

PETITION AGAINST NEW CIRCULATION POLICIES OF THE BOSTON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SYSTEM

February 26, 2013

This petition concerns the recent changes to the circulation policy of the Boston University Library System. It is currently summarized at <http://www.bu.edu/library/mugar-memorial/services/circulation/>. Recently, the Boston University Library System re-assigned borrowing privileges for BU Undergraduates, Graduate Students, Alumni, and Consortium Card Holders. This act effectually collapsed distinct populations with variable needs into a monolithic category of collegiate borrowers. This petition wishes to challenge these new policies. We request that the BU library system rescind the recently established policies affecting the borrowing privileges of the BU graduate student population.

As of recently, all members of this circulation privilege level are limited to a borrowing period of 28 days, with the possibility for a limited number of renewals (2-5 cycles). Books are not renewable online after the due date has passed.¹ Patrons can recall books after one week, and once recalled, overdue books are charged at a rate of \$2 per day.

PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED

The current BU library lending policy impedes the various research trajectories of the Boston University graduate student population. Problems with the current system include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Borrowing Duration.

- a. A four-week borrowing cycle is insufficient for the demand of long-term comprehensive exam preparation, dissertation or thesis authorship, and immersion in research topics. Graduate students should therefore be granted longer borrowing duration than undergraduates.
- b. Limitations on renewals are unnecessary and inadequate for long-term research and study agendas. If a text is not recalled, it should be renewable for as long as it is being used for study. We depend on the BU library for the acquisition of specialized and costly texts that are rarely in high demand from other students. However, when necessary, the recall system avails rare texts to those who request them. Thus, the shorter borrowing duration and limits on renewal opportunities and procedures are not justified.

2. System Notifications.

- a. The current system does not adequately notify students of approaching due dates or overdue materials. Many students have encountered these policy shifts independently in cases of great inconvenience to scholarly undertakings. An automated notification system is highly effective in organizing lending and returns, and is a common practice that many students have come to rely on both at BU and elsewhere. The lack of such a system leads to an unintended high rate of overdue materials, which “locks” students’ accounts, prolongs the duration of materials being overdue, and generally adds undue chaos and fines to the checkout process. Locked accounts remain as such until a student appears at a library in person with all overdue materials in tow, a requirement unreasonable for many graduate students who are writing, studying, or researching off campus. Most importantly it causes unnecessary disruption and stress in the research process.
- b. Online renewals are presently not allowed for books past their due date. For many students, in-person renewals are not feasible, and blocking this option for texts that are not recalled does not appear to have any advantage that outweighs the obstacle it creates for student research.

¹ To provide perspective on two populations deemed separate from undergrads/grads/alumni/consortium members, BU Faculty may borrow for 365 days, and BU staff may borrow for 133 days (4.5 months).

3. Library Carrels.

- a. Graduate students who rent a library carrell are able to circumvent the restrictions of this new policy by collecting and storing books without checking them out. However, carrel access is not feasible for the entire population due to a variety of reasons ranging from the practice of researching off-campus to the limited number of carrells available for rent. Carrell holdings must somehow be regulated.

4. Systemic Inconsistencies

- a. It is our understanding that different on-campus libraries at BU have different policies about basic privileges such as renewal limitations, borrowing duration, and fines. This is confusing for users and further increases the likelihood of borrower non-compliance, confusion, and disorganization.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

1. Borrowing Duration.

- a. Borrowing privileges for graduate students should be restored to the length of one semester. The very nature of graduate study requires long-term access to research materials; without such, our ability to perform competitive and high-level academic research is hampered.
- b. Renewals should be unlimited unless the book is recalled.

2. **Recall Policy.** Recall interims should be restored to two weeks. One week is inadequate for meaningful engagement with a text that has been recalled. Those of us preparing for comprehensive exams or researching for our theses or dissertations must have adequate access to our research materials. If a text is in high demand and subject to frequent recalls, another should be acquired. Library services must reflect the professional needs of its user base.

3. **Online Renewals.** Online renewals should be enabled for a reasonable period after a book's due date. If we are not properly notified of system needs we should not be penalized by an inconvenient in-person renewal process. Until the notification and online renewal systems are established, no fees should be applied to overdue materials.

4. **Systemic Consistency.** Circulation policies should be formalized and unified across the BU library system. If there is justifiable reasoning for policy variation, the distinction in policies must be clearly communicated. Clear and consistent policies will increase borrower compliance.

5. Organization of Library Holdings.

- a. **Study carrels.** Study carrels should be regularly inspected so that books stored there are duly checked out, locatable, and not stockpiled by occupants.
- b. **Missing texts.** If a text is determined missing after search by library staff, it should be replaced or automatically requested via the WorldCat service.

6. **System Notifications.** Sufficient notification must be granted to the BU graduate student population at the time of any policy changes. In order to prevent future disruption in graduate student progress, it is critical that graduate students be notified adequately regarding:

- a. Library policy changes which directly affect graduate students
- b. Approaching due dates of borrowed material
- c. Unusual or restricted borrowing durations (for example, one-day rentals that are not pre-marked as Reference copies)

SUMMARY:

While we understand the need of the BU library system to confront various circulation challenges, it is not reasonable or fair that an institution at the center of our student careers should compromise our research with restrictive borrowing policies or by collapsing the entire BU student population into the same privilege category. We BU graduate students respectfully request that the new policy is reversed until BU library officials in conversation with BU Graduate Student Organization can reach a reasonably supportive and mutually agreeable solution.

We, the undersigned, support the petition against the new circulation policies of the BU library system.

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