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The International University of Grand-Bassam

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Citizen Ambassadorship on Behalf of Libraries

Various locations, South Africa

*An account by Ann Hamilton
Associate Dean of the Library
Georgia Southern University*

Last year I was invited by People to People to join a group of librarians from all over the United States and two other countries to serve as an ambassador to South Africa on behalf of libraries. People to People was established by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956. As stated on the People to People Web site (<http://www.peopletopeople.com/AboutUs/Pages/OurHeritage.aspx>): "Eisenhower was acting on his firm belief that direct interaction between ordinary citizens around the world can promote cultural understanding and world peace." People to People offers a wide variety of programs, but the one in which I was involved was under the professional category of education.

Former American Library Association (ALA) President John W. Berry was the leader of the group that included academic, public, school and retired librarians. One academic librarian was from British Columbia and another

was from Kuwait. The group left Washington, D.C., on Oct. 19, flew to Johannesburg, South Africa, and arrived the following day. The program began with an orientation and cultural briefing from our official tour guide and a presentation by the treasurer of the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) – the ALA of South Africa. That afternoon we began an intensive few days visiting public and academic libraries in Soweto, Pretoria and Johannesburg. During most visits there were presentations by the librarians we were visiting, and in some cases there were presentations by members of our group.

One-to-one sharing opportunities with our South African colleagues were usually available during meals, receptions and breaks. One of the most interesting library visits was not on our original itinerary. We met the head of the National Library of South Africa at a reception for American and South African librarians, and he invited us to visit his library the next day. That beautiful new facility in Pretoria was truly state of the art and a facility of which South Africa can be proud.

After spending two and a half days in Johannesburg and Pretoria, we flew to Cape Town. During the weekend, we took a break from visiting libraries to travel down to the

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The International University of Grand-Bassam

Grand-Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire

*An account by Laura Burtle
Associate University Librarian
Georgia State University Library*

Since 1988, Georgia State University has worked with the Agency for Education and Development in Cote d'Ivoire to establish and support the first English-language university in the country, based on the American system of higher education. In 2004-2005, the Côte d'Ivoire/Georgia State University partnership established the two-year curriculum of the International University of Grand-

Bassam (IUGB), and the university's first eight students started classes in January 2005.

I began meeting with representatives from IUGB in 2007 and consulted with the IUGB librarian when she visited and on an ongoing manner via e-mail.

The idea of a book drive arose during a 2008 visit by the IUGB president and his delegation. I consulted with the IUGB librarian and the registrar to learn about the scope of courses offered at IUGB. With the support of the GSU provost, I then launched a targeted book drive on campus. I requested books in certain disciplinary areas, no more than five years old. The response was

wonderful, and at the end of the drive, we sorted books into 40 boxes. Through the generosity of a donor, the books were shipped on a *slow* boat, arriving in Côte d'Ivoire six months later. The librarian at IUGB reported, "The books from the book drive arrived in January here, and we had a library celebration: haiku, clerihews, slogans, posters and contests, which culminated in a little get-together with the American ambassador and some other distinguished guests on Feb. 13." At subsequent visits by the IUGB president, I was repeatedly thanked for the books, which I later learned comprise the vast majority of the university's library.

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Cape of Good Hope and to visit the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden. Back in Cape Town, we visited one of the townships and had a number of opportunities to visit with residents in several parts of the township. We completed our library visits at the Cape Town Central Library and at Stellenbosch University. The presentations and networking with colleagues at both locations were interesting and informative.

The Central Library was particularly interesting to me because it was created by renovating a drill hall, and a local children's author had allowed illustrations from his books to be painted on the walls of the extensive children's area. The official visit ended on Oct. 28, but a number of us chose to participate in the extension program to Kruger National Park. Those three days offered unparalleled opportunities to see an amazing variety of wildlife while on photo safaris. One evening was spent in a simulated native village where the villagers presented their history through music and dance.



I would recommend the People to People program to anyone interested in international professional networking or international cultural exchange. Once you participate as an ambassador, you receive invitations to join other groups and visit other countries. You also may have some unexpected opportunities to continue the exchanges you begin during your trip. For example, when we visited the library at the University of South Africa (the world's third largest correspondence school), I talked with the librarians about building renovation projects. One of those librarians came to the United States for a conference in May, and she arranged a detour through Atlanta to visit the renovated libraries at Georgia State, Georgia Tech and Emory.

If you are interested in more information about the People to People program, you can visit the Web site at <http://www.peopletopeople.com/Pages/default.aspx> or you're welcome to send questions to me at ahamilton@georgiasouthern.edu. ►►

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As part of ongoing technical assistance being provided to IUGB by GSU, I traveled with four other GSU faculty members to Cote d'Ivoire. We stayed in the commercial capital of the country, Abidjan, where IUGB maintains offices.

Over the course of a week, I visited IUGB, about an hour drive from Abidjan; attended an IUGB board meeting; visited several libraries at the University of Cocody, the public university in Abidjan; and, on one free afternoon, visited a local artists' market.

The main purpose of my visit was to prepare a report on the library, assessing its current status and providing recommendations for future development. I spent a lot of time with the librarian, Su Oteme,

and her assistant, Brice Niaba (who is very eager to go to library school), discussing both the collection and the academic support the library provides to students and faculty. It is certainly a challenge to provide the level of library support to students at IUGB that they would get in an American university, but since many IUGB students transfer to GSU, the librarian attempts to introduce them to concepts like scholarly vs. popular resources, call numbers and even open stacks. As a Francophone country, the concept of open stacks is unfamiliar to many students and faculty. The availability of free online resources, including JSTOR under their developing

countries program, is a boon to libraries. However, the unreliability of network connections and stable IP addresses is a challenge. At the main library in Cocody, even running computers to access these resources was a problem. Computers had been donated, but the power and air-conditioning limitations made them largely unusable. As a private university not totally reliant on state funding, IUGB faces fewer of these basic challenges.

The trip was a wonderful, exhausting experience. Challenges facing libraries in the developing world are reminders of how good things are here, even in times of budget crises! ►►

