

# University of Wisconsin- Madison

Students, Faculty and  
Staff Get the Most Out of  
Interlibrary Loan



**WISCONSIN**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

One of the world's leading public universities describes 15 years of speed, savings and service with RapidILL.

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Joy Pohlman, Head of Interlibrary Loan at University of Wisconsin-Madison



*Photo by University Marketing / Communications*

## About University of Wisconsin-Madison

The University of Wisconsin System is a state-wide network of public universities. One of the world's premier public university systems, it has over 170,000 students enrolled at 26 campuses. The University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) is one of the system's leading public research universities and ranked one of America's Best Colleges among public universities (U.S. News & World Report, 2019). It is organized into 20 schools, with over 30,000 undergraduate and 14,000 graduate students. The university is also the largest employer in the state, with over 21,600 faculty and staff.

[UW-Madison's Interlibrary Loan Department](#) employs six ILL professionals for borrowing and lending, as well as 20 to 25 student employees, who equal six or seven FTEs in practice. The department processes about 200,000 borrowing and lending requests every year, which is about 5.5 times the average. UW-Madison Libraries, a centralized organization for the many libraries on the UW-Madison campus, collaborates closely with other BTAA libraries and all the UW System schools.

## The Challenge of Being Able to Do More

The UW-Madison Interlibrary Loan department wanted to do more.

Borrowing and lending operations were essentially siloed. On the borrowing side, the librarians saw that processes were costly and, at times, cumbersome. They sought a way to make them faster and more efficient. On the lending side, the librarians had good workflows in place; however, they felt the processes they developed were not being fully taken advantage of. Even with staffing levels that were not highly robust, however, the team was prepared to handle more.

UW-Madison Libraries needed a solution addressing both efficiency and capacity, which would in turn help expand the size and variety of collections easily available to students and faculty.

## Expanding Collections and Automated Workflows

As a unique resource-sharing system, leveraging various libraries' collections for peer-to-peer sharing, RapidILL provided UW-Madison access to an exponentially broader selection of resources at a very affordable price. To optimize its participation in the RapidILL network, UW-Madison's Interlibrary Loan department made sure the institution was a member of as many RapidILL "pods" as possible. "Pods" are groups of libraries created around common needs, locations, or academic criteria to support peer or consortial resource sharing.

RapidILL was integral to UW-Madison's workflow automation and optimization across Interlibrary Loan department activities. The streamlined workflows depend on tight integration between ILLiad, RapidILL, and Alma.

In effect, the UW-Madison ILL team never has to print a requested resource or even a request form, as the process is handled end-to-end within the RapidILL environment. RapidILL automatically inserts a coversheet for every file uploaded, ensuring it is all highly organized, intuitive and searchable.

Patron borrowing requests submitted through ILLiad are directly routed to RapidILL, which checks for the requested item locally. If it is located, then a RapidILL request goes to the library staff with the relevant call number and location information. If

not owned locally, then RapidILL automatically sends a request to a collaborating library for fulfillment. The item is then sent automatically to the patron and added to the local server through the RapidILL system, without any local library staff involvement along the way.

## RapidILL Keeps Patrons and Staff Pleasantly Surprised

“RapidILL is an incredibly easy system to use in every respect, from processing requests to collecting statistics,” according to Joy Pohlman, Head of Interlibrary Loan at University of Wisconsin-Madison. “We’ve been with RapidILL for about 15 years and we’ve been incredibly happy with it every step of the way.”

Along with the technology, Pohlman noted, this longstanding relationship between UW-Madison and RapidILL has been due to the RapidILL staff: “They are always very responsive with questions and updates.”

RapidILL keeps the UW-Madison ILL team at the top of their game:

- **Speed of fulfilment:** Automatic field population for requests received by the ILL team has slashed the time staff spend on fulfillment.
- **Unmediated fulfillment:** Borrowing from collaborating libraries can be handled end-to-end, from request to delivery to the patron, without mediation - another massive time-saving automation.
- **Security and stability:** Automated RapidILL processing eliminates the risk of delivery issues and human error.
- **Improved service:** Patrons benefit from better service and more timely fulfillment.
- **Institutional value:** RapidILL provides the most accurate data on turnaround times, volume, resource use, and more, for better analysis of collection value and acquisition strategies.
- **Cost savings:** Reduced turnaround times, extensive reciprocity, and expanded borrowing options reduce library costs, and save the institution far more than any revenue gained from charges imposed on lending.

The feedback from patrons has mirrored the satisfaction among the UW-Madison library staff. The ILL team has received emails full of praise, often expressing surprise at how quickly requested resources were delivered.

On the other side of the librarian’s desk, one student employee commented: “I really love Rapid e-journals. You can really get ‘in the zone’ working so smoothly.”

## The Future is Resource Sharing

Asked to look down the road a bit, UW-Madison’s Pohlman said that resource sharing is likely to dramatically expand and grow in importance, as the nature of collections changes and libraries need to collaborate more. In fact, it is already happening. Pohlman has seen an increase of 3,000 resource sharing requests each year, over the last three years, at UW-Madison alone.

Regarding RapidILL, Pohlman commented that the functional merger with Ex Libris was very good news for the ILL team. Her colleagues expect to see a lot more integration between RapidILL and Alma, “making both services even more wonderful for interlibrary loan librarians than they already are.”



*Memorial Library. Photo by University Marketing / Communications*

## About Ex Libris

Ex Libris, a ProQuest company, is a leading global provider of cloud-based SaaS solutions that enable institutions and their users to create, manage, and share knowledge. In close collaboration with its customers and the broader community, Ex Libris develops solutions that increase library productivity, maximize the impact of research activities, enhance teaching and learning, and drive student mobile engagement. Ex Libris serves over 7,500 customers in 90 countries. For more information, see our [website](#) and join us on [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).

