

Libraries and CESS

Chris Murphy, Turkish Area Specialist, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, USA, Tel.: +1/202-707-5676, cmur@loc.gov

As the field of Central Eurasian studies grows over the next few years, CESS, as an organization representing the interests of the individuals and institutions working in this field, needs to consider issues confronting the libraries and librarians supporting our research. Other area studies associations, e.g., the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS) or the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), have approached libraries in their fields by either creating a standing committee of the organization (AAASS) or by establishing an affiliated association (MESA). While either of these approaches is workable, each has had the same fundamental problem: the librarians have tended to talk only to themselves. This is reflected by the fact that librarians constantly make decisions critical to the support of research based on their own inter-librarian discussions with little input from scholars working in the field. On the other hand, scholars often only approach libraries and librarians when the scholar needs a specific item. This ad hoc way of doing business has led to a further problem: the librarians active in an association often concentrate on "library issues" such as cataloging, and to a greater or lesser extent ignore the most important role of librarianship, that is, collection development. I describe this situation from personal experience, having served as President of the Middle East Librarians Association, and having spent five years in a university library as a Near East Specialist.

CESS, now at the beginning of its existence, is moving to correct this flawed approach. We are establishing a standing Library Committee to concentrate on libraries and library issues in the field of Central Eurasian studies. I have agreed to chair the committee and am hopeful that a scholar who is not a librarian will volunteer to become co-chair of

the committee. While it is necessary for librarians to be involved in this committee, including in leadership roles, it is even more important that active scholars always be part of the committee's work. The presence of working scholars will keep the committee focused on what should be our most important library goal at this point in this field's development, namely, the building and development of collections supporting our research. I am therefore seeking volunteers, both librarians and active scholars, to serve on this new committee. Ideally, the committee will be composed of no more than six individuals, with at least two scholars who are not librarians and one graduate student as members.

Once the committee is fully established it will immediately undertake two activities, both of which are designed to focus the committee's attention on questions of collection development. First, the committee will read and discuss the Association of Research Libraries report on the acquisition of foreign materials, which was published about five years ago. This document gives the most recent "photograph" of area studies collection activities at major research libraries in North America. Secondly, the committee will create a questionnaire eliciting information about collection development at the libraries serving our field and at other major research libraries in North America. This will provide specific information that will allow the committee to begin to make recommendations for activities which will be helpful to the field. At the same time every effort will be made to get librarians and scholars in our field to become involved in the work of the Library Committee of CESS.

Volunteers are asked to contact me by the end of February at my e-mail address, cmur@loc.gov, or by telephone at +1/202-707-5676.