

# Between Request and Delivery: A Study of Request Delivery Turnaround Time

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## Background & Motivation

The Request Delivery system allows patrons at IU libraries to request items from within the IU system without having to use the interlibrary loan system. Request Delivery had not been benchmarked since its initial beta testing six years ago; we wanted to determine the average time it took for a book to arrive after being requested.

The study was initially suggested by Randi Stocker and was designed by her and three other IUPUI University Library librarians. Another graduate student and I executed the study in the fall, and I slightly revised our methodology and conducted the study in the spring and performed the data analysis for both semesters after the study was finished.

## Study Design & Process

One concern that arose was how to test the system without putting an unusual stress on it. Smaller libraries receive fewer requests, and we didn't want to overwhelm them and increase their turnaround time. The libraries we wanted to test were divided into two groups, and we requested books five days a week (four weekdays and one weekend day), alternating the groups each day. Thus, over a four week period, forty books were requested from Wells Library and ten were requested from every other library. The study was performed in the fall and again in the spring, resulting in a total of about 560 requests: 80 from Wells and 20 from each of the other libraries.

Each day, fourteen books were requested (one each from twelve libraries and two from Wells Library). The request date, title and call number, and owning library were recorded. Then a list of books currently in transit between libraries was pulled and used to determine the number of days elapsed between the request and when the item was sent to University Library. The day after a book arrived at University Library, we received a notification email, which we used to calculate the total transit time for each book.

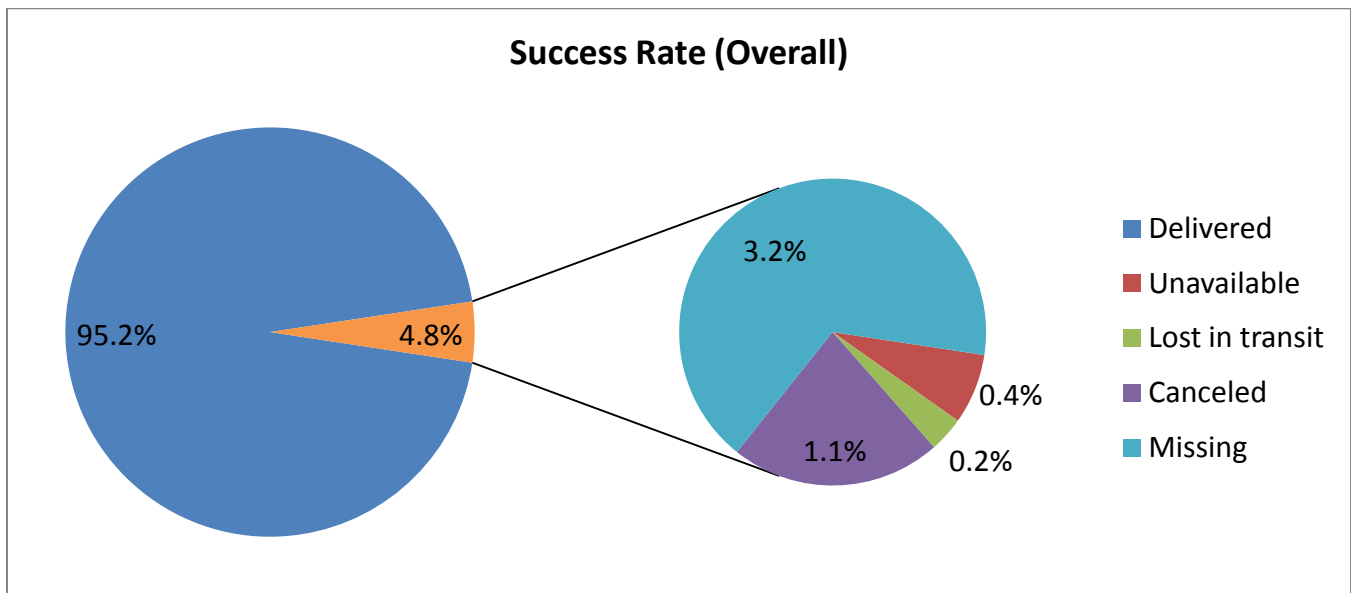
The total number of days elapsed—rather than business days—was counted because we wanted to see Request Delivery from the patron's perspective. Obviously the shipping time is outside of the library's control, and shipping times will vary depending on the proximity of the requesting and owning libraries, but Indianapolis's central location helps to naturally average out shipping times.

## Limitations

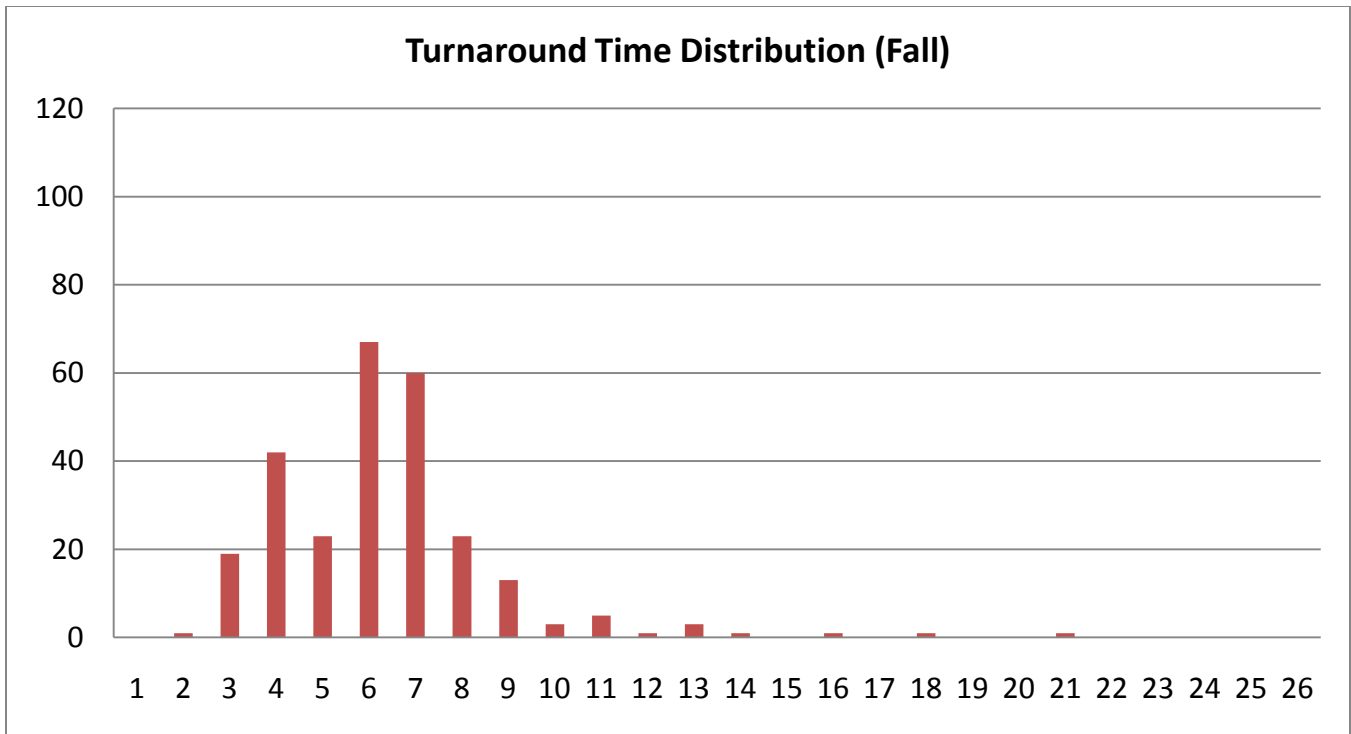
A few problems arose during the course of the study. The request schedule for the fall was initially constructed to allow what was hoped would be adequate time for books to arrive before the Thanksgiving holiday, but some books were still in transit at the end of that week. Furthermore, some books had not arrived by the end of the semester; their in-transit dates were not recorded and in a few cases, the books were not processed by University Library until the spring semester had begun. We discarded the data for books that arrived after the end of the fall semester, and we adjusted the transit times for books that were shipped around the Thanksgiving holiday by comparing the owning library's usual transit time for books shipped on that day of the week and substituting this number. The spring study began after all campuses had finished their spring breaks to avoid a similar problem.

Initially we only limited our requests to books that were owned by one library that were available through Request Delivery. Books needed to be owned by one library to ensure the correct owning library was targeted. We discovered, however, that some libraries have new books available for Request Delivery but cancel requests for them, so in the spring, we only ordered books that were owned by one library, that were available through Request Delivery, and that were published in 2007 or earlier.

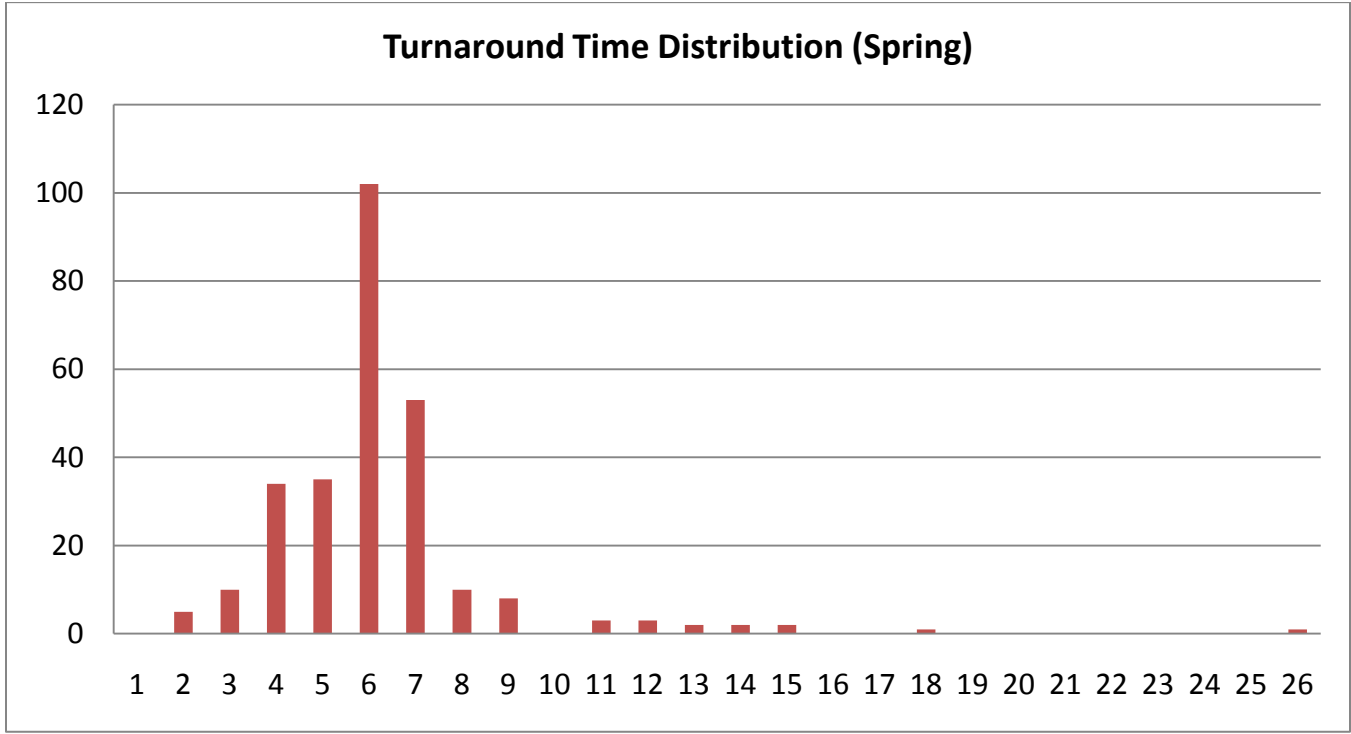
## Results



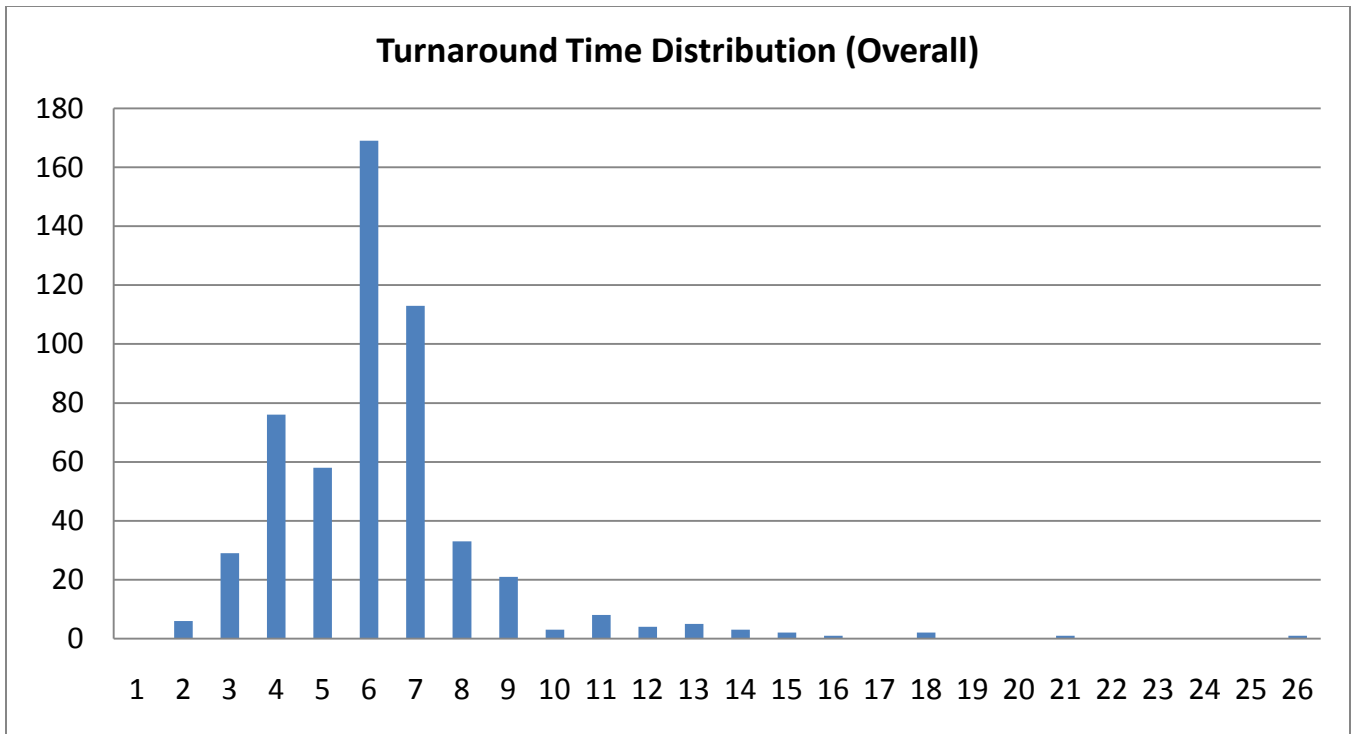
Overall, 95.2% of books requested arrived at University Library. 3.2% of books requested (18 books) were marked missing, 1.1% of requests (6 requests) were canceled, 0.4% of books were unavailable for Request Delivery (2 books), and 0.2% of books were lost in transit (1 book).



In the fall, the average total turnaround time was 6.3 days. 80% of books arrived within seven days of when they were requested.



In the spring, the average total turnaround time was 6.2 days. 88% of books arrived within seven days of when they were requested.



Overall, the average total turnaround time was 6.3 days. 84% of books arrived within seven days of when they were requested.

## Individual library averages

### FALL SEMESTER

	Success rate	Processing Time (days)	Transit Time (days)	Turnaround Time (days)
<b>Overall average</b>	<b>94.0%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
B-ALF	100.0%	1	5	6
B-BCC	83.3%	1	4	5
B-BUSSPEA	90.0%	1	6	8
B-CHEM	100.0%	1	5	7
B-EDUC	100.0%	1	4	5
B-FINEARTS	80.0%	1	6	7
B-GEOLOGY	100.0%	1	6	7
B-GEOMAP	80.0%	3	5	8
B-HPER	100.0%	1	5	6
B-LAW	90.0%	4	6	11
B-LIFESCI	90.0%	1	4	5
B-MUSIC	90.0%	4	6	10
B-OPTOMETRY	90.0%	2	6	8
B-SWAIN	100.0%	1	4	6
B-WELLS	97.5%	1	5	7
COLUMBUS	90.0%	1	3	4
EAST	100.0%	1	3	4
FORTWAYNE	100.0%	1	4	5
I-ART	100.0%	1	2	4
I-LAW	100.0%	1	3	5
I-MEDICINE	90.0%	1	4	5
KOKOMO	100.0%	1	3	4
NORTHWEST	90.0%	3	7	9
SBEND	100.0%	1	5	6
SOUTHEAST	100.0%	1	7	8

**SPRING  
SEMESTER**

	Success rate	Processing Time (days)	Transit Time (days)	Turnaround Time (days)
<b>Overall average</b>	<b>96.5%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
B-ALF	100.0%	1	5	6
B-BCC	100.0%	1	4	6
B-BUSSPEA	90.0%	1	6	7
B-CHEM	100.0%	1	4	5
B-EDUC	90.0%	1	4	6
B-FINEARTS	80.0%	2	5	7
B-GEOLOGY	100.0%	1	5	6
B-GEOMAP	100.0%	1	5	6
B-HPER	100.0%	1	4	6
B-LAW	100.0%	2	7	9
B-LIFESCI	100.0%	1	4	6
B-MUSIC	100.0%	7	5	13
B-OPTOMETRY	100.0%	1	6	7
B-SWAIN	100.0%	1	4	5
B-WELLS	97.5%	1	5	6
COLUMBUS	100.0%	1	4	6
EAST	100.0%	1	3	4
FORTWAYNE	100.0%	1	5	6
I-ART	100.0%	1	3	4
I-LAW	90.0%	1	4	5
I-MEDICINE	90.9%	1	3	4
KOKOMO	100.0%	1	4	5
NORTHWEST	80.0%	2	8	10
SBEND	90.0%	1	4	5
SOUTHEAST	100.0%	1	7	8

**ENTIRE STUDY**

	Success rate	Processing Time (days)	Transit Time (days)	Turnaround Time (days)
<b>Overall average</b>	<b>95.2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
B-ALF	100.0%	1	5	6
B-BCC	90.9%	1	4	5
B-BUSSPEA	90.0%	1	6	7
B-CHEM	100.0%	1	5	6
B-EDUC	95.0%	1	4	5
B-FINEARTS	80.0%	1	6	7
B-GEOLOGY	100.0%	1	5	7
B-GEOMAP	90.0%	2	5	7
B-HPER	100.0%	1	5	6
B-LAW	95.0%	3	7	10
B-LIFESCI	95.0%	1	4	6
B-MUSIC	90.0%	6	6	11
B-OPTOMETRY	95.0%	1	6	7
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I-ART	100.0%	1	2	4
I-LAW	95.0%	1	3	5
I-MEDICINE	90.5%	1	3	5
KOKOMO	100.0%	1	4	5
NORTHWEST	85.0%	2	7	10
SBEND	95.0%	1	4	6
SOUTHEAST	100.0%	1	7	8

## Recommendations

One major flaw in the Request Delivery system that we found was the way requests are handled when an item is discovered missing. Some libraries marked the items as missing but did not expire the hold; others removed the hold entirely. When a hold is removed, the patron is not notified. When a hold is ignored, the patron is not notified until 30 days later when the hold is put on the old holds list. We recommend marking the item as missing and expiring the hold, which notifies the patron that the item is unavailable.

We also discovered during the course of the study that some libraries remove holds if they do not want to lend an item through Request Delivery (for example, if the book is a new book). Again, the patron is not notified of the removal of the hold and he or she is left without the item, without knowing why, and without being informed of further options for borrowing the item. We recommend creating a new location (such as a new book area), modifying the records for these items to place them in the new location, and then making the location not available for Request Delivery (similar to the Undergraduate Core Collection at Wells Library).

It would also be helpful to patrons if they were notified of the removal of a hold. While we recommend alternative methods for dealing with holds that cannot be fulfilled, in the rare case that a removal is necessary, the patron should know and should be provided with further information or further suggestions for borrowing the item in another manner.

