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Canadian Academic Library Support for International Faculty: Library Experience and Information Needs of Chinese Visiting Scholars at the University of Western Ontario

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Abstract

International faculty constitute a relatively small proportion of the library user community in Canadian post-secondary institutions, but they are underserved when compared to other user groups on campus, particularly international students. The author obtained first hand information about Chinese visiting scholars at the University of Western Ontario, and in this paper she presents conclusions from her experience regarding the visiting scholars' use of libraries as well as some recommendations for serving international faculty. The author suggests that academic libraries carefully consider international faculty when planning relevant services for diverse user groups. Providing necessary and satisfying library services for this group of patrons is an excellent opportunity to better serve academic communities and to demonstrate that academic libraries are an important partner in supporting their university's international initiatives.

Keywords

academic libraries; international faculty; internationalization; multicultural librarian; outreach

Introduction

The University of Western Ontario and Its Internationalization Initiatives

The University of Western Ontario (Western), located in London, Ontario, is one of the largest research-intensive public universities in Canada. Western consists of 11 faculties and schools and 3 affiliated colleges including Brescia University College, Huron University College, and King's University College. The University has approximately 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students, and over 1,300 faculty and 2,300 staff members work on campus on a full-time basis (Office of Institutional Planning and Budgeting).

In this age of globalization, Western, like many other Canadian post-secondary institutions, seeks to enhance its visibility and involvement in international activities and collaborations, and the University has developed and released its institutional strategy documents with regard to internationalization. In Engaging the Future (January, 2007) the University's Task Force on Strategic Planning states that "a part of the competitive environment facing Western is the growth of internationalization in research and in undergraduate and graduate studies" (17). Thus, the University's support for internationalization not only encourages faculty to carry out international collaborative research but also provides students with opportunities to gain international experiences which will benefit their future job seeking (17). This document highlights the following targeted countries or geographic areas: France, India, Mexico, China, the Caribbean Basin, and Africa, and two of the focuses are "initiative in the areas of collaborative research projects" and "opportunities to engage in international development activities." (17)

The Strategic Plan for Internationalization 2009-2012 describes the University's progress, directions and recommendations for internationalization. In the Strategic Plan, Western has recognized the significance of international scholars to its research and collaboration, teaching and learning, and the enhancement of its global recognition, and so the University has developed and funded a Visiting University Scholars Program to attract visiting faculty to the campus (Board of Governors 1). Faculty members are encouraged to expand their research work beyond Canada to include international involvement, and in addition to the Visiting University Scholars Program, Western welcomes and supports short- and long-term visits through other programs and means (Board of Governors 2-5).

Chinese Visiting Scholars Programs

China assigns visiting scholars overseas through a variety of programs funded at different levels: institutional, municipal, provincial, and state. Among the programs, the State-Sponsored Study Abroad Programs (SSSAP) managed by the China Scholarship Council (CSC) has been attracting significant attention from universities across the country. CSC is affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education and comprises a secretariat and a committee of 15 central government institutions, including the Ministries of Education, Finance, and Foreign Affairs (China Scholarship Council Annual Report 2010 4). The Report further states that the mandate of the CSC is to enhance collaboration and communication between China and other countries in the fields of education, science, and technology, as well as to develop bilateral understanding and relationships (4). It also mentions that CSC follows the strategic plans made by the state government in the national policy on "Scientific Outlook on Development" by sponsoring opportunities for scholars and post-graduate students to carry out research and pursue further education overseas (7).

SSSAP consists of a number of programs which are divided into three main categories: Senior Research Scholars and Visiting Scholars Programs, PhD and Joint PhD Programs, and Programs for Masters, short-term scholars, and undergraduates. The

CSC Annual Reports for 2008, 2009, and 2010 record that approximately 6000 senior and visiting scholars are recruited by SSSAP from universities across China every year (China Scholarship Council Annual Report Site). The CSC Annual Report for 2007 shows several main target regions and countries of CSC sponsored visiting scholars, including North America (US and Canada), Europe, Australia, and Japan (6).

For the Visiting Scholars Programs, the CSC assesses and evaluates the applicant's eligibility and qualifications by a range of criteria, including language proficiency (the official language in the target country), work experience, and research fields (SSSAP Selection Guideline 2011). According to the Guideline, the applicant is required to submit a formal invitation letter from his or her target overseas university. The visiting scholars in these programs are supported to participate in research or teaching activities with a faculty member at the host university for 3 to 12 months and are required to return to their home institution upon the completion of their visit.

Chinese Visiting Scholars at Western

Western regularly hosts Chinese visiting scholars, and from April to December 2011 the author became aware of twenty-eight SSSAP-sponsored Chinese visiting scholars on campus. This paper describes a library workshop offered to these international faculty and presents some key considerations that emerged from that workshop and subsequent one-on-one consultations with individual scholars. A more detailed description of this outreach to Chinese visiting scholars at Western follows the literature review.

Literature Review

While a wealth of research literature is focused on international students, a search of the library literature revealed no research articles specifically addressing the library use and perspectives of international faculty in North American academic libraries. However, the existing literature regarding international students was informative and helpful because of some degree of commonality between international faculty and international students in culture, values, policies, and education. In particular, a number of library research articles focused on international students from Asian countries, such as China or Japan (Liu and Winn 565-573; Zhang 164-176; Ishimura, Howard, and Moukdad 1-26; Mu 571-583). The author hypothesized that there would be a significant relationship between the library information behaviors of international faculty and their languages, cultures, and previous library experience in their home countries.

Language barriers often affect the library use of international users who come from non-English-speaking countries. Onwuegbuzie and Jiao conducted a study to compare native and non-native English-speaking students and found that non-native English speakers had higher levels of overall library anxiety than their counterparts (263). Several articles noted that the lack of familiarity with library jargon or terms decreases international users' effectiveness in using library services and resources and suggested delivering or developing bilingual or multilingual library instruction, tutorials, websites,

glossary, pamphlets, and other related materials with translated library terminology (Liu and Winn 565-573; Lo, et al. 2-11; Zhuo, Emanuel, and Jiao 1-13; McClure and Krishnamurthy 26-31). The ACRL-IS (Association of College and Research Libraries – Instruction Section) developed the "Multilingual Glossary of Terms" consisting of two parts, the Language Table and the Definitions Sheet, to help English as a second-language (ESL) speakers understand library terms and assist librarians who work with these patrons. The Language Table lists 85 commonly used library terms in North American academic libraries in five foreign languages: Chinese, Korean, Japanese, French, and Spanish, and the Definitions Sheet gives explicit explanations in English for each of these library terms.

Cross-cultural communication in academic libraries is a focus in two studies, both of which highlighted the fact that differences in communication styles between Asian or East Asian students and North American librarians can affect interactions. Wang and Frank found that since direct negative feedback is not valued in Asian cultures the instructor or librarian might not know from Asian students that his or her instruction is not fully understood (212). Zhang remarked on the same issue and further stated that East Asian international students may "say 'yes' to communicate disagreement" in order to keep a positive impression for both sides in communication (168). These research results remind academic librarians to be aware of culturally sensitive approaches to communication and accordingly develop an effective way to communicate with international library users to avoid possible misunderstanding.

Several studies found that previous library experience affected international students' perceptions of North American library services. Jackson's survey revealed that some library services, such as interlibrary loan, librarian reference-by-appointment, and online reference, are unknown to international students (203). Kumar and Suresh found that reference librarians' job responsibilities are unclear to many international students so they are reluctant to approach reference librarians for help (334). Mu noted that some Asian students tend to regard the library as a study hall and librarians as book keepers, and because of their previous library experience they do not know that reference service or individual consultation is part of academic librarians' regular work (573). One study found that Japanese students rarely ask librarians for help since they do not know what help can be sought from librarians, and they doubt whether their query can be understood and whether librarians have the expertise to help (Ishimura, Howard, and Moukdad 18).

This literature review yielded no study in North America with a focus on the library use and perspectives of international faculty. Therefore, this paper serves to fill this gap in the literature by reporting relevant findings from the author's work with the Chinese visiting scholars.

Outreach to Chinese Visiting Scholars at Western

By coincidence, the author met and chatted with several Chinese visiting scholars on campus, and after this initial interaction these scholars contacted the author with some

concerns and questions about using the libraries. At the time, she was the only Research and Instructional Services Librarian at Western whose first language was Chinese, and so the author was regarded by those visiting scholars as a good person to contact. The author soon realized that a library workshop would be beneficial for them and other Chinese visiting scholars, so she planned to offer a library workshop specifically for this group and received support for this idea from the visiting scholars who had contacted her.

The author was introduced to the key contact for Chinese visiting scholars, who, designated by the Education Office of the Chinese Consulate General in Toronto, was responsible for planning and organizing events for the SSSAP Visiting Scholars at Western. The contact person met with the author to discuss the plan for promoting the library workshop to the visiting scholars and also helped the author by sending the whole group an email that included an introduction to the librarian, an invitation to the workshop, and a link to a bilingual (Chinese and English) questionnaire for gathering information about their library use and expectations for the upcoming event.

The email questionnaire was short and simple with just six questions: three open-ended and three closed-ended. The survey asked the visiting scholars about their research areas, and whether they had been to Western Libraries or accessed Western Libraries' website, to discover their use of the library in person and online. It also asked what resources or databases they had used in China and were using at Western to help learn more about their preferences for information search tools. The scholars were also invited to provide their suggestions about the upcoming library workshop. The questionnaire was created as a Google Docs form that allowed anonymous feedback.

Twelve visiting scholars responded to this email questionnaire, and the results showed that the scholars were in a variety of research areas or fields, including Agricultural Economy, Data Mining, Biology, Information Science, and several Engineering disciplines. Seven respondents had never used Western Libraries or its website while five others had used the library. Most respondents (including some who used the library resources) often used free web search engines to search for scholarly information. Several respondents stated that they had searched some English versions of databases or journal sites at their home institution and continued to use these resources at Western. Regarding suggestions about the upcoming library workshop, most responses indicated that strategies and tools for conducting literature searches would be highly welcomed.

Twenty-two of the twenty-eight Chinese visiting scholars who were visiting Western in May 2011 attended the library workshop. The coverage of this workshop was comprehensive, including literature search strategies, journal citations/impact factors, information sources, reference management, and interlibrary loan. To facilitate discussion during the workshop, the participants were asked questions such as "What information do you think would be useful?" "Do you feel this is a better resource or method?" and "What sources have you used to find this type of information?" The workshop was scheduled for two hours but extended to more than three hours as

questions and discussion arose from the audience. After the workshop, the author continued to help the Chinese visiting scholars with their reference requests and offered individual consultations as needed. Through the individual consultations, the author provided specific help to individual scholars and learned more about their issues related to library use and information needs.

Issues Related to Chinese Visiting Scholars' Library Use

Based on the interactions with Chinese visiting scholars, including the pre-workshop email questionnaire, the library workshop, and individual consultations, the following four themes were identified related to Chinese visiting scholars' use of libraries at Western: language barrier, library awareness, library experience, and information needs.

Language Barrier

Generally, Chinese visiting scholars have an acceptable level of English language proficiency. As the SSSAP Foreign Language Qualification Guideline 2012 notes, all applicants for the visiting scholars programs are required to have a certain level of foreign language proficiency, and for those who target an English-speaking country, one of the following requirements has to be met: passing the Public English Test System Grade 5 (PETS-5), holding a bachelor or advanced degree with an English major, having study or work experience in an English-speaking country, or holding a certificate of English language training offered by the Ministry of Education of China. Moreover, the SSSAP Foreign Language Training webpage states that all successful candidates have support from CSC to attend pre-departure foreign language training at a designated university for a whole school semester on a full-time basis to enhance their foreign language capability.

A number of visiting scholars nevertheless indicated that they had difficulties communicating with English speakers. One exception was that one scholar's previous work experience gave her relatively high proficiency in English, so that she was confident in teaching part of an undergraduate course with a professor at Western and helping to supervise an English-speaking graduate student. All the visiting scholars had studied English as a second language in their secondary and post-secondary studies. However, as the author knows from her personal experience, English language education in China is mainly focused on reading and writing rather than speaking and listening, and many Chinese who have learned English for years can pass certain English exams but are not conversant in English. This language education mode could affect the Chinese visiting scholars' English communication skills. Some research articles had relevant findings on Chinese or East Asian international students: Liu and Winn found that English speaking and listening are two big challenges for international students from China (568), and Zhang noted that East Asian students usually feel frustrated in communicating in English because of the little experience they have speaking the language (167). Similarly, most visiting scholars preferred to stay in a pre-existing expatriate social network which consisted only of Chinese international students

and visiting scholars. Furthermore, several visiting scholars did not even speak English at work since they were working with a faculty member or fellow researchers who also spoke Chinese as their mother tongue. All of the above could affect Chinese visiting scholars' acclimation to the English language environment and further affect their necessary interactions with English speakers.

Because of their language limitations, Chinese visiting scholars in need of library help would rather ask their friends or fellow researchers than library staff. Most visiting scholars lacked confidence and sometimes felt stressed while exploring the library (both in person and online) for their needed information, and only a very few of them proactively sought help from library staff. Additionally, some visiting scholars indicated that the reason they used certain library sources for their entire literature search was that those were the sources used by all others in their research group, and they did not even consider asking a librarian for recommendations. Regarding this phenomenon, the visiting scholars said they felt it challenging to express their needs to any campus service staff, including library staff, and worried about "losing face" and whether their requests could be understood. Wang and Frank also pointed out that Asian international students are sensitive to the need for "saving face" when communicating with instructor or librarian (212).

Lack of use of academic libraries in Canada caused Chinese visiting scholars to be unfamiliar with commonly-used library terms. All of the visiting scholars had experience using academic libraries in China so they were familiar with most Chinese library terms, for example, call number, library catalogue, and course reserve. As such, the author developed a handout in English for the workshop and taught in Chinese. This instructional method was welcomed by the participants as it helped them better understand the content, and they could also expand their vocabulary of library terms. During the workshop, the participants marked Chinese meanings beside the unfamiliar library terms on the handout. Introducing general library terms in English can both help the visiting scholars use the libraries and facilitate their future communication with English-speaking library staff.

Library Awareness

Here, library awareness has two meanings: international faculty's awareness of academic libraries' resources and academic librarians' awareness of the presence and information needs of international faculty. International faculty have fewer opportunities to learn about library services and collections than international students, since international students often attend library instruction sessions, use the library space as a study hall, and utilize library sources for their assignments or projects. In contrast, international faculty generally do not have any library instruction specifically addressed to them, and most of them have laboratory or office work space.

By the same token, international faculty are easily overlooked by academic librarians, who may receive lists of newly hired regular faculty to contact, but hardly ever hear about international faculty who come as temporary researchers and normally do not

receive payroll from the university. International faculty may not be included in their department's email lists so that they may miss librarians' emails that are sent to departments about library collection updates and instruction opportunities.

It would be difficult to provide library orientation to international faculty when they start their visit. Unlike international students who generally arrive at the university at the beginning of every school term and attend classes with regular students, international faculty join the university randomly throughout the school year. For example, Chinese visiting scholars in the SSSAP programs may start their visit anytime within two years after their scholarship is approved. In addition, academic librarians may assume incorrectly that international faculty possess the same level of library research skills as do regular faculty on campus. However, the author found that the Chinese visiting scholars who did not have previous work or study experience in a North American institution were not able to make full use of Canadian academic libraries. The Chinese visiting scholars experienced a number of frustrations in accessing and using information that is available at Western Libraries for their teaching and research needs, and they generally had library anxiety, as Onwuegbuzie and Jiao concluded from their research on international students (263). In this regard, international faculty is a similar user group to international students, and the library should assist them in smoothly transitioning into a possibly totally different library system from that of their home institution.

Library Experience

Previous library experience of international faculty varies widely since they come from different universities or institutions. Chinese visiting scholars in SSSAP are recruited from over 100 universities across China ranging from large to small, comprehensive to non-comprehensive, and state- to municipally-funded. In general, a large-sized comprehensive university is equipped with an advanced library system and enriched library collections that are purchased or subscribed to from vendors in China and overseas. Most visiting scholars from such universities were familiar with online library resources and had experience searching the English version of some resources, such as ISI Web of Knowledge, Compendex, and EBSCO databases. Their experience with these resources helped them locate and use the same or similar library resources at Western. However, visiting scholars from some small- to medium-sized universities had less experience with library online resources because they are unavailable at their home institutions, so these users tended to use free web search engines as their one-stop literature search tools. As such, these visiting scholars needed assistance to learn about library resources, especially subject-specific ones.

None of the Chinese visiting scholars had used library reference services at either their home institutions or Western. As found in the literature on international students, the Chinese visiting scholars were also unfamiliar with library reference services and did not know that reference librarians are responsible for answering patrons' library research questions. From their perspective, librarians deal with collections rather than help library users. Several workshop participants indicated that their home institution's libraries

occasionally offered training opportunities for faculty but they had never attended any library training, as they did not perceive that librarians' instruction would be helpful in their academic work. The author described a reference librarian's responsibilities and explained that she would like to be the visiting scholars' direct contact for library help at Western. In addition, the author showed the visiting scholars the webpage with contact information for all Research and Instructional Services Librarians at Western and told them to find their subject librarian for in-depth research help as needed. By attending the author's library workshop, the participants became aware of the value of library instruction for their research and teaching. In particular, many of them expressed interest in exploring their home institution's library resources, services, and training opportunities when they returned to China.

All the workshop participants knew about or had used many library services at their home university, including renewal, recall, and interlibrary loan. The author learned that interlibrary loan (ILL) is not a new concept for them, but the service differs markedly from its North American cousin. Typically only faculty and research staff can request research materials via ILL (though students in some large-sized universities are allowed to use this service). This may partly explain why some international students do not know about ILL services, as reported by Jackson (203). ILL is a fee-based library service in most Chinese post-secondary institutions, as mentioned by Liu and Winn in their research on Chinese international students (569), though some universities offer faculty members with Associate Professor rank or above financial support for requesting a certain number of ILL items.

Information Needs

Most Chinese visiting scholars were interested in learning about literature search strategies. Many visiting scholars' home institution had subscriptions to some scholarly databases from North America and/or Europe, but they had trouble locating relevant sources for their research topics. In part, this was because of differences in constructing effective literature search strategies between English-based and Chinese-based search engines. In English-based databases, users are expected to construct search terms considering variant spellings, truncation of terms, as well as singular and plural forms, because English is a letter-based language. Although finding synonyms and similar terms also applies to Chinese-based databases, there is no need to construct search terms in the ways mentioned above since Chinese is a character-based language. It was helpful to introduce how language differences affect literature searching in databases. In addition, during the library workshop participants were interested in the thesaurus feature available in some databases (e.g., Engineering Village) for finding relevant search terms.

Just like Canadian faculty members, Chinese visiting scholars needed information about journal impact factor and citations to articles. According to the workshop participants, an important indicator for Chinese post-secondary institutions in evaluating faculty members for tenure or promotion is the number of research articles published in core journals. Generally, Chinese universities' criteria for determining a core journal include

the journal's impact factor and whether it is indexed in Science Citation Index or Engineering Index (for engineering disciplines). From the workshop, they learned about citation databases, tracking features (e.g., citation alerts), and journal rankings and impact factors. Many participants said that this part of the workshop was informative and helpful.

All the workshop participants were glad to learn how to use citation management software, although only one scholar knew about this kind of tool beforehand. Because Western has an institutional license, RefWorks was introduced in the workshop. Some participants wondered whether they could continue to use RefWorks with their individual account registered at Western when they left Canada and wanted to know how to convert the bibliographic records from RefWorks to another reference management system. They wanted to see more citation styles from Asian journals for use in the reference management system and were glad to know that they could recommend their needed citation styles to RefWorks. After the library workshop, several participants learned that their institution had a subscription to a citation management system, such as Endnote, RefWorks, or NoteExpress.

Through the consultations with individual Chinese visiting scholars, the author became aware that most of them lacked awareness of copyright laws and licensing restrictions while using library collections. Several scholars inquired about how to easily and quickly download electronic books from the Library Catalogue and said that the downloads would be not only for their own use but also for their colleagues or students in their home institution. Judging by their comments, they were unaware of the restrictions on sharing copyrighted materials with other people; rather, they felt they would be doing others a favor by helping them find research materials. These examples reflect the need to increase international faculty's awareness and understanding about copyright laws and library collections' licensing restrictions in order to prevent breaches of copyright or licensing agreements.

Recommendations

Outreach Approaches

Outreach to international visiting scholars is difficult because of the nature of their roles in the university; however, building a relationship is a necessary step in order to provide relevant services to them. Librarians can proactively identify an appropriate outreach opportunity by working with individual permanent international faculty since they may have connections with visiting faculty from the same country or region. In addition, the author's experience suggests that an innovative way to contact a specific group of international faculty is through their key contact person. To reach out to the whole group of international faculty, academic libraries need to partner with other campus resource departments and individual academic departments to make library services and programs visible to these users. For example, Western Libraries may explore a collaborative opportunity with the Teaching Support Centre, which provides a variety of programs for faculty and students, to integrate a library introduction into a relevant

program for international faculty or scholars. In addition, the libraries can design a pamphlet to briefly introduce library collections and services (including librarians' job responsibilities, contact information, languages spoken) and ask departments to distribute the pamphlet to international faculty when they arrive. These approaches will help deliver a welcoming message to international faculty from the library, increase their awareness of library resources, and encourage them to use the library and contact their subject librarian when needed.

Reference Help

Librarians should keep in mind that international faculty from non-English-speaking countries often experience frustrations when using North American academic libraries. Reference librarians need to be patient when providing reference help to international faculty and to be aware that they are generally more proficient in English writing and reading than speaking and listening. In addition, many may have difficulty understanding library terminology. When a librarian encounters a situation in which an international faculty member is having trouble making his or her query understandable verbally, a suggestion is to ask the patron to write down relevant words or sentences, as proposed by Kumar and Suresh for helping international students (334). To help international faculty who speak Chinese, Korean, Japanese, French, or Spanish, librarians can take advantage of the "Multilingual Glossary of Terms" created by ACRL-IS. When a language barrier affects communication between librarians and international faculty, the patron can be referred to a library colleague who understands the patron's first language, if available. Furthermore, reference librarians should be aware that different cultures have different communication styles and try to reduce misunderstanding and confusion when providing assistance to international faculty.

Copyright and Open Access Information

International faculty come from a variety of countries which have different copyright laws or policies. In their countries people may have different social values and perspectives with regard to intellectual property. Even for Canadian faculty it is a challenge to stay current with copyright laws for proper use of information sources. While the author was unaware of the need to cover information about Canadian copyright laws and restrictions on use of library collections in the library workshop, she delivered this information to some of the Chinese visiting scholars during in-person consultations as the need became apparent. A suggestion for any library instruction for international faculty is to highlight these regulations to raise awareness about how to use copyrighted and licensed information properly.

In addition, since their stay at the host university is temporary, it is appropriate for librarians to include relevant open access information sources and library collections when offering training or research help to international faculty. This can allow them to continue to use some scholarly sources when returning to their home institution without being affected by the host institution's collection licensing and subscriptions. For example, the author mentioned Western Libraries' digital repository,

Scholarship@Western, when introducing information resources for theses and dissertations. A number of open access resources exist and can be introduced to international faculty if relevant, such as open access reference management applications, journal sites, and educational resources. Given the diversity of international faculty members, librarians need to investigate what information will be needed when planning relevant instruction or offering research help.

Conclusion

Academic librarians should be aware of international visiting faculty in their user community and of the need to make this user group aware of library resources and services. International visiting faculty are easily overlooked by academic librarians because of their short visiting period and the fact that they are hard to track on campus. International faculty, like international students, often encounter difficulties and challenges using Canadian academic libraries if they do not have previous experience with North American academic institutions. Finally, more research should be conducted to fill the gap in the library literature about these international users.

Acknowledgements

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