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## E-Books in Academic Libraries

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# 21 | E-Reader Checkout Program

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 2013, the Franklin D. Schurz Library at Indiana University South Bend was awarded a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant from the Indiana State Library to launch an E-Reader Checkout Program to provide students with the opportunity to enhance digital literacy and technology skills and to encourage reading. With the grant, the library purchased 10 electronic reading devices and a selection of leisure reading e-books. The authors describe the processes involved in implementing and assessing the E-Reader Checkout Program, as well as some of the challenges they encountered and how they addressed each challenge.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Franklin D. Schurz Library is an academic library serving the faculty, staff, and students of Indiana University South Bend (IU South Bend). IU South Bend is a comprehensive public university in north central Indiana with an enrollment of 7,860 undergraduate and 630 graduate students. The library's mission is to advance excellence in teaching, learning, and research by providing access to, and facilitating the use of, a quality collection of comprehensive information resources.

In spring 2013, the authors (the head of Library Web Services and the director of Collection Services, respectively) applied for an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Indiana State Library. The grant proposal

outlined how the library wanted to purchase various e-readers to achieve three main objectives through an E-Reader Checkout Program.

## **PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

There were three main objectives to the implementation of the E-Reader Checkout Program at the Library. The first objective was to increase the digital literacy of students at IU South Bend. At IU South Bend, 48% of students receive financial aid. To finance their college educations, 75% of IU South Bend students work. Among those students who work, 25% of them work full time. With limited financial resources, most students at IU South Bend are not able to afford new technologies. As a result, many students become victims of the digital divide. The grant provided the library with the means to provide electronic readers so students could increase their knowledge and skills with digital devices.

Second, librarians wanted to encourage leisure reading by providing popular e-books. The library's primary collection development focus is to build a collection that supports academic programs. With a limited budget, acquisitions focus on academic and scholarly material. Popular material for leisure reading is added primarily through gift donations or at the request of faculty for instruction purposes. The grant provided the library with the funds to add nearly 400 leisure reading electronic books.

Lastly, the E-Reader Checkout Program offered a third indirect goal that supported the first goal of increasing digital literacy. The e-readers provided IU South Bend faculty and students with the opportunity to explore the use of e-readers with electronic textbooks as a new tool for teaching and learning. In August 2009, Indiana University initiated an eTexts initiative that includes digital versions of textbooks and other educational resources. Contents of the eTexts are available in multiple electronic formats through computer browsers and e-readers such as the Kindle, Nook, or iPad.

## **PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Funding Sources**

In July 2013, the Schurz Library was awarded the LSTA grant in the amount of \$5,764 from the Indiana State Library. The grant enabled the library to purchase several e-readers, equipment for the e-readers, and e-books for

the E-Reader Checkout Program. The library also contributed \$1,000 to purchase e-books for the program.

### **Purchase of Equipment and E-Books**

Librarians bought 10 e-readers for the program: two iPad Minis, three Kindle Fires, three Nook HD+s, and two Kindle Paperwhite 3Gs. To protect the e-readers from damage, protective covers and carrying cases also were purchased. Power kits/adapters enabled patrons to recharge the e-reader as needed. To keep the screens clean, cleaning pads were added. Shortly after launching the E-Reader Checkout Program, program administrators realized that screen protectors also were needed. In addition, a plastic tag attached to each carrying case enabled circulation staff to identify the corresponding device in each bag quickly and easily.

Librarians consulted standard lists of popular books to select titles to load on the devices: Goodreads College Book Lists, the *New York Times* fiction best sellers, and Amazon Kindle e-book best sellers. Since the launch of the E-Reader Checkout Program, librarians bought e-books from Amazon (351 titles), ebrary (40), and EBSCOhost (50). In addition, they downloaded 98 additional free titles from Amazon. Although the majority of the e-book titles were fiction, some nonfiction titles including cookbooks, graphic novels, and DIY books were included. Patrons can discover the Amazon e-book titles by consulting the E-Reader Checkout Program LibGuide at <http://libguides.iusb.edu/ereader>. E-book titles purchased from ebrary and EBSCOhost can be found using the library catalog.

### **Staff Collaboration**

Launching the E-Reader Checkout Program required collaboration among different library departments. The business operations manager bought all the equipment and Amazon e-books, as well as tracked all of the program's financial transactions. The head of Public Relations and Outreach created marketing materials and then promoted the E-Reader Checkout Program through different communication portals. Acquisitions staff ordered the ebrary and EBSCOhost e-books; cataloging staff cataloged the e-books and equipment. The circulation supervisor established the circulation policy for the e-readers and trained student assistants in the circulation procedures for the devices. In addition to checking out the e-readers, the student

assistants also reminded and encouraged patrons to fill out a paper survey about their experience when they returned the e-readers.

### **Circulation Policy and Checkout Kit**

E-readers circulate from the library's circulation desk. The loan period for all e-readers is two weeks, without renewal. The library charges patrons a late fee of \$10 per day if devices become overdue. To protect the e-readers from damage, e-readers must be returned at the circulation desk rather than through library book drops.

When patrons check out an e-reader, they receive an e-reader checkout kit that contains the following:

- E-reader with protective cover
- Charger
- Cleaning pad
- Instructions on how to connect to IUSecure (the wireless network at IU South Bend)
- User experience survey
- Checklist of all components in the checkout kit
- Carrying case with plastic tag

### **Marketing and Promotion**

Librarians used several different avenues to promote the E-Reader Checkout Program. In September 2013, they initiated a prelaunch marketing campaign during GameOn, a campus-wide IT event. The prelaunch marketing campaign not only raised awareness of the upcoming E-Reader Checkout Program among a large number of faculty, staff, and students, but also generated continued inquiries about the program after the GameOn event. In addition to this prelaunch campaign, a display in the library lobby showcased the different types of e-readers and e-book titles.

Librarians placed table tents, flyers, and a large poster throughout the library to inform patrons of the new service. To reach campus constituents who were not frequent visitors of the library, information about the E-Reader Checkout Program appeared on the library's website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, library blog, library newsletter, the *Daily Titan* (the official e-mail communication tool of IU South Bend), and on a number of digital signs across

the campus. The head of Public Relations and Outreach also promoted the program directly to students through the Student Government Association. Since using e-readers for eText was an indirect goal, all promotional materials and activities focused on e-readers and the leisure reading collection. None of the promotional material contained information related to eText.

## **CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED**

Librarians encountered five major challenges while implementing the E-Reader Checkout Program. An early challenge was the need for protective screen covers as previously mentioned. Although not every issue was so easily resolved as this one, the librarians also were able to address some of the other issues they encountered.

In launching the E-Reader Checkout Program, librarians discovered that not only did the faculty, staff, and students show interest in checking out e-readers, but also many community members inquired about checking out the devices. As a public institution, the library is open to Indiana residents. However, because the intent of the LSTA grant was to buy the devices for IU South Bend students, staff, and faculty, circulation was restricted to that population.

The third challenge involved product registration of the Nooks. To register a Nook and ensure that it functions properly, Barnes & Noble requires a default credit card on file. To prevent users from buying additional material through the Nook, librarians used a reloadable credit card as the default credit card on file. Using the child profile feature also established a customized (restrictive) profile for patrons.

The fourth issue concerned the e-books' licensing restrictions. Each Amazon Kindle e-book can only be shared among six devices at once. Librarians needed a way to make the e-books available to all 10 devices without making the titles device-specific. The solution was to place the e-books in the Amazon cloud. From the cloud, all e-books are available for download and can be browsed on all the devices. Since the Kindle readers already have access to these e-books, the Kindle App was installed on the Nook and iPad mini readers, so users can browse the e-books in the cloud. Selected e-books can be downloaded as long as they are within the six-user limit. Current use patterns indicate that it is unlikely that more than six patrons will attempt to download the same e-book simultaneously.

The e-readers and Kindle e-books are registered to one Amazon account. To confirm that the library was not violating the Kindle e-book user agreement, the authors contacted Amazon first by e-mail and then by telephone to discuss concerns and ensure library compliance. According to both the e-mail and telephone conversations with a Kindle customer service representative, lending e-readers with Kindle e-books to multiple users in a library setting is no different than an individual customer letting a friend borrow a Kindle. Because the purchased e-readers all are tied to a single Amazon account, sharing the purchased Kindle e-books among those e-readers connected with that account is also an acceptable practice. However, if the library were to make the library-purchased Kindle e-books available to users on their personal Kindles, it would be a violation of the user agreement. The Kindle service representative also saw no violation in adding catalog records for the Kindle e-books to the online catalog to enhance discovery as long as the Kindle e-books remain accessible only on the e-reader devices registered to the Amazon account used to purchase the e-books (Amazon Customer Service, personal communications, January 23, 2015).

The final challenge related to the university's tax-exempt status. As a public institution, Indiana University is not allowed to pay sales tax on any purchase. When buying e-books from the Nook store, there is no option for waiving the sales tax during the checkout process. The Library Business Operations manager had extra work requesting refunds of the sales tax from Barnes & Noble. The initial intention was to buy e-books from both Barnes & Noble and Amazon, but because of the sales tax difficulty with Barnes & Noble, librarians eventually decided to buy e-books only through Amazon because that website allows tax-exempt purchases.

## **PROGRAM ASSESSMENT**

Since the E-Reader Checkout Program launched in November 2013, patrons checked out the e-readers 116 times over the course of nearly a year. Table 1 provides the circulation statistics for each type of e-reader through mid-October 2014.

By June 22, 2014, 20 patrons had completed the user experience survey for the E-Reader Checkout Program. Most patrons (83%) used the e-readers to read books, and of these 72% read fiction. When asked about

**Table 1.** Device checkout, November 2013–October 2014.

Type of device	Total number of checkouts
Kindle Paperwhite	12
Nook HD+ Tablet	29
Kindle Fire HD	38
iPad Mini	37

the e-book leisure collection provided by the Schurz Library, almost 70% of respondents indicated that they either were satisfied or very satisfied. In addition, 86% indicated they either were likely or very likely to recommend the E-Reader Checkout Program to others. The survey data also indicated that the *Daily Titan* was the most successful marketing channel for the E-Reader Checkout Program. Over 50% of users indicated learning about the E-Reader Checkout Program primarily through the *Daily Titan*, followed by word of mouth (28%) and the library newsletter (17%).

Staff notified the head of Library Web Services each time a device was returned; using the Amazon app, she recorded the titles and reading progress for each downloaded e-book. Because circulation student assistants sometimes failed to notify the librarian when the e-readers were returned, detailed use data from only 68 of 97 checkouts (70%) were recorded. During these the 68 checkouts, patrons downloaded 230 e-books and read 161 of them. Table 2 shows the breakdown of how much or how far patrons read when they used e-books through the Amazon app. The data show that most users read less than 30% of a particular e-book; however, it is interesting to note that 12% of patrons read over 90% of an e-book.

**Table 2.** E-book use, November 2013–October 2014.

Portion of book read	Percentage
Read < 90%	12%
60% < Read < 89%	4%
30% < Read < 59%	9%
30% < Read	75%



The recorded data reveal that 134 unique titles were downloaded to e-readers. The most frequently downloaded titles were:

1. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*
2. *The Hunger Games*
3. *Catching Fire*
4. *Mockingjay*
5. *Artemis Fowl*
6. *Easy Vegetarian Recipes*
7. *Fifty Shades of Grey*
8. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*
9. *The Yiddish Policemen's Union: A Novel*
10. *Twilight*
11. *Water for Elephants: A Novel*

Library use data show that patrons viewed 4,732 e-book pages and downloaded 29 chapters over the course of a year. The library use data do not indicate how users accessed the titles. Librarians have not yet reviewed the EBSCOhost use data.

Patrons accessed the E-Reader Checkout Program LibGuide 240 times during the program's first year. LibGuide use data indicate that 52% of users searched for information about the program, for the device user guide, how to connect to IU Secure, and how to access the leisure reading collection. In searching the collection, 27% looked for information related to fiction titles, 9% looked for information related to nonfiction titles, and 5% looked for information related to graphic novels. The data show that fiction is more popular among users than nonfiction and graphic novels, suggesting that future purchases should focus on adding more fiction e-books.

## **PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

To determine user satisfaction with the E-Reader Checkout Program, librarians included a paper survey in each e-reader checkout kit. When users returned e-reader checkout kits, circulation student assistants reminded and encouraged them to fill out the user experience survey.

Survey responses demonstrate that the program succeeded in achieving the stated objectives. Specifically, some responses indicate that the e-readers were being used to access apps (28%) and browse the Internet

(66%). These activities indicate success in meeting the goal of increasing students' digital literacy. Survey responses also indicate interest in the program's exploration of the various e-readers on the market in order to make informed purchase decisions. Selected comments regarding the reasons users checked out a specific type of e-reader include:

- Just to try out the iPad.
- Wanted to try each kind.
- It was the last e-reader available.
- The other types were all checked out.
- To see which e-reader I liked the most for apps and reading.
- Looking to buy. Trying different options. Have an older Kindle [and] liked it.
- Because I have never used one before.
- Wanted to see how one works—I read a lot.
- Have a Nook, lower version, and wanted to compare/contrast.
- To try out prior to purchase.
- I heard good things about it and I wanted to try it.
- So that I could see if I'd like to purchase one for myself.
- To compare devices.

One of the indirect objectives for the E-Reader Checkout Program is enabling faculty and students to explore the use of e-readers and e-Texts as a new tool for teaching and learning. According to the survey, 17% of patrons used the e-readers to read eTexts. This use also supports the goal of increasing digital literacy. Since there was no promotional activity targeted for e-reader use for eTexts, the authors found it encouraging that patrons did use the devices to read eTexts.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

Although the grant program officially concluded in June 2014, the library continues to check out e-readers to IU South Bend faculty, staff, and students. Using the information gathered from the user experience survey, librarians plan to implement the following measures to promote further use of the E-Reader Checkout Program. First, implementing additional marketing campaigns will increase awareness of the E-Reader Checkout Program. Second, librarians will add records for all titles purchased from Amazon to the library's catalog, Indiana University Online Catalog (IUCAT), to

increase the discoverability of leisure materials available for the e-readers. Third, librarians will continue buying electronic leisure reading materials to sustain the leisure/recreational collection.

## **CONCLUSION**

More than 10 years of reductions to the monograph budget have made it increasingly difficult to support the purchase of academic/scholarly materials as well as leisure materials to encourage reading. With support from the LSTA fund, the faculty, staff, and students at IU South Bend now have access to an e-book leisure/recreational collection to meet their leisure reading needs. User comments confirm that the E-Reader Checkout Program is a welcome addition to the library's services.