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## A Study of Present and Future Librarians Reasons for a Fine or No Fine System in Secondary Schools

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### Abstract

The fifteen practicing librarians were employed in school districts ranging in size from 150 to 900 students.

The questions asked were as follows:

1. Do you, or will you charge fines for overdue library materials?
2. What were, or are the reasons that made you decide to charge or not charge fines?
  - A. Are these reasons something: you measured or intend to intend to measure?
  - B. Did, or will student opinion have any bearing on your decision?

Of the fifteen practicing librarians, ten indicated that they did not charge fines and five indicated that they did charge fines.

A STUDY OF PRESENT AND FUTURE LIBRARIANS  
REASONS FOR A FINE OR NO FINE SYSTEM  
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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A Non-Print Research Paper  
Presented to  
Miss Elizabeth Martin  
Department of Library Science  
University of Northern Iowa

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In Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of 35.299

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by  
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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The charging of fines for overdue books is so much a traditionally accepted part of school library methodology that it is often taken for granted. This is generally considered a means of enforcing cooperation. There is also a built-in economic motivation for returning library material; for if the student fails to cooperate, he finds himself with an accumulating penalty. Actually whether fines are a part of school library policy must be determined by each school library system, large or small. Tradition has kept the existence of fines in library policy; but there is now a question arising as to whether librarians have examined their motives for charging fines.

Thus, the initial reason for designing this particular type of research project stemmed from the fact that in a review of the literature, most of the studies pertained to large public libraries.

The main concern in these studies was the effect that library fines have on the circulation and return of overdue material.

A second basic consideration was the amount of time spent on the administration of a fines system as opposed to the amount of money collected. Thus it would seem that the public libraries base their decisions on objective evidence.

Any articles relating to fines in a secondary school situation were limited and dealt mainly with fine procedures rather than with the reasons for a fine system.

I formulated the hypothesis that secondary school librarians base their decisions to charge or not charge fines

on the basis of attitudes and feelings rather than on objective measurement.

I set up the initial study to interview on audio-tape 30 librarians. Of these thirty, fifteen would be practicing librarians and fifteen would be non-practicing librarians who will be entering the field.

I felt that through this procedure I might be able to arrive at some firm conclusion as to why secondary school librarians charge fines or why they do not. I also wanted to know on what evidence their decisions were made; whether on some attitudes or feelings of their own or if their decision was made on some measurable experience.

I felt that an interview on tape would meet my objectives more precisely than a survey-type questionnaire, as from past experience I have found that librarians are reluctant to state anything in writing which asks about their attitudes or the reasons for their policies. In my opinion, I felt that if I interviewed these people on tape they would be less likely to evade the questions and would have to state a logical answer for them.

I feel that my study pertaining to fines in a secondary school situation is important, in that the question of whether to charge or not to charge fines is something every present and future librarian is faced with, and will have to come to a decision on, as it involves valuable time which could well be spent on other more professional duties.

We hear much today about accountability and yet we as librarians often tend to base our decisions upon feelings rather than on objective evaluations.

ABSTRACT

The fifteen practicing librarians were employed in school districts ranging in size from 150 to 900 students.

The questions asked were as follows:

1. Do you, or will you charge fines for overdue library materials?
2. What were, or are the reasons that made you decide to charge or not charge fines?
  - A. Are these reasons something you measured or intend to measure?
  - B. Did, or will student opinion have any bearing on your decision?

Of the fifteen practicing librarians, ten indicated that they did not charge fines and five indicated that they did charge fines.

Eight of the ten respondents who did not charge fines indicated that the collection of fines was not worth the time and effort involved. One of the respondents indicated that it was a deterrent to the checking out of books and one said that fines were not effective in bringing about a prompt return of materials.

Secondary reasons given by the ten for not charging fines were that fines encouraged students to steal books; no fines improved student attitudes in regard to library use; some students were unable to pay fines and one person said that he did not get to use the fine money.

Five of the fifteen respondents did charge fines and four of these stated that their reason was that it encouraged the prompt return of materials. One respondent indicated

that he was following former policy.

Of the fifteen non-practicing librarians, ten indicated that they will charge fines and four indicated that they will not. One person was undecided.

Five people felt that fines would serve as an incentive for returning overdue materials promptly. Two indicated that it was because of student affluence and three felt that it would serve to instill in borrowers a sense of responsibility.

Other reasons given for fines were that fines were charged by former librarians, public libraries charge fines, fines would influence borrowers to take better care of materials and would serve as a source of income.

The four respondents who would not charge fines stated their reasons as follows: three suggested that it would not be worth the time and effort required to collect them and one felt that there should not always be a punishment to fit the crime.

Secondary reasons for not charging fines were that "no fines" would encourage students to use the library more frequently and would improve pupils general attitudes about library use.

All of the respondents agreed that a poll of student opinion might be of value; but, no one had conducted or intended to conduct a formal poll by which they might evaluate student opinion to use as a tool to reach a logical decision.

Two of the practicing librarians based their decisions to not charge fines on empirical evidence and one non-

practicing librarian indicated that she would base her conclusion on objective measurement.

The interviews would indicate that future librarians will charge fines, but once in a job situation they may change their decisions. All of the respondents agreed that objective empirical evidence would be desirable; but as one listens to the tapes one receives the impression that librarians do not have any solid evidence upon which to base their policies.