

Breaking Barriers and Connecting Librarians around the World: Report of an International Training Program

By

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Abstract

This report represents the summary of a two-month international training program organized by the Mortenson Center for International Training Program, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, the United States of America, and held between September 6, 2006 and November 3, 2006. The program theme is "Connecting librarians from all over the world". A total of 17 Mortenson Associates, from seven countries, participated in the international training program.

Practical Implication: Report on the organization and impact of training program on the professional development of librarians from all over the world.

Keywords: Report, international training program, librarians, Mortenson Center, United States, Nigeria, Japan.

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Background on Mortenson Centre for International Training Program

The Mortenson Distinguished Professorship for International Library Programs was created through generous gift from of \$2 million from C. Walter and Gerda B. Mortenson, in 1986. The endowed chair focuses on international library programs for the promotion of international education, understanding, and peace regardless of geographic location or access to technology. It was the first named academic position of its kind in the United States at the time it was created. Marianna Tax Choldin was appointed the first Mortenson Distinguished Professor. The current director, Barbara Ford, is the second Distinguished Professor of the center and 1997-1998 American Library Association President.

The Mortenson Center is located at the University of Illinois situated in the twin cities of Champaign and Urbana. Over 700 librarians from 89 countries have already taken advantage of programming through the Mortenson Center since its creation - the only one of its kind in the world.

The Mortenson Center offices are located in the undergraduate library of the University of Illinois. The University Library is the largest academic library at a public university in the United States. It ranks behind Harvard and Yale as the third-largest academic library in the United States.

Main Objectives of the Associate Program

The Fall Associates Program was established in 1995 to provide a more structured program including librarians from a variety of countries. The Associate program is open to key professionals, especially at the middle level management position, from all over the world. The program provides its participants -- known as Mortenson Associates -- with a broad knowledge of, and exposure to, the theory and practice of librarianship in America and provides ample opportunities to exchange information about practices in a wide variety of countries. Accordingly mobility and exchange of ideas and knowledge remain at the heart of the ideals of the Mortenson Program.

The program, organised annually since then, takes place from early September to the first week in November and lasted eight weeks.

Expectations

The Associates' expectations for the program were varied because the program was organized to cover wide range of field relevant to the library and information science. It included, for example, new techniques of application of information and communications technology (ICT) to library activities, especially in the provision of Web based catalogues and use of electronic information sources, human management skills, organizational theories, project management, conservation and preservation techniques, information literacy, reference service trends, special assistance to physically challenged,

financing and budgeting, consortium business and library networking. Also we have our eyes on gaining invaluable experiences from discussions with our colleagues and practical training organized by the Mortenson Center for International Library Program. This will, no doubt, increase our knowledge and skills which will benefit our libraries immensely on our return.

The 2006 Fall Library Associate Program

The 2006 Associate program covered between September 6 and November 3, 2006. Seventeen participants from seven (7) countries participated. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants according to their country of origin. Colombia has the highest number of five while South Korea and Vietnam have the least with one representative each.

Table 1: Distribution of 2006 fall participants by country

No of participants	Country of Origin	Percentage
3	Chile	17.6
5	Colombia	29.4
3	Japan	17.6
2	Nigeria	11.8
2	Russia	11.8
1	South Korea	5.9
1	Vietnam	5.9
17		100

Program Organization

The program was designed in a progressive and professional manner throughout the period such that it enabled Associates to put some of the new skills and ideas gained from the program into immediate practice.

The program was organized into three major areas. These were:

(A) Classes:

(i) *New Technologies:* This involved training in the use of latest information technologies relevant to the library and information science profession. Some of the classes included those on Web design, management of electronic resources and digitization of materials. Also included was the instruction on the creation and management of institutional repositories which would increase the visibility of faculty publications/research.

(ii) Management of Resources (Human/Material):

Lecture series were offered by the professors of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, United States. Topics of interest included those on management theories, library budgeting and organizational communication.

(B) Tours of Libraries/ Library Associations:

(i) Tours: Visits to a variety of library across and outside the state of Illinois were planned in the program. The libraries visited ranged from school, college, academic, special to public libraries, including visit to the American library Association head office in Chicago and the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) headquarters in Dublin, Ohio.

(ii) Host Visit: A three-day visit to a library with similar background to the Associate's was organized for each participant. Hosting libraries offered the original training program in their institution, in addition to transportation and accommodation.

(iii) Conferences: Full attendance at the Illinois Library Association annual conference held at the Navy Pier, Chicago, was arranged. Sessions attended that were of interest include those on Building digital collections by Jenny Benevento and Amy Maroso-Hatcher; Tackling the Programmer's Paper Chase: Building a Searchable Database using MS Word, MS Outlook and Internet Explorer; Technical services Tips and tricks moderated by Joy Anhalt.

(C) Interactions with librarians:

Opportunities to interact with many librarians were offered throughout the program. The librarians from a variety of departments of University of Illinois Libraries presented their current activities. The "Mortenson Friends", who were volunteered librarians from inside the library to add friendly touch to their assistance, were pre-arranged in one-on-one basis and introduced on arrival of the participants. The information and arrangements of the staff meetings, open lectures and public events were provided, in addition to some invitations to at-home gatherings.

Summary of impact of the program

Classes

All the classes organized by the Mortenson Center were attended. The trainings provided us the opportunity to enhance our ICT skills, to become more effective in searching and retrieval of information on the internet, using electronic resources, managing digital collections, creating and designing web based information sites to promote services as well as planning library budget and human resource management.

Libraries/Library Associations Visits

The number of libraries/library associations visited during the program was well over twenty. The libraries visited included academic, public and school libraries. These visits afford us the opportunity to foster collaborations and networking with colleagues and information providers.

Interactions with librarians

A lot of presentations of current activities were given by the librarians of University of Illinois Libraries. The Mortenson Friends personally welcomed and helped us to get used to the life in the campus and to enjoy the whole experiences during our stay. The center offered the assistance of making arrangements for personal interviews and meetings with their librarians and professionals for our interests. Throughout the program, we were afforded the opportunity to interact with librarians, in addition to the daily communication and discussions with the fellow participants.

Outcome of the training experiences during the program

We will say, without mincing words that our objectives for attending the Fall 2006 Associate Program at the Mortenson Center were all achieved and we can not wait to implement all that we have learnt back our different libraries, in Nigeria and Japan respectively. We also want to add that participation in the Fall 2006 Associate Program at the Mortenson Center, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and attendance at the Illinois Library Association 2006 Annual Conference, have opened the door for networking with librarians working in different types of libraries in the United States and other parts of the world thereby achieving one of the objectives of the program- connecting librarians all over the world.

Recommendations

The followings are recommended:

- (1) The period for Host Visit be increased from two full days to five days (one week). This will enable Associates interact more with the host library/librarians and benefit fully from the organization and management of their libraries.
- (2) The training program to cover areas such as project design, budget and organizational communication in depth be added.
- (3) Participants be given the opportunities to their improve communication skills by offering English language classes according to their level of proficiency.

Special Thanks

We want to express our sincere thanks to the Mortenson's and C. Walter for providing the training platform on which we came to University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign for this professional development.

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The Mortenson Center for International Library Programs, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Visited 19 January, 2007, <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/mortenson/>.