TEACHING
INTERNATIONAL
LIBRARAINSHIP

International
Federation of
Library
Associations and Institutions

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Executive Summary

With IFLA's centenary set to provide an opportunity to reflect on the past, present and future of international librarianship, this report looks to support preparations by exploring how international librarianship is being taught today. While it cannot claim to be fully authoritative or representative, it offers valuable insights and ideas, both for further study and for IFLA itself.

A key highlight is that there are differing approaches, with some institutions not teaching international librarianship directly, but rather looking to integrate it into other learning. At the same time, others do make it a distinct subject area and dedicate entire modules or courses of study to it, recognising how it can be an opportunity to promote the habit of critical reflection and develop soft skills, alongside building up practical knowledge, for example around how to work with international standards.

Other points to note are that IFLA materials are being used in education (both as an object of study and as key tools), and that there is the scope to do more to adapt them for this – both for students and those in continuing education. Similarly, there may also be scope to offer clearer routes into IFLA engagement for those most interested.

Finally, there is scope to explore this area in more depth, both in terms of more advanced methodologies, and through bringing together those who are teaching about IFLA and international librarianship. This could help both those looking to do more around teaching, and build a stronger flow of people into IFLA in the long-term.

Introduction

As IFLA's centenary approaches in 2027, there is already a significant focus on our past – nearly 100 years of providing a space for the international library field to come together to exchange, debate, develop standards and form wider positions. Throughout its existence, IFLA has made it possible to make a reality of international librarianship, turning this from an abstract concept to a set of concrete activities and outputs. The celebrations will provide strong scope to evaluate this history, and ask what international librarianship means today, and what it might mean in future.

However, IFLA certainly is not the only place where international librarianship 'happens'. With the spread of digital technologies, the possibility to access and engage with colleagues around the world has grown.

It is also not the only place where reflection about the nature – past, current and future – of international librarianship takes place. Another logical place to look for insight and ideas is the library and information science (LIS) education sector, and in particular to explore how international librarianship is being introduced and taught to (future) professionals. If IFLA100 is to be an opportunity for critical reflection on the topic, we should also be looking here.

This report therefore aims to shine a light on the practice of teaching international librarianship. It shares the results of a survey developed by IFLA Headquarters, in collaboration with IFLA's Sections on Education and Training and on Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning. This survey had, as goals:

1) To understand better what is covered by concepts of international librarianship in library and information education;
2) To bring together insights that can support library and information educators in their own practice;
3) To identify where IFLA could develop materials and tools to support educators.

After the introduction, the report starts with a description of the survey and overall profile of respondents, before sharing information about how respondents reported that international librarianship was being taught. Next it explores formats, target audiences, learning outcomes and course structures (with details where these were available).

There is then a look at reasons given for stopping international librarianship where this has happened, before turning to suggestions for additional materials and other ideas that respondents proposed, before the conclusion.

Methodology

The study is based on a survey run using the Alchemer platform between 10 October and 9 November 2025. The survey was distributed via relevant IFLA sections and mailing lists, with an effort to target library and information schools.

The survey started by asking whether responding institutions offered training on international librarianship. When respondents answered 'yes', they were then asked to share more about the form of training (modules, lectures), whether this was mandatory, the qualification level of students, and learning goals. There was then the possibility to upload syllabi. Respondents were finally asked if they felt that they could benefit from more access to materials.

A next segment looked at experience of teaching about IFLA In particular with similar questions, although it turned out that this was not necessary as the responses to previous questions tended to cover this anyway. Finally, the survey asked if institutions had offered training in the past, but had stopped, and if so, why this was.

Overall, the survey received 42 responses from 38 different institutions. 53% came from Europe, and just over a fifth from North America. 16% came from Asia-Oceania, 5% from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 3% each from the Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Using the names of the institutions shared, we can also classify them by type. 63% of respondents were from universities in some form. Next most popular were schools (11%), followed by library associations (8%) and national libraries (5%).

Intergovernmental organisations and public libraries had one respondent each (3%), and three counted as 'other' (such as retirees or consultants). It should be noted that the survey was aimed at institutions teaching library and information science, and so low numbers for non-teaching institutions are not a problem.

Is International librarianship being taught?

In response to this question, 15 respondents responded positively, coming from 13 different institutions. Once the three 'I don't know' answers are discounted, this represents 37% of those who gave a firm answer. Looking across the different types of respondents, 39% of university respondents gave a positive response. Others offering training included one national library and one association.

Looking regionally, half of the European respondents and 29% of the North American ones offered education about international librarianship. None of the LAC respondents did so, nor did the one from MENA, although the African respondent did do so. Just one of the five from Asia-Oceania did so.

In what formats is international librarianship being taught?

Across those who are teaching international librarianship, six report offering **complete modules**, all (unsurprisingly) being taught within a university setting. These are offered at the Vest University of Timisoara in Romania, the St Petersburg State University of Culture in Russia, the University of Public Services in Bavaria, Germany, the Haute Ecole de Gestion in Geneva, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), and San Jose State University (SJSU). Outside of such structures, San Jose State also makes international focus part of the competencies that students are expected to gain over the course of their study[1].

Others offer at least a **series of lectures** – this is the case for Makerere University, Uganda and the Department of Archival, Library & Information Studies, University of West Attica. The University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Bulgaria offers a lecture.

Non university respondents also provide a series of lectures or materials, such as the Austrian Library Association, the State Library of Bavaria and an independent respondent. An independent consultancy offered webinars and conferences about international librarianship.

There was almost a 50/50 split between **mandatory and non-mandatory content**. Of the full modules, SJSU and the University of Public Services of Bavaria require students to follow this, while West Attica and Makerere oblige students to follow relevant lectures. The course at UIUC is optional, as are those in Timisoara, Saint Petersburg and the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Bulgaria.

In terms of their **target audience**, all of the university respondents (with the exception of Timisoara) aim at the student population. Saint Petersburg, the University of Public Services of Bavaria, Makerere, West Attica, the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies and the Haute École de Gestion all focus on **bachelors students**. The Bavarian State Library also offers this for anyone looking to qualify as a librarian.

Of these, Saint Petersburg, Makerere, West Attica and the Haute École de Gestion also serve **masters students,** and the latter two also **doctoral students**. Meanwhile, SJSU and UIUC only offer courses for masters students. There is also provision for **people in continuing education**, for example by the Austrian Library Association, InveSTEAM in Croatia, Vest University of Timisoara and West Attica.

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[1] It is possible, however, that different understandings of the word 'module' may affect these results – further exploration of course content would be needed. Of these six, it was only possible to get a full course overview for SJSU and UIUC.

What do international librarianship courses cover?

There were a range of responses to this question, with some providing high-level descriptions, and others sharing detailed text from course descriptions. Bringing these together, we can distinguish four major groups:

- **Learning how to engage internationally**: Build awareness of IFLA and how to engage in the international agenda. In some cases it can also be about learning about structures, and even funding opportunities.
- **Critical perspectives**: To understand global perspectives on and trends in effective information practices and different traditions of global librarianship, and in particular 'new' topics, such as inclusive learning spaces, bibliotherapy, AI, inquiry-based learning, well-being (comparative librarianship)
- **Practical skills**: To be able to apply global standards and practices and work effectively in international networks
- **Develop intercultural skills**: To be more appreciative of the diversity of language and culture, and collaborate effectively with (or serve) people from different backgrounds

Some respondents provided copies of syllabi, offering more of an insight into the approaches taken. For example, SJSU's International Librarianship Course is organised as follows:

1. Introduction to the course and discussion of what it means to do or study international librarianship (two sessions)
2. Critical perspectives, including the dominance of Western libraries and the risk of cultural imperialism (one session)
3. The landscape of organisations supporting international librarianship, as well as a look at other actors such as NGOs (two sessions)
4. A series of 'issue spotlights', with each one led by a guest speaker and some introductory readings, and a discussion form for each. The topics included in the copy shared were Indigenous knowledge and culture, Open Access initiatives, Support for the procession (including LIS education), and Global information literacy (five sessions)
5. A series of geographically focused sessions, each again with a guest speaker and light reading, plus a discussion form. These look in turn at a country or countries from the Americas, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe (five sessions)

Assessment is based on a networking assignment (to engage with a fellow student from another country, the discussion forms highlighted above and cumulative reflection. Students are expected to write a professional report analysing an international issue, and an analysis of a given country's library landscape.

The module on Global Principles and Local Libraries explores how library principles appear across the globe, and how resources, policy and tools might be employed

"locally" considering regional differences. Specific learning outcomes include awareness of principles applied inside and outside of regions, the issues facing libraries in different contexts, the role of (library and non-library information organisations), being able to analyse different services and systems, as well as to take critical approaches. Crucially, at the beginning of the course, the students choose a region for their focus and explore others through discussions during the term.

The structure of the course is as follows:
- Introduction to the course, overall principles and the Sustainable Development Goals (1 module/session)
- The cross-cultural workplace and international and regional professional organisations (1 module/session)
- A series of three thematic sessions, looking at freedom of access to information and freedom of expression; copyright, intellectual property, privacy and open initiatives, AI; and safeguarding cultural heritage (3 modules/sessions)
- A module practically applying foundational principles in a local context, and producing a resource building on the findings.

Assessments here include analysis of documents from a specific region and discussion with peers, a reflection paper looking at the importance of cultural competency in international collaboration and differences in work cultures and communications styles , a practical application of a foundational principle, and a comprehensive overview of the library field in a chosen region provided as a resource on the region selected for future use by course colleagues.

It is worth noting that SJSU also offers modules on international children's literature, global library issues using project-based learning, and globalisation and information, and intercultural communication.

A syllabus was also shared for the International Librarianship course at UIUC. This is structured in the following way:

1. Introduction to the course, and to international librarianship (3 sessions)
2. A focus on global, comparative and transnational perspectives (1 session)
3. A focus on internationalization at home, looking at users, services and collections (2 sessions)
4. Global librarianship and professional practice (1 session)
5. A focus on internationalization abroad, looking at the actions of national libraries and associations, NGOs, engagement around the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and funding, budgets, development and aid, and LIS education (4 sessions – the session on LIS education comes at the end of the course as a whole)
6. International policy issues – intellectual property, political economy and information flows, and libraries in times of crisis (3 sessions)

The basis for grading includes a range of learning activities, as well as two reflective essays (one linking the course with career goals, and the other thinking about what has been learned from the course), three reports (one on a webinar (for example from IFLA), one on the international components of a library conference, and one on an association or organisation engaged in international work), and a seminar paper (preceded by a proposal and a poster presentation) on a significant issue in international or comparative librarianship in order to go into depth, showing engagement with the topic and relevant theories.

Elsewhere, international aspects are considered in the context of a wider course on Trends in Information Science at Makerere University, Uganda, which explicitly looks to identify international trends alongside national and regional ones. All trends are analysed for their impacts on the profession and what response may be needed.

Outside of universities, the training offered by the Austrian Library Association offers a four-hour session which addresses IFLA's overall mission and structure, its main projects (Library Map of the World, the Global Vision process, the Trend Report), and an interactive element focused on ways to get involved in IFLA.

Reasons for stopping international librarianship education
We asked all recipients if they knew of examples of international librarianship education which had stopped, and if so, why. Just two respondents said yes to this, with one noting that it was down to a change in personnel. The other noted that it was because of a need to reduce the number of courses offered, but also highlighted how much it was the drive of one individual that had brought international librarianship onto the syllabus.

Further Insights

We also asked if respondents felt that there were materials missing where IFLA could help. While six respondents did suggest that no more was needed, others suggested:

- A toolkit with relevant introductions, texts, and guidance for workshops, for example around the Trend Report. This could include materials about history, best practices, case studies and even interviews;
- Linked to this, materials that explain more effectively and accessibly how to get involved in IFLA (as well as ensuring that these possibilities exist in reality);
- Bibliographies about librarianship in different languages;
- Readier information about libraries in different parts of the world (taking account of the diversity that exists within regions and countries). This could potentially be provided in the form of an Open Educational Resource. One respondent provided a long list of topics covering everything from library collaboration to grant-writing and comparative analyses of digital libraries.

One respondent went into more detail, proposing recommendations more aimed at their own LIS school, but which also include a strong IFLA element:

- adding an IFLA primer into relevant courses;
- readier integration of the Trend Report and Library Map of the World into teaching;
- creating an IFLA student liaison role and a student standing interest group tied to IFLA sections;
- an IFLA microbadge for completing webinars, readings and a reflection;
- a series of webinars with Section chairs and a panel of early-career librarians;
- encourage an IFLA focus in capstone projects, potentially engaging IFLA people as reviewers;
- student competitions around IFLA;
- provide a structure for making connections between LIS programmes in different countries;
- track and celebrate student participation outcomes to build momentum.

Some ideas that were suggested are of course already a reality such as grants for earlier-career librarians to attend the World Library and Information Congress, the possibility to join IFLA mailing lists as a means of disseminating insights and learning, or the advocacy community of practice. This indicates a need for more effective dissemination of the opportunities already available.

Another respondent, more specifically, suggested that a useful activity could be partnership between course directors and IFLA people in order to develop content, while a further one suggested taking further the idea behind this survey in order to understand better how to integrate the international into LIS education.

We also gave respondents the opportunity to provide any other thoughts. In their responses, some underlined a desire to make LIS education more international, for example by running exchange programmes, as well as to explain why international librarianship matters.

Another noted, at least from the point of view of associations, that rather than dedicated training modules, an alternative approach could be to run regular seminars and discussions that immersed people in international librarianship more indirectly.

One respondent indicated that they did not treat 'internationality' as a topic in and of itself, but rather integrated it into wider teaching, for example through integrating IFLA guidelines and policies into teaching elsewhere, or talking about IFLA among other structures in which librarians can engage. Others did both – having both dedicated teaching, and looking to integrate the international into other courses and programmes.

Finally, one respondent nonetheless noted that the (perceived) cost of international engagement could be a barrier. Following LIS education abroad was unaffordable for many, and there was a sense that the same could be for IFLA engagement, which could reduce motivation to follow international librarianship training.

Conclusion

This report contains a lot of ideas and perspectives around what the teaching of international librarianship is today, and what it might be in future. At the same time, the nature of the tool used – a survey – necessarily means that it only scratches the surface of what is happening, especially in those settings where there is a dedicated focus.

Similarly, it is not possible to be sure what share of the total number of programmes that exist with a major international librarianship component are covered. Of our respondents, only two provided clear evidence of dedicated modules, although a wider range discussed international librarianship in some way. However, such modules may exist in other LIS schools, and be organised in very different ways that shed a different light on perceptions of international librarianship.

This report therefore cannot claim to provide a representative overview of the state of international librarianship teaching – this would be a much more significant project – but it does raise some interesting points and questions that could both guide future research, and already offer inputs that can help planning.

First, it is not universally considered that international librarianship should be a specific area of study – for some it is rather something that is mainstreamed elsewhere. Both logics have their merits. It is certainly a good thing that the relevance of international engagement is recognised across different areas of practice, rather than seen as something divorced from normal practice.

At the same time, in the examples we have of dedicated training, international librarianship can provide an opportunity to promote the habit of critical reflection and develop soft skills, alongside building up practical knowledge, for example around how to work with international standards.

Second, IFLA materials and tools are being taken up and used in (international) librarianship education, either as examples of knowledge worth having in their own right, or as a means of illustrating a point. There appears at least to be an appetite for more, in particular around flagship publications and projects such as the Library Map of the World, and the Trend Report.

Third, there would be interest in finding ways in which people studying international librarianship in an educational context can subsequently practice it. IFLA could explore how to present opportunities for engagement in a way that is clear and accessible for all. Without this, there is indeed a risk of international librarianship seeming either distant, or like something that exists in a silo.

Fourth, while much of the focus here has been on formal education, it will pay to keep in mind how to ensure that what IFLA produces can also be helpful for those

offering continuing professional development. This can be about standard materials, but it can also be more flexible, for example with models for discussion groups.

Linked to the above, there is a community – maybe a large one – of people who are interested in and see the value of teaching about international librarianship. Especially in the context of preparations for IFLA100, it may be interesting to think about how to support this community by providing a space to come together and share, and even support exchanges.

Finally, IFLA of course has an interest in supporting work in this space. In many cases, initial education provides a well structured way of learning about different library structures and organisations. As such, it represents a potentially very valuable way of making sure that new talent is aware of the Federation, and may look to engage in our work.

IFLA is grateful to everyone who completed the survey and shared their insights and ideas, as well as to those who subsequently reviewed this paper.

This paper has been prepared by IFLA Headquarters.