FEATURE: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

So Different Yet So Similar: A Tale of Two Academic Libraries in the United States and Poland

Katarzyna Cyran

abstract: The aim of this article is to present a comparison between two academic libraries: Indiana University Libraries in the United States and the Library of Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska, Poland. This comparison is based on data that each of these libraries published in statistical reports. Much of the information used in the article was obtained during interviews with librarians that took place during the author’s visit to the Indiana University Libraries in Bloomington. The comparison shows that despite the differences in the size of the universities, both libraries pursue their missions, increase their collections, and offer services to their users in a similar manner. Visiting libraries in different countries is important to exchange knowledge and experiences between professional librarians. Librarians can subsequently use this knowledge to improve and enhance work in their home institutions.

Introduction

T echnological advances such as the Internet, and consequently Facebook and other social media, have enabled people to communicate and to exchange and access information worldwide. However, these digital achievements cannot replace personal contacts and meetings, which allow the direct exchange of views and experiences. In the library field, international internships or visiting exchanges not only offer the unique opportunity to become familiar with the activities and the organization of the hosting library and the nature and culture of the country but also provide fascinating challenges related to performing a variety of complex and often new tasks. International internships offer a great opportunity to gain valuable experience and broaden one’s expertise by jointly performing everyday work and participating in discussions with hosting librarians. The necessity of communicating and expressing oneself in a foreign language, the ability to overcome cultural barriers, and simply

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coping with everyday situations help to build the visiting librarian’s confidence in his or her own professional ability. This, in turn, can be a powerful motivating force for personal career development.

One of the largest exchange programs in the European Union, Erasmus (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), has supported international academic exchanges for nearly 28 years. The program’s main goals are to improve the quality of higher education, expand scientific cooperation, and advance the professional skills of university staff and students. Since 2007, nonacademic employees have been eligible to apply, and so employees of university libraries increasingly participate in these internships. Thanks to this program, I had the opportunity to visit the Docklands Library at the University of East London in the United Kingdom. The experience there and my observations from the visit were presented in an article published in the journal Zagadnienia Informacji Naukowej (Issues in Information Science). Programs such as Erasmus provide invaluable opportunities for librarians, and their international scope makes them especially attractive. Work experience and study abroad would remain unfulfilled dreams for many people if funds from the Erasmus program were not available. Graduate students and university staff, thanks to scholarships that cover trips to numerous universities, can work with outstanding professors and inspiring people. What is more, they can establish long-lasting contacts and meaningful friendships.

Universities in the United States set trends in library sciences, and their libraries are a source of inspiration for European librarians. Exchange programs between other countries and the United States, like the European Union’s Erasmus, would allow librarians to trade ideas, share experiences in dealing with difficult issues, and search for optimal solutions. The purpose of this brief article is to compare two libraries: Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education Library in Biała Podlaska, Poland, where the author works in the Department of Gathering, Developing, and Controlling Collections, and the Indiana University (IU) Libraries in Bloomington, where she visited during the summer of 2016. This visit was motivated by the author’s desire to broaden her expertise and gain new experience in various aspects of the librarian profession.

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The Library of Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska

The Library of Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska—abbreviated as PSW from its name in Polish, Biblioteka Państwowej Szkoły Wyższej im. Papieża Jana Pawła II w Białej Podlaskiej—was established in 2000. Today, it has over 3,500 students in 17 fields of study and more than 40 areas of specialization. Most of the students are enrolled in bachelor’s programs, but there are also six master’s level
programs. In 2013, Department of Economics and Technical Sciences and Department of Health and Social Sciences were established.

The library of PSW was founded in 2001. At the beginning, it was limited to a single room. In November 2016, a new library building opened. In the new building, users have access to a modern system of borrowing books in a spacious, comfortable setting. A significant part of the library is designated as “free zones.” There, open areas allow for easy viewing of collections. There also are rooms available for individual and group work. In addition, self-checkout and a “smart shelf” for returns provide flexibility and speedy service. The “smart shelf” has sensors that read the information from tags on the books and update the books’ status in the library system when they are removed from, or returned to, the shelf. The new building, with its modern interior and open spaces, encourages students to take advantage of its services.

On September 30, 2015, the PSW Library held 31,202 volumes, including 29,435 books, 1,551 booklets, 210 audiocassettes, 56 videocassettes, and 350 CDs and DVDs. In the academic year 2014–2015, users read 23,383 books from 27 subject areas in the main reading room, according to data from the Polish library management system SOWA. The data showed that the most popular books were related to medical sciences—9,450 volumes. Second place was occupied by organization and management with 2,168 volumes, immediately followed by economics and finance with 1,791 volumes, and English philology with 1,558 volumes. In the main reading room, readers used 428 bound journals and 1,893 current, unbound periodicals. Figure 1 presents the reading statistics.

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The PSW Library has had open access to the EBSCO database since 2007. Currently, the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education pays for the license. In the academic year 2014–2015, students consulted the EBSCO database 1,021 times, and the staff used it 26,513 times. The total number of searches in the database amounted to 36,634. Since
January 2010, the PSW Library has had access to the online resources within the Virtual Library of Science, a database created by the Interdisciplinary Centre for Mathematical and Computational Modelling at the University of Warsaw in Poland. The Virtual Library of Science includes the databases EBSCO, Elsevier, Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, Scopus, Web of Science, and Science and Nature. Students and faculty can access these databases from their home computers since August 2010. In the academic year 2014–2015, the PSW Library also provided access to electronic resources on the Polish digital library IBUK.pl, offering a total of 798 electronic books, including 195 that carried charges for their use. Platform usage statistics indicate that the number of user sessions was 2,059 (an increase of 1,132 compared to the previous academic year), publications were opened 3,936 times (an increase of 3,267), and 83,142 pages were reviewed (an increase of 74,278). In total, readers spent 443 hours 39 minutes reading, about 391 hours more than in the previous academic year. The PSW Library offers interlibrary loan services, instruction and teaching, librarians provide training, advising, consultations, and other forms of education such as:

- Library training for first-year PSW students (both traditional and online),
- Seminars on search skills, the knowledge databases, and e-sources for various groups, and
- EBSCO electronic databases training for employees.

In the academic year 2014–2015, the PSW Library in Biała Podlaska started a blog called Knowledge Locator. The library has also created a profile on Facebook that currently has 473 likes.

Indiana University Libraries

Established in 1820, Indiana University (IU) has grown from a small state seminary into a large multicampus university with more than 110,000 students. Its main Bloomington campus has about 37,000 undergraduate students and almost 3,000 faculty. The IU Bloomington campus covers more than 1,800 wooded acres and is distinctive for both its parklike grounds and its limestone architecture created by local stoneworkers. In the early years, the Indiana University Bloomington Library was a single room, housing a small collection acquired through the generosity of donors. The first funding allocated by the state for library collections was an astonishing $75 a year, compared to fiscal year 2013 funding for collections that reached $11.8 million. Despite three fires (in 1854, 1883, and 1969) that destroyed all or parts of the libraries’ collections, the libraries’ holdings compare with those of its peers in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL).6

The Indiana University Libraries are regarded as one of the leading academic research library systems in North America. They provide strong collections, quality service and instructional programs, and leadership in the application of information technologies.

On the Bloomington campus, the Herman B Wells Library, with its double towers of Indiana limestone, forms the visual center of the multi-library system and primarily supports the humanities and social sciences. The IU Libraries rank 14th in size among ARL member libraries. A team of specialists selects, manages, and builds the research collections, which include more than 9 million books in over 900 languages. The materi-
als support every academic discipline on campus, with an emphasis on the humanities and social sciences. Collections also include journals, maps, films, and sound recordings. Users can access more than 800 databases, 60,000 electronic journal titles, and 815,000 electronic books, as well as locally developed digital content.

On June 30, 2015, IU Libraries held 7,497,691 titles (10,121,934 volumes) and 1,971,380 e-books. Total library expenditures (excluding fringe benefits) in 2014–2015 were $36,971,707. Total spending on library materials was $17,410,242 in fiscal year 2014–2015.

**Similarities and Differences**

It is difficult to compare academic libraries from two dissimilar societies and cultures. The two libraries discussed here serve universities different in size and age; Indiana University is bigger than PSW and much older; its establishment dates to 1820, whereas PSW formally came into existence only in 2000. The IU campuses serve over 10 times more students than PSW does, and expectedly the Indiana University Bloomington Libraries have larger collections.

The number of students generally increases each year at IU, while at PSW the enrollment has decreased about 10 percent annually over last several years due to demographic decline in Poland every year. Table 1 presents the data about the number of students in these two universities.

Despite their differences, many similar trends and issues are common to both the IU Bloomington Libraries and the PSW Library. Both libraries registered an increase in

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**Table 1.**

Numbers of students at Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska, Poland, and at Indiana University, Bloomington

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska</th>
<th>Indiana University Bloomington</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013–2014*</td>
<td>3,337</td>
<td>37,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014–2015*</td>
<td>2,983</td>
<td>37,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage change</td>
<td>–10.6%</td>
<td>+0.5%</td>
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*Academic year for Pope John Paul II State School and fiscal year for Indiana University.
library collections. The number of volumes in IU Bloomington Libraries grows at a rate of 1.89 percent per year, while the collection of PSW increases by about 4 percent per year. These data are presented in Table 2.

In both libraries, the user impact, defined as the number of books per user, is growing. In the IU Libraries, the growth was about 2.5 percent per year, and in the PSW Library about 17 percent (see Table 3).

Expenditures on total library materials amounted to $17,410,242 in the 2014–2015 academic year at the IU Bloomington Libraries, and the growth rate in comparison to the previous year was 8.20 percent. PSW Library recorded a 37 percent decrease in expenses. These data are presented in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage increase</td>
<td>4.16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage increase</td>
<td>1.89%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal year</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Volumes</th>
<th>User impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013–2014</td>
<td>3,337</td>
<td>29,955</td>
<td>8.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,983</td>
<td>31,202</td>
<td>10.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage increase</td>
<td>2.53%</td>
<td>16.52%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*For this article, impact means the number of books per user.

Table 2.
Volumes in library collections

Table 3.
User impact*

This mss. is peer reviewed, copy edited, and accepted for publication, portal 17.4.
Table 4.
Expenditures on library materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska</th>
<th>Indiana University Bloomington</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal year 2013–2014</td>
<td>$40,119</td>
<td>$16,091,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal year 2014–2015</td>
<td>$25,304</td>
<td>$17,410,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage change</td>
<td>--36.93%</td>
<td>+8.80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.
Expenditures on the purchase of monographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska</th>
<th>Indiana University Bloomington</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal year 2014–2015</td>
<td>$12,486</td>
<td>$6,497,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage change</td>
<td>--50%</td>
<td>+12.82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The largest decrease in spending at the PSW Library was in the purchase of monographs (50 percent), due to lack of storage space before relocating to a new building. The data concerning expenditures on the purchase of monographs are presented in Table 5.

The contemporary library user prefers electronic collections, which they can quickly access from a home computer. As Pauline Dewan observes, this tendency seems to be universal:

Why are e-books growing so rapidly in popularity? What are the advantages of e-books over traditional books for readers in general, and our users in particular? Convenience is one of the reasons. Readers can borrow online texts without entering a library or being restricted to library hours. They do not have to return to the building to bring books back and they can avoid incurring library fines. Users can access e-books all day, every day, and use them when the print books for their topic are out on loan. Anyone who had to carry academic tomes around a campus or packed books for travel can attest to the advantages of weightless e-books. Users also like the fact that e-books take up no space on their shelves. Online books are searchable, an undeniable advantage over print texts. E-readers allow users to customize fonts and pages, thus improving their reading experience.
experience. Furthermore, users can instantly look up an unfamiliar word on e-readers. Finally, fewer trees are cut and less fossil fuel is used for transportation of goods. Due to rapid improvements in the technology, e-books are being used by an increasing number of people who have discovered their many benefits.9

IU Bloomington Libraries significantly increased the purchase of e-books. This category remains small in the PSW Library; however, there has been an interest in the IBUK platform (a Polish database of e-books) and other electronic databases. Table 6 presents information about electronic books in both libraries.

Although IU Bloomington Libraries and PSW Library differ in size and user population, they offer many similar services and fulfill their missions in similar manner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska</th>
<th>Indiana University Bloomington</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal year 2013–2014</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>1,864,483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal year 2014–2015</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>1,971,380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage increase</td>
<td>17.52%</td>
<td>5.73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although IU Bloomington Libraries and PSW Library differ in size and user population, they offer many similar services and fulfill their missions in similar manner.

The Learning Commons on the first floor of the West Tower within the Wells Library at IU Bloomington is a technology-focused learning center open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Formed from a partnership between the IU Bloomington Libraries and the University Information Technology (IT) Services, the Learning Commons offers wireless access and multiple services, including writing tutorial services, research help, peer coaching, tech support, IT training, and printing and computer help. Additionally, students can visit the Learning Commons Library Services Desk for quick help, reserve holdings, and circulation checkout and returns. Collaboration rooms are available on a first-come, first-served basis, with groups having priority.10

The new building at the PSW Library has well-designed spaces for individual study and a group work room. The library offers wireless access and the possibility of using tablets, laptops, and computers. Modern interiors make it a good place to acquire knowledge or to relax (relaxation areas with couches have also been provided). The professional staff of PSW librarians stands ready to help in the search for sources.
library also offers full flexibility in borrowing independently, using self-checkout and self-return with the help of a “smart shelf” that automatically tracks the status of books. Both libraries provide training and presentations for their users. The PSW Library conducted 49 presentations, and IU Libraries did 989 in the fiscal year 2014–2015. The average number of presentations decreased in both libraries, in PSW by about 2 percent and in IU Libraries Bloomington by 24 percent. These data are presented in Table 7.

PSW Library and the IU Libraries acquire materials from other libraries for their users if they do not have what the users seek. Any current faculty, staff, or student may use the free interlibrary loan service. The total number of filled requests provided to other libraries from the IU Libraries increased in comparison to previous year by about 4.98 percent, while in the PSW Library the number of filled requests decreased about 73 percent (see Table 8).

Both academic libraries are fundamental indicators of what is taking place at the heart of the institution at the time. They define the depth and scope of the educational experience and the degree of learning. Both have similar mission statements. The mission statement of IU Bloomington Libraries declares, “Our mission is to support and strengthen teaching, learning, and research by providing the collections, services, and environments that lead to intellectual discovery.”¹¹ The mission statement of the PSW Library reads:

The mission of the library is to pursue, to the highest professional level, gathering, developing, sharing, and storing collections. Duties and responsibilities of the library staff include participation in the process of education, research and cultural activities, carried out at Pope John Paul II PSW in Biała Podlaska, providing readers with access to information about local and global scientific achievements, and making the bibliographic databases using modern technologies.¹²
Table 8.
Numbers of interlibrary loans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Requests provided to other libraries from the Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska (PSW) Library</th>
<th>Requests received from other libraries or providers to PSW Library</th>
<th>Requests provided to other libraries from Indiana University (IU) Bloomington Libraries</th>
<th>Requests received from other libraries or providers to IU Bloomington Libraries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013–2014*</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34,470</td>
<td>36,244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014–2015*</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36,187</td>
<td>32,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage change</td>
<td>–73%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>4.98%</td>
<td>–9.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Academic year for Pope John Paul II State School and fiscal year for Indiana University.
Personal Benefits and Impressions from Library Visits

According to Donald Sager, who wrote about the international exchange of library staff:

Foreign exchange presents a number of challenges. It is really remarkable for a person to consider leaving a comfortable spot and a secure position to travel thousands of miles to a foreign country. It takes a lot of commitment and courage. One must possess more than a little faith that a colleague in a foreign country will be able to adjust to conditions in this nation and must have equal faith regarding one’s own adjustment to the circumstances that may be experienced overseas.\(^\text{13}\)

After my first foreign internship in the library at the University of East London five years ago, I realized that such visits were extremely beneficial. There, I saw an outstandingly modern library, with many interesting architectural solutions. PSW authorities had already announced plans to build a new library, and therefore I paid attention to every detail and took notice of appealing solutions for interior design. During that visit, I also realized that my knowledge of English was not sufficient to freely communicate and gain the information necessary to librarianship. This visit inspired me to improve my command of English.

During the summer of 2016, I had the opportunity to visit the United States, and I contacted the library of Indiana University in Bloomington. Thanks to IU Bloomington librarians, I observed the work of the Department of Cataloging and visited both the Herman B Wells Library, the university’s main library, and the Lilly Library, a repository for rare books, manuscripts, and special collections. This visit enabled both sides to exchange experiences and achievements of our respective universities.

Visiting the IU Bloomington Libraries, I was particularly interested in special areas designed for group work and individual work spaces for students and staff. The PSW Library at that time was under construction, and the planners considered my observations while organizing similar places in the building. A visit to the Herman B Wells Library and the Learning Commons Group Study Rooms reinforced my conviction that such areas must be provided in the new PSW library. Such spaces have turned out to be an excellent solution; students use them all the time. Students like to work in a group study room, but scientists and scholars prefer a room for individual work. During my visit to IU Bloomington, I noticed that students liked sitting in custom chairs, comfortable sofas, and large spaces. Similar interior design solutions are now available in PSW’s new library, with comfortable seats, a relaxation area, and colors such as purple and turquoise. All this makes the new library a pleasant, modern space conducive to learning and frequent visits.

During my trip to Bloomington, I participated in a meeting of cataloging managers. The IU integrated library system and the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) were presented at the meeting. OCLC launched and leads a project titled Virtual International Authority File (VIAF), designed to combine the resources of many national library catalogs. In August 2013, Poland’s NUKAT (National Universal Central Catalog) became involved in the project. NUKAT is the largest central catalog of Poland, covering the holdings of Polish academic and research libraries. The PSW Library does not cooperate with NUKAT. That librarians in IU Bloomington knew about NUKAT inspired me to...
start talks with the management of PSW Library about possibly of joining the national catalog to provide extended opportunities for development and allow international exchange of experience in cataloging. The PSW Library also began to implement a collections policy with a focus on increasing the number of electronic documents and on purchasing access to licensed databases. In Poland, licensed databases, most of which are created by foreign companies, are expensive. The Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education supports the library and subsidizes these charges. PSW Library uses every opportunity to get access to licensed databases, even as a short trial, to allow students to use the resources of the world of science.

The PSW Library employs 10 librarians, and 5 of them participated in internships within the Erasmus program. They are motivated and want to learn and exchange experiences.

I hope that this article will inspire institutions to create interlibrary visiting programs in the United States like that sponsored by the EU. Many librarians around the world dream about visiting a library in the United States, the country that created MARC (machine-readable cataloging). MARC provides the digital formats that enable computers to read and interpret bibliographic records for items cataloged by libraries, a system that is now used worldwide. Various foundations support young students and scientists, but not librarians, who must equip themselves with a large base of knowledge from various fields to help find information for their seekers. Librarians should, as often as possible, exchange experiences and learn from one another. Internships and study visits are a good way to accomplish this.

Conclusions

A contemporary library must evolve, consider the future, offer access to books in every possible form and format, and encourage a new generation of people to develop more interest in reading. Libraries with important digital collections are becoming leading institutions, managing information and knowledge. With librarianship emerging as a global profession, librarians need to be conversant with technology and willing and able to speak in public. They must possess people skills and a commitment to lifelong learning, because the profession and the expertise necessary for success are constantly changing. Modern librarians should be not only information brokers for both print and electronic media but also educators, innovators, designers, managers, trainers, and more. The library profession stimulates international cooperation in bibliographic stan-
dardization, document supply, exchange of publications, preservation and digitalization projects, attendance at international conferences, job exchanges, and many other activities.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank for Michael Charbonneau, associate dean for technical services at the Indiana University Bloomington Libraries. Thank you for helping to provide statistical data, which were very useful in my comparison.

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Notes

2. Ibid., 19.
8. For this article, impact means the number of books per user.
