Middle East Library Partnership Project

Project Report

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Project website: http://melib.web.unc.edu

Executive Summary

The Middle East Library Partnership Project was conducted over the course of one year, from July 2014 to June 2015, sponsored by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Scholarly Communications program. The project aimed to develop a better understanding of the opportunities for and obstacles to international collaboration between libraries in Arab countries and the United States. To that end, the project pursued several avenues of research:

Survey of library professionals and educators in Arab countries

In a survey of 237 library professionals and educators in Arab countries, plus 20 Middle East librarians in North America, two thirds reported that they were aware of international collaborations at their institution. However, 96 percent expressed a desire for more such collaborations, especially consortial agreements, vehicles for idea-sharing, and professional training. Respondents identified a variety of cultural and administrative obstacles to international collaboration.

Library websites and online catalogs in Arab countries

One opportunity for collaboration involves upgrading of library catalogs in Arab countries. Of 831 libraries in 17 Arab countries, 32 percent had active websites, and 15 percent had functioning online catalogs. These online catalogs used a variety of software systems with different metadata standards, some of which might be upgraded to match current international procedures.

Panel discussions with leading library scholars and professionals

The project convened two panel discussions with library leaders from the Arab Federation for Libraries and Information (AFLI), and the Special Libraries Association - Arabian Gulf Chapter (SLA-AGC), and the Middle East Librarians Association (MELA), one in Washington, D.C., and one in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. These discussions identified a number of key needs, including disaster management plans for libraries in Arab countries, expanded training programs, and coordination of cataloging systems.

Recommendations

On the basis of this research, we recommend:

- Sustained cooperation between library professional associations, including joint membership and participation at conferences.
- Conferences of library directors to learn from their colleagues' initiatives, best practices, and common challenges.
- Disaster management plans to establish protocols to mitigate damage in the face of armed conflict.

- Interlibrary catalogs to expand the visibility of Arab library collections, in conjunction with the pioneering initiative of the Arabic Union Catalog and the OCLC's Worldcat.
- Interlibrary loan agreements among libraries in Arab countries and other regions, focusing on digitized materials, subject to the copyright regulations.
- Internships and exchange programs for librarians in Arab countries and other regions to work side-by-side and learn from one another.
- Training workshops to deliver no-cost or low-cost training to librarians in Arab countries, both in-person and online.
- A reference network to facilitate reference queries across countries, beginning with a limited number of participants and expanding as capacity and interest grows.

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Project personnel

Charles Kurzman (principal investigator) is professor of sociology and co-director of the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Kurzman is author of three books in Middle East studies and editor of two anthologies in Islamic studies, for which he used dozens of libraries and archives in the Middle East and more than a hundred libraries and archives around the world. He served for a decade as an elected faculty representative to the Administrative Board of the Library of UNC-Chapel Hill, and was a participant and steering group member of the Duke/Center for Research Libraries Task Force on Global Dimensions of Scholarship and Research Libraries.

John D. Martin III (research assistant) is a doctoral student at the School of Information and Library Sciences (SILS) at UNC-Chapel Hill and one of the inaugural cohort of fellowship recipients of the ELIME-21 (Educating Librarians in the Middle East: Building Bridges for the 21st Century) graduate program. He has a background in Islamic studies and system administration and has lived and worked in Cairo, Egypt, as a system administrator and system designer. His research at SILS has involved educational programs for library and information science in the Middle East.

Mohamed Hamed (liaison to MELA and AFLI), holds an M.A. and B.A. in library and information science from Cairo University in Egypt, where he is currently enrolled in the library and information science Ph.D. program. He joined UNC-Chapel Hill in October 2010 as the first Middle Eastern and Africa Studies Librarian. He serves as a member on the advisory board for the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilization, as well as the African Studies Center at UNC-Chapel Hill. He is also an active member in a number of professional associations, including the Africana Librarians Council and the Middle East Librarians Association, in addition to a number of regional and international associations. Previously, Mohamed lived and worked in Egypt as an Arabic cataloger at the American University in Cairo.

Advisory Board

Khaled al-Halabi, professor of library and information science at Cairo University in Egypt and president of the Arab Federation for Libraries and Information.

Hasan al-Sereihy, professor of information science at King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia and past president of the Arab Federation for Libraries and Information.

Azzedine Bouderbane, professor of library science at the University of Constantine 2 in Constantine, Algeria.

Christof Galli, Middle East librarian at Duke University and former president of the Middle East Librarians Association.

David Hirsch, Middle East librarian at UCLA and former president of the Middle East Librarians Association.

Jasim Jerjees, professor of library and information sciences at the American University in Dubai and founding executive director of the Arab Federation for Libraries and Information.

William Kopycki, Cairo field director for the Library of Congress.

Eric van Lubeek, managing director, OCLC Europe, Middle East and Africa.

Barbara Moran, professor of library and information science at UNC-Chapel Hill and director of ELIME-21.

Seteney Shami, founder and director of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, based in Beirut, Lebanon, and a member of the steering committee of the Duke/Center for Research Libraries Task Force on Global Dimensions of Scholarship and Research Libraries.

1. Introduction

The Middle East Library Partnership Project grew out of the Task Force on Global Dimensions of Scholarship and Research Libraries (http://blogs.library.duke.edu/globalscholarship), convened by Duke University and the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) and supported by the Mellon Foundation. The Task Force brought together experts from around the United States and beyond, who issued a series of recommendations in Spring 2013 for next steps in the internationalization of library collections and access to global research materials more broadly.[1]

As noted in the Task Force's deliberations and report, internationalization has been a major priority for academic institutions and U.S. education policy for many years. This priority was the impetus for the federal government's first sustained investment in higher education, the National Defense Education Act of 1958, which declared that "the security of the Nation" required more training in foreign languages.[2] This priority has been reaffirmed numerous times by federal agencies and task forces, most recently in the Department of Education's "International Strategy" of 2012: "In today's globalized world, an effective domestic education agenda must address global needs and trends and aim to develop a globally competent citizenry."[3] Federal funding for international education has fluctuated over the decades, and the conceptualization of "international education" has taken many forms, from a focus on foreign languages to a focus on area studies knowledge to a focus on "global competencies."[4] Yet the importance of an increased international component in American education has remained a recurrent theme in federal and educational priorities for more than half a century.

Library collections have played a vital role in meeting the need for international education. These collections have served the growing demand for instructional and research materials, and the academic libraries in the United States, taken collectively, now constitute the most comprehensive repository of global knowledge that humanity has ever compiled.

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[1] Deborah Jakubs, "The global dimensions of scholarship and research libraries: finding synergies, creating convergence," Duke University/Center for Research Libraries Task Force on Global Dimensions of Scholarship and Research Libraries, April 2013, http://www.crl.edu/sites/default/files/d6/attachments/events/Global%20Forum%20Recommendations.pdf.

[2] National Defense Education Act of 1958, Public Law 85-864, Title I, Section 101, February 1958, http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-72/pdf/STATUTE-72-Pg1580.pdf.

[3] U.S. Department of Education, "Succeeding globally through international education and engagement: U.S. Department of Education international strategy 2012–16," November 2012, http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/internationaled/internationalstrategy-2012-16.pdf.

[4] Charles Kurzman, "Crippling international education," April 2013, http://kurzman.unc.edu/international-education/crippling-international-education.

However, growth of these global library collections has stalled in recent years. Beginning in approximately 2000, the number of international books in American academic libraries has stagnated, after four decades of steady growth (see Figure 1). This finding, presented to the Duke/CRL Task Force by Charles Kurzman, the principal investigator of the Middle East Library Partnership Project, is a troubling indicator of the financial limits that libraries now face. In a world of ever-expanding information flows, library budgets have not kept pace with rising costs.[5]

Figure 1. International books at U.S. academic libraries, 1960-2007
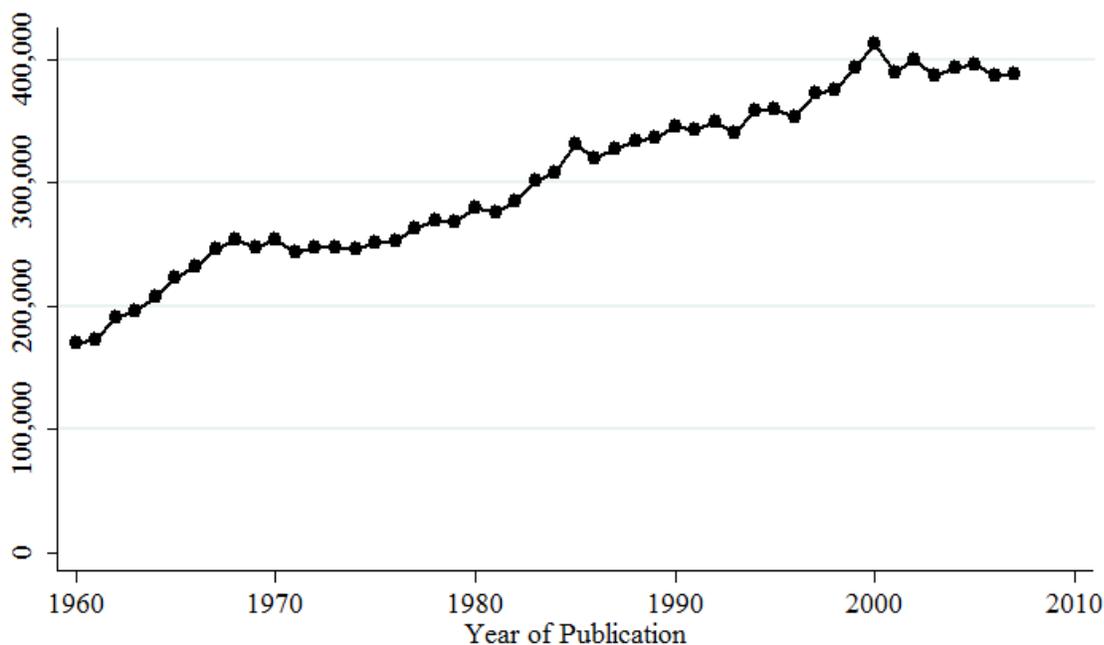
This plateau in international library collecting is not visible for all regions of the world. The number of books from Arab countries, in particular, has continued to grow since 2000, with annual collecting doubling between 1992 and 2007 (see Figure 2). This increase reflects the growth in scholarly and public-policy interest in the Middle East, both before and after the violence of September 11, 2001. As of 2007, the number of books from Arab countries collected by American academic libraries was in the middle of world regions of comparable populations (200-600 million)—one eighth of the total from Western Europe (even

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[5] These figures were derived from bibliographic records made available by the OCLC in 2011. The date of acquisition of each book is not easily available, so the figures rely on the date of publication instead. Books published since 2007 were not included in the analysis because considerable numbers of them had not yet been catalogued and uploaded to the OCLC database at that time.

excluding the United Kingdom), 40 percent of Eastern Europe, half of Latin America, slightly higher than Southeast Asia, and more than twice as high as Subsaharan Africa.

Figure 2. Books from Arab countries at U.S. academic libraries, 1960-2007
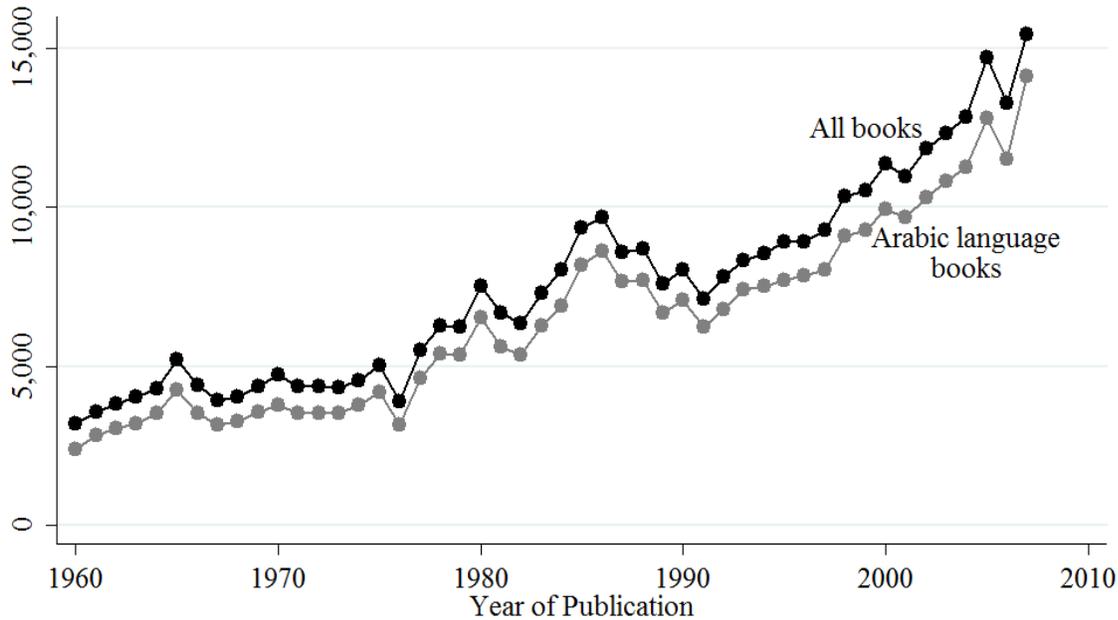
The recent rise in library collecting from Arab countries should not overshadow the historic lack of Arab materials in U.S. academic libraries. Until recently, books from Arab countries were second lowest of any region of comparable population, just above Subsaharan Africa (see Figure 3). For decades, books from Arab countries totaled two thirds of books from Southeast Asia, one third or less than books from Latin America books, and one fifth or less than books from Eastern Europe. In one year, 1976, U.S. academic libraries purchased fewer books from Arab countries than from Subsaharan Africa. These trends suggest that there may be a considerable backlist of Arab books not held by U.S. academic libraries, and reinforce the comments by numerous participants in the Duke/CRL Task Force that a large portion of the published works from Arab countries are not held by any U.S. academic library. That view underlies the Task Force's recommendation that libraries be more proactive and creative in building their international collections.

Figure 3. Books from Arab countries at U.S. academic libraries,
as compared with selected other world regions, 1960-2007
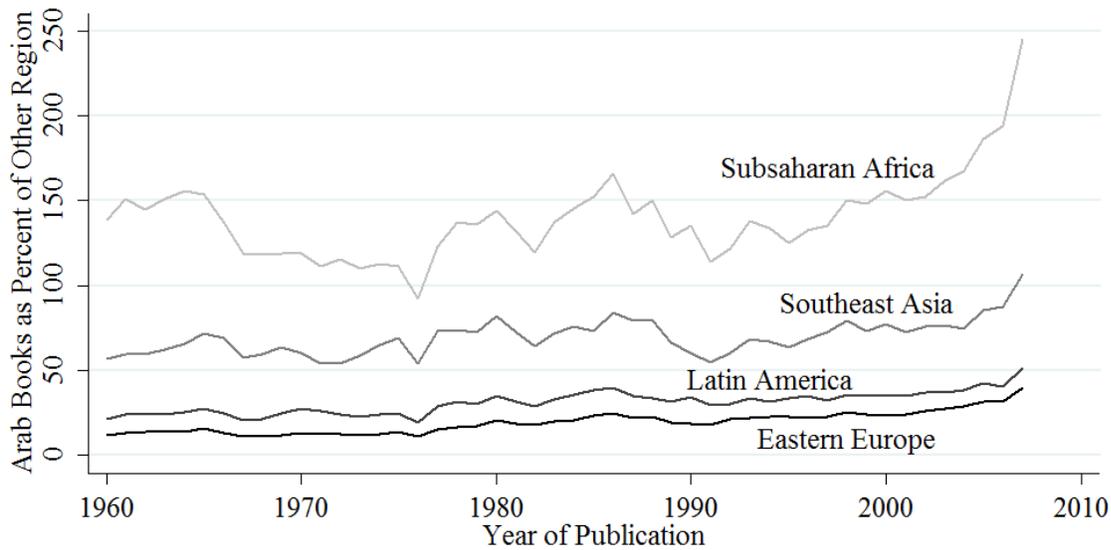
However, it is currently difficult to estimate the scale of the Arab publications missing from U.S. academic libraries, much less the individual items that are missing, and that uncertainty is another reason for exploring partnerships with libraries in Arab countries. Data on book publication in Arab countries are severely incomplete, but several estimates suggest that 12,000 or more books were published each year from the mid-1990s through the early 2000s (see Table 1).

The estimates listed in Table 1 are strangely similar to one another, given the different number of countries covered (out of 22 member countries of Arab League). If we accept these estimates as reasonable, notwithstanding the omission of the rest of the Arab region, then U.S. academic libraries were collecting only two thirds of the books published in Arab countries in the early 1990s.

Ideally, we would be able to compare U.S. library holdings with Arab library holdings to identify material that has gone uncollected in the United States. For Arab countries, this procedure is challenging. As we document in Section 3 of this report, relatively few libraries in the region make their catalogs accessible outside of the library building, and not all of the accessible catalogs are in formats that allow direct comparison with catalogs in the United States.

Table 1. Estimates of the number of books published in Arab countries

Source	Countries	Years included	Books per year
Arab Human Development Report (2003)[6]	8	1990s	11,893
UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2007)[7]	12	1995-1999	11,924
Frankfurter Buchmesse (2010)[8]	5	2002-2004	12,284

International collaborations are needed in order to make more Arab publications accessible to scholars in the United States and elsewhere, and to make the written heritage embodied in the collections of Arab libraries visible to the world. The following sections of this report identify the need and prospects for collaborations, based on a survey of library professionals and educations in Arab countries, a review of library websites and online catalogs in Arab countries, and a series of discussions with leading library professionals and educators from Arab countries and the North America.

2. Survey of library professionals and educators in Arab countries

To understand the challenges and opportunities facing collaboration between libraries in Arab countries and the United States, we conducted an online survey consisting of 22 closed-ended questions and 6 open-ended questions in Arabic, English, and French. The full

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[6] *Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Arab States, 2003), Table A-12, pp. 204-206, "Number of book titles (per million people), 1990s." I have multiplied the rate per million by 1995 population estimates from *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, CD-ROM Edition (New York: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2011). It should be noted that the total of 11,893 is almost double the controversial figure presented in the text of the report: "in 1991, Arab countries produced 6,500 books" (p. 77). This discrepancy between the figures in the text and the appendix has received little or no attention. For a review that expresses suspicion about the report's figures on Arab book production, but offers no alternative estimates, see Eugene Rogan, "Arab Books and Human Development," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Spring 2004, pp. 67-79.

[7] UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Table 21: Historic Data (1995-1999): Book production: Number of titles by UDC classes," May 2007, http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=5594.

[8] Frankfurter Buchmesse, "Book Markets," May 2010, http://www.book-fair.com/en/international/book_markets.

instrument and related materials can be downloaded from the project website: http://melib.web.unc.edu/project-documents/.

The survey was conducted in conjunction with two professional organizations for librarians and library educators: the Arab Federation of Libraries and Information (AFLI), which is based in Tunisia, and the Middle East Librarians Association (MELA), which is based in North America. These organizations distributed our survey recruitment message to more than 4,000 listserv members and approximately 11,000 Facebook viewers. The response rate to this solicitation was quite small, with a total of 237 respondents in Arab countries, plus an additional 20 respondents in North America. A majority of the respondents (58 percent) identified themselves as librarians, archivists or other library professionals; a quarter identified as library educators; and the remaining respondents identified themselves as library administrators or para-professionals (catalogers, conservationists, and other library employees).

Two thirds of the respondents indicated that they were aware of international collaboration projects in their library; Table 2 presents nine types of possible collaborations listed on the survey. Of the respondents who answered this question, more than half reported international collaborations in training programs, double the rate of the next most common forms of collaboration: cataloging, interlibrary borrowing, and digitization efforts. (Respondents were allowed to select multiple types of collaboration, so the percentages do not total to 100.)

Table 2. "Are you aware of any current international collaboration projects in your library?"

Type of Collaboration	Percent
Training programs	57.9
Cataloging of documents	29.8
Interlibrary borrowing or sharing	28.1
Digitization of documents	26.3
Staff exchange	22.8
Preservation of documents	18.4
Library consortium	18.4
International research exchange	10.5
Other (please specify)	12.3

The survey respondents indicated overwhelmingly that they perceived a need for more collaboration (see Table 3).

Table 3. "What is your opinion of the amount of international collaboration at your library?"

	Percent
We need more international collaboration	96.5
We have enough international collaboration	2.1
We need less international collaboration	1.4
Total	100.0

2-1. Benefits to collaboration

In an open-ended question, the survey asked respondents about the possible benefits of international collaborations. The 103 written responses to this question may be grouped into five general categories, listed in Table 4.

Table 4. "What are some possible benefits of international collaborations?"

Primary benefit mentioned	Percent
Consortial agreements	41.8
Sharing ideas/expertise	27.2
Professional development/training	21.4
Cultural exchange	5.8
Preservation of heritage and materials	3.9
Total	100.0

The most commonly cited benefit from international partnerships was the creation of interlibrary consortial agreements that involve the sharing of resources, avoiding duplication, expanding access, and the proliferation of common standards for library services. As one respondent wrote (we have translated written comments from Arabic or French, when necessary):

Libraries should work together in the processes and procedures for the preparation of technical information sources, both electronic and paper, to avoid duplication of effort and waste of time on the same tasks.

Specific examples of duplicated mentioned in the responses included the sharing of practical information about processes such as digitization and cataloging and educational and reference materials. According to another respondent, consortial agreements could help "save time, effort and cost, in addition to mobilizing the resources of the cooperating libraries for the benefit of a library's users." Several respondents mentioned the potential benefit of consortial agreements for libraries with limited resources, especially in poorer countries and rural areas, both in terms of sharing the burden of providing serves and in terms of benefitting from international standards in librarianship:

> On the whole, underdeveloped libraries benefit from collaborative projects with developed libraries, particularly in the overall application of high quality practices and standards. Collaborative efforts benefit libraries by giving them the ingredients for success. They lessen the burden through the sharing of resources, which is the first principle of collaboration.

One particularly compelling response suggested that library consortia could help to develop a "broader understanding of the issues faced by libraries and librarians in the Middle East." This was echoed in another response that international cooperatives could help to "identify the most important problems and difficulties that hinder the development of libraries."

The sharing of ideas and expertise between professionals was cited in more than a quarter of the responses as a benefit of international collaboration. One respondent characterized sharing as "empowerment" that would increase motivation and enthusiasm for professional development in libraries. Another respondent saw collaborations as promoting librarians' cosmopolitan identity: "International collaboration helps to get in touch with the wider world of culture and all the new things that are happening. It magnifies our cultural and informational horizon."

A fifth of respondents identified professional development and training as the primary benefit of international collaboration. Most of these responses mentioned the need for workshops and conferences and for financial support to attend them. International training was also characterized as a way to keep libraries and professionals up to date with current practices and international standards:

> There are great many benefits to the international cooperation between libraries, including the vocational and professional development of information specialists, development of tools for work and standardization, exchange of experience in joint ventures, bridging the knowledge gap between foreign and local professionals through training in the best IT practices and their application in the Arab environment.

Two other categories of benefit showed up in a smaller number of responses that warrant mention. Some cited the benefit of cultural exchange, cross-cultural communication, and cultural competency. "Collaboration … allows us to know other cultures: this is very rewarding." A few respondents referred to the preservation of heritage and materials as a

primary benefit of international collaboration, though fewer than one might expect, given the rate of existing collaborations on digitization and preservation (Table 6). Those respondents who prioritized preservation were adamant, however:

> One exciting possibility is to help preserve a country's cultural heritage and make it more widely available globally via digitization while not expatriating it.

> With Middle Eastern collaborations it is interesting to discover how language material is handled in countries in which it is the national language. Increasing globalization and shifting in cataloging practices is allowing for closer alignment of metadata which has potential for greater sharing and interlinking of data.

2-2. Obstacles to collaboration

A second open-ended question asked about obstacles to international collaborations. Fewer respondents – a total of 49 -- offered written answers to this question, perhaps because of the sensitivity of the subject. Table 5 groups these responses into six primary themes.

Table 5. "What are some obstacles or challenges faced by international collaborative projects in your department?"

Primary obstacle mentioned	Percent
Philosophical or cultural differences or misunderstandings	38.8
Logistical, administrative, or bureaucratic barriers	36.7
Budget, finances	8.2
Communication breakdowns, language barriers	8.2
Lack of staff, lack of training	4.1
Standards	4.1
Total	100.0

The most frequently cited obstacle to international collaboration involved philosophical or cultural differences or misunderstandings among the partners. One responded attributed problems to differing "cultures of collaboration" among partners, and another bemoaned the "absence of a culture of information" at the respondent's institution. Others complained of differing expectations of collaborations, such as the respondent who wrote, "Projects are usually started in good faith and with good intentions," but there is often a "mismatch in expectations and shortfalls of administration and operation that create problematic circumstances in international collaborative efforts." This response also broaches the second most commonly listed obstacle, logistical and administrative barriers, "from

departmental to governmental," according to one respondent. In the words of another respondent:

> In my opinion, the administrative obstacles are the most important: 1) no strategic plan to ensure the sustainability of projects and return of future collaboration; 2) staff members without qualifications to carry out these projects.

Related to this theme was a concern about the availability of qualified personnel or training to carry out the collaboration, including an "uneven level of training between our teachers and researchers and our [international] partners." Several respondents also mentioned language barriers, as many international partners could not communicate in Arabic and a considerable portion of library personnel in Arab countries find it difficult to communicate at a professional level in English or other languages. "There is always the possibility of misunderstandings," one of our respondents wrote. Finally, two respondents highlighted problems with "each country using local standards and specifications," or differing visa and import/export regulations complicating collaborations that send personnel, equipment, or payments across international borders.

Overarching a number of these themes was an emphasis on "political will," to use one respondent's phrase, on the part of library leaders, given often-challenging political circumstances. Another overarching theme in a number of responses was a concern that training and other collaborative opportunities were sometimes commandeered by senior staff and did not benefit librarians in the early stages of their careers. Some of these responses identified a class hierarchy: "Training courses belong to a certain class of people," one respondent complained.

2-3. Proposed solutions

A final open-ended question asked for proposed solutions to address the obstacles to international library collaborations. Forty-four respondents offered suggestions, which are grouped into six categories in Table 6.

Table 6. "What solutions do you suggest for the challenges or obstacles to international collaborations that you have described above?"

Primary proposed solution	Percent
Revise administrative procedures	36.4
Training	22.7
Better communication practices	15.9
Marketing and awareness of projects	11.4
Increase funding, improve access to funding	6.8
Changes to infrastructure	6.8
Total	100.0

Increased attention to training, including language training, was the next most common proposal, as described by one respondent:

> Training and building teams based on what is available in the market. With time, these teams will get bigger and more versed with the skills and knowledge necessary to work on more and bigger projects. We have actually moved from a library with virtually no projects several years ago (just providing basic library services to students and faculty) to a library that is currently working on a number of major projects (several of which are international in scope).

Other respondents suggested improved communications practices, including one who proposed that "Patience is key, along with a sense of humor. While it may be painful, be as specific as possible about processes and procedures. This is critical when working through layers of an unfamiliar bureaucracy."

Some respondents also suggested better marketing and broader public communication as a way to improve awareness of and participation in international collaboration, along with clarity in the terms of the collaboration and what appears to be a reference to safeguards against the misuse of project funding:

> Increase awareness among officials of the importance of collaboration through the establishment of seminars and forums about projects. Set the terms and conditions of cooperation with the participation of all parties. Avoid questionable requests for funds during the establishment of collaborations.

A handful of respondents focused on addressing physical and infrastructural deficiencies in libraries, or on financial support for training. One respondent recommended easier and more flexible procedures for obtaining grant funding for training. Another respondent suggested that a portion of the budget for every collaborative project should be provided for training.

3. Discussion panels of leading library scholars and professionals

The project convened two discussion panels of leaders from the Middle East Librarians Association (MELA), the Arab Federation for Libraries and Information (AFLI), and the Special Libraries Association - Arabian Gulf Chapter (SLA-AGC) to discuss the website and survey findings and to identify major issues for international library collaborations. The first panel was held in Washington, D.C., in November 2014, in conjunction with the MELA annual conference; the second was held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in March 2015, in conjunction with the SLA-AGC's annual conference. Both panels presented the project's findings to conference participants, including the project staff and members of the advisory board who were able to attend, and encouraged open discussion of the findings and of future directions for international library collaboration. These panels attracted 45 audience members at the MELA conference and 70 members at the SLA-AGC conference.

This section focuses on seven major issues that were raised in these discussions:

3-1. Disaster management

Libraries are among the elements of cultural heritage that have suffered during recent civil conflicts in Iraq and Syria.[9] While there has been a great deal of public attention paid to the destruction of ancient artifacts, librarians have also mobilized efforts to assist libraries in the region, beginning with a committee formed by MELA soon after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq,[10] and complemented by a project of the American Library Association (ALA) beginning in 2006.[11]

Participants in the panel discussions expressed concern over the lack of well-articulated disaster management protocols or digital preservation plans for libraries in Arab countries, especially countries that are experiencing civil conflict. Such plans would provide guidelines for preserving irreplaceable materials and objects. Digitization was discussed as potentially useful for at least preserving some aspect of materials that may be at risk of destruction, but without a plan in place and large-scale sharing of digital copies, the results of digitization efforts could be at risk of destruction as well. It was agreed by all that such plans would only be possible through a coordinated international effort. It was suggested that AFLI be a coordinating body for these efforts.

In addition to the preservation and safeguarding of resources in libraries, deep concern was expressed for the physical safety and livelihood of the professionals conducting these efforts. It was agreed that a better-articulated plan and set of protocols was needed and that a more stable source of funding must be developed to help librarians in the region. This effort is ongoing in the case of Iraq, but efforts are only just beginning in Syria. Any lessons that can be learned from these episodes will be of great value for future disaster planning.

3-2. Resource sharing

Inter-library loan systems are rare in Arab countries, as institutions are hesitant to loan physical materials over concern that they will be lost or damaged along the way, according to discussion participants. In addition, items are sometimes stuck in customs and subjected to import and export taxes. These and other logistical concerns were cited by a number of professionals throughout the discussion.

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[9] "Nabil Al-Tikriti, "'Stuff Happens': A Brief Overview of the 2003 Destruction of Iraqi Manuscript Collections, Archives, and Libraries," *Library Trends*, Vol. 55, No. 3, Winter 2007, pp. 730-745; Destruction of Cultural Heritage, Global Policy Forum, https://www.globalpolicy.org/humanitarian-issues-in-iraq/consequences-of-the-war-and-occupation-of-iraq/destruction-of-iraqs-cultural-heritage.html

[10] Committee on Iraqi Libraries, MELA, http://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/melairaq.html.

[11] Assistance to Iraqi libraries, ALA, http://www.ala.org/offices/iro/iraq.

Digitization was suggested as an alternative to the transfer of physical objects, and this has been a major motivation for digitization projects in the region. However, smaller and poorer institutions lack the resources, equipment, and training for digitization; participants suggested that better-resourced libraries could assist with the promotion of digitization efforts at partner institutions.

The problem of discoverability of library resources in Arab countries, documented in Section 4 of this report, also prompted considerable discussions. One proposed solution was to develop a reference network that would coordinate and route requests and information between librarians in different countries. It was suggested that this might best occur with the input of national library associations, although not all of these associations are currently active. To explore the feasibility of a small-scale pilot project that would get a reference network off the ground, two project participants visited Mr. Juma al-Majid, the founding director of the Juma Al-Majid Center for Culture and Heritage in Dubai, who expressed enthusiasm about his library's participation in such an initiative.

3-3. Cataloging systems

Inconsistencies in cataloging systems were the subject of several discussions. As discussed below in Section 4, libraries in the Arab world use multiple software and classification systems, not all of which are compatible with systems in use in the rest of the world. Participants noted that compatibility issues complicate the integration of library records from multiple systems, slowing coordination efforts.

Some of these incompatibility issues are the result of proprietary software that is marketed to libraries in Arab countries. Other issues result from the continued use of older metadata standards by some libraries. Other issues arise from insufficient documentation of cataloging and other standards or incomplete translation of international documentation into Arabic. Still other issues arise from inconsistent implementation of standards, both between and within libraries.

Discussion participants indicated that there are ongoing efforts to develop and distribute standards documentation for use by libraries in Arab countries, including a program which is translating and updating the documentation for major international standards. The output of this effort is intended to be published via the AFLI website. Participants also drew attention to the Arabic Union Catalog, which offers interlibrary search for a number of library catalogs in the region.

Another cataloging issue facing libraries in Arab countries involves U.S.-centric aspects of the two main classification systems, the Dewey Decimal System and the Library of Congress Subject Headings. Each of these systems devotes an extensive call range to American subjects, a detailed call range for European subjects, and a much more restrictive call range for Arab and other subjects. For example, the Dewey system offers 10 call numbers each for Christianity (230-239), Christian practice & observance (240-249), Christian pastoral practice & religious orders (250-259), Christian organization, social work, & worship (260-269), History of Christianity (270-279), Christian denominations (280-289), and only one call number for Islam, Bábism & Bahá'í Faith (297). The Library of Congress subject

headings reserve the entire E section for American history; Great Britain (DA), Germany (DD), and several other European countries get their own subsections; while all of Asia (DS) and Africa (DT) share comparable subsections. As a result, some libraries in Arab and other countries have created their own versions of these classifications in order to provide greater ranges of call numbers for materials on Islam and Middle Eastern subjects, [12] with the result that a single item may have different call numbers in libraries around the world. Discussion participants recommended collaborations to harmonize these different classification systems.

3-4. Availability of catalog data

As will be discussed in Section 4 of this report, a large proportion of libraries in Arab countries have no online catalog. Participants attributed this, in part, to political instability and civil conflict, which have disrupted long-term investments in library infrastructure. For some libraries, the mission of preservation is a higher priority than the mission of accessibility. Participants also suggested that there is a reluctance in some libraries to share information on their collections, out of concern that identifying these works publicly may expose them to theft, government seizure, or destruction, and that digitization may degrade the value the library's physical collection.[13] Participants also suggested that some library administrators may be hesitant to put their catalogs online because they consider the cataloging metadata to be proprietary, or because they prefer researchers to come to the library in person.

Notwithstanding these barriers, participants stressed that making library catalogs available online, in a format that can be merged with other library catalogs from around the world, is of utmost importance for libraries in Arab countries. Online catalogs and integrated search systems make the heritage of Arabic publications visible both to Arab readers and to the rest of the world. They are central to other major goals raised by participants, including disaster planning and resource sharing, and they help generate efficiencies through collaborative collecting and cataloging.

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[12] S. Mahmood Hasan Qaisar, *Islamic Sciences: Expansion of Dewey Decimal Classification ed. XVI, for Oriental Libraries* (Aligarh, India: Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, 1965); ʿAbd al-Wahhab ʿAbd al-Salam Abu al-Nur, *al-Tasnif al-bibliyujrafi li-ʿulum al-din al-islami* (Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Thaqafah li'l-Tibaʿa wa'l-Nashr, 1973); Ziauddin Sardar, *Islam: Outline of a Classification Scheme* (London: C. Bingley, 1979); Syed Riazuddin, *Classification of Islamic Literature* (Karachi, Pakistan: Royal Book Company, 2002); Haroon Idrees and Khalid Mahmood, "Devising a Classification Scheme for Islam: Opinions of LIS and Islamic Studies Scholars," *Library Philosophy and Practice*, October 2009; Haroon Idrees, "Organization of Islamic Knowledge in Libraries: The Role of Classification Systems," *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 2012, Paper 798.

[13] Sumayya Ahmed, "And We Keep a Copy: Digitization, Ownership and Colonial Memories," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Washington, D.C., November 2014.

3-5. Training programs

Discussion participants echoed the survey respondents' desire for more training opportunities for librarians in Arab countries. Training programs are often conducted as one-off workshops, some of which are expensive, or are geared toward the goals of specific grant-funded projects, or limit attendance. Educational programs in library and information sciences exist in several Arab countries, although few of these programs offer internationally accredited degrees.

Participants offered several ideas to meet the unmet demand for training. One suggestion was to establish training or internship programs which would allow librarians in Arab countries to travel to universities outside of the region to work as interns in their area of specialization and audit classes in a school of library and information science. A second suggestion was to offer short-term training in Arab countries on a non-profit basis, with teams of trainers holding workshops on specific subjects in a series of locations that would be relatively accessible to large numbers of librarians in each country. A third suggestion was to offer training modules online, along the lines of a pilot project being developed by the ELIME-21 project (Educating Librarians in the Middle East: Building Bridges for the 21st Century) at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (http://elime.web.unc.edu). All of these efforts would require a stable source of funding in order to be developed and made available at low or no cost to large numbers of librarians in Arab countries.

3-6. Partnerships with older libraries

Another issue raised by discussion participants involved the needs of older libraries in Arab countries. International collaboration tends to focus on newer libraries, which are more likely to have technological infrastructures suited for digital communication, or to physical restoration of older buildings. There has been relatively less collaboration around other aspects of library management in older libraries, especially school libraries. These institutions are more likely to lack the technological infrastructure to develop online catalogs, preserve and share information through digitization, and maintain regular communication with institutional partners. For example, several major libraries in Arab countries do not have a functioning e-mail system. Employees at these library use commercial e-mail servers such as Gmail for their official correspondence, and many senior administrators rarely communicate via e-mail at all. Technological needs such as these handicap these libraries, and others like them, both in offering services to their users and in forging partnerships that could help improve services to their users.

Discussion participants recommended specially designed partnerships with older libraries that would assist in developing infrastructure, as a first step toward other forms of collaborations. They suggested that this sort of initiative would mitigate the trend toward forgetting about the old in favor of the new that prevails in many institutions in Arab countries. Participants expressed concern that international partners often favor high-profile projects and modern architecture over much-needed but less showy collaborations to upgrade capabilities and preserve heritage.

3-7. Library leadership

Discussion participants also expressed concern about unevenness in the selection and performance of library leadership in Arab countries. Too many library leaders are political appointees who lack library training, they said, and are replaced too frequently to engage in long-term institution-building. The resulting lack of continuity can demoralize library staff and make it difficult for strategic initiatives to be developed, approved, and seen through to completion. Participants gave the example of a library administrator who seemed to view the library's holdings as his personal collection, removing items for personal use with no record of having checked them out. Apparently, this administrator did not expect to be in his position for long and sought to make the most of his time in office. This sort of irresponsibility is extreme, and not representative of all library leaders in Arab countries, but it highlights the uneven qualifications of library leaders in the region. International partnerships will not solve this problem, and discussion participants did not suggest that libraries in the United States or elsewhere attempt to intervene in the selection of library leaders in Arab countries. However, they did suggest that high-level working groups of library leaders might be worthwhile in communicating expectations and best practices in library leadership, comparable to the Leadership Institute of the American Library Association and the International Leaders Programme of the International Federation of Library Associations.

4. Library websites and online catalogs in Arab countries

Many of the ideas proposed for international collaboration, both in the survey and in the panel discussions, involved electronic communications and sharing of data, particularly digital preservation in case of disaster, interlibrary borrowing, and integrated cataloging systems. Yet as a number of our project participants noted, the digital infrastructure of libraries in Arab countries is uneven.

To gauge the current state of this infrastructure, the project reviewed the online presence of all 831 libraries in 17 Arab countries listed in the 2013 edition of the *Directory of Middle East and North African Libraries*, whose estimated holdings comprise more than 50 million books.[14] While not fully complete, this directory serves as the most complete available listing of libraries operating as standalone institutions or under the umbrella of a larger cultural, governmental, or educational institution. We sought to identify how many of these libraries have websites and online catalogs. For those libraries with online catalogs, we examined the software, metadata standards, and classifications used in these catalogs, the presence of discovery systems, the script of the metadata and language of the interface, and the availability of portals for aggregation protocols.

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[14] *Directory of Middle East and North African Libraries*, 3rd edition (Sydney, Australia: Asia Pacific Infoserv Pty, Ltd., 2013). The directory also includes libraries in Iran, Israel, and Turkey, which are not analyzed in this project. Five members of the Arab League -- Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, and Sudan -- are not included in this directory.

A major effort to make catalogs in Arab countries accessible is the Arabic Union Catalog (http://www.aruc.org), an effort launched by the King Abdulaziz Public Library in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in 2006. The Arabic Union Catalog – also known in English as the Arab Union Catalog -- seeks to provide a unified online catalog for libraries in Arab countries, much like the mission of OCLC's Worldcat interlibrary catalog. In fact, the Arabic Union Catalog entered into a partnership with OCLC in 2011, depositing 1.4 million records, including 700,000 in Arabic, that are now visible in Worldcat.[15] The Arabic Union Catalog and its technology contractor, Naseej Arabian Advanced Systems, conduct training seminars for librarians in Arab countries and promote online cataloging and standardized metadata at conferences in the region.

This pioneering initiative is still in development, and it is unclear at this point how many libraries in Arab countries are participating (inquiries from this project received no response from officials at the Arabic Union Catalog) and how frequently the records are updated. Arabic Union Catalog records, on their website and in Worldcat, do not indicate shelf numbers or offer links to libraries that hold each item, as other records in Worldcat do. Spot checking of Arab-language books in Worldcat suggests that the Arabic Union Catalog's records have not yet been "de-duplicated," that is, they seem to be listed separately from other libraries' records for the same editions.

Alongside the efforts of the Arabic Union Catalog, it appears that more work needs to be done in bringing libraries in Arabic countries online. Just under half of the libraries listed in the *Directory of Middle East and North African Libraries* -- 402 of 831 libraries -- list a web address, more than double the 175 library websites identified by a study published in 2005.[16] However, only 270 of the 402 library websites were active in late 2014 and early 2015. Of these 270 active websites, fewer than half included an online catalog for public use – 126 in total, or 15.2 percent of the libraries listed in the directory.

Of the 17 Arab countries included in the directory, Gulf countries had the highest rate of libraries with websites – almost two thirds of libraries in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had working websites – and the highest rate of libraries with online catalogs. However, even in these countries, fewer than half of the libraries allowed public online search of their collections (see Table 7).

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[15] "OCLC Partners with King Abdulaziz Public Library to Make Arabic-Language Resources Available through Worldcat.org," November 29, 2011, https://www.oclc.org/news/releases/2011/201169.en.html.
[16] Sharif Kamal Shahin, "Faharis al-maktabat al-'arabiyya al-mutaha 'abr shabakat al-intirnit" (Arab library catalogs available on the internet), *Cybrarians Journal*, Vol. 4, 2005, http://www.journal.cybrarians.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=513:-qiflaq-&catid=241:2011-08-16-08-16-55&Itemid=66.

Table 7. Libraries and web presence in Arab countries, by country

Country	# of Libraries	% with Websites	% with Online Catalogs
Algeria	82	34.1	12.2
Bahrain	25	52.0	20.0
Egypt	181	16.0	7.2
Iraq	30	16.7	6.7
Jordan	40	30.0	15.0
Kuwait	25	64.0	40.0
Lebanon	53	39.6	22.6
Libya	37	5.4	0.0
Morocco	94	25.5	6.4
Oman	22	59.1	22.7
Palestine	21	52.4	28.6
Qatar	16	56.3	25.0
Saudi Arabia	37	64.9	32.4
Syria	20	40.0	10.0
Tunisia	52	5.8	1.9
United Arab Emirates	86	60.5	37.2
Yemen	10	0.0	0.0
All	831	32.5	15.2

Table 8 shows the distribution of libraries by institutional type, along with the percentage of institutions with web presence and online catalogs. One quarter of college and university libraries in the region have online catalogs, while the highest rate of web presence and online catalogs is found among national libraries (although three of the 17 countries under study -- Oman, Palestine, and Yemen -- do not have national libraries; national libraries are under development in Oman[17] and Yemen[18]). Six of the remaining 14 countries' national libraries do not have websites, and eight of 14 do not have online catalogs.

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[17] The Oman Cultural Complex Project, https://mhc.gov.om/tabid/388/Default.aspx.

[18] Yemen's National Library Project, http://yemen-nic.net/home_e/power/P4.pdf.

Table 8. Libraries and web presence in Arab countries, by type of library

Library Type	# of Libraries	% with Websites	% with Online Catalogs
Research institute	193	22.3	5.2
University/college	408	42.4	24.5
National libraries	13	57.1	42.9
Public libraries	31	22.6	16.1
Special libraries	185	21.1	2.7
All	831	32.5	15.2

As one would expect, larger libraries are more likely than smaller libraries to have a web presence – 17 of the 20 libraries with holdings of 500,000 books or more have websites, and libraries with websites account for two thirds of all book holdings in the region. Most libraries in the region, however have collections of fewer than 100,000 books (see Figure 4), and the smaller the collection, the less likely the library is to have a website and online catalog (see Figure 5, which divides the libraries into equal quintiles of collection size).

Figure 4. Libraries in Arab countries, by size of book holdings
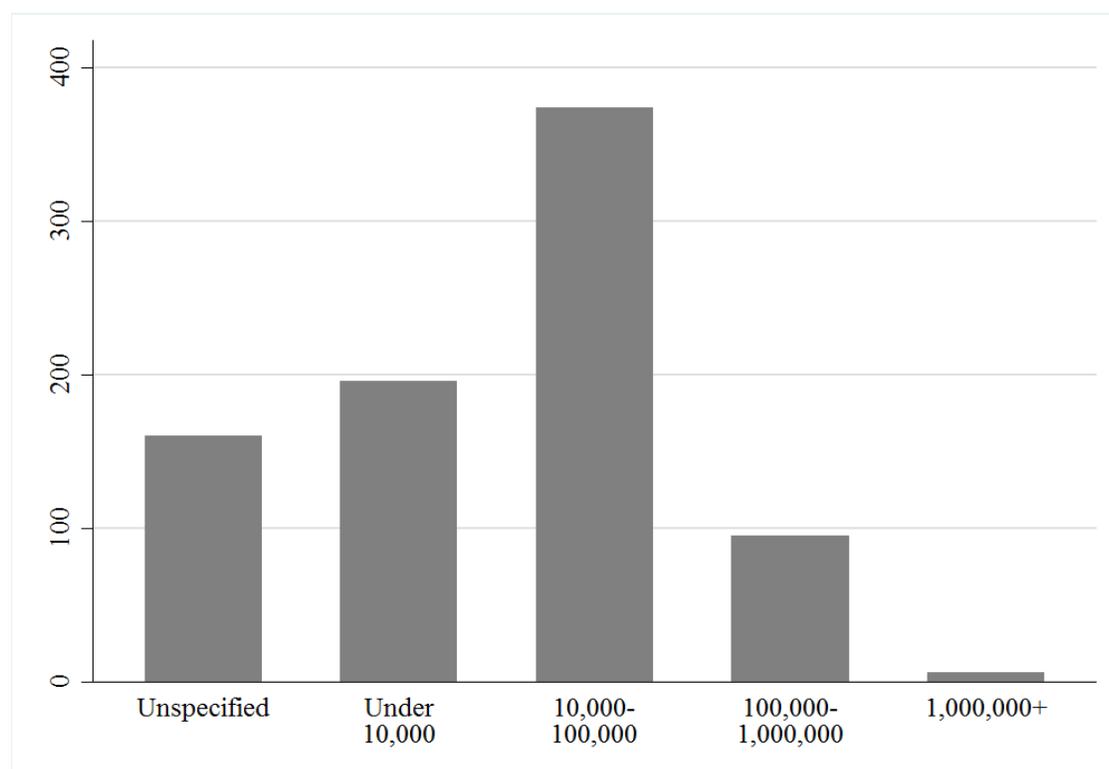
Figure 5. Library websites and catalogs in Arab countries, by size of book holdings
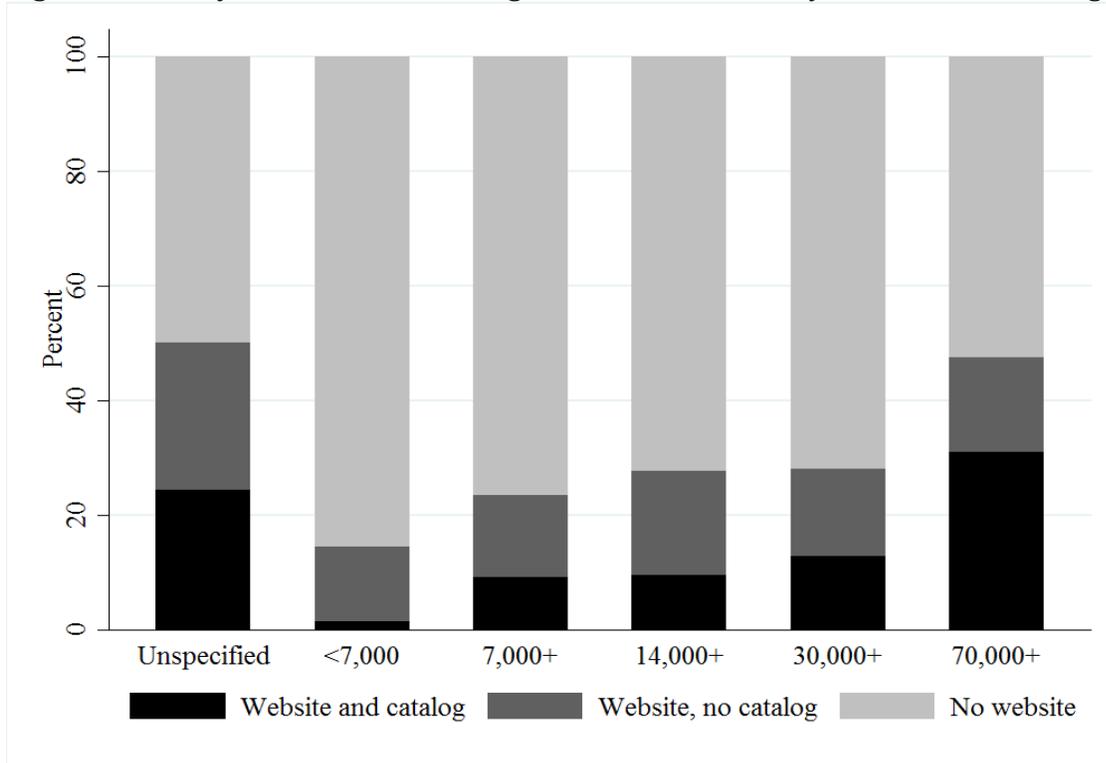
Of the 126 online catalogs in Arab countries, two can be queried directly from the institution's home page. Another 49 can be reached with one click from the home page – a relatively accessible position on the website. More than half require two or three clicks (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Online catalogs in Arab countries, by number of clicks from institution homepage

Note: The bar for 1-click includes two institutions with catalog searches on their home page (0 clicks).
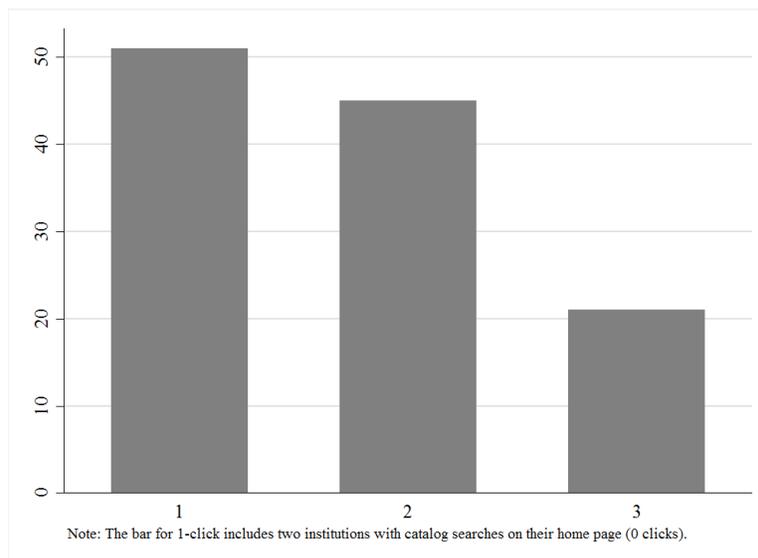
In the early days of electronic cataloging, there were barriers to keeping records in Arabic script, and Arabic-language material was often entered into catalogs using Romanized transliterations. Software has since been developed to allow easier text entry in Arabic script, and most online library catalogs in Arab countries now use Arabic script for Arabic-language metadata, as shown in Table 9. We considered the script presented in the title and author fields of the metadata presented in in the online catalog interface. National and public libraries are proportionally more likely to have Arabic-only metadata in their online catalogs, presenting Arabic-language titles in Arabic without any transliteration.

Table 9. Script of metadata records in online catalogs in Arab countries (percentage)

Library type	Arabic	Transliterated	Both Arabic and transliterated
Research institute	28.6	57.1	14.3
University/college	64.0	18.6	17.4
National libraries	83.3	0.0	16.7
Public libraries	80.0	0.0	20.0
Special libraries	25.0	25.0	50.0
Total	62.0	19.4	18.5

In addition to the metadata language, we gathered data about the language of the online catalog interface (see Figure 7). Many search catalogs presented multiple links to users which allowed the user to choose the display language of the interface. However, some of these links did not work, in which case the default language was the only language actually available. English is the most widespread language in online library catalogs in Arab countries, available either solely or in combination with other languages in more than three quarters of the catalogs. Arabic is available in less than half.

Figure 7. Language of online library catalog interfaces in Arab countries
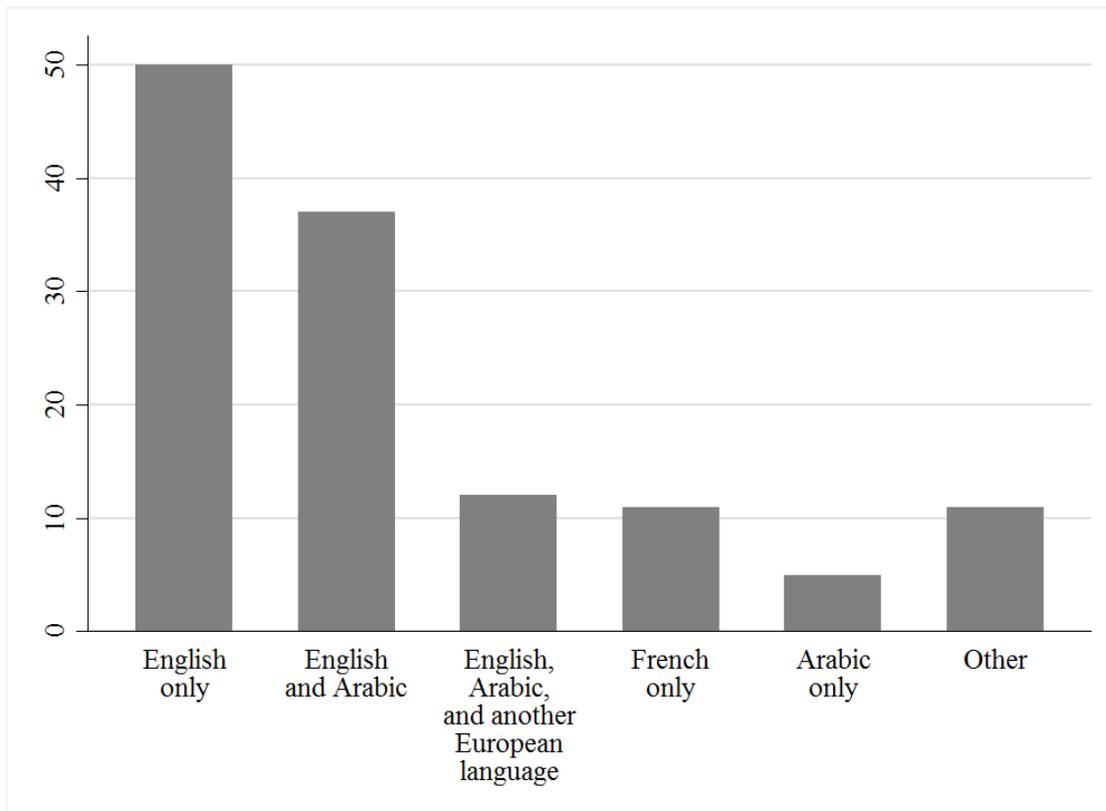
Figure 8 shows the catalog systems of online library catalogs in Arab countries, where they could be identified from the web interface. Some of these systems were identified based on copyright notifications and other web-metadata included in the `<head>` section of the catalog's HTML code, while others were identified by inspection of the webpage. As in many regions of the world, the implementation of catalog systems is primarily the activity of software vendors. Millennium was the most widely implemented, followed by SirsiDynix software (either Symphony or Horizon). Koha is the only open-source system in use that we were able to identify, and it is not found at very many Middle East libraries at present, despite gaining in popularity throughout the world, especially at smaller institutions that do not have a large budget for software licenses. Many of the sites were running slightly older versions of these catalog software systems, possibly as a result of the expense of upgrades or difficulties with backward compatibility for new versions or systems.

Figure 8. Catalog software of online library catalogs in Arab countries
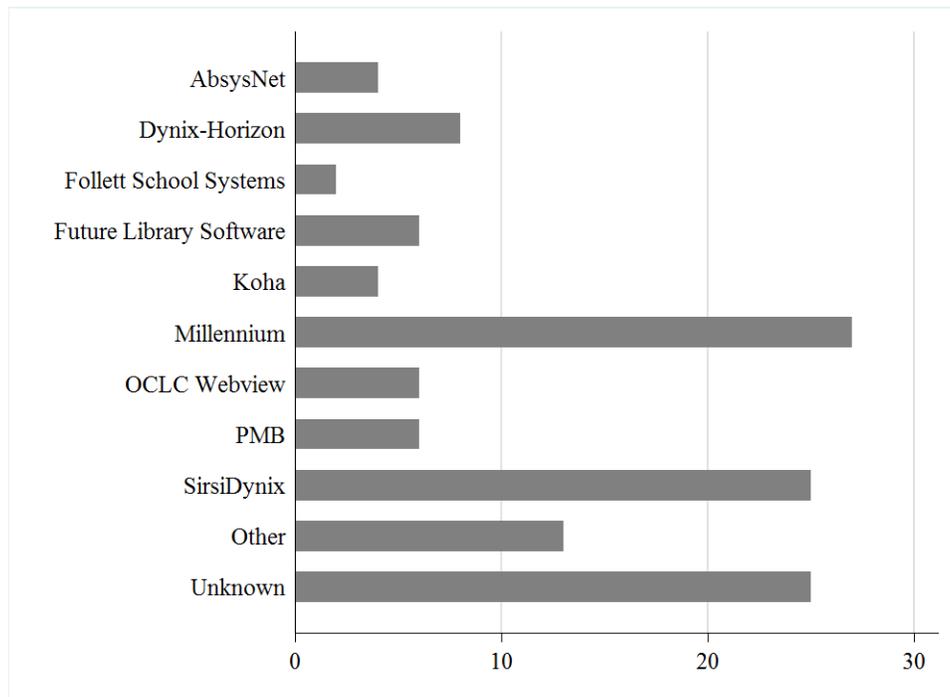
Most of the online library catalogs in Arab countries do not have discovery systems, which integrate searches of the library's catalog with searches in a range of databases (see Figure 9). The most common discovery system in these libraries is Summon, a ProQuest product, which is among the most widely-used discovery systems around the world.

Figure 9. Discovery systems of online library catalogs in Arab countries
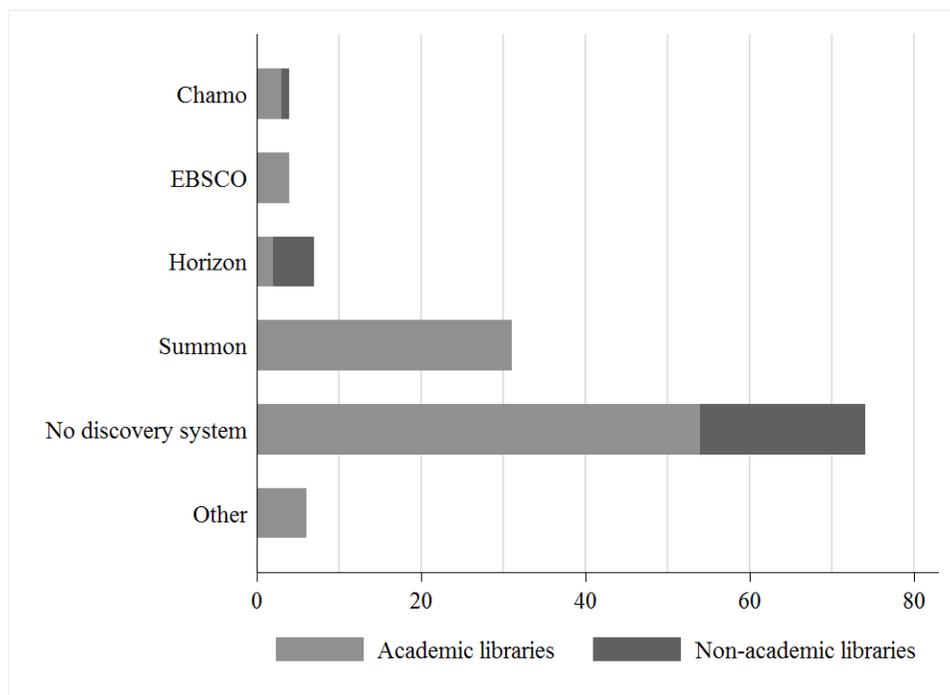
Many online catalog systems have the capacity to expose their metadata to allow access to aggregated search systems, facilitating multi-site catalog search and links to resources held by different libraries. Several mechanisms have been developed specifically for this purpose, such as the Z39.50 standard protocol implemented by the United States Library of Congress. This protocol is used widely throughout the world, but we were able to identify only seven libraries with active Z39.50 portals in Arab countries:[19]

1. American University in Cairo, Egypt
2. American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
3. British University in Egypt, Cairo, Egypt
4. Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
5. United Arab Emirates University, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
6. Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik, Lebanon
7. University of Dammam, Saudi Arabia

By contrast, Pakistan – to pick a single example -- has 19 libraries listed in the Library of Congress Z39.50 directory. Without Z39.50 targets, it is sometimes possible to access metadata directly from online library catalogs, but it is burdensome to develop customized software to access each catalog. For most online library catalogs in Arab countries, however, even this customized access is not possible, because the metadata format is not visible in the user interface (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Metadata standards of online library catalogs in Arab countries

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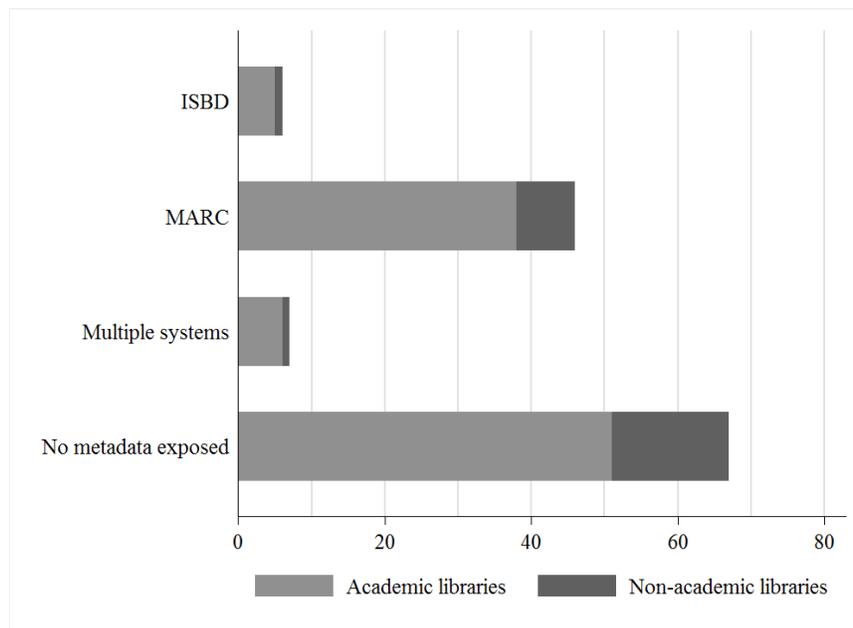
[19] These libraries were identified using the Library of Congress's "Gateway to Library Catalogs" (http://www.loc.gov/z3950/), and various user-driven Z39.50 directories that exist online. There is no comprehensive listing of Z39.50 targets worldwide.

One third of the online catalogs used some form of MARC (MAchine-Readable Cataloging), the most widely used format for electronic cataloging in the world. (Most of the catalogs did not specify which version of MARC they were using.) Only 13 catalogs used other standards, and most did not reveal any information about their metadata standard. Proportionally, there was not much difference between academic and non-academic libraries with regard to metadata standards.

A final aspect of our review of online catalogs was the classification system used to organize books by subject categories (Table 5). The two most widely used systems are the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and the Dewey Decimal Classification system. In addition, many catalogs listed International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) as well.

Table 10. Classification and ISBN in online library catalogs in Arab countries (percentage)

Library Type	LCSH	Dewey	Other	ISBN
Research institute	14.3	71.4	14.3	40.0
University/college	57.0	31.0	12.8	56.9
National libraries	16.7	66.7	16.7	16.7
Public libraries	0.0	80.0	20.0	0.0
Special libraries	50.0	50.0	0.0	40.0
Total %	49.1	38.5	13.0	50.8

Note: The presence of ISBN numbers is separate from the classification systems.

University libraries were most likely to employ Library of Congress call numbers, but most other libraries continue to use the Dewey system, as is the case for many public libraries in the United States and elsewhere. A small number of online library catalogs used accession numbers instead of a classification system – that is, the order in which books were acquired. Other institutions have systems that developed locally or are less widely used.

One of the initial goals of this project was to better understand the state of deromanization in catalog records, particularly as it relates to records being imported into OCLC's WorldCat interlibrary catalog. Deromanization is the process of adding Arabic-script titles and authors to catalog records that have only the Latin/Roman transliterations of the original Arabic-language information. Transliterated records are problematic because different systems are often used in the process, and records cannot be searched and located using the original Arabic script. It turns out that the OCLC has made considerable progress in deromanizing Worldcat records. By March 2015, the OCLC reported that more than half of all Arabic-language records in Worldcat (50.2 percent of 1,613,617 records) now include Arabic script. Further monitoring of this progress would be worthwhile, but the project decided not to dedicate further time to this issue.

5. Recommendations

5-1. Collaboration of professional associations

The three professional associations that participated in this project – the Arab Federation of Libraries and Information (AFLI), the Middle East Librarians Association (MELA), and the Special Libraries Association – Arab Gulf Chapter (SLA-AGC) have not collaborated in a sustained way, despite their overlapping missions and membership. We recommend that these associations negotiate formal connections with one another and develop ongoing partnerships. We recommend that these associations also forge partnerships with national library associations in Arab countries, and assist in the formation and activation of national associations where they are non-existent or moribund.

These partnerships might involve sharing information over their associations' listservs, websites, and social media accounts. Information about upcoming conferences, training opportunities, and job openings, for example, might be distributed to members of all three associations. Another level of partnership might involve reciprocal or joint membership privileges, so that members of any of these professional associations could participate in the activities of the others. Each association might be invited to organize a panel at the other associations' conferences; funding might be located for travel to conferences, especially for librarians for whom the cost would be prohibitive.

5-2. Library leadership conferences

The directors of libraries in Arab countries rarely meet as a group, and never in conjunction with library directors from other regions. Such meetings would provide a venue for library directors to learn from their colleagues' initiatives, best practices, and common challenges. Collaborations might emerge naturally from such discussions among officials with the authority to engage their libraries in significant projects, such as standardizing cataloging systems and participating in interlibrary borrowing networks.

On an even more senior level, we recommend regular meetings of national librarians and presidents of national library associations, perhaps in conjunction with the annual meeting of ministers of culture -- who oversee library systems in many countries – that is convened by the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALECSO, http://alecso.org). These meetings would potentially generate positive competitive pressures for the advancement of library systems, as well as collaborations in addressing common needs, such as meetings or task forces to examine issues surrounding interlibrary catalogs, interlibrary loan, copyright laws, and open-access protocols.

5-3. Disaster management plans

As our discussion participants noted, libraries in several Arab countries have suffered from the lack of disaster management plans in the face of armed conflict. Such plans, and associated professional training, would establish protocols to mitigate damage to library collections and infrastructure and threats to personnel. A first step would be a research

project to study the damage to libraries in recent conflict zones, and the lessons that might be learned from this experience.

5-4. Interlibrary catalogs

The Arabic Union Catalog has begun to collate library catalogs in Arab countries and make them searchable through a single online portal, and the Arabic Union Catalog's partnership with the OCLC's Worldcat has brought these holdings into an even broader search portal. However, much work remains to be done. Most libraries in Arab countries do not have online catalogs, and many libraries use cataloging software and standards that are at least partially incompatible with one another. We recommend a project, organized in conjunction with Arab library associations, that would work with libraries in Arab countries to develop globally compatible online catalogs and integrate them with the major interlibrary catalog initiatives.

5-5. Interlibrary loan

Very few libraries in Arab countries have interlibrary loan agreements, and as a result people have to move to reach books, rather than moving books to reach people. We recommend an initiative to establish interlibrary loan agreements among libraries in Arab countries, and between these libraries and libraries in other world regions. Given the costs and government restrictions that are obstacles to delivery of physical items across international borders, we recommend starting with digital loan agreements that would transmit digitized items electronically. These items are still subject to copyright regulations, and a preliminary phase of this project might investigate the legal frameworks in Arab and other countries that would govern such an interlibrary loan system.

5-6. Internships and exchange programs

Building on the recommendation of our discussion participants, we propose the creation of an internship program to send librarians in Arab countries to several-month stints at libraries in the United States and elsewhere, as well as sending American librarians to several-month stints at libraries in Arab countries. These internships, whether organized through a central clearinghouse or configured as bilateral exchanges, would expose librarians to professional practices and needs in Middle East librarianship, as well as creating personal and professional connections that will deepen future collaborations.

5-7. Training workshops

Growing out of a related recommendation of discussion participants, we propose the creation of training modules to allow broad access to state-of-the-art procedures among librarians in Arab countries. These training modules could be delivered in person through teams that offer short-term workshops in a series of Arab countries, especially for leadership and management skills, and through an online platform, especially for cataloging and technical services. To maximize access, funding for this training should include no- or low-cost options.

5-8. Reference network

Among the most actionable ideas to come out of the project discussions was a suggestion that a network of librarians in Arab countries and other world regions be established that would facilitate reference queries. Such a network would act as a clearinghouse for information and build experience with collaboration. Participants suggested that the network could be initiated with a limited number of participants and expanded as capacity and interest grows. Eventually, the network might include translation of reference queries from Arabic into English and vice versa, to expand the network to include librarians who wish to engage with colleagues abroad but lack the language skills to do so directly.