



3-31-2016

Mongolian Libraries Assessment: A Collaboration Between Western Washington University and the American Center for Mongolian Studies

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Recommended Citation

Gossett, J. Gabe and Oleen, Jenny K., "Mongolian Libraries Assessment: A Collaboration Between Western Washington University and the American Center for Mongolian Studies" (2016). *Western Libraries Departmental, Committee, and Working Group Documents*. 5.
https://cedar.wwu.edu/library_docs/5

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MONGOLIAN LIBRARIES ASSESSMENT

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN WESTERN WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY AND THE AMERICAN CENTER FOR MONGOLIAN
STUDIES



Authors: Gabe Gossett & Jenny Oleen
March, 2016



INTRODUCTION

In November, 2015, Western Washington University (WWU) librarians Jenny Oleen and Gabe Gossett, the authors of this report, were invited to visit Ulaanbaatar in order to do a preliminary assessment of library services in the area and participate in a conference. The assessment was supported by the American Center for Mongolian Studies (ACMS) and WWU with the purpose of identifying ways in which there could be improved collaboration and development between Mongolian libraries, ACMS, and WWU (Western Libraries in particular). The librarians made numerous site visits over a two week period in Ulaanbaatar and the surrounding area to gather information about library facilities, collections, services, and, most importantly, their development goals in order to meet the information needs of Mongolians in the 21st Century. Near the end of their stay the librarians took part in a conference, hosted and co-sponsored by the Mongolian National University of Education, with over 200 library participants.

This report includes an overview discussing general themes, a narrative describing issues and areas for development identified during library site visits and conference, and recommendations for partnerships.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank a number of people and institutions that helped to make this report possible. Without the ACMS staff none of our work would have been possible. In particular, this includes Marc Tasse, Resident Director, who helped to facilitate many of the connections we made and B. Baigalmaa, Office Manager, who provided scheduling assistance. L. Gantulga, Executive Director of the Mongolian Libraries Consortium, provided a great deal of context and background information, as did J. Baatarsuren, Dean of Libraries at the Mongolian National University of Education. Thanks also to Mark Greenberg, Dean of Western Libraries, for his support and encouragement in this effort.

Finally, we would like to thank all of the fellow librarians and library staff who took the time to meet with us and learn with us at the Mongolian Libraries in the 21st Century Conference. Their ideas, cooperation, and optimism is truly inspiring.

OVERVIEW

Almost all libraries visited might benefit from collaborations based on their current and projected needs. The needs fall into two main categories: professional development and resources. Professional development needs centered around topics like cataloging, digitization, copyright, and information literacy support. Access to relevant collections, both print and digital, is an almost universal need among libraries visited. Many institutions also lacked functioning computers and other digital resources. In a number of cases libraries have access to donated materials, computers, and scanners, but are unable to use them because of language, policy, and staffing barriers.

Cataloging training is the most common professional development concern expressed by librarians. Currently, standards and best practices around cataloging have led to inefficiencies between institutions and poor quality records. Many libraries, regardless of size or type of institution have moved towards adopting a variation of the Dewey Decimal System, if they have cataloged books at all.

Another professional development concern stated by many librarians is around copyright best practices. Understanding around copyright, including fair use and its application within the Mongolian legal context, is poor or inconsistent. It is important to many librarians to develop a better understanding of existing copyright laws and policies because of digitization practices. Just as important, librarians felt as though their particular needs, and the needs of their patrons, are not considered in the current legal and policy development context. Advocacy around this issue is crucially important in order for libraries to remain relevant while also following the law.

Numerous libraries have digitized books, often as course reserves. For some libraries there is an interest in digitizing content like old newspapers to make them more readily available to the public. However, many institutions lacked the capacity to scan materials due to lack of knowledge about practices and lack of staff dedicated to scanning.

Related to digitization, most of the libraries visited have very limited or no digital collections. Those offering digital content are often doing so under tenuous legal circumstances. In many cases, especially at institutions of higher education, libraries are scanning books and possibly giving access to the content in violation of Mongolian copyright law and international treaties. In other cases subscriptions to digital content is being provided, but often on a trial basis. Further complicating this issue, much of the digital content available is not in Mongolian, and while many libraries have computers, they are often not functioning or not accessible to patrons, further limiting digital access provided by libraries.

While there is a wide variety of resource needs for Mongolian libraries, almost all have acute collection budget deficits. Most libraries either have no collections budget or only a minimal budget inadequate for purchasing and processing materials. In many cases the libraries rely exclusively on donated materials. While many of the donated materials are useful, there are also examples where they are outdated or in a language that the patrons cannot read. The majority of collections that are in the Mongolian language are from the Communist era and minimally used.

NARRATIVE

While visiting libraries in the Ulaanbaatar area we asked about the needs of each institution and ways in which they hope to enhance their services. Here we have listed the libraries with brief notes on main issues and themes that came out of the meetings. They are arranged in the order in which the meeting took place. Due to scheduling constraints some meetings were more extensive than others.

NATSAGDORJ PUBLIC LIBRARY

Natsagdorj Public Library, as the central public library branch, is well-situated in terms of facilitating collaboration with other libraries and with NGOs and other organizations. It already has significant collaboration and established relationships with ACMS and the US Embassy. An impressive distinguishing feature of Natsagdorj Library is the talking book services for visually impaired patrons.

Needs and areas for development:

- The collections budget is under a great deal of stress. Better collaboration and material sharing could help with this issue, in addition to strategic planning for fund development.
- A unified online catalog with the branch libraries could help increase discoverability of materials, standardize and improve cataloging, and facilitate resource sharing.
- The library houses newspapers and rare books that it would like to scan and make available to patrons.
- Programs supporting information literacy among patrons do not appear to exist or are nascent, including basic research assistance services like reference support.



The Natsagdorj Public Library lobby, showing the influences of the United States and Soviet Union

Online catalog system: Koha

Repository system: None

Cataloging standard: Dewey

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MONGOLIA

The National University of Mongolia director of the libraries showed little interest in collaborations with outside partners.

Needs and areas for development:

- None identified

Online catalog system: Lib4U

Repository system: DSpace

Cataloging standard: Dewey

MONGOLIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

The Mongolian National University of Education (MNUE) would be an excellent organization to collaborate with, especially in continuing to develop and deepen ties with WWU. Both universities have a strong focus on teacher education programs and the Library Dean, J. Baatarsuren, has demonstrated a keen interest in cultivating relationships and aligning the library at MNUE to meet the needs of Mongolians for the digital age.

The Mongolian National University of Education hosted the library conference the authors attended on Mongolian libraries in the 21st century. It is clear from the support provided by the institution, including the opening remarks by President D. Munkhjargal, that it is a good candidate institution for cooperative efforts, including ones that may extend beyond the university itself.

Needs and areas for development:

- There is interest in providing leadership on developing Mongolian language digital collections.
- Faculty at MNUE were interested in finding ways to access information, including open access databases and how to make connections with scholars outside of Mongolia.

Online catalog system: Lib4U

Repository system: None

Cataloging standard: Dewey

UNIVERSITY OF MEDICAL SCIENCE LIBRARY

This institution opened a new library and reading hall for upper level students and researchers just days before the authors' visit, expanding usable library space and reading halls for all students to alleviate overcrowding issues. Language was recognized as a potential issue here, classes were once taught in Russian, however there is a transition taking place to instruction in English. As a result, there is a mix of languages in the collection, and some professors clearly prefer Russian for instruction and research. There is some digitization of heavily used and/or rare/hard to find books, and a few of these are available electronically. Subscriptions to electronic journals are limited, primarily relying on a trial of a for-profit journal publisher package and a subscription to the Hinari package through the World Health Organization.

Needs and areas for development:

- Recognizes need for unified library software system, potentially to go so far as a shared catalog.
- There seems to be insufficient awareness of the English language medical research resources, such as PubMed, that are available. Librarians and researchers would likely benefit from developing awareness and training programs related to these resources.



Serials and textbooks at the University Medical Science Library

Online catalog system: Unknown

Repository system: None, though using Calibre with ebooks loaded on local machines

Cataloging standard: Dewey

PARLIAMENT LIBRARY

The Parliament Library appears to have its most immediate needs around digitization efforts. The few employees it has expressed a strong interest in collaborating in order to improve services. While the library is interested in expanding public services this could be difficult given that the facility is not very accessible to the public.

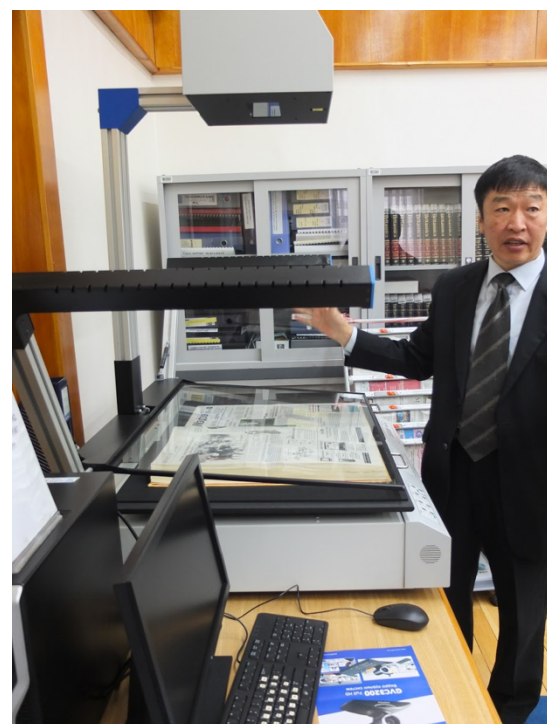
Needs and areas for development:

- The Parliament Library would benefit from improved capacity for scanning services or practices. Currently, the director houses their scanner in his office and scans materials when able to.
- Library houses unique collections, including an archive of newspapers going back to 1923 that could have high impact in serving the public.
- Seeking to provide public services, but currently not able to do so with three staff and only one professional librarian.

Online catalog system: Koha

Repository system: None, but need one for newspapers; interested in DSpace or BePress

Cataloging standard: Dewey



One of three scanners for digitizing books and newspapers at the Parliament Library, pictured with the library director

NATIONAL LIBRARY

The National Library of Mongolia identified significant issues with space, both physical and virtual, while also acknowledging a need for increased professional development. The director expressed strong interest in collaboration to improve training and services. As a home to unique collections, such as the UNESCO World Heritage Site and Rare Book Museum, there are prime opportunities for digitization projects. However, the current software delivering online reading has reached capacity for records and an alternative must be found.

Needs and areas for development:

- Updated software for the library catalog and online reading is a top priority, but they feel they need additional support.

- While there are currently scanning projects, the National Library is currently unable to make them accessible electronically through the current online reading software.
- As a primary training center for libraries across the country, the director wishes to expand her staff members' training and proficiency in order to more successfully train others.

Online catalog system: Currently LSoft, transitioning to Koha

Repository system: None (online reading of scanned materials in LSoft)

Cataloging standard: Dewey

PUBLIC SCHOOL NO. 84 LIBRARY

The meeting with the librarian at Public School No. 84 was one of the most interesting visits. She demonstrated ways in which she is doing remarkable outreach efforts with little in the way of resources. This includes visits to other libraries, like the Children's Book Palace, and author visits. School 84 is interested in enhancing collections, especially in regards to picture books for language learning. Like many other libraries, there is an interest in book scanning and ways in which that might enhance services. The librarian has challenges in the way of advocacy, expressing how she felt like her work was not supported and understood by the school principal. When we met with the principal she strongly encouraged us to consider her school for a partner project. This school would likely be a good place to consider for more extensive collaborations, especially with other school librarians and possibly children's librarians in North America.

Needs and areas for development:

- Increasingly, the library has been losing space as it has been taken over for instructional purposes. There is a need to maximize use of existing space and possibly develop an advocacy plan and policies to ensure that the library spaces are not further diminished.
- The school lacks funds for collections and is reliant on donations, digital copies of books, and those provided by the Ministry of Education.
- Computers are needed for information access.



The authors' translator examining books with the school librarian

Online catalog system: None, card system is used

Repository system: None

Cataloging standard: Dewey combined with unique shelving system

NEW MONGOL SCHOOL

Situated in an area of Ulaanbaatar without a nearby public library, the New Mongol School is interested in increasing library hours and potentially opening to the public. This process would require an update of their collection, as most books are acquired via donations. The principal has identified English language books and books to prepare students for studying abroad as a high priority. Many of the books in the collection are in Japanese.

Needs and areas for development:

- Collection development is a priority, focusing on books to assist students preparing to study abroad (1 in 3 graduates study abroad post-graduation)
- The school would like to eventually open to the public in the area and have the library open 24 hours.

Online catalog system: Unknown

Repository system: None

Cataloging standard: Dewey

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF ULAANBAATAR LIBRARY

The International School is the best resourced library the authors visited, with little in the way of needs for development. That said, the librarian has been and could continue to be a good partner for professional development locally.

Needs and areas for development:

- This library might benefit from continued connections with other Mongolian libraries around professional development.

Online catalog system: Destiny Quest

Repository system: None

Cataloging standard: Dewey

CONSTITUTIONAL COURT LIBRARY

The Constitutional Court expressed great interest in taking part in a collaboration and has the potential for more extensive partnerships, such as with a law or court library. There is a need for increasing the collection of legal books, especially those regarding similar court and political systems. The Constitutional Court librarians feel as though they are disadvantaged financially as compared to other government libraries in Mongolia. While this library's role in supporting the Constitutional Court is just as important as other government libraries, Parliament controls the budget and is not as likely to support this library as they are others. The librarians are interested in expanding public services, moving to a digital software system, and have begun to scan items for online reading. However, there is a recognized need for improved technology if this is to continue.

Needs and areas for development:

- Collection development is a concern, specifically books about similar constitutional court systems in other countries translated into Mongolian.



The official copy of the Constitution of Mongolia

- If they are going to expand into more digital projects and services, the computers and other technology in the library needs to be updated.

Online catalog system: Lib4U

Repository system: None

Cataloging standard: Dewey

UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE LIBRARIES

The University of Agriculture was another leader within librarianship in Mongolia and has potential to be a natural partner in collaboration. This library is very involved in outreach to students and staff through training such as the use of the library catalog or support for the writing process. While involved in the digitization of the library collection, they're cognizant of copyright restrictions in doing so. This library is a part of an interlibrary loan system, though services appeared to be concentrated on lecturers and upper level students. Also, the library system recently moved from a partially closed stacks system to one that is fully open. Because of the specific nature of the institution, this library could benefit from more extensive partnerships such as with a library at a Land Grant institution in the US.

Needs and areas for development:

- This library expressed interested in a book exchange program.
- This library might be able to offer valuable professional development locally in terms of leadership and management best practices within an academic library.

Online catalog system: Lib4U

Repository system: Lib4U used in a limited capacity as a repository and course reserves system

Cataloging standard: Dewey

KHAN-UUL PUBLIC LIBRARY

As a branch library within the larger Ulaanbaatar Public Library System Khan-Uul Public Library has very similar needs as Natsagdorj Public Library described above. However, it is a good example of a library that has benefitted from funds that were donated from a Parliament representative from the area, a fund development approach that might be effective elsewhere.

GERMAN-MONGOLIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

The German-Mongolian Institute of Technology's greatest area of need is collection development. This institution relies primarily on donations for its collections, resulting in a collection that does not necessarily reflect the areas of instruction and materials are in a variety of languages. Occasionally there is the opportunity to purchase a single copy of a text, which is then photocopied to provide additional copies for student use.

Needs and areas for development:

- This library could benefit from implementing a collection development plan, primarily in determining collection priorities and acquiring books to meet those needs - especially books in the engineering fields.
- The library is interested in transitioning to a different library software system, with an emphasis on ease of use and access to the collection. There is interest in Koha, but also recognition that more information is needed.
- There is a need for development of cataloging skills.

Online catalog system: Lib4U (looking into transitioning to Koha)

Repository system: None (though they described a plan of some sort for master's theses in Koha)

Cataloging standard: Dewey

NALAIKH COMMUNITY CENTER

While this library is the main library for the district outside of Ulaanbaatar, the Nalaikh Community Center Library only has funds for staffing. They identified a great need for assistance with collection development, as the library relies heavily on donations. The Mongolian language portion of the collection is very old and the most recent acquisitions are primarily English language, which is unreadable to a significant portion of the population. Additionally, there are nearly 6,000 Kazakhs in the district, and the library has expressed interest in acquiring books in Kazakh for their use. This library has partnered with various NGOs in the past, including one that resulted in acquisition of a small contemporary collection and computer that led to the reopening of the library after being closed due to lack of use.

Needs and areas for development:

- Collection development, primarily in the acquisition of books in Mongolian and/or Kazakh.
- There is interest in an electronic catalog and/or online reading.
- The staff, including the Community Center Director, expressed a need to be able to advocate to the Ministry of Education for collection development funds.

Online catalog system: None

Repository system: None

Cataloging standard: Dewey



Books purchased with donated funds that led to the reopening of the library

ERDMIIN ORGIL SCHOOL COMPLEX

This school has very rudimentary library and information technology services available. Computers that had been used for online reading are broken with no plans to repair them. The reading room has no books and is not used much. There appeared to be little motivation to collaborate on improving services.

Needs and areas for development:

- They would like to offer more services for online reading.
- They would like to improve their literature collection.

Online catalog system: None

Repository system: None

Cataloging standard: Unknown

ORKHON UNIVERSITY

Our visit to the library at Orkhon University was brief. However, they appear to be working on issues that are common to other Mongolian libraries visited. They expressed a strong interest in developing partnerships.

Needs and areas for development:

- They would like to develop a Center for Inner Asian Studies.
- They are working to offer these electronically.

Online catalog system: Unknown

Repository system: Unknown

Cataloging standard: Unknown

MONGOLIAN LIBRARIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY CONFERENCE

There are a number of ideas and themes that were discussed at the conference at the end of the authors' visit. It is clear that many librarians in attendance are interested in engaging with contemporary issues facing libraries, many of which are very similar to issues being faced by libraries in North America. Resource access, especially resources that are digital and in the Mongolian language, was brought up in a number of cases. Library Dean J. Baatarsuren presented on a vision for a collaborative digital library of Mongolian resources, possibly similar to the Digital Public Library of America and other national virtual libraries. There is a strong interest in developing a better understanding and influencing policies around copyright and how they apply to libraries. A number of presentations and participant comments focused on professionalization of the library field in Mongolia, including ongoing development and training. Presentations and participants spoke to the need to be relevant and meeting library users at their point of need, including the use of social media and connecting to patrons through their mobile devices.

Needs and areas for development:

- Copyright is a significant, and controversial theme. The conference highlighted a need for both copyright education/literacy and advocacy on the part of libraries to agencies like the Ministry of Education and Intellectual Property Office.



Librarians taking part in break-out groups

- The need for a standard cataloging system was highlighted and there is interest establishing more professional development in this area.
- The need for collaboration around digital collections was apparent. This might include curating and serving more Mongolian language content and using combined purchasing power for subscription access to databases. Many librarians and some presentations also noted that there need to be efficiencies with scanning efforts so that multiple libraries can share in the benefits of digitized materials.
- In terms of professionalization many participants emphasized the need to create specializations and enhance the educational backgrounds of librarians. In many cases librarians have not yet developed the reference and instruction skills to provide even rudimentary reference services. It is clear that development around leadership and advocacy issues would be of benefit since many library administrators were at a loss about how to deal with external management issues.



Librarians sharing ideas related to scholarly communication

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

The authors have arranged recommendations into three categories: WWU, North American Library Partners, and Mongolia Internal Development. Recommendations for WWU are focused on collaborations that can take place directly with Western Libraries personnel. In some cases it would be better for libraries to collaborate with another institution, which is why the authors recommend identifying other North American partners as a way to move forward. Finally, while ACMS is likely to be involved with the above recommendations the last section is focused on needs that ACMS could possibly address directly between partners within Mongolia.

WWU

Training and professional development: Western Libraries, with support from ACMS, should work on a professional development program in support of the following:

- Information literacy--using teaching and learning practices to address the needs of academic researchers in the 21st century with a focus on using both open access and locally available resources.
- Best practices for copyright--issues, practices, and technical approaches to supporting copyright compliance in library work and patron research.
- Collection development--strategically building and curating collections focused on user needs and with a selective approach to donations.
- Cataloging--workflows and practices for effective documentation and discoverability of collections (note: WWU would be limited in this effort because it does not use the Dewey Decimal System common to Mongolian libraries)

Ideally, this professional development effort would be a multi-pronged effort that would include a program of development webcasts throughout the year, collaboration on at an annual conference in Mongolia, and bringing Mongolian library students and staff for exchanges to the United States.

Digital collections: There is opportunity for Western Libraries to support the mission of ACMS through dissemination of that organization's documents. As a member of the American Center for Mongolian Studies, Western Libraries should create a collection for the ACMS within Western CEDAR as a way to highlight the research the ACMS supports within Mongolia. This can be a repository of materials from the research fellowships, hosted speakers, and other activities of the ACMS, made more highly visible through the search engine optimization of Western CEDAR.

Open Educational Resources (OER) for information literacy: Western Libraries has already begun discussions with L. Gantulga regarding creating a translated copy of the [Library Information Tutorials](#) (LIT) created at WWU. LIT focuses on developing information literacy, critical thinking, and writing skills. The content would be hosted on a common site for Mongolian libraries and patron use. Other online learning objects might be considered for sharing as well.

NORTH AMERICAN LIBRARY PARTNERS

Many of the libraries visited expressed a strong willingness to take part in international collaborations, however, WWU would likely not be an ideal partner. Instead, we recommend identifying similar North American institutions where these partnerships could be sustainably take place.

Institutions that should be examined for partnerships include:

- Public School No. 84 Library-- The librarian at this school showed remarkable enthusiasm and an ability to accomplish a great deal with little resources. Partnering with another school library or librarian might be of value. Western Libraries might still contribute to this partnership if it were a school in Bellingham.
- University of Agriculture Libraries-- The organization, professionalism, and interest in adopting new technologies and practices impressed the authors. However, this institution would likely benefit most from a collaboration with a land grant university or another university with a strong agricultural program, something WWU lacks.
- Constitutional Court Library and Parliament Library-- Both of these libraries are associated with government institutions, with dedicated and engaged staff who would benefit from collaborations with either other legal libraries or academic institutions with strong law programs, something WWU lacks. They might also benefit from greater collaboration and resource sharing with each other.
- Nalaikh Community Center-- This public library showed significant impact with little in the way of resources. Partnering with another public library or community organization around fund development might be of benefit.
- New Mongol School-- This is another library that would benefit through collaboration with another school library. As a private institution, there may be value in pairing this library with another private institution, specifically one with an emphasis on preparing students for continuing education and/or study abroad.
- Naksagdorj Public Library-- This library has already been a part of many collaborations with NGOs and the US embassy and has demonstrated an openness to collaboration. This library might benefit from working with other public librarians, both in and outside of Mongolia, to develop advocacy programs and skills in working with government agencies around resource access issues in Mongolia.

MONGOLIA INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT

Digital collections: Many of the libraries involved in this survey are implementing some form of a digital collection, whether it be scanning collections for “online reading” (reading electronic copies of library owned books from a library computer workstation), preservation of unique and historical collections, or the publication of journals. There is also significant room for collaboration amongst the libraries involved. Many libraries mentioned an intention of scanning newspapers and rare books. ACMS, as an outside but interested party, should facilitate a network through which libraries involved in digitization of publications can cooperate, collaborate, and share the process, rather than having each institution digitize the same works individually. This network could be further grown, with respect to public domain items (in Mongolia, items published prior to 1993 without publication outside of the country fall within the public domain), as a way to deliver content to libraries in desperate need for collections, such as to support teaching missions.

A project of this nature could naturally lead into a discussion and implementation of Open Education Resources at Mongolian educational institutions.

Collection Development and Donations: Many libraries expressed the importance of donations to their collections, while often admitting that said donations are not always as useful as hoped. While collection development training has already been mentioned, it is important to reiterate the value of strategic decision-making around collections, the preparation of a collection development policy, and how to use that while working with the facilitators of donor programs, such as ACMS and the Books for Asia program, to ensure that the right collections are going to the right libraries.

OER: One of the most effective ways to address information and teaching & learning needs is to support the development of OER in the Mongolian language. When these resources are developed with Creative Commons licenses it improves resource sharing, develops an online learning community, and gives patrons access to information in their native tongue. In order to best support effective use of OER there should be collaborations between librarians, instructional designers, teaching faculty, and administrators. Successful pilots of OER textbook programs have taken place already in taken place elsewhere, such as the [Open Course Library](#), [BCcampus OpenEd](#), and [Open Textbook Library](#). Any OER effort should be developed in order to be sustainable and align with the teaching and learning missions of the schools and libraries associated with the programs.

Libraries Outside of Ulaanbaatar: One of the limitations of this report is that it only includes information and recommendations based on visits to Ulaanbaatar area libraries. Future collaborations and partnerships with libraries outside of the capital should be examined as a long-term goal.

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