UNIVERSAL RETURN PRELIMINARY REPORT

Team Members: Chris Coad, Jennifer Osgood, Brice Sullivan (team leader) and Bruce Williams
Implementation Team Rep: Mark Marrow

I. Background

Universal Return is a service that allows students, faculty and other users to return borrowed material to any library on campus, where it will be removed from their account and routed to the owning library. Current policy restricts check-in at non-owning units and holds the patron responsible for in-transit items. Universal Return, in some form, has become standard practice at other peer libraries and has been one of the most requested services from UCB library users.

II. Defining a Public Policy

A survey of other UC and ARL library policy statements reveals that while the goal is to make returning materials as convenient as possible, there is also a need to set limits on the types of materials that qualify for Universal Return. A balance must be struck between a clear and concise policy for the public and one that appreciates the diverse nature of the collections. One such model statement can be found at the UT Austin Library webpages:

Statement from University of Texas at Austin
http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/borrower/returning.html

All University of Texas Libraries materials may be returned to the circulation desk from which they were checked out. Return receipts are available upon request. For borrowers' convenience, each of the University Libraries, except Architecture/Planning, has book returns available for use both during and after hours. Materials returned after a circulation desk closes may not be checked in until the next day the library is open. Recalled items are due by the recall due date before the circulation desk closes.

Some materials must be returned only to the desk from which they were checked out. These are:

- reserve materials
- materials borrowed through Interlibrary Services
- non-book items
  (e.g., audio/video tapes and disks, microfiche, CD-Roms, maps, DVDs, equipment)
  except Fine Arts Library media, which may be deposited in the slot specifically designated for their return on the west side of the Doty Fine Arts Building
materials on less than 14-day loan journals
fragile materials
Tarleton Law Library materials*

Materials other than the exceptions above may be returned to any library's book return or at drive-up book returns. Book returns are regularly cleared; nevertheless, returning books to a book return will delay their being checked in and may result in fines if the books are returned after the last time the book return is cleared for the day.

*The University of Texas Libraries and the Tarleton Law Library are separate entities. Return each library's materials to the owning library.

Recommendation: Adopt a public policy which, while encouraging convenient returns, requires that the following items be returned to the desk from which they were borrowed:

- Course Reserves & Short Term Loans (2-hour, 1-Day)
- Non-book Items (audio/video tapes, CD/DVD’s, maps, scores, equipment, microform)
- Interlibrary Loan Material
- Fragile Material

The group discussed whether to add non-participating libraries, such as the Boalt Law Library, to this list, and felt that for ease and clarity it would be better to develop uniform signage for all circulation desks and bookdrops which instead lists all participating libraries (see Next Steps below.)

The issue of whether to add recalled items to this list was discussed. A recalled item would be available for the holding patron sooner if returned at the owning library, however, depending on recall and notice timing, a patron will not always be aware that an item they are returning has been recalled. Also, encouraging returns to the closest and most convenient library will likely result in items being returned sooner.

III. Circulation Implementation

Adoption of a Universal Return policy has many and varied implications for circulation unit operations. In 2006, a Public Service Council taskforce collected concerns from Unit Heads and Circulation Supervisors regarding how to implement such a policy and what specific issues would need to be addressed. This group investigated these “Topics of Concern” and makes the following recommendations adapted to the Millenium Circulation Module:

Reserves & Other Non-qualifying Items
While a public policy can require reserves and other items to be returned to the owning library, it is impossible prevent this from occurring at bookdrops. This group recommends separate treatment for reserves and all other non-qualifying items.

1) Reserves

Reserve materials are time sensitive by nature and fining libraries must be able to enforce proper student behavior with shared course resources.

*Recommendation:* Remove all reserve sublocations from the Locations Served tables in Millenium.

If a patron returns a reserve item to the non-owning library, that item would be scanned and placed “In Transit.” However, it would remain on the patrons account, accruing fines (if from fining unit.)

2) Other Non-qualifying Items:

Non-book items that are returned to a non-owning location should still be checked in and removed from the patron’s account. However, in these cases the student checking in the items may be unfamiliar with practices associated with special materials. It is likely that missing parts and/or certain types of damage that would have been spotted by a student at the owning library will be missed by a student unfamiliar with the item type.

*Recommendation:* Revisit decision regarding retention of last patron information for a limited term of 96-120 hours.

Privacy concerns regarding retention of last patron information could be assuaged with special programming to delete this information after a period of 96-120 hours. This buffer time would be long enough for the item to be delivered to the owning library for closer inspection. If required, the owning library would have the ability to recharge, bill, or contact the last patron.

Claims Returned

When a patron disputes an item on their account that they believe to be returned, a Claims Returned is filed. Current practice generates a search at the owning location. However, Universal Return will require new practices, as the Claim Return location could different from the owning location.

*Recommendation:* Notify Claims Returned New Processes Mastering Team of all decisions relating to Universal Return.

This group can then address the implications of added locations as part of a new Claims Returned process.
Block Clearing

In addition to returns, the check in function is used for the purpose of clearing blocks related to overdue items. If a patron is blocked for multiple books at multiple locations, the current practice is for the patron to go to each library and ask for the item to be discharged and held for them while they do the same for all other blocked item locations. Once unblocked for all locations, the patron would then return to each library to recheck the items they wish to keep. This is a common occurrence and could be made easier with Universal Return since blocked items could be checked in at one location. However, a decision on whether non-owning units can check out items is required to avoid public service problems at circulation desks.

Recommendation: Institute a library-wide policy decision to allow the check-in location to also check out non-owned material.

This would eliminate the need for patrons to visit every blocking location twice. It would also alleviate the pressure on circulation students, who after checking in a non-owned book, may be then asked to recheck it out, since the block has been cleared.

Routing of In-Transit Material

As Universal Return is anticipated to be a popular and well-used service, it is vital that there exist a standard practice regarding the routing and receiving of materials.

Recommendation #1: Create a uniform Routing Slip in conjunction with what NRLF will use to route storage requests. The Millenium-generated transit slips create a full page slip for each item and do not conveniently allow for batching of items going to the same location. Investigation into customizing these transit slips will continue.

Recommendation #2: Using the Create Lists function, automate a master list of all items placed “In Transit” for each circulation desk location. This list would be checked by circulation staff responsible for routing material to ensure all items are accounted for.

Recommendation #3: Develop a Best Practices document for circulation staff units regarding the timely checking in of returns and routing of materials (see Next Steps).

In-Transit Overdues

A procedure for ensuring that items do not remain “Lost in Transit” for extended periods of time is required. The current practice for NRLF items “In Transit” is for the receiving location to search their shelves after an item is 1 week “overdue” and to follow up with other units as needed.

Recommendation: Using the Create Lists function, automate a master list of all items left “In Transit” for over 1-week. This list would be searched by the receiving location in their stacks and follow up with other units as needed.
IV. Mail Operation Implementation

The single most important component to successful implementation of a Universal Return policy is insuring the ability of the Library Mail Room to effectively handle any increase in mail volume, while maintaining current delivery time standards. Additionally, there are five affiliated libraries who will be joining Millennium circulation as participants in Universal Return: the Ethnic Studies Library, the Institute of Governmental Studies Library (IGSL), the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment (IRLE), the Institute of Transportation Studies Library (ITSL) and the Water Resources Center Archives (WRCA). These affiliates do not currently have Library Mail stops and would need to be added for the most efficient delivery of returns.

Increased Volume of Material in Mail Flow

No statistical data exists for current volume of mail flow, and it is unknown to what extent the volume will increase as a result of Universal Returns. This volume is relevent due to space issues in the delivery vehicles. The mail van used to make branch delivery/pickup runs is operated by Student Library Employees, and backed up by career staff if/when a student misses a shift. It is estimated that vehicle capacity for current branch runs is already at 100%, making a second run necessary if any volume increases as a result of Universal Returns. A second run would add an estimated 20-30 hours per week in GA expenditures. Career staff who currently provide backup for students would not be sufficient for backing up a second run, and more support would be required.

Recommendation: Analyze the budget requirements for adding a second branch mail run and make additional allocations as necessary.

Additional Library Mail Stops for Affiliated Libraries

Affiliated libraries without Library Mail stops would be required to route returns through Campus Mail or “hand deliver” items to the nearest location with a Library Mail stop if not added to the mail van’s branch runs. Adding new Affiliate Library delivery points will require a second run regardless of the increased volume expected with Universal Returns. Additionally, the nature of the Ethnic Studies and WRCA collections often require their use of archive boxes which are bulky and will not fit with rest of the branch runs.

While the affiliates currently use Campus Mail for a number of delivery requirements, this system is out of library control and often involves inconsistent delivery times. Additionally, Campus Mail will not handle loose book material – all books must be boxed, wrapped or placed in envelopes.

Recommendation: Add Affiliated Library mail stops for Ethic Studies, IGSL, WRCA and ITSL (shared), and IRLE (off campus), with additional budget allocations as mentioned.
Alternate Recommendation #1: Allow affiliated libraries to route returns through campus mail.

Alternate Recommendation #2: Institute a hand delivery system for the affiliates, wherein a staff member walks returns to Main or the nearest subject specialty library.

Additional Factors Impacting Mail Operation

The following impending demands on Mail Operation, though unrelated to Universal Returns, should be included for decisions regarding implementation:

- Relocation of Technical Services will require an extra truck run wherever that location decided upon. New book acquisitions will then need to be transported by vehicle to the mail room rather than rolled in as is currently done.
- Relocation of The Bindery from the Merchant Building to the Regatta Building in Richmond will require additional time for delivery of the bindery run.

V. Next Steps

The Universal Returns Group will be examining the following pending implementation decisions:

- Consult with Library Graphics Office to develop uniform signage for book returns.
- Consult with the Millenium Public Information Group regarding publicizing the new “Open Returns” (potential name) service.
- Develop Best Practices documentation with consultation from the Circulation Services Group.