

**MORDECAI KAPLAN LIBRARY:**  
**CIRCULATION POLICIES AND THE PROBLEM OF “OVERDUES”**

**CIRCULATION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Library materials may be borrowed by registered patrons – students, faculty, administrative staff, alumni, and guests. Books circulate for a period of four weeks (six months for faculty), and audio-visual materials (CDs, DVDs, videotapes) for two weeks. Books placed on Reserve may be checked out overnight after 3 p.m., and are due back at 9 a.m. of the next day that the Library is open. Reference books, Bet Midrash texts, Kaplan Collection books and periodicals do not circulate and may be used only in the Library.

**Renewals:** Materials may be renewed three times (twice for faculty) as long as they are not overdue or requested by another patron. Renewal requests can be made in person, by telephone, by email or online via the Library’s online public catalogue. After three renewals, materials must be returned and checked in, after which they may be checked out again.

Materials are due for return on the date stamped on the “date due” tag. After a three day grace period they are considered overdue and may not be renewed until they are returned in person.

**Overdues:** Once an item is overdue, the computer system creates a notice to the borrower and it is sent out by email or postal mail. Reminder notices are generated and sent out every two weeks thereafter for the next several months until the materials are returned and checked in. After several months of being “overdue,” the items are flagged as “missing” and finally as “lost.” When an item is marked as missing, the patron’s borrowing privileges are suspended until it is returned or accounted for. When an item is marked as lost, an invoice for its cost plus a processing fee is sent to the patron.

**THE CURRENT SITUATION**

Over the last few years both students and faculty have become more lax in paying attention to their library materials’ due dates, both for our own materials as well as Inter-Library Loans, i.e. those items borrowed from other, cooperating libraries. Unfortunately this has contributed to the creation of a culture in which deadlines, dues dates, etc. seem to be considered unimportant and may be ignored:

- Borrowed materials are not returned or renewed on time;
- Overdue notices and even invoices for “lost” items are repeatedly not responded to and/or are ignored.

The previous lack of any enforcement on the Library’s part has allowed the situation to continue and worsen in breadth (the number of people who are delinquent) and depth (an increase in the length of overdue time and response to overdue notices). It could also reasonably be asked “what effect might this kind of behavior have on the meta-issues of rabbinic formation and the character development of future rabbis?”

**THE LARGER ISSUES IN AN INSTITUTION SUCH AS OURS**

Our circulation policies and procedures are considerably generous to our patrons and easy to comply with. They are neither excessive nor do they place an undue burden upon even the

busiest of persons. In addition, our Library has a limited amount of resources and our small staff (one full-time and one part-time person) has a very limited amount of time. When materials are not returned or renewed on time they become unavailable for other people who might want and/or need to use them. Our staff also must spend extra time away from their other duties to follow up on overdue materials. In an institution such as ours it is reasonable to expect that patrons should to be more responsible for the materials they use and borrow, especially with regard to returning or renewing them on time. Cooperation is a *middah*/quality that students ought to be developing as part of their rabbinic formation -- specifically a greater mindfulness about sharing the resources that their colleagues and friends might be using. Faculty too should serve as role models for our students, as well as practicing the same "good citizen" habits that all of us, as ethical people who are interested in living in community, should be observing.

### **ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION**

In the last year a number of steps have been taken to address and attempt to remedy the problem. Primarily, we have tried to make our patrons more aware of the circulation policies and of the importance of returning or renewing materials by their due date.

- At the beginning of the summer of 2014 a new handout was prepared describing and explaining our circulation policies as well as the various processes available for renewing borrowed materials. It was included in the orientation packets for incoming students, referenced at the new student Library orientation tour, and emailed to all returning students and the faculty at the beginning of the fall semester. It continues to be available in the Library information rack by the entrance and is posted on the Library page of the College website.
- A small insert summarizing the policies and renewal procedures is stamped with the due date and given to each patron whenever they borrow any materials.

In addition to the above actions, we have been more careful in the implementation of the current, stated circulation policies and procedures:

- We have limited the ability to renew books once they are marked as overdue, without physically returning them to be checked in;
- Patrons who repeatedly fail to return their overdue materials may not check out anything else until they clear their records;
- As in the past, seniors slated for graduation who have outstanding Library obligations (either books or money owed) are reported to the registrar and/or dean, who may hold up a student's receiving their diplomas;
- We have tracked the number of overdue notices and reminders sent out before an item is returned or finally paid for.

It is, as of yet, uncertain to what extent any or all of these measures have been effective in reducing the number of overdues or the length of time it takes before an overdue item is returned, but it is clear that the problem persists enough to consider further measures.

### **INSTITUTING FINES FOR OVERDUE MATERIALS**

Almost all libraries, public, private, academic, etc., levy some type of fine on overdue materials as a dis-incentive to keeping items beyond their due date without renewing them. In 2013, we conducted a simple study of 18 academic libraries of various sizes in our geographic area and their overdue policies with particular respect to fines. Of the 18 libraries contacted, 17

responded, all of them indicating that they impose fines for late returns. Fines on books ranged from \$.10 to \$.50 per day per item, the average fine being \$.20 per day per item. As to audio-visual materials, an overwhelming majority of libraries charged \$1 per day per item, with two libraries capping the total fine at \$25 and \$30 respectively.

In light of our ongoing situation and the practices of other libraries described above, we propose the following measures in addition to the actions previously taken (see above), in the hope that they will greatly reduce the problem of overdue materials in our library:

- Checkout procedures and circulation periods will remain the same;
- If it is technically possible with our ILS (Integrated Library System), a brief reminder will be automatically generated and emailed several days before a checked out item is due for return;
- A “grace period” of three days will be given before fines begin to accrue;
- After three days a fine of \$.25/day per book and \$1/per day per A-V item will be charged on overdue materials. Fines will not be charged for days that the Library is closed (e.g. weekends), when materials cannot be returned;
- Once an item is marked as lost and an invoice is sent out, upon payment for or return of the item(s), the fines previously owed may be renegotiated with the Library Director.

These new actions will be instituted at the beginning of the spring 2016 semester, with notification to all students and staff to be communicated during the first week of January 2016. For items that are already overdue at the beginning of the spring term, fines will be calculated only for those days that occur from the time that the new policies begin.

It is our expressed hope that with these new steps in place, the institutional culture of RRC in general and the Kaplan Library in particular will be affected for the better and make for a more cooperative, communal atmosphere that reflects the College’s self-understanding.