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Hi everyone. I'm Emily Spangler Thank you for coming to my presentation, called far-flung solutions: How we managed a distance Returns service. I'm a library services Supervisor at McKeldin Library at the University of Maryland Libraries. And yeah, welcome to my tcal talk. Okay.

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So what is a distance return service? Why did we need one? The closure of U Md. libraries, due to the pandemic between March through July of 2020, resulted in many of our students unsure of how to return their books if they moved out of state to quarantine, If they graduated in May the 2020 really, for any reason that they are leaving the State. It begged the question, how would they return their books If they were nowhere near the campus. Umd libraries were extending due dates during this closure period. But it's still left the problem of how students would return books if they weren't close to Campus and did not plan on returning so out of this project the need we proposed a distance return service which would assist the students in returning library books via prepaid ups labels. and this was specifically within my department,

the user services and resource sharing department with another staff member.

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So just going over a little bit of the prep. work and proposal for the service. We worked with our ups Rep. to test out the service and get a rough estimate of cost. We also finalized the proposal in April 2020, and the service was approved by our library management group with a $2,000 budget. For ease of use for both patrons and staff we made a Google form for the service. Some of the service restrictions and guidelines included only offering the service to UMCP Patrons current or former due to budget constraints. We would have liked to open it up broader to our consortium in general, but it would have probably just be a little too much pressure on the budget. We thought the service would also ideally only be offered to UMCP patrons out of state. So out of the State of Maryland, were our target patrons those patrons who moved to California, Missouri, or New Jersey. We wanted to help them specifically get their books back, whereas patrons who were still in the State of Maryland, there were other options for returning their books. And the eligible patrons could send back any Usmai and Umcp ILL items that they had checked out, and Usmai is the consortia in the State of Maryland that we are in.

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So this is just a snapshot of the Google form, as you can tell just going over it kind of quickly. We ask for their basic information, their name, their email, their university Id how many books they need to return. We also ask them other questions like, Do you have access to a working printer? Do you have access to a ups drop off center? Do you have a box? All these questions we ask because it influenced the method of the return label They would receive. Usually we would send it either electronically to their email, or if they didn't have a working printer, we would send them a print label. We would also send them a box if they needed a box.

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So this is just a brief overview of the timeline. So in phase 0, which we like to call the period between March and July of 2,020, when everyone was still teleworking. The form went live in April 2020, and then we were sort of just responding to patrons spelling out the form as they came in. But we were not. We were just emailing them, letting them know that We received the response. Once we are back on site we will send you a label, but we cannot send a label

Yet, because no one is there physically at the library to unpack your books, and then phase one to the to present day. So phase One started when in July, 2020, when folks were allowed back on site. So from that point to now. we have been receiving responses from the form and sending folks their return labels For those who are eligible.

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So you may be asking how does the service work? It's really easy generally the patron fills out the form that I just showed you. When a new request is submitted, a staff person, verifies that the patron is eligible for the service so mainly that they're affiliated with the University, and that they live out of State. If eligible, the patron is notified that they will be sent A prepaid ups label, either electronically or physically depending on their needs, Again that we gather from the form. Once a label is generated by library staff The patron is notified that the label is on its way, and they are also sent instructions for sending the books back.

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Apologies for the low quality of this snapshot. I wanted to try to get all of the columns in our spreadsheet that we use to track All of these form submissions. So every time a patrons submits a new form response, it gets directly populated into this Google sheets spreadsheet. So in the black boxes are sensitive patron information So I block that out. But you can tell from all the other columns here I'm showing the there's like the weight of the books so we can put that in the label information. There's a number of books they mean to return if they have access to a printer. What The label tracking number ends up being, the cost On the far right side, so feel free to pause. Take a look over this if you can see it. This is what we used to keep our sanity with this service it's the best way to keep track of just everything that's coming in, and the red rows mean that that particular submission Was not eligible for the service. The green rows mean. They were eligible.

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Okay. So, briefly, going over international returns in 2021, we were able to expand the distance return service internationally. As of this month we have sent return labels to 3 international patrons, resulting in 4 books being returned. The reason that we had to start it in 2021 and not 2020 is, We ran into several issues with coordinating international returns for a while, such as a country not providing ups as a courier or a patron not being located near a ups drop off location. It's also just more work. for international for sending international books and receiving international items in general. You have to go through customs. it's more of a process than sending it through Just domestic ups.

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This is the number I like to brag about. So 384 Usmai slash our ILL books were returned using the service since August 2020, and this might not seem like a huge number. It may not be like a super small number either. i'm, just really proud that we were able to help so many patrons return their library books through the service During a really difficult time for a lot of people. So this is the number of books we have managed to help folks return using the service.

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Okay, So just a brief overlook on data as of July, 2022, we have received a 100 submissions from the distance returns service Google form. Out of these submissions 71 patrons were eligible for the service, and 29 were not. Again that's based on all the criteria. I went over before so distance from campus affiliation. We also got a couple of duplicate requests So all that goes into that number. Out of the 71 eligible submissions, we have sent 50 return labels via email and the remaining 21 labels by printing the label out and shipping it to them physically. We have sent labels to patrons in 22 different States and 3 different countries. The 3 different countries have been is interested is Denmark, Finland, and Italy, Pennsylvania, California, and New York and Connecticut are the States that we have sent the most labels to. So if anyone is also interested in that information, those are the most popular states that I guess our students have moved to since the pandemic started.

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So this is just a snapshot of the service requests per month. This is the number of submissions that the Google form receives Since we have started the service. in April 2020, as you can tell, we have our peaks and valleys. We have been on a steady decline since september of 2021 which was our peak. But you know it's just it's been a lot of time. It's been 2 years since we started the service so it's kind of to be expected. I hope most folks have figured out how to return their books, either through our service or through another method. So we're just seeing the service kind of drop off which is to be expected. And Yeah, but this is just a an informational snapshot of the usage of the service since it started cost, as of July 2022.

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We have spent almost a $1,000 on the service, which includes the cost of the return labels and other shipping costs. International shipping is more expensive than domestic shipping. Out of the total cost. Number $342 was dedicated to just the re return labels. So that's the international returns. so 3 out of 71 labels were that was 342, because they were international returns. The cost of a return label depends on a variety of factors, including weight, label, format, and distance.

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Feel free to pause this if you want to read all the incredible feedback we've gone about the service. But this is just I Some of the feedback we have gotten about it. It's all extremely positive. again. I it warms my heart to read these comments. I think a lot of people are grateful We were even offering it during covid 19 and I'm. Well, we were able to help people out during a time where it was probably really stressful, and they were really unsure how to return their library books if they lived out of State.

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Some notes about the service. The service was originally only supposed to run for a year, but back in July of 2021, we were still receiving a lot of requests, as you could tell or are peak with September 2021, and we were approved for that. Some exceptions to the initial patron criteria.

I just wanted to note that we did send some labels to some folks in Maryland, mostly because the not every resident in Maryland lives near a Usmai library that they can return their books to some folks live in rural areas or have accessibility concerns. So we did work with those folks to get the books back to us.While it was a guideline we had at the beginning, we also consider extenuating circumstances even if they're in Maryland. There were also some instances where we had to reprint labels for patrons whose labels timed out after 120 days. This has happened twice where a patron gets a label, and then it times out after 4 months, and they request they they fill out the form again and request another label. We have ended up accepting those second requests, we send them another label, but we do make it clear that this is their last chance to use the service because they've already wasted, and in essence 1 one label which did

cost money of the service. So we make it clear that this is the last chance with them, and they do have to send their books back with this new label.

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But yeah, that is my presentation. Feel free to leave any comments or questions in the comments section. I think this will be uploaded on Youtube so feel free to leave me comments.