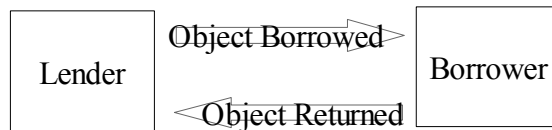


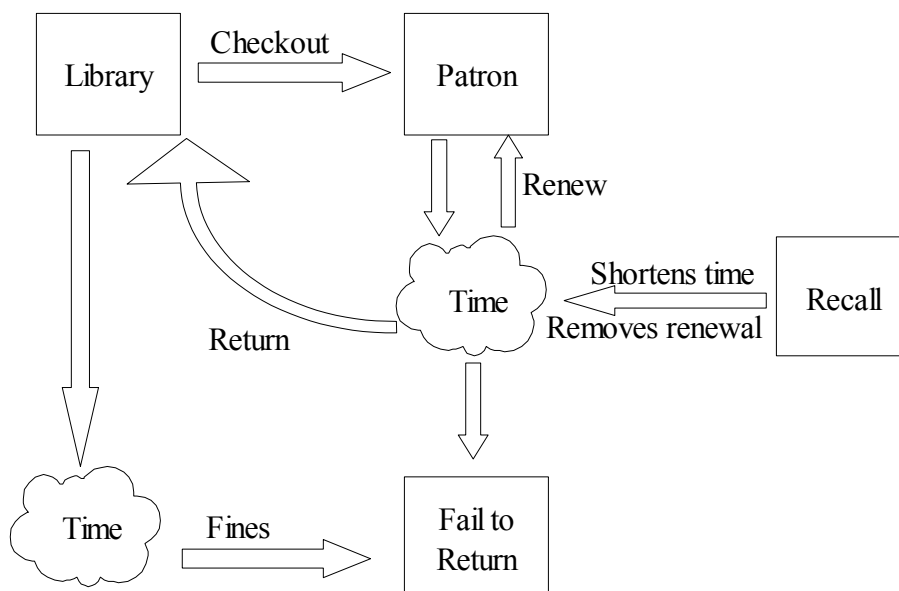
## Cultural Models in Library Checkout

In an interview, a student employee at Geisel Library discussed the process of checking out books, renewing them, late fees, and other things associated with borrowing books from the library. It turns out that there are many cultural models involved in this process, all of which are highly interactive. Depending on how the models are instantiated, they may change the instantiation of the others. The chief of the models that came up in the interview are outlined below.

The primary cultural model in the interview is based on the more general model of borrowing and lending. In this model, there are two actors: the lender and the borrower. The lender gives some item to the borrower, with the assumption that the borrower will eventually give it back.



The cultural model in the interview is a more specific instantiation of this, in which the library is the lender, (many) library patrons are the borrowers, and books and other objects that are kept in the library are the objects being lent. The more specific library model also includes additional objects and actions not included in the general one: a set amount of time in which the book may be borrowed, recalls and holds made on the book by other patrons, renewals, grace periods, and late fees.



When a patron “checks out” (or borrows) a book, a patron has a certain amount of time to use the book, after which they must either return the book to the library or “renew” it, at which point the time period starts over.

...for academics because they get their initial checkout date is one year and their renewal gives them another year, and they have six renewals. So they can theoretically keep a book for seven years. If it's not...recalled by someone else.

The patron may renew it a certain number of times based on the type of patron they are (which will be explained later), after which the book must be returned. Recalls may shorten this period.

Some patrons fail to either return the book or renew it, which is where grace periods and late fees come into play. At the end of the allotted checkout time, if the book is neither returned nor renewed there is a grace period (provided the book is not a reserve book). If the book is still not returned then the library may start charging the patron for the book. This contingency, however, is considered out of the ordinary, especially for books that are very overdue. Referring to one patron who had accumulated several hundred dollars in late fees for books up to a year overdue, my informant stated:

I can't begin to conceive, y'know being being the kind of person I am where I freak out if I'm over a due date by two days. I I can't begin to conceive how that could have happened.

The informant both used and explained the parts of the lending model in the interview. She explained parts about late fees and specific library details that were not very familiar to me, and perhaps most other people—it could perhaps be questioned whether these specific parts should be included in a “cultural” model. However, the vast majority of the model was merely implied, and used, for example, to talk about a specific patron who had accumulated a very large fine. This portion of the conversation relied on the general knowledge of how libraries work, and lending in general, and without my sharing this knowledge with her she would perhaps have had to go into tiring detail for me to make any sense of the story. Even her explanations of the more specific details of library function

assume understanding of the basic processes of checkout, returning, and late fees.

The library lending model does not stand alone; many of its parameters are highly influenced by other cultural models. One of these is the “patron type” model:

Um because for academics because they get their initial checkout date is one year and their renewal gives them another year, and they have six renewals. So they can theoretically keep a book for seven years. If it's not...recalled by someone else.

Although this model was not well-elaborated in the interview, one can gather from the informants comments that patron type influences the initial checkout time and the total number of renewals, with different patron types getting different amounts of time and different numbers of renewals in the library lending model.

Another model that influences the lending model, one that was much more significant to the informant, is based on need. In this model, one person checks out a book. Another person needs the book, but it is not available because someone else has it. The second person has the option of placing a recall or hold on the book, thereby telling the library that they want the book: “...if the book's been recalled, that person needs it.”

When the library knows that someone needs a book (via recalls, etc.), the library has an obligation to make that book available:

[the 3-week grace period before fining is] even on recalled books. And we think it really should be a little tighter. Because if the book's been recalled, that person needs it.

It can be inferred from this statement that fines are used as a method to incite people to return books on time when someone else wants them. This draws upon yet more cultural models: people do not like paying fees, and people will take action to avoid unpleasant things. So in order to avoid the fees, which it is assumed that patrons do not like to pay, patrons will be more likely to turn books in on time. As a last resort, a replacement fee is charged:

But the ones that get recalled, have three or four holds waiting in the cue on them and it's still not coming back and it's been y'know two or three months, hit that person with a replacement fee because obviously they're, you know, have no interest in returning it, or they've gone incommunicado or something.

This way the books that are needed by other patrons may at least be replaced by the library, if the original does not get returned, ensuring that others will get the book eventually.

Conversely, people do not place holds or recalls on books they do not need. When there are a lot of books on a subject or a book is on a subject that is very esoteric and less generally useful, these books receive fewer recalls and holds:

I think our our um replacement fee policy on books is a little more lenient than others because we have so many books in the library, and some of them are very esoteric, and y'know, not everybody's gonna want them. So we're much less worried about the ones that don't need to be brought back in.

People need each individual one of these books back, so there is not as much need for them. Since there is less need, the library does not have to take action to ensure that these get back on time: the library has the option of *not* fining for those books for a longer period of time. An interesting point here is that the library (or rather, its employees) does not *want* to fine people, and in fact the workers find fines “unfortunate” and “sad”, but sometimes necessary. If, therefore, fines are deemed less necessary, library employees will be less likely to issue them.

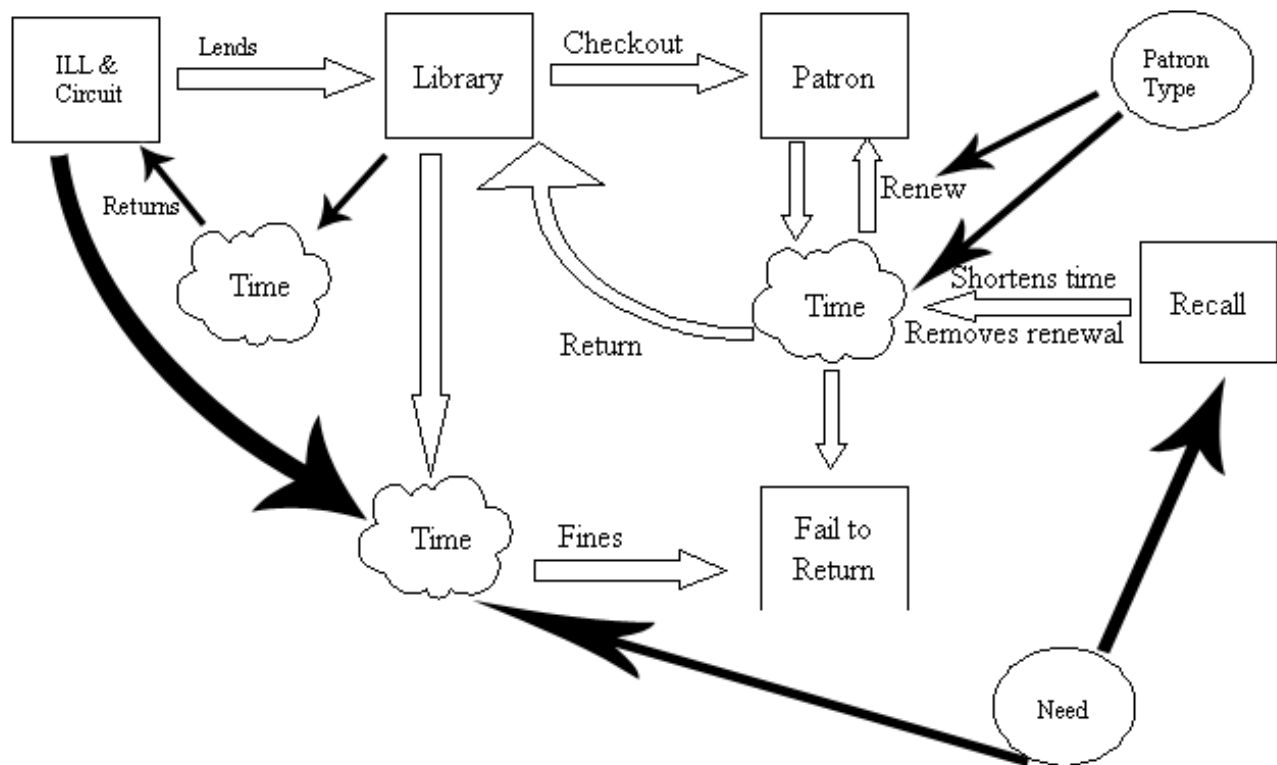
The demand for a book can change both of the time parameters in the lending model. As discussed, it can change the time before the library starts charging for a book, but it can also change the amount of time a book can be checked out: recalled books must be returned sooner and may not be renewed. In this effect it also interacts with the Patron Type model: total checkout time varies by patron type, but the total checkout time can be reduced by the demand for a book. Unfortunately, how far the Need model goes toward eliminating the effect of the Patron Type model toward some baseline value did not come up in the interview.

A third cultural model influences the library lending model by adding an extra actor and eliminating the influence of need over late fee latency: the ILL and Circuit model. Patrons may borrow books from ILL and Circuit via the library, so ILL and Circuit are an additional lender in the schema. ILL and Circuit books all start accruing late fees right away, with no distinction between books that are

in high demand versus books that are more obscure.

...with the circuit books and the ILL books, depending on when the lending library wanted it back they start charging replacement fees very rapidly.... If you don't get that book in, they're going to start hitting you with replacement fees for not getting it back in.

ILL and Circuit want their books back when they want them back, no exceptions. This, like the original library lending model, relies on the model of patrons avoiding fees by returning books. Since all overdue books lead to fines indiscriminately, this addition to the model in effect cancels the effect of low need for a book and the library employees' desire not to fine patrons unnecessarily.



The complete model of library lending includes many features that are heavily influenced by other cultural models. The time constraints, in particular, are variable depending on the influence of the other models. Patron type can change the amount of time a patron gets to keep a book, both by the original amount of time and by the number of recalls. “Need” for a book (which is perceived by the number of recalls and holds on it) can change two time parameters: the amount of time a book may be checked out, by decreasing the original time and removing renewals, and the amount of time before the

library will begin charging for something. These additional models can even cancel the effect of one another, such as ILL & Circuit removing the effect of low need on a book or the Need model decreasing the amount of time that even the more privileged patrons may keep a book. Thus all of the models involved in library lending are highly dynamic and interactive.