

Library and Information Resources for International Education

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Introduction

Libraries are unique among Title VI/Fulbright-Hays program areas because they support the entire system of international education. Libraries sustain international teaching and research. To a considerable extent, the health of libraries influences the success of scholarship. This paper analyzes the collective ability of libraries to meet the contemporary needs for international information of students and scholars in the United States. The analysis revisits six broad areas that were highlighted in the session on “Library Collections and Access: Supporting Global Expertise” at the 1997 UCLA conference on *International Education in the New Global Era*: budgets, collection building, research and teaching needs, access to information, electronic resources and digital initiatives, and library staffing. Cooperative efforts to address the challenges currently facing libraries are described, and the essay also highlights areas in which federal support, through Title VI and other programs, has been or could be helpful for libraries as they seek to support international education – and for scholars and students seeking access to research and information. The paper concludes with a brief speculation on what an ideal system for access to international scholarly information might entail.

What are the principal obstacles to providing today’s researchers with foreign information and research? Have the recommendations of the 1997 conference been implemented? What additional and previously unforeseen developments have enhanced or complicated our access to international information? Are changes in the nature and direction of scholarship placing new demands on libraries? If so, how are these repositories adapting? What is the impact of new technologies? Responses and reactions to these questions were solicited from area specialist librarians via e-mail survey and informal interviews. Their views and experiences have informed this paper.

Academic libraries are challenged by ever-expanding priorities and by mandates that exceed their means. Ours is a complex era for information, characterized by distinct and only occasionally overlapping systems of print publications and electronic resources. The balance between analog and digital varies widely from field to field. Some disciplines, such as chemistry or high energy physics, rely primarily on information that is produced, communicated, and consumed through electronic means. The information required by scholars and students concerned with area studies as traditionally understood,

by contrast, relies on a more eclectic mix of electronic resources and print materials. Libraries are under tremendous pressure as they strive to sustain user access to both these systems for producing and consuming information. Even without external cuts and recession, collections budgets and service models have been stretched very thin. Some analysts argue that today's print/digital dilemmas are merely transitional, and that things will improve as the electronic (inevitably) crowds out everything else. So far, however, there is no compelling evidence to support this view.

Librarians, these pressures notwithstanding, also revel in the new technologies that support entirely new modes for locating, consulting, combining, and manipulating information. New institutional partnerships among librarians and scholars, libraries and academic programs, libraries and other cultural institutions, and libraries both domestic and international, are likewise taking shape. Other shifts are at once homely and profound. Electronic journals and books, for instance, can be read at a desk or in a dorm. Ubiquitous access reduces the need for trips to the library—while, perhaps, also altering the symbolic and conceptual significance of these typically monumental spaces. Rare and unique materials have been digitized and then disseminated among groups that would never set foot in the owning library—K-12 students, for example, or schoolteachers in other countries. The hundreds of library catalogs now available on the web have raised our students' and scholars' awareness of what exists to consult. Everyone benefits from these new avenues for access.

U.S. scholars and their overseas colleagues are accustomed to intellectual collaboration: the scholarly community is for the most part already global. Explicit cross-national cooperation among libraries remains less frequent, though easier communications and new technologies are facilitating new inter-institutional relationships. Researchers benefit as resources that previously could only be consulted on-site become available at a distance. New international standards for more sophisticated systems of interlibrary loan and easier, quicker document delivery have been particularly important.

Budgets

The pressures on library budgets remain acute and continue to constrain U.S. research libraries. More is being published, throughout the world, in both hardcopy and online formats. Astronomical, oligopolistic price increases for scientific and technical journals continue unabated. Libraries, as they respond to user demand, have shuffled their priorities to provide more and more electronic access. The proportion of library budgets consumed in annual payments for access to electronic databases, e-journals, and e-books—that is, for materials that the library never actually owns—has risen steadily, resulting in diminished purchasing power. The statistics speak for themselves: between 1986 and 2001, while serial costs have increased 215%, serials purchased have decreased by 5%. Similarly, while monograph costs have increased by 68%, the number of monographs purchased has decreased by 9%.

Collection Building

Despite our unrivaled collecting achievements, our libraries still lack a great many of the resources needed for area studies research and teaching. Materials budgets are limited

and the world's information output continues to grow. Simply keeping current with the scholarly record, just in English, typically squeezes other collecting areas—including, perhaps especially, international acquisitions.

Current models to address this “crisis in foreign acquisitions” are focusing less on centralized coordination of print collecting and more on local access to remote resources. Rapid electronic delivery of information, along with vital partnerships with foreign institutions, has undercut the perceived need to capture all research resources so that they are physically available somewhere within this country.

Research and Teaching Needs

The universe of source materials required to support today's scholars exceeds any repository's collecting capacity. Scholarship is omnivorous, as well as increasingly interdisciplinary. Scholarly demand is at the same time highly differentiated both within fields and across the academic landscape. Within the realm of area studies, Title VI National Resource Centers have been established for every region of the world. The associated scholars have a welter of needs and priorities. The areas upon which they focus likewise vary widely in terms of their information output and structures for publishing and distribution; and also in the nature of their cultural institutions. Area-specific concerns are likewise emerging from such “new” quarters as professional schools and in fields like law, public health, and business.

Scholarly agendas evolve. Libraries must be flexible enough to accommodate these changes, while also respecting the local collections whose integrity and coherence often reflect many years of careful and sustained effort. The budgetary pressures described above, especially those associated with subscription costs for scholarly journals in science and technology, and for electronic products, likewise impinge upon this flexibility.

Access

For librarians, the term “access” has multiple connotations. One meaning centers on identifying materials that might be relevant to the project at hand. A second focus is to verify where to locate a specific item, be it a book listed in a bibliography, a journal article, or an electronic document. And a third meaning centers on actually consulting the material. The paper particularly focuses on bibliographic control, the process of cataloging or indexing information resources so that users know what is available. Good bibliographic control is essential in ensuring easy access to all materials, not just international publications. If a researcher does not know that a work exists, he or she cannot take advantage of it. Issues of special concern are the lack of adequate indexing of journals published in the vernacular, displaying non-Roman scripts in online resources, the over-representation of foreign-language materials in library cataloging backlogs, and the challenge of finding – and affording – regular staff with the requisite language skills.

Electronic Resources and Digital Initiatives

Scholars and librarians increasingly rely on electronic resources, a broad category that includes print and other originally analog materials that have been converted to digital

form as well as resources that were “born digital.” The panorama has been transformed since 1997, and many academic libraries now subscribe to thousands of electronic journals. A growing number of research libraries have also launched “digital library” programs to provide electronic versions (by purchase or reformatting) of sometimes rare materials that were formerly available only in print or on microfilm.

As of 1997, area studies respondents reported that most electronic products were English-language resources aimed at the largest market, with only a few specifically geared to area studies. That situation has begun to change, depending on the region. Area studies scholars and librarians have also taken the lead in creating their own digital products, for instance through such exemplary efforts as the Digital South Asia Library. The expense of digital access and reliable archiving of digital products are current concerns.

Library Staffing

The library profession is aging. Area librarians are in this respect true to the norm, as they persist in a trend already noted in 1997. Cause-and-effect relationships can be difficult to determine—positions left vacant, in any area, may reflect funding cuts or shifting priorities— but thin pools of potential replacements certainly affect the overall staffing panorama. On the other hand, new modes of professional preparation have also emerged. Many libraries are also re-examining the rationale behind requirements that candidates for specialist positions hold a master’s degree from a program accredited by the American Library Association. Libraries also face an urgent and ongoing need for professionals who are proficient in a wide array of foreign languages.

Cooperative Efforts

Advances in technology facilitate collaborative work among libraries in providing access to international resources. Two projects currently funded by grants from the Department of Education Title VI program, *Technological Information and Cooperation for Foreign Information Access* (TICFIA), the Digital South Asia Library and the Latin Americanist Research Resources Project, are highlighted. The area studies programs of the Center for Research Libraries offer other examples of successful cooperative efforts. The many facets of the Library of Congress support international scholarship as well.

The Realities and Promise of Federal Support

In this section, the paper evaluates the successes of existing programs (e.g., TICFIA) and suggests a number of areas in which additional federal support could benefit libraries and their patrons regarding access to international information. The important role that NRCs play in supporting campus libraries is cited, as is the potential for contributions to this area from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Reauthorization of Title II-C, *Strengthening Research Library Resources*, would open another avenue of federal support for international resource repositories.

Conclusions

As the Higher Education Act moves toward reauthorization, libraries, which form part of the core infrastructure for international education, have a critical role to play. Meeting

the nation's goals for international research and teaching requires dependable access to the broadest possible range of foreign information resources.

This is a time of both opportunity and challenge for all our international programs. Research libraries share in the general dynamic, and also have particular issues of their own. New technologies, for example, have changed how scholars conduct research, the topics they choose, and the way they disseminate their results. New technologies have also changed how libraries work, what they acquire, and how they project both analog and digital information to user constituencies that are new as well as known. Libraries face huge challenges in balancing needs, adjusting priorities, and managing limited financial resources in the face of these burgeoning opportunities and demands.

External support, particularly when channeled through targeted programs based on shared understandings of priorities and needs, have substantially enhanced libraries' ability to support international research and teaching. Funds for the traditional activities of acquiring, processing, and preserving hardcopy materials continue to be necessary. Support for programs to create or provide access to electronic resources is crucial as well. Programs that foster the organizational, technological, and legal infrastructure for new cooperative initiatives reflect needs and possibilities that lie beyond most institutions' mandates and capabilities. Finally, ever more globalized scholarship and information resources will benefit from consortia and cooperative initiatives that are international in both design and execution. New sources of support will facilitate all these activities.

The Ideal

Research libraries share the ultimate mandate and goal of ensuring that scholars and students, and also the public at large, enjoy timely and effective access to all recorded expressions of human thought and creativity. This section offers assumptions that reflect the realities of an "ideal" plan of action, and speculates on how that plan might successfully be implemented.