



International Leads

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Liaison librarian makes overseas connection

By Robin Bergart

As a liaison librarian at a university library in Ontario, my normal liaison duties don't take me much farther than the edge of campus. But last winter, out of the blue, a professor in one of my departments asked if I would be interested in some library work at the University of Ghana in Accra. He is an agricultural economist and had a grant from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to research microenterprises in Ghana. A small part of this project includes the development of the Agricultural Economics & Agribusiness department library at the University of Ghana. That is where I fit in. I jumped at the opportunity and I didn't have to twist my colleague, Wayne Johnston's, arm too hard to convince him to accompany me and lend his IT expertise to the project.

This would be my first foray into international librarianship and I needed to get up to speed quickly. In preparation for the trip, I joined IRRT, read whatever I could get my hands on about libraries in Africa, and got in touch with librarians who had experience working in developing countries. I quizzed students and faculty on my campus who had lived in Ghana and I contacted several students, faculty and librarians at the University of Ghana.

The picture that began to emerge of libraries at the University of Ghana seemed full of contradictions. On the one hand, I learned the University of



photo by Robin Bergart

Library workers from the University of Ghana unload materials bound for recycling as part of a weeding project at the department library in Accra. The project was one of several accomplished during the author's time in Ghana.

Ghana has access to over a dozen full-text journal indexes and e-journal suites. A project to implement the first automated catalog was in progress. A brand new student computer lab was available in the department in which we would be working. On the other hand, when Wayne and I surveyed faculty and students about their resource needs, they said that they could not access current journals and that they relied on worn, outdated books for their research.

We were concerned about how we would be received. Would our work be

viewed as just another well-meaning but unsustainable project undertaken by foreigners? We were especially concerned as the library assistant in the department library had not responded to any of our emails. Did he even know we were coming? We did not dare to be too sanguine about how things would proceed once we arrived in Ghana.

With only a hazy idea of what the situation was really like at the department library, we had to decide in

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photo by Robin Bergart

The Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness department library at the University of Ghana in Accra is shown amid a weeding project aimed at clearing out damaged or unneeded materials.

Ghana

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advance how to spend our limited budget. We selected some textbooks and CD ROMS, purchased cataloging supplies, and spent the bulk of our budget on The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library, a hard drive loaded with 115 full text agricultural journals produced by Cornell University's Albert R. Mann Library. We also acquired UNESCO's CDS/ISIS database software so we could—if need be—create an automated catalog for the library.

The contradictory impressions we had formed about the situation all turned out to be accurate. Though the campus *does* have an impressive number of subscriptions to online databases and there *is* a pristine computer lab in the department, Internet connectivity is so limited as to make the online databases practically worthless. On good days, it was so slow we could pick up a copy of the *Daily Graphic*, Accra's daily newspaper, and read through it before a webpage loaded—or else the Internet was down altogether. The TEEAL hard drive we brought with us needed a server and we discovered that there was no server

on campus with the capacity for it. Although it was true that a new automated catalog system had been purchased for the campus, it would be months or years before the smaller department libraries would be added to the system.

The department library was in a bad state of neglect. Hundreds of books and periodicals were utterly disorganized, and boxes of donated books sat unopened. Most of the collection was out of date or irrelevant to the department's needs, or both. The shelves were dusty and many of the books were mildewing. We decided that the most important contribution we could make would be to weed, organize, and provide good access to the collection through an automated catalog. We would also have liked to install TEEAL, but that project awaits a new server.

While Wayne toiled away at designing a catalog, the library assistant and I weeded, dusted, and organized the bookshelves. We wrote a collection policy to discourage the library from accepting any more donations of outdated and/or irrelevant books from well-intentioned but

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Message from the IRRT Chair

By Jeannette Pierce,
Immediate Past Chair

IRRT in New Orleans!

I would like to personally thank everyone who conducted the work of the IRRT at the Annual Meeting in New Orleans. As Chair, I have been the fortunate recipient of many compliments about the high quality of IRRT programs and events. More importantly, IRRT members are doing more than ever to create opportunities for librarians from around the world to network with each other and share our commitment to the future of libraries around the world. Highlights from the Annual Conference:

- “Thinking Outside the Borders” (Pre-Conference) - In past years, the pre-conference has only been open to non-U.S. librarians. This year we opened registration to all with great success!
- International Librarian’s Orientation - A big “Thank You” to Keith Fiels, ALA executive director, for welcoming librarians from abroad to the conference and to George Needham, OCLC vice president, Member Services, for speaking about trends in U.S. libraries.
- “National Libraries” (Paper Session) - Excellent papers from Denmark, Scotland, and Germany, as well as a paper on the Virtual International Authority File Project.

- International Poster Session - The poster sessions just keep growing in number and quality!

- “From Nepal to Nicaragua: Sustainability in International Projects” Another outstanding program organized by the International Sustainable Library Development Interest Group.

- “Intellectual Freedom: Views through a Cross-Cultural Lens” – Another big “Thank You” to Robert Wedgeworth, president and CEO of ProLiteracy Worldwide, for providing the keynote address

- International Librarians’ Reception – As you know, this is a wonderful event at *every* conference. The reception could not be held without the support of our sponsors. Special thanks go to our friends at Blackwell’s Book Services, Elsevier, OCLC/WebJunction, and 3M Corporation!

ALA-World Listserv

For many years, ALA-World has functioned as an unmoderated listserv open to anyone interested in international librarianship. Last year the IRRT Executive Board tasked our Publications Committee with writing a purpose statement for the listserv and making recommendations regarding the

future management of the listserv. Thanks to the hard work of the committee, the IRRT Executive Board has approved a new purpose and guidelines for ALA-World and we will be seeking a volunteer listserv manager to begin this year. The purpose and guidelines will be distributed to our membership via e-mail and posted on the IRRT web site.

Leslie Burger’s Emerging Leaders Initiative

The IRRT Executive Board has approved a \$500 grant towards the expenses of an IRRT member selected to participate in Leslie Burger’s Emerging Leaders Initiative. Information about the program and how to apply has been sent to all members via e-mail.

Join Us!

The IRRT is an important venue within ALA for encouraging a global perspective on librarianship. In addition to our established activities the IRRT wants to provide opportunities for our membership to bring forward new ideas and activities. As an example, IRRT member Mollie Fein has initiated an effort to form a Public Libraries Interest Group within IRRT (see page 7 in this issue). If you have ideas for new initiatives, please contact Susan Schnuer, IRRT Chair.

IVC welcomes more than 580 international visitors

By Liz Cooper, Chair-IVC Committee

Thanks to everyone who helped to make the International Visitors Center (IVC) a success at the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans! The IVC, which provides a friendly place for international visitors at the annual conference to stop and ask questions about the conference or host city, access Internet/email, and meet with friends and relax, was very popular with ALA’s international attendees.

According to our statistics, over 580 people visited the IVC during the four days it was open — we were busy!

Special thanks to the 64 people who staffed the IVC as well as the 100+ people who offered to volunteer at the IVC and weren’t able to serve because of schedule conflicts. We were lucky to have so many people offer their time. Having a large pool of volunteers gave us the flexibility to set a schedule that

kept the IVC double-staffed from 9-5, Friday - Monday of the conference.

Special thanks also go to Delin Guerra of the International Relations Office who helped get the IVC organized. We couldn’t have done it without her!

Thanks again to everyone who contributed to the IVC and helped to make ALA’s international guests feel welcome!

Travelers visit trendsetting Singapore library

By Mollie Fein

Early morning, February 16, 2006, Carl Birkmeyer, Rose Frase and I boarded a United Airlines flight to join other librarians on a tour of libraries in Singapore and Hong Kong with the Urban Libraries Council. Over 20 hours later we landed . . . exhausted . . . in Singapore. The date was February 18 (my birthday!) at about 1 a.m. We had crossed the international dateline, so February 17 disappeared into the strangeness of international flight.

The trip was sponsored by the Urban Libraries Council, SirsiDynix, and The Library Corporation. The expenses were shared through a grant from the Maryland Department of Library Services, Baltimore County Public Library, and our own individual contributions.

Why Singapore and Hong Kong?

In the world of libraries, both Singapore and Hong Kong are seen as having very progressive library systems. Singapore, in particular, has been recognized as an international trendsetter for years. In fact, I had heard about the Singapore Library System while visiting librarian friends in Australia. So, when the opportunity to go on the tour presented itself, I decided to go.

The Republic of Singapore is an independent island nation in Southeast Asia. It is a small country, about the size of Manhattan, with 4 ½ million people. They have a high GDP- US \$24,000. Employment is almost 100% and the education level of Singaporeans is high. On international tests, Singapore students test number one in math and science.

Technology has always been important. For example, 18% of the current land mass has been reclaimed from the sea; reverse osmosis is used to recycle kitchen and bath water and a universal cash card is promoted so that Singaporeans don't need to use cash. There is this amazing 'green building'



photo by Carl Birkmeyer

Visitors to the new National Library in Singapore enjoy one of its many gardens. The Urban Libraries Council recently sponsored a tour of libraries in Singapore and Hong Kong, of which a visit to Singapore's national library was a part.

movement that encourages planting gardens and plants on rooftops to help lower the temperature of the city. The new National Library had five separate gardens that were beautiful and functional. According to library staff, the library gardens helped lower the cost of air conditioning significantly.

About 70 percent of Singaporeans are ethnic Chinese. The other 30 percent are Malay, Tamil, and Indian. It is interesting that the language of the home (mostly Chinese) is different from the language of commerce, education and politics (English). Singapore decided to separate the two, initially to prevent bad feelings from minority language groups. The choice, however,

has proven itself to be economically and strategically brilliant. At a time when Asia is growing rapidly, there is obvious advantage to a multilingual population.

I was told that in the 1960s, right before Singapore became independent from the British, there were ethnic riots. Librarians pointed to this past as significant in the evolution of their identity and culture. There is a lot of emphasis on behaving correctly. Community values are more important than individual values. For instance, it is illegal to publicly criticize minority ethnic groups and movies, books and

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Chair's program examines intellectual freedom

By Pat Harris

It caught my attention when I read on the IFLA website “that in Turkmenistan libraries were closed under presidential order, on the grounds that ‘no one reads.’” Censorship, restrictions of press freedom and governmental restriction and surveillance of Internet use are documented frequently in the world press. Intellectual freedom is a topic that is persistent in its importance and fascination.

The annual IRRT Chairperson's program held June 25, 2006, during the 2006 ALA Conference in New Orleans brought together an articulate and well-informed group of speakers to examine in some depth how intellectual freedom is viewed and supported around the world and, specifically, how the concept of intellectual freedom is perceived and supported in China, the Middle East, and Africa.

The program, achieved by IRRT chair Jeannette Pierce, took as its starting point Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly over fifty years ago, the declaration states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

The speakers were asked to gauge progress in meeting this goal on a global and national level.

Robert Wedgeworth, former executive director of ALA and now the president and CEO of Pro-Literacy Worldwide, keynoted the program. Wedgeworth pointed out that the understanding of intellectual freedom will vary from country to country and it cannot be assumed that the concept of intellectual freedom is an important part of a library's philosophy. Wedgeworth reminded the audience that historically all governments have practiced censorship.

Wedgeworth defined four global forces—economics, technology, and demography, culture—that in his view impact and create an environment to support intellectual freedom. Wedgeworth also drew on his deep experience in the library and information arena to explore each dimension. Wedgeworth noted for example that in developing countries' tariffs and foreign exchange-currency controls regulations can impose significant barriers to educational materials entering a country. Without access to resources such as books, journals and other published literature

“The right [in Africa] to freely access information in the national and worldwide public domain still remains a ‘luxury item.’”

-- Angel Batiste, program speaker

it is not possible to support educational programs and research. Wedgeworth noted that this situation hit home during the 1984 IFLA Conference in Kenya as the national government imposed a tariff on the exhibit materials being imported by a major scientific publisher exhibiting at the conference.

Wedgeworth noted with pride the success of the IFLA Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) formed in 1998 with the express purpose of defending and promoting Article 19 and monitoring and reporting on intellectual freedom within the library community worldwide. FAIFE's most recent biannual report released in 2005 describes the intellectual freedom environment in 150 countries. The next report will be issued in 2007.

In closing, Wedgeworth reminded the audience to strive to understand the context surrounding intellectual freedom conflicts and to remain flexible, noting that the world will change and we must change as well.

A panel of three speakers built on Wedgeworth's overview giving their personal and professional perspective on the intellectual freedom environment in three global areas: the Middle East, China, and Africa. The panelists were forced to keep their remarks brief and focused due to time constraints. However, their complete presentations are available on the IRRT website.

Dr. Yue Li, assistant university librarian at Florida State University Libraries, visited China for three weeks in late 2005 to undertake research for his presentation. Dr. Li reported, based on his observations and interviews, that the use of Internet resources in China is severely restricted and research on politically incorrect topics cannot be pursued due to limits on Internet access. Dr. Li explained that although historically China has no heritage of intellectual freedom, due to the growing influence of the outside world the situation is slowly changing. He was optimistic that the intellectual freedom climate will continue to improve. (Dr. Li's slides, featured on the IRRT website, include an impressive and informative summary of Chinese political and social development and provide a wealth of detail.)

Jordan Scepanski, an internationalist with strong connections in Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, recounted a number of events illustrating how intellectual freedom is supported in the Middle East. He cited the recent controversy surrounding publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed in what many deemed a disrespectful way. He spoke of two incidents he observed while working abroad in the 1980s and

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LIS educators seminar held in Copenhagen

By Ismail Abdullahi

Historical Background

Beginning 2004, informal discussions were held at IFLA Buenos Aires Conference between LIS Educators from Africa, Asia, and Latin America (AALA) countries. This discussion generated an interest to organize a working seminar in Copenhagen Denmark prior to IFLA Congress in Oslo and it was suggested by the participants that Dr. Ismail Abdullahi should approach the Royal School of Library and Information Science (RSLIS) in Copenhagen, Denmark, to sponsor this seminar. That effort eventually obtained support from the Royal School of Library and Information Science and the Danish Ministry of Culture, the Danish Center for Culture and Development (DCCD) to organize a Working Seminar at the Royal School of Library and Information Science.

The Seminar

The Africa, Asia, Latin America (AALA) Working Seminar of LIS Educators from Developing Countries was held in Copenhagen, Denmark from August 10-12, 2005. It was sponsored by Danish Ministry of Culture, the Danish Centre for Culture and Development (DCCD) and hosted by the Royal School of Library and Information Science, Denmark and arranged jointly with AALA. The main subject of the Seminar was Curriculum Development with Special Focus on Collection and Mediating Local Non-written Cultural Heritage in LIS Schools Curriculum in Developing Countries.

The aim of the workshop project is three-tiered:

1. The direct goal of the project is to generate interest in and enable library school teachers (LIS Educators) in selected developing countries to teach their students why staff in local libraries should and how they can identify, collect and mediate/transmit local stories, myths, dance and other



Attendees participate in the Africa, Asia, Latin America (AALA) Working Seminar of LIS Educators from Developing Countries, held in Copenhagen, Denmark, August 10-12, 2005.

kinds of non-written pieces of cultural heritage.

2. More generally, the goal is to encourage and stimulate a larger involvement and participation of members of local populations in the cultural work of libraries and to work with free and equal access to information.

3. Creating a network among library schools in the Third World with a view to developing public library services in developing countries with particular emphasis on the local cultural dimension.

The number of participants representing different countries were: three from Asia, two from South Africa, six from Africa, one from Latin America, four from Denmark, and three from the United States, including IFLA Past President Bob Wedgworth and ALA President Michael Gorman.

The workshop commenced with an informal welcoming evening reception held at the Hotel Park Inn where most participants were staying. The evening started with the introduction of the participants, informal discussion, and deliberations. Participants exchanged their views in the area of international librarianship and LIS education in developing countries as a whole. Eight workshop sessions were held.

The AALA workshop was run parallel with the Seminar of European Working Conference addressing the contents and thematic profile of European LIS school curricula.

In the closing session (Joint Session for LIS Educators from Europe and Developing Countries), the keynote address was delivered by Gorman. The title of his address was "A Unified approach to teaching libraries, culture and information in LIS Education."

The workshop participants interacted with issues relating to their respective countries and it was in the opinion of all the participants that these issues should be addressed to an international forum like IFLA. It was also pointed that there should be collaboration between public libraries and school libraries and the interrelations between them can be the subject of curriculum. Another issue that came to the fore during the discussion is networking of LIS schools in developing countries and an exchange program for the teachers. Yet another case was depleting strength of students in LIS schools in some countries of the Third world. In this regard there is a need for inculcating fresh initiatives in the curriculum of LIS Schools in these countries. The levels of LIS courses were also part of the discussion.

Singapore

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the Internet are censored specifically to discourage disharmony.

Singapore is famous for the strictness of its legal code. Some examples: There is a mandatory death sentence for trafficking in drugs and fines are very serious for small things like littering, jaywalking and even chewing gum. Cigarettes are banned in all public spaces. As a result, the city is cleaner than any city I have ever seen. There is no litter and cleanliness is a high community value. The impression is one of strict organization and behavior.

However, their laws are surprisingly relaxed in other areas; prostitution is legal (taxed and regulated) and the gay community is recognized as a positive economic force.

Libraries! Libraries!

Most impressive was the Singapore National Library. It is a combination Library of Congress and public library. There are 16 floors with 58,000 square meters and 630,000 items. It is beautiful and ultra-modern, with numerous gardens and lots of natural light. Materials are available in English (70%) and Malay, Tamil and Chinese. In addition to the National Library there are twenty Community Libraries, three Regional Libraries and twenty Children's Libraries.

Singapore was the first library in the world to deploy RFID technology for self check-out and returns.

One of the most interesting experiments that Singapore is conducting is the development of a "Do-it-yourself" (DIY) library (Sengkang Community Library). The library runs entirely without an information or circulation desk. Everything is self service. You can register for a library card, borrow and return books, renew books, check library records, pay fines, access internet computers (eLibraryHub), add money to your CashCard and seek assistance on library items and other services through "Cybrarian."

Cybrarian is a virtual librarian that is available to answer questions and CashCard is a universal cash card used throughout Singapore to pay for lots of things. The only regular staff person is a "concierge." The concierge works as security guard and answers basic directional questions. (Basic statistics for the Sengkang Community Library-Circulation: 1.5 million; Visitors: 1.7 million) The library is open 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday through Sunday.

Another interesting approach is their concept of a "Children's Library." These libraries are very small (2,000-3,000 sq. feet) and are geared to 4-10 year olds. (It is assumed that by 11 children can independently take public transit.) There are currently about 30 of these libraries. Any community can have one of these libraries. The target market for these libraries is large housing complexes in lower socioeconomic areas. They represent a curious community partnership. The community provides the space and the volunteers to help operate the library. The library provides part-time staff for story times, library materials, self-check out/returns machines and maintenance of materials.

The 3 regional libraries are quite large. We visited the Woodlands Regional Library, a 4 story space of almost 120,000 square feet with over 500,000 books. Circulation last year was 2.2 million. Each floor has a specific target market. (One floor reference, one floor for children, one floor for adult, one floor for young adult). The young adult floor had a massive study area. There were no tables on the adult floor to discourage young people from "hanging out." Regional Libraries are the only libraries with Children's Librarian's; community libraries have "generalists."

I think I can speak for both Carl and Rose when I say we all gained a lot from the trip. We saw new ways of looking at libraries and each of us is interested in sharing our observations.

In the works for a future issue: Mollie Fein takes you on a tour of libraries in Hong Kong!

Have an international interest in public libraries?

Dear IRRT members,

I am exploring the possibility of forming a Public Libraries Interest Group within the ALA International Relations Round Table. I am seeking other IRRT members who have an interest in exploring the focus and mission of a group interested in international public libraries. At this point, I envision the mission something like: "The IRRT public libraries Interest Group (PLIG) will create a forum for the exchange of ideas, best practices and challenges of public libraries around the world. PLIG will work to promote the values of public libraries worldwide and encourage and advocate for awareness of international public libraries within the American Library Association."

IRRT Interest Groups are self-organizing units of librarians passionate about a particular issue. Potential activities of PLIG could include discussion groups, an online forum, social activities and programming at conferences.

So, I am interested in other librarians, particularly public librarians, interested in forming a Public Libraries Interest Group to help forge PLIG and determine its initial mission and objectives. This group would get together virtually in late September or early October.

If you are interested let me know by sending me your name, e-mail address, library institution address and a contact phone number.

Please feel free to contact me with your questions/thoughts/ideas at Mollie Fein, Library Manager, Baltimore County Public Library, Essex Branch, 1110 Eastern Boulevard, Baltimore, MD, 21221, 410-887-0295, x100 or 110, mfein@bcpl.net. Hope to hear from you soon!

Thanks to Jeannette Pierce, IRRT Past Chair, and Susan Schnuer, IRRT Chair for their help and encouragement.

-- Mollie Fein

Ghana

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misguided donors. We wrote a guide to searching the catalog and held a library instruction session for faculty and graduate students. The library assistant, far from resenting our presence, seemed to enjoy the new challenge of organizing and cataloging the collection.

In spite of a lack of resources, we found we were able to work more efficiently in Ghana than we do normally at our home library. Everyone was incredibly willing to help us accomplish our goals, and as we were unencumbered by committees, policies, and multiple levels of administration, our work proceeded quickly.

For example, when we decided to dispose of ten year's worth of yellowing and mildewing copies of *The Daily Graphic*, we were given full support by the librarians at the central Balme Library, who invited us to take everything we didn't want to their recycling facility. The Agricultural Economics department provided us with a van and a driver, and the library assistant and driver worked tirelessly in the heat to load up the van.

We are even hopeful that our work will be continued by the library assistant and will not become just another well-intentioned but unsustainable aid project.

Program

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the 1990s, one relating to tensions over the conservative dress of female students, the other involving the purchase of books on sensitive topics.

Drawing on recent events, Scepanski mentioned the altering in an Arab newspaper of a western wire service story on oil fields, and the policy and process his Middle Eastern university used in reviewing challenged materials.

Scepanski's stories and experiences aptly conveyed the complexities and challenges of ultimately achieving freedom of expression and added a personal dimension to the program.

Angel Batiste, Library of Congress area specialist for the African and Middle Eastern Division, presented a thoughtful and well-researched overview of the development and state of the information infrastructure in Africa and the status of freedom of information legislation and its implementation in the African nations.

The bottom line Batiste described was stark. In her words, "existing institutional capacities for promoting and implementing intellectual freedom rights and the free flow of information

in African countries are inadequate." In Africa today, she noted, "the right to freely access information in the national and worldwide public domain still remains a 'luxury item.'" Numbers and events backed up her points: fewer than three out of 100 Africans use the internet compared with an average of one out of two persons in the G8 countries.

In introducing the program, Lea Wells, chair of the IRRT program committee, expressed the hope that the program would inform, raise issues, and provoke thinking on what can be done on an individual and professional level to support intellectual freedom globally.

The program met its mark. Thanks to Lea Wells and her committee members—Sharon Bostick, Jackie Xiang Ding, Fred Gitner, Pat Harris, and Susan Schnuer—for organizing the event, attracting an outstanding panel of speakers, and staging a well-planned and well-received program.

This event demonstrated that intellectual freedom continues to be important and fascinating as it drew an attentive and alert audience that filled the meeting room despite stiff competition during an afternoon time-slot that had First Lady Laura Bush speaking on the other end of the New Orleans Convention Center.

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