

An Internship with the U.S. Department of State

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ILS 582 Library Science Practice

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December 19, 2012

My internship with the U.S. Department of State began on September 17, 2012 and concluded on December 7, 2012. For the internship, I was working at Africa Regional Services (ARS), which is located in Paris, France. ARS supports information resource centers at embassies in Francophone Africa, the Maghreb, and Haiti. Recently, it has begun supporting Portuguese-speaking posts in Africa as well. My work was divided evenly between two sections of Africa Regional Services. I spent the morning working with the Bibliographic section. During the afternoon, I would work with Nouveaux Horizons. In addition to all of the information and library science tasks that I completed, I was also expected to attend events that would enable me to better understand what life is like in the Foreign Service.

The Bibliographic section consists of a librarian. I assisted her throughout my internship. While working with this section, I wrote and updated webliographies, updated Books-in-French lists, entered Books-in-Portuguese lists into the SQL, responded to research requests, reviewed books for inclusion in lists, marked books of interest, copied images of book covers, and went to a bookstore for research.

The webliographies are lists of websites in French relating to a specific theme that will be useful for posts. The Department of State or the diplomatic posts request the themes. Websites are sorted into smaller subcategories within the webliographies. All of the sites must be in French and from reliable sources. I searched for websites using Google.fr and checked for useful websites that had been created by the Department of State. Shortly after I arrived, I found websites for use in a webliography on the U.S. Presidential Elections. I wrote a short explanation of each site in French. The librarian reviewed and corrected my work. The final product is now available at [ars-paris.state.gov/bif\\_webliographies\\_e.html](http://ars-paris.state.gov/bif_webliographies_e.html) under U.S. Presidential Elections

2012. In addition to creating webliographies, I also updated webliographies that were already in existence so that they had current information and all of the links were still working.

Work with Books-in-French (BIF) lists occupied a lot of my time. I began by downloading images of book covers from an online database called Electre ([www.electre.com](http://www.electre.com)) for later use in the SQL. After a few weeks of that, I was given the appropriate permissions in the SQL to be able to create and update BIF lists. To update a list, I would compare the information on a printout from the SQL or the ARS website with the publisher's information on each book that was provided in Electre. I had to check that the price in Euros had not changed for each book. If the price had changed, I would enter the new price in Euros into the SQL and calculate a new estimate for the cost of the book in U.S. dollars. If I was already making changes to a record, or if the book was printed by a publisher that was known to have changed distributors recently, I would make sure that the correct distributor was listed in the record. If a book was out of print, I replaced it with a new edition. When there was no new edition, things became more complicated. I would either mark that book as out of print so that people ordering the BIF list would know that they would not receive the book or find a suitable replacement. This was usually a similar book by the same author.

After some work in updating BIF lists, I was told to search for books that could be included in a new BIF list on wildlife trafficking. I found about twenty books in Electre for consideration. The librarian went through the list I had come up with and ordered copies of books that she thought could be used. She then reviewed three of the books and I reviewed one. The book that I reviewed was the only one suitable for inclusion in a BIF list so instead of me creating a new list, the librarian sent the one book to posts as a supplement to a previous list. She explained that books on some topics are difficult to find in French. People in those fields simply

read the books in English. Books included in the BIF list must give an international or American view depending on the topic in addition to supporting their arguments well.

My work with the Books-in-Portuguese (BIP) lists varied slightly from my work with the BIF lists. The Portuguese books had already been selected by the librarian and shipped to posts in Africa. However, the librarian had made her entire list without the use of a database since the SQL was put into place shortly before the Portuguese books were shipped. My task was to take the printed lists that she had made, find any missing information, and enter the records for each book into the SQL. Also, I had to find pictures of the book covers. It was more challenging to find information on books in Portuguese than in French because I did not have access to a universal database like Electre. I looked for information at the websites of the two distributors in Portugal that the books had been purchased from. The sites were written in Portuguese so I was conducting searches in that language. I had to be very careful when inputting the records into the SQL that all of the words were spelled correctly and had the appropriate diacritical marks. I do not speak Portuguese so I had to use my knowledge of Spanish and French along with a dictionary to complete the task. There were a total of six BIP lists. To make the task more difficult one of the sites I was using could not search by ISBN. Also, some Portuguese distributors delete books from their public databases when they stop selling them instead of marking the books as out of print so some books seemed to have never existed. I was able to find most of the information that I needed. When all of the information had been entered into the SQL, I was able to mark the books as belonging to a certain BIP list so that a list could automatically be generated and printed by the computer. The librarian looked up information in her records that I could not find at the distributors' websites or at FNAC.pt (A bookseller in Portugal owned by a French company).

Also, I looked through copies of *Livres-Hebdo*. This is a weekly magazine with descriptions of all of the books that have been published in France. I marked the books that might be of interest for future BIF lists and photocopied the necessary pages. During the final week of my internship, I went to FNAC, which is a department store that includes a large bookstore to begin the research for a new BIF list. It was nice to hold the books in my hand as I made notes of which books could be useful. A post recommended the new BIF list topic. Unfortunately, my internship ended before the list was finished so I will not see the final results.

Other tasks included doing research for a post and cataloging books. One of the posts requested a list of websites that would be useful for its programming for the International Day of the Girl Child and International Women's Day. I looked for useful websites in French using Google.fr and Google.com. It was difficult to find sites relating to International Day of the Girl Child because the holiday was just created by the United Nations this year. I was able to send the research to the post myself after it had been reviewed.

I had successfully completed some practice worksheets relating to Dewey classification during my internship. In the final week, I selected call numbers for two newly published Nouveaux Horizons books. My choices were not correct, but I now know that assigning a call number depends partially on the library. Since the libraries served by ARS are small and a large part of their collection relates to the United States some geographic codes can be omitted and the numbers do not need to go out more than a couple of decimal places.

In the afternoons during my internship, I worked with Nouveaux Horizons. It is a book publishing company that is operated by the U.S. Department of State. It sells books to bookstores in Francophone Africa, the Maghreb, and Haiti at a reduced price. Additionally, each diplomatic post receives a certain number of copies for free and can purchase more books if they would like.

The books are all in French except for a few bilingual books for children. At least one of the authors must be American for a book to be included in the program. The books are translated from English into French. I assisted the publisher by reading reviews of books in English, researching the answers to questions, recommending books for publication, and reviewing books that were being considered for publication. When I first arrived, I wrote synopses in French and English for books that had been recently published. They will eventually be used in the SQL. Also, throughout the semester, I wrote many postings in English that were later translated to French for use on the Nouveaux Horizons Facebook page. In the final week before I left, I thoroughly examined the research function in the SQL to determine if specific books could be found using the search tools.

I was working on many tasks that were related to finding books by American authors that could be considered for translation and publication by Nouveaux Horizons. I would read book reviews in *Publishers Weekly*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and *The New York Review of Books*. While reading the reviews I would mark any books that related to the topics that Nouveaux Horizons publishes books about such as political science, management, and civilization to bring them to the attention of the publisher. In addition to the topics I had to consider if a book was too long and if it would be useful for an African audience. Not all of the recommendations were based on magazines. There were other situations when I was expected to recommend books as well. Once I was given a list of popular and classic children's books that was being sold in English to diplomatic posts by another publishing company that Nouveaux Horizons sometimes partners with. I had to narrow the list of 50 books down to about 10 books. The publisher then read through my notes and reasons for recommending or excluding books. She requested examination copies of the books that she felt were best suited to the program. In

this case, the books needed to have already been translated to French to speed up the process. I could find the names of French versions using the Bibliothèque nationale de France online catalog or Amazon.fr. A few times, the publisher gave me a topic and asked me to find books that they could consider in that topic. I would look for books using Amazon.com or sometimes I would find lists of award winning books on the ALA website.

When a book is under consideration for publication by Nouveaux Horizons it must be reviewed. I read many children's books in their entirety and skimmed an adult book to complete this process. Then I completed a book review form to respond to questions about the book such as what reading level it is written for and will it quickly become obsolete. I had to explain if I would recommend the book for publication or not and why. I reviewed several children's chapter books that were in French and picture books in English as well as one book for adults in English. As I was reading, I made note of what verb tenses were being using in French and if the authors had characters speaking with an accent. I also made note of anything that might be offensive or out-of-place to people in Africa.

The research questions that I was asked by the publisher, related to books that were being considered for publication. When I was preparing a list of books to recommend on an assigned topic, I had to verify that the authors were American. Usually, I could not find a site listing what country an author was a citizen of, but I could come to the conclusion that someone who was born in the United States was most likely American and that someone who had completed all of his or her schooling outside of the United States was probably not. I knew that if someone won the Newbery Medal they were American.

Also, I searched for biographies of famous people. This task was required for two different picture books that will be published by Nouveaux Horizons. In the first book, everyone

was very famous so I was able to find information about each person at biography.com and summarize important information about the person in a few sentences. This will help to explain who the people are in the book to people outside of the United States. The women in the second book were very important, but not all of them were well known. I searched the Internet and Credo to verify that the biographies, which had been published a few years ago, were still current. I found that two of the individuals had died. Another two individuals were not mentioned by reliable websites. I think this was because they had both been dead for a long time. Nouveaux Horizons will make the appropriate updates to the book when it is translated to French and published.

Also, I spent time most days writing posts for the Nouveaux Horizons Facebook page. These posts were intended to draw fans attention to certain books related to upcoming holidays and events or themes. My post about World Food Day was translated and placed on the page. Towards the end of my internship, I began to find quotes from famous Americans that related to the themes that Nouveaux Horizons publishes books on. Some came from websites that I found while the rest were from picture books that were recommended by the publisher. Nouveaux Horizons will publish those books in the future. I was also searching for photos of the famous people who had said the quotes. The woman who is in charge of working with social media for ARS gave me some suggestions on how to proceed.

One of my favorite tasks during the final weeks of my internship was working with the research feature in the SQL. It has not been release to the posts yet. I was looking through all of the search features to find out how they worked. I attempted to find specific books and books on certain topics. I discussed the results of my searches with the publisher and gave her my notes. It



was interesting because I could see the interface both as a regular user would see it and as a member of the ARS staff could see it. This view allowed me to better understand search results.

In addition to my work that was related to information and library science, other portions of my internship were to help me better understand what life is like in the Foreign Service. I attend a meeting for the ARS heads of section and an expanded ARS staff meeting. I also wrote a list of question to ask the librarian and publisher who I worked with about how the organization worked and how they received feedback from posts. I attended a meeting at the embassy with my supervisor where in addition to seeing the meeting of section heads, I was presented to the U.S. ambassador to France. I got to meet Foreign Service officers, local staff, and an ambassador who toured ARS. I was expected to participate in social activities with Embassy employees and their families. I enjoyed a walking tour, and a tree lighting ceremony. I would have liked to have become involved in social activities earlier in my internship.

My internship and my stay in France were valuable experiences. I have gained many new skills relating to information and library science and French. Also, I got to see a bit of how an embassy functions and what life is like in the Foreign Service. I am very glad that I was accepted for this internship.