Information Professional Task Force
ASIS&T Task Force Sponsors People to People Visit to China
by Nancy Roderer and Gail Bonath

The work of the ASIS&T Information Professional Task Force went international this year with Nancy Roderer's leadership of a People to People delegation to China to discuss the education and promotion of information professionals. People to People (www.peopletopeople.com/) was founded by President Eisenhower in 1956 to foster direct interaction between citizens of the United States and other countries, and it sponsors a variety of programs for both students and professionals.

From April 17-26, 2010, 10 information professionals from the United States, Canada and Japan visited five libraries and information professional schools in Beijing and Shanghai. Members of the delegation included **Nancy K. Roderer**, director, Welch Medical Library, Johns Hopkins University; **Gwen Alexander**, dean, School of Library and Information Management, Emporia State University; **Sandy Arbuthnot**, web librarian, Toronto Public Library; **Lori Beaudoin**, public

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services librarian, United States Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases Library; **Gail Bonath**, librarian, Grinnell College; **Pascal Calarco**, head, Systems Department, University of Notre Dame; **Anne S. Caputo**, executive director, Dow Jones & Co., and president, Special Libraries Association; **Rumi Graham**, librarian, University of Lethbridge, Canada; **Ann Prentice**, professor emerita and former dean, College of Information Studies, University of Maryland, College Park; and **Yukiko Sakai**, associate manager, Keio University Library, Tokyo, Japan. Nancy Roderer and Ann Prentice are members of the Information Professional Task Force.

It was a special pleasure to have Anne Caputo, president of the Special Libraries Association, as a member of the delegation. Anne has been heavily involved with ASIS&T in the past and was able to contribute the perspective of SLA to the conversations. One relevant task that SLA has undertaken is the description of the competencies of information professionals – see the document, "Competencies for Information Professionals of the 21st Century," available at www.sla.org/content/learn/members/competencies/index.cfm

The professional program for the delegation consisted of visits to three

institutions in Beijing and two in Shanghai. The three in Beijing were the National Science Library, Chinese Academy of Sciences (NSLC); the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China (ISTIC); and Beijing Normal University and College of Information Science and Technology. The two in Shanghai were the Shanghai Municipal Archives and the East China Normal University Library.

Each of these institutions (with the exception of the Shanghai Municipal Archives) includes both a library and an information professional degree-granting program. The delegation had the opportunity to meet with both librarians and library school faculty at each institution.

NSLC is the library of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, which is the national academy for natural sciences in China. NSLC serves 30,000 researchers and 40,000 graduate students throughout China. The director of NSLC, Zhang Xiaolin, gave a presentation to the delegation titled, "Toward Knowledge-Based Information Professionals." He detailed the National Science Library's promotion of the embedded subject librarian, a change in service model, which their institution made in 2006. The embedded subject librarian has a research-based masters or doctoral degree in a

scientific, technical or medical (STM) field. These knowledge-based information professionals are either provided with on-the-job training in information skills or, because NSLC has their own graduate education program, they enroll in the graduate program while they are employed. Embedded subject librarians have no library responsibilities other than to their users. Professor Zhang outlined the key differences between the embedded subject librarian and the traditional librarian:

- Subject librarians understand the STM fields and the R&D process in that field. Their knowledge extends beyond the collections and search and retrieval skills.

- Subject librarians share the users' culture.

- Subject librarians are capable of analyzing, developing and designing customized services.

- Subject librarians' capabilities are not bound by the library's resources.

Next, we visited the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China (ISTIC). ISTIC is a nonprofit research center under the Ministry of Science and Technology, and it serves both the government and the general public. Dr. Zhao Zhiyun, deputy director of ISTIC, provided an overview of the institution for us. Like NSLC, ISTIC has a degree-granting graduate education program for information professionals. Ann Prentice, one of the members of our delegation, has taught in this program at ISTIC several times. While NSLC focuses heavily on service to users, ISTIC focuses on the provision of information services and

collections. Besides publishing 19 science, technology and information science journals, they develop technologies and platforms for information such as Chinese vocabulary systems in subject areas, open-access journal platforms and information mining. ISTIC has purchased the archives of Nature and of the Institute of Physics for the entire country. These and other resources allowed them to provide document delivery for one billion items last year.

China's model of graduate programs for information professionals attached to scientific institutes that are run by the government, as occurs at NSLC and ISTIC, is not found in the United States. ISTIC began to offer the M.A. degree in information science in 1984. They have approximately 35 students each year. NSLC began its graduate education programs in 1979 and began offering the M.L.S. and M.I.S. degrees in 1986. The Ph.D. program in library science began in 1993, and in 1996 NSLC began to offer the Ph.D. degree in information science in conjunction with Nanjing University. NSLC has about 150 students and 50 faculty members. The number of faculty is quite large as all faculty members are practicing librarians, supervisors and researchers as well as instructors. Both ISTIC and NSLC are government agencies with ISTIC being directly under the Ministry of Science and Technology. The Chinese Academy of Sciences, for which NSLC is the library, is the government institution for the management of China's scientific research and was founded on November 1, 1949, one month after the founding of the People's

Republic of China. This involvement at the government level in information professional education extends to the mandating of a core curriculum at the undergraduate level.

Following our visits to the two scientific institutes, we observed information science programs at two universities: Beijing Normal University and East China Normal University (Shanghai). The administrative location of information science programs in Chinese universities varies widely. In Beijing the College of Information Science and Technology is part of the School of Management; at Shanghai the Department of Information is in the Business School. Although only a few institutions in China, including BNU and ECNU, offer the masters degree in library science, there are over 800 institutions in China that offer some sort of information-related degree. Most education in library and information science is at the undergraduate level. The Chinese Ministry of Education has established eight mandatory courses for library and information science curricula at the undergraduate level which include, among others, information technology, information resource management and information theories. Fifty percent of students in the graduate program have undergraduate degrees in library and information science; the other 50 percent have undergraduate degrees in the sciences or social sciences.

At each site we talked about possibilities for collaboration between the institutions and the People to People delegation. Possibilities that were discussed included participating in an ASIS&T panel in

October 2010, speaking at an SLA meeting in June 2011, participating in the Asian chapter of SLA or organizing an Asian chapter of ASIS&T, and developing faculty, student or librarian exchanges. Our Chinese colleagues were very interested in these suggestions.

We also visited the Bund Branch of the Shanghai Municipal Archives. While there we toured the "City Memory" exhibit which chronicles the development of the city of Shanghai from its beginning as a small fishing village in 1292 to the present time. We visited the public reading room and their electronic archives reading hall where about 3000 digitized films are available, along with other digital materials. This gave us the opportunity to find out about training for archives work in China. We learned that for the most part archives education is considered to be a different major than library and information science. Whereas public libraries in China are governed by a cultural ministry, the ministry of archives governs archives.

Of course our trip was not all work, and we did spend some time sightseeing. In Beijing we spent one day visiting Tian'an Men Square and the Forbidden City as well as the Badaling section of the Great Wall. In Shanghai we toured the Bund, the Shanghai Museum, Yu Garden and the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall and attended a performance of the Shanghai Acrobatic Show. We were able to drive by the sites of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. We also enjoyed many excellent meals, including one at the Quanjude

Tian An Men Square 2010.4.21

Members and guests of the ASIS&T Information Professional Task Force People to People delegation to China are, front row, Xu Ning and Meng LiangLiang/Bruce, Peope to People guides; back row, David Roderer, guest; Nancy Roderer; Ann Prentice; Sandy Arbuthnot; Anne Caputo; Pascal Calarco; Rumi Graham; Gwen Alexander; Ashley Meyer, guest; Yukiko Sakai; Lori Beaudoin; Gail Bonath; and Barton Graham, guest.

Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant and a memorable meal at a private home in the Caoyang residential area.

Overall, the delegation found the trip very productive. We learned more about the education of information professionals in China, shared our goals for the promotion of information professionals and had positive responses to the idea of collaborating further. The state of information professional education in China seems to be on something of a parallel track with that of the United States, with a number of different kinds of programs aimed at different aspects of the information professions. Differences include a heavier government involvement and, perhaps, a greater concentration on technological aspects in China than in the United States.

In addition to our interaction with the Chinese, we derived two additional bonuses from this trip. Because of the makeup of the delegation, we were able to discuss information professional education not only in China and the United States, but also in Japan and Canada. Through the participation of Anne Caputo, we learned more about SLA activity in this area and agreed on further collaboration between our respective organizations. At the completion of the trip, all participants agreed to continue talking. A first step in those ongoing conversations will be a workshop planned for the ASIS&T Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh; speakers there will include both People to People delegates and Professor Guoqiu Li from the Department of Information at ECNU. ■