Zach's News

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Georgia Southern University, Zach S. Henderson Library

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A delegation of academic librarians sponsored by the People-to-People Ambassadors Program visited Russia in November 2007. They met with counterparts in the Russian Library Association and three different universities in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Bede Mitchell, Dean of the Library and President of LAMA, has provided this TravelLog.

Follow Dean Mitchell's travels:

RUSSIA — November 11, 2007. Our delegation of 19 academic librarian delegates and guests arrived in Moscow on the afternoon of Saturday, November 10. I slept very little on the plane trips, so the Saturday evening briefing is a blur. Yesterday was devoted to sightseeing, including Red Square and the Tretyakov Art Gallery. We met Ann Symons, former ALA president, for lunch. She works in Moscow as a school librarian at the school for embassy employees and other Americans. A government employee, she enjoys diplomatic immunity and the most generous library budget she has ever had.

Our first professional visit is this morning at the Moscow State University of Culture and Arts. I will try to send a longer message later, with details of the meeting. Right now, there is a queue for this, the only high speed internet computer in the hotel that does not cost you $10 an hour.

MOSCOW — November 12, 2007. It is 11:30 pm here in Moscow and we just returned to the hotel from a performance of Tchaikovsky’s opera “Eugene Onegin” at the Bolshoi.

Today was our delegation’s first meeting arranged by the People to People Ambassador Program. We visited the Moscow State University of Culture and Arts. This institution was founded in 1930 as a school for training librarians. The founding director, H.K. Derman, was born in Latvia and obtained her library degree at Simmons College in Massachusetts. She worked in the Harvard library system as well as at the Library of Congress before returning to Russia and designing the curriculum at what was then the Moscow Library Institute. The institution went through several names over the years to reflect the addition of many new programs. Today the university continues to be one of the leading producers of school and academic librarians while offering 37 specialties, or majors. There are more than 11,000 students from all regions of Russia as well as 35 countries.

Our delegation of 14 academic librarians met with almost 20 library faculty members and personnel from the university’s library. They were particularly keen to know more about how we educate librarians. Unlike our model, the Russians do not expect future librarians to complete a bachelor’s degree before beginning the study of librarianship at the master’s level. Instead, students are given a broad general education followed by a specialization in library studies, rather like an undergraduate major. The program is quite rigorous and appears to emphasize theory to an even greater degree than American library schools.

The majority of our conversation focused on information technology. One of our delegates, Chandrika Shantaram, library director of Baker College in Grand Blanc, Michigan, gave a presentation on electronic library resources, especially designed for serving distance education students. Our Russian counterparts proved to be very sophisticated with regard to electronic library resources and services, such as those offered by Baker, Georgia Southern, and many other American colleges and universities, but limited funding prevents such technologies from being widespread in Russia. One story shared with us involved a librarian at a small school in one of the most remote areas of Siberia. A graduate of the Moscow State University of Culture and Arts’ library program, he also has a degree in English. His small community recently installed a satellite dish, and he e-mailed his former professors that he can now bring to his students the full range of both Russian and English Internet resources.

The conversation was congenial and informative, but it takes some time to get used to going through a translator. Ours did an outstanding job, but being so good she made it easy for speakers to go on greater length than is reasonable before pausing to allow her to translate. The entire visit lasted about 3 hours, but that included a tour of their classrooms, library, and museum, and a gracious greeting by the University Rector. We exchanged several gifts, and their library is now the proud owner (this is not meant ironically) of a copy of Georgia Southern University’s centennial history, “The Southern Century: 1906-2006.”

One the many high points was our arrival: as we entered their building and shook off the fresh sleet, we were greeted by three young ladies in traditional folk dress who were singing a traditional song of greeting and carrying brown bread and vodka. Honoring the tradition, one of our delegates tore off a piece of bread to eat while our delegation leader, Camila Alire (dean emerita of the University of New Mexico), knocked back a shot of vodka at
9 in the morning. Everywhere we went we were followed by students in their photography program who were documenting our visit for their web site. Made us feel like real celebrities.

On Tuesday we will visit the Russian State University for Humanities Library, and will then depart for St. Petersburg. I hope to send another update upon arrival in St. Petersburg.

**ST. PETERSBURG — November 13, 2007.** It is 10:33 pm on November 13, and we have arrived at our hotel in St. Petersburg. We were 3 hours late arriving because a snowstorm slowed traffic in and out of the Moscow airport. The runway had to be cleared, the wings had to be de-iced, and we sat in the plane all that time after boarding on time. However, the airline, Rossiya, brought us food and coffee, tea, juice, soft drinks, etc. We had a sandwich, candy bar, and peach yogurt. I don’t know whether that snack was intended for our one hour flight, but it helped tremendously to have it served while we waited.

Earlier we spent a marvelous morning at the Russian State University for Humanities Library. The university is the result of a 1991 merger and reorganization of the Moscow Public University, founded in 1908, and the Moscow State Institute for History and Archives, which was established in 1930 as a center for preparing archivists and gradually expanded into archaeology and paleontology. Upon merging with the MPU, which had the mission of offering higher education to those not well off economically, the Institute for History and Archives achieved university status focusing on the humanities. The library has a rich collection of rare books and primary sources, manuscripts, etc. relating to Russia’s history and cultural life. The library employs about 100 people, who provide the expected range of services to students and faculty as well as perform extensive book preservation, repair, and restoration for libraries all over the country.

The university is housed in a grand 6 story building featuring columns and porticos befitting a lofty institution of higher learning. There was a marked contrast with the spartan facility University of Culture and Arts that we visited yesterday. The latter building was functional, but felt rather like a 1950s American public school. The University for the Humanities Library features a grand reading room with a high ceiling and walls decorated with scenes from antiquity. We entered through a security gate similar to those found in most American libraries but which is unusual in Russia since most collections are kept in closed stacks. While this is also true of the Humanities Library, we found substantially more books on open shelves than is typical in Russia. The library is also notable for featuring a large number of sculptural replicas on loan from the Pushkin Museum of Fine Art, which owns the original sculptures. The replicas are spread over four floors of the building and feature art from ancient civilizations in Greece, Rome, Egypt, and other regions. The replicas are said to be almost identical to the originals, which I found easy to believe.

We met with 9 of their librarians and discussed intellectual property and copyright, digitizing historical collections, and assessment techniques for library collections and services. Russian copyright law is in greater flux than American, although since Russia adopted the World Intellectual Property Organization’s principles in the mid-1990s their practices have been more in accordance with the rest of the world. However, works published prior to Russia’s signing of the WIPO principles are often still treated as part of the public domain. Much energy is going into digitization projects, but progress is slow because a lot of the work is outsourced and project funding is scarce. Russian library assessment focuses almost exclusively on collection size, depth, and quality, to the exclusion of service quality. Our counterparts were intrigued with our description of the LibQUAL assessment commonly used in Anglo-American academic libraries.

We were interested to learn that there are no reciprocal lending agreements between the many Moscow colleges and universities, even though the practice is common in other cities. Also, interlibrary loan is declining, partly because electronic information transfer is easier, but also because Russian libraries have not reached full agreement about which library, the lender or borrower, is responsible for a book at various stages of the transaction.

Once again the visit was warm and cordial. Our hosts clearly enjoyed showing us their facilities and collections, and we could have spent many more hours asking questions and sharing ideas. Tomorrow is for resting and sightseeing, with our next library visit scheduled for Thursday morning at St. Petersburg State University.

**ST. PETERSBURG — November 15, 2007.** We just finished touring the incredible St. Isaac’s Cathedral, and we have two hours to rest before leaving at 6:30 for a performance of Tchaikovsky’s ballet Swan Lake. This morning we visited the Scientific Library of St. Petersburg State University. The Scientific Library is one of Russia’s major research libraries, yet it still occupies only a fraction of the Twelve Collegiums, the university’s main building and one of the largest I have ever seen. I did not get the dimensions, but it seems to go on forever.

The Scientific Library is, according to their information guide, “the scientific-methodological (regional) center for the university academic libraries of the Northwest region of Russia (70 libraries). It consults, holds seminars and conferences and organizes apprenticeship for the library managers and staff on different issues of library practice.
The Scientific Library of St. Petersburg University carries out the work on forming and using information resources for university community within the frame of national and international programs and projects.” Toward that end, the Library invests much time and energy in digitizing many of its rare books and manuscripts.

The library was first established when Empress Catherine the Great purchased more than 1000 volumes from the library of “an educated official,” P.F. Zhukov. By 1823 the library held 2,150 titles in 7,748 volumes, thanks primarily to further private gifts from patrons and scientists. From that point on the Russian government made more consistent and concerted efforts to purchase books for the institution, and the library began to grow more rapidly. After the institution adopted a new university charter in 1861 serious efforts were also made to build the manuscript collections. Today the library contains 6.7 million units, including more than 1000 manuscripts in various European languages, and 55 thousand manuscripts in Oriental languages and xylographs.

We met with the library’s director as well as the electronic resources librarian and the special collections librarian. There are 335 librarians and staff members spread among the central library and 22 branches serving various academic departments. We were shown excellent examples of decorated books they had digitized, and they also shared one of the 3 million images they have made of both sides of their card catalog cards. (INSIDE JOKE ALERT: This would make Nicholas Baker happy.)

As a research library, the Scientific Library subscribes to a great many electronic resources, most of which are familiar to us, such as JSTOR, Scopus, and EBSCO. They like the EBSCO feature that translates entries, but they tend to use the German or Spanish because the Russian version does not come out well. Their electronic resources licenses are negotiated for them by the Russian Consortia (not the exact name, my notes are faulty here), which consists of 400 libraries.

Our discussions also extended to many other aspects of electronic resource management. Given that so many of their resources are kept in closed stacks, the typical European and Russian model, students and faculty are very pleased with how much more quickly they can find journal articles in JSTOR or other e-resource than having to wait for a volume to be retrieved physically.

Despite their large building, of which only a section is library space, the Scientific Library is faced with major book and periodical storage problems. The librarians were very impressed and enthusiastic about my presentation regarding Georgia Southern University’s automated retrieval system (ARS). They asked many questions about how much less expensive it is to store books in the ARS compared to other storage options, and how many more items can be stored per square foot as well. I was able to show them a video of the ARS made by Steve Hooley in our library systems department, which illustrated how convenient it is to have the books brought to you in containers rather then your having to retrieve them yourself. Finally, the librarians seemed especially pleased to receive copies of slides showing various ARS images and facts, complete with my presentation notes translated into Russian and displayed in the Cyrillic (sp?) characters. I am very grateful to Professor Grigory Dmitriyev of Georgia Southern’s College of Education for helping with the translations.

We concluded our visit with a lengthy conversation about the graying of the library profession in both America and Russia. We were told it is very difficult to attract young people to the profession since the salaries are so low. According to the director, the average librarian salary is so low that most of her librarians still live with their parents! However, as librarians become increasingly involved with information technology and are perceived as prestigious “information managers,” the director hopes more young people will become interested in studying librarianship.

A very impressive library and trio of librarians. It’s too bad we did not meet more of their staff. Tomorrow we will meet with officials of the Russian Library Association. Meanwhile, I think I hear the swans gathering... Bede

ST. PETERSBURG — November 17, 2007. Yesterday was our final professional meeting on our Russian trip. We went to St. Petersburg State Polytechnical Institute, a school of about 25,000 students that is particularly known for its physics and engineering programs. This is where we met with the executive secretary of the Russian Library Association and some of the association officers. We were formally greeted by the deputy president of the polytechnic institute. He warmly praised the dedication of the institute’s librarians and told us how much of the annual budget is devoted to the library. By my rough calculation, the library receives about 300,000 dollars annually for collections. This is one of the larger academic libraries in the country. We asked whether in this new era of the Russian economy universities are actively pursuing private giving. Apparently it is illegal for state institutions to establish foundations, and there are no incentives for private gifts (such as tax breaks). So private gifts are not common and they truly reflect a generous impulse.

The Russian Library Association was formed in 1994 as regional associations and unions, which had been banned under Stalin, sprang up after perestroika and banded together for national clout. RLA members are associations and institutions, not individuals because librarians are paid too poorly to support professional
membership dues. There are 130 members, including all central federated libraries and major university libraries. The RLA holds annual conferences and provides many professional development programs that are typically hosted by individual libraries and universities, somewhat similar to the way LAMA does its regional institutes. The annual RLA conference is competed for by cities, rather like the way cities compete to host the Olympics. It is expected that a city will substantially increase its investment in local libraries during the 3 years leading up to when it hosts the conference and becomes “the Library Capital of Russia” for the year. There are usually about 1500 attendees at the conference, and there would probably be many more if travel was not so expensive. However, the host city is expected to provide free rooms and exhibit halls, which helps mitigate the costs.

I will send another message later about the rest of this meeting. Right now – lunch! Bede

ST. PETERSBURG — November 17, 2007. The next part of our meeting with the Russian Library Association officers was a presentation by the chair of the academic division. She explained that because Russian academic libraries tend to be better funded than their public library counterparts, the academic institutions tend to be more involved in developing new services and learning resources using technology. She then gave a lengthy overview of the activities at her library at South Urals State University, an institution that enrolls more than 60,000 students! They have almost 3 million print titles and 40 electronic databases, including such familiar titles as ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost, the Journals of the American Institute of Physics, NDLTD, PubMed, and ArXiv.org. Obviously they carefully cull the best of the free Internet resources as well as subscribe to pricey products such as ScienceDirect. While most of what the SUSU director described in the way of their services and projects would be familiar to most academic librarians, nevertheless there is no doubt SUSU library would be considered an advanced and progressive institution in the U.S. Our Russian colleagues were quick to point out that SUSU is one of a handful of institutions leading the way, and there are many more academies that are struggling to catch up. President Putin has proposed in general terms that the country move more aggressively to develop its libraries, but it is too early to know what specific initiatives may result.

Our conversation then turned to institutional repositories, which are evolving rapidly in Russia. One advantage the Russian institutions have in building their repositories is that the intellectual output of their faculty and students is understood to be the property of the academy, so there are no copyright or intellectual property rights that must be cleared before archiving and posting works to the repositories.

The last major topic in what was a long and far ranging professional meeting focused on a major Russian initiative, the work of the Association of Regional Library Consortia, consisting of 87 academic libraries, 78 public libraries, 9 Academy of Science libraries, and 4 special libraries. Together they are creating a vast national electronic library network that can be found at www.arbicon.ru. So far there are 40,000,000 bibliographical records searchable through the network, with 500,000 full text documents.

These brief messages capture only a small part of the rich and informative exchanges we had with our Russian colleagues. They were gracious and enthusiastic hosts who were very curious (and well informed) about American academic libraries, and who were eager to share their experiences with us. I was struck by many similarities, such as the predominance of the baby boomer generation and the difficulty of recruiting young people to the profession. Russian librarians are also usually female. They spend a lot of their energy reaching out to faculty and students, trying to promote the value and utility of their resources. I hope we in LAMA might develop some collaborative leadership training with our RLA counterparts, and I strongly encourage anyone who has the opportunity to participate in a People to People Ambassadors international visit.
New Electronic Journals

January 31, 2008

We are pleased to let you know that Henderson Library has now added 389 electronic journals to our collection. Included are 12 titles in Project Muse, 18 titles from Duke University Press (plus current subscriptions to 11 additional titles for which we already had online back issues), 177 titles from Cambridge University Press, and 182 titles from Oxford University Press. These, along with all of our e-journals, are now available via our Electronic Journals A-Z list, where you can search by journal title, publisher, or ISSN, or browse by subject.

You can access our e-journals and databases from anywhere with your GALILEO password (only needed when off-campus). We’re in the process of putting this new information in the library catalog as well. We had previously subscribed to some of these journals in print. For those which have been changed from print to electronic format, we have placed a sign in each journal’s former location in the Current Periodicals shelving area on the 3rd floor of the Library.

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