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# Here's Looking At: Fostering International Awareness through University Faculty and Library Partnerships: The Dacus Model

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# Here's Looking At — Fostering International Awareness through University Faculty and Library Partnerships: The Dacus Model

by **Terry L. Norton, Ph.D.** (Professor of Reading Education, Winthrop University) and **Jonathan W. Vare**  
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In an issue of *International Leads*, **Mihaela Parus** described the transformation of libraries in Romania following the December, 1989 revolution that toppled the country's Stalinist-style regime under **Nicolae Ceausescu**. Since then, Romania's libraries have faced tremendous challenges in meeting the information needs of a free society. Parus imperatively stated the necessity for that nation's libraries to transform themselves from "passive depositories of knowledge to institutions that actively participate in the process of democratization." Such a goal would "use the best information and professional advice available" in order to reach "high standards of public services."<sup>1</sup>

This objective for Romania's libraries, eloquently articulated by Parus, is also a worthy aspiration for libraries in countries with longstanding traditions of democracy and freedom. One means by which to accomplish this goal is to inform library constituents of significant trends and issues of an international nature. Such educational outreach is essential for citizens of the world as it becomes more of a shrinking global village.

## Senior Research Associates for Archival Development

At Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina, the **Ida Jane Dacus Library** is meeting the mission of actively promoting global understanding. The impetus behind this objective has been the library's Department of Special Collections. Through the leadership of Professor **Ron Chepesiuk**, head of the department, university faculty have formed the **Senior Research Associates for Archival Development**, or SRA. This organization is best described as an interdisciplinary collaborative designed to harness the scholarly expertise among a selected group of faculty of Winthrop University. Coming from a variety of academic disciplines, its members are noted for contributions within their particular branches of study, for their dynamic speaking abilities, and for their insightful and timely publications. Academic specialties include anthropology, archives, biology, business, education, modern languages, history, human growth and develop-

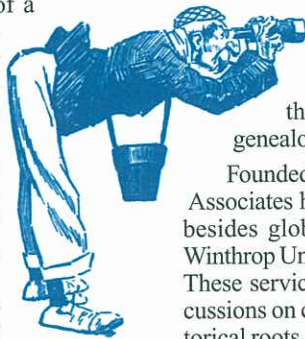
ment, young adult and children's literature, library science, mass communication, political science, and speech. In an effort to broaden its domain of knowledge beyond Winthrop University faculty, SRA has recently expanded its membership to include experts who are from the local York County community: **Gene Barnwell**, **Scott Coleman**, and **Pat Fitzgerald**. These individuals possess expertise in politics and music, in the American Civil War, and in genealogy and journalism, respectively.

Founded in 1994, the Senior Research Associates has provided numerous services besides global outreach programs for the Winthrop University community and beyond. These services have ranged from panel discussions on censorship to lectures on the historical roots of racism in American culture to slide presentations on the more than 600 rare and antique books of the library archives—holdings known as the **Eleanor Burts Collection**. Moreover, members of the group have written news articles on such timely issues as the need for all-day kindergarten in South Carolina's public schools as well as the need for greater emphasis on multicultural education. In addition, such books as *Cook-*

*ing with Mother Goose* (1997) and *Literacy Strategies* (1997) have been authored by group members and other members of the university faculty.

A critical focus of the Senior Research Associates has been its international component. According to Chepesiuk, current executive director of the organization, a fundamental purpose of the group is its concentration on "matters of international importance." Senior Research Associate **Dr. Edward Lee**, a historian with expertise in twentieth century Russia, has noted the importance for citizens of the United States to possess global awareness and believes that this understanding cannot be overly emphasized. Lee observes, "In the new millennium, there will be no national boundaries. SRA members are presenting information to constituents which is beyond national boundaries to assist people in seeing global connections that touch their everyday lives." Seminars and programs, grant applications, the publication of books and of journal articles as well as editorial opinion pieces for newspapers, and ties to other university programs that foster international understanding are all means by which SRA promotes global education.

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### Seminars and Programs

Three years ago, SRA members began a series of programs on global current events. Now offered annually, the programs have attained an especially popular status among students on the Winthrop campus and members of the local community. Called "Hot Spots," the hour-long lecture feature current information on areas of political conflict in the world today. These lively and timely programs educate persons on why a particular country is in conflict and stimulate participants to consider options for conflict resolution.

The "Hot Spots" concept enables the Senior Research Associates to take advantage of the broad range of international expertise among members of the group. In 1996, the series of lectures included Nigeria (**Dr. April Gordon**, Sociology), Vietnam (**Professor Haney Howell**, Mass Communication), Russia (**Dr. Edward Lee**, History), the Middle East (**Dr. Edward Haynes**, History), and Bosnia (**Dr. Larry Timbs**, Mass Communication). In 1998, a new series of programs featured the countries of Cambodia (**Professor Haney Howell**, Mass Communication), Israel (**Dr. Christopher Van Aller**, Political Science), Northern Ireland (**Professor Ron Chepesiuk**, Special Collections), and Zaire (**Dr. April Gordon**, Sociology).

Due to the enormous popularity of its "Hot Spots" lectures, the Senior Research Associates decided in 1998 to add a second international program. A "Cultures of the World" seminar series now features countries such as Canada (**Dr. Christopher Van Aller**, Political Science), Colombia (**Professor Ron Chepesiuk**, Archives), France (**Dr. Judith Barban**, Modern Languages), and Kenya (**Dr. Janice Chism**, Anthropology and Biology).

### Grant Applications

In addition to the provision of local programs and seminars, long-range goals of the Senior Research Associates include further outreach activities within the local community of York County and the state of South Carolina at large. Currently, SRA members are formulating plans to seek monetary support for expansion of the lecture series on international topics. The group proposes to foster community involvement through a series of videotaped lectures on current issues that link the United States and the global community. Proposed lectures for the initial series include: "Russia Looks West," "The War on Drugs: What Are the Options? What Are the Solutions?," "Children in Crisis," "Uncle Sam's Borders," "Opportunities and

Challenges in the Twenty-first Century," and "Africa in Transition."

Other activities will accompany the lecture series; for example, SRA lecturers plan to publish editorial pieces and feature stories in local newspapers and on Internet Web pages as companion pieces to the lectures. Also, through videotaping of lectures, Senior Research Associates can replicate the series for use in other libraries within the state of South Carolina. Accompanying packages of materials will enable persons in other communities to facilitate discussion groups about the international issues addressed in each particular lecture.

### Publications

Another major component of the Senior Research Associates global outreach effort occurs through publications. Its faculty engage in a wide range of publication activities on global topics. These activities take the form of editorial opinion pieces, magazine articles, books, and editorial work, only a sampling of which can be given here.

Members of the SRA faculty collaborative write newspaper articles and opinion editorials, many to run as companion information pieces to the "Hot Spots" and "Cultures of the World" programs. One of **Dr. Edward Lee's** editorials, for example, characterized the resurgence of Stalin's popularity in Russia as "a desperate case of nostalgia." Another piece by **Dr. Terry Norton** and **Dr. Susanna Duckworth**, both in the College of Education, highlighted the diversity of American society and the importance for parents to foster tolerance and respect for differences among various groups of children. As a companion piece to the "Hot Spots" programs on Columbia and Cuba, **Chepesiuk** contributed one opinion-editorial on current United States policy toward Castro's regime and the disadvantages of a "big-stick" approach and a second piece about the new drug threat posed by guerrilla drug trafficking in Columbia.

### Links to Other University Programs

A final means by which SRA has strengthened its arm for international outreach has been through the work of **Dr. Chris Van Aller** in his role as the director of **Winthrop University's International Center**. From this position, he brings to the group an invaluable perspective. The International Center promotes faculty and student exchanges with other countries, serves as a clearinghouse for information, and facilitates cultural accommodation for Winthrop students and faculty who travel abroad or for foreign students and faculty who visit Winthrop on an exchange basis. Van Aller would like to broaden faculty and student participation in the center by introducing greater flexibility into exchanges through such features as shorter terms for visits and better articulation of transfer credits.

Van Aller is also coordinator of **Winthrop's Model United Nations**, a program through which high school students are brought onto campus, participate in simulations of roles representing other nations, and thereby approximate a degree of global immersion. A native of Canada, Van Aller sees an international focus like that found in the Model United Nations as vital for enlarging student perspectives beyond localized culture.

### Conclusion

As Garcia has reported, the cultural and linguistic diversity of the United States today is increasing with the greatest rates of immigration coming from Mexico, followed by the Philippines, then China, Korea, and Vietnam. Accordingly, the nation's population is both "rapidly growing and rapidly diverging."<sup>2</sup> Such facts necessitate that individuals become educated about other people and places. Through its seminars and programs, its potential grants, its publications on global issues for both local and wider audiences, and its affiliation with other programs at Winthrop University having an international orientation, the **Senior Research Associates for Archival Development** is helping to meet this need for higher education and the larger community. The organization is thus fulfilling a major component of its mission: namely, the promotion of global understanding and concomitantly global peace. In this respect, SRA is part of a long-standing educational tradition which continues today with the efforts of UNESCO<sup>3</sup> and which may be traced as far back as the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries when **Pierre Dubois** proposed the idea of international schools as a means to further the abolition of war.<sup>4</sup> 🌍

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Parus, Mihaela. "A Model of International Library Cooperation: The Romanian-American Experience." *International Leads* (Dec. 1997): 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Garcia, Eugene. *Understanding and Meeting the Challenge of Student Cultural Diversity*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994, pp.7-10.

<sup>3</sup> Good, Harry G. and James D. Teller. *A History of Western Education*. 3rd edition. London: Macmillan, 1969, p.312.

<sup>4</sup> Meyer, Adolphe E. *An Educational History of the Western World*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1965, p.491.