

Team Spirit: How Three Libraries Are Working to Support Health Sciences Libraries in Liberia

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BACKGROUND

- Liberia is a country recently torn apart by civil unrest but actively building strong civic institutions and facing challenging health issues
- There is an incredible need for health sciences and medical information to support emerging educational programs in an environment that is infrastructure poor
- Strong models for cooperation among Liberian and American institutions already exist, including:
 - an Indiana University/University of Massachusetts/ US AID partnership to support undergraduate medical education
 - the HEARTT (Health Education and Relief through Teaching) organization which offers education and training to practitioners
 - Simmons Graduate School of Library and Information Science and University of Liberia project to assess University library computer, building and training needs



BEFORE



TEAM FORMATION

Two events occurred to bring three US libraries unexpectedly together on a common project:

- The Lamar Soutter Library of the University of Massachusetts, Worcester (UMASS), was asked to assist on the US AID grant by providing advice and training on “rebooting” the University of Liberia A.M. Dogliotti College of Medicine Library. (The Fondazione per la Sicurezza in Sanita had already jumpstarted some activities.)
- The George Washington University and Howard University health sciences libraries were asked to join a coalition of hospitals and libraries in both the United States and Liberia to support the transfer of the collection of the soon-to-be-closed Walter Reed Army Medical Center Library to the University of Liberia Dogliotti School of Medicine Library. This project was spearheaded by PATT (Partnership for Advanced Technology Training).

Clearly, it was time for the 3 libraries to join forces and work toward a common goal of creating both a strong health sciences collection and robust services at the Dogliotti College of Medicine! Years of collaboration through MLA, AAHSL, and NN/LM activities made the process of team formation easy! Our different geographic locations supported various aspects of the partnership. Having a large team of experienced librarians to draw on for advice and brute strength proved invaluable.

TEAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Hosting of planning meetings for the US AID and PATT partners. (All 3 libraries)
- Cataloging services for donated materials (Howard)
- Collection of supplies and book donations (All 3 libraries)
- Meeting with the Walter Reed Army Medical Library staff (Howard and GW) to assess collection and furniture
- 3 in-country visits to assess donations, organize physical library, conduct computer literacy and basic library skills training, match resources in library to new curriculum and course modules (UMass)
- Weeding, sorting and preparation of over 18,000 monographs at Walter Reed for future shipment to Liberia (Howard and GW)
- Liaison with the Liberian ex-pat community in Washington (Howard and GW)
- Creation of resources pages with free and vetted Internet resources in the health sciences (GW and UMass)



AFTER

CHALLENGES

- Final details regarding disposition of government property and secure shipment and delivery of materials to Liberia is still in process via PATT
- High tech dependent US librarians had to return to the “basics” and computer literacy skills, create library policies for the paper world, learn and then teach programs like OpenOffice and ShelvIt!
- Too few dollars and supplies in Liberia: no paper, standard library supplies, bookcarts, or bookends; limited library hours of operation
- No professional librarian at the Dogliotti Medical School Library staff with transportation problems getting to work
- Little infrastructure in Liberia: no Internet, printer, scanners or copiers onsite
- Working at a distance, both in US and Liberia, required lots of e-mails and conference calls
- Convincing the program partners to include the JFK Hospital in Monrovia in the donation program so that residents and practitioners there could have an on-site collection of clinical textbooks

LESSONS IN TEAMWORK

- Projects like this require lots of asking, sharing, listening, and communicating to assign appropriate team roles and build on each other's progress
- Having a broad range of people to test ideas, brainstorm, and teach cultural competencies is essential to creating a program that allows us to share our skills AND meet the actual needs of our partners in Liberia
- Multiple partners allows each person to capitalize on their area of expertise while also learning about new areas
- More people also means more hands to help with the physical tasks associated with the projects (selecting, unpacking, shelving, etc.)

FUTURE PLANS

- Fall 2012 trip to Liberia to begin instruction in information literacy and evidence-based medicine to both library staff and College of Medicine faculty and students
- Creation of a consortium of health sciences libraries in Liberia
- Expansion of program to allied health, nursing and graduate medical education programs