

national shared cataloging and interlibrary loan efforts? What might be the effects of zero funding?

Any group or individual interested in sharing additional information or concerns should contact the Chair of the CLS Impact Committee, John

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The Exchange Experience: An American Perspective

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As I have just completed eleven months at the University of Edinburgh Library as an exchange librarian from Indiana University Libraries, a number of librarians have asked me about my experience. In this report I will comment on some aspects of the exchange program that may be useful to other American librarians who are planning a similar experience in a British library.

It all began in 1975 when I met Ruth Melting, British librarian now in Colchester, England, who was an exchange librarian at the Indiana-Purdue University campus at Fort Wayne. When I asked her how I might arrange a similar exchange, she explained that certain agencies involved in exchange programs for teachers would occasionally aid librarians, but their contacts with British libraries were inadequate. She suggested that I find someone in Britain who was interested and pursue it on my own.

My plan remained dormant until March, 1980, when I responded to an interlibrary loan inquiry from Margaret Dowling, ILL librarian at Edinburgh University Library. For some reason I was inspired to add a postscript that read: "Would you be interested in trading jobs for a year? If so, let me know. We may be able to work something out." Ms. Dowling very quickly wrote back saying she was interested. From that point it was a matter of 1) securing from our supervisors approval in principle, 2) exchanging resumes and information about our respective positions and libraries, and 3) pushing all of the paperwork for official approval through the bureaucratic process. This, along with negotiations for living accommodations and personal family matters, took a full year. A single person could easily speed up the process, but moving my family of four 4,000 miles required a great deal of logistic planning.

Apparently my fishing technique was a stroke of luck, for a colleague of mine has tried the approach several times with no result. British library administrators were often interested, but I met few librarians who were willing to trade jobs.

Family concerns and job security were the major reasons for their reluctance.

In my case most of the paperwork was done by us rather than by the university administration. Following an exchange of resumes and job descriptions the library administrators decided what position could be offered to each exchange person. It was not a direct exchange. At Edinburgh I took over Ms. Dowling's position which was changing because of reorganization. At Indiana my administrative position was filled temporarily with an experienced IU librarian, and Ms. Dowling was offered a position as a reference librarian in the Undergraduate Library. Each of us found the arrangement to be exactly what we were seeking. For me it was a year in which I got away from the demands of an administrative position and worked directly with users in reference and ILL. For Ms. Dowling it was an opportunity to broaden her experience by becoming actively involved in library instruction and undergraduate reference service, in contrast to her working primarily with faculty and graduate students at Edinburgh.

The librarian at the University of Edinburgh and the dean of libraries at Indiana University then agreed in writing to accept each other's librarians without pay and conform to the working conditions of the host library. Earlier it had been decided that the best way to arrange the exchange was for each of us to continue to be paid by the home institution and be sent "on assignment" to the host library. Any other arrangement would have required Edinburgh to provide considerable justification for a work permit for me, and it is very likely that it would have been denied—proving that I was more qualified for a reference and ILL position than 3 million unemployed British citizens is not an easy task!

At Indiana approval by the dean of faculties, the vice president for academic affairs, the president, and the board of trustees was necessary. Similar arrangements had already been made for teaching faculty, so that once the dean's office found the appropriate procedure, it was a matter of moving the paperwork through the right channels.

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One surprise occurred at the immigration desk upon my arrival. I was prepared for questions regarding employment in Great Britain and had in hand letters from both universities stating that I was being paid by IU, not a British employer. But I did not expect to have to register as an alien with the local police at a fee of \$40! The old maxim, "Take less luggage and more money," is the best advice I can give.

I went to Edinburgh with 14 years of experience in virtually every department of a library except rare book collections, and Ms. Dowling came to Indiana with over 10 years of varied library experience. One aid to the transition was that we both had been working in areas that differed primarily in procedure, not function. Librarians or managers working in specific subject areas, rare books, acquisitions, reference, or interlibrary loans will probably not have a long period of adjustment. Even catalogers may escape being overwhelmed by procedural differences, because a surprising number of British libraries are using Library of Congress classification.

British libraries are also coping with the same issues as we are—budget cuts, automation, and copyright. The problems are the same but there is a different approach. University library committees are given considerable authority and are less advisory in nature. A librarian's academic rank is more significant than his or her position. Middle managers function differently than in the U.S. Personnel budgets, not materials budgets, are the sacred cows. The change in perspective is sometimes enlightening and sometimes frustrating, but the experience is most valuable for both parties to the exchange.

As a manager returning to front-line reference work after several years, I was concerned about my ability to cope. I found, however, that although Edinburgh's reference collection had a British emphasis, I quickly learned what was where and how to use it. Reference questions regarding the university, its organization, and its archival material were the most difficult.

Lack of a subject catalog was the most troublesome problem in reference work. I never quite understood the classification scheme (a variation of Dewey) well enough to use the classed catalog effectively. Catalogers served as subject specialists, however, and were always available and willing to help.

Another reason why I learned the job so quickly and easily was the friendly, helpful, stable, and experienced staff at Edinburgh University Library. Unlike many American academic libraries where staff turnover is high and within a year one can become a senior member of the department (as my exchange partner did), most of the staff at Edinburgh had been in their positions five years or more.

Perhaps the most obvious difference I noticed was a less formal, less anxiety-ridden atmosphere

than one finds in large libraries in the U.S. The fact that librarians at Edinburgh do not face the rigors of annual evaluations, salary increments based on performance, and a promotion and tenure process very likely has something to do with the more relaxed approach. Working in both types of situations has been personally rewarding.

The benefits of this kind of exchange program depend on the backgrounds, interests, abilities, and positions of the exchange partners. We were able to experience one year of working in a different position in a foreign library without committing ourselves to a permanent move (or a higher mortgage rate). Exchanges within the United States and abroad seem to be a viable means of helping librarians to avoid burnout. No matter how much you like your job, ultimately boredom will set in and productivity, initiative, and creativity will decrease. An exchange provides a needed change, a fresh view, an opportunity to try something different. If nothing else results from an exchange, you very likely will learn that your own situation is not so bad after all.

An exchange for librarians is analogous to the teaching faculty's sabbatical. The personal, cultural, and professional benefits of an exchange comprise an essay in itself and depend considerably on the person. A poor librarian would likely return from an exchange unchanged; a good librarian will benefit immeasurably. If we ever expect to realize the utopian dream of international cooperation and resource sharing, what better place to begin than by sharing our librarians?

Editor's Note: Margaret Dowling will share her version of the Exchange Experience in the November C&RL News. ■ ■



Exchange Option

Another institution has shown an interest in participating in the *ACRL Exchange Librarian Program* (see *C&RL News*, June 1982, p. 205, July/August 1982, p. 241, and September 1982, p. 302). The Colchester Institute, Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3LL, United Kingdom, is an institute of higher education much like an American community college. Many of the students are 18–20 years old. Ruth H. Melling, Institute Librarian, writes: "We have an unusually wide range academically, from bricklaying to bachelor's degrees in music."

Libraries or librarians interested in participating in an exchange should contact the Institute directly.