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Chan, L. et al 2002. *Budapest Open Access Initiative.* New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml [Retrieved 22 January 2007].

Information literacy education in US libraries

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The following is a brief account of my visit to several libraries in New Jersey, USA. The visit had several purposes. Officially, Debbi Boden and I were on CSG-Information Literacy Group (ILG) business to make contact with librarians in the United States and see how they practise information literacy education (ILE), while at the same time promoting the work of the Information Literacy group in the UK and the LILAC conference.
On a more social note, we were also looking forward to visiting our friend and fellow librarian, Jacqui Weetman Dacosta, who moved to the United States a few years ago. Jacqui now works as the Information Literacy Librarian at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ), and serves as the international representative on the CSG-Information Literacy Group.

Our first stop on the first morning of our trip was Monmouth University Library, which is based in a former Guggenheim mansion on the New Jersey coast. The meeting was a fascinating insight into the differences, but also the huge similarities, that exist in the library world. For example, in terms of getting information literacy widely recognised and embedded in the curriculum, surprisingly our American colleagues felt we were perhaps further ahead than they were.

Picture 1: (Debbi Boden (left) and Jacqui Weetman Dacosta at Monmouth University.

However, we also learnt that information literacy standards seem to be better established in US universities as they suit the academic culture of a general education covering a broad range of subjects for the first two years of university. We also discussed the 'freshman' experience, which is often a rather more extensive process in US universities compared with induction at UK universities, as it is designed to build loyalty between the student and their university (partly to help retention).
The discussion moved to staff development, which raised a number of similarities between US and UK experiences as both countries are enthusiastic promoters of new technologies in relation to ILE, such as producing podcasts and using Camtasia software to create multimedia. Concerns about the financial crisis impacting on staff development budgets are also shared by librarians on both sides of the 'pond', it seems.

Our second stop was the library at Princeton University, which dates back over 240 years. We began our tour at the Firestone Library, which was built in 1948 and is the main humanities and social sciences library at Princeton. At the time of our visit, Princeton was engaged in the Kindle pilot project, where 60 undergraduates were given an Amazon Kindle pre-loaded with all their course readings. The project aimed to evaluate the pilot at the end of the semester.

Picture 2: From left: Keith Gresham, Jane Secker, Jacqui Weetman Dacosta, and Debbi Boden during the Princeton visit.

Amongst the areas we visited were the European documentation centre and a United Nations documentation centre, where we had the opportunity to examine some rare League of Nations materials.

Over lunch, we discussed ILE with some library staff, including Keith Gresham, Mary George and Steve Steven Adams, and were told that, at Princeton, ILE is delivered mainly on a one-to-one basis. Our hosts indicated that they thought some of the ILE work Debbi and I were doing in the UK was more developed compared to IL provision in the US.

Picture 3: TCNJ Library

Our visit to the Firestone Library was followed by a visit to the modern Lewis Library housing the science collections on the Princeton campus. Opened in 2008, this library is a landmark building designed by architect Frank Gehry, famous for buildings such as the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. We were shown round by the Library Administrative Officer who enthused about the building's many unusual features, comprising a combination of modern but comfortable furniture and access to state of the art media.

On Monday, Jacqui took us to her library at TCNJ. This is a relatively new building in the heart of the campus and the buzz from students was obvious from the moment we arrived. The Library café was packed with students working on laptops, chatting and drinking coffee amidst a maze of wires from the laptops plugged into every available power socket. This scene highlighted the difference in the students' patterns of attendance between Friday afternoon at Princeton where few students were to be found and Monday afternoon at TCNJ.

The Library is on several floors and offers areas for reading and research, as well as a large lecture theatre, a training room and a new media centre. Jacqui informed us that the library gets excellent feedback from student surveys and is currently one of the top 10 academic libraries in the United States, as rated by students. We could see why.

Picture 4: From left: Jane Secker, Leslie Burger and Debbi Boden at Princeton Public Library.

We also paid a visit to Princeton Public Library where we met the Director, Leslie Burger, a former president of the American Library Association (ALA) and worked tirelessly to raise funds to build a new public library in the heart of Princeton, which opened in 2004. It is a new library, but while being modern and full of light, it retains the traditional look and feel of a library and was a pleasure to visit. It's also right in the centre of Princeton and at its entrance there is a second-hand bookstore, stocked with unwanted reading material donated by Princeton residents.

The library collections were truly impressive comprising stocks for users of all ages. The lower floors of the library feature reference collections, magazines, and a well-supplied audio-visual collection with additional stocks of books in mp3 format for downloading.

All the collections have Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags and the library has also been trialling DVD rentals from a vending machine situated just outside of the library, which can be accessed out of hours.

Picture 5: Debbi Boden in front of the iconic New York Public Library building.

The last library we visited on our tour was the iconic New York Public Library. The imposing portico front with twin lions guarding the entrance was somewhat obscured by hoardings as refurbishment was taking place. However, the grand entrance was nothing short of impressive and the Library gift shop was a delight to visit. We paid a visit to the reading room, although only as tourists, and so didn't get to see anything behind the scenes.

The libraries we visited were real islands of quiet for serious study, with high quality furniture and fittings and a distinct lack of PCs as almost all the students had laptops. On average, the library staff we met during our visit were older than the library staff in the UK, and this can be explained by the fact that as there is no official retirement age in the US: it is not uncommon for people to be working well into their seventies. It was therefore a pleasant novelty to see that our status as academic librarians in relation to our age sparked a great deal of surprise amongst our hosts.

Further reading

Additional details about the trip in September 2009 are available from Jane's blog:
http://elearning.lse.ac.uk/blogs/socialsoftware/2009/09/princeton-philippa-and-donut-overload/
http://elearning.lse.ac.uk/blogs/socialsoftware/2009/09/philly-cheese-steak-and-liberty-burger/
http://elearning.lse.ac.uk/blogs/socialsoftware/2009/09/on-tornado-watch-in-monmouth/

Further information on the Princeton Kindle pilot is available at:
http://elearning.lse.ac.uk/blogs/socialsoftware/2009/09/princeton-kindle-pilot/
(Accessed 29 January 2010).

The libraries mentioned in this article:

The College of New Jersey: http://www.tcnj.edu/

Monmouth University: http://www.monmouth.edu/

Firestone Library: http://firestone.princeton.edu/

Princeton Public Library: http://www.princeton.lib.nj.us/

New York Public Library: http://www.nypl.org/