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# Not just icing on the cake

## International strategy and resources at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**G**lobalization, glocalization, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary are all terms that are being used with increasing frequency in the academy. They reflect the current wave of realization that we live in a highly interconnected world, one that has been enhanced, or even made possible, by the information technologies that the academic world has relied upon for almost two decades. How are academic libraries responding to a renewed emphasis on international studies? The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) has developed a number of strategies to address these new opportunities and challenges.

### Library international strategy

In fall 2001, University Librarian Paula Kaufman appointed a Task Force on an International Strategy for the University Library. The purpose of the task force was to develop goals and outline activities that the library must take to maintain and develop its strength as a major player in the university's international programs. Such a focus, it is believed, will benefit not only the faculty and students on this campus, but also people the world over as we move into the 21st century. This vision is in keeping with one articulated several years ago by the campus administration.

The primary mission of the University Library is to provide the best possible collections and services to our users. In order to achieve the library's mission, the task force identified six strategic goals that are crucial to the mission of the University Library and the UIUC campus. These goals are:

- develop an international dimension to all library services;
- develop outstanding collections;
- promote the University Library within the international library community;
- engage the public in international activities at the University Library;
- strengthen the role of international activities within the University Library; and
- develop resources to support international library activities.

The strategies for the implementation of the steps that will help us achieve these goals are outlined in the document *Library International Strategy*.<sup>1</sup> This article summarizes a presentation at a recent Association of Research Libraries Leadership Institute session in which we described a few of the ways the University Library is working toward these goals.

### International collections and resources

The UIUC Library is a highly decentralized system with 42 departmental libraries. The area studies libraries are known for their outstanding collections and, over the past 50 years, have focused on collecting materials from non-English-speaking parts of the world, the so-called vernaculars, as well as English-language materials published in

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other countries. The librarians in these units possess excellent language skills and expert knowledge of the cultures of many countries of the world in order to serve their increasingly diverse users on campus and beyond. In recent years, three additional units have been added to the list of libraries with a defined international focus.<sup>2</sup>

The longstanding, traditionally internationally focused units in the University Library are:

**African Studies and Afro-American Studies.** These two bibliographic units maintain a unique reference collection of African, African American, and African Diaspora resources. The combination of the two units in one place continues to be novel and innovative in academic libraries and fosters crosscultural, international, transnational, and multidisciplinary perspectives about the Black experience.

**Asian Library.** Probably the most diverse in terms of language and culture, the Asian Library's collection covers Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Persian, Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, Hebrew, and about 12 Indic languages, including Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Sanskrit, Punjabi, and Gujarati. Because of the complexity in languages covered, over the years the Asian Library has also built outstanding technical services to offer expertise in providing timely access to a wide range of vernacular materials within the unit. It is one of very few libraries in the system that has both public and technical services functions within the same unit.

**Latin American and Caribbean Studies Unit.** This unit covers the entire Latin American and Caribbean region, as well as Hispanic American communities in the United States. It has the largest collection in its topic area in the Midwest and holds many rare and unique materials. It also has a strong collection of journals, publishes the *Bolivian Studies Journal*, and contributes to the production of HAPI Online (Hispanic American Periodicals Index).

**Slavic and East European Library.** Much like the libraries mentioned above, this unit was created to answer the call for more

diverse and rich resources for the study of other countries and cultures during the Cold War. The services and collections of this unit have changed and developed to match the demands of the political climate.

Three other units, with a less traditional concentration, also work to support the international strategy articulated for the library in very focused ways:

**Women and Gender Resources Library.** This unit supports both the Gender and Women's Studies Program and the Women and Gender in Global Perspective Program, which facilitates research and graduate study on the role of women in developing countries. It is uniquely situated within the Area Studies Division with a thematic approach that is, by nature, universal.

**The Mortenson Center for International Library Programs.** The Mortenson Center is a unique and innovative professional development center offering programs to librarians around the world. Established by two generous gifts from C. Walter and Gerda B. Mortenson, the Mortenson Distinguished Professorship and the Mortenson Center were established in 1991 to strengthen international ties among libraries and librarians worldwide. The goal of the center, as Walter Mortenson put it so eloquently, is to promote international education, understanding, and peace. To date, 700 librarians and information specialists from 86 countries have participated in programs in at the center.

**Center for Global Studies.** The Center for Global Studies has added the new position, global studies librarian, which it has funded through grant money. As written, this grant stipulated funds to hire a half-time global studies librarian. This position supports the center's mission to explore globalization as a contested notion. The position is embedded within the center, a rather unique occurrence in the University Library's culture. Most work is targeted for the virtual world, but some print materials are purchased and distributed to other units. The center boasts a virtual bookshelf and a blog, along with

several other means to build bridges between resources and users at an international level.

### **A sampling of international activities**

In the 1950s area studies was developed as a uniquely U.S.-based branch for research in answer to the stresses of the Cold War. The Cold War ended with Glasnost, Perestroika, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Area studies, and their related libraries, did not become less important, but became even more important in supporting understanding between the United States and the other cultures with whom we share the planet. The collections of these libraries have changed markedly with the ability to purchase materials from the far reaches of the globe. But even as the collections have changed, the services provided by these libraries have morphed and responded to the pressures of the 21st century.

As part of a large research library, UIUC's international libraries have some unique opportunities for service and outreach. Libraries have built upon strong collections, generous gifts, and grants to provide special services on a national and international level. A few of these unique services and opportunities for outreach are described below.

#### ***Slavic Reference Service***

The Slavic and East European Library provides one example of the unique aspects of the area studies libraries through its Slavic Reference Service (SRS). More than 30 years ago, SRS was established at UIUC as a unique service designed both to meet the needs of Slavic scholars, and to enhance the collection at the university. SRS was a natural outgrowth of the annual Summer Research Lab for Slavic scholars sponsored by the University of Illinois Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center. As scholars attended the lab, they would leave any complex reference questions behind to be pursued by the Slavic librarians.

The presence of so many scholars in such a broad range of disciplines presented an opportunity to develop a one-of-a-kind service that could contribute to building a truly unique Slavic collection in the library and

assist researchers struggling to find obscure materials. A standardized way of searching bibliographic citations to guarantee a relatively uniform level of service was developed. National funding was procured to support the acquisition of material on microfilm from Eastern Europe and Russia.

From its inception SRS was a collaborative venture on all levels. Nationally, close working relationships with Slavic librarians at the Library of Congress, Harvard, Berkeley, and a number of other institutions have been nurtured. In the mid-1980s, the possibility of expanding this type of relationship to Russian colleagues was explored, and collaboration was established with the social science library of the Academy of Sciences. This relationship had two aspects: to obtain Russian dissertation abstracts on microfiche that had been largely inaccessible and to establish a reference exchange via telex. Although impossible to maintain due to the political situation, these services set a precedent, and demonstrated how much could be accomplished for our patrons when working collaboratively with our colleagues in Russia.

With the evolution of the political situation and tremendous advances in technology, an opportunity to establish a reference exchange again arose in the late 1990s. By this time SRS had developed an online bibliographic guide.<sup>3</sup> Librarians at the Jagiellonian University Library, the Russian National Library, and, in this coming year, the Ukrainian Parliamentary Library, participate in the virtual reference program and contribute materials to the online bibliographic guide. With the generous support of the University Library and U.S. Department of State, training has been made available to these individuals. Their contributions have greatly enriched the resources offered to patrons, from answering very obscure reference questions in a short period of time, to counseling scholars preparing for research trips.

#### ***Mortenson Center programs***

The Mortenson Center hosts an associates program that brings librarians and informa-

tion specialists from other countries to the campus for extended stays. This allows the visiting librarians to observe and learn firsthand the workings of U.S. libraries, and to share information and experiences from their libraries. While at the Mortenson Center, international librarians make presentations at the Illinois Library Association and go on host visits to libraries around the state, which are organized by the Illinois State Library. UIUC and local librarians serve as friends and mentors for the international visitors as they participate in a program of short courses, library tours, discussions, and other activities. Greater international awareness and contacts throughout the State of Illinois have resulted from the visits to libraries and interactions with friends and mentors.

The partnership program assists other countries in their efforts to develop self-sustaining centers for continuing education for librarians. Recently the Mortenson Center staff traveled to Haiti, to advise Haitian training teams on their professional development strategy for a network of 40 rural community libraries, and to Georgia, to talk with government and university officials about establishing an MLS program. Grants from the MacArthur Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, and Mellon Foundation have facilitated work with libraries in Africa. In addition, each year the Mortenson Distinguished Lecture Series brings a speaker to campus to share his or her expertise and increase knowledge about library-related issues.

### **Where do we go from here?**

Many of the units within the library have an abiding interest in international activities. One of the most recent, and far reaching, opportunities for the members of the community is a proposed collaboration between UIUC and the University of Toronto. Both are similar institutions that have an interest in sharing expertise and collaborating on projects. Following a visit by four librarians from the University of Toronto to UIUC, several opportunities for such collaborations were identified, and librarians on each campus

were put in charge of the initiatives. Each institution has developed a list of activities in their library and a common Web site, where the information can be shared.

Where do we go from here? International studies collections, resources, and activities are the backbones of libraries and their institutions. They are not just icing on the cake as perceived by some in the face of changing financial realities. They are, in fact, vitally important assets for any library, large or small (perhaps more so for the large libraries) to stay in the forefront of world knowledge by providing our users with world-class collections and resources. It is also critically important to acknowledge the future scholarship these international resources, both tangible and ephemeral, will bring and to continue to support and promote these resources to the very complex global society within which we live.

### **Notes**

1. Library International Strategy, [www.library.uiuc.edu/administration/services/policies/library\\_int\\_strategy.htm](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/administration/services/policies/library_int_strategy.htm)
2. Library Unit Home Pages. African Studies Library, [www.afrst.uiuc.edu/lib.html](http://www.afrst.uiuc.edu/lib.html)  
Africana and Afro-American combined page, [www.library.uiuc.edu/afx/](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/afx/)  
Afro-American Studies Library, [www.library.uiuc.edu/afx/afro.htm](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/afx/afro.htm)  
Area Studies Division Libraries, [www.library.uiuc.edu/afx/Area/division.htm](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/afx/Area/division.htm)  
Asian Studies Library, [www.library.uiuc.edu/asx/](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/asx/)  
Center for Global Studies, [www.cgs.uiuc.edu/resources/-home-/index.html](http://www.cgs.uiuc.edu/resources/-home-/index.html)  
Mortenson Center for International Library Programs, [www.library.uiuc.edu/mortenson/](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/mortenson/)  
Latin American and Caribbean Studies Library: <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/lat/>  
Slavic and East European Studies Library, [www.library.uiuc.edu/spx/](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/spx/)  
Women and Gender Resources Library, [www.library.uiuc.edu/wst/](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/wst/)
3. Slavic Library Bibliographic Guide, [www.library.uiuc.edu/spx/class/titlepage.html](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/spx/class/titlepage.html). ❧