

# The German-American Library Exchange Program

*Eine Gelegenheit, die man nicht verpassen sollte!*

Professional Visit to the Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen  
and Practicum at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München

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**T**hanks to the American Library Association (ALA), the Berufsverband Information Bibliothek (BIB), and the Bibliothek & Information-International (BI-I), I was able to participate in the German-American Library Exchange Program in the spring of 2014. The program normally hosts German librarians who wish to visit American libraries, thus my application to head in the opposite direction was unusual. Moreover, my professional circumstances were likely uncommon: I was an unaffiliated but professionally trained and experienced librarian, seeking to learn about international library practices and to find employment, whether in the U.S., Germany, or Europe.

I had received my library degree many years ago while working on a grant-funded project in a special collections library of a large American university. As a historian of medieval and early modern art, I was also engaged as an independent scholar in postdoctoral research and publication in the area of manuscripts and early printed books. Similar to the experience of many library colleagues in recent years, no permanent position followed the soft money that had funded my temporary job; furthermore, pervasive downsizing of library staff in academic and public institutions had worsened employment prospects. At the present time, I am employed full-time in university administration, but am dissatisfied with its political bureaucracy and lack of intellectual stimulus. An approved leave of absence and participation in the library exchange program allowed me the time and space to evaluate my personal and professional goals.



This report summarizes my experiences with the library exchange program, highlighting the application process, trip preparation, visits and training at libraries in Göttingen and Munich, and the annual Bibliothekartag conference held this year in Bremen. Finally, it mentions briefly a number of considerations important to weigh prior to application. For me, the library exchange experience exceeded my expectations.

## Application and Preparation

I TURNED TO THE ALA'S WEBSITE for information and found the library exchange program <[http://www.ala.org/offices/iro/iroactivities/bib-ala\\_exchange](http://www.ala.org/offices/iro/iroactivities/bib-ala_exchange)>. The program offers the opportunity to learn about library operations in other countries and can be scaled from one week to several months. Michael P. Dowling, director at the ALA's International Relations Office, answered my initial e-mail and helped me with the process. I completed the two-page application, expressing interest in manuscripts and early books, digitization, and electronic publications, especially at the University of Göttingen and at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, both renowned for their special collections and digitization efforts. Mr. Dowling put me in touch with Sabine Stummeyer of the Technische Informationsbibliothek Hannover and contact person for BIB. It was through her friendly and successful requests that I was able to visit the Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen and the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. From personal conversations and email contact with librarians at the Goethe-Institut in Boston and in New York, I learned about potential funding from BI-I. I completed an application available on its website <<http://www.bi-international.de/deutsch/antraege/fachaufenthalte/>> and was pleasantly surprised by the positive reply to provide financial support for four weeks of my practicum in Munich.

As the length of the exchange program would exceed my accrued vacation time, I had to secure permission from my employer for an unpaid leave of absence. The length of time of my stay in Germany also brought up the issue of a visa. U.S. citizens may remain in Germany for up to three months without a visa; for

a longer stay, U.S. citizens must submit a residency application, while in Germany. As it happened, however, I returned to the U.S. to attend a week-long conference, thereby restarting the clock upon my re-entry in Germany.

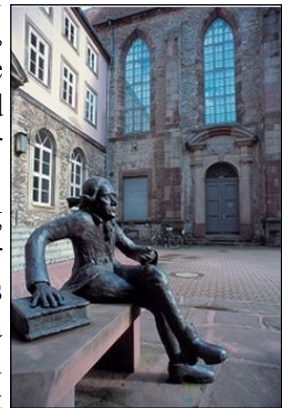
The ability to speak German would indubitably enhance my experience, that is, a level higher than my current competency, which was commensurate to being able to order from a restaurant's *Speisekarte*. During my postgraduate education, I had taken classes to read academic German, and my doctoral studies had required reading of secondary literature in German. However, I had not learned to speak German, so in the fall 2013, I began attending a German language class every Sunday morning at the Goethe-Institut in Boston. I continued language classes at the Goethe-Institut in Göttingen and in Munich, after which I was able to pass the B1 intermediate-level exam. Although the exchange program indicates that language fluency is not a prerequisite, my experience suggests that a higher level is probably recommended to take full advantage of and participate in lectures delivered in German, even though the library staff accommodated me and switched to English, when possible. Nonetheless, I think my experiences would have been enhanced had my language skills been better.



### Professional Visit to Göttingen

WHILE IN GÖTTINGEN, I met several times with Dr. Heinz Fuchs from the Zentralbibliothek. Dr. Fuchs is the *Fachreferat*, or subject specialist, for many collecting areas, including Linguistics and Literary Studies, Archeology, Art History, Romance Languages and Literatures. On the library tours of the Zentralbibliothek and the Bereichsbibliothek Kulturwissenschaften, we discussed library practices in Germany and particularly at Göttingen. I was struck with the library's response to the changing study habits of students: more desk space has been made available for students using computers, although this meant the elimination of many work-stations dedicated to catalogue searches; moreover, a recently completed multi-story building provided individual and group study rooms, as well as instructional spaces, all of which could be booked for specific days and times.

On another occasion I met with Dr. Helmut Rohlfing, head of the *Spezielsammlung und Bestandserhaltung* at the Historisches Gebäude, a venerable space in the former Paulinerkirche and convent buildings of the Dominican order. Dr. Rohlfing, who is chiefly responsible for the recent and complex renovations of the library, took me on a thorough tour of the historical and modern areas of the public spaces, reading rooms and stacks; the old stacks are a particular marvel. I was struck by his strong personal interest in historical archives and his commitment to the library.



Both of these librarians were generous with their time, and I was fortunate to have the chance to speak at length with two very knowledgeable librarians.

### Practicum in Munich

THE PRACTICUM in the Department of Manuscripts and Early Books at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich was a well-organized arrangement of staff instructional sessions and individual project tasks. My program was six-weeks in length; at the same time, the library also hosted other individuals whose training lasted from three to twelve weeks. The staff was generous in giving their time, usually one to two hours per session, which provided an overview of departmental responsibilities, collections, and current projects. Individual presentations from eight staff members concerned the acquisition, description, and administration of the department's manuscripts, archives, early and rare books. The sessions on material description discussed text and image, bindings and watermarks for print and electronic formats, such as databases, as well as full digitization.



In addition to these sessions, I was able to attend a one-week module of the *SCRIPTO* program, sponsored annually by the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität

Erlangen-Nürnberg <[http://www.mittellatein.phil.uni-erlangen.de/scripto/scripto\\_en\\_aktuell.html](http://www.mittellatein.phil.uni-erlangen.de/scripto/scripto_en_aktuell.html)>. SCRIPTO, an acronym for Scholarly Codicological Research, Information & Palaeographical Tools, offers four modules of study hosted by the Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, the Stadtbibliothek Nürnberg, and the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel. The program sessions in Munich, which totaled more than twenty hours delivered by thirteen staff members, discussed book bindings, incunables, current digital projects and workflow, data archiving, and tours of the Scanzentrum and the Institut für Buch und- Handschriftenrestaurierung.

Besides these instructional sessions, trainees helped out with departmental projects related to their skills and interests. One librarian in my group catalogued a manuscript related historically to her library in Mantua; a post-graduate German student catalogued images, building on her interest in medieval art history. I was asked to translate several project descriptions into English for the library's Manuscripta Mediaevalia website <[http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/?INFO\\_projekte#|5](http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/?INFO_projekte#|5)> and several catalogue entries for their upcoming exhibition on Hartmann Schedel, the humanist, physician, and author of the *Nürnberger Chronik*, printed in 1493. I liked contributing to an actual project, which also deepening my knowledge of printing history in Germany.

Without exception, I found the staff at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek to be extremely knowledgeable in their areas of expertise and responsibility and very generous in giving so much time to visitors, students, and trainees.

### **103. deutscher Bibliothekartag, Bremen**

THANKS TO the kind invitation of the BI-I, I was able to attend the 103. Deutscher Bibliothekartag in Bremen, 2-6 June 2014. Sessions that focused on international exchange and librarianship, digital projects, and ebooks interested me, such as BIB's 'Austauschprogramme und internationale Bibliotheksentwicklungen', organized by Sabine Stummeyer; 'Digitale Erschließung besonderer Bibliotheksbestände'; and 'eBooks in öffentlichen Bibliotheken'. I gave a short presentation on my experiences with the library exchange program. I also attended special events for international guests, such as the orientation session, tours of the city and the historic Ratskeller, and the mayor's reception, held in the upper hall of the Rathaus. The informal interactions allowed me to get know librarians from the Czech Republic, France, Poland, Switzerland, and the UK.

I was impressed with the friendliness of conference librarians, some of whom spontaneously engaged me in conversation or sought me out after a session, curious about my professional background and experience on the exchange program. I thoroughly enjoyed the enthusiastic conversations and welcomed the opportunity to learn about libraries and library practices in Europe.



### **Personal and Professional Considerations**

EVERYONE'S considerations for an extended practicum will inevitably be different. I had to re-evaluate my professional goals and whether they would be advanced by an international practicum. A long sabbatical leave from my present job was possible, because of my university's union contract, but for others, it may be necessary to take vacation days and therefore arrange a shorter practicum.

Another important consideration is unquestionably one's family and how to manage those obligations while on a practicum. Parents or parents-in-law can sometimes help with child care. That arrangement allowed a colleague to spend several weeks on a practicum in London; she had weighed the practicum's long-term advantages against the short-term inconveniences to her and her family. The travel and housing expenses for any practicum will naturally depend on one's choice of location and length of visit. I stayed with a friend in Munich, and the stipendium from the BI-I helped to defray expenses for language classes. Other colleagues found accommodation in hotels, though expensive; far better for some would be to rent an apartment or to share an apartment, as another colleague did in Munich.

Finally, one should consider seriously or try to imagine one's reactions in a different locale, a different culture, and a different language. One's potential responses will depend of course on personality and prior experiences. People deal with unfamiliarity in different ways.

### Be among the 4%

THE GERMAN-AMERICAN LIBRARY EXCHANGE PROGRAM certainly takes the difficulty out of arranging one's practicum. Thanks to the program staff of the ALA, BIB, BI-I, and to librarians here in Germany, I have enjoyed a spectacular experience, one that I will long remember. I would definitely recommend the experience to anyone wishing to jumpstart or enhance one's career or to anyone dreaming about other possibilities in life. While 38% might dream of taking a sabbatical from work, according to recent survey, only 4% follow through to do it <<http://www.brigitte.de/frauen/job/nicht-mehr-arbeiten-1159108/>>. My advice is to be among the 4%.

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<p><b>38 Prozent träumen von einem Sabbatical. Erst 4 Prozent machen es</b></p>	
	<p>Fernbeziehung, ihr Freund „Ich wollte wissen: Kann</p>

### Acknowledgements

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