

NETWORKING THE ASIA-PACIFIC: A CO-OPERATIVE LIBRARY VENTURE BEGUN THROUGH SPECIAL LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION (SLA) AND THE AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION (ALIA)*

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Abstract: During the past three years a network for librarians and information specialists has been established in the Asia-Pacific Region. This network has been encouraged from two sources, namely the PAM Division of SLA and ALIA.

As it has developed, there has been a shift in focus. Originally envisaged as a network for astronomical libraries in this Region, through the involvement of 1997-98 PAM Chair, Liz Bryson, the PAM International Relations Committee (IRC) developed objectives for the group which emphasise world-wide equity of access to information resources.

In late 1998 letters of invitation to participate in an international forum were sent to librarians, in the subjects covered by PAM, who were within the geographic area. Response was sufficient to establish a discussion list and develop a web-site. The Forum has been named the Physics Astronomy Mathematics, Asia Pacific Forum (PAM-APF).

In August 1999 the Forum met in Hobart, Australia at the ALIA Specials Conference. The focus for this session was the development of email-partnerships between librarians in developing and developed countries. As at January 2000 more than 60 librarians from 21 countries representing, relatively equally, developed and developing countries had indicated their interest in participating. From these a small group was chosen to trial the project for a three-month period before all other participants are involved. It is anticipated that results from the initial stages of the project will be available by mid 2000.

This paper will detail the methodology used in the establishment of PAM-APF. As the publishing and research industries are changing rapidly, it is through the development of networks such as PAM-APF that colleagues have the opportunity to exchange information quickly and effectively and so are able to provide necessary resources for their research and client communities.

Introduction

Non-commercial scientific publications have been freely distributed world-wide to relevant institutions for more than a century. Scientists have considered collaboration a very important aspect of their work and to assist them, librarians have established a supportive international network. However, new technology is

* Professional Paper contributed to the Worldwide Conference on Special Librarianship "Global2000" organized by the SLA, 16-19 October 2000 (paper not presented due to time restrictions)

providing new approaches for both the research communities and those managing resources. The role of librarians and information specialists is not changing, but the method of providing the resources required by researchers has changed dramatically. Now much of the work undertaken by librarians and information specialists is done inconspicuously. Without this work researchers would not have access to the many bibliographic databases that they use on a daily basis.¹

The distribution of resources is inequitable between the North and South. On 1 April 1999, *Nature* published a special supplement *Science in Latin America*. On 11 June 1999 *Science* published a two-page article "A second chance to make a difference in the Third World?" Both articles highlighted the benefits that can be made through supportive networks.

During the past three years the International Relations Committee, Physics Astronomy Mathematics and Computer Science Division (PAM) of the Special Libraries Association (North America) has been working with the Asia Pacific Special Interest Group (APSIG) of the Australian Libraries and Information Association (ALIA) in the formation of PAM-APF.

The aims of PAM-APF are:

- fostering the exchange of information amongst colleagues;
- ensuring that publishers are aware of technological weaknesses in developing countries, especially in the Asia Pacific Region; and
- assisting colleagues to obtain the bibliographic information required by their research communities.

Background

Since 1988, a series of meetings for astronomy librarians, Library and Information Services in Astronomy (LISA) have been held in the USA and Europe. From the network that developed, as a result assistance in the form of twinning libraries was introduced between libraries in Europe and the USA and those in former Eastern Block countries. However, such a program has not been developed for libraries in the Asia Pacific Region and the number of delegates from Asia and the Pacific region who have been able to attend these meetings is declining. Unfortunately, the last meeting received little publicity in Asia and the Pacific, and the only two

¹ Grothkopf, U. (2000): *Astronomy libraries 2000: Context, coordination, cooperation.*; *Information Handling in Astronomy*, Andre Heck (ed.), Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 165-174

delegates from that Region were from India and from Australia. This event emphasised the need for publicising the problems faced by those in this Region.

During the past two years, PAM-APF has been an intermediary for the international library community and publishers to publicise the problems faced by libraries and their research communities in developing countries. A website was developed in 1998 to enable PAM-APF to act as a forum for sharing and exchanging information resources and knowledge. This site includes a list of participants from 23 countries. The pages are now translated into Chinese and Spanish, and these are maintained in China and Chile respectively.

Methodology

After the 1995 LISA II meeting, a need for support for astronomy librarians in the Asia Pacific Region was perceived. Jeanette Regan, Australian National University, who chaired the PAM IRC from 1997-2000, established regular meetings with other astronomical librarians in Australia and maintained contact with colleagues in China. Then, in 1997, this contact was formalised through the involvement of Liz Bryson of the Canada France Hawaii Telescope, and the PAM International Relations Committee (IRC). Under the direction of the IRC Chair, and supported by APSIG, objectives were developed emphasising the need for equal, world-wide access to information resources, through PAM-APF.

Since 1998, a discussion list has been developed with over 100 participants from 27 nations, and a web site has been established at <<http://msowww.anu.edu.au/library/pam-apf/intro.htm>>. This includes a list of those willing to share their expertise and knowledge.

It was decided that the most appropriate and effective method to assist librarians in developing countries was by direct exposure to colleagues and publishers in developed countries. To achieve this, a strategy was developed that directly involves these colleagues by:

- providing publicity through announcements over relevant discussion lists and articles in library newsletters and magazines;
- providing a Forum for these colleagues to present the situation within their country at major conferences;
- providing the opportunity to network with colleagues and publishers;
- involving colleagues from developing countries in policy decisions through participation on the PAM International Relations Committee.

Approximately 600 librarians from Asia, Australasia, Latin America and the Caribbean were contacted at the end of 1998 and invited to participate in the Forum and to complete a questionnaire detailing level of Internet access. The World of Learning was used as the source for addresses, supplemented occasionally with information from the World Wide Web. Chinese and Spanish translations of these letters were sent to relevant colleagues. The organisation of this survey was managed by the then IRC Chair and involved librarians from five continents. Full details of a report on this survey were presented by Christina Louis at the 1999 SLA Annual Conference and are available at <http://msowww.anu.edu.au/library/pam/intro.htm>.

At the same time, the IRC has also worked to establish awards which would enable colleagues in developing countries to have a means with which to voice their concerns to both publishers and colleagues in developed countries. This has been achieved through the establishment of the PAM International Membership Award (PAM IMA) and the PAM International Travel Award (PAM ITA). The first award provides two years membership to SLA. The recipient is also made a member of the IRC and so able to advise directly on how developing countries can best be assisted. The PAM Travel Award, sponsored by the Geelong East Rotary Club (Australia), fully funds the PAM IMA winner to attend the SLA Annual Conference in the USA.

Within many developing countries there is no facility to share bibliographic resources. In India astronomy librarians, lead by Christina Louis of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, are establishing a combined catalogue through the Forum for Resource Sharing in Astronomy (FORSA). This Forum is being used by PAM-APF to broaden library resources to other related subjects including physics, mathematics and computer science. In 2000, a brief survey was undertaken by Myrna Koch, Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile and Maria Eugenia Gomez, European Southern Observatory, Chile, of facilities that are available in five countries within the Latin Americas. General reports on these areas are available on the PAM-APF web site.

In addition, an Email Partnership Program is being trialled. This aims to establish email partnerships between librarians in developing countries and those in developed countries. In early 2000 a trial group was contacted and partnerships formed. This trial group is being regularly monitored. Then, in June 2000, all colleagues who had responded to the initial questionnaire were contacted again and invited to join the Email Partnership Program by completing a web form on the PAM-APF web site.

Achievements and challenges

There have now been two PAM IMA recipients. At the time the first award was given, the PAM ITA had not been established. However, the winner, Christina Louis from India, was able to attend the SLA Annual Conference as the recipient of another annual award, the Sci-Tech Award. (This annual award is available to SLA member librarians who are outside North America.) The second PAM IMA winner is Nancy Gomez from Argentina. Nancy is the first to receive the PAM ITA.

There have been immediate benefits at several levels for the recipients of these awards:

- they have received recognition from their home institutions;
- by observing, at first hand, the example of their colleagues in developed countries, they have realised the enormity of the benefits produced through networking;
- they have established personal contacts and networks with both publishers and colleagues in developed countries;
- some publishers have responded with special arrangements for the libraries involved;
- Christina Louis was invited to present further papers at both a local library seminar and at a major national conference, Recent Advances in Information Technology 1999 (READIT 99)²
- Nancy Gomez received further financial assistance from other sources to attend the Computers in Libraries 2000, and to present a paper at Transborder Library Forum, Albuquerque, New Mexico 2000³

The last two points show how librarians in specialised subjects can lead others by their example.

In August 1999, the first PAM-APF meeting was held as a focus session of an ALIA conference, held in Hobart, Australia. Ten delegates attended this session

² Louis, C. & Vagiswari, A., PAM-APF (Physics, Astronomy, Mathematics - Asia/PacificForum): Network for Resource Sharing and Consortium formation, , *Proceedings of the conference on Recent Advances in Information Technology*, Kalpakkam, India, Oct.28-29, 1999, p.182-194.

³ Gomez, N. Access options to primary documents in Argentine Science Libraries. *Beyond our borders: Interconnections, FORO X Transborder Library Forum*, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, March 23-25, 2000.

and they represented not only the PAM subjects but also medicine and law. They represented a number of countries including Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Hong Kong, United Kingdom and Australia. Dr Nancy Lane, Australian Academy of Science, proposed the to establishment of the Email Partnership Program, and this was announced at this meeting. All those present and a number who were unable to attend, gave their full support to the following:

- the establishment of partnerships in all disciplines, not just those in the PAM subjects.
- working in conjunction with the publicity provided by having awards for delegates to attend further meetings in developed countries.
- further investigations of organisations are already providing assistance to colleagues in this Region and how there might be collaboration with them

In early 2000, the first a trial group for the email partnerships was contacted. From this group the guidelines were amended better to reflect the informal style of partnerships that are now being proposed. In June 2000 all librarians on the web list were contacted and invited to participate in this program.

Future developments

A basis has now been developed on which this Network can be extended. As well as the main PAM-APF, there are now groups of librarians active in both India and the Latin Americas. Future work will be aimed at consolidating all these networks throughout the Asia Pacific Region. This will be achieved by continuing to use the strategies that have been developed and implemented successfully by and for PAM-APF.

Those who attended the meeting in Hobart were enthused to have the email partnership extended outside the PAM subject areas. It was decided initially to limit the group to ensure that the proposed scheme was workable. As this has been achieved, those outside these subjects now have a model which can be repeated.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that PAM-APF has made an impact, both within specific developing countries and to the relevant library communities world wide.

There is still much to be done to consolidate networks, and to ensure that librarians and information specialists from the many different cultures throughout this region are not too reserved to participate. Co-operative networking ventures such as PAM-APF serve Librarians and information specialists with the facilities

to provide more effectively, the bibliographic resources required by research communities.

Acknowledgements

Many people, within the library communities and outside them, have given their time and technical expertise directly and indirectly in the various matters dealt with in this paper and it is appreciated. A special note of thanks go to the IRC and PAM Board, Amelia McKenzie, Convenor, APSIG and to Dr Nancy Lane, Australian Academy of Science.

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