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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a framework in which the library profession can view the role of its international clientele, usually foreign-born students, in American society as a whole, before discussing specific ways to improve library services to meet these students' needs. International students are frequently hampered in their uses of the library, not only by language and cultural barriers, but also by a limited understanding of the potential resources and services a library may offer. Nevertheless, international students have many favorable impacts on American academic communities. The proper relationship between the library and the student is one of mutual empowerment, in which the contributions of the student are acknowledged by the library staff. International students benefit from their time in the United States and are a benefit to U.S. industries and academic institutions, but they are also able to take information and library knowledge with them when they return to their native countries. Cultural sensitivity on the part of library staff can be fostered by increased training that will benefit U.S. libraries as well as their international users. (SLD)

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND AMERICAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES:
AN EMPOWERING RELATION

by

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International Students and American Academic Libraries: An Empowering Relation

INTRODUCTION

In providing library services to an increasing number of international students in American academic libraries, it is useful to place them first in a broader context of American society. What are some of the ramifications of an influx of international students into the United States? Do the students have any significant roles to play? Are they indeed being empowered by the library profession, and if so, towards what end? A broad, contextual placement of their enlarging presence will help the library profession to clarify its mission and to improve its services with a meaningful purpose. It does make a significant difference knowing *who* the clientele is, and *why* the service, before thinking about *how* the profession is to provide the best kind of quality services. What follows is an attempt to provide a meaningful framework with which the library profession can view its international clientele's role in American society at large before discussing the specificity of ways to improve library services to better meet their needs.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND HUMAN CAPITAL

Since World War II, the presence of international students in the United States has grown rapidly. In 1953 there were 33,833 international students in American colleges and universities. During the following two decades the number quadrupled to 151,066; in the 1970s alone the number of international students more than doubled the previous count to 326,299. The Institute of International Education census report states that, in the 1991-92 academic year, the number of international students in this country has reached a new record: nearly 420,000 students from more than 190 countries.¹ Although seven institutions of higher education in the United States have attracted an enrollment of international students over 3,000 each, over 100 institutions currently have more than 1,000 international students represented on each campus.² In terms of revenue, international students each year contribute over \$5 billion to the United States in the form of tuition, room and board fees, and other payments, according to Commerce Department estimates.

Due to domestic demographic changes, cost considerations, budgetary retrenchment, and other factors, U.S. colleges and universities have in recent years become more aggressive in recruiting international students into our higher education system with the increasing practice of setting up recruiting offices abroad. The decades of international student migration since World War II suggest that the United States is in a unique

position to consider international students as valuable human capital in compensating for our deficiencies in certain areas. Not only do they bring in valuable foreign funds, which are used partly to subsidize American students' financial aid, but they are increasingly playing a significant role in contributing to the United States economy, education, science and technology. According to the National Science Foundation, well over half of all international graduate students in science and engineering choose to remain in the United States after their schooling. As Joel Kotkin points out,

These foreign-born technicians and scientists form an increasingly important part of our high-tech work force. In Silicon Valley, for example, about one in every three engineers is Asian. At such elite research institutions as IBM's Yorktown Heights laboratory, Asians account for one in four researchers; at AT&T's legendary Bell Labs, for as many as two in five.... Foreign-born engineers make particularly strong contributions to fields increasingly critical to America's economic future. Excluded by their lack of citizenship from work on defense projects, such engineers enter not our fading military-based corporations, but fast-growing fields such as personal computers, telecommunications, and development of medical instruments.³

Contrary to a misguided and suspicious view that these foreign-born students, technicians, and scientists are stealing coveted positions away from the American-born, both in institutions of higher learning and in the job market, international students are actually contributing to the United States in its efforts to stem national crises in science and technological education. The crisis level in science education, for example, is attested to by as many as 100 national reports, issued between 1983 and 1988, calling for greater rigor in

science education and suggesting numerous reforms⁴, but without desirable impact.

The crisis in science and technological education also leads to such "pipeline" problems as faculty shortages. A third of the nation's higher education faculty will have to be replaced by the year 2000, and yet the number of Ph.D.'s issued each year in critical fields has declined and almost half of those with Ph.D.'s currently work outside of academia. Lester M. Salamon comments:

Because of reductions in support for graduate training in the sciences and engineering as well as a structure of economic rewards that reduces the incentives for scientific careers, for example, the number of people entering scientific fields of study has declined markedly in recent years, as has the general science literacy of the nation's student body. Although an influx of foreign students has filled part of the resulting gap, ...the number of science and engineering Ph.D.'s produced annually if present trends continue will be 40 percent below the annual number needed by the year 2000.⁵

Perhaps a more pressing problem facing the United States is the "emerging majority" of minority groups. Their population growth has been almost three times that of whites, on the one hand, yet they have had the most limited educational and economic opportunities. This combination does not bode very well for the socio-economic future of this nation, particularly in times of intense international competition. According to Arnold H. Packer's forecast,

Between 1987 and 2000 a projected 42.8 million workers will enter the work force. About one-third of these will be non-Hispanic white men, one-third non-Hispanic white women, and one-third minorities. During the same period, 23.4 million workers are projected to leave the labor force, about half

of whom will be non-Hispanic white males.⁶

All together, more than 85 percent of the new entrants to the labor force over the next 15 to 20 years will be minorities, women, and immigrants. Preparing the economically and educationally disadvantaged segment of the population to fill the labor force will not come at a cheap price. While international students are certainly not a panacea for our national crises, these highly educated, motivated, and skilled people make it possible for the United States to acquire the social benefits, without having to incur the costs of their education and training, in the forms of scientific preeminence and the world class quality of many of our institutions of research and higher learning.

Within American classrooms, communities, and in the job market, international students also contribute to the way we understand their countries and cultures and help us to internationalize our outlooks and perspectives. International students who return home after a number of years in the United States may play a valuable role as effective intermediaries in international politics, trade, business, and education.

By acknowledging that international students are neither a temporary nor marginal feature on American campuses but permanent and integral members with special needs, our institutions of higher learning--at all levels of administration, faculty, student body, and research facilities--must prepare short-term strategies and long-term planning and coordination to meet the

needs of international students as we begin to feel their enlarging presence and their impact.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN AMERICAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

The library, as the center of academic and research activities on campuses, plays the key role in empowering international students. In her inaugural address for the presidency of the American Library Association on July 1, 1992, Marilyn L. Miller said,

Empowering people through libraries means, above all, rearrangement of ourselves, our minds, and attitudes. Those whom we regarded only a short time ago as being on the fringes of our responsibility, subject to outreach when we had the time and resources, ignored when we did not, must now be perceived as central to our concerns and planning.⁷

Although by "people" Miller was primarily speaking of Americans, her message also very well applies to international students. Yet, both in the degree of our understanding of international students and in the depth of our inclination to guide them, the library profession by and large lacks short-term strategies as well as long-term planning. Frustration for both international students as well as the library staff is a natural, all too frequent outcome, especially at the public service areas of libraries in institutions where there is a large concentration of international students. While international students are empowering this nation by contributing to our educational and economic strength, our profession has done very little to empower

them in return. Instead, international students are often treated as an invisible thorn in our flesh, precisely because a common practice in our profession is to regard international students as temporary foreigners with marginal, second-class significance, yet expecting and demanding from them the same language proficiency, fundamental library familiarity, and accultured stability of any other American-born students. The reality of the matter is that international students are suffering from the lack of the very things that Americans take for granted on a daily level. By being in a foreign environment preoccupied with certified and much politicized domestic minority groups on campus, international students are indeed the silent minority of minorities, left alone to pave their own way through a cultural and academic jungle. From an economic point of view, if international students are to be seen as foreign "customers" trying to "purchase" an American education, a legitimate question might be raised as to whether they are involved in an educational shortchange program, instead of an exchange program.

THE TRADITIONAL LIBRARY INSTRUCTION: DIFFICULTIES AND CONSTRAINTS

To be sure, libraries are equipped with orientation and bibliographic instruction programs to ease international students' way around the library, but largely these are general in nature. Kline and Rod's survey of 54 colleges and universities with the largest number of international students,

pointed out that

Twenty-four libraries (44 percent) stated that there was *no separate orientation program* for foreign students; and of the thirty (56 percent) replying that they had a separate program, ten were through English as a second language (ESL) classes, two excluded undergraduates, and three were by request only.⁸

Even when library instruction sessions are given that are specifically designed for international students, it is common that they produce less than desirable effects due to communication and cultural constraints. An anecdotal case in point: after a library orientation tour for a group of Japanese students was given at the request of the Intensive English Department at the University of Nevada, Reno, Yoshi Hendricks, Head of Bibliographic Control, sometimes encountered these students as they were leaving and overheard the following conversation in Japanese: "'Did you understand anything?' 'No, did you?' 'I didn't either.'" "While it is sad to think", Hendricks comments, "that the library staff's efforts have been mostly wasted on this group, it is not surprising."⁹ After such an orientation tour for a group of international students, we may feel a fine sense of a duty accomplished, but the students may leave the library more confused, and worse still, with discouraging impressions of our library system. Macdonald and Sarkodie-Mensah elaborate the point further:

Erroneous assumptions due in part to language difficulties may undermine librarians' most zealous efforts to teach foreign students library skills. One scenario is the 'ostrich' approach, simply to hide one's head and ignore the problem. This librarian (or teacher), while perhaps aware that something is not quite right, nonetheless assumes that

the foreign students have the same level and speed of comprehension as American students. Hence, in conducting the bibliographic instruction lecture or orientation tour, he or she uses such library jargon as *card catalog*, *indexes and abstracts*, *periodicals*, and *citations* without explanation. One must remember that even for American students such unexplained terms can be daunting. How much more intimidating will this be for students from completely different linguistic backgrounds, Arabic or Korean, for example? The students may nod politely and one or two may ask intelligent questions, but the majority will leave the session more confused than when they started, or, even worse, determined never again to ask a librarian a question.¹⁰

A survey by Ziming Liu showed that, unable to understand during orientation sessions, more than half of the international student interviewees often turned to their compatriots for help when they faced difficulties with the library system, instead of seeking a librarian.¹¹

THE ROLE OF NATIVE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

There have been a few dozen publications in library literature regarding international students in American libraries since World War II, consisting mostly of journal articles and a few conference presentations. While some dealt primarily with cultural issues,¹² ethnic group-specific issues,¹³ or even contributions based on the writer's personal friendship with international scholars,¹⁴ most of these publications are general in nature or devoted to the subject of orientation tours or BI's in English. Two contributions, however, offered information about the viability and methods of orientations in native

languages.¹⁵

Such innovative and practical methods of offering library instructions in native language by employing bilingual librarians when available or training volunteers from international student groups, would have avoided the kind of situation Hendricks and Macdonald and Sarkodie-Mensah described, and these approaches were proven highly effective.¹⁶ These methods, however, are easier implemented than accepted, as the subject of native language instruction may prove to be controversial depending on the institutional character. Its potential controversy is related to the larger controversy of bilingual education.¹⁷ While the national controversy at large has become politicized and complicated, the issue with respect to library instruction is relatively a simpler one: acculturation of international students through English-only instruction or through a temporary utilization of their native languages to overcome initial difficulties. The resolution of this issue lies in recognizing the major difference--not prima facie similarity--between the regular practice of bilingual education in the nation's classrooms and what takes place in a usual 50-minute, one-shot orientation session for international students. The nature of library orientation and bibliographic instruction programs is not to enhance the English proficiency level of international students; rather, it is to introduce, as effectively and early as possible, the American *library system*, so that international students can get on with course assignments which are more often

than not given out even before they can find their way around the campus. English is difficult enough for international students; imposing it to learn our library system even when native language orientations may be readily available is to place the students in an unnecessarily painful bind. It is also approaching the issue with a myopic view that we are contributing to the students' mastery of English as well as their acculturation process within a 50-minute time period. Any librarian who has delivered a library orientation for American students with English proficiency would admit that even with American students there is no guarantee of a successful orientation session. Apart from the library system international students also must struggle with other American academic procedures such as registration, course requirements and prerequisites, testing, and other potentially bewildering academic rituals.

Once the American library system with its unique jargon is bilingually introduced, students with limited English proficiency are more effective in communicating with the library staff to obtain their research needs. Far from such bilingual efforts impeding their mastery of English and the acculturation process, such efforts actually expedite the process of integration of international students into the mainstream of academic activities.

THE LIBRARY OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

John N. Cable summarizes in the following what is all-too typical an experience of international students:

Usually a considerable amount of attention is given newly arrived students from abroad: airport greetings by college officials, teas, receptions, invitations to visit homes, appearances at the Rotary Club, and so forth. But when the cheering has stopped, when the business of the semester gets underway, when class assignments are given, quizzes administered, hour examinations graded, the foreign student often feels that he is in an unfriendly, almost hostile, uncaring environment.¹⁸

Once the institutional greetings and initial warmth are withdrawn, international students are pretty much on their own. Even such shallow greetings, however, are often absent within the library environment, let alone any strategically planned functions. As the library environment increasingly feels the enlarging presence of international students, it is time to plan permanent strategies that will help them become integral clientele of library services as well as find their place in the academic environment.

THE INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT

Apart from the role native language plays in library instruction programs, its significance is far-reaching outside the limited durations of these sessions. The library "outreach" activities can be most effectively established, without even having to step outside the library walls, by the library staff

responsible for orientations or BI's for international students. The advantage of native language instruction, especially performed by bilingual, ethnic minority librarians when available, is easier access to the students' trust and confidence in order to establish rapport. Whether library orientations are offered in the native language or in English, however, the library staff's willingness to offer an individualized (or a very small group) bibliographic instruction as a future follow-up, makes an immense difference in the way international students can access needed information as well as their favorable perception of both the individual and the profession. This individualized approach may initially seem to tax our resources, but the author's own experimentation with this approach, which averaged one or two such sessions a week, has produced rewarding results both personally and professionally without any negative repercussions in other areas of professional duties. Since international students tend to be closely knit in mutually supportive groups of the same language and ethnic backgrounds and share newly discovered information, one can take advantage of this behavior pattern by encouraging them during individualized sessions to pass the new knowledge on to others.

Once the rapport has been established by such means, the willing library staff can function as a de facto library mentor or advisor or simply be a familiar and friendly face to place international students at ease when seeking assistance. Individual commitment and involvement are crucial, since it is on

a personal level that empathy can be cultivated, while provisions can be made on an institutional level for such cultivation. Even without institutional inclination or support, those who are personally inclined can cultivate a variety of involvements, such as attending international student association activities, or lectures or workshops involving international students. The library staff can learn not only tremendously from such activities, but by regarding international students as potential teachers and friends, we could challenge our unsuspected stereotypes and assumptions about them. Growing diversification and internationalization of American campuses suggest that understanding cultures other than our own is critical not only for our survival as a nation but as an interdependent citizenship in the global community. Instead of focusing on acculturation of others, we would do ourselves a far greater service by shifting our attitudes to what may be called the "crossculturation" process, a mutual acculturation process that goes both ways. One relationship between a librarian and an international visitor exemplifies this process: "At first I was very shy, always thinking that I would disturb you, that I would be a stone in your shoe. But when we share, I don't feel like a stone in your shoe. You listen with interests; it means it is good for you too. You are learning and getting some experience in return."¹⁹ The true form of empowerment is when those who are in a position to empower also become empowered in the process.

THE LEADERSHIP ROLE

Library administrators can implement a variety of both inexpensive and, budget allowing, substantial outreach activities:

- International students could be welcomed to the library open-house at the beginning of each semester.
- Introductory, welcoming materials, identification of the library administrative resources and services specifically addressing the needs of international students, and the schedule of library/international activities, could be given out along with the regular institutional package. These materials should be readily available at the international student offices and in the library throughout the academic year.
- Subscribing to international newspapers and magazines; and exhibiting new book collections and other materials in the areas of international students' interests.
- Representatives from international student groups or international student office personnel could be invited to staff meetings to communicate their concerns or difficulties.
- An interested library administrator, who could accommodate extra activities without sacrificing his or her regular duties, could be designated to act as the international student contact person for their administrative and other concerns.
- Workshops, either substantial or brief "brown bag" lunch meetings on a given topic between the library staff and international students could be initiated.
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Once the rapport has been established within the library, library outreach activities outside the library walls will become all the easier. For those institutions with a large enrollment of international students, it is imperative that a permanent professional position for library liaison activities be

established. This particular position may combine the outreach activities for international students along with the outreach activities for domestic minority student groups, or incorporating it as a part of the revised role of the Bibliographic Instruction Coordinator. Some university libraries, such as those at the University of California at Santa Cruz and the University of California at Irvine, have created the position of Multicultural Services Librarian, the main function of which is to reach out to minority members of the community, but which has also proven to be highly instrumental in changing the library environment, increasing the level of sensitivity awareness, and increasing minority retention.²⁰

CULTURAL AWARENESS SKILLS AS A PART OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Library outreach activities, whether individually involved or administratively provided, are not as effective without an inclination to heighten our own cross-cultural awareness. Without adequate administrative support, individual efforts can turn out to be stressful experiences. Furthermore, institutionalized outreach activities send a clear message to both the academic community at large, with positive and proactive images of the library, as well as to the library staff, that the library administration is serious about cross-cultural issues as an integral aspect of continuing education, staff development and evaluation.

Depending on the size of international student enrollment and the library budget, staff development activities can vary from informal to more formal. For libraries that lack the staff, budget, as well as the number of international students to justify a formal program, Terry Ann Mood suggests

providing a reading list of articles concerning the foreign-student experience and making the articles available in a staff lounge or in the reserve collection; having a series of lectures presented at staff meetings by foreign students or foreign-student officers; encouraging staff's attendance at foreign-student open houses and club meetings; or offering the library as a meeting place for such clubs.²¹

The following are some of the proactive institutional examples that are worth emulating. One such example of formal and well-designed staff development activities was offered by the Library Instruction Department of the University of Arizona Library, in collaboration with the University's Center for English as a Second Language, the English Department, and the International Student Office. The day-long workshop included use of "a videotape developed to demonstrate language difficulties, cultural difficulties, and instructional differences. A cross-cultural simulation game was also built into...the workshop, as was a lecture on cultural differences given by an expert in cross-cultural communication."²² The targeted goals of the workshop were:

- to have the participants experience some of the pressures inherent in trying to understand concepts and words in a second language;
- to encourage the participants to feel some of the emotions associated with culture shock;

- to lead the participants into an awareness of their own cultural assumptions and interpretations;
- to show the participants some typical cultural differences (demonstrated by an encounter at the reference desk) and some effective ways to handle intercultural communication;
- to demonstrate how to be effective when dealing with students from other cultures, especially during large instructional sessions.²³

At the University of Michigan Libraries, where the impact of a large international student population is felt, a formal staff development program was also initiated to heighten library staff awareness for improvement of service to international students. The plan was received by the library staff with an "overwhelmingly positive response".²⁴ A four-hour workshop was planned, which included the videotape developed by the University of Arizona Library, an exercise in stereotyping to divulge some distinct patterns, and another exercise to demonstrate how libraries reflect their cultural contexts, followed by stimulating discussions. The goals for the workshop were for the participants to "learn to differentiate between cultural and individual behavior patterns; heighten their sensitivity to problems facing foreign students; and to learn to communicate more effectively with the foreign student population."²⁵

The University of California at Davis, likewise, organized "a series of informational meetings, workshops, and seminars for sharing our research findings with public-service personnel. Our goal was to dispel the stereotypes and focus on real issues, problems, and differences" with regard to international

students.²⁶ For those libraries with cross-cultural staff development programs already in effect for domestic minority students, incorporating the focus on international students can be done relatively easily, as resources are already in place.

CONCLUSION

International students in American academic environments make their contributive impact on us as we certainly impact them. What takes place between international students and the library staff is hard to identify, as the effects of a mutual empowering influence are indeed far-reaching. For international students returning to their native countries, they take not only the acquired subject expertise to transform their own national industries, but their sense of our library and information system which makes that transformation a less cumbersome possibility. What informational reforms they might espouse upon returning home is largely guess-work on our part, but the main point is that as long as there is a significant impact on each international student, we can count on the fruits of our labor to materialize in distant places and times.

For international students who decide to remain in the United States, their acquired library skills will perhaps empower them to achieve great prominence as scientists, engineers, educators, or business leaders, or simply as productive citizens in our communities. By remaining in the United States, they

contribute in many ways to the current and future well-being of this country which faces enormous socio-economic and educational challenges as it moves toward the next century. By actively reaching out and empowering them with our profession, we are indeed doing ourselves a service.

ENDNOTES:

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