
Cate Carlyle and Dee Winn, Your Passport to International Librarianship. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2018, 144 pp., $66.00.

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Your Passport to International Librarianship is most useful as a motivational guide to prepare the reader for a successful journey. The book consists of eight chapters. The first chapter defines international librarianship, and the second outlines its many benefits. Chapters three through six detail the authors’ own international volunteer experiences, including trip-planning information, practical insights and advice, and following up after returning home. Chapter seven describes Librarians Without Borders’ Guatemala program, and the book ends at chapter eight with a list of resources on international librarianship. While the first chapter provides a scholarly definition of international librarianship, the rest of the book adopts a more informal tone. Though the authors briefly introduce ways that readers can engage in international librarianship without leaving home, the book’s central focus is on the experiential aspects that require leaving home and volunteering internationally. Authors Carlyle and Winn wrote this book because they discovered a lack of resources when they were planning their own international librarianship trips. The book also serves to inspire and empower the reader to make the world a better place by volunteering their time and energy in an international library.

This book was written for a broader audience than just LIS professionals, so it could be useful for anyone interested in volunteering for international efforts. Many of the projects that are described take place at school libraries and are focused on children’s programming, but that doesn’t mean that the tasks are solely for school or public librarians. Both authors explain how these trips have benefited them as academic librarians.

Chapter two outlines the ways in which all librarians can benefit the profession and themselves through international librarianship, which reinforces many of the core values of the library profession. Throughout the book, readers are presented with social responsibility initiatives that address inequalities due to lack of information and resources in other parts of the world. The authors summarize how librarians can embrace diversity by partnering with an organization from a different
culture. Furthermore, the volunteer efforts support education by providing culturally relevant materials that complement the curriculum, developing programming with the educators, and teaching information literacy skills.

In chapter three, the authors provide a detailed account of their volunteer trips. Carlyle and Winn have been on three volunteer trips each, so they are seasoned international volunteers. While most of the experiences described in the book involve working with Librarians Without Borders, where the authors first met, Carlyle’s trips offer additional insight into working with two other nonprofit library organizations in Central America. Her trip to Honduras was one that she arranged on her own, and her account of that experience depicts all the details that go into organizing a trip.

Chapters four through six focus on practical elements of international trips, so this section is especially useful for anyone who intends to volunteer internationally. Chapter four starts, logically, with the planning stages, providing information on selecting and applying for the trip, understanding related expenses, ways to fundraise, and the packing essentials. The expense comparisons are useful for potential travelers to get an idea of how much they will spend based on the type of trip they select. Chapter five provides an assortment of advice, such as weather, culture shock, and communication barriers. Some of their advice is generic to international travel, while other tips are specifically relevant to international librarianship trips: transporting supplies, being flexible to unexpected changes, and living and working with a group of new acquaintances. A common occurrence throughout their experiences is that not everything goes according to plan, so it’s best to be prepared for the unexpected and to be flexible. In chapter six the authors discuss appropriate follow-up ideas after the trip, to maintain a relationship with the international community and to share the knowledge gained from the experience.

The authors are noticeably sensitive when describing the partnerships between the volunteers and the communities they support. The volunteer organizations’ involvement with these communities is collaborative, long-term, and sustainable, so that it is a mutually beneficial partnership. They listen to the needs of the community and work with them to come up with culturally appropriate solutions. For example, whenever possible, books are purchased in the host country, to promote the local economy. Books published locally will also contain content in the correct dialect and be culturally relevant to the audience. The emphasis on partnership is evident in chapter seven, written by contributor Debbie Chavez, who is the Guatemala program manager of Librarians Without Borders. She details the ongoing relationship and shared goals between her program and the Asturias Academy, a private nonprofit grade school in Guatemala. She describes the history of the partnership and elaborates on how it is sustained with annual trips to maintain the school library and to promote early-childhood literacy.
The book ends with chapter eight, a list of resources for the reader to find opportunities to engage in international librarianship from home or afar. While the book concentrates heavily on Librarians Without Borders, this chapter includes many other education and library service trips. The descriptions are brief, as the authors intend this section to be a starting point for the research process.

There are several text boxes throughout the book that are written by other volunteers and individuals from the partnered communities, which complement the main text. These contributors’ perspectives serve to convince the reader that international librarianship is an enriching experience for all involved. Carlyle and Winn have successfully communicated that anyone with the right attitude, regardless of their means, can participate in international librarianship. Your Passport to International Librarianship serves its purpose of inspiring the reader and providing a starting point for trip planning.