

INFOBILA

Lat 1162 Puerto Rico
MFN 6880 BIBLIOTECA



CENTRO UNIVERSITARIO
DE INVESTIGACIONES
BIBLIOTECOLÓGICAS

The educational value
of
ACURIL
by
Blanca Hodge

INFOBILA

The educational value of ACURIL

ACURIL is the acronym for Association for Caribbean, Research and Institutional Libraries, and was founded in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The Association of Caribbean Universities (UNICA), organized in 1967, to promote Caribbean Universities inter-cooperation, recognized the need of library cooperation in the region. In the 1968 annual meeting of UNICA, papers were presented on the theme of library cooperation. This Association sponsored the first Caribbean conference on university and research institutes library cooperation, hosted by the University of Puerto Rico in June 1969, in San Juan. Forty delegates from the Caribbean region and observers from other areas attended the meeting. At this conference the Association of Caribbean University and Research Institute Libraries (ACURIL) was born to meet the need for a joint approach to cooperative acquisition, cooperative bibliographic indexing and microfilming, and four working committees were set up for these areas. Resolutions were adopted stressing the control of government publications in the Caribbean.

The Constitution outlined the association's aims as follows:

- to facilitate the development and use of libraries and the identification of library collections in support of the whole range of intellectual endeavors throughout the Caribbean area.
- to strengthen the profession of librarianship in the region.
- to promote cooperative library activities in pursuit of these objectives.

Membership was opened to "University and research libraries situated within the Caribbean archipelago and the mainland countries or the states of the United States which border the Caribbean Sea or the Gulf of Mexico, including the Guianas".

Libraries located outside the region with collections pertinent to the Caribbean were admitted as associate members.

The association was incorporated as a non-profit organization under the laws of Puerto Rico.

Later - in response to the need of development of the association - some changes have taken place in the organization. In 1976, the association opened its doors to other kinds of libraries, and the word institutes was changed to institutional, thus becoming the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries.

In 1986 ACURIL widened its scope again by opening up to library associations, libraries, archives and information centres and its personnel.

By keeping pace with the demands of its membership ACURIL has grown over the years. From 25 to 100 institutional members has been paralleled by the attendance of annual conferences rising from around 50 at first to 250 at present.

Moreover, all the four official language groups of the area - Dutch, English, French and Spanish - are now fully represented in ACURIL's membership which spans 31 countries and islands.

A major achievement, and an example to others.

To many Caribbean librarians, ACURIL is synonymous with people. So strong have been the personal bonds forged over the years that not a conference passes without gifts being exchanged between the regular attendees. Equally, to many ACURIL is the professional stimulation derived from the annual conferences and all that takes place in both formal and informal discussion. To all, ACURIL is the Caribbean library co-operation, continuing education and camaraderie par excellence.

It is the boost which ACURIL has given to Caribbean librarianship as a whole that is most appreciated.

By fostering unity among library, information and archives personnel, by developing a scholarly approach to the profession and by generating a new sense of self-esteem and confidence among its members, ACURIL has effectively set its seal on inter-library-relations throughout the region and beyond.

ACURIL is not involved in training programmes. ACURIL is the mechanism through which the professionals in the Caribbean are exposed to new developments in the Library and Information Sector. It is the mechanism that brings together all these librarians from different backgrounds, different types of libraries and different language groups to find out if and where there is common ground to work upon.

On an annual basis conferences are mounted, the themes of which, are chosen by the president. This theme is dealt with in a variety of ways, by a variety of people, and from a variety of viewpoints. It is done in such a way that all professionals will find something of interest in the presentations.

The ACURIL official languages are English, French and Spanish, and there is simultaneous interpretation during all plenary sessions.

The format has changed over the years, and the accepted structure for the moment is that there are plenary sessions in the morning and workshops and/or group sessions in the afternoon, ensuring the widest participation possible.

All plenary sessions are followed by discussions, ensuring a two-way communication, and much of the discussion continues during coffee-breaks, lunch breaks and continues into the social gatherings of the evening.

During the years the following topics have been dealt with:

- 1969: Library cooperation and information.
- 1970: Official publications of Caribbean governments.
- 1971: Library resources in the Caribbean.
- 1972: Personnel management in the Caribbean.
- 1973: The role of the library in the development of a country.
- 1974: Centralization and decentralization in university and research libraries.
- 1975: Education of librarians in the Caribbean.
- 1976: Planning of national library and information systems.
- 1977: Caribbean resources sharing, preservation and photoduplication.
- 1978: Non-print media and audio-visual aids in the libraries of the Caribbean.
- 1980: Role of the librarian in a developing society in the Caribbean area.

- 1981: Communication in the Caribbean : myth or reality?
- 1982: Information and development in the Caribbean area.
- 1983: Caribbean libraries and research.
- 1984: Automation and information in the Caribbean.
- 1985: Users of information ; the critical variable in the Caribbean setting.
- 1986: Continuing education of librarians in the Caribbean.
- 1987: Caribbean collections : professional management and strategies for librraies.
- 1988: Information technology : computers, communication and the Caribbean.
- 1989: The universal availability of information ; the Caribbean perspective.
- 1991: The production and distribution systems of books in the Caribbean.
- 1992: Management of resources in Caribbean libraries and information centres.
- 1993: Information horizons for the Caribbean : systems and services.
- 1994: Diversity and integration in the Caribbean

One has to bear in mind that the Caribbean area is "hampered" by its small scale. I am bringing this point forward to explain the educational value of these annual conferences. Although conferences are important for everyone, this is more so the case for smaller - isolated - nations. I think that for this extensive Latin American continent it will be difficult to understand, but you could compare it with libraries, operating in remote villages - without any form of communication with the outer world. Due to the fact that in many of the islands there are just a few professionals, ACURIL is often the only available professional outlet.

Within the ACURIL-body there are various Standing Committees and Special Interest Groups, which also contribute towards the professional development of the participants.

The following committees are in operation:

Acquisitions (English)
Acquisitions (Spanish)
Bibliography
Constitution and By-Laws
Francophone
Indexing (English)
Indexing (Spanish)
Preservation and Conservation

The following Special Interest Groups exist:

Archives
National libraries
Public Libraries
School libraries
Special libraries
University libraries

The committees and special interest groups meet twice or three times during the week, and work on joint projects that are carried out throughout the year. Many people cannot contribute or receive during the large plenary sessions, and are much more comfortable in the smaller settings of the committees and/or special interest groups. The special interest groups especially, provide professionals with the needed opportunity to discuss common problems, and look for common solutions.

In the committees cooperative projects are undertaken, such as the gathering of information on addresses and exporting policies of booksellers, identifying periodicals and newspapers, collecting of data on audio-visual equipment.

By gathering this information, it can be shared.

The annual conference is often preceded and/or followed by specific workshops or seminars, in which more in-depth information on certain topics are offered, usually for a limited number of persons, which contributes considerably to the professional development of the individual participants.

Just to name a few examples:

In 1988 there was a post-conference workshop on library buildings, whereas the conference was preceded by a very intensive language lab that lasted for more than a week. It offered qualified participants to improve on their knowledge of the French language. And since French is one of the official ACURIL-languages, and the conference was held in Martinique (French territory), this highly contributed to the possibility of communicating with one another on a one-to-one basis.

In 1991 ACURIL-attendees were able to participate in a disaster management workshop: What to do in case of an earthquake, hurricane? How to rescue what's left?

All topics that are very much related to the professional.

ACURIL is now occupying itself on how to achieve even more. This is being done through strategic planning. We have to await the outcome as the process is still ongoing.

In closing I would like to address the issue of funding, for I can well imagine that people would wish to know how such a succesful organization exists.

The membership of ACURIL consists of various categories, viz.

(a) Institutional members:

Libraries, archives and schools conducting programmes of library or archival education.

Annual dues are five ten thousandths of the operating budget with a minimum of US\$ 25.00 and a maximum of US\$ 150.00.

(b) Library related non-profit organizations of two classes:

(1) National library associations; and

(2) Regional and other special organizations and associations.

Annual dues are US\$ 0.20 per member of the organization with a minimum of US\$ 25.00.

(c) Personal members:

(1) Regular members - librarians and archivists, other employees of libraries or archives, and others interested in library, archival, or related services and activities, with certain exceptions.

(2) Student members - members who are enrolled at least half time in a programme of library, archival or information science.

(3) Non-salaried librarians.

(4) Honorary members.

Annual dues range from US\$ 7.00 in the case of an associate personal member to US\$ 25.00 in the case of

regular member.

It is a matter of course that Honorary Members are exempted from paying dues.

For the annual conferences the reigning president - who has a one-year-term - is responsible for mounting the conference. (S)he tries to organize it in such a manner that it costs ACURIL little or nothing.

This is being done by obtaining funds/grants from international agencies. It goes without saying that it becomes increasingly difficult to obtain funding.

Attendees are sponsored by their institutions, or by themselves. In case the annual conferences are profitable, the profit is returned to the ACURIL treasury. Publications are being sold.

ACURIL's expenses consist of nominal reimbursements to both the Executive Secretary and Treasurer, while President and Vice-President also receive some monies to cover their basic expenses.

In closing: It is true that ACURIL doesn't provide members with ready-made training programs, but ACURIL has succeeded in bringing about an awareness of togetherness, an awareness that - in case you need to know something - you know that there is a colleague elsewhere, but close-by, that can assist you, and ACURIL will remain the primary continuing education tool for many a Caribbean librarian.

After introducing ACURIL as the leading library association in the wider Caribbean area for various types of libraries, surpassing geographical and linguistic boundaries, the author continues to explain why and how ACURIL is involved in the continuing education process of the Caribbean librarian. She gives an overview what has been done so far and also explains how the ACURIL machinery works.