

**THE NEXT GENERATION OF PROFESSIONAL LIBRARIANS –  
JOB SEARCH IN THE PERSIAN GULF AND WITH  
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*We examine international career opportunities for new library professionals who are entering the workforce during a time of economic decline. Through a survey of websites and job listings, a review of current literature, and discussion with librarians working in the field, the paper targets two attractive global career possibilities: library jobs with academic institutions in the Persian Gulf and jobs with international organizations. English language library job opportunities in Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Dubai are outlined and brief summaries about each location are provided. Opportunities with the United Nations and UNESCO are described and the application processes for each organization are explained. Both sections offer information about the highlights and potential drawbacks of these opportunities. We conclude that by working in an international setting, new librarians will regenerate the profession through cultural and professional exchange and gain experience that will remain valuable throughout their careers.*

**THE JOB SEARCH FOR NEW LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS**

The current economic climate forces librarians to postpone retirement, and widespread hiring freezes make it necessary for new professionals to consider all career options. As library students, we learn about the triumvirate of school libraries, public libraries, and academic libraries. Special libraries, archives, and art librarianship are also addressed, but the number of job opportunities is rapidly shrinking. Given that library students today are globally aware, some expand the scope of their job search internationally. Employment abroad is both personally rewarding and an important component in regenerating the library profession. In the interest of sharing potential opportunities that have come to our attention, this paper outlines two international library career options experiencing growth despite general economic decline: working in the Persian Gulf and working with international organizations. Both of these possibilities offer new librarians unique but transferable skills that can be shared with colleagues in one's home country.

## A LIBRARY JOB SEARCH IN THE PERSIAN GULF

### *An emerging academic hub*

Just forty years ago the rolling deserts of the Persian Gulf were sparsely populated. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), formerly six separate states, gained independence in 1971 after the discovery of oil and natural gas jumpstarted the economy.<sup>1</sup> That same year, Qatar also gained independence and benefited from the discovery of these natural resources.<sup>2</sup> Over the last four decades, the economy in the Persian Gulf has grown rapidly.

In the last ten years, a concerted effort has been made to diversify the economy in the Gulf Region. Officials hope to provide young people with access to high quality education so they will be prepared to fill positions in government and industry. They also hope to draw international students to the Gulf area. The demand for education continues to attract internationally accredited academic institutions from around the world. Although a six-year oil boom leveled out during the second half of 2008, English language academics continue to develop in Doha, Qatar, and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).<sup>3</sup>

In the Arab world, traditional centers of study such as Beirut, Baghdad, and Cairo have been disrupted by political instability and war.<sup>4</sup> Qatar and UAE enjoy relative political stability and, for the time being, a significant amount of oil wealth. These factors make it possible and important to invest in higher education. As more internationally accredited universities open in the Gulf, English language academic librarian positions will follow.

### *Employment for English language academic librarians in the Gulf*

The majority of universities in the Gulf operate in English, so there are an increasing number of job openings for English language librarians. Library jobs in the Gulf are similar to those anywhere in the world, but the benefits are enticing. Depending on the university, salaries are comparable to that of a professional librarian in the United States, but they are not taxable in the Gulf. Employees are offered an annual travel stipend to return to their home country, free private schooling for children, and a furniture allowance. At one university, employees agree to a three-year contract and upon completion they are offered a three month's salary bonU.S., a flight home, and a relocation allowance. Though benefits vary from institution to institution, these benefits are not uncommon.<sup>5</sup>

For some Westerners, a move to the Persian Gulf sounds drastic. "Even though UAE is a very moderate country, it still has many strong ties to Muslim values and there are strict rules and consequences for not following them."<sup>5</sup> The same is true for Qatar. In some areas it is illegal to live out of wedlock with a partner. There are also very strict regulations regarding drugs and alcohol, so it is important to be aware of the laws and to be prepared to respect them. In addition to the cultural differences, some librarians may also be concerned about the attention this region

has received for human rights violations.<sup>6</sup> There is an increasing consciousness of this issue and projects in Qatar and Abu Dhabi have begun to address the violations.<sup>7, 3</sup> Contributing to this region's focus on education has the potential help improve the standard of human rights.

Foreigners also imagine a place where only men can be hired for jobs, intellectual freedom is limited, and life, in general, is "mind-numbingly boring." This is not the case. Women are hired for academic positions and intellectual curiosity is encouraged.<sup>7</sup> Numerous job postings indicate that learning Arabic is encouraged and acquisition of the native language would only enhance discovery and the chance to make local acquaintances. Generous vacation time also allows for ample opportunity to travel throughout the region and to take advantage of the Gulf's central location. Flights to Asia, Europe and Africa are feasible, reasonably priced, and much shorter than they would be from the U.S.

More importantly, a move to the Persian Gulf gives new professionals a chance for adventure and innovation. In the case of the Abu Dhabi's Masdar Institute of Science, still under construction but to be opened in fall 2009, the dean stated that the selection of students "is not an easy thing...They are not coming to an established lab, established libraries and dormitories. So we want mature people who understand the challenges and also understand the opportunities."<sup>7</sup> These are precisely the opportunities that new professionals must seize in order to have the chance to implement new practices. In well-established institutions, positions tend to be clearly outlined and room for innovation may be impeded by existing protocols. One American librarian in Abu Dhabi said "the best part of my job is the amount of freedom I am given here. If there is something new that I want to try here, my boss is more than willing to let me do it. There are a lot of things I have learned here, probably a lot more than I would have learned staying in the United States."<sup>5</sup>

### ***The education system***

There are two types of universities in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar: public universities funded by the government and international universities from around the world. Due to the multitude of international companies in the Gulf region, there is a high demand for graduates from internationally recognized academic institutions in the local workforce. Rather than going through the complicated accreditation process starting with non-accredited institutions, many international universities including those from the United States are "filling the gap" by opening outposts in the Persian Gulf.<sup>5</sup>

In UAE, about one-third of Emirati students attend international universities.<sup>8</sup> Tuition in public universities is free for citizens of UAE. Though the official language is Arabic, public and private universities operate in English. Besides American universities, there are also institutions from India, Europe, and elsewhere in Asia. Though they often run independently, these academic institutions

are housed in complexes with a unifying name. In Dubai there is International Academic City and Knowledge Village, in Abu Dhabi there is University City and in Doha, Qatar the complex is named Education City. Their central location between Asia, Africa, and Europe draws students from around the world. Many of these international universities receive financial incentives from the government and frequently, construction of the buildings is financed by the government. In many cases, the government offers a sum of money to pay for start-up fees.

### ***The application process***

From application to employment, the process can take anywhere from three to six months.<sup>5</sup> Many library job sites list a variety of openings in the Persian Gulf (<http://www.lisjobs.com/>, <http://www.libjobs.com/>, <http://www.higheredjobs.com/>). For a jobseeker without extensive knowledge of the Gulf region, sifting through job ads can be difficult. The next section presents the general structure of higher education in three of the major academic hubs: Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, and Doha, Qatar. Each section lists universities that are currently open and universities that will be opening in the next few years. Generalizations about each location are based on an interview with an American librarian in the Gulf region and the authors' observations from research.

### ***Education City: Doha, Qatar***

Operated by the Qatar Foundation, the aim of Education City is to "develop people's abilities through investments in human capital, innovative technology, state of the art facilities and partnerships with elite organizations, thus raising the competency of people and the quality of life."<sup>9</sup> Education City is home to seven foreign universities including The Virginia Commonwealth University, Weill Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M University, Carnegie Mellon University, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, Northwestern University, and one national program, the Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies. Each program has its own library. A central library that will serve all of the universities and the Qatar community is projected to open in 2010.<sup>10</sup>

While Qatar is a fairly traditional country, classes at Education City are mixed gender.<sup>4</sup> The picturesque campus was designed by the world renowned Japanese architect, Arata Isozaki.<sup>11</sup> One American working in the UAE says that life in Qatar moves at a slower pace than in Dubai or Abu Dhabi.<sup>5</sup> Northwestern University's website offers a wealth of information on working in Qatar at <http://www.qatar.northwestern.edu/employment/Default.aspx>. The "Guide to Northwestern Life in Qatar" offers practical advice about settling into the area.<sup>12</sup>

***University City: Abu Dhabi***

Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, sits on one-tenth of the world's oil reserves.<sup>13</sup> Though it has taken Abu Dhabi somewhat longer to introduce foreign institutions, it appears that it will quickly entice prestigious universities. New York University recently signed an agreement to open a liberal arts campus (projected for 2010) after they were offered fifty million dollars in addition to construction and operational fees.<sup>4</sup> Other universities that will join University City include the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, opening in fall 2009. A number of universities have already opened, including Johns Hopkins University and France's Sorbonne University.<sup>4</sup>

Abu Dhabi is quieter than Dubai. With a population of about 900,000,<sup>14</sup> traffic is not as intense.<sup>5</sup> With projects in the works to build a branch of the Guggenheim and the Louvre art museums, it appears that Abu Dhabi will continue to expand as a cultural center.<sup>4</sup>

***International Academic City: Dubai***

The academic environment has also been growing in Dubai. Knowledge Village, a one kilometer campus centrally located within Dubai, was an earlier effort to "develop the region's talent pool and accelerate its move to the knowledge economy."<sup>15</sup> Knowledge Village proved to be a mix of educational institutions of varying caliber.<sup>4</sup> International Academic City is a new complex with nearly twenty-five national and international universities and it is operated in conjunction with Knowledge Village.<sup>16</sup> The University of Michigan is one of the newer additions that officials hope will inspire other prestigious universities to follow its lead.<sup>17</sup> Rochester Institute of Technology recently opened a graduate program and will take undergraduate students by 2010.<sup>17</sup>

George Mason University's Dubai campus plans collapsed in February 2009 when their partner in Dubai, a private educational investor, withdrew some funding. Additionally, George Mason struggled to get enough students of the same caliber as their students in the United States, which would compensate their accreditation. While this has caused for alarm amongst other universities, it is important to note that partnerships with the Emirati and Qatari governments have been successful thus far as they are motivated to diversify their workforces and are not "gambling."<sup>18</sup>

While it is difficult to determine what will become of Dubai, it is clear that the world-wide economic crisis is taking a toll on Las Vegas-like city known for its indoor ski slope and luxury hotels. Because of Dubai's early economic focus on tourism, rather than education, it has taken a hard hit. Whether or not other American Universities in Dubai will continue to operate remains to be seen. As of March 2009, the University of Michigan remains optimistic, claiming that they selected programs that have a competitive edge in Dubai. Additionally, they plan to take another year to start paying back loans that they accrued to open the campus.<sup>18</sup>

## A LIBRARY JOB SEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

### *International organizations*

International organizations are typically divided into two categories: inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Although international organizations have been in existence since the 1800s, the terms “inter-governmental organization” and “non-governmental organization” were not popularized until 1945 with the foundation of the United Nations. Today there are more than 44,000 international organizations in existence.<sup>19</sup> “The growth of non-governmental organizations has been almost exponential as the growth of the Internet and has sometimes been seen as part of the process of globalization.”<sup>20 (p2)</sup> Although some argue that IGOs and INGOs can be imperialist and exempt from international law, there is now such a large variety that it is increasingly difficult to categorize these organizations. Inter-governmental organizations are characterized by the Yearbook of International Organizations as “based on a formal instrument of agreement between the governments of nation states;” “they include three or more nation states as parties to the agreement;” and “they possess a permanent secretariat to perform ongoing tasks.” The website [www.ngo.org](http://www.ngo.org) defines NGOs and their common attributes as follows: “A non-governmental organization (NGO) is any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on a local, national or international level. NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bringing citizen concerns to Governments, advocating and monitoring policies and encouraging political participation through provision of information. Their relationship with offices and agencies of the United Nations system differs depending on their goals, their venue and the mandate of a particular institution.”<sup>21</sup>

### *The role of librarians in international organizations*

The appeal of working for an international organization involves several factors. Someone seeking a job with an international organization should be prepared to enter an entrenched bureaucratic framework. Still, some library professionals may be attracted to the structure and historical legacy that these organizations represent. Then, there is the romantic ideal of living and working abroad and being involved in something greater than oneself. There is the desire to expand one’s horizons beyond the stereotypical “Ugly American” from William J. Lederer’s 1958 novel. There are also concrete advantages to employment with organizations that offer opportunities for growth abroad and at home. It is common to complete a stint abroad and then move into a new position in one’s home country within the organization, whereas, with an organization like the Peace Corps, returnees have to start a new career. Even after leaving an international organization, the skills gained are transferable and help expand one’s resume. The salary and benefits in

these organizations are often generous and include perks such as relocation costs, language training, and extended annual leave and opportunity for regional travel.

The proliferation of international organizations has created a flood of information that needs to be collected, catalogued, disseminated, and archived. This information includes financial reports, briefing papers, case studies and programming suggestions and they can be organized by topic, country, or by the issuing organization. One example of growing awareness for the importance of this information is The University of Colorado at Boulder's collection of archival materials on human rights NGOs from the 1990's that was later bought by Columbia University because "These materials were identified as vitally important documents to help understand the human rights movement."<sup>20 (p5)</sup> Library jobs with international organizations will continue to offer librarians a vital role working on new projects. Many IGOs and NGOs are subsidiary organizations of the United Nations, so the United Nations is a logical starting point to explore careers for librarians with a professional interest in international relations.

### ***United Nations national competitive recruitment process***

To view employment opportunities for Libraries and Information Management, apply for vacancies, and to create and update a personal history profile, interested applicants can go to <http://jobs.un.org>. However, with these positions preference is given to internal applicants and those who have already taken the national competitive recruitment exam. Therefore, new professionals with less than five years experience should begin with the application process for the "P2" professional positions at the United Nations, which involve a series of filters beginning with the age and nationality requirements, followed by the application process, then competitive examinations, and finally ending with an interview. The United Nations does not hire for library positions every year, so prior to the application process, applicants should check the website to make sure the Library Occupational Group is listed at <https://jobs.un.org>, or for entry-level positions recruiting for the examination at <http://www.un.org/Depts/OHRM/examin/welcome.htm>. Librarian titles are not yet listed for the 2009 exam, but there are positions open in the related Information Technology field. An entry-level library position is described as follows on the Employment Opportunities with the United Nations information brochure:

Services include management of an archival collection of United Nations documents and publications in print and electronic formats, production of databases and reference service to a wide range of clients. The information produced and provided by library staff is used by delegates, Permanent Missions, United Nations staff members, as well as by specialized researchers, while enabling all librarians in the United Nations system to function as a user-oriented network. The UN libraries also support the world-wide network of depository libraries, which assist in disseminating United Nations information.<sup>22 (p3)</sup>

The expected date for an examination will also be listed and applicants must be younger than thirty-two years of age on the 31 December during the year of the exam. There will also be a list of participating countries for the National Competitive Recruitment Examination and applicants must have citizenship in one of the inadequately represented member states in order to apply. There are currently forty-three countries listed including<sup>23</sup> the United States which is often on the list of inadequately represented countries. Applicants must be fluent in either English or French and it is advantageous for a prospective employee to speak any of the other official languages of the United Nations which are Arabic, Chinese, Russian, or Spanish. If a potential applicant is not yet thirty-two, their country is listed, and they speak either English or French then they are eligible to complete the online application. One additional point of interest is that "...the General Assembly has set out clear directives aimed at promoting the appointment of women as one of the objectives of the recruitment policy, with a view to achieving a more equitable balance of men and women in the Secretariat...In order to attain the latter goal, equally qualified women will be given preference in recruitment."<sup>22 (p7)</sup>

### ***The application and examination***

The six-page P-11- Personal History application can be found online at <http://www.un.org/Depts/OHRM/examin/download.htm>. The areas covered include language knowledge, educational background, employment, references, country of origin, and all relevant coursework.<sup>24</sup> The application is due in October of each year, though early submission is encouraged. Once submitted, each applicant will receive an application number. If admitted to the written examination, they will be notified and their application number will be posted online by the end of December. The written examination is divided into two sections, one forty-five minute general paper to test drafting skills, followed by a three hour and forty-five minute hand written paper which tests the knowledge of the applicant's specialization. A librarian who took the exam in 2006 described the process on his blog, Marcus' World, and suggested that applicants "think about the role of libraries in large global organizations; think about how electronic access is changing libraries; and, finally, consider your general philosophy of librarianship."<sup>25</sup> There are also sample exams for review posted on the website prior to the exam. The exam takes place in February each year at a number of UN sites throughout the world. Candidates successful in the written examination will be invited to an interview. Finally, candidates successful in the interview will be placed on a reserve list of qualified candidates and they may be called to serve at the Dag Hammarskjöld library of the UN headquarters in<sup>26</sup> New York or at another duty station in Africa, Asia, Europe, or Latin America.

### ***Salary and benefits***

Although the application process is extensive and highly competitive, the United Nations is looking for lifelong employees and once hired, there seems to be little incentive to leave. The annual starting salary is between U.S.\$43,662 and U.S.\$55,924; there is a post adjustment; and there is an annual dependency benefit of U.S.\$1,780 for each eligible child. Other dependency benefits include annual education and travel grants for each eligible child for employees who are assigned to a duty station outside of their home country. For employees outside of their home country, home leave travel expenses are covered every two years and employees may receive an assignment and later repatriation grant, removal of household effects, and rental subsidies up to 40 percent. For all UN staff members regardless of station, there is a pension fund, medical and dental benefits and thirty days of annual leave.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Subsidiary UN opportunities***

The United Nations is the umbrella organization for many other divisions including the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), among others. On the NCRE application form (P-11) there is a question that asks “Other agencies of the United Nations system may be interested in our applicants. Do you have any objection to your personal history form being made available to them?”<sup>24(p4)</sup> However, the NCRE application is not necessarily the gateway to all UN agency jobs and many agencies have their own application process.

### ***UNESCO Young Professional Programme***

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was founded in 1945 and now contains 726 field offices around the world. Its function is described on the website “...as a laboratory of ideas and a standard-setter to forge universal agreements on emerging ethical issues. The Organization also serves as a clearinghouse – for the dissemination and sharing of information and knowledge – while helping Member States to build their human and institutional capacities in diverse fields.”<sup>28</sup> The Young Professional Programme is a fixed term contract of one year upon appointment at the UNESCO Paris headquarters. The first nine months is a probationary period followed by renewable fixed-term contracts of two years if the evaluation is satisfactory. Following the program, Young Professionals are required to work in a field office after two to three years with the organization. The base salary and benefits are the same as those for entry-level positions throughout the United Nations system.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Application process***

UNESCO has application restrictions similar to the United Nations. Applicants for the Young Professional Programme must be under thirty years of age before December of the year they are applying their country must be on the list of under-represented countries and they must speak either English or French, with additional knowledge of Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, and/or Russian as an asset. This program is a highly competitive process with only ten applicants selected each year, from all over the world. If the basic qualifications are met young professionals are encouraged to request the application from the National Commission for UNESCO in their home country during the recruitment period (usually between March and April). Once the have applications are submitted, twelve applications from each country will be selected and passed on to the Bureau of Human Resources Management of UNESCO. Then a committee will evaluate the applications based on “professional and international experience as well as their language skills and other relevant knowledge and abilities.” The short list of applicants will be interviewed and will undergo language exams to test their knowledge of English and French. The selected ten applicants will receive a letter of appointment soon after the interview process and they will receive training to enhance their professional development and prepare them for service.<sup>30</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

In today’s uncertain economic climate, it is clear that new professionals must consider different approaches to the job market. Embarking upon a professional life in an international setting will open new opportunities and provide future librarians with a broader worldview. The experiences that they gain in these positions – whether they choose to work for an intergovernmental organization for life or complete a three year contract in Abu Dhabi – will prove to be rewarding and will promote cultural understanding.

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