

Libraries as gateways to an enlightened world

The 65th IFLA Conference

by Hannelore B. Rader

From August 20–28, 1999, the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) held its 65th conference in Bangkok, Thailand. Approximately 2,250 delegates from 117 countries attended the conference with the theme “On the Threshold of the 21st Century: Libraries as Gateways to an Enlightened World,” an appropriate theme as we enter the next millennium and try hard to prepare libraries and people for the information age.

The largest delegation (310 delegates) was from the United States and the second largest group (305 delegates) represented Thailand. More than 100 exhibitors presented various products and demonstrations during several days of the conference. As was the case last year, the ALA booth was most popular with conference attendees who stopped to pick up literature about our professional organizations and to chat with ALA dignitaries.

The opening ceremony of the conference featured Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, who spoke about the importance of books and libraries in the fight against illiteracy and in preparing people for information use in the 21st century.

IFLA President Christine Deschamps reported on her challenges and activities during the first year in this important position. She outlined her priorities for the organization such as training, standardization, help for developing countries, and support for free-

dom of expression. The last item has been addressed because IFLA will soon be a member of IFEX, the International Freedom of Expression Exchange.

OCLC and IFLA announced the IFLA/OCLC Early Career Development Fellowship, which will support library and information science professionals from countries with developing economies during the early stages of their career development. Up to four fellowship recipients a year will travel to OCLC in Ohio for four weeks to participate in an intensive program of lectures, seminars, and mentoring.

Guest lectures addressed “Reaching the information gateways: an unfinished task” and “The development of human rights/intellectual freedom in Asian perspectives with a particular emphasis on cultural and ideological obstacles.”

The User Education Roundtable held a meeting with the theme “Integrating Information Skills into a Changing Curriculum.” Speakers from Mexico, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel addressed the theme in a variety of ways.

University Libraries and General Research Libraries

IFLA’s Section for University Libraries and General Research Libraries, with a membership of more than 450 international members, sponsored the following programs:

About the author

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• *Performance measurement in academic libraries.* Discussions continued based on the publication *Measuring Quality: International Guidelines for Performance Measurement in Academic Libraries*, by Roswitha Poll and Peter te Boekhorst, K. G. Saur, 1996. A number of academic libraries around the world have used this work to begin measuring their performance.

• *Implications of the electronic information environment for academic libraries, and in particular those in developing countries: Alternative structures for financing and delivery of services.*

Graham Bulpitt from the Learning Center at Sheffield Hallard University in the United Kingdom, addressed new organizational and financial models for academic libraries based on the experience in the United Kingdom.

Gunnar Sahlin from Stockholm University in Stockholm, Sweden, discussed new organizational and financial models for academic libraries in Scandinavian countries. Both speakers provided new ideas for academic libraries in developing countries.

• *Life-long learning in an electronic environment.* Carolyn Argentati, from North Carolina State University (NCSU), who addressed library-university partnerships in distance learning, discussed the leadership role taken by the NCSU libraries to create a learning and research center for the digital age. This center is comprised of faculty support areas such as intellectual property, scholarly communication, scanning and digitization, information technology for teaching, and space to develop instructional methods.

Sabena Robertson from the University of Melbourne (UM) Library in Australia discussed how the UM Library meets the challenges of providing information literacy in a networked environment. She described the "outplacing" of a librarian in the context of changing modes

of delivery of instructional programs. Such a librarian collaborated with academic staff and student support services to ensure that post-graduate students learn how to effectively use information resources to help them meet their lifelong learning needs.

Christina Tovote from Malmo University in Sweden talked about a new kind of student, one unfamiliar with university studies, and how such a student can become information literate. She described the founding of a new university to help educate people who are jobless and immigrants and prepare them for lifelong learning.



The Royal Grand Palace in Bangkok, one of several cultural visits for IFLA participants.

Discussions among the workshop attendees made it clear that most academic libraries around the world face similar issues as presented by the speakers. These issues include library support for distance and Web-based education, building partnerships with faculty to inte-

grate information skills into the curriculum, how to do outcome assessments, and how to change education for librarianship to make it more realistic for the next century.

The University and General Research Libraries Section addressed important issues currently of concern to academic librarians within the international setting. Many of the IFLA papers will be available on the IFLA site at <http://www.ifla.org>.

Sightseeing in Bangkok

In summary, the IFLA Conference presented many programs of interest to all types of librarians. A number of cultural events sponsored by the conference featured the wonderful and artistic Thai dancing and music. Visits to some of the 20 local universities were most educational.

I was fortunate to visit Thammasat University, established in 1934, with an enrollment of almost 26,000 students. It has a new

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useful in determining whether something has already

been invented and if one's idea is worth pursuing. It is also useful in exploring information contained in patents relating to one's field of endeavor.

There are two sections of the U.S. Patent Database, although they cover the same patent information with comparable search options. The Bibliographic Database at <http://128.109.179.23/access/search-bool.html> offers a rapid search of patent front pages including all bibliographic data as well as an abstract and brief description of the patent's contents.

The Full-Text Database section at <http://164.195.100.11/netahtml/search-adv.htm> offers a more thorough search of the full text of U.S. patents with all of the text words in the patent being searchable. It includes all bibliographic data as well, such as the inventor's name, the patent's title, the assignee's name, abstract, the full description of the invention, and the claims. This database also offers some full-text images, although I did not find any patents with images available.

The databases are easy to use with plenty of background information and FAQs for people who are new to the patenting process. It is the perfect place for preliminary searches for inventors. However, the site does link to patent lawyers and patent depository libraries for more in-depth assistance and legal information.—*Gentry Holbert, University of South Alabama Biomedical Library, gholbert@jaguar1.usouthal.edu*

Publishers' Catalogues Home Page.

Access: <http://www.lights.com/publisher/>.

This site provides access points, organized by country, to publishers' homepages. For example, clicking on the hyperlink labeled "Russia" will take the user to a list of publishers based in Russia.

Developed and maintained by Peter Scott of Northern Lights Internet Solutions, represented publishers in each country are those that choose to participate in the directory and have registered. Thus in the example of Russian publishers, the list (as of August 1999) held the names of 12 publishing companies, a list that did not include the important presses

operating out of Russian scholarly academies.

The publishers of the United States, Britain, and the Western European countries are well represented. Because the links are maintained by the active cooperation of the publishers, not all of the links are accurate.

The site's index of countries is overwhelmed by the addition of advertisements, which include three search engines sponsored by commercial vendors. The graphical layout is visually noisy and a first-time user may overlook the real value of the site. A link to this site is provided by the invaluable Acqweb site (<http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/law/acqs/acqs.html>), which is a site with a broader compass established for librarians with collection development responsibilities.

The strength of the Publishers' Catalogues Home Page is the organization of publishers by country, giving access to catalogs on an international level. The most significant limitation of the site is in the weak representation of academic presses in countries outside of the Western industrialized community.

—*Sara Rutter, University of Michigan, sara@umich.edu* ■

("Libraries as gateways . . ." continued from page 733)

main library, with four levels underground and three levels above ground. It was interesting to note that the Thai government plans to free all universities of state control within the next five years. It was also interesting to note that the library was very heavily used, that it had very few computers (although it has a new automated library system and several Internet connections), and that the electronic resources are still scarce.

Bangkok is an exciting and interesting city with more than 10 million inhabitants. The traffic is a nightmare, but the people seem to have adapted to it. The food is wonderfully delicious and there are many restaurants. Shopping is plentiful and bargaining is the acceptable way of doing business. The city is alive for 24 hours every day.

It is a city of contrasts—beautiful flowers and palaces and enormous traffic jams and tremendous poverty. The most memorable impression I have is that the people are very gracious, polite, patient, and highly likeable. ■