

IJIDI: Book Review

Carlyle, C., & Winn, D. (2018). *Your passport to international librarianship*. Chicago: ALA Editions. ISBN 9780838917183. 132 pp. \$49.99 US.

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Your *Passport to International Librarianship* is founded upon the experiences of authors Cate Carlyle and Dee Winn. Rather than discussing strategies for pursuing library careers overseas, addressing skills for supporting international users, or helping librarians forge relationships with international libraries, this book focuses on international volunteer (IV) opportunities for librarians. Carlyle and Winn address the benefits of such projects, provide fundraising tips, and discuss practical strategies for librarians volunteering internationally to succeed during their placements and upon their return home.

Carlyle and Winn wrote this book based on their personal experiences with international volunteer teams in Honduras, Guatemala, Zambia, and Nicaragua. The two met during a trip to Guatemala, and their experiences on this trip and others inspired them to share their accumulated wisdom with other librarians seeking to participate in, or create, IV projects. Coming from an academic background, they volunteered in school and public libraries; their advice is broadly applicable to librarians seeking to volunteer in any type of library.

The authors situate international librarianship (IL) and volunteer work in the social justice nature of librarianship, through which lens librarians are tasked with considering our professional pursuits for empowering our users and communities. This book is written for librarians seeking to broaden their horizons and improve the world or for other philanthropic-minded people seeking guidance in international volunteering regardless of their professional pursuits. Carlyle and Winn explain that they wrote this book “because [they wished] such a book had existed” (p. xii) when they were embarking on their own IV trips, and seek to provide readers with practical information, tips, and insights for a successful trip abroad.

In the first chapter of the book, Carlyle and Winn explain their view of IL and its mutually collaborative nature. They use J. Stephen Parker’s 1974 definition that IL “consists of activities carried out among or between [entities] of two or more nations, to promote, establish, develop, maintain, and evaluate” (p.1) library services, librarianship, and the library profession. The authors also present four approaches to IL to illustrate alternatives to travelling abroad, such as following discussion lists, creating subject guides for international users, conference attendance, supporting library projects through charitable giving, and writing and research.

The authors provide, in great depth, arguments as to why one should volunteer in international libraries. These include the personal benefits of an expanded worldview and the intrinsic

rewards of effecting positive change and the opportunity to develop professional skills while cultivating meaningful personal and professional relationships. Carlyle and Winn also explain that IV work benefits the library profession by demonstrating the value of libraries to the host country and community. Although the average reader of this book may already be interested in volunteering internationally, many of the reasons outlined in the second chapter are useful for someone seeking funding for their volunteer pursuits. However, the authors write from their own perspective as North American volunteers in African and Central American libraries, and do not explicitly address the ways that their background affects their approach to IL.

In the third chapter, the authors recount their personal stories of volunteering in their local communities and abroad. The descriptions of their respective paths to international travel remind the reader that opportunities for volunteer work abroad can manifest in unexpected ways. These may originate with projects that are not in libraries (as in Winn's experience) or from a lasting curiosity, such as Carlyle's, in existing volunteer organizations such as Librarians Without Borders (LWB). The reader may be actively pursuing international placements in order to see more of the world, or these situations may occur serendipitously (as was this reviewer's experience), with an international opportunity presenting itself which matches one's professional and personal goals.

These stories illustrate the contemporary phenomenon of *voluntourism*, an English term originated in the 1990s which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "tourism in which travellers spend time doing voluntary work on development projects, usually for a charity" ("Voluntourism", n.d.). All of the service trips the authors describe included a combination of tourist excursions and professional service work, including cataloguing collections, programming, education, and community outreach. This chapter outlines the realities of this blend of volunteer work and tourism, and is therefore useful for any reader still considering IV work. Noticeably absent is any discussion of the criticisms of voluntourism and its potential for harm. Some potential risks are especially obvious and grievous, such as appointing volunteers to work with children without verifying that the volunteer is trained in recognizing and responding to trauma and needs in children, and that the volunteer themselves is not a threat to a child's welfare. Other risks are more subtle: is the volunteer sufficiently trained to perform the tasks asked of them? Does the revolving door of short-term volunteers heighten issues with abandonment or damage the local perception of the service provided? Can the volunteer balance their professional values (assuming they are volunteering in a project for which they have expertise) with local ones, or will the volunteer run afoul of censorship issues or taboo topics? Is the volunteer providing free services that a local could be paid to do? Tina Rosenberg (2018) rightly points out that money goes far in poor countries - volunteers might be inadvertently disenfranchising the local community. Although many of the volunteer organizations named in this book, such as LWB, are engaged in beneficial projects and provide some level of pre-service training, voluntourism projects undertaken without careful consideration may inflict more harm than good to the community being served. These considerations are especially vital for a reader who plans to develop their own IV project. For more reading, consult Ahmed et al. (2017), Anderson, Kim, and Larios (2017), and Goodwin (2015).

Chapters 4 and 5 provide practical, actionable steps for a reader who is ready to pursue IV work. The authors provide advice to one researching volunteer organizations, as well as suggest strategies to fund service trips, and how to prepare for the unexpected challenges of being abroad. These two chapters are of great value to readers who are committed to joining a trip

or creating their own opportunity. From raising awareness to health and safety concerns to guiding the reader through the very real processes of culture shock and homesickness, these chapters are derived from the authors' experiences. The following chapter discusses closure following a service project: how the volunteer will adjust to their return home and the potential for reverse culture shock, as well as strategies for continuing a relationship with the host library through networking, social media, follow-up, and continued advocacy. For a reader who seeks to develop their own IV projects, Chapter 7 is written by Debbie Chavez, the program manager for LWB Guatemala. Much of what Chavez writes in this chapter echoes the experiences and suggestions in the rest of the book, but is supported by Chavez's considerable expertise and experience leading service trips.

The final chapter is a curated list of resources, including travel blogs, discussion lists, and IV opportunities. These include book donation programs and organizations that coordinate service trips. Some of these blogs, such as *The Traveling Librarian*, are no longer actively maintained, but may still provide valuable historical perspectives. It is unfortunate that the authors do not include other relevant books on working abroad or IL. For readers seeking guidance in careers abroad, alternative titles might include *Taking your MLIS Abroad* (Philips and Holovet, 2016), *Law Librarians Abroad* (Sinder, 2000), or the more general *Working Abroad* (Reuvid, 2010) which help a reader explore librarianship from an international perspective, provide vocational guidance, and address the psychosocial challenges of culture shock, adaptation, and reverse culture shock.

Your Passport to International Librarianship is a pleasant read, though somewhat superficial. Its title is misleading, implying a more comprehensive discussion of opportunities for working abroad and developing relations with international libraries. It suffers from not addressing the potential harm of voluntourism, though the authors do remind the reader that volunteers must remain humble and consider the needs and expertise of their hosts. This book's greatest value is helping a reader prepare for a trip overseas, though some of the advice (such as fundraising strategies) lacks originality. Similar advice may be found online, but the author's experiences give this book more authority. The list of resources at the end is a valuable resource for the reader who is ready to volunteer internationally. The government resources listed and strategies suggested may not be as relevant for non-American readers seeking international placements.

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