

Winter 2016

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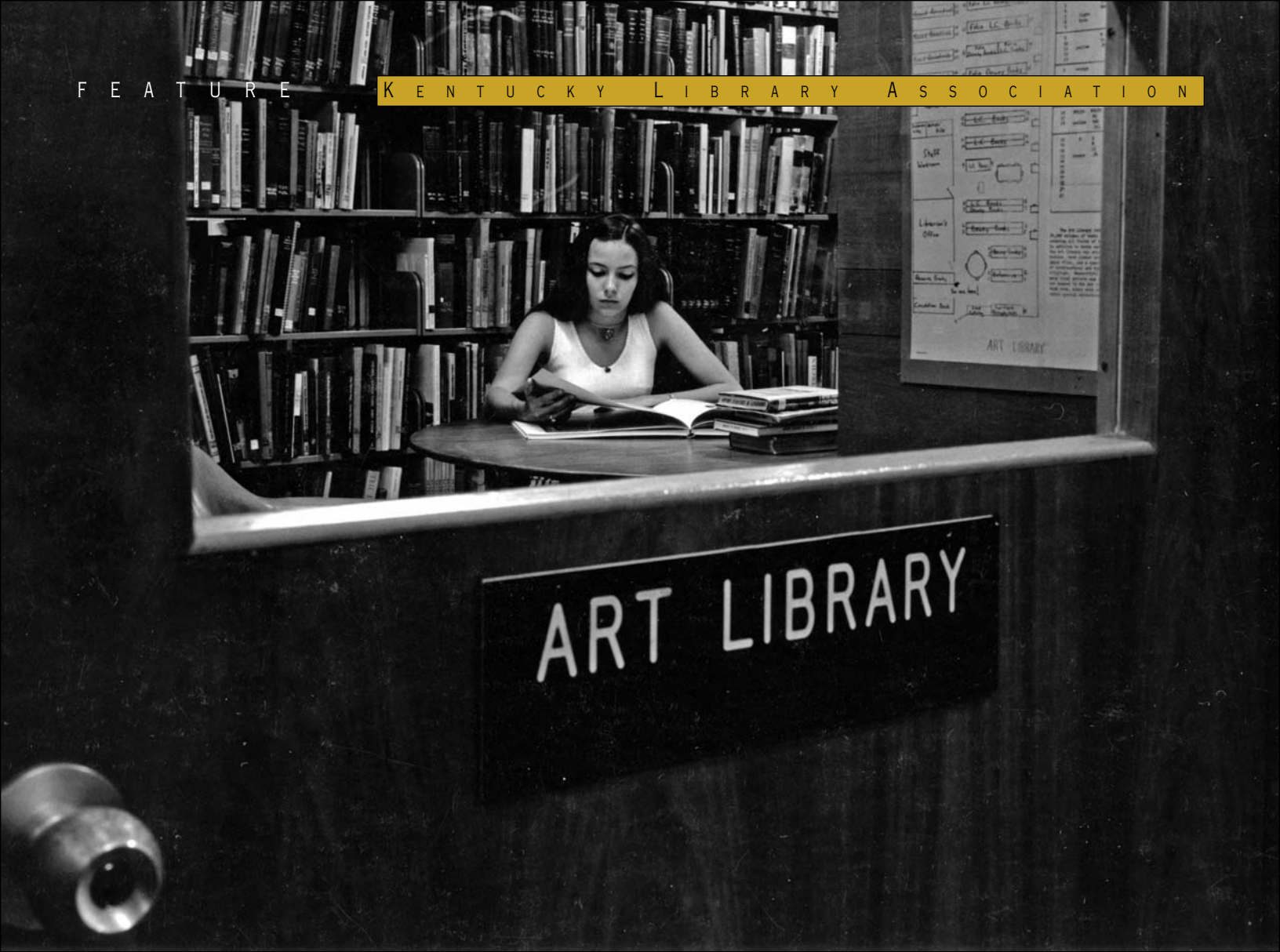
## Original Publication Information

This article was originally published in *Kentucky Libraries*, volume 80, number 1, in 2016.

## ThinkIR Citation

Carter, Sarah C., "Circulation policy for undergraduate students at Margaret Bridwell Art Library." (2016). *Faculty Scholarship*. Paper 49.

<http://ir.library.louisville.edu/faculty/49>



# CIRCULATION POLICY FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT MARGARET BRIDWELL ART LIBRARY

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ABOVE...A student seen studying through a window in the University of Louisville Art Library (undated photo). University Archives, University of Louisville.

**Abstract: This article examines the foundation of the Margaret Bridwell Art Library at the University of Louisville, and highlights the recent reversal of a 52-year circulation policy restricting undergraduate students from borrowing materials from the branch library. The article examines the rationale for the policy at the time it was implemented, and the recent circumstances leading to change. Factors considered during decision-making and implementation are also reviewed.**

In August 2015, the Margaret Bridwell Art Library at the University of Louisville reversed a 52-year-old policy prohibiting undergraduate students from borrowing books. This decision was much influenced by current best practices, which Dee Ann Allison writes about in her 2013 book, *The Patron-Driven Library*. She says that libraries “should take as their starting point the user not the collection, and should focus on the needs of the institution or community served by the library.” The particular visual research needs of emerging and practicing artists remain heavily dependent on printed materials (Hemmig; Mason and Robinson), and many of their activities, such as oil painting, sculpture, and printmaking, are not conducive to in-library study.

#### A BRIEF HISTORY

Sarah Fruehling established in her 2007 dissertation that the history of the Art Library collection at the University of Louisville was tied closely to the development of art education and historiography of the twentieth century. The separate art book collection dates to 1937, when the Art department chair, Justus Bier, collected art books from the University Library’s general collection and located them together in a room near the department’s offices (Moore). Twenty years later, the University Libraries moved into Schneider Hall, and the Art Library was formally established in the basement, under Art Librarian Margaret Bridwell’s management (Buie).

In 1966, the department began offering Master’s degrees in Creative Art and Art History, and a PhD program in Art History in 1991, spurring further collection development of art books (Grubola). In 2010, the Speed Art Museum consolidated holdings with Bridwell Art Library, strengthening the collection’s quality and quantity. The Art Library’s collection grew from 10,000 volumes in 1963 to 93,000 volumes in 2014.

University of Louisville librarians focused on theft and damage to books in annual reports from the sixties. Margaret Bridwell reports in the 1963 annual report to Head Librarian Evelyn Schneider that she felt a sense of responsibility to protect the books under her care. After consultation with Art department

faculty and Head Librarian Schneider, Margaret Bridwell states in the library’s annual report of 1963 that,

At an Art Department staff meeting...it was decided to make the Art Library a reference library. This decision was the result of long and careful deliberation and study. The many rare and out of print books in the Library and the exorbitant cost of art books were two of the numerous reasons why this decision was reached.

For the next 52 years, the library’s books did not circulate to undergraduates, unless they were given special permission to borrow the books for the duration of a class period.

Throughout the nineties, the art library began to allow more graduate students in arts-allied fields to borrow from the collection, eventually extending loan privileges to all graduate students enrolled at UofL. Bridwell Library Director Gail Gilbert wrote in her 1996 annual report, “During the Spring semester 5 English 102 classes were assigned projects in Art. Other classes with specific assignments in the Art Library included French, Sociology and Expressive Therapies. Increasingly other disciplines are using the Art Library.” In 2014 the Art Library directorship changed hands, and the incoming director began an exploration of past factors in policy decision making and future opportunities for change.

## RATIONALE FOR RETAINING LEGACY POLICY

In many ways, the legacy circulation policy turned the library into a reference collection, and users knew that in most cases, books would be on the shelves at their point of need. However, by granting circulation privileges to graduate students and faculty, the concept was not executed to the fullest extent possible. Maintaining a collection on the shelf for “just in case” use does not work when all users are not accorded the same privileges. Thanks to the security gate and a well-monitored reading room, recent incidents of mutilations or theft were scarce. Since theft and high replacement-value were cited in 1963 as top reasons for making the Art Library a reference collection, the new director embarked on two reviews of the collection. First, during the Fall and Spring semesters, an inaugural inventory project was undertaken of the major shelving location in the library. Less than one half of one percent of books were found to be missing, a far lower percentage than expected.

Second, replacement-value is an ongoing concern for librarians who purchase art texts. Many are published in limited runs, and once the edition is sold out, may only be available at higher, out-of-print prices from dealers. In conjunction with an intern, the librarian surveyed a sample of folio-sized exhibition catalogs. Of the 133 exhibition catalogs sampled from the folio stacks, the mean high replacement cost was \$198, and a median replacement cost was \$137. Low prices were also included in the analysis, and the low mean replacement cost was \$54, while the low median replacement cost was \$35. None of the volumes selected for pricing was unavailable on the secondary market.

**TABLE 1 – MEDIAN AND MEAN COST OF SAMPLED FOLIO**

	Median Replacement Cost/Volume	Mean Replacement Cost/Volume
Highest Price	\$198	\$137
Lowest Price	\$35	\$54

Based upon the review, the director decided to move 23 of the highest-valued items into the library’s restricted Rare Book Room.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHANGE

Referral of undergraduate students to alternative resources had become repetitive and time-consuming for staff members. Staff at Bridwell Art Library would routinely refer undergraduate students to the Ekstrom Library to borrow alternative sources. As the years went on, and duplicating services became more widely available, the staff offered photocopying and scanning as a means for students to take surrogates of materials from the library. Finally, Bridwell Library has for many years maintained a section of unassigned “student shelves” where any student may leave a pile of books with her name on them, for later reference upon her return to the library. The library does offer assigned carrels, but those have been restricted to graduate students and faculty studying within the Art department. The University of Louisville Libraries conducts biennial bench-

mark surveys of user satisfaction, and the Art Library had received negative comments regarding the circulation policy from undergraduate students in both the 2012 and 2014 results. This was corroborated by hallway surveys executed in the Spring of 2015, which showed that students were in favor of being allowed to check out materials.<sup>1</sup> Of the four libraries administered by the University Libraries at the University of Louisville, the Art Library was the only library to restrict circulation of the collection from undergraduates.<sup>2</sup> In comparison to these other libraries, the Art Library was not consistent in policy, often causing confusion to users who expected the Art Library to circulate materials in a similar manner.

Finally, when compared with 17 other peer institutions as defined by the Council on Postsecondary Education, the University of Louisville was the only library system that restricted circulation of art materials from undergraduate students.<sup>3</sup> The restrictive circulation policy also held true for the Art Library’s interlibrary loan policy, which deflected all stacks and folio materials from being requested through ILLiad. While Art Library users benefited from the ability to borrow books from other institutions, the Art Library was not reciprocating by lending bibliographic holdings.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The first step to changing the policy involved developing appropriate loan policies for patron types. Next, the new director gave stakeholders opportunities to contribute input and voice their concerns. She attended a department meeting to discuss the proposed policy, and welcomed feedback via email. Very few concerns were voiced, and some faculty members said undergraduate students should be limited to a certain number of check-outs. The director assured faculty members that she would take their concerns under consideration after the first year of implementation. Each faculty member received a printed handout with justification for the change, as well as a table of material types and a proposed check-out period and fines. Finally, due to the higher market price for art books, the Bridwell Library replacement-value was set higher than other libraries in the UofL system. Instead of \$80, the library charges \$175 for each of those lost items, as well as a processing fee. As Kahn recommends, Bridwell Library also decided to implement blocking of a student’s bursar account for unpaid charges. Additional review of volumes with fragile bindings and high replacement costs will take place over the coming year, and items will be moved to the restricted Rare Book Room as necessary.

Once the director got buy-in from stakeholders for the policy change, the next step was to implement these policies within the Integrated Library System. At the time, the University of Louisville Libraries were migrating from Voyager to WorldShare Management Services, so the opportunity to start with a new circulation policy matrix was ideal. In setting loan limits, the director decided to standardize the undergraduate loan length with the majority of other campus libraries. Books may now be borrowed for 28 days, and media circulation of DVDs and VHS tapes is offered for three days.<sup>4</sup> At the same time that loan priv-

ileges were set up for undergraduates, all UofL graduate students and faculty received longer check-out periods.

In Fall 2015, the Art Library launched a campaign publicizing the policy change in the student email news instrument, in the faculty email newsletter, and in an article for the University Libraries newsletter.<sup>5</sup> The library's in-house open reserves section was expanded to accommodate faculty who depend on accessing the collection for teaching, as well as students working on class projects, for which there may be limited print resources.

In addition to circulating materials to University of Louisville students, the Art Library began to participate in Interlibrary Loan lending of its collection. This necessitated an adjustment to art library staff work duties, as well as a review of procedures, which involved inter-departmental communication with the Ekstrom Library's ILL unit.

## CONCLUSION

In the intervening years between 1963 and 2015, a variety of factors developed that made retaining the legacy circulation policy a burden on our users. The nature of information delivery changed, with article indices and full-text articles becoming available through online access 24/7. Student study habits and service expectations morphed to include greater access to materials, while their lives became busier and more demanding. Under Bridwell Library's legacy circulation policy, staff spent much of their time explaining how to make copies or scans of books, where to find similar materials in the Ekstrom Library,

and how undergraduate students could leave piles of books on "student shelves" for later in-house study.

Margaret Bridwell observed in the library's annual report of 1963,

"Whereas, when the books circulated, the student came in the Library, checked out two or three books and left, he now stays in the Library and uses, perhaps, a whole shelf of books. Many books are used now which never before were taken off the shelves..."

While Bridwell found that the changed policy benefited the collection as well as student research habits of the mid-twentieth century, this restrictive circulation policy in the twenty-first century is not optimal for student success. Current library practice favors stronger instruction and outreach practices.

The Art Library staff must enact the new circulation policy with discretion, balancing the replacement costs of volumes against user needs. This discretion is most frequently exercised when approving or denying Interlibrary Loan requests. We hold many unique and out-of-print volumes that we decline to circulate outside of the University of Louisville user-base. Bridwell Art Library staff will continue to balance user needs with collection preservation, making the best effort to ensure that collections can be accessed by future generations of artists and scholars.

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## NOTE:

*Thank you to Maurini Strub for her partnership in surveying students regarding satisfaction with the legacy circulation policy. I also appreciate Elizabeth Loeffelman's assistance reviewing book costs during her internship. Finally, thank you to Gail Gilbert, who pointed me in the direction of relevant historical documents for this article.*

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## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Unpublished survey conducted with Maurini Strub, User Experience & Assessment Librarian at University of Louisville.
- <sup>2</sup> In addition to the Art Library, University Libraries consist of the Dwight Anderson Music Library, Kornhauser Health Sciences Library, and William Ekstrom Library. The Law Library at the University of Louisville is administered by the Louis Brandeis School of Law, and does not allow circulation of many of their materials.
- <sup>3</sup> As defined by the Council on Postsecondary Education: SUNY at Buffalo, SUNY at Stony Brook, Temple University, University of Alabama at Birmingham, University of California - Irvine, University of California - San Diego, University of Cincinnati - Main Campus, University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Iowa, University of New Mexico, University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, University of Pittsburgh - Main Campus, University of South Carolina at Columbia, University of South Florida, University of Utah, Virginia Commonwealth University, Wayne State University.
- <sup>4</sup> <http://louisville.edu/library/services/borrowing-privileges.html>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://louisville.edu/library/give/notes/fall2015/art/>

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