

**INTERLINK®**  
**AT INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY:**  
**ADVENTURES IN LIBRARY INSTRUCTION**  
**FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

*by Karen Evans*



## **BACKGROUND ON INTERLINK**

Indiana State University (ISU) is one of four universities within the United States to provide a home for an INTERLINK Language Center; other locations include the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Valparaiso University in Indiana. According to their website for the ISU center, INTERLINK has partnered with ISU since 1987 to provide students with “*quality training in English, culture, and academic preparation.*” Additionally, INTERLINK strives to provide assistance to students in a multitude of areas; including “*speaking and understanding the English language, research and writing skills, an appreciation of cultural mores, and the ability to use technological tools*” for academic, professional and personal use.

The INTERLINK Language Center website advises that the “*majority of INTERLINK patrons are undergraduate or graduate students preparing to attend colleges and universities in the United States. A few students are professionals who enroll in the program to improve their language proficiency. . . . Students arrive from all major geographical regions of the world, including Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.*” When students arrive at INTERLINK, they are “*interviewed and tested in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in order to determine their levels of proficiency. Each student is assigned to one of five levels*” of learning; from an elementary to advanced academic preparation level.

## **INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND INTERLINK**

As of June, 2006, sixty students were enrolled in the INTERLINK program at ISU. Students come from a variety of locations, particularly the Middle and Far East. Many times, after completing their course of study within INTERLINK, students will stay at ISU to obtain an undergraduate and/or graduate degree(s). Library research is a scheduled component for the advanced level classes, but students often receive library instruction at various points throughout their INTERLINK tenure.

Before students arrive in the library for their scheduled instruction session, the librarian requests a list of their topics or interests, and tries to incorporate the topics into search strategies. The topics are often far-reaching and show a wide variety of interests. During the last few library instruction sessions, the topics of *plastic or cosmetic surgery, obesity, school uniforms* and *free trade* have been popular research interests. The classes are often small, ranging from four to ten students. The small class size allows more interaction between the students and librarian. The librarian has the ability to move among the students, spending more time with each one on their search strategies. The two-hour sessions also incorporate the library concept of *self-service*. The idea of searching for and locating materials is often a foreign concept to the students. Students need to realize they can search for sources within the library catalog by themselves, go to the shelf and look at the item and make a decision to check the item out. Discussing self-serve is an excellent time to introduce the idea of browsing the shelves. Explaining the concept of browsing the shelves to find similar materials close by is often a new (and exciting) concept for the students.

## **WHAT INTERLINK (AND INTERNATIONAL) STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW**

With over six years experience in teaching INTERLINK and international students, the author has noticed situations which seem to present unique challenges to the students. In response to these situations, the following list of items is offered for consideration in planning and conducting instruction sessions for INTERLINK or international student groups and individuals:

### ***Cultural Differences***

Be aware of cultural differences. Professors (including librarians) are often held in high esteem in their homeland. Greet them when they enter the library instruction room. Spend a few minutes outside of class chatting with them; a “Hello” and “How are you?” are all you need. Often the student will recognize the

instructor outside of the classroom, but will wait for you to speak first. If you do not have the time to chat, at least acknowledge the student as you walk by.

### ***The Alphabet***

Many international students may not have been exposed to the alphabet American students learn; they may have learned an Arabic or Cyrillic alphabet. To assist the students in learning the alphabet and finding items on the shelf, the alphabet is included on a bookmark given to INTERLINK and international students (see Figure 1). There was a concern when the bookmark with the alphabet was first introduced to the students; however students find the alphabet helpful in deciphering call number locations.

### ***Locating Items in the Library***

This is the most intensive area of instruction. The organization of the Cunningham Memorial Library is covered; from the Reference area to government documents to the Browsing section. The Library of Congress (LC) classification system is briefly introduced. LC is explained as a way to organize items on the shelf using a call number (talking about LC is a great segue-way into call numbers). Call numbers are explained using the analogy of the student ID number. Everyone has a unique student ID and every item in the library has its own unique ID—a call number. Books are displayed showing where the call number is located (spine or front cover). The idea of unique call numbers and locating items in the library is reinforced during library catalog search sessions. The librarian will highlight a catalog entry and ask the students which floor shelves the item. Often, a practice session provides additional experience for students to locate items in the library. The students are handed a call number and a title (to make the search easier for the librarian to provide assistance, all items are located on the same floor) and asked to locate the item. The practice session gives the students a chance to locate an item and ask any questions about the process.

### ***Materials in the Library***

International students may not be familiar with many sources available in libraries in the United States. Encyclopedias (general and subject specific) and almanacs are two sources shown during instruction

sessions. Scholarly and popular sources are discussed, including abstracts and citation lists. Differences between established print sources and the Internet are highlighted, as is the importance of evaluating information obtained from Internet sources.

### ***Services in the Library***

Services available to students and faculty are briefly discussed. Reserves, individual library instruction, recalling an item, interlibrary loan, and the concept of fines for overdue materials are presented. The services are defined and the students are shown any links available to assist them with library services.

### ***Vocabulary***

Libraries and librarians have their own lingo. *Boolean searching, stacks, ILL, check-out, and abstract* are all familiar terms to librarians and some American patrons. To international students, the terms can be bewildering. During instruction, take a few minutes to explain the terms or show the students a library vocabulary list. If students understand the terms and how they apply to library and research, they will find using the library much less stressful.

### ***Asking for Assistance***

Asking for assistance may be a new idea to the international student. Librarians in their homeland may not be accessible for assistance. Asking for help at ISU's Library is strongly encouraged with international students. They are encouraged to ask any questions; from how to find an item on the shelf, to the meaning of a library term, to which database is best for their research. One librarian at ISU is responsible for the majority of instruction sessions for INTERLINK and international students; students often seek out this librarian for assistance. The students are comfortable asking her questions and feel they have a relationship with her because of prior instruction sessions.

During instruction sessions, students are shown a page within the library website where various ways to access assistance are listed. A personal anecdote from a librarian is often shared during this section: an international student spent four hours looking for an item on a Saturday morning, without success in finding the item. The student returned to the library on Monday

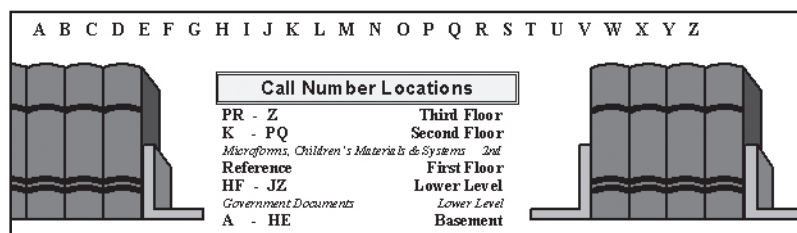


Figure 1

morning and asked the instruction librarian for assistance. He explained his unsuccessful venture in locating items over the weekend. After the items were located; the librarian explained that he should never spend that amount of time without asking for assistance. This example is used to explain to students that browsing an area is fine; but if they are looking for a specific item and cannot locate the item, ask for help. Do not spend four hours looking for something!

### ***Government Documents***

INTERLINK and international students are often amazed at the variety and amount of information available from the United States government. Often, the students are from countries with restrictive governments where information is not readily available. Showing students websites like THOMAS Legislative or The White House provide the students with a new perspective on the amount and diversity of information available from government sources. During library instruction sessions, students are given an opportunity to look for information on their countries and respective governments.

### ***Plagiarism***

Although plagiarism is discussed in the classroom, instructors often request the librarian to include a segment on plagiarism during library instruction. Sessions at ISU include a definition of the term, websites to help students develop the skills to avoid plagiarizing and a tutorial for students to work through. Plagiarism is often a difficult concept for international students; plagiarizing a source can be seen as an honor to the original author. International students attending universities and colleges in the United States need to understand the concept of plagiarism and the consequences of committing plagiarism.

## **THE VIEWPOINT OF AN INSTRUCTION LIBRARIAN**

Instruction for INTERLINK and international students often takes more preparation to cover more background material (self-serve, vocabulary, services...), but the rewards are well worth the time. The students arrive with a desire to learn how to use the library and research their topics. Their enthusiasm is refreshing; they actually have fun learning the finer points of Boolean searching! The students ask questions about how to locate materials or perform searches or alternative keyword sources. Their eagerness and excitement are rejuvenating for the instructor.

## **RESOURCES MENTIONED IN ARTICLE**

INTERLINK Language Centers. Retrieved 6/12/2006.  
From <http://www.eslus.com/>

INTERLINK Language Center: Indiana State University.  
Retrieved 6/12/2006. From <http://www.indstate.edu/interlink/>

Indiana State University Library's *Ask Us* page <http://library.indstate.edu/askus.html>

Indiana State University's Plagiarism Tutorial <http://library.indstate.edu/tools/tutorials/plagiarism/>

THOMAS Legislative page <http://thomas.loc.gov>

The White House <http://www.whitehouse.gov>

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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