
The Benefits and Challenges of Developing a Multilingual Library

Stephanie Garrett, Director of Library & Learning Services, Catholic International University

ABSTRACT: As online instruction allows universities to reach a global audience, there is a rising demand to offer courses and resources in multiple languages. This conversation session shared participants' collective concerns and hurdles, along with their best practices and successes when developing multilingual collections in their libraries.

The purpose of this conversation session is to share our collective concerns and hurdles, along with our best practices and successes when developing multilingual collections in our libraries. As online instruction allows universities to reach a global audience, there is a rising demand to offer courses and resources in multiple languages. While many publishers have international divisions, this does not necessarily mean that non-English resources are made available in the US. The American Library Association has published “Guidelines for Multilingual Materials Collection Development and Library Services to Hispanics,” but these guidelines have not been updated since 1990 and do not take into account digital library resources and ebooks in non-English languages (ALA 2007). Further, as universities offer classes taught in Spanish and other languages, this limited guidance increases the difficulty libraries face when striving to fulfill their mandate to provide “access to collections sufficient in quality, depth, diversity, format and currency to the research and teaching mission of the institution” (ALA 2006).

The goal for today is to help each other navigate the “expanding frontier” of digital access to published works from around the world. The session is designed to be interactive, and we will be using Padlet to allow both in-person and online attendees to provide input. We will begin with introductions and our institutional considerations. Then we will discuss benefits and challenges, best practices, preferred vendors and resources, and finally where we can find more help.

Last night, my university held the official ribbon cutting ceremony and changed its name from Catholic Distance University to Catholic International University. We are now operating under a mandate to “Teach All Nations.” We are a 100% online university that was founded in 1983. As a pontifical institute, we have grown from being the first online university with the authority to award Catechetical Diplomas to offering AA, BA, and MA degrees in Liberal Arts, Ecclesial Management, and Theology.

In Fall 2023, we enrolled our first cohort of Hispanic lay ministers in an AA in Theology program with a concentration in Catholic Social Teaching, to be taught in Spanish. In 2025, we will begin offering our MA in Theology program in Spanish. Also, in 2025, we will offer our MA in Ecclesial Management in both Italian and Spanish. While most of our faculty resides in the United States, we also have faculty working from Australia, Chile, Italy, Korea, Mexico, and Spain. Along with students in the United States, Catholic International University’s enrollment includes students from Canada, Curaçao, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Nigeria, and Switzerland.

To view the responses from attendees, or to add your library to the conversation, view the Introductions Padlet (<https://padlet.com/sgarrett64/introductions-arqs9ztwsf7rzpva>). Twelve attendees from eleven institutions responded. Ten of those institutions are developing multilingual collections in both print and digital; two institutions are working on digital-only collections. Language needs include Chinese, Dutch, Fijian, French, German, Korean, Samoan, Spanish and Tongan. Besides Latin America, libraries are working to service students in Africa, Asia, Europe, Fiji, India, and the Pacific Rim.

For Catholic International University, the benefit of developing a digital multilingual collection goes beyond simply adding non-English titles to the library’s holdings. Since we are a completely online university, being able to acquire unlimited user access to books in Spanish and other languages improves our ability to provide required and recommended reading materials for students no matter their country of residence. Not all students live in areas with the First World convenience of Amazon two-day delivery. Providing digital access to course materials ensures that students do not fall behind while waiting for the arrival of their books. As with all ebooks and digital resources, students benefit from improved accessibility,

accommodation of learning styles through features such as screen readers, search features, bookmarks, highlighting and annotation tools, and portability of materials between electronic devices.

We are also working to reduce reliance on non-English digital materials of questionable provenance. Beyond the need to better understand international copyright law, we face many of the same challenges theological institutions face with English titles in theology: not all titles are available digitally, titles are frequently out of print, digital copies available for institutional use can be difficult to find, and pirated material is increasingly pervasive on the internet.

To view the responses from attendees, or to add your library to the conversation, view the Benefits and Challenges Padlet (<https://padlet.com/sgarrett64/benefits-challenges-pk29jxfcn3lpvakz>).

At Catholic International University, we use both EBSCO and Proquest to purchase Spanish titles and frequently write publishers asking them to consider making titles available digitally, hoping that one day the squeaky wheel gets greased! Our existing subscription to the *Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials* provides articles in a myriad of languages. Subscribing to *Digitalia Hispanica* has been a boon, not only for the wide variety of theology and religion titles at a reasonable price, but also for access to the multitude of other disciplines included with the subscription. We also make use of the AI technology in DeepL translation software ([DeepL.com](https://www.deepl.com)) to help students translate open-source material from English to Spanish.

To view the responses from attendees, or to add your library to the conversation, view the Best Practices and Preferred Resources/Vendor Padlet (<https://padlet.com/sgarrett64/best-practices-preferred-resources-vendors-6rkog93wspjvy0tt>).

Special thanks to Christina Torbert from the University of Mississippi, Ellen Frost from SMU's Perkins School of Theology, and Deborah Ortiz-Rivera from the Pitts Theological Library at Emory for stepping up to the mic and sharing their experiences.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), Standing Committee on Copyright & Legal Matters (CLM): <https://www.ifla.org/units/clm/>

International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organizations (IFRRO): <https://ifrro.org/>

Copyright Advisory Network: <https://www.librarycopyright.net/>

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Copyright Treaty (WCT): <https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/wct/>

U.S. Copyright Office, International Issues: <https://www.copyright.gov/international-issues/>

REFERENCES

American Library Association (ALA). 2007. *Guidelines for Multilingual Materials Collection and Development and Library Services*. American Library Association. Accessed May 24, 2024, <https://www.ala.org/rusa/sections/rss/rsssection/rsscomm/spanishspeaking/guidelinesmultilingual>.

American Library Association (ALA). 2006. *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*. American Library Association. Accessed January 5, 2024, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standardslibraries>.