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# Providing library services to the university's overseas development projects

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*Establishing an overseas support unit within the library.*

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In 1975 the Title XII amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (Famine Prevention and Freedom from Hunger), was enacted, in part, because Congress had declared that the United States should strengthen the capacities of land-grant and other eligible universities in program-related agricultural institutional development and research.<sup>1</sup> Congress described how various participants working together could make the difference in preventing famine and establishing freedom from hunger for all the world's people.<sup>2</sup> One of the provisions of Title XII was the establishment of the Strengthening Grant program which was specifically designed to increase the effectiveness of U.S. land-grant universities in their efforts to assist other countries in the development of improved agricultural systems. Eligible universities were encouraged to apply for a matching grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

to "strengthen their capabilities" for participation in Title XII.

Washington State University, a land-grant university, has been involved in international development for over fifty years. For the purpose of this article, the phrase "international development" refers to contracting for and operation of technical assistance projects abroad, and also to the integration of international development activities into appropriate and relevant on-campus programs. This involvement has been considered an integral part of the land-grant mission of the university.

With this in mind, WSU accepted a Strengthening Grant from USAID in 1979. The goals of the Strengthening Grant, as defined by Albert C. Yates, Washington State University's executive vice-president and provost, are: "1) to increase the university's ability to staff development projects at home and abroad; 2) to increase the university's ability to expand and improve educational programs relative to the needs of developing countries; 3) to improve WSU's ability to prepare faculty and students for long-term involvement in development programs; 4) to stimulate the ability of faculty to relate domestic research programs to the needs of developing countries; and 5) to improve administrative capability in support of development projects." The

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce H. Anderson and Darl E. Snyder, *Strengthening United States Universities for Participation in Title XII*, AUSUDIAP Publication no.1 (Washington, D.C.: AUSUDIAP, 1977).

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Board for International Food and Agricultural Development, *A Guide to Title XII and BIFAD* (Washington, D.C.: The Board, 1983).

International Program Development Office (IPDO) was created to direct and coordinate the University's involvement with development projects.<sup>3</sup>

### The need

Experience with the University's initial development projects demonstrated a need for rapid access to background information about the host country and to scientific literature relating to the problem-solving mission of the project to assist in the accomplishment of the project's goals. According to the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, "By the nature of development activities, professionals on international assignment are somewhat isolated professionally, at least in comparison to their colleagues at home. A continuous flow of up-to-date information...improves productivity, both through knowledge that there is a mechanism for keeping up-to-date, and through the usefulness of new information in the exercise of the job assignment."<sup>4</sup> Access to information is available on-campus through the use of computerized database searches, printed indexes, and books and journals available in the library's collections, or secured through various document delivery channels. The challenge was to provide similar services to personnel working on the project in-country. Although most developing countries have emerging information delivery capabilities, the researchers' needs for access to information often exceed those capabilities.<sup>5</sup>

The concern to provide adequate library services to overseas personnel contributed to the decision in 1980 to initiate an agreement between the WSU coordinator of the University's Strengthening Grant and the Libraries' director to establish a Strengthening Grant-funded library support unit to provide faculty on international assignment with access to information services. This agreement had three major components: a .25 FTE international development liaison librarian, .25 FTE support staff, and an allocation for the purchase of materials

to initiate an International Development Collection within the Libraries.

### The back-stopping support unit

The first and foremost responsibility of the unit is to serve as a "backstop" for the library and information needs of WSU faculty and staff working on projects overseas. The goal is to imitate as closely as possible the library environment that a faculty member would experience if he or she were located on-campus. The librarian in charge of the unit provides reference service, conducts automated bibliographic database searches, supervises a document delivery service, and provides other services upon request. The document delivery service is extremely important since database searches identify references to materials that may not be available in-country.

The campus project support office for WSU's projects acts as the intermediary for these services and direct charges, e.g., commercial database searches, photocopies, and ILL service, are billed to the individual projects. The librarian has also supplied extensive reference service to the project personnel located on campus including identifying suppliers for ordering equipment and supplies, initiating arrangements with a book jobber for the purchase of library materials for an overseas facility, selecting appropriate library furnishings for a specific library being developed, and necessary order information for books and journals. Additionally, this support has been expanded to include service to the counterparts and other staff and students in-country.

### The international development collection

Another component of the support unit was the creation of an International Development Collection. In 1980, utilizing the funding designated for this purpose by the International Program Development Office (IPDO), a collection was initiated to provide materials that could be used in the orientation of personnel who would be working on WSU's development projects, either overseas or on campus, and for faculty and students involved in new courses and existing courses that had added an international dimension. The subject content of the collection reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the concerns and activities of WSU's development projects. Thus topics range from world hunger to country-specific information to cross-cultural needs and concerns. The primary geographic coverage is Africa and the Middle East because of WSU's emphasis, but other developing areas are also represented.

This special collection is not intended to be comprehensive nor does it extensively duplicate

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<sup>3</sup>Albert C. Yates, *A Special Challenge to the Modern University*, Washington State University International Program Development Office, Occasional Paper no.2 (Pullman: Washington State University, 1984).

<sup>4</sup>National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, *Basic Principles for College and University Involvement in International Development Activities* (Washington, D.C.: The Association, 1983).

<sup>5</sup>Paulette Foss George and Donna Schenck-Hamlin, "Using Special Libraries to Interface with Developing Country Clientele," *Special Libraries* 77 (Spring 1986): 80-89.

materials elsewhere in the University Libraries. It does provide a means to acquire materials that pertain to ongoing development projects, thereby enhancing the Libraries' collections in subject areas where acquisitions are limited due to collection development policies or budgetary constraints. The monographic titles are easily identified and accessible through the Libraries' online catalog.

Additional important resources that are part of this collection include two major non-print collections and appropriate language tapes. The Sahel Microfiche Collection, articles selected from Michigan State University's Sahel Documentation Center, and the Appropriate Technology Microfiche Library which contains the complete text of materials on proven village technologies, were acquired because of their unique subject content.

The collection's most dynamic element is the vertical file. This file houses reprints, speeches, reports, conference proceedings and papers, newsletters and other serial publications of many international development agencies, etc.—materials published and distributed outside of normal publication channels and frequently referred to as gray literature. In addition, the collection contains circulating copies of WSU's project reports, thereby providing convenient access to these ephemeral publications. An online file is maintained on a microcomputer, and a printed index is produced with main entry, title, and subject access.

Of course, all of the materials supporting WSU's development activities are not purchased with these funds and are, therefore, not located within this collection. However, by using the online catalog, a user has access to all relevant titles (except the vertical file materials) regardless of location.

### **Additional activities**

As WSU's participation in international development activities has changed over the years since 1980, so has the Libraries' international development component. Because WSU's involvement emphasizes institution building, frequent short-term training sessions on campus have been scheduled for developing country personnel associated with these different institutions. The liaison librarian has participated in these courses by presenting information on various aspects of library management and development. Other developing country personnel visiting WSU have been provided information on library and documentation center roles and needs even if a formal training program has not been conducted. Short-term training programs specifically designed for library personnel have been offered for several projects.

Each of the development projects for which WSU serves as the lead institution has an on-campus advisory committee. The liaison librarian

serves on these advisory committees, thus playing an integral role in the implementation of the individual projects. This involvement also provides the opportunity to suggest where the library might respond to specific information needs and thus make a contribution to the success of the project.

When the International Program Development Office (IPDO) investigates new opportunities for the university's involvement, and a meeting of representatives of the relevant departments on campus is scheduled, the liaison is included. Therefore, even if the Request for Proposals (RFP) does not specify library and information needs, the librarian has the opportunity to stress the importance of including at least some aspects of an information management component in the response submitted for consideration.

The Libraries' international development activities have continued to be supported by first the Strengthening Grant and later by its successor, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) grant from USAID. The increased utilization of the offered services has resulted in the increase of the librarian position from .25 FTE to .5 FTE.

### **Summary**

This article has described one means of responding to the information needs of faculty working in-country on a development project. Providing library services to project personnel is not unique. What is unique is the cooperative agreement between the WSU Libraries and the university office responsible for the overseas development projects which provided funds to initiate the Libraries' backstopping unit. The existence of a librarian position in the unit provides a firm link between individuals on overseas assignment and the essential library services that are available to anyone on campus. It enables the Library to extend its service area to include WSU personnel working overseas. It also more firmly establishes the Library in a partnership with other areas on campus in the fulfillment of WSU's international development goals and objectives. The unit's activities have increased the recognition of the importance of library services by project directors within the University and by host-country administrators. The Libraries' backstopping unit has provided invaluable assistance to the University and the international community that it serves. ■ ■

