
La bibliothéconomie en France: An exchange librarian's report

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An excellent opportunity for professional development provided by the French government.

Having just completed a master's degree in French, and anxious to put some of my language skills to practical use, I was most interested by an announcement in late 1983 that the Association of College and Research Libraries was searching for qualified librarians to spend a year on an exchange program in France. This seemed an excellent opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge of the current state of libraries in a country with which I have long felt a great affinity. No American had as yet participated in this relatively new program which was co-sponsored by the Franco-American Commission for Educational Exchange and the Direction des Bibliothèques, des Musées et de l'Information Scientifique et Technique (DBMIST), a branch of the French Ministry of Education. After gaining the approval of the administration of the Smithsonian Institution Libraries, my employer, I submitted my resume to ACRL. In March 1984 I was notified that I had been selected to spend 1985 at the library of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM) in Paris. In a reciprocal arrangement, Madame Sylviane Ashworth of the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine in Nanterre was detailed to the Smithsonian Institution Libraries, to learn various applications of our integrated automated system, and to work in several units of the Libraries. The time I spent in Paris was definitely worthwhile, en-

abling me to learn the routines and procedures of one particular library, while further gaining some insights into the professional training of French librarians and the centralized administration of most libraries in France.

The name of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers reveals very little about its mission and is, in fact, rather misleading. Founded in 1794 in the wake of the French Revolution, the Conservatoire was established as a "depository of machines, models, tools, drawings, descriptions and books in all areas of the applied sciences." Today it is a teaching and research institution, headquartered in Paris with regional centers throughout France, offering courses to 74,000 students, most of whom hold full-time jobs while working toward degrees for professional development and advancement. Among the sixty-three subjects taught are chemistry, physics, nuclear science, economics, business administration, mechanical engineering, and information science. Also attached to the Conservatoire is the Musée des Techniques, a museum of the history of technology.

The library in which I worked is therefore essentially a university library, serving researchers, students, and their instructors. Access is also given to outside researchers who may obtain a reader's card upon presentation of proper credentials. Located in one of two remaining buildings of the royal pri-

ory of Saint-Martin des Champs, the library occupies the 13th-century edifice which was once the refectory. A vaulted gothic ceiling and stained glass windows give a most impressive appearance to the reading room, which features a pulpit built high into the wall at one end. Card catalogs, a reference desk, and places for 100 readers have altered the medieval atmosphere, but the overall impression

The 13th-century reading room features stained glass windows and a pulpit.

remains rather awesome.

All seats are generally filled during the open hours, which are few by American standards. The library is open from 1:00 to 8:30 weekdays, 9:00 to 8:30 Saturdays, and Sunday mornings. The collection of 200,000 volumes and 3,500 periodicals, of which 1,000 are currently received, is heavily used by the readers. Other sources available to the users are a rare book collection including 7,000 volumes published prior to 1800, and, at the other end of the time spectrum, computerized access to over 350 databases. The origin of the rare book collection is of interest. The initial deposit consisted of volumes confiscated from the libraries of the royal family, the nobility, and the clergy during the Revolution. The coats of arms of Louis XV and of Marie Antoinette are still visible on the leather bindings of two volumes. Among the special collections are the Bartholdi archive of materials relating to the construction of the Statue of Liberty, and the Fourastie collection of department store catalogs.

All processes in the library are manual, with the exception of online database searching and participation in an automated interlibrary loan network and in the Catalogue Collectif National, a database of 300,000 serial titles. France does not as yet have cooperative cataloging, and so each book or journal of the Conservatoire is cataloged and classified according to a particular scheme devised for that library in the last century. Subject headings are assigned from a local authority file maintained in the library. I will long remember my hours of typing, duplicating and filing catalog cards.

The budget for books and journals compares quite favorably with those of other French libraries of similar size. In 1985 the library spent 250,000 francs for books and one million for periodicals. At the present exchange rate this equals \$30,000 and \$118,000 respectively. Although 90% of the periodicals budget is spent on foreign acquisitions, this sum accounts for only about half of the titles pur-

chased. The majority of these foreign journals are in English. French book purchases have a slight edge over foreign, accounting for 51.5% of the budget. Given the disproportionate expenditure for English-language journals and the unfavorable exchange rate that has prevailed in recent years, the CNAM library has been most fortunate in being able to maintain all subscriptions. Contracts for book and journal purchases are held with several jobbers in Paris. Few titles are obtained directly from the publisher.

Students may not borrow books or journals from the library, although journals are routed to faculty members. As book stacks are closed, most materials must be delivered to the reading room. A great many of the most frequently used volumes are in open access on the reference shelves, which line one wall of the reading room. The staff of three conservators, five assistant librarians, one clerk, and five *magasiniers*, employees who page and shelve the books and take care of some of the physical maintenance of the collection, copes admirably with the workload, considering the size of the collection and the large number of readers.

The training and professional education for librarians in France differ from practice in the United States. For the beginning level, *bibliothécaire-adjoint*, one must possess a *baccalauréat*, roughly equivalent to an associate degree. After a one-year training program at one of twenty-six regional centers throughout the country, students who pass an examination of professional skills are eligible for employment in a technical or support position. To attain the rank of *conservateur*, librarians with more creative and/or greater administrative duties, one must have a *licence*, or bachelor's degree, or have worked as a *bibliothécaire-adjoint* for five years. Candidates who successfully pass written and oral exams in general culture and in a foreign language are admitted to a one-year course of study at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Bibliothèques (ENSB) in Lyon. Only about twenty students are admitted to this program each year, and all successful candidates are guaranteed government positions.

A third type of library professional is the *chartiste*, or archivist-paleographer, a graduate of the prestigious École des Chartes. Trained to work with archives and rare books, the holders of this advanced degree must compete for only one or two open positions each year. Finally, there is the *documentaliste*, most often employed in documentation centers in the private sector. The equivalents of our special librarians, *documentalistes* attend a one-year program at the Institut National des Techniques de la Documentation (INSB), a division, incidentally, of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers.

The French library system differs greatly from that in the United States in that most libraries are state-run, attached to either the Ministry of Education (municipal and university libraries) or the

Ministry of Culture (museums and cultural centers). It is because of this organization that graduates of the various programs can be assured a position, as the number of students admitted is determined by the projected number of vacancies. Librarians seeking to change posts can submit their applications to a panel at the DBMIST which meets annually to determine who will fill which vacancies.

My own experience at the Conservatoire was very rewarding. I was given the opportunity to participate in nearly all of the library's functions. Thus I cataloged, registered the receipt of standing orders, answered reference questions for readers in the library and by telephone inquiries, and performed more in-depth research for requests received by mail. Two special projects assigned to me were the translation of the library's information brochure into English and the annotation of all course bibliographies for the next year. The latter was most informative, as it enabled me to learn the nature of the courses being taught. I was also given the responsibility of determining which books would be purchased, as the reading lists contained far more titles than could be bought with that year's budget. The autonomy which I was granted in carrying out my tasks was indicative, I think, of a respect for my professional background.

Equally important to the value of my experience was the reception given to me by the library staff. The trepidation that I felt at first as a foreigner was

quickly dissipated by the warmth and good humor surrounding me. I was soon accepted as one of the team, taking my turn making the morning coffee and then sharing the duties of the day.

My original goals of making use of my language abilities and learning more about French libraries were certainly both met. All communication at the library was in French, enabling me to improve my fluency through the immersion method. My only use of English was in responding to requests in that language or in helping "anglophone" researchers.

While visits to other libraries in Paris, such as the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Mazarine, and the Sainte-Genevieve, did not afford me an in-depth knowledge of their organization and function, they did permit me to appreciate a diversity among French libraries comparable to that found in the United States. In submitting a written evaluation of my experience to the DBMIST, I stated that it had been a very exceptional occasion of personal and professional development. I also expressed the hope that this exchange would continue, as it is to the benefit of both countries to do so. By gaining an appreciation of the similarities and differences of United States and foreign libraries, we will be able to make better use of the resources available abroad. Anyone having an inclination to learn about our profession at an international level would do well to investigate this or similar exchange programs. ■ ■

U.S./France librarian exchange

ACRL is again assisting the French government in arranging exchanges of librarians between the United States and France. Four French librarians have been selected to come to the U.S. ACRL needs to hear from you by the end of April if you are a U.S. librarian who would like to exchange jobs with one of these individuals during the 1986-87 school year. The requirements are: U.S. citizenship, ability to speak French, and at least tentative approval for the exchange from your library administration. Librarians selected for the exchange must keep their existing salary.

The positions open in France are:

Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire de Montpellier. Science library of approximately 850,000 volumes. Responsible for cataloging and public relations with the university.

Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire d'Aix-Marseille, Aix-en-Provence. Humanities library of approximately 250,000 volumes. Responsible for acquisition and processing of works in French literature, art and archeology, music, and cinema.

Bibliothèque Américaine de Nancy. Responsible for the management, functioning, and organization of a library of 9,000 books and 40 periodicals

(in English).

Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire de Toulouse. Science library of 60,000 volumes, 950 serials. Responsible for information retrieval, both manual and computer-based, interlibrary loan supervision, and technical services.

The French ministry will approve individuals chosen for the exchange. Round-trip airfare will be paid by the Fulbright Commission. For further information about this program, see *C&RL News*, December 1983, p. 436.

Interested librarians should send a letter of interest and a current vita by April 30, 1986, to: Mary Ellen Davis, Program Officer, ACRL/ALA, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611-2795; (312) 944-6780. ■ ■



International Conference on Data Bases in the Humanities and Social Sciences

From June 22 to 24, 1985, approximately 150 people from all over the world gathered at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa, for the International Conference on Data Bases in the Humanities and Social Sciences. It was my privilege to present a paper, co-authored by myself, Thomas J. Donahue Jr., from the library at Georgia State University, and Mindy R. Wertheimer, from the Social Work Department, on "The Use of Online Demographic Databases in the Provision of Social Services." In the paper, we explored the benefits of using readily available databases, such as *Donnelly Demographics*, the National Planning Association's *Demographic Database*, and *Electronic Yellow Pages*, for human services planning and evaluation.

At least four other papers of the 58 presented were given by librarians. Penelope Krosch and Patricia Loehlein from the University of Minnesota spoke on "Online Access to Semi-Published Papers in Business"; Anita Lowry from Columbia University presented a paper analyzing the FRANCIS database; John Budd from Southeastern Louisiana University spoke on "Bibliographic Data Bases and

Literary Research"; and Marianne Gaunt from Rutgers University gave a paper entitled "The Rutgers Inventory of Machine Readable Text in the Humanities."

Other papers dealt with development of databases in areas ranging from linguistics to archeology. One particularly exciting development from the University of Iowa is a project to put the School of Art and Art History's slide collection on videodisc. The paper was presented by Joan Sustik Huntley and Julie Hausman.

My most vivid impression of the conference was the productive exchange among scholars including librarians. The papers given by librarians were well received and generated a number of questions. On the other hand, librarians need to be very aware of the advancements being made in the development of all kinds of scholarly databases. Access to these databases is going to be a crucial problem for academic librarians in the years to come.

Proceedings of the conference will be published by Paradigm Press.—*Mary Reichel, Head, Reference Department, Georgia State University.* ■■

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