

International Library Connections in Academic Libraries Through Visiting Scholar Programs

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BACKGROUND



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Located in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, USA, The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) Libraries is a large academic library at an R1 institution with a staff of approximately 500 FTE serving a community of nearly 90,000 students, 8,000 faculty, and 17,000 staff across the commonwealth. Over the past six years, the Penn State Libraries has been exploring a variety of global engagement opportunities and programming in support of the larger university's global engagement goals. One successful project has been the exploration of a variety of international visiting scholar models within an academic library context. Thus far, the Penn State Libraries has had the opportunity to host five* international librarians as visiting scholars from 5 different countries at various levels of sponsorship.

From September of 2016 through the present, the Penn State Libraries has hosted visiting scholar librarians from: Brazil (2017), Jordan (2019), South Africa (2021), Norway/Philippines (2022), and Argentina (2022). The visits ranged in length from 4 months to 11 months and focused on areas of librarianship such as preservation and conservation, information literacy programming, librarian education, library diplomacy, and rhetoric, among other themes.

*A visiting scholar program within the Penn State Libraries for a librarian from China was cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



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OBJECTIVES

- Provide an opportunity to share practices, tools, and experiences across international borders
- Create a space for participants to learn and practice new skills
- Support global engagement goals of the larger institution
- Foster a broader understanding of librarians' work in different cultural contexts
- Strengthen ties between the Penn State Libraries and international professional networks

PLANNING AND LOGISTICS

Program: The programs were customized for each visiting scholar according to their unique goals and the shared professional interests of Penn State Libraries; however, common elements of the visiting scholar programs did immerse as particularly useful:

- A welcome meeting with the Libraries Administration
- Weekly program planning meetings with the Head of Global Engagement Initiatives
- A visit to a non-University Park campus library
- Strategic meetings with relevant Libraries departments
- A visiting scholar program project to be completed by participants
- A capstone presentation to the entire Penn State Libraries

Logistics: The International Visiting Scholars Program has been administered through the Libraries' Global Engagement Initiatives Department, which processes visiting scholar program proposals, ensures compliance with university policies and procedures, liaises with the University's Global Regulations Office, establishes individualized visiting scholar programs in coordination with other Libraries' departments, and acts a regulatory host for the visiting scholar during their stay. The Libraries has explored 4 visiting scholar sponsorship models:

- Add-on J-2 Spousal Visa Arrangements in collaboration with other Penn State Departments
- Non-sponsored J-1 Visa Arrangements as sponsored through the University's Humphrey Fellows Office
- Traditional, Full J-1 Visa Sponsorship through the Penn State Libraries
- Non-traditional, Full J-1 Visa Sponsorship through the Penn State Libraries (limited programming support)

Funding: To date, the Libraries' International Visiting Scholars Program has only provided in-kind support for the program through the funding of the the Global Engagement Initiatives Department, providing visiting scholars with office space, technology during their stay (laptop, access to printing, etc.), various business meals, and sponsored university access (id-cards, databases, etc.). Two of the visiting scholars were funded through the US Humphrey Fellowship Program, two scholars were supported through grants from their home-countries, and one scholar was self-funded.

- Scholars must show proof of funds to be eligible for visa clearance
- Scholars were responsible for their own room and board throughout the stay

OUTCOMES / FUTURE WORK

• Outcomes

Both visiting scholars and Penn State Libraries employees have expressed great appreciation and satisfaction with visiting scholar programs. The programs have allowed for not just increased skills and networking within librarianship as a profession but have also supported impactful intercultural development opportunities for all involved.

• Establishing a Formal and Funded Program

While the Penn State Libraries has been able to run successful international visiting scholar programming without formal funding support in place, the Libraries is now beginning to explore avenues to establish additional, funded visiting scholar models to support scholars from underfunded areas. Potential areas for exploration include donor and endowment funding and collaborative funding models.



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