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Serving International Students at IUPUI University Library

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IUPUI ScholarWorks

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By Bronwen K. Maxson

Yoo Young Lee and I recently presented a poster at the Indiana Library Federation (ILF) conference in Indianapolis. This article is a summary of our work that we illustrated on that poster.

In the summer of 2015, three librarians and two library staff members formed an International Students Working Group at IUPUI University Library. All of us have international experience and want to serve our students. Our goal is to improve the experiences of international students at the library. Throughout the following year and a half, we have formed connections across campus to facilitate professional development opportunities, participate in campus events, and create some of our own initiatives. We did not accomplish all of our goals, but we are still planning to continue our efforts.
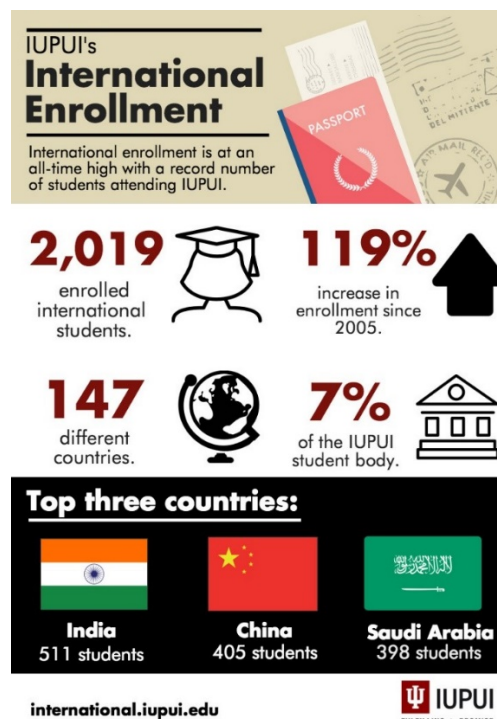
Bronwen Maxson is the English and Spanish Subject Librarian who created the group. The idea came from interactions with international students, especially during her first classroom experiences in fall 2014 during Bridge. May Jafari, Engineering & Technology Subject Librarian, and Yoo Young Lee, Digital User Experience Librarian met to discuss how we might meet the needs of our students. We were soon joined by Alicia Añino and Marc Huber from the library's administrative office. Between us, we speak five other languages including Farsi/Persian, French, Korean, Spanish, and German; four of us had been international students at one time; and all have lived abroad. Some of us have researched topics related to international students and libraries, but our real-world lived experience was invaluable to our ability to collaborate and communicate.

In 2014, the Institutional Research and Decision Support office on campus did a Climate Survey in which questions about citizenship were asked. The survey found that "approximately 13% of international faculty/staff and 15% of international students report experiencing bias/harassment/discrimination based on their citizenship status – compared to only 1% of native U.S. citizens for both groups."[1] In fall 2015, enrollment of international students hit an all-time high with 2,019 students[2] (later revised downward to 1,993). These numbers are an increase of 118.6% since 2005. Students hail from 147 different countries and make up 7% of the student body. The top three countries where students came from were India, Saudi Arabia, and China. In fall 2016, international student enrollment increased to 2,030. The top three

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[1] http://irds.iupui.edu/Surveys/Campus-Climate-for-Diversity
[2] "IUPUI international enrollment hites record level" Press Release. 14 Sep. 2015. http://news.iupui.edu/releases/2015/09/iupui-international-enrollment.shtml

countries stayed the same with India's enrollment increasing by 17%. Mexico, South Korea, and Iran were the next top countries, followed by Malaysia, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Canada[3].

Fall 2015 numbers

In September 2015, Chancellor Paydar spoke of the campus priorities and how international students contribute: "Our growing international student population at IUPUI reflects the increasingly global nature of our campus and strengthens our educational and research programs by reinforcing and adding to a worldwide network of talent," [he] said. "This not only enhances the dynamic and diverse nature of our campus, but it also helps our students develop as global citizens, both of which are strategic priorities for IUPUI."[4]
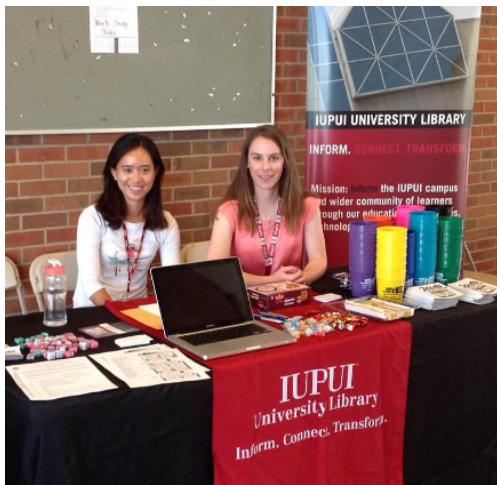
The working group formed around three goals: 1. Provide better customized library services for international students, especially for those who had different library service models in their home country; 2. Improve their library experience by being proactive rather than reactive; and 3. Facilitate training for librarians and staff in how to better serve international students.

To meet the first goal, we worked with the Office of International Affairs (OIA) to attend the International Student Orientation Services Fair in the fall and the International Festival in the

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[3] iStart: Online Services for International Students, Scholars & Staff. "International Students Fast Facts: Indianapolis" https://istart.iu.edu/dashboard/studentOverview.cfm. Accessed 28 Nov. 2016.

[4] "IUPUI international enrollment hites record level" Press Release. 14 Sep. 2015. http://news.iupui.edu/releases/2015/09/iupui-international-enrollment.shtml

Spring. We hosted a table and talked to international students about ways the library supports their learning. We also displayed and demonstrated library resources with content from various countries. At the spring International festival, we advertised an upcoming Speed Friending event, inspired by Laurie Bridges at Oregon State University. Two of our working group librarians are members of a campus Community of Practice for Intercultural Learning. We partnered with them, the OIA, and the Office for Intergroup Dialogue and Civil Community to host this event. We had 20 students attend and all of our survey responses were positive. We also launched a glossary of terms on our website, written with international students in mind, which received 487 page views between June 20 and October 26, 2016.
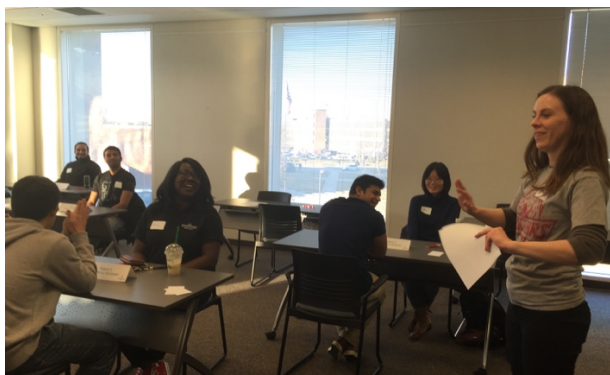

Two librarians at 2015 Fall Orientation Services Fair.

Three librarians at the spring 2015 International Festival.

Additionally, we drafted three workshops for students. The first is an introduction to an academic library in the U.S., the second discusses challenges to freedom of speech, copyright and censorship issues in the library, and the final one about scholarly communication for graduate students who may be working towards the goal of publishing research. We have not yet scheduled these workshops because of librarian schedules and challenges in marketing the workshops to the students. We hope to leverage our relationships with other organizations on campus to overcome the challenges.

Speed Friending Event

The second goal is important to us because we are trying to proactively create an environment where all students feel welcome. The 2014 Climate Survey revealed that "[m]ultiple respondents speak of disparaging comments made to them due to their accent as well as a perceived lack of intelligent or exclusion from others due to English being a second language." We believe the library should be a space where everyone is welcomed, included, and their intelligence is valued. The library profession upholds equitable access to information, and we feel with international students this requires a proactive approach. Incidentally, the library experienced a challenge in the recent past with a specific group of international students. While other units in the library worked to find a solution, we made ourselves available to interface with the students. We hope that our efforts in the future, through our workshops and other activities, will prevent situations where students feel unwelcome in our space. Additionally, we attempted some surveys to try to understand what international students use the library for. However, we found that surveying was difficult to do at an event like the International Festival. Also, the UL Campus Outreach Group (COG) gathers feedback each year of this nature, but from the whole student body, so in some ways we found we were duplicating efforts. Our surveys didn't result in enough responses to be representative, but we found international students give very similar feedback to the people who participate in the COG data gathering effort.

To accomplish the third goal, we worked with the library's administration and Diversity Group to provide development workshops for our staff. We partnered with the OIA and the Multicultural Center (MC) to bring in speakers to UL for all employees. Working group members also attending professional development events outside of our organization. The staff and teaching librarian training sessions covered topics of diversity and inclusion, language challenges, and culturally responsive teaching. Campus events included RISE Day, Gateway to Graduation, and the Plater Institute. Also, in early August 2016, two working group members attended the Purdue University research symposium about information literacy and international students.

With a year and a half of experience, we have devised the next steps. We will continue to build our relationships with OIA and other campus units; continue to participate in campus events on global learning, employ better assessment tools especially with our workshops, and look toward publishing further when we have better data.