



**Going Global: Facilitating global research and education at GMU Libraries**

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**Disappearing disciplinary borders in the social science library - global studies or sea change?**

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Across the United States, colleges and universities are feeling the pressures of globalization and responding with innovative ways to “internationalize” the curriculum and better educate students with an understanding of the global economy and environment. These developments have manifested in a variety of ways at a number of different institutions. In some cases, this meant expanding and enhancing existing curricular offerings to incorporate a more global knowledge base, while in other instances it resulted in the development of new programs and services in order to better meet the needs of international students and researchers. Additionally, however, some institutions are using globalization as an opportunity to re-envision the configuration of university departmental units, to remap the relationships between different academic divisions, and to cross the borders of traditional university structures as well as disciplines.

Academic libraries as partners in the university’s teaching and learning activities must also play a key role in the development of these global initiatives. Academic libraries in particular are uniquely situated at the intersection of scholarship within their respective institutions. Furthermore, they have a long tradition of selecting and managing research resources across a variety of different departments and disciplines. Lastly, libraries often have personnel who are responsible for outreach to specific departments in the university that rarely communicate with one another. This centralizing role, which is both organizational and informational in nature, serves as a real strength to universities which are seeking to effectively integrate both their services and global scholarship throughout the institution.

In this regard, libraries have an opportunity to contribute a more holistic perspective to globalization initiatives than most traditional academic units on their respective campuses. However, while libraries are used to responding to the establishment of new programs, the overarching nature of many university-wide globalization efforts go beyond the addition of new courses, students and faculty. When these initiatives are fully realized they may also involve the restructuring of academic departments, curriculum and curricula as well as new programming on the part of university student affairs divisions.

In addition to conducting an assessment of library collections and services, libraries seeking to be proactive in this environment will also require an understanding of the concepts of globalization and internationalization with regard to their implementation in the university setting.

### **Globalization and Internationalization in Higher Education**

While trends toward the globalization of higher education are relatively understood, the terminology used to discuss and describe its related activities and initiatives is not entirely agreed upon. According to the encyclopedia "Higher Education in the United States", "Internationalization' is a term that applied loosely in a higher education context, describes a trend of institutions, faculty and students developing an

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increasingly sophisticated understanding of and salient relationships with their counterparts worldwide”(p. 359). Sometimes referred to as *globalization*, this idea encompasses a variety of efforts on the part of universities to increase the capacity of their students to perform in a global environment.

Institutions seeking to internationalize and globalize their campuses often employ a variety of methods including encouraging international exchanges of students and faculty, prioritizing the establishment of international partnerships and research, and emphasizing a need to further infuse global awareness into the academic curriculum. This topic is not new to higher education, and many have urged that such developments are crucial in order to prepare students to succeed as we enter an increasingly globalized society. “Educating Americans for a World in Flux,” a report issued by the American Council on Education in 1995, is particularly notable for its call to arms which highlighted a need for American universities to work to increase understanding of global systems, revamp curricula to reflect the need for international understanding, examine the organizational needs of international education, and develop cooperative opportunities with institutions in other countries.

In an article entitled “Internationalization of higher education: motivations and realities,” authors Philip Altbach and Jane Knight address the distinctions between *globalization* and *internationalization*, defining *globalization* as the “economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education toward greater international involvement,” and *internationalization*, in the context of higher education, as including “the policies and

procedures undertaken by academic systems and institutions-and even individuals-to cope with the global academic environment”(p.290). Their article reviews a variety of motivations for international initiatives in university settings and highlights the significance of competition and strategic advantage in the higher education arena.

Author Nelly Stromquist echoes some of these ideas in an article entitled “Internationalization as a response to globalization,” which reviews the distinctions between *internationalism* and *internationalization*. Stromquist posits that while *internationalism* focuses on global issues, learning and fostering a sense of place in the global community, *internationalization* “refers to greater international presence by the dominant economic and political powers, usually guided by principles of marketing and competition” (p.82), which is indicative of a more entrepreneurial and capital driven approach to these initiatives. In “the Global Campus,” author Beth Mc Murtrie highlights the role of business and political leaders in “pressuring colleges to prepare globally competent students” and suggests that a “growing number [of universities] are hiring senior administrators to oversee many international ventures, including research, service, and teaching” (p. A37).

In summary, these articles reveal a situation in which universities are working to take advantage of and develop opportunities that simultaneously recognize the educational, social, and economic benefits behind international and globalization efforts.

### **Globalization/Internationalization Support in Academic Libraries**

Recognizing the rising interest in global studies, an increasingly international curriculum, and the growing diversity of student bodies, academic libraries have responded in kind, with services far exceeding traditional inter-library loan or providing off-campus access to online library resources.

In 2001 the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign identified the need to internationalize both library collections and services and thus established a task force to develop an international strategy for the university library. The task force examined already existing internationally-aimed library activities, including a strong emphasis on collecting materials from non-English-speaking parts of the world, a decentralized area studies libraries structure, and unique libraries services such as the Slavic Reference Service and their Mortenson Center visiting librarians program (Wei, Sullivan, Rudasill, & Ford, 2006). But even with the library's push towards internationalizing collections and services, the task force acknowledged the need to further expand these efforts. To this end, the library has investigated the possibilities of collaboration with universities in other countries, notably with the University of Toronto to facilitate sharing expertise and best practices (Wei et al., 2006).

Facing similar difficulties with aligning the collections and services of separate area libraries in the face of interdisciplinary subject matter, the Penn State University Libraries' Global Studies Group was formed in 1999 to strengthen the ties between the individual libraries. The group consists of librarians from a variety of subject areas,

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including Anthropology, Business, Education, Geography, History, International Relations, Music, and Women's Studies as well as collection specialists in area studies such as African Studies, Asian Studies, Latin American Studies, and Middle Eastern Studies. The group is charged with reviewing international purchasing plans and expanding access to international electronic resources ("About Global Studies," 2007).

### **Global Research and Education at George Mason University**

As an entrepreneurial leader in higher education since 1972, George Mason University's history is marked by rapid expansion and innovative planning. Mason currently offers 64 undergraduate and 94 graduate degrees while serving a total of 30,000 students between its three campus locations in the metropolitan Washington DC area and recently opened a fourth campus in Ras-Al-Khaimah (RAK), located in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Mason also boasts one of the most diverse student bodies in the nation according to the Princeton Review ("Mason Visitors Center--Mason Facts and Figures").

The university recognizes that its students are living and working in an increasingly global society, and thus an emphasis on global education has long been a priority at Mason. A wide-range of academic programs fostering global understanding has been the end result, from undergraduate degrees in global affairs to doctoral programs in climate dynamics. In February 2008 Provost Peter N. Sterns announced Mason's Spire of Excellence in Global Research and Education initiative in order to further establish Mason as a leader in global scholarship. The Global Research and Education

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committee, headed by the Provost, features faculty appointments from several interdisciplinary academic units, including the School of Public Policy, the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, the Department of Public and International Affairs, the School of Management, and the College of Education and Human Development. The committee will be responsible for furthering global studies initiatives at the university.

Mason currently has a strong academic roster of programs and institutes focusing on international and interdisciplinary research. Several relevant degree programs exist, including an undergraduate Global Affairs degree through the College of Humanities and Social Sciences; undergraduate and graduate degrees, as well as professional certificates, from the Institute of Conflict Analysis and Resolution; and masters and doctoral degrees through the School of Public Policy. Global interests are well represented in each of these programs, whether the emphasis lays in public policy or economics or international relations.

The increasingly diverse nature of academics at Mason has manifested itself in the creation and growth of interdisciplinary research units, many of which utilize the divergent teaching strengths and research interests of faculty members from across the curriculum. The Center for Global Studies boasts over 100 faculty members from a full range of academic areas; such a diverse roster enables CGS to collaborate with a variety of universities, think tanks, and research centers in its active education outreach programs. Similarly, the School of Public Policy supports a variety of research centers, including the Center for Global Policy, the International Center for Applied Studies in

Information Technology, and the Office of International Medical Policy. Other successful research ventures include the Center for International Education, which has focused on international teaching and language training programs.

The Provost's Global Research and Education committee is thus charged with a variety of tasks which will strengthen Mason's global orientation even further and will benefit students through increased exposure to international scholarship. Under the guidance of the committee, the Provost intends to hire several new faculty members in the area of global studies, establish a new Master's program in Global Affairs, launch a professional executive global affairs program, and continue to establish and support research institutes.

### **Traditional Library Services with "Global" Implications:**

Within the George Mason University Libraries there are already a number of services and skill sets at work that support the University's global related efforts. The Libraries are well known and respected for their digital initiatives, most of which are readily accessible to members of the Mason community on campus and from locations around the world. Even physical materials like books have been taken abroad by students studying in other countries for the semester.

The services listed below are among those offered by the GMU Libraries that serve the dual purpose of reaching a wider, perhaps international audience, as well as supporting the university's distance education and study abroad programs.

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### **Virtual Reference Services**

George Mason University Librarians serve as subject specialist liaisons to different departments and often receive email reference questions sent directly to them or directed through an online question submission form. Additionally telephone numbers to all reference desks and liaison librarians are readily available to the Mason community. Additionally, GMU Libraries' currently offer Instant Messaging (IM) Reference assistance via a Meebo widget linked from the library homepage. This service is open to all researchers wherever they reside, and the service operates during set hours with shifts rotate among librarians.

### **Web-Based Research Guides and Instructional Materials**

Librarians at Mason have developed a number of pathfinders and instructional tools for students and researchers that are available online. Infoguides is a grouping of subject specific web guides that provide links to research resources and other library materials online in a user friendly format. The library also maintains a WebCT course entitled "Library Research Basics Online" which allows students to login and follow along with a self-paced study of library related research methods.

### **Off-Campus Access to Databases and Electronic Journals**

GMU Libraries provides access to over 500 databases to students, faculty, and staff.

Aside from licensed databases the libraries also link to free credible web resources for

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researchers. Since the resources on the database pages include licensed and open access items an icon system was implemented to give visual cues to researchers demarking what is open versus restricted.

### **eBook Collection**

At present the libraries utilize two eBook packages. NetLibrary provides the largest portion of our eBook collection with titles classified as reference and general collection. The other supplier, Oxford Reference Online, is comprised of various reference eBooks.

**Mason Archival Repository Service (MARS)** exists to be a stable, well-managed, permanent archive for digital scholarly and research materials of enduring value produced by Mason faculty, staff, and students. MARS is also the platform for some of the University Libraries' noteworthy digital collections and archives. Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs), for those students who chose to participate, are also stored in MARS.

### **Collections and Document Delivery Services**

Librarians at GMU collect resources in multiple formats and languages, from a variety of different sources both domestic and international. Librarians from the university have traveled to book fairs in other countries in order to acquire representative materials. Additionally, GMU Libraries provides extensive document delivery services through an intercampus lending system which moves materials between the university's four primary campuses, a consortium loan service which transfers material among a network

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of nine universities, and an InterLibrary Loan (ILL) system which provides access to materials in both domestic and international collections. Furthermore, the University has partnerships with both the Library of Congress and the Center for Research Libraries, which provide access to in-depth collection of international and foreign language materials to members of the Mason Community. Some of these services include the electronic delivery of articles in addition to physical media.

Collectively these services illustrate some of the tools in place at Mason that work to support the research of domestic and international students and faculty. GMU Libraries, however, must continue to raise awareness of their contributions to and support for the University's global initiatives. Furthermore, the University's effort toward establishing global research and education as a priority for the institution warrants a more structured solution from the Libraries. One approach for accomplishing this was the development of a dedicated web based information portal for accessing a variety of resources related to international research and study at the university.

### **Global Research and Education Library Portal**

In response to the growing emphasis on global research and education at Mason, and taking a cue from the aforementioned initiatives within libraries at other universities, Mason librarians acknowledged the need to enhance our web-based presence and services in order to better collocate and consolidate resources to support the Provost's new Global Research and Education spire of excellence. The establishment of a library

research portal for Global Research and Education will be one of the key developments in this process.

In 2007, the university librarian at Mason called for the development of research portals as a means of better connecting the libraries electronic capabilities with the work and needs of the universities graduate research programs. These portals would allow for new ways to tailor services and to organize a subset of the libraries electronic resources in support of specific academic units on campus. The development of the global education and research portal, then, stemmed from a combination of interests within the Libraries and the Office of the Provost's work to bring together the universities' resources in support of international related research and teaching.

The portal design team consisted of three librarians with specializations in global affairs, public policy, and international relations and a representative from the Libraries' Digital Programs and Systems office. Among the first tasks was the creation of a resource classification scheme for global research that encompassing international subjects with a focus on international affairs, education, and economics—all areas which are prioritized among the Mason community. Following that step, the team then began to identify resources, databases and websites that would be included in the portal.

Additionally, the project team researched different campus programs in order to identify likely beneficiaries of the portal. Work on the portal is ongoing, but will include meetings with some of the constituent groups mentioned earlier in the paper to further customize the contents and utility to their specific needs. A few more technical aspects, like

whether to include live chat/instant messaging functionality or the best ways to utilize RSS feeds are currently under discussion.

### **Reflections and Conclusions:**

Academic libraries that are seeking to better align themselves with the goals and initiatives of their universities must take a proactive stance in the development of tools and services that benefit these interests. To this end, through the establishment of the Global Research and Education portal the George Mason University Libraries have taken a significant step by attempting to anticipate and address the growing need for resources to support the University's new direction for global education. Along the way we have learned a great deal about the needs of this emerging area of practice. For instance, through some of our initial discussions we learned that while most of the involved units were supportive of the provost's efforts toward globalizing the campus, some were not in full agreement with his methods and approaches to doing so. Furthermore, during the development of the project we also learned that some faculty members had concerns about the ability of the library to support the University's international efforts, which perhaps indicated a need for the Libraries to better publicize some of its own efforts.

Another question that arose during the project was in regards to the long-terms support for the research portal. Would the initial team of librarians continue to support the development and maintenance of the portal, or would a more effective approach be to

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assign those duties to one designated librarian? Most recently, Library administration announced the creation of a new librarian position with assigned responsibilities for global studies, which in addition to further showcasing the Libraries support for the university's international initiatives, also presented a potential solution to that concern.

Lastly, the group also considered a variety of next steps that could be taken in order for the library to better support the university's increasingly global dimension. The recent acquisition and implementation of OCLC's Collection Analysis tool may represent yet another avenue in which the University Libraries can play a greater role in facilitating global research and education at George Mason University, by assessing the Libraries' capacity to fully support the global work of the university from the standpoint of its physical collections.

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