International Librarianship

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CONCLUSIONS

*International Librarianship: Developing Professional, Intercultural, and Educational Leadership* compiles the experiences, adventures, and lessons learned from eighteen library professionals who engaged themselves with the world. Our colleagues demonstrated their commitment to develop intercultural expertise and sensitivities. They embraced their willingness to travel to distant countries to share their knowledge and learn from other global citizens, documenting their experiences in this collection of essays.

The twelve essays, grouped in five broad categories (Academic Exchanges, Fulbright Experiences, Information Literacy and Access, International Partnerships, and Training Models) span countries including China, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Latvia, Morocco, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Zambia.

The library profession encompasses values and guiding principles about learning, sharing, and supporting others to expand knowledge and understanding. The authors of the contributed chapters constructed their projects on the pillars of collaboration and exchange of ideas by designing new services and instructional modules, augmenting collections, lecturing, and organizing conferences.

Imagine travelling in northern Africa during the Arab Spring to explore religious diversity and bring back knowledge to your home campus to enhance dialogue about interfaith, interethnic, and interracial issues. Imagine travelling to South Africa with the goal of designing a sustainable strategic plan for the new Steve Biko Centre’s library and archives, or partnering with librarians in war-torn Cyprus to promote shared understanding by facilitating a discussion between Greek Cypriots and Turks.

These experiences and the love of adventure that began as professional assignments demonstrate how the library profession prepared our colleagues and their global counterparts. For example, work in remote and rural villages provided access to textbooks that supported medical personnel in an Ethiopian hospital, awareness of the needs of vulnerable
children in Zambia, and an understanding of global issues in the international library community through the work of librarians who developed training materials for the Peace Corps in the African village of Yikpa. Library faculty from City University of New York and their counterparts in Shanghai collaborated in an international exchange program that benefitted both universities and initiated opportunities and new visions for academic library services.

As demonstrated by these projects and the adventurous expeditions of participating librarians, international work requires survival skills and cultural awareness for connecting with local communities. This must be fundamentally based on natural curiosity and a sense of inquiry. International librarianship depends on diplomacy, deep respect, ongoing reflection, and acceptance of local customs and religions that at times may conflict with one’s own personal beliefs.

The greatest rewards from such intellectual exchanges derive from acknowledging that nations are composed of people with dreams and aspirations. All authors aspired to develop communities of learning and trust by building confidence and promoting the benefits of shared values of education, medical care, research, and cultural awareness.

As stated by former Senator J. William Fulbright, founder of the Fulbright Program: “We must try to expand the boundaries of human wisdom, empathy and perception, and there is no way of doing that except through education. . . . The essence of intercultural education is the acquisition of empathy—the ability to see the world as others see it, and to allow for the possibility that others may see something we have failed to see or may see it more accurately,” (United States Department of State, n.d.).

The contributors ultimately attest to earning personal and professional rewards from their international work. As a consequence, we have emerged more confident and knowledgeable about professional practice—as well as ourselves. We have come to realize that our community is our libraries—and our libraries, our world.

REFERENCE