

## **The History of the *Comité de Cooperación entre Bibliotecas Universitarias (CCBU)* in Guatemala**

Presented by Dr. Samuel Berberían during the celebration of CCBU's XX Anniversary. Guatemala, May 2003. Transcribed by Inés Zúñiga and translated into English by Sofía Porres, New Media Department, Universidad Francisco Marroquín, Guatemala

This morning I am honored to have among us some of the founding members of CCBU, such as Ing. Roberto Solís, who was back then the *Rector* of the Mariano Gálvez University, and Dra. Jeannette de Criado, who was head librarian at the Francisco Marroquín University. Before the foundation of the CCBU, there had been three previous cooperation attempts promoted by different institutions, but somehow those lost force and were neglected.

Finally, at the beginning of 1983, the *Rectores* of the five existing universities had some concerns related with the elaboration of thesis projects. During their monthly meetings, they discussed some alternatives for cooperation. By Dr. Armando de la Torre's initiative, during one of those sessions, an idea was born: the librarians of the five universities should get together and cooperate. The purpose was that the librarians could search for practical options to resolve their common problems, since those were technical elements that they could well handle themselves.

On that occasion, the *rectores* asked Ing. Roberto Solís to bring together the librarians and to present to them the idea of creating a cooperation project. And on May 12<sup>th</sup> of 1983, the first reunion of librarians was held at the Mariano Gálvez University. The committee agreed to meet every 15 days and to start working on a united catalog of university thesis. The classical problem that was to be avoided was that of plagiarism: under the same name, same composition, with the same mistakes and carelessness, there were frequently two authors of the same work. You had no way of knowing who the original author was. With the united catalog, that problem was avoided. Besides, a resource was created to guide the student so that they would not give into that game.

We were commenting this morning with Dr. Armando de la Torre that the CCBU is one of the few committees of cooperation that has worked for twenty years. Why? Historically, culturally, we have been placed as Third World, underdeveloped, developing countries, I do not know which of the developments it is anymore – but, somewhere around there. One of the typical problems is that, if there is no cooperation, a nation doesn't develop. All the nations that

progress have a common root denominator, which is the concept of natural cooperation. Do you have a good idea? Don't say it because they will copy it and you loose the idea! Have you been through highschool? Have you completed your graduation project? The one that worked the least got more applause! The one that worked himself to death is blamed of all the mistakes that the work had! These are the typical problems of the absence of cooperation.

During these twenty years the CCBU has worked on various projects to cover the needs that the libraries have had to face. It worked on a united reference catalog. Why? Because none of the universities had the economic capacity to acquire all the resources that their students needed. Thanks to the united catalog, they could tell them, "If you are searching for that, this university has it". Back then, each one of the universities had a strong point, or a specific orientation of interest. One was focusing on law, another one on economy, the other on humanities. So: "Do you want materials related to law? *They* do have it". And it was a satisfaction to hear: "Oh, thank you, that's great!" That way the student was stimulated to not minimize efforts for research. Even if he had to go from one end of the city to the other, he knew that he could find the information he needed. And, of course, each university knew what the others had in their reference collections and could guide the student.

The third project CCBU worked on was a catalog of serial publications. Why? Because each university had subscriptions to unique, high cost, and at the same time, low circulation newspapers. In the committee, information was exchanged about publications according to the interest areas of each university. The committee never surpassed the capacity or the profile; emphasis was on cooperation, each university kept its politics, its criteria, its working profile and what was kept was simply the cooperation.

How did the CCBU work? At the end of each year, the committee presented a circumstantial report to each *rector*, informing what had been achieved. Also, when there staff changes, the *rector* of the university named another person to represent him in the CCBU. As time passed by, new universities emerged and today there are eight active representatives in the committee.

The fourth project was an inter-library loan system. Note that each project requires more commitment, more confidence and support from each librarian and from each university. In the case of the inter-library loan, there could be a dean, or the *rector* or some researcher that needed a specific material and the librarian knew that the other university had it. Only between one librarian and another one was the loan made, according to specific regulations.

The librarian was a facilitating agent, and that was the objective that was strived for in each project. It seems simple, but the committee would work for months, seeing all the difficulties,

seeing the pros and cons to be able to reach the crystallization of a project. Why? Each library has its politics, its philosophy, and it cannot violate its own rules to cooperate with another one. Therefore, a way had to be reached so that none of its members would be affected by a project.

Our fifth project is related with the intellectual property issues related to academic dissertations. How could we, as libraries, cooperate with the thesis author to help him ensure and respect intellectual property? This project was and is a pilgrimage for us; so much so that someone skilled at drawing could make good use of our story and create a whole album of cartoons. Back then the CCBU even appealed to Congress, but found the most diverse and irrelevant answers. We were referred to artists, to guitar players who sang at nights, to discuss royalty negotiations. Unfortunately, we still have the same concerns, and there is work being done on these projects to keep them relevant.

The sixth project was related to the organization of documents. In Guatemala, economic reasons don't allow the publishing of monographs. Usually, pamphlets circulate with unique and historical content that can't be ignored because of their value for research. The committee worked on the organization of documents published about Guatemala, by Guatemalans, and others. A guide to process and organize documents was circulated; we set common criteria to make them accessible.

The seventh project was the classification of audiovisual material. Besides books, we have newspapers, videos, cassettes, discs, and more. What criteria were used? In the committee, concepts were discussed-- e.g., the use of colored cards to identify them. An agreement was reached so that the five existing universities used the same colors to identify each type of audiovisual material. This way, we achieved a balance and more consistent information.

The next project, the eighth, was to consolidate the national existing bibliography of the Guatemalan universities. What have Guatemalans written? Which of their writings are in the collections? Of course, the San Carlos University has a whole section dedicated to the national bibliography. How could the related information be rescued? It was an arduous, long task, but a very gratifying one.

The ninth project was a guide of universities and of the university libraries. There are universities that have one library, others that have fortysix libraries. Other libraries are at different locations, with other entrances; others are spread across the country. The objective of this project was to gather all that information to help the public search for something and to refer them to a university library that was close to where they live. Have you ever bumped into a Guatemalan who doesn't know, but is ashamed to admit it? So he lives in eternal ignorance.

The pamphlet helped guide such people and direct them in their searches. “Look, if twenty kilometers from my house there is a library, why go all the way to the capital city if I can look it up in here!” This project helped extend the access to the information.

The tenth project was the one that practically changed the direction of the committee. It involved library automation. It involved getting over a taboo and following a criterion that the society demanded from us. Here, credit and merit should be given to Ing. Jorge Arias de Blois, may he rest in peace. He insisted, encouraged, and contacted the AID (Agency for International Development). He knew how to lobby each *rector*, since this was a very big project. Each university has its working philosophy and the committee should not be the one to tell their bosses how to do things. But Ing. Arias was able to sell this idea that the five universities had to get into this together and, by golly, it was achieved. In Antigua Guatemala, at the site of a historical university, the corresponding agreement was signed. Back then we ended up exchanging diskettes, of course now that seems to us like the Stone Age, but we were moving forward.

What was the dream? That one day all universities would be networked. They say that progress is to see ahead and see towards the future as a better opportunity. This was what was visualized. You arrive today at a university, and there is the card catalog but there is also a computerized option. This was a product of much work that CCBU members knew how to do, changing like this the whole status of their professions. Librarians had to travel to México, had to travel to the United States, see, visualize, choose programs, choose modalities, train themselves and launch it. Yes sir, it was investment in the university user of today, that was progress.

The eleventh project was the preparation of the committee's statutes, how it was going to be regulated, how it was going to work and how the exchange of publications would be made. Before this, the exchange of duplicates was done peer to peer, informally. But then the exchange of materials was regulated, focusing more on the needs of the final users, enriching a library with another one in an absolute cooperation.

And the last project, number twelve, was the creation of the Web page for the committee, where we're starting to have information not only about the libraries, but also socio-historic information, character profiles of individuals that, for each university, have importance, have transcendence and have made a social contribution.

One final comment before I close. The community of librarians, I have for them a great deal of respect – I'm not a librarian, I'm just a curious fanatic of this type of work. I see that the

librarians' committee has had a very interesting folklore, for example, an anecdote is that we've had members of the committee representing a university; after some years the person makes a turn and re-emerges here with a different hat and a different label. Do you know something? That is maturity. And twenty years have given us maturity. The CCBU has matured, and in twenty years it has created history. The previous attempts that didn't work out were out school, we learned from them.

Finally, the committee doesn't handle an economic budget beyond the support given by its authorities. It's more of a technical cooperation, of criteria, of mutual support. We will continue ahead. Thank you very much.