

**iWorld Student Librarian Panel:  
Working or Volunteering in Libraries Abroad**

Featuring Scott Dalessandro, Jennifer Knight, Annalisa Pesek, and Erin Sterling

Erin opened the panel by discussing her experiences opening a new library in Nicaragua. She spent ten months in Nicaragua in 2006 helping to build a library, train staff and obtain and catalog books. It was a community library, but it was attached to a school and aimed at kids. Much of the work was done by the community members, and the community constructed the building and agreed to teach classes in order to help pay back the loans for the facility. Erin talked about the challenges of explaining what a library *is* to a community of people who are not readers.

Jen followed with her experiences in Oaxaca, Mexico during the summer of 2008. She acknowledged that the original goal of the experience was to help her learn the language, and for six weeks she took Spanish classes in the mornings and volunteered with a children's library in the afternoon. Though her Spanish was not initially strong enough to be able to successfully lead children's crafts, she was able to observe the children's projects and work on a cataloging project for the library.

Annalisa then talked about her experience in Prague. She wanted to study abroad for DFW credit over the summer, but was disappointed by the lack of opportunities through the Information School. Instead, she wrote letters to libraries around the globe volunteering her time. She was accepted by the National Library of Prague for two months, and spent her time editing documents, looking at international documents, doing translation work, and checking the accuracy of search terms. She got to do a little bit of everything and showed the audience the first two weeks of her very busy, and varied, schedule.

Scott discussed his two experiences working in Geneva, Switzerland at the International Labor Office. The first time he went as an intern, and searched through binders of old reference questions to make a resource guide on youth employment for the library's website. The second time he received the title of "Librarian," and produced a librarian's guide for labor researchers.

The group concluded by answering questions from the audience about housing (hostels, home stays, apartments), and their familiarity with the language (all had at least some though they regret not keeping up with the language since returning), and finally the group concluded with a consensus: If you want to work or volunteer abroad you absolutely should; it was an amazing and rewarding experience. Although, be prepared to be flexible as the circumstances of your visit and your experience may change.