

# INTERNATIONAL LEADS

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## Beyond Borders: A Panamanian Librarian's American Experience By Isaac Carranza

*Isaac Carranza is a Panamanian librarian who has worked for 14 years at the Panama Canal Library. Thanks to a Fulbright scholarship, he had the opportunity to stay in the United States for one year and do internships at three libraries: the Library of Congress, the University of Florida Library, and the Pennsylvania (Penn) State University Libraries. This is an account of what he learned at the Penn State Library during his seven-month stay.*

I arrived in State College, Pennsylvania, in the middle of August 2024. A couple of days later, I was walking around the corridors of the Pattee-Paterno building of the Penn State University Library. It was my first time in an American library, and I found it half-empty. I thought to myself, “They will never fill this place; this



building is huge.” The fact was that, a week later, when classes began, the place was packed—full of students from the United States and all around the world. They were not just looking for books but also casually reading

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newspapers and magazines, enjoying a cup of coffee or tea, using services that the library provides, such as 3-D printing, One Button Studios, and virtual reality sets, exploring exhibitions, having group workshops in individual classrooms, and, most importantly, enjoying an imaginative and safe place where they could study their assignments without constraints. A place to share ideas. A place to be themselves.

## Understanding the Library, One Department at a Time

At the Penn State Library, I had the opportunity to visit several departments where I always felt welcomed. All of them provided me with new knowledge and ideas that I will implement back home.

## The importance of donations

Stakeholders and philanthropy were words that I heard often while studying and working in the United States. While talking with colleagues from the Department of Development and Alumni Relations, I understood the importance of having contacts and making those contacts feel part of our institution through donations that can make a real impact in the lives of students and researchers of the Panama Canal. Learning that my library can rely on people who have bonds with our institution made me realize how necessary it is to have a board of directors that will help my library to keep us on track with our mission and shed light on our educational vision.

## Copyrights issues

At the Panama Canal Library, we have numerous documents that, due to a lack of understanding of

copyright laws, we have found difficult to post online with confidence. Having a department such as Scholarly Communications and Copyright that provides accurate answers—such as explaining that documents created by the United States federal government are not copyrighted and can be freely shared online—gave me solutions to questions I had had for years.

## The joy of printing our own books

Understanding the benefits of owning a press was an eye-opening experience for me. I had previously thought of a press as primarily a business focused on sales through printed documents. However, during my visit to the University Press of Penn State Libraries, I learned that one of the main goals of having a press is the opportunity to connect with authors on topics in which the library specializes. A press also helps create educational niches to develop and, in the process, gain prestige by publishing high-quality materials. In my case, back home, the Panama Canal Library specializes in the history of West Indian migration. Perhaps the most important aspect of the future press we hope to establish is building relationships with Caribbean printers through topics that naturally unite us.

## Colored Conventions Project

This is a scholarly and community-based research project dedicated to bringing the decades-long history of nineteenth-century Black organizing to life. It highlights the collective nature of the nineteenth-century Colored Conventions in the



United States. This project uses innovative, inclusive models and partnerships to locate, transcribe, and archive the documentary record related to this nearly forgotten history and to curate digital exhibits that highlight its stories, events, and themes. This was the department where I found the most similarities with my library, the Panama Canal Library. We have an extensive collection of books, newspapers, brochures, and photographs detailing immigration from the Antilles to Panama and the struggles for rights in the former Canal Zone. This project inspired me to create a website that brings together the stories of the Afro-Antillean people in Panama.

### **The creation and measure of good practices**

Guided by the library's vision, mission, and strategic plan, the Library Assessment Department (LAD) leads the Penn State Libraries assessment program. LAD provides consultative services for library personnel to evaluate the effectiveness of library services and resources, coordinates external reporting efforts, leads user experience initiatives, and generates assessment and benchmarking reports for University Library Administration. If I had to choose one department that caused the greatest "Wow" moment, it was the LAD. I had never seriously considered how important—and even enjoyable—statistics could be. How many students and members of the general public visited today? How many classes were taught at the library last year? How do we compare with other university libraries? All those questions, and more, were answered by the LAD. Also, they serve as the

compass that shows the path the library should follow in order to become more successful through the creation of the strategic plan—something that I will certainly replicate at home.

### **Special Collections**

At its core, the Panama Canal Library is a large special collection about the Canal. We have 55,000 documents (books, maps, microfilms, pamphlets, photos, and objects). However, the art of displaying our collection through exhibitions is something we only recently began to do. The Special Collections Department of Penn State constantly works with students conducting research to create new exhibitions, and in that way, they create win-win scenarios. These exhibitions are promoted through social media and are visited by classes related to the topic and the general public. The duration of the exhibitions varies: some last only a day, while others remain open for months. It was also mind-blowing to see the annexes of the library (huge buildings with an organization similar to warehouses) where the rest of the special collections and documents that cannot be shelved in the main library buildings are stored.

### **A long-lasting characteristic**

After visiting many departments and learning how the whole organization works, what struck me most was the freedom of information, albeit sometimes overcrowded, that could be found scattered throughout the library, especially online. This chaos, but also the accessibility, was something I greatly appreciated.





## **An Exhibition about the Panama Canal and the Workers Who Built It**

One of the highlights of my internship was the opportunity to organize an exhibition during Black History Month that emphasized the role of West Indian women in the construction of the Panama Canal. My internship occurred during a rather turbulent political climate in early 2025 and, at that time, issues related to the Panama Canal were very much in the spotlight. Historical aspects that were not aligned with reality were presented on several occasions. One of these issues was the number of American workers involved in the construction of the Canal by the U.S. government. I decided to take advantage of the interest and flexibility of the Penn State Library to create an exhibit highlighting the work of West-Indian workers, who made up the largest labor force in the construction of the Canal, and especially the contributions of their women. I was surprised by the prompt support I received from the different library departments and it was gratifying to see the large amount of Panama Canal literature already in the Penn State Library.

The exhibit was very well attended, and we even were able to screen a film about the construction of the Canal for library users. We also managed to transport it to one of the library branches in the city of Altoona.

## **How to Become a Librarian, American Style**

As a whole, I spent seven months of continuous learning that helped me understand how a large and complex library operates in the United States. However, an important lesson I learned while doing my internship at Penn State was related to the most important asset of any library: its people. How are

these library professionals trained in the United States? What does it take to be a librarian here? It was a pleasant surprise for me that, unlike in my country, where a library science degree can take more than five years, in the United States, vocation is valued and rewarded. I say this because the idea of preparing professionals in any branch of knowledge through a master's degree in library science, as it's done in the United States, seems extremely sensible and intelligent to me. What I admire most about the libraries where I have worked in the United States—whether in Pennsylvania, Washington, DC, or Florida—is the quality of the librarians, the diversity of thought, and the flexibility of ideas. The possibility of making your area of interest your area of expertise in a place as inspiring as a library is something I deeply admire.

## **Knowing your goal**

The most important lesson I learned during my time in the Penn State Libraries was the realization that my “business” is education. Don't get me wrong: I knew I was working in a library and that for many years I had been helping researchers, but part of me tried to see it as just a job, not as a passion. Realizing that the goal of my life is to facilitate access to information for people who need it was something I discovered during my internship. I came to that conclusion while interviewing librarians at Penn State, talking to people who love information and the sharing of it, and realizing that—even when we were working far apart—this passion for information and eagerness for learning more is something that unites all librarians. I decided to embrace that passion and I will always be grateful for that.

## THE EDITORS



**Whitney Bevell**  
Whitney is the Humanities Librarian for Collection Management at Appalachian State University. Her background is in foreign language education and she is active in global librarianship-related committees in ALA.



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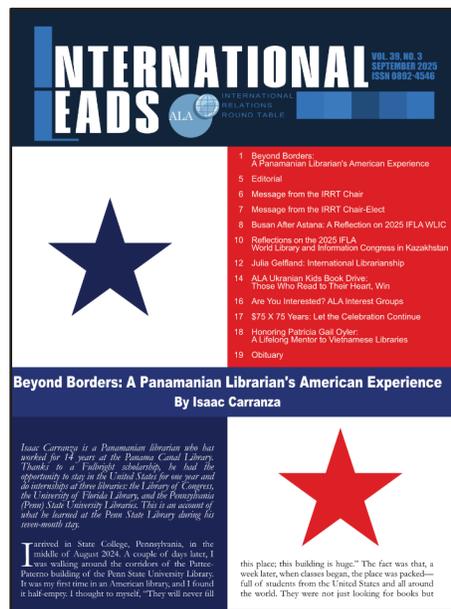


**Johann Frederick Cabbab**  
Igor is an Assistant Professor at the University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies where he currently teaches Media Materials and Technology as well as Literature for Children and Young Adults.

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to *International Leads*! We have lots of information for our readers this quarter. We hear from a Panamanian librarian about his time in American libraries. In Ukraine, a book drive helped librarians establish Little Free Libraries. We hear about Korea and the Korean delegation to IFLA, and Julia Gelfand being awarded the John Ames Humphry/OCLC/Forest Press Award for International Librarianship. Have you considered joining an interest group? We have more information on that and the \$75 x 75 years campaign. Finally, we remember Professor Pat Oyler and hear from one of her former students in Vietnam. Happy reading!

### The Editors



## ABOUT INTERNATIONAL LEADS

*International Leads* (ISSN 0892-4546) is published quarterly by the International Relations Round Table of the American Library Association in March, June, September, and December. IL is indexed by Library Literature and Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) and ProQuest. The IRRT mailing address is: International Relations Office, American Library Association, 225 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601.

## MESSAGE FROM THE IRRT CHAIR

**WELCOME TO A NEW IRRT YEAR!  
“ONE WORLD, MANY LIBRARIES:  
BUILDING THE FUTURE TOGETHER”**

**Sandy Hirsh**

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It is an honor to begin my term as Chair of the International Relations Round Table. I'm excited to build on the remarkable work of our Past Chair Carol Brey and the incredible dedication of IRRT members and volunteers.

This year, I look forward to working alongside our vibrant international library community to strengthen global connections, foster collaboration, and promote meaningful professional exchange. As I write this, I'm en route to Astana, Kazakhstan, to attend IFLA's World Library and Information Congress—an inspiring opportunity to reconnect with library colleagues and friends from around the world, including many IRRT members and leaders. I'm also

excited to make new connections, listen to global perspectives, and explore how we can work together to shape the future of libraries worldwide.

I'm pleased to introduce my Chair's Theme: **One World, Many Libraries: Building the Future Together.** This theme builds upon Carol Brey's theme of "Connections Worldwide." My Chair's Theme celebrates the diverse environments in which libraries operate—from bustling urban centers to rural villages, from academic hubs to community reading rooms—and it affirms that while we may serve different communities, our shared values and aspirations unite us across borders.

Libraries around the world are responding to a rapidly changing information landscape shaped by emerging technologies, growing inequities, geopolitical uncertainty, and environmental urgency. Yet, again and again, we see libraries innovating, collaborating, and finding bold ways to serve and empower their communities.

Throughout this year, IRRT will explore what that future can look like—together --



## MESSAGE FROM THE IRRT CHAIR-ELECT

and I can't wait to hear the ideas that our creative international community will generate. We will explore these ideas through our IRRT committees and initiatives, such as:

- Hosting thought-provoking **webinars and programs** featuring voices from across the globe;
- Supporting **international partnerships** through initiatives like the Sister Libraries program;
- Sharing stories through **committees, publications, and conversations** that amplify global perspectives.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to get involved—join a committee, participate in a virtual program, or bring your ideas forward for new initiatives and/or ways that IRRT can better meet the needs of our members.

On behalf of the IRRT Executive Committee, I thank you for your continued commitment to our global community of library professionals. Let us use this year to deepen our connections, spark new collaborations, and celebrate the incredible work being done in libraries around the world.

### Whitney Bevill

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As librarians, we witness the extraordinary every day—the effects of our work extending beyond our libraries' walls. Sometimes we use circulation statistics or gate counts to measure our impact, but actually, libraries do so much more. They serve as vital catalysts for community transformation in ways both evident and unseen. Each interaction, every program we design, and all the moments of connection we facilitate contribute to a larger tapestry of social change that is at the heart of what makes communities thrive.

Our role as community anchors has never been more critical. In an era of increasing digital divides, social fragmentation, and information overload, libraries are beacons of accessibility, equity, and even truth itself. We provide not just resources but sanctuary. Through collections, programming, and other services, we create pathways for advancement of our communities.

The impact we create together as library professionals extends into the future. Our patrons—no matter where they are in the world—carry with them these seeds of positive change. Our legacy is that cultivation of potential. In celebrating this profound community impact, we honor both our communities and the calling that brought us to this wonderful profession.



# BUSAN AFTER ASTANA

A REFLECTION ON 2025 IFLA WLIC

Peter Bae

After attending the 2025 IFLA World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) in Astana, I'm buzzing with excitement for the next one. While every conference is a chance to connect and learn, this year was special because I got a sneak peek into the 2026 WLIC, which will be hosted in the stunning city of Busan, South Korea. The large Korean delegation didn't just promote their upcoming event; they brought a slice of their vibrant culture to Astana, leaving everyone eager for more.

## A Taste of Korea in Astana

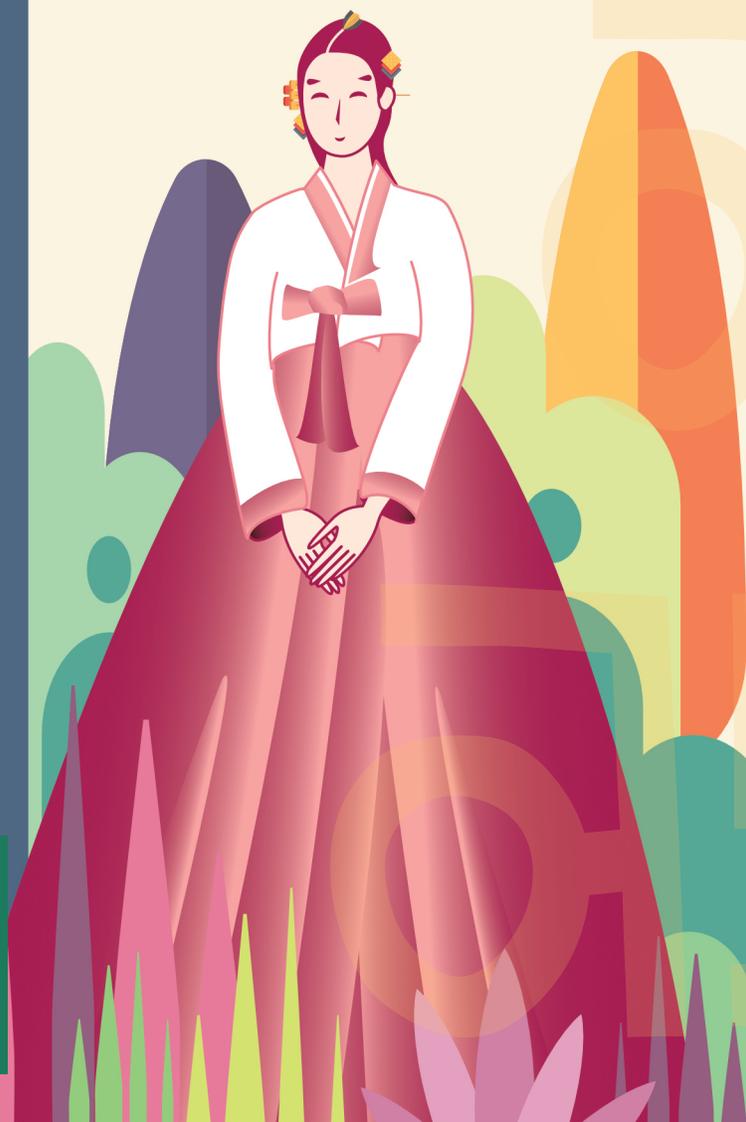
The Korean delegation's booth was a major highlight of the exhibition hall. It was more than just a table with brochures and posters; it was an immersive experience. Attendees were given beautiful hand fans adorned with traditional Korean patterns, a perfect souvenir to beat the heat and a lovely keepsake. A popular feature was the calligraphy station where we could get our names beautifully written in Hangul, the Korean alphabet. It was a fascinating experience to see my name translated into a script so distinct from the Chinese and Japanese characters common in the region.

But what really drew the crowds was the chance to try on Hanbok, Korea's traditional dress. Visitors posed for photos in front of a giant mural of Busan, creating a fun, interactive way to experience Korean culture. The delegation also taught us a new way to make the heart sign—not with two hands, but with two fingers, a gesture that has become a staple of Korean pop culture. The energy at the booth was infectious, and it was clear they were having a great time sharing their culture with us.

The excitement culminated at the closing ceremony. A large delegation took to the stage with a vibrant banner welcoming everyone to Busan. The president of the Korean Library Association, a representative of the Korean government, and the director of the National Library of Korea all spoke, extending a warm invitation to their country and assuring us of their readiness to host an unforgettable event. As they left the stage, a song from the popular Netflix series *KPop Demon Hunters* filled the hall, turning the formal conclusion into a celebratory send-off.

## Busan: A City of Stories and Culture

Busan is a bustling port city on the southern coast of the Korean peninsula. Anyone who's read Min Jin



Lee's novel *Pachinko* will recognize the name of Yeongdo, the island where the story begins. While it's now connected to the mainland, Yeongdo still holds incredible charm. For instance, the Gamcheon Culture Village, a stunning hillside neighborhood, is a visual feast of colorful houses, murals, and street art. It's a remarkable place with a rich history, originally built in the 1950s as a settlement for refugees of the Korean War.

Busan is also a cultural powerhouse. The renowned Busan International Film Festival will celebrate its 30th anniversary next year, and the city's Bosu-dong Book Street is a must-visit for any book lover. Librarians and bookworms alike will appreciate the city's unique libraries. The Busan Sea Library is a pop-up library that opens on Haeundae Beach during the summer, while the nearby Library of Mystery Literature, founded by author Kim Sung-Jong, is a treasure trove for fans of the genre. Best of all, both are just a short distance from BEXCO, the convention center where the conference will be held.

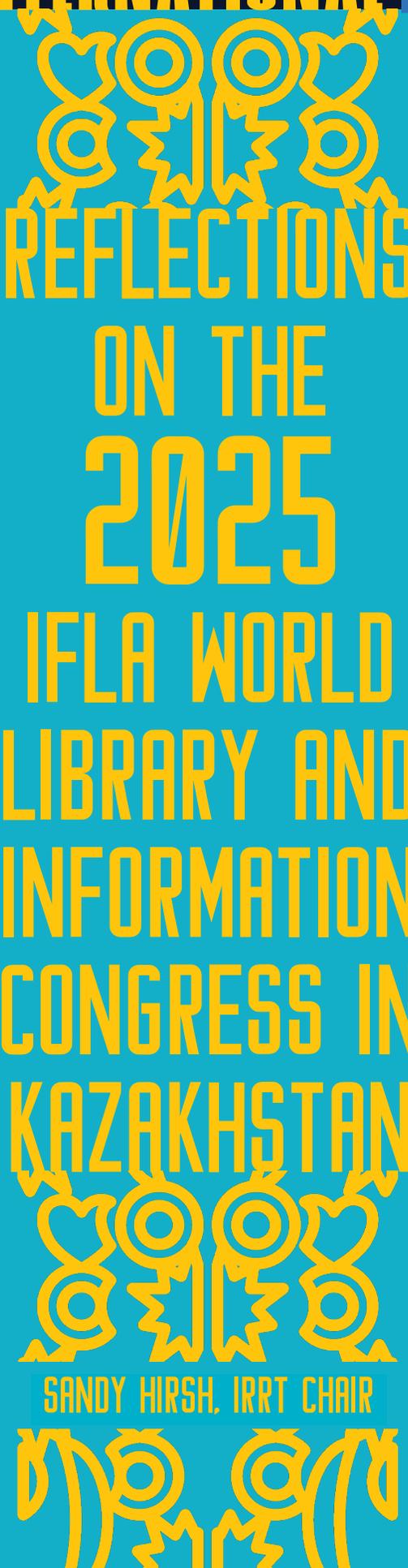
### Looking to the Future of Korean Libraries

Korea last hosted the IFLA WLIC in Seoul back in 2006, an event that many still talk about for its seamless organization and warm hospitality. That congress was a turning point for Korean libraries, boosting their public profile and affirming their importance in the country. Since then, Korea has seen a dramatic increase in the number of libraries and a genuine surge of public interest in their services. What were once seen as quiet study spaces have transformed into vibrant "third places," thanks to creative librarians who are developing innovative programs and services that foster community engagement.

Twenty years later, with the IFLA WLIC returning to Korea's second-largest city, the Korean library community is ready to take another big step forward. They're not just hosting a conference; they're aiming to become an even more active and influential member of the international library community. Based on what I saw in Astana, I have no doubt they'll make it happen, and I can't wait to be a part of it.

*Pictures from the Korean Library Association.*





## REFLECTIONS ON THE 2025 IFLA WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS IN KAZAKHSTAN

SANDY HIRSH, IRRT CHAIR

In August 2025, I had the privilege of attending the IFLA World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. The conference brought together more than 1,600 delegates from over 110 countries, with about 25% (400) coming from Kazakhstan. This was the first time in IFLA's nearly 100-year history that WLIC was hosted in Central Asia. For me, it was also a first visit to this beautiful region. I took the opportunity to arrive a week early and explore parts of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where I was struck by the richness of the culture, history, and landscapes. I left inspired to return and see more.

Going into the conference, I wondered what the mood might be, given the many global challenges that libraries face. What I encountered was an invigorating sense of optimism. Bold visions for libraries' futures and innovative explorations of artificial intelligence (AI) emerged throughout the program. The theme, "Uniting Knowledge, Building the Future," resonated strongly with my own IRRT Chair's theme this year, "One World, Many Libraries: Building the Future Together." Outgoing IFLA President Vicki McDonald emphasized her theme "Stronger Together," while incoming President Leslie Weir (now President) set a powerful tone with her call to "Be Bold!" Together, these messages underscored the importance of collective action and innovation in shaping our profession.

### Highlights and Takeaways

One highlight was participating in the Knowledge Café "United Colleagues in Building Our Future." I served as rapporteur, while Xiaoli Li facilitated two engaging discussion rounds on "AI – Workplace Applications." Participants from around the world shared early experiences with AI in cataloging, metadata, chatbots, translation, social media, and clerical support. Many libraries are offering hands-on training and AI literacy programs to build staff confidence and reduce apprehension. At the same time, colleagues raised thoughtful concerns about accuracy, bias, ethics, privacy, overreliance, and environmental impacts. A recurring theme was that human oversight must remain central, even as vendor-driven integrations shape workflows. My impression from the discussions was that librarians recognize that AI has great potential to streamline routine tasks and enhance services, but that success will require careful prompt design, robust training data, transparency, and a commitment to preserving the uniquely human aspects of library work.

I also had the chance to contribute to both IFLA and ALA initiatives during the week. I participated in a pilot IFLA Member Focus Group, a follow-up to the recent Member Sentiment Survey, where we explored ways to improve the

member experience and strengthen engagement. It was energizing to share ideas and connect with colleagues I had not met before. I also helped at the ALA Booth in the Exhibit Hall alongside Michael Dowling, ALA's Director of International and Chapter Relations, who announced his retirement shortly after WLIC. His thoughtful leadership has greatly shaped ALA's international work, and he will be deeply missed.

Another highlight was reconnecting with colleagues on the IFLA Section for Education and Training (SET), where I've begun a second term as a standing committee member. In 2024, SET celebrated its 50th anniversary, and to honor this milestone, I am co-editing a forthcoming book with Albina Krymskaya and Jaya Raju: "Library and Information Science Education around the World: Historical Trends, Current Perspectives and Future Projections." Scheduled for publication in 2027 in the IFLA Publication Series by De Gruyter, the volume will examine changes in LIS education over the past decade and future LIS education opportunities across all IFLA regions.

Finally, one of my favorite moments was organizing a dinner for IRRT members attending the conference. Nearly 15 of us gathered for a traditional Kazakh meal, joined by colleagues from the Korean Library Association, Juhée Song and Hyun-Woo Park, who built excitement for next year's WLIC in Busan, South Korea. We were also delighted to have ALA President-Elect Maria McCauley with us. The evening was filled with camaraderie, cultural exchange, and anticipation for the future.

**Looking Ahead**

The 2025 WLIC was an unforgettable experience—an opportunity to engage with global colleagues, share knowledge, and build momentum for our shared future. I am grateful for the chance to serve the international library community through IFLA and IRRT, and I look forward to reconnecting with old and new friends at the 2026 WLIC in Busan.



*Xiaoli Li (Facilitator) and Sandy Hirsh (Rapporteur) with one of our table groups for the Knowledge Café discussion focused on AI-Workplace Applications.*



*ALA Booth: Sandy Hirsh and Michael Dowling*



*IRRT Dinner with Erica Saito, Michael Huang, Diana Price, Michael Dowling, Gina De Alwissh, Polly Boruff-Jones, Joan Weeks*



*IRRT Dinner with Juhée Song (Korean Library Association), Maria McCauley (Incoming ALA President) and Sandy Hirsh (IRRT Chair and dinner organizer)*



*Past and present IFLA SET standing committee members: Albina Krymskaya, Sandy Hirsh, Lisa Hincliffe, Jasenka Pleško, Joan Weeks*

**ALA** American  
Library  
Association



## JULIA GELFAND INTERNATIONAL LIBRARIANSHIP

*Julia M. Gelfand was recently awarded the John Ames Humphry/OCLC/Forest Press Award for International Librarianship. Below is a copy of her acceptance speech:*

I am very humbled to be here receiving this award and thank OCLC and Forest Press for honoring John Ames Humphry and his legacy of international reach through his leadership at Forest Press in extending the Dewey Decimal system in multiple languages by sponsoring this award. As New York State Librarian and Assistant Commissioner of the New York State Education Department and library director of libraries including the Brooklyn Public Library now renowned for their services to large communities of non-English speakers, he promoted multilingual collections and library services.

I thank the International Relations Committee for establishing this award in 1987 nearly 40 years ago and as the International Relations Roundtable celebrates its

75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, it is especially meaningful to reflect on the contributions of previous recipients and the work that IRRT is currently engaged in. Among those we remember the recent passing of Patricia Oyler, a renowned library school educator who received this award in 2009. I thank and acknowledge those who contributed to my nomination packet and hope that my international focus continues as I celebrate my retirement after 48 years of practice. It was at ALA in 1977 in Detroit that I parked myself at the Job Placement Center seeking my first position and experienced the wonders of ALA and first joined IRRT.

My own career has been global from the beginning. Upon graduating from Goucher College fifty years ago this year, I was named a Thomas J. Watson Fellow and allowed to spend a year traveling through Western Europe studying national library systems. That was my first trip abroad and relying upon public libraries and working in government libraries, I was convinced that my career goals would have an international component from then on. I attended the International Graduate School of Librarianship at the College of Librarianship Wales in Aberystwyth, as it was called then, and took several courses in international librarianship with giants in the field, such as the late Frank Hogg dedicated to library development around the world. I later taught international librarianship as an adjunct library school faculty member at several institutions for nearly 20 years.

I returned to the United States and received my MSLS at Case Western Reserve University when it had a School of Library Science, and found myself among fellow students and faculty from all parts of the world, as well as at a testbed site for OCLC pioneering technologies. I was fortunate to study with Alan Rees, Tefko Saracevic, William Goffman, and others whose influence is still recognized. The Baker Building was truly a microcosm of the globe, on Euclid Avenue in Cleveland, several miles up from the infamous Cleveland Public Library, another icon of our profession.

I was fortunate to work in libraries that promoted strong professional development opportunities. I received the Fulbright U.K. Professional Librarian Research Award in 1992-93 and was based at the Science Museum / Imperial College Libraries in London where I hosted the first international Scholarly Communication in the Sciences Symposium bringing together librarians, publishers and professional societies, modeled somewhat after the merits of the Charleston Conference, which has influenced me

greatly. I presented my research from that Fulbright experience at my first IFLA conference in Barcelona in 1993 and got hooked and remain steadfastly committed to international cooperation. The colleagues and friends I made through international connections have stayed with me as I became active in IFLA, IATUL and numerous other national library associations, often collaborating and leading various initiatives in the areas that evolved into collection management and STEM librarianship, including hosting the 1996 conference at my campus.

Fast forward to today, when I have just retired from the University of California, Irvine Libraries after nearly 44 years of service there. I will begin my second Fulbright Award in January 2026 when I will go to the Botswana International University of Science and Technology in Palapye, Botswana for six months to develop several professional development programs with the staff there and become engaged with library members of the SANLiC consortia in South Africa which the Botswana institutions have recently joined. I still have much to learn from all these new relationships.

It is the friendships, collegiality, collaboration, and common goals that have made my career so special and sparked the ability to travel, visit libraries, attend international conferences and share experiences. My husband, David Lang has been dragged to library meetings and library visits on our many travels and I thank him for his love and support that has made my career so special.

Yesterday, I spent several shifts at the International Visitors' Booth and that is always a special place to connect with librarians from overseas, aiding them to navigate the richness we have in resources at ALA and I hope you join me in celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of IRRT this year by participating in the webinars, programs, committees, publications, and sharing your ideas by contributing to *International Leads* and the endowment that makes all this outreach possible so that we can continue to attract colleagues from around the world from whom we can learn and partner with. I served on many IRRT committees that planned this event in numerous cities from New Orleans, Washington, Chicago, San Diego and never imagined that I would be a recipient of this award. Thanks again, for this honor. I treasure it.

June 28, 2025

# ALA UKRAINIAN KIDS BOOK DRIVE

THOSE WHO READ  
TO THEIR HEART, WIN

ULIA GOSART



*iSchool Director, Anthony Chow collecting books*

The work of Ukrainian librarians today testifies to the significance of the library profession at the moment of crisis; Ukrainian librarians provide shelter, humanitarian help, emotional and legal support to their communities, service internally displaced people, send care packages to the army, and fight on the information front volunteering to bring the victory home. Their courage and invisibility is inspiring solidarity across library communities of the US.

To support the Ukrainian library community, the School of Information at San Jose State University partnered with the American Library Association and Little Free Library to collect books for Ukrainian children at ALA.

“The goal is to establish 6 Little Free Libraries in Cherkasy, Central Ukraine, that will serve as safe havens where children can read, learn, and dream,” the initiator of the drive, Anthony Chow, iSchool Director. “Last year at ALA conference we’ve collected over [370 children’s books](#). This year we are sending much more, and we will continue.”

The history of iSchool support of Ukrainian librarians goes back to the beginning of the war in 2022, when the iSchool partnered with Saving Ukrainian Heritage Online to equip the Cherkasy Regional Library with technology to preserve cultural heritage. This work unfolded into biannual symposia featuring Ukrainian librarians reporting on the state of libraries in Ukraine and a [Ukrainian children war art exhibit](#) that travels across the US educating students and the general public about the war. Currently the initiative has spread to the Kyiv region with book donations to [Boyarka district village libraries](#), and to Kherson, with the [current fundraiser](#) aiming to restore the ruined Kherson Regional Library collection for the blind. This work is primarily done with support of students’ volunteer teams. For the book drive they created flyers, posters and bookmarks, featuring war drawings of Ukrainian children.

“Getting involved in this project lets us see the human side of things and the lived experiences, as a lot of the [news] coverage [of the war] is reduced to numbers, statistics,” shares iSchool student Ocelia Stanley. “It’s hard for people here to remember that time doesn’t stop for people who are impacted by wars. Kids in Ukraine are still growing as they can’t just pause and wait until the war is over to get back to learning things. They have to do it now.”

“It’s been incredible connecting with librarians from all over, who are interested in the work we’re doing to help Ukraine,” adds Sarah Schwartz, impressed by the sense of comradeship among library professionals,

united by their commitment to serve communities and people in need.

“Library communities are strong because of the solidarity,” notes Daniel Gumnit, the CEO of Little Free Library, who is of Ukrainian descent. “It’s holding not only library communities together, but I think it’s holding our whole world together because of the libraries, particularly the public libraries. These are the heroes. I’m impressed by the solidarity and unity that I’m seeing from everybody here at ALA.”

“We need to keep writing, keep reading, keep thinking, keep resisting, and keep being together in solidarity not only with Ukraine but with all the people in the world who want all the wars to end,” adds to this David Corey, of Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The iSchool and ALA are already planning for the next year’s book collection at the 2026 conference in Chicago.

“The conference is a great opportunity for children’s books donations,” shares Michael Dowling, Director of ALA International Relations Office. “The whole community has been so willing, and so the collaboration with the iSchool, the vendors, and the publishing community brings us together because we know the importance of the cause...We know in Ukraine they’re trying to wipe out the culture, and it’s imperative that people have access to materials during these dark times when missiles are coming down. A book creates a little bit of normality that is needed. And we want to really work on, once the war is over, to continue to assist the librarians.”

The books arrived in Cherkasy at the beginning of August. There were close to 2000 titles, half of them comics, which are among most wanted books for Ukrainian teens. On September 17<sup>th</sup>, six Little Free Libraries opened across Cherkasy, servicing 3 schools and also child patrons of Youth and Children libraries.

“We are sincerely grateful to our American friends for their cooperation, support, and assistance in implementing the Little Free Library project in Cherkasy, and for giving us the opportunity to develop librarianship, preserve cultural values, and nurture spirituality during such a difficult time for the Ukrainian people,” said Luidmyla Diadyk, director of Cherkasy Regional Universal Library who coordinates the project in Ukraine.



iSchool student Sarah Schwartz and Director of ALA International Relations Office Michael Dowling in front of iSchool conference stand featuring war drawings of Ukrainian children



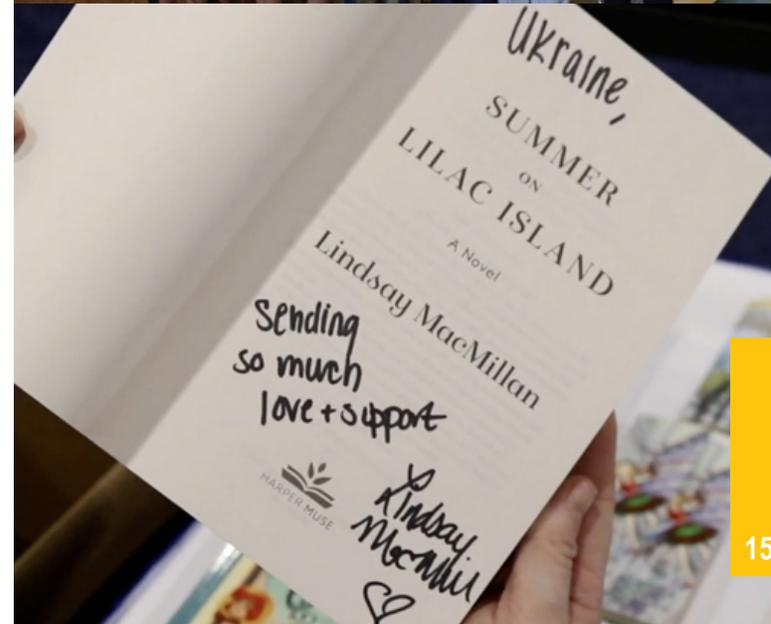
Cherkasy Academic Lyceum students are reading new books in English



Students along with their teachers and Luidmyla Diadyk (second on the right)



Young patrons of Cherkasy Children Library in front of their LFL with newly arrived books



# ARE YOU INTERESTED?

## ALA INTEREST GROUPS

GLORIA DIKEOGU

An interest group is organized by groups of librarians interested in working on projects, policies or advocacy in a specific work area. Librarians choosing to participate in an interest group might be drawn to it because they are set on influencing public policy or raising awareness in a specific work area. They may also have shared goals and values associated with that specific area or they may be new to the topic and want to participate in discussion about ideas and models the interest group members might champion, so that they can learn more about it and how to work with it in a library setting. As a result, the group may work together to plan and engage in connected ALA or ACRL programming relating to specific topics and shared interests.

The American Library Association has interest groups focused on many different subject areas, librarians from all types of libraries can join. The ALA Core Interest Groups list can be found at <http://ala.org/core/member-center/interest-groups>

Interest groups provide ALA members internationally with opportunities for networking, information-gathering about specific interest groups, and the chance for members to problem-solve around important topics. ALA holds an annual Interest Group Week the first week in March, where interest groups and others can have topical discussions and also present programs at a distance. More information can be found at <https://www.ala.org/core/continuing-education/interest-group-week>.

Several of the ALA and ACRL Interest Groups often meet at ALA Annual and ACRL to present and participate in table discussions groups on their topics of interest. The website provides ALA members with descriptions of recordings of group events at ALA Annual. Librarians can listen to interest group presentations they may be interested in or may have missed out participating in. If you want to know more about an interest group's charge or leadership, these can be viewed on their websites, on ALA Connect.

The ACRL website also provides academic librarians with a list of ACRL interest groups (<https://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/interestgroups/igs>) that are focused on academic topics e.g. the Academic Library Services to Graduate Students Interest Group, or the African-American Studies Librarians Interest Group.

An interest group I am currently participating in as a Convener is called ALSIS (Academic Library Services to International Students). This interest group, in particular, is open to any librarian working with undergraduate international students or who are interested in this topic area. Each interest group has a Discussion page in ALA Connect. The ALSIS's Discussion page can be found on ALA Connect at <https://connect.ala.org/acrl/communities/community-home/digestviewer?CommunityKey=702a05f1-bdb4-4dfd-9fad-94a98c63c67f>.

If you are interested in participating in ALA or ACRL Interest Groups, you must be an ALA or ACRL member. If you want to view interest group events, be sure to check the ALA Connect website periodically as interest groups often post advertisements about their events/activities during the year. This Fall 2025, ALSIS has created two online events, and would appreciate your interest and participation in them. You can register for these programs on ALA Connect. Participation in all interest group events is free of charge, and does not require interest group membership to participate in them.

Please see information about ALSIS online programming this Fall 2025 as listed below.

### Share & Tell: Library Partnerships for International Student Success [[dartmouth.zoom.us](https://dartmouth.zoom.us)]

o International Education Week is coming up (November 17-21)! In preparation, we invite you to a lively "Share & Tell" session focused on how your libraries are working with partners across campus and beyond to support international students. Share your successes and challenges and learn from colleagues doing similar work.

- Tuesday, October 7, 2025 | 2-3 PM EST

### Bring your own article meeting [[dartmouth.zoom.us](https://dartmouth.zoom.us)]

o Have you recently read an article that has got you excited about supporting international students in your library? Bring an article related to library services for international students to this informal meeting. There will be time to read, discuss, and share helpful things you've read. Afterwards, add your article to the [ALISIS shared Zotero library](#).

- Tuesday, November 6, 2025 | 3-4 PM EST



## LET THE CELEBRATION CONTINUE

Julia Gelfand  
[jgelfand@uci.edu](mailto:jgelfand@uci.edu)

In Summer 2024 the International Relations Round Table (IRRT) rolled out its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. To commemorate the milestone, IRRT launched a new fundraising campaign at the ALA Annual Conference in San Diego. The goal for this campaign is to raise \$75,000 to create engagement grants which will provide supplemental travel funds to two MLS students, one domestic and one international, to attend the ALA Annual conference each year and to become engaged with international librarianship and the profession. This professional exposure anticipates delivering a career of global interest that will be sustained throughout these successful individuals' careers, where international librarianship will be pivotal in their work and relationships with library users and colleagues.

The new campaign is modeled upon the then ambitious and successful "\$60 for 60 Years" campaign which allowed IRRT to launch the Mission Enhancement Grant Program which continues to positively impact the profession to this day. With the previous successful campaign, Librarians have proposed exciting projects all around the world that

promote literacy and various creative service projects fostering partnership, collaboration and professional relationships between US librarians and their colleagues overseas.

The "\$75 x 75 years" campaign seeks to invite a long-term relationship in developing a professional commitment that involves global understanding, cultural awareness and opens the doors to the extensive programming and relationship building that IRRT offers. Encouraging affiliation and membership in IRRT will contribute to greater participation that will showcase the work of school libraries, academic libraries, public libraries, governmental and special libraries, in urban and rural populations. How libraries serve their communities through a new generation of library workers suggests the transformative impact this endowment will have in libraries both in North America and abroad.

Over the last couple of years, IRRT has lost some long-term active members and their families have chosen to honor their memories by directing funds to the new endowment campaign. Most recently, the family of Dr. Patricia Oyler, Professor at Simmons University, directed donations to the new endowment as a way to remember her international impact on the profession. IRRT would like to thank Dr. Oyler's family for this generous and thoughtful gift. If you, as an IRRT member, feel so inclined to remember Pat or others, please consider donating to the campaign in their honor. This is a wonderful way to celebrate memories and honor those with festive milestones such as birthdays, anniversaries, promotions, retirements and other occasions.

This new endowment campaign is ongoing and IRRT invites you to join your friends and colleagues by participating in this vital campaign to support the next generation of IRRT members as they begin a pathway of global outreach by establishing meaningful relationships that will showcase the value of libraries worldwide. Better yet, organize a group of like-minded colleagues to join you in participating in this outreach effort. Please consider contributing \$75 or multiples thereof to ensure that the \$75,000 goal is met. Contributions in all amounts are welcome. Share this idea with friends and colleagues to make sure that IRRT can contribute to a rich future for librarians worldwide. You can contribute by simply donating at <https://ec.ala.org/donate/projects>, and select Roundtables > IRRT > IRRT 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary for your donation. Checks can also be addressed to ALA with the subject line noting *FOR IRRT 75x75* and sent to ALA, 225 N. Michigan Ave, Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601.

## HONORING PATRICIA GAIL OYLER A LIFELONG MENTOR TO VIETNAMESE LIBRARIES

HUYNH THI TRANG, PH.D.

The passing of Professor Patricia G. Oyler, fondly known to many of us as “Má Oyler” leaves an enduring legacy in Vietnam’s library and information sector. Her work, guidance, and friendship profoundly shaped the development of librarianship in my country and the lives of countless professionals, including my own.

### **Building Bridges through Education**

In 1995, thanks to the Harvard Yenching Scholarship, seven of us, the third cohort of Vietnamese professionals, began our master’s studies in Library and Information Science at Simmons University, Boston. Professor Oyler not only taught and mentored us in Boston but also organized classes in Vietnam, combining theory with valuable study tours across libraries from the North to the South of Vietnam. These experiences gave us a panoramic understanding of Vietnam’s library landscape and inspired our long-term plans for modernization.

Throughout the years, Professor Oyler tirelessly organized training in six cities: Can Tho, Da Nang, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hue, and Thai Nguyen. These workshops covered library management, automation, preservation, and marketing of library services - topics that helped Vietnamese librarians reimagine their profession. Her 2008 course at Hue University, for example, introduced international cataloging standards, preparing us to unify bibliographic practices nationwide and integrate with global library networks.

### **Transformative Projects for Vietnam**

Professor Oyler further played a critical role in formulating our national library strategic initiatives. She advised the National Agency for Science and Technology Information in securing \$2 million from Atlantic Philanthropies to develop Vietnam’s electronic library consortium and to introduce MARC21 cataloging standards. She was instrumental in the Vietnamese translation of the DDC14 abridged edition, launched in Hanoi in 2006 and proudly presented at the IFLA conference in Korea the same year - a milestone celebrated as a breakthrough in global librarianship.

Her contributions extended to Can Tho University, where she helped design the undergraduate curriculum and evaluated foreign textbooks for the Library and Information Management program (2005). These initiatives ensured that future generations of librarians in the Mekong Delta could be professionally prepared to meet the challenges of a changing information landscape.

### **A Mentor and a Second Mother**

For me personally, Professor Oyler was not only a teacher but also a mentor who guided my academic and professional journey with extraordinary care. In Boston, she introduced us to advanced cataloging, arranged tours of the Library of Congress, and even looked after our daily needs with warmth and humor. In Vietnam, she continued to inspire us through library tours and workshops, keeping our skills and knowledge up to date long after graduation.

Her encouragement pushed me to apply successfully for the Fulbright Visiting Scholarship (2008–2009) and the Australian Development Scholarship (2012). Each step of the way, she offered timely advice, unwavering support, and heartfelt encouragement.

### **Recognition and Remembrance**

On November 25, 2013, the Vietnamese Ministry of Science and Technology awarded Professor Oyler the Medal for Science and Technology in recognition of her invaluable contributions. Yet, perhaps her greatest legacy lies in the generations of Vietnamese librarians whose careers she shaped and whose lives she touched.

When we last welcomed her to Can Tho in May 2023, she told us it would be her final visit. True to her words, it was the last time we were together. But the seeds she planted - her vision for libraries, her passion for education, and her boundless generosity - continue to grow across Vietnam. For all of us who had the privilege to call her teacher and “Má Oyler” her life’s work remains an enduring inspiration.





## PATRICIA GAIL OYLER

1943-2025

Patricia Gail Oyler of Watertown, MA died Tuesday night, June 10, 2025, at the AccentCare Inpatient Hospice Center in Milton, MA of metastatic ovarian cancer at the age of eighty-one. She was diagnosed five years previously and had undergone extensive treatment with both established and experimental drugs before succumbing to the disease.

Pat was the oldest of five children of the late Dr. James R. Oyler and Gail Dinwiddie Oyler of Biglerville, PA. She is survived by three brothers and a sister, James R. Oyler Jr. of Salt Lake City, UT; John S. Oyler of Huntingdon Valley, PA; Carol A. Oyler Snyder of Harrisburg, PA; and Dr. George A. Oyler of Lincoln, NE.

Pat was born November 11, 1943, at the Sloane Hospital in Manhattan, New York City. At the time of her birth her father, Dr. James Oyler, was working at Columbia University in New York City as part of a team funded by the US War Department to test and improve the “K Rations” used in World War II. Shortly after the end of the war, James, Gail, and their young daughter Pat moved to Gettysburg, PA and later Biglerville, PA.

She attended grade school and high school in Gettysburg and McSherrystown, PA, and then received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia. She went on to receive Master’s and PhD degrees from the University of Pittsburgh, and later Master of Business Administration from Simmons College in Boston, MA. Her academic and professional work was in Library and Information Science.

Pat entered her professional career at Simmons College in 1974 in the early days of applying computers and information science to the ancient art of library organization and management. As a Professor of Library and Information Sciences at Simmons, she achieved worldwide recognition for her accomplishments as well as training many other professionals to efficiently convert and standardize information. In addition to newly developed



*Professor Oyler (Center in front) at the Ho Chi Minh City Training course on Communications and Networking in 1999*

# INTERNATIONAL LEADS

information, she also worked with archives and rare documents and other materials to safely bring them into the computer age.

Throughout her career, Pat believed strongly in free access to information for the growth and freedom of people throughout the world, including developing countries. She was a Fulbright Scholar in Brazil, worked with the Royal Library of Sweden, and the US Information Agency in both the USA and India. Pat's commitment to librarianship and access converged with the education of Vietnamese librarians at Simmons, which was supported for several years by a generous grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies. In 2009, Pat was selected by American Library Association as the recipient of the John Ames Humphry/OCLC/Forest Press Award for International Librarianship, the citation for which read in part: Pat “.. has dedicated the past 16 years of her professional and personal life to the development of a program for Vietnamese librarians to earn MLS degrees in library and information science at Simmons College. Creating an exemplary model for professional training for 21st century librarianship in transitioning countries, Dr. Oyler has coordinated fundraising, teaching, consulting and many other logistics for the now 55 plus graduates. She also consulted on the grant-funded building of five major university libraries in Vietnam.” In 2013 she was awarded Vietnam's Medal for Science and Technology by the Vietnam Ministry of Science and Technology.

She served and held leadership positions with professional organizations in the United States, including the American Library Association, chairing

its International Relations Round Table (IRRT), and the Association of College and Research Libraries, as well as worldwide with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. She especially focused on training and sharing among libraries and collections throughout the world.

While she never married, Pat always remembered the birthdays of her many nephews, nieces, and grand-nephews and nieces. Her “animated cards” became a standard feature when they first appeared on the Internet, and were appreciated both because they were touching and often funny.

Services will be held at the Church of Saint Ignatius Loyola, 1095 Church Road, Orrtanna 17353 (Buchanan Valley) on Saturday, July 19. A reception will begin at 10:00 AM at the Loyola Center at the Church, followed by a Mass of Christian Burial at 11:00 AM. A private burial will follow in the Church Cemetery.

Memorial contributions in Pat's name, in lieu of flowers, can be made to the Adams County Library System, 140 Baltimore St., Gettysburg, PA 17325, or to the ALA International Relations Round Table 75th Anniversary Funds (at <https://ec.ala.org/donate/projects> ; scroll down, click on “Roundtables” then scroll further click on “IRRT”; scroll down to 75th Anniversary Funds).



*Professor Oyler (Center) at  
Can Tho Training Workshop  
on Information Brokering  
Professionals in 2013*