
Volume 7
Number 1
International Librarianship, Part 2 (Spring 2001)

July 2014

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Faye Powell
Portland State University

Recommended Citation

Powell, F. (2014). A World of Information: The Intercultural Communication Institute Library. *OLA Quarterly*, 7(1), 7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1566>

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OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

A World of Information: The Intercultural Communication Institute Library

by *Faye Powell*

Social Sciences Librarian

Millar Library, Portland State University

Nestled among shady trees in a small, quiet West Slope business complex in southwest Portland is the Intercultural Communication Institute (ICI), a private nonprofit foundation founded by an endowment from international businessman, S. D. Bennett. Janet and Milton Bennett, former Peace Corp volunteers, well-known theorists, authors, and trainers in the field of intercultural communication are the Institute's directors. The multicultural, multiethnic faculty represents various academic disciplines, business, and intercultural training organizations throughout the United States and is dedicated to the mission of the Institute: "to foster an awareness and appreciation of cultural difference in both the international and domestic arenas." (ICI Mission Statement)

Originally located at Stanford University, the Institute moved to Portland in the mid-1980s. For over twenty years it has sponsored the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication which provides professional development and training for persons working in multicultural environments. In addition, the ICI offers an Intercultural Certificate Program and a Master of Arts degree in Intercultural Relations through an affiliation with Antioch University. Located on the Pacific University campus, the Summer Institute includes single-focus workshops in both foundational intercultural topics and cutting edge issues over a three-day or week-long intensive, interactive forum

Of particular interest to librarians, the Institute has an extensive, one-of-a-kind library. In August, 2000, Kris Kern, Portland State University Preservation Librarian, and I received a tour of the Institute by Kathryn Stillings, Executive Assistant, who was filling in for the librarian, Sandra Garrison, on leave at the time. The reception area, located on the second floor, provides a warm welcome, enhanced by the friendly staff, colorful Latin American wall hangings, ethnic figurines, a nursery-size collection of African Violets and other greenery, and a bowl of Hershey kisses.

The library is located on the first floor of the two-story building in a well-lit area with comfortable furnishings and audio-video playback equipment. The library contains 15,000 to 20,000 books, training manuals, theses, manuscripts, and files of articles and other publications as well as a small collection of training videotapes. Most of the books are shelved in the large main room along with rows of file cabinets, but other parts of the collection, including the culture-specific collection and some donated scholarly research files, have spilled over into several adjacent "annexes." The Institute receives research materials and publications from retiring faculty members. Librarians can readily relate to the myriad issues and problems involved with categorizing and housing such a diverse collection.

Much of the collection is derived from personal donations of the directors, faculty, staff and others. In addition, the Institute purchases books and subscribes to journals in its field. An important source of training materials on many countries, including every country in Africa, has been the Peace Corps.

The library's classification system and record formats have also evolved over time which, according to Stillings, are not as suitable as they once were when the collection was smaller. For example, books are classified under 78 broad headings such as Adaptation/Adjustment, Culture Shock/Reentry, Gender, Intercultural Theory, Living Abroad, Perception, Semantics, and Values (Cultural) as well as by country and geographic region. The file collection is similarly arranged under 111 categories. At this time the library has a book catalog only.

Catalog records have their own unique format as well, with location codes that are not readily apparent to the untrained user. Books are arranged on shelves by broad headings and are color-coded. Like many specialized collections that have started small, it has now outgrown its original catalog and classification systems that do not provide the in-depth access now needed. The staff's first step to upgrade their system is planned for Fall, 2000, with the conversion of all of the book records to MARC format.

The ICI Library is an excellent resource for teachers and trainers in the area of intercultural communication as well as for business people and others who plan to travel or work abroad. The public is welcome to use the library in-house (except during the months of July and August when the Summer Institute is in session) by contacting Sandra Garrison, ICI Librarian, or Kathryn Stillings, ICI Executive Assistant, by phone at 503-297-4622 or by email at ici@intercultural.org. The Institute is located at 8835 SW Canyon Lane, Suite 238, Portland, OR 97225. ☐