

Professional Mobility and Institutional Cooperation in Kazakhstan: A Model for Dynamic Library Services in Asia

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Globalization is an impetus for broader collaboration and academic mobility. The need for global competitiveness in terms of knowledge and services gave rise to various forms of cooperation from the institutional level to the subsystems like the library. Libraries as key players in building a culture of research and knowledge development need to meet the international standards. This empirical descriptive-narrative shares about the role of institutional cooperation and professional mobility in order for libraries to develop dynamic services and build on the capacity of local practitioners. Insights from vicarious experience as a librarian and internationally patterned services will also be discussed. This hopes to provide a model for developing libraries in Asia.

Keywords: academic mobility, institutional cooperation, cross-border collaboration, library services

Introduction

Regional cooperation and cross-border collaboration in higher education constitute an important part of internationalization. International projects are generally undertaken to add value to the ‘product’ of universities, whether that be through widening skills development opportunities, improving the curriculum or by increasing the university’s symbolic prestige through associating with strong partners (Tadaki & Tremewan, 2013). Increasing numbers of countries, particularly across Asia, are initiating and participating in regional and cross-border collaborations as a strategy for strengthening their higher education systems. In the past, these collaborations were most frequently structured as partnerships between Asian universities and universities in the United States (US), Europe, and Australia (Knobel, Patricia Simões, & Henrique de Brito Cruz, 2013).

Often embodied in the form of student and staff mobility programmes, co-taught degrees and research collaboration, the projects pursued under collaborative ventures are as diverse and evolving as the parent institutions (Knight 2007). Collaboration for capacity- building or for the improvement of libraries become part of the institutional cooperation or consortia. The value of professional mobility in librarians can be gleaned from various forms of activities such as internship, exchange programs, senior fellowships, hiring of international library professionals, etc. However, Green (2012) made a caveat on this endeavor positing that ‘institutions need to judge not only the quantity of activity but also its quality and its contribution to overall institutional goals’.

Meeting the demands of the diverse roles of librarians requires more than just resource-sharing. It requires institutionalized cooperation and professional skills integration. The latter is not often realized by most universities, particularly where there is budget constraint.

Objectives:

This presentation attempts to elucidate through personal experience, taking into account the empirical case of one University in Kazakhstan. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Discuss the concept of cross-institutional collaboration in libraries.
2. Provide insights in developing international partnership/linkages.
3. Share ideas on how to develop, and expand partnerships or collaborative projects/programs from the case of academic libraries in Kazakhstan.
4. Share experience on how international librarians contribute to the development of international standards and adoption of global trends.
5. Discuss how professional mobility and institutional partnership enable libraries to adopt to international demands.

Cross-institutional Collaboration in Libraries

Partnership in libraries has become an important topic as early as 1979 with 1879 indexed by Scopus. Discussions on international collaborations of academic libraries have been in diverse context spanning from literacy (Tzoc & Ubbes, 2017) and (Reading, 2016); digital scholarship (Montoya, 2017), research resources and its implication in resource sharing (Lenkart, 2016); developing virtual libraries (Ramos, M.M., Alvaré, L.M., Ferreyra, C., Shelton, P., 2009), collaborative chat reference services (Truelson, 2004; Wilson and Keys, 2004) to name a few. The importance of developing library services through visiting librarians was a concept elucidated by (Xu, Zhang, & Deng, 2016). Kovarova (2017) in her paper about information literacy education in Czech libraries and the educational needs of teaching librarians emphasized the role of international library professionals in the development of the program.

Documents by country/territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories

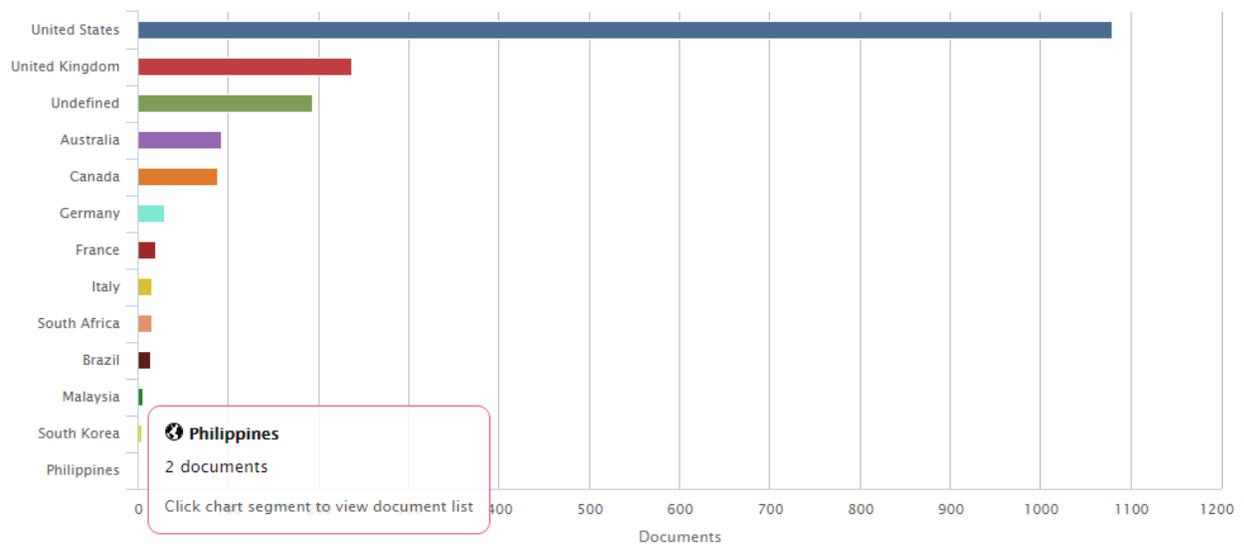


Fig. 1. A Graphical Presentation of Scopus-Indexed Publications by Country/ Territory on Collaboration in Libraries

The role of knowledge- sharing from diverse perspectives of library professionals show how it contributes to the development of library services; and ultimately, to overall institutional goals. Professional mobility is adopted in Nazarbayev University in a form of internship, where professionals visit the institutional partner; through resource- sharing; and hiring of international librarians in the institution. This model is deemed effective in a multilingual environment where the medium of instruction is in English.

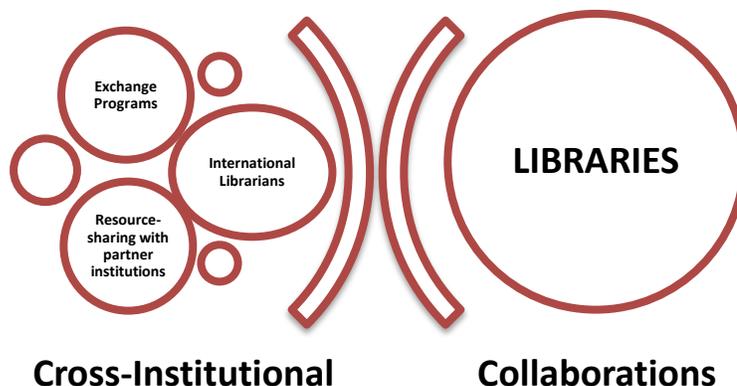


Fig 2. Cross-institutional Collaboration, Library Programs on Cooperation and Professional Mobility

At present, there are four institutional collaboration where the library is participating:

Institution	Activities
University of Wisconsin in Madison	Document Delivery Service Consultation (virtual and in-person) Knowledge- sharing (as guest lecturer or as visiting expert)
University of Pittsburgh	Document Delivery Service
Warwick University	Knowledge- sharing Training
Duke University	Document Delivery Service

Table 1. Institutional Partners of Nazarbayev University with Library Collaboration and the Activities Shared

International Hires and the International Practices

Librarians are increasingly working in a global network, not only from the more traditional resource sharing and interlibrary loan, but also as students become global learners (Xu et al., 2016). This is also true in the University where majority of the faculty are international professors who are mainly English- speakers and the medium of instructions are in English. The limitation of having local library personnel without Library and Information Science background creates a gap in communication and services in the library. Library and Information Studies (LIS) as a discipline taught in schools are also inclined towards traditional librarianship (e.g. bibliographies, traditional reference and patron service, etc.). With the growing demand for Information Literacy and open educational resources (Academic and College Research Libraries, 2016) and other global trends, a need for international hires who understand the online platform, scholarly communications and technology- driven services is a must.

I. International Hires Coming into the Picture

International hires from diverse backgrounds serve various departments as Subject experts or Technical Experts. A Master in Library and Information Science is required and the international

professionals are preferred to have at least 2 publications. Each professional is assigned to a certain department where no expert is available. Considering the growing importance of library professionals in the University as a research institution, currently, the international librarians are all under the Reference Department which mainly works face to face with researchers, professors and students. Each international hire also handles various major projects where success are redounded to key performance indicators. Some of the projects, programs and services are as follows:

A. Research and Scholarly Communications

Information Literacy. One librarian with background on education and scholarly communications handle the entire project related to instruction. The current project is specifically focused on institutionalizing an inclusive information literacy program across all level in embedded and integrated mode. The project includes designing modules, re-scaling librarians and developing assessment tools. Coordination with one partner institution is also done regularly by the project manager.

Standardization of Online Content. Another librarian who has experience on web content development handles all web related issues. Reporting (web analytics), monitoring and development of policies and standardized practices are also part of the task. This project also covers the development of LibGuides. LibGuides is an easy-to-use content management system deployed at thousands of libraries worldwide. Librarians use it to curate knowledge and share information, organize class and subject- specific resources, and to create and manage websites (Springshare, 2017). All Subject Librarians handle the content creation but it is overseen as part of the online content to promote consistency and branding.

Information Sessions. Aside from information literacy program, the library also provides information sessions on key topics beyond assistance with curriculum-related tasks. These information sessions are developed to promote lifelong learning and research skills of the academic community. Some of the topics include deciphering Intro to GIS (Geographic Information Systems), Selecting a Journal for Publication, Detecting Bullshit: Critical Thinking in News and the Media and other topics which may not be covered by syllabus- based information literacy instructions. There are more than 100 information sessions conducted every year, mostly by international librarians.

B. Technology Integration

Ask-a- Librarian. This reference service is mainly adopted to provide in-depth research assistance to all users. It includes face-to-face and online platform both in synchronous (chat or online meeting via Skype) and asynchronous (email) format. One person is in charge for the continuous development of the service as well as for developing the policies and plans.

Assistive Technologies. As one of the thrusts of the university is creating and promoting an inclusive environment, assistive technologies are adopted and in the process of being developed. The work is done collaboratively with local specialists and librarians.

II. Hire vs. Visit

While visiting experts help in clarifying tasks and initiating a project, not to mention its cost-effectiveness, the permanency of contribution of those who stay for a year or more is incomparable. The closer contact helps locals understand the concepts and ensures materialization of projects.

III. The Perks for International Hires

For international hires, the challenge to learn new tools in an environment where a mentor is distant makes self-learning skills very important. Being outside the comforts of the country breeds multicultural competence to adapt to a different language and new ways/ tools. It is also an avenue to immerse with new culture that tourists do not acquire.

Conclusion

Institutional cooperation means institutional level support for libraries. This is very important for libraries to advance and keep abreast with global practices. The exchange programs, expert visits, and internship are valuable to see rooms for improvement and fast track development. Moreover, aside from short- term programs which are often part of the collaboration initiative, it is also useful to have in-house experts from other countries. International hires not only complete projects but they also influence behaviors of local practitioners for the better. Being embedded in the system facilitates more meaningful engagement that brings in deeper understanding of new platforms.

There are challenges and opportunities to be anticipated having and being an international hire. But the advantages surpass the challenges. International professionals have more opportunities to help and share knowledge back to their respective countries. The sense of purpose as a professional doesn't end in the country or institution served. Working in an international environment is a room for collaboration but the presence of international hires and institutional cooperation should be strategically adapted in such a way that it creates dependence. Innovativeness, self-learning and global mindset should always be in mind as the end goal.

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Short Bio:

Reysa Alenzuela has a degree in Doctor of Philosophy Major in Educational Management, Master in Library and Information Science and Bachelor in Education Major in English and Library Science. She was a Post-Doctoral Fellow (Research in Library and Information Science) in South Korea 2015- 2016 under the Korean Government Scholarship Program of the National Institute for International Education. Dr. Alenzuela is currently an Expert-Manager at Nazarbayev University Library in Kazakhstan. She also serves as Instruction and Information Literacy Coordinator working with various University Libraries in the US and UK to design an institutionalized and inclusive information literacy framework for Nazarbayev University. She has recently received a grant from IFLA's International Advocacy Program to build capacity and raise awareness of librarians in Central Asia including countries Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.