



Board of Trustees of The City University of New York

RESOLUTION TO

Remove Overdue Fines from Circulating Stack Books at City University of New York Libraries

April 6, 2020

WHEREAS, CUNY is legislatively mandated to be a critical component of upward mobility for low income New Yorkers, regardless of race or gender; and

WHEREAS the American Library Association passed a resolution in 2019 recommending that libraries evaluate their use of fines and actively work to eliminate them; and

WHEREAS over 40% of CUNY students live in households earning less than \$20,000, library fines for overdue books can be a severe penalty impeding retention and graduation; and

WHEREAS there is little return on investment for collecting fines; and

WHEREAS collecting fines antagonizes the relationship between libraries and the communities in which they serve; and

WHEREAS several large research libraries including New York University and Texas A&M as well as the Chicago Public Library and San Francisco Public Library systems have eliminated overdue fines; and

WHEREAS there are ethical considerations about the impact on fines of low-income patrons;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, That the Board of Trustees of the City University New York eliminate all late return fines from circulating (Stacks) books (“General Fines”), currently set at \$0.25/day.

Explanation: In Fall 2018, the Council of Chief Librarians created a task force to investigate library fines for overdue and lost items at and beyond CUNY, and to recommend changes (if needed) to fine structures and loan periods to ensure the best service for our library users, and to mitigate the negative effects of fines on our students.

After a thorough review of CUNY library fines policies and procedures, including the CUNY Tuition and Fees Manual, as well as research into the experiences at academic libraries that have reduced or eliminated fines, the task force made its recommendations to the Council of Chief Librarians. At the December 9, 2019 Council of Chief Librarians meeting, the proposal to eliminate late fines from circulating (Stacks) books and remove past overdue fines was approved. At the March 9, 2020 Council of Chief Librarians meeting, the proposal to stop placing library holds due to overdue fines on students' CUNYFirst accounts was approved.

As a large urban university system where over 40% of students live in households earning less than \$20,000, CUNY has a responsibility to eliminate as many obstacles as possible for its students (CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2018). Fines for overdue books can be a severe penalty for students from low-income households. Eliminating overdue fines on circulating (Stacks) books will aid students in persisting and completing their degrees as students will be more likely to retain their library privileges during their entire college career.

In 1998 Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) implemented "fineless" circulation after discovering that it "had cost \$25,000 to collect \$15,000 worth of fines (Mitchell, 2000). At Texas A&M the same low return on investment was found, in exploring the fines system, managers realized that approximately \$80,000 in staffing time and resources was being used to generate around \$20,000 in overdue fines revenue" (Mitchell, 2000, 17).

Several years ago, New York University (NYU) and Texas A&M removed fines from circulating books (Rupp, Sweetman, Perry, 2010; Mosely, 2004). More recently Brigham Young University and Vancouver Island University (VIU) did the same (Reed, Blackburn, & Sifton, 2010, Wilson, 2014). Both NYU, VIU, and Texas A&M reported a considerable increase in good will with students, creating a more positive environment in the library. NYU and VIU reported that they did not see a significant drop in return rates (Rupp, Sweetman, & Perry, 2010; Reed, Blackburn, & Sifton, 2010).

Many public libraries, including large systems such as Chicago Public Library and San Francisco Public Library, have removed fines as well citing the considerable amount of staff time involved in collecting small amounts of fines, ethical considerations about the impact on low-income patrons, and the negative impact on the library's reputation (Chicago Public Library, October 1, 2019; San Francisco Public Library, January 2019). The American Library Association, the largest association for librarians, issued a resolution in 2019 recommending the libraries actively work to eliminate fines to decrease social inequities among library users. (American Library Association, 2019).

Note: This resolution does not eliminate fees for lost or never-returned books.

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