

# INTERNATIONAL LEADS



INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS  
ROUND TABLE

VOL. 39, NO. 4  
DECEMBER 2025  
ISSN 0892-4546

- 1 Destruction of Cultural Institutions and Centers in Gaza 2023: A Documented and Statistical Study
- 4 ALA IRRT Pre-Conference
- 5 Editorial
- 6 Message from the IRRT Chair
- 7 Message from the IRRT Chair-Elect
- 8 Supporting Multilingual Communities: UCM ELL Fellows & Loida Garcia-Febo Conversation
- 10 World Library Leader Spotlight: Lynn Chua
- 14 Where Do I Shelve Honey and Onions?
- 16 From National Roots to Global Reach: Celebrating 27 years in the ALA International Relations Office
- 19 IRRT Mission Enhancement Grant Call for Proposals Deadline
- 20 A Stellar Librarian: Dr. Dorothy Gwendolyn Williams Collings
- 23 NCL Strengthens Global Partnerships through "The World Symphony of Reading Enjoyment" at the Taiwan Reading Festival
- 24 Applications Sought for the Breaking Barriers Award
- 24 Breaking Barriers: Engaging Emerging LIS Leaders from Low- and Middle-Income Countries
- 24 Call for Applications: 2026 International Librarians Networking Program



## Destruction of Cultural Institutions and Centers in Gaza 2023: A Documented and Statistical Study

Anan Hamad

Gaza has always lived between fragility and brilliance—between the weight of siege and the determination to create, read, archive, and remember. But after October 7, 2023, the Strip witnessed not only the destruction of its buildings, streets, and neighborhoods, but also a deeper kind of loss: the collapse of the cultural world that has long sustained its people.

From libraries and museums to archaeological sites and community cultural centers, Gaza's cultural soul was struck at its core. What disappeared under the rubble was not only stone—it was memory, creativity, and centuries of history.

### A LIVING CULTURAL PULSE

Before the war, Gaza's cultural landscape was astonishingly alive. The Strip, despite its blockade, hosted dozens of libraries, active cultural centers, and vibrant artistic hubs. The Gaza Municipal Library—bright, modern, and multilingual—welcomed students, researchers, and curious readers every day. The Diana Tamari Sabagh Library buzzed with workshops, book discussions, and community events.

Academic life, too, thrived. Al-Azhar University and the Islamic University housed large collections that supported generations of students.

Culture in Gaza was not an accessory; it was a lifeline—a space where imagination survived even when everything else felt confined.

## WHEN WAR TARGETS MEMORY

The months that followed the 2023 war brought an unprecedented wave of devastation. UNESCO recorded over 110 damaged cultural sites; local authorities counted 207 destroyed or severely affected heritage locations. Museums, libraries, archives, and community centers—spaces that preserved identity—fell one after another.

And behind every shattered building stood the silence of voices no longer with us: 44 cultural workers, among them artists, photographers, writers, and performers.

## LIBRARIES LOST TO FIRE AND RUBBLE

The destruction of Gaza's Central Municipal Archive signaled a heartbreaking blow—150 years of documents vanished in moments. Rare manuscripts stored in the Great Omari Mosque's library were buried under centuries-old stones.

The Islamic University's central library, home to nearly 240,000 academic works, was reduced to ruins.

Altogether, the Strip lost more than 350,000 books and much of its archival history.

## MUSEUMS AND ARCHAEOLOGY: VANISHING ERAS

Gaza's museums, each a guardian of heritage, suffered devastating losses. The Rafah Museum and Qarara Museum were completely destroyed. The Pasha Palace Museum—an emblem of Ottoman-era history—sustained severe damage. Entire archaeological sites, such as the ancient port of Anthedon, were wiped off the map.

The Old City's cultural heart was also crushed. These were not simply structures; they were the visual vocabulary of Gaza's history.

## A HERITAGE IN PERIL

UNESCO's decision in July 2024 to place the ruins of the Saint Hilarion Monastery on the "World Heritage List" and the "List of Heritage in Danger" underscored the urgency of protection. The loss of cultural spaces was matched by the loss of those who animated them—artists who illustrated Gaza's memories, comedians who brought laughter, and craftswomen who preserved traditions through their hands.



## BEYOND NUMBERS: THE CULTURAL HEARTBEAT THAT SURVIVES

By early 2025, nearly all of Gaza's museums were gone, three-quarters of its libraries destroyed, and two-thirds of its archaeological sites damaged. Yet, even in displacement, Gazans continued to salvage manuscripts, digitize documents, and record oral histories.

Culture in Gaza has always been an act of resistance—an assertion that identity persists even when buildings fall.

### CONCLUSION

The destruction of Gaza's cultural institutions in 2023 is not merely a statistic; it is a story of memory under attack. Libraries, museums, archives, and archaeological sites hold more than objects—they hold identity, continuity, and belonging. Their loss is immeasurable.

And yet, the cultural spirit of Gaza endures in its people—in their stories, their art, and their determination to rebuild what was meant to be erased.





## The American Library Association's International Relations Round Table Pre-conference

# One Mission, Many Voices: Libraries Collaborating for Inclusion



Learn more  
about

- ✓ How libraries collaborate across borders and sectors to advance inclusion
- ✓ Programs that address barriers such as social, cultural, economic or digital challenges
- ✓ Training that equips librarians to lead inclusive change
- ✓ Innovative approaches to inclusive design, engagement, and outreach
- ✓ Case studies and strategies that strengthen equity and access

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### 26 JUNE 2026 · FRIDAY

8:00AM - 12:30PM

Ticketed session: USD \$90. Includes registration, materials, and breakfast.  
Learn more at: <https://2026.alaannual.org>

THE EDITORS



**Whitney Bevill**  
Whitney is the Humanities Librarian for Collection Management at Appalachian State University. Her background is in foreign language education and she is active in global librarianship-related committees in ALA.



**Amanda Harrison**  
Amanda is an Assistant Professor at the University of Central Missouri in the Educational Technology and Library Sciences department. Her current and on-going interests include school libraries, global librarianship, critical pedagogies, and diversity in children's literature.



**Gloria Creed-Dikeogu**  
Gloria is the Associate Dean of Libraries at California State University, Bakersfield. Her current interests include global librarianship, serving international student populations in academia, Africana and writing poetry, children's picture books as well as young adult, new adult, and adult novels.

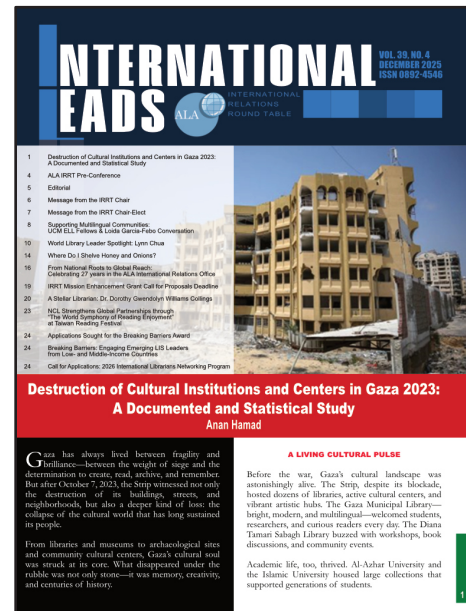


**Johann Frederick Cabbab**  
Igor is an Assistant Professor at the University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies where he currently teaches Media Materials and Technology as well as Literature for Children and Young Adults.

EDITORIAL

We have lots of information for our readers this issue. We hear about the devastation due to the damage dealt to cultural institutions in Gaza. Loida Garcia-Febo discussed with UCM ELL Fellows about supporting multilingual populations in libraries. We also focus the spotlight on Lynn Chua of the NLB in Singapore, ALA's own Michael Dowling, and Dr. Dorothy Gwendolyn Williams Collings, a pioneer in the field of Comparative Librarianship. Learn about “*fi yom asal, fi yom basal*” as well as thoughts on the Dubai International Library and Publishing Summit and working as an expat librarian in UAE. We also hear about “The World Symphony of Reading Enjoyment” at the Taiwan Reading Festival. Lastly, there are also calls for applications to the 2026 Breaking Barriers Award as well as the 2026 International Librarians Networking Program and 2026 Mission Enhancement Grant. Enjoy reading and Happy Holidays!

The Editors



ABOUT INTERNATIONAL LEADS

*International Leads* (ISSN 0892-4546) is published quarterly by the International Relations Round Table of the American Library Association in March, June, September, and December. IL is indexed by Library Literature and Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) and ProQuest. The IRRRT mailing address is: International Relations Office, American Library Association, 225 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601.

## MESSAGE FROM THE IRRT CHAIR

## Sandy Hirsh

Email:

[sandy.hirsh@sjsu.edu](mailto:sandy.hirsh@sjsu.edu)



Since my last column, I've had the privilege of traveling twice to the other side of the world from California—first to Kazakhstan for the IFLA WLIC in Astana in August, and later to the United Arab Emirates for the [Sharjah International Library Conference](#) in November. Both experiences introduced me to regions I had known little about and to colleagues—both new and long-standing—from across the globe. I came away inspired by the energy, creativity, and commitment of librarians who are making a tangible difference in their communities. If you're interested, I shared more reflections on my visit to Kazakhstan in the September 2025 issue of *International Leads*. These experiences reaffirmed for me how essential it is for professionals in our field to seek out opportunities to learn from and connect with one another—embodying this year's IRRT theme: "One World, Many Libraries: Building the Future Together."

#### ADVANCING THE THEME: IRRT PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Our committees have been hard at work translating this year's theme into action.

The **Chair's Program Committee** is developing an exciting program for the ALA Annual Conference: "*Building the Future Together: Libraries Partnering for Collective Impact*." This session will feature a diverse panel of speakers from around the world who will explore how libraries are collaborating to address pressing global challenges. Through shared knowledge, cooperation, and partnerships, libraries can amplify their collective impact. Building on the success of last year's small-group discussions, attendees will also participate in an interactive activity designed to foster international dialogue and collaboration.

The **International Librarians Reception Committee** has also been busy preparing for one of our most anticipated events. Please note that the

reception will take place **Sunday, June 28, from 6:00–8:00 p.m.** (location to be announced) due to ALA's 150th anniversary celebration. The reception is always a joyful gathering where librarians from around the world come together to connect and celebrate our shared mission. This year, we will also honor **Michael Dowling**, ALA's longtime and outstanding Director of International Relations and Chapter Relations, who is retiring after nearly 27 years of service. I hope you'll join us to thank Michael and celebrate his extraordinary contributions.

The **Pre-Conference Committee** is organizing a half-day pre-conference, "*One Mission, Many Voices: Libraries Collaborating for Inclusion*," to be held **Friday, June 26, from 8:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.** This program will explore how libraries worldwide are advancing inclusion and equity through innovative partnerships, programs, and professional development initiatives that break down barriers and empower communities.

#### IRRT UPDATES AND INITIATIVES

Beyond conference programming, there are several other important developments across IRRT.

The **Poster Session Committee** has renamed the international poster session from "*Global Solutions*," to "*Global Perspectives and Approaches*." While the title is changing, the poster session will continue to showcase the work of international librarians and U.S. librarians engaged in global projects and partnerships.

The **Publications and Communications Steering Committee** is implementing recommendations from last year's Emerging Leaders report to strengthen IRRT's communications. This year's focus is on revitalizing the IRRT website and reestablishing a consistent social media presence. Committees are currently reviewing their web content to ensure accuracy, update links, and provide recommendations for improvement. The goal is to complete a comprehensive website refresh by May 2026.

The **ALA Executive Board** approved changes to standardize Round Table officer structures. Going forward, all Round Tables will include only the following positions: Chair (including Chair-Elect and Past Chair), Round Table Councilor, Secretary, and

Treasurer. For IRRT, this means that after the current Members-at-Large complete their terms, the position will be retired. In addition, the combined Secretary/Treasurer role will be divided into two distinct positions beginning in 2027. The IRRT Executive Committee is currently drafting the position descriptions for these roles.

Finally, the **Membership Recruitment and Engagement Committee** is launching a new grant initiative—the **2026 Breaking Barriers Award: Engaging Emerging LIS Leaders from Low- and Middle-Income Countries**. This program aims to support library and information professionals in countries where ALA membership fees may be prohibitive by funding one year of membership, with the potential for renewal. Applications are due by **February 28, 2026**, and should be submitted via email to [intl@ala.org](mailto:intl@ala.org).

#### LOOKING AHEAD

As you can see, there is incredible momentum across IRRT, and I am deeply grateful to all our dedicated volunteers who give their time, talent, and energy to strengthen our international community. Together, we are advancing understanding, fostering collaboration, and building a vibrant global network of librarians committed to shared learning and mutual growth.

As we close out 2025, I want to extend heartfelt thanks to all of you for your engagement and contributions to IRRT. I am immensely proud of what we are achieving together. Wishing you a joyful, healthy, and inspiring end to 2025—and an even brighter 2026 ahead!

## MESSAGE FROM THE IRRT CHAIR-ELECT

### Whitney Bevill

Email:  
[bevillwl@appstate.edu](mailto:bevillwl@appstate.edu)



Libraries have long been beacons of knowledge and community, and in our interconnected age, they're evolving into something else—intersections in a global network of shared learning and cultural exchange. Across

cultures, librarians recognize that while they serve their local communities, they're part of a universal mission to democratize information and foster connection. They are building bridges that transcend borders, and this interconnectedness proves that knowledge knows no boundaries.

In this issue, several opportunities to reach across boundaries are presented: the Breaking Barriers Award, the International Librarians Networking Program, and the IRRT Mission Enhancement Grant. We encourage folks to consider applying to these programs and to share these widely with colleagues, especially those in medium- and low-income communities. We encourage you to remember the IRRT theme this year and that we can “build the future together.”

Happy 2026!

## INTERNATIONAL LEADS SUBMISSIONS

We want to celebrate YOU! Have you recently received an award, completed a significant project, earned a new certification, or achieved a professional milestone? We'd love to feature your accomplishments in an upcoming issue of International Leads. Whether it's a grant you secured, an innovative program you launched, or recognition you've received from your community, your colleagues want to hear about it. Please send your news to us at [ala.intl.leads@gmail.com](mailto:ala.intl.leads@gmail.com). Let's shine a spotlight on the amazing work happening across our library community!

# SUPPORTING MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITIES: UCM ELL FELLOWS & LOIDA GARCIA-FEBO CONVERSATION

Nicole Anderson, Elizabeth Bishop, Lindsey Jones-Renaud, and Marlene Mullen

The English Language Learner (ELL) Library Fellows program is a unique collaboration between the Educational Technology and Library Science and the Educational Foundations and Literacy departments at the University of Central Missouri (UCM). Four students studying for a Master of Library Science were selected to participate and invited to enroll in either "Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students" (taught by UCM's Dr. Daniel Gilhooly) or "Language and Culture" (taught by UCM's Dr. Christina Kitson). Through these courses, the Library Fellows have paired their knowledge of library science with what they are learning about supporting culturally and linguistically diverse populations. For example, the Fellows are learning about the six English proficiency levels, WIDA tools and systems, and how ELL students are assessed in schools. This information is helpful in understanding more about how librarians can support linguistically and culturally diverse students and families in libraries as they develop English proficiency. They also had an opportunity to connect with librarian mentors across the United States who work with highly diverse populations. These collaborative relationships have helped to strengthen their services. It has been a wonderful opportunity for the Fellows!

As part of the funding for the ELL Library Fellows program, guest speaker Loida Garcia-Febo was invited to discuss supporting multilingual populations in libraries. Garcia-Febo has a long career in library leadership, serving as a past president of the American

Library Association, winning the ALA Medal of Excellence and currently serves on the IFLA Governing Board. Garcia-Febo presented *Expanding Access: Libraries, Technology and Sustainable Services for Multilingual Communities* for pre-service and early career librarians, as well as ESL pre-service teachers. Her discussion highlighted access to information and technology, sustainable services, and collaboration between librarians and educators. To ensure information is accessible for English Language Learners, Garcia-Febo suggested libraries can have a rich selection of multilingual collections, provide translation and interpretation support, and engage in community-centered outreach. Bridging the digital divide can be supported for the multilingual communities by device lending programs, multilingual tech workshops, one-on-one digital support, and multilingual websites and signage.

While libraries often create programs or services for their patrons, Garcia-Febo emphasized the importance of sustainability. She shared practical elements that make services sustainable, such as integrating initiatives into policy and staffing, involving the community, and maintaining consistency rather than relying on one-time efforts. She stated, "Sustainable means thinking about what we can keep doing month after month, year after year...even if it's small." Comments indicated that this idea resonated with the audience, because meaningful change happens through consistent ongoing efforts. Librarians and educators often serve the same families, and by working together they should co-develop resources,

host joint events and programs, and learn mutually from each other to impact multilingual communities. Ultimately, Garcia-Febo's expertise inspired attendees to view sustainability, collaboration, and inclusivity not as occasional goals, but as continuous commitments that strengthen libraries to empower the multilingual communities they serve.

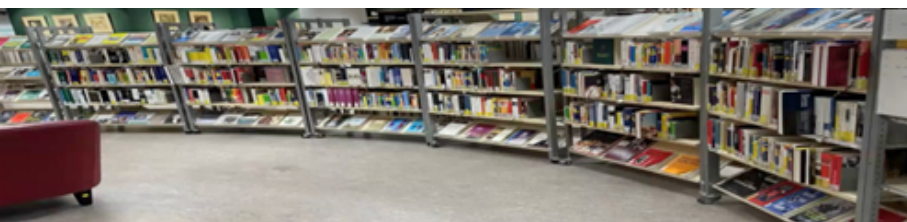
Garcia-Febo's focus on access, equity, and community engagement aligns with the fellowship's emphasis on supporting culturally and linguistically diverse students and patrons. Within the program, the ELL Fellows discussed understanding cultural identity and differences in communication in their coursework, building a foundation for culturally responsive practices, ideas that Garcia-Febo also emphasized. Her examples of community partnerships and library-school collaboration connect closely to course discussions on how partnerships can enhance language and literacy support. Likewise, her emphasis on sustainable initiatives aligns with the fellowship's focus on preparing librarians with the inclusive skills and cultural understanding needed to serve diverse communities. Hearing these ideas from a national

library leader reinforced the importance of co-creating services with communities, rather than for them, challenging the Fellows to think beyond programming and towards partnership.

The UCM ELL Library Fellows program is providing additional learning opportunities for students to disseminate their learning. Fellows Lizz Bishop and Lindsey Jones-Renaud co-led an instructional activity in the Language and Culture course where students explored public library websites to analyze programs and services for refugees and immigrants. Students applied readings about theories of assimilation and integration to analyze how library programs and services were supporting refugees and immigrants and protecting their cultural rights. Together with professor Dr. Jenna Kammer, Bishop and Jones-Renaud also submitted a proposal for a poster session at the ALA 2026 conference about how libraries are supporting refugee and immigrant populations. This will share specific examples of library programs that foster equity and belonging, with recommendations for how libraries can serve as community anchors for the immigrants and refugees in their community.

Fellow Nicole Anderson is working with Dr. Amanda Harrison to design a study abroad experience in South Korea for students in the LIS program to learn more about culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Garcia-Febo will also be expanding her presentation to offer a 3-credit, online seminar on the same topic at the University of Central Missouri. The fellows, their mentors and professors continue to explore other opportunities to share their experiences and learning through publications and conferences.

The ELL Library Fellows program is a prime example of interdisciplinary collaboration to prepare library students for work in an interconnected world. Through coursework, mentorships, a speakers series, and presentations at conferences, students and faculty are developing skills and strengthening UCM's institutional capacity to serve multicultural and multilingual communities from Missouri to South Korea and beyond.



## Expanding Access: Libraries, Technology, and Sustainable Services for Multilingual Communities

Loida Garcia-Febo  
International Library Consultant

University of Central Missouri/ Library Science Program

Loida Garcia-Febo speaks to UCM students about how libraries support multilingual communities.

Thank you. Muchas gracias. Hola

# WORLD LIBRARY LEADER SPOTLIGHT LYNN CHUA

SENIOR DEPUTY DIRECTOR AND SENIOR PRINCIPAL LIBRARIAN,  
NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD, SINGAPORE

Gloria Dikeogu

## COULD YOU GIVE US AN OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD (NLB)?

The National Library and Archives Board (NLB) marked its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, having been established as a statutory board in 1995. It oversees the National Library, the National Archives of Singapore (NAS) and a network of 28 public libraries across the island. Our libraries and archives promote reading, learning, information literacy and an interest in Singapore's history and heritage, reaching more than eight in ten residents through our services, programmes and spaces.

Each year, our libraries welcome more than 20.8 million visitors who borrow over 38.8 million items. We also host over 19,000 programmes annually, attracting 2.86 million participants of all ages. In addition, our digital collection of more than 2.6 million eBooks, audiobooks and online resources ensures that reading and learning remain accessible anytime and anywhere.

To keep pace with the ever-evolving needs of our community, NLB continually experiments with new ideas and technologies to make our libraries more engaging, inclusive, and relevant. Guiding us on our transformation is the Libraries & Archives Blueprint (LAB), which identifies four key roles to drive discovery among our patrons: building a **Learning**

**Marketplace**, nurturing a **Reading and Informed Citizenry**, inspiring **Singapore Storytellers**, and being an **Equaliser**.

## Could you share some of NLB's recent innovations that might serve as inspiration for libraries internationally?

NLB has launched many exciting innovative initiatives over the years. One of our recent focus areas has been Generative AI (Gen AI), which has been integrated into the **SG60 flagship event, the Heart&Soul Experience** at Orchard Library. The showcase, jointly developed by the Ministry of Digital Development and Information (MDDI) and NLB, brings Singapore's vision for tomorrow to life through an imaginative journey that takes visitors through Singapore's past, present and future. Through immersive storytelling and generative AI, each visitor is treated to a personalised experience, offering a peek into what their future in Singapore could look like.

NLB has also leveraged Gen AI to draw from the wealth of resources in our libraries and archives to support the learning experiences of our patrons. For example, with NLB's new tech prototype StoryGen at the Central Library, patrons can add a unique twist to well-loved stories including Singapore folktales, and visualise them through an immersive multimedia experience powered by Generative AI. NLB also

invites users to try out ChatBook, a Generative AI-powered chat service where users can have a conversation with a book.

As we embrace these new technologies, we recognise the importance of digital literacy and have rolled out public education programmes on digital media and information literacy, and scams. For example, NLB's signature S.U.R.E. (Source. Understand. Research. Evaluate.) programme, launched in 2013, offers a wide variety of resources and programmes, including free courses, talks, tours, and workshops, that support everyone of all ages to learn information literacy skills. The resources in English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil cover topics ranging from fighting online scams, to Generative AI tools, Information Literacy, Digital Safety and Digital Wellness, and the dangers of misinformation. These resources are available online at [go.gov.sg/sure1](https://go.gov.sg/sure1).

We have also rolled out innovative ways for Singaporeans to engage with NLB. These include **nodes** in parks, malls, train and bus stations, and hospitals for people to access our material anywhere and anytime. The Star Wars Pop-Up Library, currently open at Changi Airport Terminal 3, is a fully self-service library where we are piloting an automated book retrieval and return system. Patrons can select items through a screen, and a robotic arm would locate and transport the selected titles to the collection point for easy pickup. Offerings like these are continuously refined as NLB studies the feedback and responses to these experiments.

Besides tapping on new and emerging technologies in our offerings, we also continue to enhance the patron's experience in our libraries. Our fourth regional library, and our biggest public library to date, the Punggol Library is a platform for many services that demonstrate NLB's innovative mindset and spirit across our LAB roles. For example, we have piloted new accessible services like Borrow-n-Go, which enables patrons to walk or wheel through a borrowing booth that will scan items automatically; and Calm Pods, which is a quiet and safe space for adults and children with disabilities to go to when they need a private and calming sensorial experience. Response to the library has been very encouraging, with many of our patrons sharing our excitement for the new learning opportunities that the library offers and regularly coming back for more. The numbers show it too – Punggol Library was the most visited library in

2023, with 1.3 million visitors and 2.15 million loans within its first year.

### **HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED IN YOUR CURRENT POSITION AT THE NLB? WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO IT?**

I've been with NLB for 24 years. What drew me to this role and what keeps me here is the opportunity to see the impact of what my team does for the communities and audiences we serve. I have seen how young readers are engaged in our programmes and how these experiences help them to learn, discover new stories and grow in their reading journey. Engaging directly with children, parents and educators also gives us valuable feedback on how our programmes support reading and learning at home and in schools. That sense of connection and purpose has been meaningful for me.



I also have a special love for picture books, particularly the way illustrations bring stories to life and often convey just as much, if not more, than the words themselves. One of my all-time favourites is *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch, where the gentle illustrations beautifully capture the passage of time and the enduring bond between parent and child, adding emotional depth that complements the text. And of course, working in libraries has its perks. I have access to more picture books than I could ever possibly read, which has brought me great joy during my time with NLB.

### **WHAT MAJOR COLLECTIONS ARE AVAILABLE ACROSS NLB'S NETWORK OF LIBRARIES?**

NLB's libraries offer collections that support reading, learning, and research for all ages, including books, magazines, audiovisual and multilingual materials in English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil, as well as eResources such as eBooks, audiobooks, and online databases.

Beyond the general collections, the National Library also houses the *Singapore and Southeast Asia Collections*, *Rare Materials Collection*, *Donor Collections*, and the *Legal Deposit Collection*, which preserves all works published in Singapore under the National Library Board Act, while the National Archives of Singapore holds government records, photographs, maps, audiovisual materials, and oral history interviews that document Singapore's history and development. Together, these collections support reading, learning, research, and the preservation of Singapore's heritage across communities.

NLB also engages in various initiatives to improve the accessibility of our collections to the public. As part of NLB's efforts to expand vernacular resources and programmes, NLB launched an online exhibition on Chinese reading clubs, the Prominent Malays of Singapore online portal and the Encyclopedia of Singapore Tamils. These resources aim to inspire future generations to appreciate and build upon our rich cultural heritage.

### **WHAT SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DOES NLB PROVIDE FOR CHILDREN?**

At Punggol Library, NLB offers a range of special collections that make reading and learning more

inclusive and engaging for children. The *World and Us Collection* introduces children to stories and experiences from around the world, fostering cultural awareness and appreciation of diversity. The library also houses a special collection of educational aids at its Toy Library, which supports creative, dramatic, and sensory play. Through these hands-on experiences, children develop motor skills, problem-solving abilities, and social interaction, making learning both engaging and meaningful within the library setting. Punggol Library also features inclusive collections such as tactile books, Braille materials, and large-print titles to support readers with disabilities.

The Central Library also features the Children's Biodiversity Library by Singapore Oceanarium, the first marine biodiversity-themed learning space for children at a library in Singapore. Developed in partnership with Resorts World Sentosa, it includes a floor-to-ceiling column with coral-like features, a collection of marine specimens including shark egg cases and coral skeletons, digital content from the aquarium, an outdoor mangrove showcase and the Submarine, a room for educational programmes.

### **WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE AND LIBRARY'S SERVICES FOR TEENS IN SINGAPORE?**

The National Archives of Singapore supports NLB's services for teens by providing rich primary resources that students can use for project work and research. Oral history recordings, photographs, maps and government documents offer teens authentic sources to explore Singapore's past. Through school programmes and projects, students are encouraged to tap on these archival resources to strengthen their research skills and deepen their understanding of Singapore's history in their projects.

### **WHERE AND HOW DID YOU TRAIN AS A LIBRARIAN?**

My training as a librarian began with a master's degree in information studies, which provided a strong foundation in library and information science. This foundation has since been strengthened through many years of hands-on experience working in Singapore's public libraries. NLB has also provided me with many opportunities for growth, including

specialised courses and international conferences that have broadened my perspective and skills. I continue to learn on the job as well, particularly in the areas of children's and teen services and programmes.

### **COULD YOU EXPLAIN YOUR ROLE AT THE LIBRARY?**

As Senior Deputy Director and Senior Principal Librarian at NLB, I oversee early literacy and children and teens programmes and services across Singapore's network of public libraries. I lead a team of librarians in developing and delivering initiatives that nurture a love of reading and support learning from the early years through to the teenage years. I also champion the professional development of the librarians, working with our Learning and Development division in NLB to strengthen their competencies and expertise. In addition, I collaborate with strategic partners such as schools to extend the reach and impact of our libraries, ensuring that more children and young people benefit from our collections and programmes.

Beyond my work in Singapore, I serve as co-chair of the American Library Association's (ALA) IRRT Preconference Committee, where I provide leadership in shaping, planning, and delivering programmes that foster professional exchange at the international level.

### **HOW DID YOUR LIBRARY WORK PRIOR TO THIS CURRENT POSITION PREPARE YOU FOR YOUR CURRENT ROLE LEADING PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES FOR YOUNG READERS AT NLB?**

My career has always centred on children's services, and every role I've taken on has deepened my understanding of how children and teens connect with libraries. From curating programmes that cultivate early literacy to developing initiatives that nurture a love of reading, these experiences have given me both practical insight and a broader strategic view.

This grounding in children and teens services has shaped how I approach my work at NLB, ensuring that our services remain engaging, inclusive, and forward looking, while continuously adapting to meet the evolving needs of our audiences.

### **HOW DO YOU WORK WITH PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN SINGAPORE?**

I am part of the Public Libraries division in NLB. I guide librarians across Singapore's public libraries in curating and delivering early literacy as well as children's and teens' programmes and initiatives. I also work closely with them in developing services, supporting them with issues faced on the ground, and ensuring that our programmes are impactful, relevant, and aligned with the needs of the communities we serve.

### **WHICH CULTURES DOES THE NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD SERVE?**

NLB serves Singapore's multicultural society by reflecting this diversity through multilingual collections and programmes in our four official languages: English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil, as well as accessible spaces and resources. NLB also works with partners to provide programmes and exhibitions that celebrate cultural heritage and promote intercultural understanding, including festivals and storytelling sessions that help children and teens explore and appreciate different cultures through stories.

### **WHAT CHANGES DO YOU PLAN TO MAKE TO CURRENT SERVICES THAT ARE AVAILABLE TO CHILDREN AND TEENS?**

NLB is constantly working to improve on how libraries support children and teens in their learning and development, working closely with partners such as Singapore's Ministry of Education. Through this collaboration, we aim to reach more students by integrating library use, a love of reading, and information literacy into the school experience.

We are also placing greater emphasis on digital literacy and wellness, helping children, teens, and parents build the skills and habits needed to use technology confidently and responsibly. At the same time, we are expanding in-library services such as the Toy Library and Spark!Lab™ to more locations. These interactive spaces promote curiosity, play-based learning, and creativity through hands-on exploration.

We hope these efforts will equip children and teens with the essential skills needed to thrive in an increasingly digital and globalised world.

# WHERE DO I SHELVE HONEY AND ONIONS?

Alan Jacques  
[info@beyondbooks.ae](mailto:info@beyondbooks.ae)

I have a favorite Egyptian saying that I like to use, and my Egyptian friends laugh at me when I do because it reminds them of their grandmothers. I figure that's a net win because grandmothers are usually pretty neat. I have worked as an expat school librarian for over twenty years and in the UAE for the last ten years, and I feel that this is the perfect proverb to explain the current moment. Please excuse my poor pronunciation, the saying goes like this, “*fi yom asal, fi yom basal.*”

I'm originally from New Zealand, but I've lived and worked in more countries than most, and so I feel on safe ground when I say that the Emirates is an unusual and unique place to be. It is a nation in the midst of change in every way and I would recommend it to any librarian looking to extend their horizons and put a few extra dirhams in their pocket.

The rate of growth here is astounding, and with growth comes opportunity. So far this year I have attended three wonderful conferences that I probably would not have been invited to back home. Each of them was completely free, being sponsored by various NGOs and local government as part of the constant and concerted effort to build the economy and culture in the region. Last week I spent three days at the *Dubai International Library and Publishing Summit*, held at the Mohammed Bin Rashid Library, known locally as MBRL. The building itself is marvelous, shaped like a Koran laying open on a rehal. Yes, it's a library built in the shape of a book.

The summit itself was not typical fare for a school librarian, but very typical of Dubai. The kickstarter nature of their social institutions means there is a willingness to try new things, so at this summit I attended panel discussions between librarians, publishers, book agents, and authors, all let loose on the same stage. What's a school librarian got in common with a literary agent? Not much, at least not until they make an effort to find that common ground, and that's indeed what happened, again and again. I didn't walk away from that summit with new pedagogical theories or classroom techniques, instead I came away with ideas and possibilities, which led to a series of parental empowerment workshops and a podcast.

Dubai is big and small at the same time, like the inside of a time machine. Big things start here, but because they are starting, they are often small as well. Earlier in the year I attended the *Reading for Pleasure Conference*, hosted by the Emirates Literature Foundation, which is helmed by the inimitable Isobel Abulhoul, OBE. The Literature Foundation has a charter to support both international and local talent, and I had the opportunity to give a workshop on one of my specialty areas, using cultural capital to motivate readers in the library. The keynote speaker was Prof. Teresa Cremin, a world leader in Reading for Pleasure (RfP), and a researcher at the Open University UK. Listening to people who have mastery in their domain is invaluable and, as expected, her speeches were rich in data and anecdote. But unexpectedly, I was able to meet her in person and spend an hour discussing her latest research and gather a list of recommended readings to support my own projects. This is the Dubai big/small paradox at work.

The third in my list was the first *Dubai International Library Conference*, also at MBRL, except this time I was invited to speak at the opening. I was also given free rein to select my topic, which is unusual for a large conference, but I think I've sufficiently explained how these things work in the UAE. Most of the education in this region is privatized and it is very big business and the audience was full of administrators and officials, so in typical fashion I went straight for the jugular of the beast and chose to speak about how schools are teaching students to hate reading. Yet, none of the



Mohammed Bin Rashid Library. Photo from the Dubai Media Office.

<https://www.mediaoffice.ae/en/news/2025/october/29-10/mbrl-library-launches-2nd-edition-of-dubai-international-library-and-publishing-summit>



**Alan Jacques on the Web:**

<https://beyondbooks.ae>  
<https://substack.com/@atheneumandbeyond>  
<https://www.instagram.com/atheneum> and [beyond/](https://www.instagram.com/beyondbooks)  
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/alan-j-beyondbooks/>

organizers flinched at my topic or my slides, and the talk was very well received by the teachers and librarians in the room. Such are the advantages of having institutions that support culture, there were no sponsors to anger. As a slight aside, last year I paid \$30 to see Suzanne Vega on stage for the same reason.

But now I am at risk of hagiography, so I shall touch on some of the challenges that make resilience and flexibility so important if you are thinking of working as an expat. There is a desire in this region for organizations to distinguish themselves from western style social institutions, to create new and different paths, sometimes these create unexpected opportunities, and sometimes unexpected challenges. Many countries I've worked in have censorship laws which go against my personal values, but part of my job as a school librarian is to maintain those policies. If you'd told me this before I took my first job, I'm not sure what I would have replied, but it's a contradiction that everyone must adjust to when working as an expat. Every country & culture develops on its own path. I was hired by my host country for my skills and I like to think that my presence here contributes something valuable, but it's not my role to select the path and importing my 'superior' cultural values uninvited reminds me of colonialism.

It's easy to become racist as an expat. Embarrassing but true. Literally everyone is here in the UAE, 90% of the population is foreign and we bring our foreign ways with us. I have been told that I lace my shoes wrong, been complimented on how fat I am, and

scolded for having the wrong haircut. I'm sure to have committed similar crimes myself without knowing it, and you'll notice that I haven't attached any nations to each of my complaints, because it is simply a melting pot of petty grievances. However, daily frustrations will wear a person down, which makes it important to monitor your own wellbeing, and return to your core values once in a while. Surprisingly, the one happening that never ceases to annoy me comes from growing up in a small farm town - I still feel that it's rude to pass people on the street and not acknowledge each other with a smile or a nod, and it's this final gripe that is my tell. It tells me when it's time to get away for a break, because all these differences are actually mine.

So, being an expat has its pressures, but some of those people who insulted my shoe tying abilities have become my friends. As promised by our Egyptian proverb "some days are honey, and some days are onions." The term *Middle East* is not popular here because it represents how other people named the region according to their own needs and perspectives, but it's correct in one aspect - it is indeed the middle, and you can fly almost anywhere from here. A few hours on a plane will put you in Europe or Asia, in forests or snow, on a beach or a mountain. In fact, I know so many people from so many countries, and I've visited their countries so often, that I've stopped thinking of myself as a tourist. My family and I are simply living out here in the world, and yes, I recommend it.



# FROM NATIONAL ROOTS TO GLOBAL REACH: CELEBRATING 27 YEARS IN THE ALA INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OFFICE

Amanda Harrison and Gloria Dikeogu

Since 1997, Michael Dowling has been on the forefront of ALA's international work. Through his beginnings as Deputy Director of RUSA, the Reference and User Services Association, in 1997, to his role as Director of International and Chapter Relations at ALA in 1999-2025, he has had the opportunity to witness the many benefits that arise when libraries collaborate. While formally, ALA is a national library organization, it has always had a global role, connecting libraries, people, and ideas across borders. Michael's story offers a lens on how international librarianship has evolved over the past 27 years and how continued relationship building can help shape ALA's global future.



## THE PATH TO INTERNATIONAL LIBRARIANSHIP

Michael traces his library background to his mother's work in the professional library for the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland. In college, he had the opportunity to work some summers helping to move and close down libraries as demographics shifted and library needs changed. He remembered these experiences when his initial foray into graduate education, law school, was unsatisfying.

Leaving law school, Michael pursued his library degree at the University of Maryland, taking night classes while working for the International City Management Association. After completing his degree, he decided to spend a year traveling the world. He relates his good fortune to finding an international library job, "And while I was traveling, I met a professor who was working at Temple University in

Japan. Temple University in Philadelphia has a campus in Tokyo. He said, we're looking for a librarian. So I worked there for three and a half years in Japan as a reference librarian at the university."

After Japan, Michael returned to the United States and worked as the director of the Monroe Public Library, a small public library in Wisconsin, south of Madison, for three years. He remembers his public library years fondly, "I was fortunate to get the job as a director at this small public library. I really fell in love with public libraries because obviously you're working day-to-day with people who are in the real world, and all types of ages."

### **BUILDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

International relations have always been built on relationships. Michael notes that when he began at ALA in the 1990's the internet was just beginning to change the world and the way people connected. In particular, "When I began at ALA I had a typewriter in my office, not that I was using it, but it was still there."

Mimeograph machines transitioned into the first correspondence via listservs, but many of the features of in-person engagement still influenced international relationships. ALA's connection with USIA, the United States Information Association, back before it was taken over by the State Department, offered a fellowship program which also helped support the office with funding for about 10 years. This grant helped fund the technical transition, and Michael notes, "We had librarians from the U.S. who then went to other countries for 4 months to up to a year to help them to start to make that transformation. To teach them the new skills about how to use the technology, computers and set up cataloguing systems in different countries." The fellowship program set the foundation for the core of the IRC community.

Michael served as the first staff member formally hired for the ALA's International Relations Office by the association. Previously, the office had been funded entirely through grants, which had meant some inconsistency in ALA's international approach. Influential ALA presidents such as Barbara Ford and Betty Turok saw the importance of engaging internationally, particularly through a "global reach, local touch."

### **PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION: CONNECTING LIBRARIES ACROSS BORDERS**

Michael found the transition from public library to association difficult, but quickly jumped on opportunities to support librarians and make international connections, stating, "My first day, official day, working as the Director of International Relations Office, I actually traveled to the Guadalajara Book Fair. So my first day on the job, I was actually doing international work."

He continued, "I was fortunate to kind of keep helping it to grow, and assist librarians to go down and buy Spanish language materials. I think it's one of the longest diversity projects ALA has [because] we were understanding that we have all these speakers of Spanish in various communities throughout the country, and we made that partnership, and it grew and continued to grow."

The end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s were also a strong time period of infrastructure growth. For example, Michael remembers, "We were giving away funds to different libraries to create their computer centers." However, these collaborations did not just begin and end with infrastructure. They also provided opportunities for collaboration and exchange. For example, "Where can we put some efforts and opportunities to help people, or to connect with people, and also learn from them?"

The rise of computers and technology also brought with it a concern related to the role of libraries in the public sector. With infrastructure, ALA also introduced the concept of advocacy and the role of "making the case" for library funding. In the USA, advocacy was necessary due to the decentralization of how libraries are funded in the USA. However, this focus also helped ALA refine its advocacy efforts and provide an example for other areas of the world.

The ALA/Sharjah collaboration emerged from a chance conversation and has grown into a sustained regional hub for professional development. As Michael explains, it began when he and Janet Fritsch compared notes at the California Library Association conference. Her team had met librarians at the Sharjah International Book Fair who were eager to connect with the U.S. library community but had little access to formal training. Recognizing this need, the ALA approached Ahmed Al-Amiri of the Sharjah Book

Authority, and together they launched what is now the Sharjah International Library Conference, marking its twelfth year in November. Over time, the partnership has expanded beyond general academic and public librarianship to also focus on school libraries. Michael notes, “It’s been kind of amazing to see how the Emirates Library and Information Association has kind of grown in the last 10 years... and they just translated five ALA books into Arabic, so that was another opportunity of growth of our connections with this sister library association.”

## **LIBRARIES IN CRISIS: ALA AS A CONDUIT FOR GLOBAL SOLIDARITY**

In moments of crisis, Michael’s stories highlight how ALA’s international relationships move from abstract ideals to tangible support. He recalls that after 9/11, “it was kind of amazing how many messages we got to ALA of support from the international library community.” Notes, emails, and letters arrived from around the world as colleagues reached out to the ALA community to say they understood that the United States was “under this terrible situation” and wanted to lend support. For Michael, this response affirmed that librarians truly saw themselves as part of a shared profession across borders and that “we are a global community, and so when it’s our turn to help people, we should help people.” Even though the attacks did not directly target libraries, international colleagues chose to respond through the association that represented U.S. libraries, underscoring ALA’s role as a symbolic and practical point of connection.

Over time, that sense of mutual care has taken on more structured forms. Michael describes how ALA has repeatedly served as a gathering point for financial and moral support in response to “natural disasters overseas, or man-made disasters.” After the tsunami in Japan, typhoons in the Philippines, the earthquake in Haiti, and now through the Ukraine Library Relief Fund, ALA has provided a way for members and “people who like libraries” to donate to affected communities. In his words, “ALA is... just kind of a conduit to set that up, but again, get the word out,” so that funds and attention flow to libraries that are trying to provide stability when local communities are under extreme stress.

This pattern of solidarity has not been one-directional. Michael notes his involvement in

support after Hurricane Katrina and how, even in that case, ALA received donations and offers of help from abroad. International colleagues raised funds, adopted specific institutions as sister libraries, and looked for ways to assist particular libraries recovering from damage. These responses created what he describes as “intertwining” relationships, where disaster relief efforts deepened existing ties and sometimes sparked new ones.

## **ALA AND IFLA: SHARED LEADERSHIP IN A GLOBAL ECOSYSTEM**

As an ALA international relations director, Michael also engaged with IFLA. The 2001 IFLA conference was held in Boston, and “I think one of the main reasons that [ALA] kind of started to invest in international.”

Michael also saw changes in IFLA throughout his tenure at ALA, “When I was kind of starting, it was itself transitioning from being much more European association to being actually a more global association.” Originally, even though it had international members, it was still primarily a European, North American organization, and that’s where they pulled most of their participants.” In addition, “to be involved in IFLA, it costs a little more money, to kind of either go to the conferences or go to a committee meeting, in a winter meeting that’s in a different country. So at least certainly back then, the kind of people involved were more or less upper-level management people.” Even though it has an international audience, ALA operates a lot larger organization than IFLA. “When I started, IFLA only had about 9 staff, and ALA had close to 200 staff at that time, so just the scale. It’s tough to be an international organization, to grow and be a very large international organization.”

ALA is also older, with a longer history. IFLA will be celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2027. Michael notes there is overlap, obviously, at the upper level, in both organizations. “So yeah, we certainly encourage people who have an international interest in the U.S. to get involved in IFLA, and a lot of the people at IFLA are core ALA members as well, so they see that value. So, there’s an opportunity to have a leg in both of the associations there.”

## THE NEXT CHAPTER: SUSTAINING ALA AS A GLOBAL ORGANIZATION

Michael sees promises and challenges in the road ahead for ALA, noting “ALA is definitely a global organization and ALA's been “pretty much a global organization since its inception. We were connected with the UK libraries right at the start. Some of them went to our first ALA conference and vice versa.” In addition, “We have [a lot of] the library schools, we have a master's degrees, the accredited programs here in the U.S, and so over the years, a lot of the librarians from other countries, came to study in the U.S. or Canada, and so a lot of the leadership in other countries got connected to ALA through going to school here.”

Of course, investing internationally is always a challenge and has continued to be so throughout Michael's tenure at ALA, supervising both the International Relations office and ALA Chapter Relations. He notes that challenges can be “a crisis or they can be an opportunity.” However, he highlights the current activities in which IRRT is engaged, such as mentoring programs, webinars, and other avenues of dialogue. These resources can support connections during times of stress. “We didn't have a lot of international people come to our conference in Philadelphia because of the situation, and again, you don't want to lose those connections, long-term, so I think that's where opportunities to, try to find some other ways to bring people together who are members from both outside the U.S. and inside the U.S. And certainly dialogue on some of those issues, because as you said, others are feeling some of those same constraints or stresses.” Concluding, overall, “the library community needs to stay strong together.”

For librarians thinking about ALA's future and the future of international relations, Michael shares this advice: “You get involved in the committee or the roundtable, and then you meet people there, and then that grows to you to make a connection with someone in a different country. Then you create these long-lasting friendships and conversations, and everybody gets enriched by it. It's been a privilege to serve in this role, and it's tough to leave, to transition, but it's kind of time to do that for me.”

# IRRT MISSION ENHANCEMENT GRANT CALL FOR PROPOSALS DEADLINE

IRRT announces the call for proposals for its 2026 Mission Enhancement Grant. In 2016, IRRT members & supporters established the IRRT Mission Enhancement Endowment. Interest from the endowment is used to fund member-initiated proposals for international projects that contribute to ALA's role in international librarianship. Goals for the funding are to provide support for international projects or partnerships; promote a global dialogue about librarianship, increase visibility of international opportunities for U.S. and international librarians, and to encourage international collaboration in librarianship.

Examples of proposals that could be considered for funding include, but are not limited to:

- Support for travel that is necessary to advance an international project
- Funds to collaborate with sister library projects
- Funds to support the development and distribution of training or publicity materials in support of an international project.

The amount available for grants may vary each year. IRRT may choose to use available funds to provide one or more grants of varying amounts. The maximum grant amount per proposal will be \$1,000. Proposal process: Please visit the [IRRT Mission Enhancement Grant website](#) to learn more about the selection criteria and proposal process and to download the proposal form.

Proposals are due no later than **January 5, 2026** and will be reviewed by the IRRT Endowment and Fundraising Committee.



Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library,  
Special Collections, Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, box 522/523, folder 19



## A STELLAR LIBRARIAN: DR. DOROTHY GWENDOLYN WILLIAMS COLLINGS

Simone Clunie

Black immigration to the USA has been more visible and a constant since the 1990s with changes to immigration laws and quotas allowing for greater numbers. This immigration pattern has a long history, particularly for those coming from the Caribbean where the continual movement of peoples within the region, back and forth to past ‘mother countries’ and beyond has been a staple. In the early 20th century, Black people(s) immigrating to the United States was documented by sociologist Ira de Augustine Reid in *The Negro Immigrant, His Background, Characteristics and Social Adjustment 1899-1937*. In his study, Reid, quoting the Bureau of Immigration, stated, “...between 1899 and 1937, 143,747 Negroes were admitted to the United States”<sup>1</sup> coming from Africa, Canada and the West Indies. During this early period, the parents of a remarkable librarian made their way to the United States from Jamaica. The librarian’s path through the profession led her to work with prominent Black librarians and institutions, several countries under UNESCO’s umbrella, be the founding Head of the Department of Library Studies at the University of the West Indies, and to blaze a trail as one of the early librarians to create curricular material and teach in the fledgling period of Comparative Librarianship. That librarian is Dr. Dorothy Collings.

Dr. Dorothy Collings was born Dorothy Gwendolyn Williams, September 22, 1911, in New Haven, Connecticut, to Arthur G. and Maud E. Williams, who married at the St. Luke’s Church in Kingston, Jamaica on April 29, 1908. In 1911, the Williamses moved to Madison, Connecticut, where Arthur worked as the steward at stables owned and operated by Frank Butterworth and Louis Stoddard. Dorothy Williams’ early education took place at the Hand Academy in Madison, and in September 1928, she entered Hunter College of the City of New York, now Hunter University, matriculating in English. She was an active student and participated on the Editorial board of Hunter College *Bulletin* (1930-1932): Editorial Board of

<sup>1</sup> p.42.

the Hunter College Yearbook (1932) and was a member of Sigma Tau Delta, where she served as the Treasurer.<sup>2</sup> She attained an A.B. (Bachelor of Science) June 1932. In September of that year, she entered the Bachelor of Science of Library Science program at Simmons College and graduated the following June (1933). In her last semester she undertook the two week “fieldwork” requirement with the New York Public Library.<sup>3</sup> She enrolled in the Master of Science Program at the School of Library Service at Columbia University in the summer of 1936, attending between September 1939 and February 1940, and then again in September 1940. She graduated June 1941, producing the thesis *National Negro Organizations in the United States and their Publications*. Williams was a recipient of various grants that helped her with her education. As part of her graduate matriculation, she received a Carnegie Corporation grant-in-aid toward completing her master’s degree at Columbia University. For her doctorate she received Julius Rosenwald fellowships between 1942-1943<sup>4</sup> and 1944-1946. Dorothy Williams completed her Ph.D. in 1947 at the University of Chicago, graduating in the two hundred and forty-seventh convocation on December 19, 1947. *The Treatment of the Second Roosevelt Administration in Three Popular Magazines* was the dissertation she produced.

Williams started her professional working career with Samuel Huston College in Austin, Texas, where she worked under the title of Librarian from 1933 to 1935. Her next position was at St. Augustine’s College in Raleigh, North Carolina, between 1935-1936 where she held the position of Acting Librarian. On June 1, 1936, Williams became the Cataloging Assistant at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and held that position until 1939. Williams returned to New York in June 1939 to become the Cataloging

Assistant at the New York Public Library, and there she cataloged material in the Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature and History, now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Between February and July 1940, she worked as a cataloger with Talladega College, brought onto a cataloging project by then director Eliza Atkins Gleason.<sup>5</sup> In June of 1941, Williams was hired as the Catalogue Librarian at Atlanta University Library.<sup>6</sup> In 1942, she was appointed to the teaching staff of Atlanta University’s year-old School of Library Service, which offered a one-year program that led to the Bachelor of Science in Library Service degree.<sup>7</sup>

Williams served as the first fulltime Dean at the School of Library Science, North Carolina College between 1946-47<sup>8</sup> and in 1948, she took up the position of Acting Curator of the Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature and History on April 20, 1948, when Dr. Lawrence D. Reddick resigned to take the position of Chief Librarian at Atlanta University.<sup>9</sup> By December of that year, she left the Schomburg and joined the Fundamental Education Section of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and moved to the headquarters secretariat in Paris. On October 14, 1950, Williams married William Edward Collings in Paris. Collings was a publisher and was also employed by UNESCO. As a representative of UNESCO, Dr. Dorothy Williams Collings’ work was varied and *The Shoreline Times* newspaper describes her work as follows: “Mrs. Collings, a specialist in fundamental education, has represented UNESCO in Geneva, Vienna, London and

<sup>5</sup> Eliza Gleason Gets Library Science Degree: She Is First of Race With Ph.D. In Field. *The Chicago Defender* (National edition) (1921-1967); Apr 6, 1940.

<sup>6</sup> *Atlanta Daily World*, September 7, 1941.

<sup>7</sup> *The Atlanta University Bulletin, 75th Anniversary Edition, July 1942*. Atlanta University Bulletins: 1940-1949. Atlanta University, July 1942. Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library. [https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12322/auc.002.bulletin:1942.07\\_1](https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12322/auc.002.bulletin:1942.07_1).

<sup>8</sup> Speller, B. F., & North Carolina Central University. School of Library and Information Sciences. (1991). *Educating Black librarians: papers from the 50th anniversary celebration of the School of Library and Information Sciences, North Carolina Central University*.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, Paul. *Dr. Williams Is Schomburg Book Curator*. New Journal and Guide (1916-); May 1, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> Hunter College. (1932). *Wistarion 1932*. Hunter College Archives. Hunter College. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.39202552>

<sup>3</sup> *The Simmons News*, March 9, 1933.

<sup>4</sup> *The Atlanta University Bulletin, Series 3 No. 47: July 1944*. (1944, July). Atlanta University; Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library. [https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12322/auc.002.bulletin:1944.07\\_1](https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12322/auc.002.bulletin:1944.07_1)

Amsterdam and recently returned from a mission to India, where she conferred with Prime Minister Nehru on the problem of establishing adequate educational facilities in that country.”<sup>10</sup> In 1953, she traveled to Egypt where she became Chief, Regional Library and Clearinghouse, Arab States Fundamental Education Centre (ASFEC). Two years later, the Collingses returned to New York City and Dr. Collings moved to the United Nations Headquarters into the position of Chief, Educational Liaison Section, Office of Public Information (OPI). Between 1961-1964, she had several short assignments in Washington D.C. where she served as Acting Director of the United Nations Information Centre.

According to William Vernon Jackson’s *The Pioneers: Dorothy G. Collings*,<sup>11</sup> “she accepted Columbia’s invitation to offer a course in comparative librarianship and proceeded to plan, develop, and organize a Seminar in Comparative Librarianship, the first to be given in the United States.” As a lecturer with the School of Library Service at Columbia University, between 1956-1970, Dr. Collings conducted a one-semester graduate seminar on Comparative Librarianship on Wednesday evenings from 7-9pm during the Spring term. In 1970, Dr. Collings as a UNESCO expert was appointed the founding Director and faculty member of the Department of Library Studies at the University of the West Indies in Kingston Jamaica. On arrival in the region, she travelled throughout the Caribbean contacting government officials and professional circles, recruited students, made public appearances, and spoke on radio and television to raise the profile and attention of the new library school. Collings returned to the USA after the first group of students graduated in 1974. She was one of the fifteen professional librarians Dr. Lelia Gaston Rhodes interviewed for her 1975 dissertation, *A Critical Analysis of the Career Backgrounds of Selected Black Female Librarians*. In the summer of 1976, Collings taught a Comparative Librarianship seminar at

the University of Denver, and in 1977, she was again invited by the Jamaican government “to serve as coordinator for the preparation of a national plan for library, archival and information services.” Over the course of her career, Dr. Williams Collings was a member of many professional organizations such as Delta Sigma Theta, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, the American Library Association, and Special Libraries Association.

Dr. Dorothy Williams Collings had an illustrious career, and it speaks to her dedication to education, literacy, libraries and the fundamental exchange of information between peoples. She was responsible for the inception of numerous projects, having good foresight for problem solving and seeing “the big picture.” Earlier on, this attribute was noticed by Atlanta University Librarian Charlotte Templeton and detailed in the reference letter she provided for Williams’ application for a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship to undertake doctoral studies. “Miss Williams has a good cultural background; an alert, exploring type of mind, together with a capacity for steady and exact work; a broad professional outlook and an ability to see problems as a whole.”<sup>12</sup> In 1992, the Department of Library Studies at the University of the West Indies held an evening of tribute in her memory for her work and contributions to the department, the university, and across the Caribbean region. The event was documented in a forty-four-page publication by the department titled *Record of Tributes to Doctor Dorothy Collings*.<sup>13</sup>

Dorothy Gwendolyn Williams Collings passed away March 6, 1991, in Somers, New York.

<sup>12</sup> Williams’ Rosenwald Fellowship application, 1941-1942. Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, Box 522/523, Folder 19.

<sup>13</sup> University of the West Indies. Dept. of Library Information Studies. 1997. *Record of Tributes to Doctor Dorothy Collings*.

<sup>10</sup> *Shoreline Times*, November 2, 1950.

<sup>11</sup> <https://worldlibrarians.dom.edu/index.php/worldlib/article/view/367/323>

# NCL STRENGTHENS GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH “THE WORLD SYMPHONY OF READING ENJOYMENT” AT THE TAIWAN READING FESTIVAL

許琇媛 Shiou-luan Hsu (Ph.D.)

The National Central Library (NCL) of Taiwan continues to advance its mission of fostering international cooperation through reading and cultural exchange. Building on the momentum of previous years, *The World Symphony of Reading Enjoyment*—a signature program within the Taiwan Reading Festival—has become a vibrant platform where libraries, foreign missions, and cultural institutions collaborate to celebrate global literary diversity.

In 2024, the program brought together 11 embassies and international organizations, offering visitors a multicultural journey through picture books, storytelling, and literary traditions from different regions of the world. Their participation demonstrated how reading can unite communities, bridge cultures, and inspire mutual understanding.

On December 6, 2025, this collaborative initiative expanded even further. The NCL welcomed 15 additional embassies, cultural institutes, and international organizations to join the festival, marking a significant milestone in Taiwan’s efforts to cultivate cross-border connections through libraries. The growing number of partners highlights NCL’s evolving role as a facilitator of global cultural dialogue and a trusted collaborator in international librarianship.

NCL Director-General Han-ching Wang emphasized that these partnerships are more than event-based cooperation—they represent a long-term vision of using libraries as gateways to the world. Through shared exhibitions, multilingual reading activities, and cultural showcases, NCL and its partners create

opportunities for Taiwanese readers to explore global literature, while offering international communities insight into Taiwan’s flourishing reading culture.

The participating partners from 2019 until now (2025) showcased an impressive array of cultural strengths. Caribbean nations presented regional history and storytelling traditions; European offices introduced bilingual reading sessions, classic literature, and seasonal customs; partners from the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia enriched the festival with traditional crafts, contemporary works, and interactive family programs. Taiwan’s own contribution—led by the International Picture Book Center of Kaohsiung Public Library—featured initiatives designed to bring Taiwanese picture books to the global stage.

By integrating hands-on workshops, live storytelling, cultural demonstrations, and multilingual reading corners, *The World Symphony of Reading Enjoyment* transforms the Taiwan Reading Festival into an inclusive, immersive cultural experience. Children and adults alike embark on literary journeys that transcend national boundaries.

As the festival continues to grow, NCL’s collaborative model stands out as an example of how libraries can promote cultural diplomacy and foster sustainable international partnerships. Through shared commitment and the universal language of reading, Taiwan is strengthening its ties with the world—one story at a time.

## Applications Sought for the BREAKING BARRIERS AWARD

The International Relations Roundtable (IRRT) of the American Library Association (ALA) is accepting applications for the 2026 Breaking Barriers Award, which aims to engage emerging library and information leaders from under-represented countries. Library and information workers in low- and middle-income countries for whom the ALA membership fee is out of reach are invited to apply for the award. Membership enables three awardees to benefit from resources and support that ALA's professional community offers.

The Breaking Barriers Award is for one year's ALA membership with the possibility of a one-year renewal.

### ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Currently working in the library or information science field (excludes workers from institutions who receive funds for professional development and travel, for example school librarians at private K-12 schools).
- Resides in a country that is classified as low-middle income according to various reports published by (for example) UNESCO, IFLA, and the World Bank.

Successful candidates agree to:

- Participate remotely in one or more IRRT committees.
- Submit a report in English of at least 500 words. Due on May 31 (one month before the end of the membership period).

**Applications** should be submitted via email to [intl@ala.org](mailto:intl@ala.org) by February 28, 2026

## Breaking Barriers

### Engaging Emerging LIS Leaders from Low- and Middle-Income Countries

ALA's International Relations Roundtable (IRRT) invites librarians, library assistants and others interested in library and information service to apply for the Breaking Barriers Award. Intended for Library/Information Service staff in low- and middle-income countries for whom the membership fee is out of reach, it enables awardees to benefit from ALA's resources and support. Membership is for one year with the possibility of a one-year renewal.

Applicants should state how membership will assist their work in libraries and contribute to our mission of ensuring reliable access to information for all.

- How will ALA assist you in your professional work? (200-500 words)
- First Name
- Surname/Family Name
- Institution/Employer:
- Postal Address:
- City, State/Province, Postal Code:
- Country:
- Email address:
- Phone [include international country code]

### AWARDEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

- Participate remotely in one or more IRRT committees.
- Submit a report by May 31, 2027. The report should include details of how membership helped them connect with the international LIS community and furthered their professional goals.

## Call for Applications: 2026 International Librarians Networking Program

The International Connections Committee is pleased to announce that applications for the 2026 International Librarians Networking Program will open in January 2026. This unique initiative brings together librarians from around the world to foster professional exchange, collaboration, and global understanding within the library and information science community.

To be eligible for the program, participants need to meet the following requirements:

- Have access to the Internet
- Able to communicate at least once a week
- Willing to build professional connections
- Be able to fulfill a 3 month commitment (March to May 2026, about 1 hour per week)
- English proficiency
- A willingness to work collaboratively to produce an informal poster by the end of the program and share it with the cohort of participants (template and guidelines will be provided)

Stay tuned for updates, and mark your calendars for January 2026!

If you have additional questions, send a message to [irrt.networking@gmail.com](mailto:irrt.networking@gmail.com)