elsevier, the Dean of the LSU Libraries and his staff negotiated a thoroughly slimmed down subscription package of 197 high-usage or critically important journals. In order to ensure that the remaining journals not included in the subscription remain accessible for researchers at LSU, the library offers an expedited inter-library-loan service for just these titles. They promise that any request for an inter-library loan article from non-subscribed Elsevier journals will be made available to researchers within two hours. Reports from faculty users indicate that the turn-around can be as fast as 20 minutes.

As much as we applaud the efforts to make efficient use of the limited financial resources available to the LSU Libraries and as much as we admire the savvy negotiations that the Dean and his staff carried out, the debate surrounding the deal gives much reason to pause and wonder. The two-hour wait for materials that LSU no longer subscribes to has been cause of anxiety and concern among many colleagues from the fields of Math, Natural Sciences, Engineering, and the Social Sciences where Elsevier publishes. Numerous conversations with concerned faculty have taken place and deans as well as leading university administrators broadcasted messages reminding everyone of the overall benefits of this deal and reassuring them of the library's dedication to meet all research needs, with waiting times of no more than two hours.

The committee's deliberations on this issue unearthed a stark difference in how researchers from different disciplines can rely on library resources. For faculty members in most of the Arts and Humanities a mere two-hour wait is an unimaginable luxury. Especially in the smaller fields that deal with languages other than English, the vast majority of research resources are either entirely unavailable or accessible only after extensive waiting times. In the Humanities and Arts, so the consensus of the committee discussions, student researchers and faculty members regularly adopt a fair number of workarounds that make up for substantial shortcomings in the research support from the LSU Libraries.

To substantiate these committee impressions, we set out to survey the situation among colleagues in the Department of World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures as well as the Department of French Studies. These two departments are outliers, even within the Humanities, as, in these fields, faculty and student researchers heavily rely on materials written in languages other than English or published in countries other than the US and Canada. As such research materials and databases that are relevant to them are of use to a limited contingent of members of the wider LSU community. As a result, these two disciplines are more prone to fall prey to budget cuts than other Humanities disciplines. Precisely because these departments are outliers, they provide a concentrated outlook into the daily struggles that many people conducting research in the Humanities and Arts at LSU likely experience.

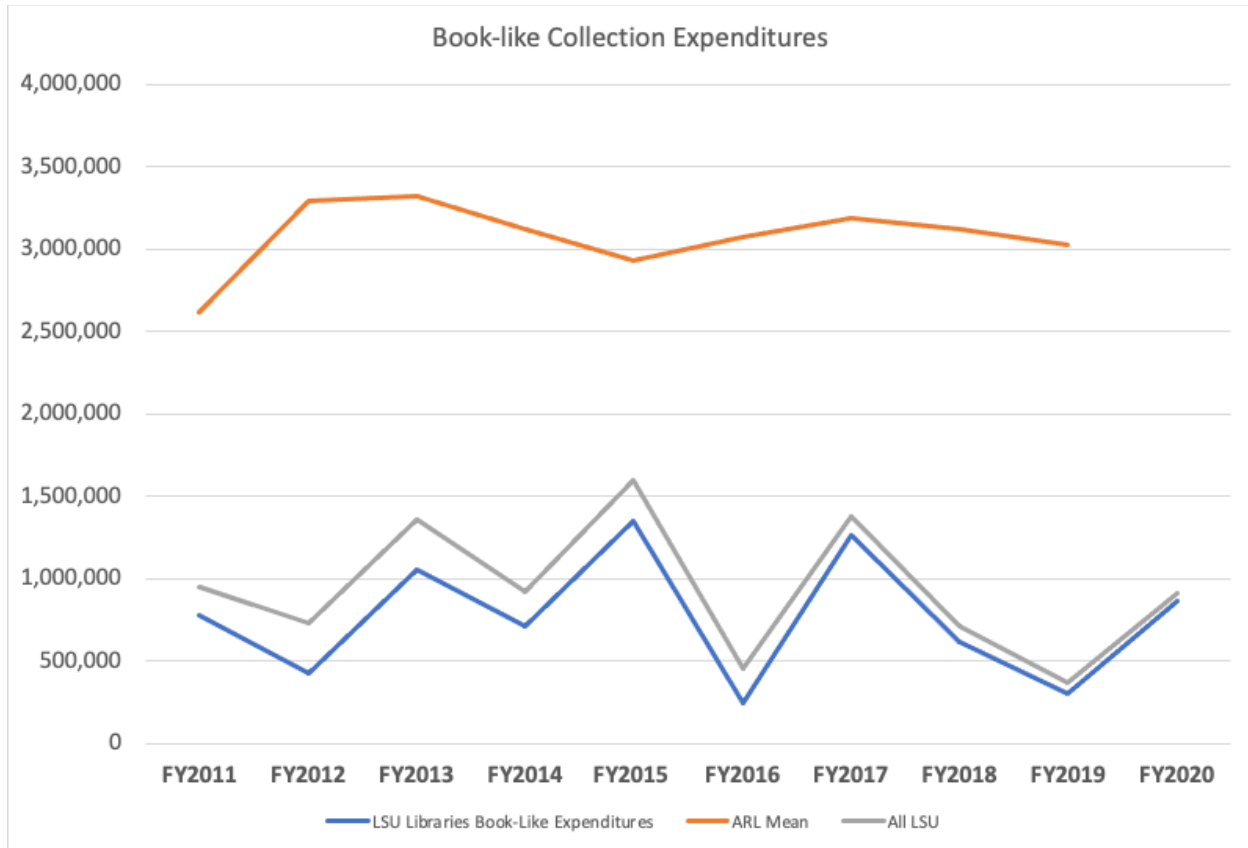
For this report, we asked colleagues in WLLC and French: "Do you experience lack of research materials at the LSU library? If yes, how does this affect your research and teaching?" Here are the results of thirteen conversations. Since we guaranteed anonymity to everyone, we quote without giving names.

2. Context: Library Expenses over the Past 10 Years

Years of budget cuts and cost reductions, of efficiency measures and funding battles have reduced the LSU Libraries to a bare-bones operation. Even after the additional influx due to the reduction of Elsevier subscription fees, LSU spent only \$373,409 on printed books and monographs—media that continue to be central to all Humanities scholarship. In 2020, the SEC Mean of Total Library Expenditure was almost \$25 Mio, LSU's expenditure came to a mere 60% of that. LSU's investment into the library stands at just about 25% of what our peer Texas A&M spends. The contrast is even starker with respect to expenses on books: the mere \$373,409 LSU invested in the book collections are only at 26% of the SEC Mean, 10% of the Texas A&M expenditure.

SEC			
Rank order by book expenditures			
Rank		Total Library Expenditures	Books
1	TEXAS A&M	48,107,898	3,618,738
2	VANDERBILT	35,094,366	2,948,101
3	SOUTH CAROLINA	24,254,106	2,109,351
4	GEORGIA	30,126,288	2,066,176
5	TENNESSEE	30,074,049	1,319,392
6	FLORIDA	35,161,790	1,303,270
7	KENTUCKY	22,846,210	1,170,147
8	ALABAMA	21,761,848	1,085,716
9	Mississippi	\$15,880,607	\$899,772
10	AUBURN	15,203,203	736,112
11	MISSOURI	18,753,808	697,693
12	LOUISIANA STATE	14,669,172	373,409
13	Mississippi State	\$12,364,903	\$190,408
		24,946,019	
Mean			1,424,483

This spending pattern has been going on for many years and the result is that librarians have been and continue to be unable to properly maintain and curate collections according to standards necessary at a Research One institution. Over the last ten years, LSU's library expenses on books have been consistently far below the mean spending of the American Research Libraries, comprised of the 116 largest research libraries in the US/Canada, in 2016 even as low as 10% of the ARL Mean.



3. Gaps in the Collections and Inter Library Loan

As budget cuts caused ever more and ever larger gaps in the collections over the last two decades at LSU, Inter Library Loan has become the go-to solution. Everyone interviewed for this report is grateful that ILL supplies them with critical materials. Without it, they would not be able to do most of their work. It provides access to collections on other campuses and is a good way to share limited resources, yet it still complicates and delays the work on projects. In the Humanities, there are no two-hour turn arounds for requests. The waiting time runs typically two to ten days for electronic deliveries and up to three weeks for hard-copy materials. When hard-copy material arrives, it is only available for a few weeks, sometimes as little as three or four.

This is how the heavy reliance on ILL negatively affects research and teaching: Scholars in WLLC and French learn to calibrate projects carefully around the time when the library service makes these titles available to them. Especially during hectic mid- and end-of-semester times, this can be difficult. It makes it impossible to have many different materials available at the same time for large projects. Occasional mishaps like incomplete or incorrect deliveries of materials written in languages library staffers don't know or not well enough further exacerbate the difficulties. Often the waiting and additional times are simply not feasible and faculty members retreat to one of the workarounds listed below.

It is important to note that ILL does often not work when it comes to making teaching materials available for a course, unless instructors are willing to violate copyright laws by copying a title in its entirety—which many admittedly end up doing. To give an example: A colleague teaching French uses commented editions of literary texts for his courses. These editions have been curated to help new

readers, especially students, to understand historical context and outdated language. As commented editions are more expensive and circulate in addition to texts without commentary, the LSU Libraries often do not procure them for the collections. A copy retrieved through ILL cannot remedy this gap: It cannot be made accessible to students for the duration of an entire semester unless the faculty member violates the copyright law and spends endless hours of labor on making it available by copying or scanning in its entirety. The same is true for working with new translations of works that have been translated before.

Of course, instructors have the option to contact their library liaison to request materials if they feel that they need to have specific titles available on campus. At the moment, communication between the departments and their liaison occurs on an ad-hoc basis and does not always seem to be working very well. According to the Dean of the Libraries, liaisons report too little engagement from faculty members. On the other hand, faculty members feel poorly served by their liaisons. For the faculty, the problem is two-fold: First, many requests are not granted. Second, the time between sending the request and getting access to the material is typically somewhere between three and six months, although one person in WLLC reported that she once had to wait for a full two years. Such long waiting times make it very difficult to rely on it.

4. The Biggest Problem: Lack of Database Access

The most significant result of this informal survey is that by far the biggest shortcoming of the library resources is the lack of database access. For scholars of literatures from around the world it is critical to be in touch with research outside of the US, yet the few databases that are available at LSU often yield little to no results when it comes to foreign language publications.

To illustrate this point, here is one prominent example: A current research project deals with a newly emerging field in German studies. A search for the topic on *the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association* (MLA)—a database LSU subscribes to—yielded a total of 4 results. The same search on the German *Bibliographie der deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaften* (BDSL, the premier German database in this field) yielded 19 pages filled with 280 bibliographic references. The Library is not in a position to subscribe to this database, not enough funds available, too little demand on campus. The search mentioned was conducted during a research stay at a German archive—using other libraries is the only way for an LSU faculty member to access such a resource. Individual researchers could not even pay for it personally since this database, like many others, only offers institutional subscriptions. Another example is an encyclopedia called *Kritisches Lexikon der Gegenwartsliteratur* (KLG). This is to German Studies what Wikipedia is to popular science and trivia. It is *the* place to go for a quick overview, it provides all the essential basics about writers from the 20th and 21st century. Again, the Library cannot subscribe to this database. Several researchers in WLLC report having paid out of pocket for databases like this.

These are two examples, but every single person interviewed shared the exact same complaint. One scholar in Arabic Studies is trying just as desperately to have the subscription to the *Encyclopedia of Islam* updated or get access to a Hebrew language database. Faculty members in Spanish would love to use the *Hispanic American Periodicals Index (HAPI)*, and the list goes on. What is more there are numerous important authors whose complete works are published in online databases—critical tools for anyone wishing to work in the Digital Humanities—but they simply don't have access to them at LSU. Scholars in WLLC and French desperately need these databases that are specific to each of their area

studies. The difficulties in accessing databases and the limitations it places on their abilities to survey existing scholarship are severe impediments to both research and teaching.

Faculty members and student researchers in these departments all must learn to work around these gaps in order to conduct our research in spite of the dire lack of resources. Yet such work-around solutions do often not work for teaching. The lack of resources creates a serious obstacle for both graduate and undergraduate students hoping to acquire research methods. One faculty member asked with a sincere expression of exasperation, “How can I teach my undergraduates any research methods, if they cannot access the databases? They need to learn how to navigate and select from them, but how can I do this if they never get to the data? It’s impossible!” Another one admits that he doesn’t even try to attract undergraduate students for research projects because he does not think that they can realistically complete them given the lack of resources on campus.

5. Workarounds

Workaround 1: Extending Project Time

Arranging work schedules around long waiting times is a skill that people in WLLC and French hone and refine as best as they can at LSU. It is the first skill they must teach undergraduate and graduate advisees. Of course, many advise undergraduate or graduate theses despite these difficulties, and one of the first skills they teach the students is to find workarounds. A faculty member in Spanish who regularly oversees undergraduate research projects, reports that she requires students to start their projects scheduled for the Fall semester in March or April such that they can gather materials over the summer. That is the only way in which they can complete the project in time, she explains. That also means that the advisor must invest her time well before the onset of her assignments to enable the projects. In the same way, graduate students must learn to organize their work around availability of materials. A former LSU graduate student working as instructor in WLLC explained: “I had to get every single title for my dissertation through Inter Library Loan. LSU did not have any of the things I needed.”

It is important to note that there are many instances when arranging schedules around availability of material is not working. Especially with large projects that require a wealth of materials or for the purpose of making scholarship accessible as course material, ILL often does not work. Repeated ILL borrowing of the same materials is both expensive (to the Library) and ineffective. To quickly get access to library materials without the unpredictable waiting times and to be able to use it repeatedly and long-term, faculty have taken to adopt other workarounds.

Workaround 2: Traveling to Other Libraries

A shocking finding of this survey is that virtually everyone in WLLC and French heavily relies on *other* universities to do the research they hired to do at LSU. Several faculty members use their personal travel and research trips to make up for the lack of resources at LSU. One person reports that he regularly drives to New Orleans to use the libraries of Tulane University. Another one frequently travels to New York where she tries to access library materials where possible. Sometimes she returns empty handed, since she cannot afford to pay the fees university libraries charge for those who are not part of their respective communities. Another person pays for the library fees of every major New York library to enable research she conducts while visiting the Northeast. Many rely on their old alma maters where they attended graduate school as they often grant alumni (at least some) library privileges. Traveling to places like the University of Chicago, Harvard, Stanford or UCLA during summer research or sabbaticals is often the only way in which they can quickly access the resources they need and ensure that they get

the correct ones. A faculty member in French regularly uses her conference travel to visit other university libraries, adding whenever she can a day of travel just for that purpose. Someone from WLLC reports that the biggest advantage of his last research stay at a university in California was that he downloaded a whole lot of e-books which he would have had to pay for otherwise. “It saved me thousands of dollars,” he reassured us—we would like to add, probably also weeks of project time.

Workaround 3: Paying Out Of Pocket

Numerous faculty members report that they buy materials which they cannot get on campus in the time frame and for the duration they need it, thus using their relatively modest incomes to subsidize their research and teaching. With very few exceptions of endowed professorships, scholars in WLLC and French do not receive research allocations from the university or the college, personal funds are all they have at their disposal. In fact, one person stated outright: “I personally buy every single title that comes out in my field because I know that the library will never get it.” Another faculty member estimates that she spends about \$500 annually on materials for research and teaching. We do not know how common personal purchases are, but find it alarming that in so many instances faculty members and even some graduate students use their salaries or modest stipends to subsidize their work at LSU.

Many of the expenses people cover out of pocket concern database access as ILL cannot make up for this gap in library services. Faced with the need to gather up-to-date information on publications and scholarship, many pay from personal funds. At the end of the day, they cannot allow a paywall to become a roadblock on their path to graduation, tenure, or the next promotion.

Workaround 4: Cultivating a Culture of Low Expectations

What would happen, we wonder, if faculty members in the Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Math and Engineering were told that the Libraries would no longer make available to them several databases critical to their research and that from now on, they would be personally responsible to either travel to some place where they can access them or pay out of pocket to get access? What would they say if the waiting time for Inter Library Loans would on average be two weeks instead of a mere two hours? After listening to the debates about the recent Elsevier deal, we suspect that the outcry would be enormous.

So why, we wondered, is there no such outcry among Humanities and Arts scholars? We found that apathy seems to be a common coping mechanism. Faculty members in WLLC and French mentor one another with statements such as: “Don’t count on the library for your research. I don’t even check the library catalog anymore. I just go straight to World Cat and order everything through Inter Library Loan.” They simply accept it as a given and unavoidable fact that research materials are hard to get. What is more they specifically instruct new colleagues never to expect anything from the Library.

When conducting research, people in WLLC and French look for alternative solutions and make peace with the fact that the cumbersome process of Inter Library Loans is the only option. No one wants to be known as troublemaker or dissident. Rallying for funds at the library seems not worth the effort. They think that they already know the answer all too well—negative—so why bother? They just see that they somehow conduct their research and get it published, no matter what the cost. That they spend large amounts of personal funds along the way and that week-long waiting times complicate their work and unnecessarily extend the duration of their projects is maybe too embarrassing to admit or maybe too tiresome to lament for the umpteenth time. The general attitude seems to be that it is best to keep expectations very low when it comes to research support at LSU.

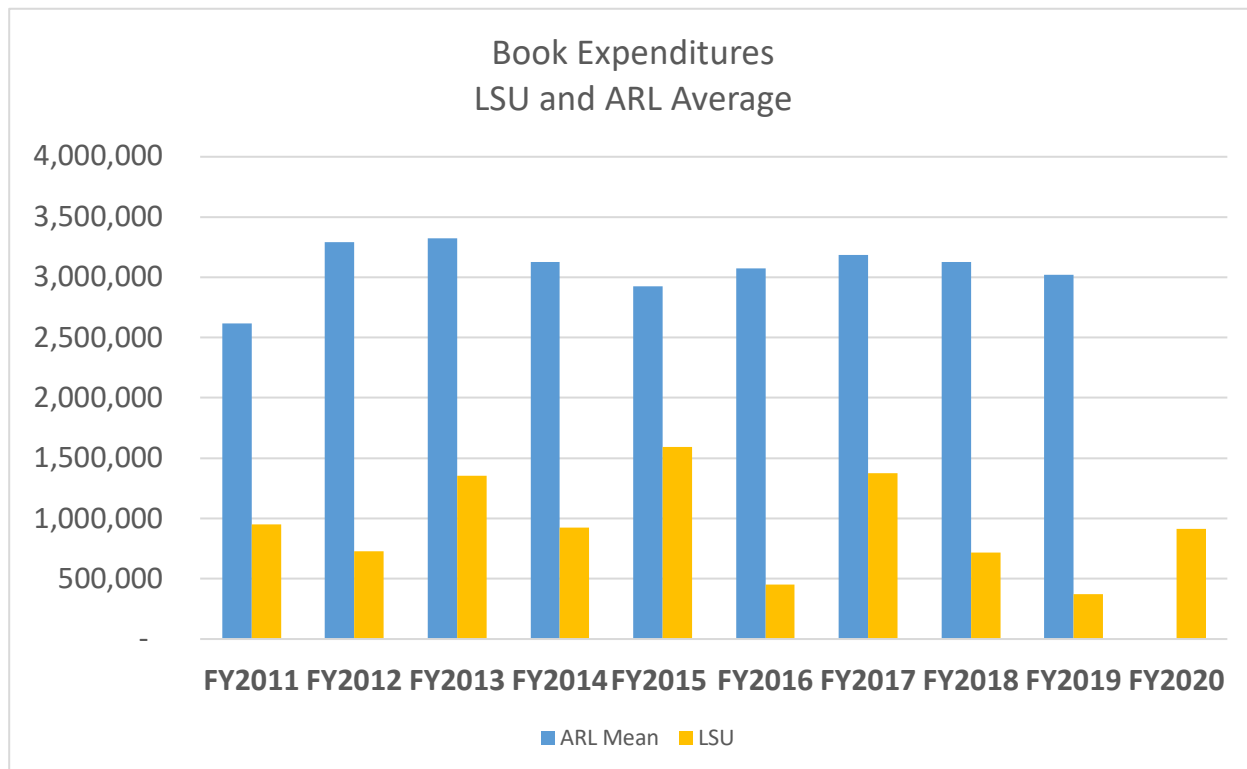
Appendix

Monographs and Book Resources at LSU: Data Analysis and Needs Estimate

Library data documents the need for increased book funding, and in particular for books in humanities and social science disciplines.

Longitudinal data¹ indicate that LSU Libraries' book expenditures are about a third of the *average* of Association of Research Libraries (ARL), [Figure 1]. No institutional factors account for this disparity.

Figure 1



The best quantitative measure of the adequacy of book collections is interlibrary loan borrowing data. When viewed in the aggregate, LSU's borrowing data is the rare category in which LSU closely approximates the ARL average. [Figure 2] The steep rise in borrowing beginning in 2018 is a result of improvements in our systems that make it much easier for faculty to submit ILL requests. Some of the increase may also be due to journal cancellations. The takeaway in Figure 2 is that while LSU lags well behind its peers in every other measure of effectiveness, it generates as many borrowing requests as the ARL average.

¹ Charts include the ten most recent years of LSU data, including FY20. The most recent benchmark data from ARL is from FY19, hence the charts include only nine years.

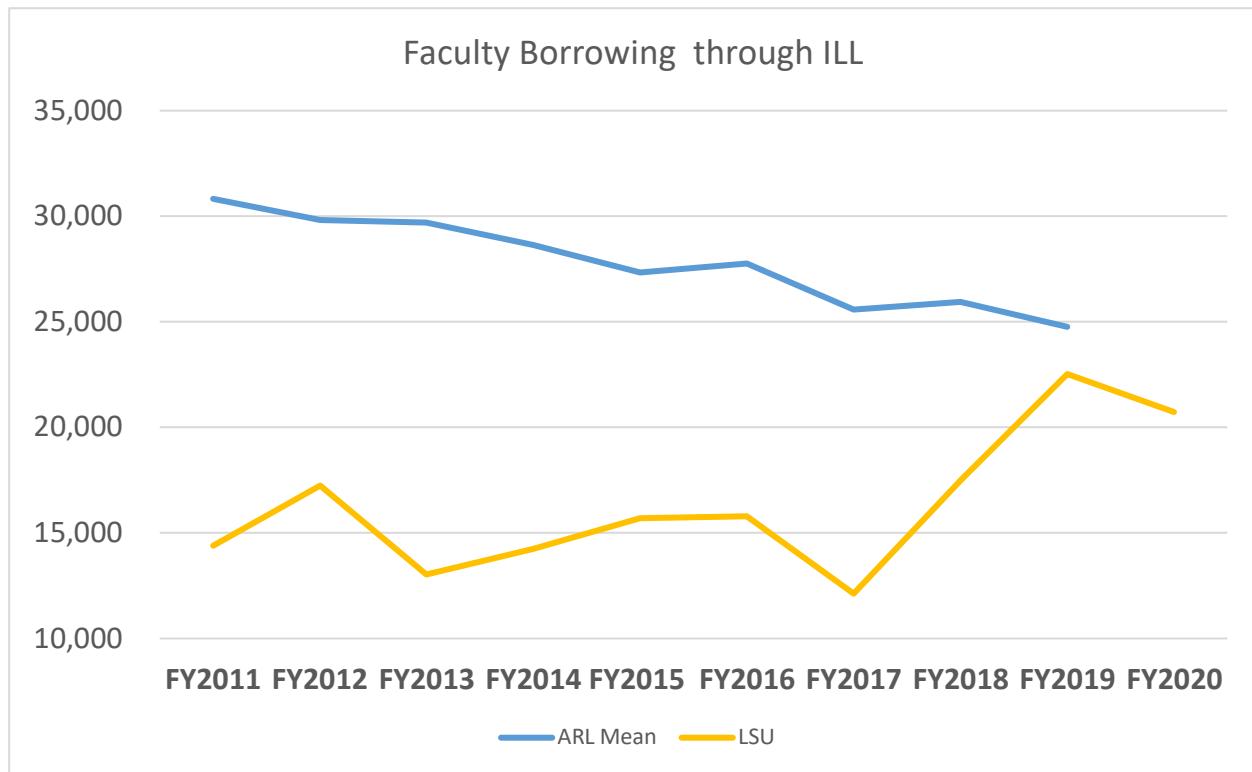


Figure 2

Turning to LSU’s internal ILL transaction data, we find that faculty borrowing requests skew heavily towards the humanities and social sciences disciplines. For example, the College of Humanities & Social Sciences accounts for only 19% of total faculty at the university, but 35% of all ILL requests. The situation in the College of Human Sciences & Education is somewhat worse, in that 7% of University faculty generate 14% of requests. The message here is that while LSU’s low level of book expenditure affects all disciplines, it naturally has a disproportionate impact on book-based disciplines.

At the department level, nine HSS departments place among the top twenty for per capita ILL borrowing. HSE accounts for three of the top four departments.

Special mention is due to those of our faculty whose research depends on scholarship in foreign languages. These faculty are almost entirely dependent on ILL because the Libraries purchases very little such material.

Conversely, the ILL data suggest that on a per faculty basis, STEM colleges and departments make less use of ILL, suggesting that our book collections more adequately meet their needs. It should be noted that STEM faculty are heavy users of book collections, though that use is almost entirely concentrated on ebooks.

A short-term solution

A permanent increase in the Libraries' book budget of \$650,000 would bring that line up to \$1,000,000. When combined with foundation-based book funds, the Libraries would better meet faculty and student needs, and bring LSU's expenditure level to half of the ARL average, up from one third.

That \$650,000 permanent increase would need to be supplemented by an annual increase in the amount of the inflation on our journal subscriptions. This amounts to approximately \$300,000/year. It is the chronic absence of an inflation adjustment that forces the Libraries to divert book funds to pay for journals.