

Nicole E. Brown and Jill Barr-Walker

Collaboration and innovation “across land and sea”

Developing global library orientations

In January 2013, *College & Research Libraries* published “Libraries across Land and Sea: Academic Library Services on International Branch Campuses.” In this preliminary study, Harriett Green shares the results of a survey of services at branch campuses of U.S. institutions located abroad.¹ The article ends by predicting “creative outreach programs” and calling for future studies focusing on “methods of collaboration between home and campus libraries.” Here, two New York University (NYU) librarians, one in New York City and one in Abu Dhabi, respond to the article. We offer a tale of collaboration and innovation in library orientation for undergraduates “across land and sea.”

The Global Network University

Founded in 1831, NYU is the largest private university in the United States. Its Washington Square campus in New York City enrolls more than 20,000 undergraduate students. NYU’s Bobst Library boasts more than 3.7 million volumes, 58,000 serial titles, more than 5 million microforms, and provides access to thousands of electronic resources both on-site and to the NYU community around the world.² NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) is the first comprehensive liberal arts and science campus in the Middle East to be operated abroad by a major American research university. The student body is comprised of 450 undergraduate students from more than 89 countries. The NYUAD Library is a small physical space, relies heavily on

electronic resources, and contains 20,000 print volumes.³

NYU recognizes its students as global citizens by encouraging travel and facilitating scholarly interactions around the world. With this goal in mind, NYU is organized as a “Global Network University” (GNU). Two “portal campuses” anchor the GNU: one in New York and one in Abu Dhabi, and with a third in Shanghai, set to open this year. With a portal campus as a home base, students can study abroad at any of ten global sites located on five continents within the GNU. Indeed, more than 40 percent of New York-based undergraduates study abroad.⁴

At NYUAD, the numbers are higher and more than 90 percent of third-year students have studied abroad. As students circulate among the GNU’s “idea capitals,” librarians interact with students from other portal campuses. Often, these students bring different research experiences, expectations, and needs. If students are to become global citizens and collaborate across the GNU, shouldn’t librarians adopt this model, too?

Although Bobst Library and the NYUAD Library are situated within unique institu-

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tional contexts, the NYU Libraries system is a learning organization and encourages faculty and staff to take full advantage of the GNU. NYUAD librarians routinely visit New York for short visits during the academic year (and vice versa) so they can touch base with counterparts and cultivate collegial relationships. Two NYU librarians, working on different sides of the world, embraced the ideals of the GNU and collaborated on a library orientation for students moving between the New York and Abu Dhabi portal campuses.

Our story: Developing orientations “across land and sea”

The characters in this tale are Jill and Nicole. Jill, based at the

NYUAD library, was fairly new to the profession and eager to try new instructional techniques. Nicole, a seasoned instruction librarian with experience teaching information literacy, including several years at The American University in Cairo, was eager to mentor a colleague within the GNU from her location in New York.

Part I: A meeting of the minds

In August 2011, librarians at NYU’s Bobst Library revamped their orientation programming by incorporating the Cephalonian Method.⁵ This technique pairs images with question prompts and is widely recognized as an effective orientation method because it is a fun and engaging way to impart introductory information. Bobst librarians created a fast-paced, interactive slideshow using images of iconic New York City locations, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and

the Washington Square Arch. Each image was paired with a question prompt related to library services, spaces, and collections, which were interspersed among students in the audience. For example, when a photo of the Brooklyn Bridge is projected on the screen, the student with that image asks the question written on that card, which might be: “How many books can I check out?” or “Can



Camels in the UAE desert. Image used on question card for: “I forgot my laptop and I need one for class. What do I do?” Image by Diana Chester.

I access library resources from off campus?” The librarian answers the question and projects an image of the featured service, space, or collection, and the presentation continues like this until all of the prepared questions are asked and answered.

The technique was a success and Bobst librarians began using it in some orientation sessions for introductory courses, so it was fresh in Nicole’s mind when Jill came to visit in February 2012. The purpose of Jill’s trip was to experience the culture at Bobst by participating in committees and classes, shadowing at the reference desk, and meeting with individual colleagues. The libraries were sending NYUAD librarians one by one for such visits with an eye toward promoting unity and collaboration. How lucky that the first to come was the instruction librarian. We shared calendars, set up a meeting, and prepared to learn from each other.

Part II: The collaboration

One week before the scheduled meeting, Jill e-mailed Nicole with news:

“I heard about something today and thought that you would be a great person to

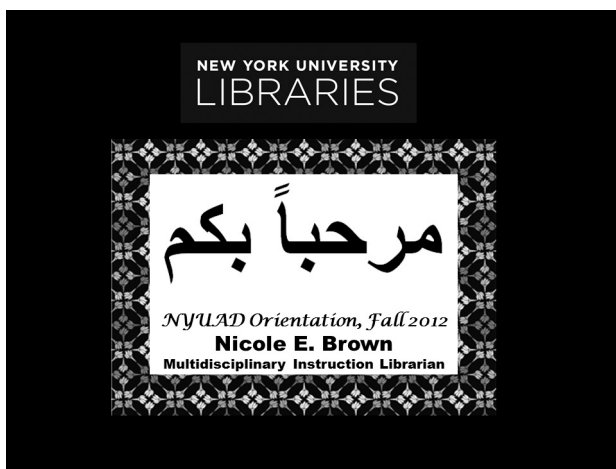
contact about it. We are thinking of holding a library orientation for NYUAD students that will be studying in New York next fall. I think it makes sense to partner with someone in New York to make sure that we have accurate information...I'm wondering if this is something that you might be interested in working on with us?"

Nicole responded with enthusiasm:

"I would be delighted to work on this with you and the AD librarians! Perhaps we can even come up with a co-presentation or something down the road... Library Outreach across Continents... Well, I'm sure we would have a better title than that. Anyway, I don't foresee any roadblocks to partnering with you on this. Thanks for reaching out to me about this."

Now, we had a meeting agenda and a common goal.

During our meeting, we explored the interactive Cephalonian



presentation as a possible instructional solution for the upcoming orientation and immediately saw potential in the concept. Jill returned to Abu Dhabi with the New York-focused slides and presented the concept to her NYUAD colleagues in March 2012. They liked it.

In May 2012, Jill got to work modifying the presentation for the predeparture orientation, shortening it from 25 questions to 14 and focusing on big-picture topics like "Where do I start my research?" over detailed prompts like "Can I use my cell phone?" This design allowed NYUAD students to learn about the resources of Bobst Library while seeing images of the city where they would be studying for the next few months. When she presented

to the group of 75 students, she kept the tone informal (even a bit goofy), and the students really got into it. But their trip to New York was still three months away.

Across continents, we realized that it would make sense to work together on a customized orientation for the NYUAD students upon their arrival in New York. In June 2012, we met with the program coordinator in charge of planning a full-day post-arrival orientation for NYUAD students. The coordinator welcomed a library presence in this program, especially because students often asked her questions about the library.

We decided that the Cephalonian format would,

once again, be a good fit for this orientation and that it would also work well for the "Marhaba ("Welcome" in Arabic) Week" orientation sessions in Abu Dhabi. In August, Jill delivered the customized "Marhaba Week" slideshow, complete with

iconic images of Abu Dhabi, and Nicole delivered a customized session for the NYUAD students in New York, complete with Arabic script.

Part III: Looking back

In December, we surveyed students who studied in New York and had attended the pre- and post-arrival library orientations. We asked two questions: "What do you wish you had known about Bobst Library before you came to study at the Washington Square campus?" and "What advice would you give to fellow NYUAD students coming to New York about the library?" Students were also

asked to share comments they had about the orientations. Fourteen students responded to the survey, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Survey results showed that NYUAD students wished they had known that printing is not free in Bobst; it is free at the NYUAD Library, and they expected that it would be the same in New York. Despite the printing confusion, NYUAD students enjoyed amenities that are not available at NYUAD, such as extensive study spaces and comprehensive print research collections. When asked what advice about the library they would give fellow NYUAD students coming to study in New York, they said things like:

“It’s wonderful! There are great study areas . . .”

“Make sure to check it out, it has incredible resources and books you didn’t think they might still have in print, as well as sheet music from all eras and styles.”

“It is one of the best resource that one can have. Use it as much as you can.”

Students also shared insightful comments that we will use to improve future orientation efforts. For example, a suggestion to omit the pre-departure orientation and simply do an orientation upon arrival makes a lot of sense.

Lessons learned

Collaboration is essential for this type of program to succeed, and we found that casual, in-person meetings were crucial for building rapport. Being able to joke around with each other made it easier to brainstorm and discuss ideas for orientation programming. We used a wide range of communication tools, but meeting in person helped us build a bond that enabled us to use the tools effectively. We quickly found that e-mail was inadequate for some types of communication (brainstorming, for example), so we moved to regular Skype meetings, during which we co-wrote ideas using Google Docs. This helped to keep the conversation going in a way that formal e-mail communication could not.

Our global collaboration taught us new techniques and gave us plenty of ideas, which

was the goal. One unexpected result was that we learned more about each other’s library and institution. When designing the presentations, we leveraged each other’s expertise to clarify details about the two campuses. We shared knowledge about library resources, services, collections, and student research interests. After learning more about the unique needs of the NYUAD population, we were better able to design the orientation in New York and predict the types of questions students would ask upon their arrival to the campus.

Going forward

We found the collaboration valuable and intend to work together beyond orientations to provide holistic instructional services across the GNU. Ideas for future collaboration include sharing lesson plans, learning objects, assessments, and classroom techniques.

Our takeaways are applicable even for librarians without an international branch campus. Increasing communication across a large state university system, or opening up communication with sites where students study abroad, can have a positive impact. Even if you’re not “across land and sea,” take the initiative to meet colleagues in person and find out what they’re doing; there may be an opportunity to collaborate!

Notes

1. Harriet Green, “Libraries across land and sea: Academic library services on international branch campuses,” *College & Research Libraries* 74 (2013): 9–19.
2. “About NYU Libraries,” last modified December 2008, <http://library.nyu.edu/about/about.html>.
3. “About NYU Abu Dhabi Library,” accessed March 7, 2013, <http://nyuad.nyu.edu/research/library/about-the-library.html>.
4. “The Global Network University,” accessed March 7, 2013, www.nyu.edu/global/the-global-network-university.html.
5. Nigel Morgan and Linda Davies, “Innovative library induction—Introducing the ‘Cephalonian Method,’” *Sconul Focus* 32 (2004): 4–8. ¶¶