

Collection and Community Analysis at Dubai Women's College

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the collection of Dubai Women's College library, an institution where the author is a collection development intern. A particular emphasis is placed upon the history collection to allow for a close examination within a manageable scope. An analysis is offered by using Bowker's Book Analysis tool, contrasted against the end-user and social dimensions. This paper is constituted in three parts: a background study of the patron and community attending DWC, an examination of collection data and a discussion of patron information needs and collection coverage. It was found that while the United Arab Emirates is making a strong effort to modernize, particular case examples like the Dubai Women's College still possess collections with severe gaps of subject coverage.

Collection and Community Analysis at Dubai Women's College

Since the 1960s the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been in a state of rapid modernization, quickly coming into great wealth after oil fields were discovered in the region during that decade. As oil revenues increased and the region was unified into a federation in 1971, Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, then ruler of Abu Dhabi and eventually president of the new country, undertook a massive construction program to bring the region up to Western standards of infrastructure, education, health and business. Al Nahyan disbursed wealth from oil profits to build a vast new system of schools, public infrastructure, hospitals and colleges, all the while inviting Western intelligentsia from Europe and the United States to act as administrators and faculty for these new institutions, speeding their implementation. English quickly became the secondary language of the land, and the *lingua franca*, underlying all commerce and professional pursuits.¹

A notable policy of the new federal government, spearheaded by the late President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan was to fully integrate women into the public sector. In his own words: "Nothing could delight me more than to see the woman taking up her distinctive position in society ... Nothing should hinder her progress ... Like men, women deserve the right to occupy high positions according to their capabilities and qualifications."² This view was also represented and enforced by the UAE constitution. With a combination of legal and moral support, Al Nahyan aimed to create a state which upheld Arab and Islamic traditions whilst still exhibiting liberal political and social forms. Accordingly the President utilized the First Lady and his wife Sheikha Fatima bint

Mubarak to implement a program in which women would be integrated into education and business, as previously they had lived a mostly interior and domestic life.³ Mubarak was essential in establishing the Women's Federation, a powerful organization promoting the advancement of women in the UAE. The case of the UAE is one of the most impressive in historical egalitarianism: the federation transformed in a mere three decades from a traditional Arab state in which women were subordinated to a domestic life to one in which female students now outnumber men two to one at the United Arab Emirates University; they make up roughly 82% of employees in the national ministries of Health and Education.⁴ If we are to believe the official press of the federation:

“Illiteracy, which affected up to 85 percent of UAE women at the outset of the federation, had fallen to 7.6 percent by 2005, with female participation at elementary and middle schools equaling that of their male counterparts. In subsequent years, national women have surpassed UAE men and now account for 56.3 percent of students at schools and 70.8 percent of students attending university.”⁵

While the UAE's educational reforms have roots in the 1970s, they have reached an apex of funding and attention in the past five years. In 2007 the current ruler of Dubai and vice president of the federation, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum pledged 10 billion dollars to develop educational infrastructure across the Middle East and in particular the UAE. This represents the largest charitable and education endowment in history and is aimed at transforming the Middle East into an educational power with original research and writing ability. As of 2007 the entire Arab world produced less books than Turkey.⁶ In the last few years dozens of Western schools have been

constructed across the UAE, including branches of the most prestigious universities in the United States. From all appearances the UAE is undergoing a golden age of educational reform and expansion as the federation's vast funds are continually dedicated to developing social programs and public projects, culminating in a series of five year plans under the "Education 2020" program. The ultimate goal of the Education 2020 program is to achieve a local takeover of the education programs, now currently dependent on the capable, imported foreign faculty.⁷

The literature gave little treatment to this topic until very recently. In 2004 Patricia M. Richardson argued that while women are offered a college education in the UAE traditional Islamic perceptions of women are acting as a hindrance to their professional work, at least in the case of the education program at one college. While women are often offered a college education, the curricula and particularly the course materials (as we will soon see with the examination of the collection at one college) are still lacking in subject coverage and breadth. For instance, one library administrator confided to the author that she did not believe many of her undergraduate patrons would be able to locate China on a map. This might partially be explained by the American educational model being imported to the region without an appreciation for cultural empathy or considerations, as one Crabtree (2010) has been keen to suggest. A key issue which continues to effect women is the dominant place of the male in Arab society; while women may be more highly educated than men, or perhaps exist higher in a modern business hierarchy, there is still the issue of being customarily and socially obligated to obey men. Madsen (2010) argues that cultivating leadership skills in female students could alleviate some of these problems, although we must caution against judging or

interpreting the UAE culture by Western standards else we may find ourselves guilty of Orientalism. Regardless these topics are outside the scope of such a paper and were reviewed just for contextual consideration.

Dubai Women's College (DWC) is one such college that has roots in the modernization project which has been sweeping the UAE for the past three decades. Founded in 1989, the school specializes in business, information technology, health science, communications technology and education and engineering. The DWC is part of the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) system, a national post-secondary education network of over 17 campuses which is rapidly expanding. Admission to HCT schools is free of charge for UAE citizens. Like all colleges in the UAE, the DWC is restricted to sex; men attend separate schools. The DWC grew from a modest 200 students at its opening to over 2200 students by 2006.⁸ The author began a virtual internship at the college library in spring 2011, tasked with modernizing the severely lacking history collection. Many of the following observations derive from the author's work experience.

The DWC is populated by a fairly heterogeneous base of library patrons. Under 20% of the population of the UAE are Emirati, while over 50% derive from South Asia and 23% from other Arab states and Iran.⁹ Regardless, most patrons entering the college speak Arabic, all are female, are in their late teens and twenties and are all undergraduates pursuing professional degrees. The prevailing religion of the patrons is Islam, although the schools in the HCT are secularized and task oriented around professional development. The faculty is overwhelmingly Western: the majority of which are imported intelligentsia from the United States, although there is a sizable minority of Europeans and Commonwealth citizens. Most students come from middle class families

and enter the college to graduate into the professional rather than academic sphere. The students are overwhelmingly English as a second language (ESL), with all the classes, services and library collections offered in English only. This is not to suggest that the student body have mastered English, as might be the case at some schools in the Netherlands for instance. Rather the limited English comprehension creates a series of compelling issues to constantly consider. Two billion dollars was allocated by the Ministry of Education in 2008 to assuage the issue of poor ESL performance, as it is a current impediment to new graduates entering the English dominated professional space.¹⁰ Even so, ESL comprehension continues to be a factor to the time of this writing.

Although the official collection development policy mentions ESL and comments on the need for all works to be in English it does not explicitly inform on the topic of comprehension level. It was explained to the author by his supervisor that all works added to the collection would need to be at a high school English level, and would need to contain unambiguous knowledge due to lack of English reasoning skill at the DWC. In this manner the working policy of the library is to maintain general reference level works rather than more intellectually challenging secondary works. This reality informs the principal information needs of the patrons. In other words the DWC patrons expect coverage of a wide array of academic topics while also maintain a lower level of reading comprehension as would be common at most colleges and universities in the United States. The author was informed that many of the students may have never heard of broad terms such as Communism and when confronted with such ideas would be best served with basic primers on the topics at hand; the only recently waning cultural isolation of the UAE and other Middle Eastern states presents a fragile situation in which the Western

intellectuals flooding into the country have a very serious responsibility to properly introduce foreign and complex concepts.

Now that the patron and social dimensions of the community surrounding the DWC have been considered in brief, we may now turn to considering the library collection. For purposes of this paper the author will focus on the topic of the library's history collection, for which an intimate and close analysis is possible. There is no history program at the DWC and no dedicated history faculty/program, although history classes are taught as part of a very limited liberal arts curriculum. The main purpose of the history collection at the library is twofold: to complete coverage of an academic library, and to inform the study of various course work at the college. One unique feature of the physical plant must be mentioned: there is practically unlimited shelf space. This may be a surprising discovery to the reader as many libraries in the United States are constantly struggling with issues of space, but in the UAE many large colleges and libraries were created during the innovation of the past few decades and are just now being properly populated; massive funds poured into developing the country's physical education infrastructure, but until recently material knowledge was lacking.

The author was employed to further develop the history collection on a budget of \$5000. This is a sizable sum for a particular subject area within a library collection of DWC's size, but as we shall see, the sum is dwarfed the immense shortcomings of the collection's coverage. Bowker's Book Analysis, an online service which compares current library holdings against various lists of core works was used to produce a portrait of the history collection (reference figures 1 and 2):

Percentages of Catalog Selected				
Catalogs: Resources for College Libraries				
Dubai Women's College				
Limiters: RCL Audience:Upper, Lower, Faculty, General; RCL Format:Book				
Dewey Decimal Classification	Title in Library	Title NOT in Library	Total Title with this Subject	Percentage of Titles Held
(000) Computer science, information & general works	35	962	997	3.51%
(100) Philosophy & psychology	30	2633	2663	1.13%
(200) Religion	9	2560	2569	0.35%
(300) Social sciences	167	14925	15092	1.11%
(400) Language	14	702	716	1.96%
(500) Science	29	4629	4658	0.62%
(600) Technology	95	3605	3700	2.57%
(700) Arts & recreation	68	7347	7415	0.92%
(800) Literature	277	13346	13623	2.03%
(900) History & geography	46	8110	8156	0.56%
(B) Biography	0	67	67	0.00%
(E) Easy Reading	0	1	1	0.00%
(Fic) Fiction	31	161	192	16.15%
Grand Totals:	801	59,048	59,849	1.34%

Figure 1: Overview of all collections at Dubai Women's College, for general context. Retrieved March 21 2001 Bowker's Book

Analysis

Percentages of Catalog Selected				
Catalogs: Resources for College Libraries				
Dubai Women's College				
Limiters: Status: In Print; RCL Audience:Upper, Lower; RCL Format:Book				
Dewey Decimal Classification	Title in Library	Title NOT in Library	Total Title with this Subject	Percentage of Titles Held
(900) History	5	289	294	1.70%
(901) Philosophy & theory	0	19	19	0.00%
(903) Dictionaries & encyclopedias	0	4	4	0.00%
(904) Collected accounts of events	0	3	3	0.00%
(907) Education, research & related topics	0	31	31	0.00%
(908) Kinds of persons treatment	0	1	1	0.00%
(909) World history	5	231	236	2.12%
(910) Geography & travel	6	376	382	1.57%
(910) Geography & travel	2	108	110	1.82%
(911) Historical geography	0	44	44	0.00%
(912) Atlases, maps, charts & plans	1	14	15	6.67%
(913) Geography of & travel in ancient world	0	23	23	0.00%
(914) Geography of & travel in Europe	0	40	40	0.00%
(915) Geography of & travel in Asia	1	34	35	2.86%
(916) Geography of & travel in Africa	0	16	16	0.00%
(917) Geography of & travel in North America	1	88	89	1.12%
(918) Geography of & travel in South America	0	3	3	0.00%
(919) Geography of & travel in other areas	1	6	7	14.29%
(920) Biography & genealogy	0	155	155	0.00%

(920) Biography, genealogy & insignia	0	140	140	0.00%
(929) Genealogy, names & insignia	0	15	15	0.00%
(930) History of ancient world (to ca. 499)	3	536	539	0.56%
(930) History of ancient world to ca. 499	1	78	79	1.27%
(931) China to 420	0	8	8	0.00%
(932) Egypt to 640	1	56	57	1.75%
(933) Palestine to 70	0	8	8	0.00%
(934) India to 647	0	7	7	0.00%
(935) Mesopotamia & Iranian Plateau to 637	0	27	27	0.00%
(936) Europe north & west of Italy to ca. 499	0	31	31	0.00%
(937) Italy & adjacent territories to 476	1	154	155	0.65%
(938) Greece to 323	0	123	123	0.00%
(939) Other parts of ancient world to ca. 640	0	44	44	0.00%
(940) History of Europe	0	1664	1664	0.00%
(940) History of Europe	0	444	444	0.00%
(941) British Isles	0	139	139	0.00%
(942) England & Wales	0	132	132	0.00%
(943) Central Europe; Germany	0	240	240	0.00%
(944) France & Monaco	0	167	167	0.00%
(945) Italian Peninsula & adjacent islands	0	92	92	0.00%
(946) Iberian Peninsula & adjacent islands	0	95	95	0.00%
(947) Eastern Europe; Russia	0	199	199	0.00%
(948) Scandinavia	0	21	21	0.00%
(949) Other parts of Europe	0	135	135	0.00%
(950) History of Asia	17	860	877	1.94%
(950) History of Asia; Far East	1	23	24	4.17%
(951) China & adjacent areas	1	150	151	0.66%

(952) Japan	0	39	39	0.00%
(953) Arabian Peninsula & adjacent areas	4	29	33	12.12%
(954) South Asia; India	1	96	97	1.03%
(955) Iran	4	37	41	9.76%
(956) Middle East (Near East)	5	334	339	1.47%
(957) Siberia (Asiatic Russia)	0	6	6	0.00%
(958) Central Asia	1	33	34	2.94%
(959) Southeast Asia	0	113	113	0.00%
(960) History of Africa	6	286	292	2.05%
(960) History of Africa	0	63	63	0.00%
(961) Tunisia & Libya	0	15	15	0.00%
(962) Egypt & Sudan	1	47	48	2.08%
(963) Ethiopia & Eritrea	0	14	14	0.00%
(964) Northwest African coast & offshore islands	1	13	14	7.14%
(965) Algeria	1	13	14	7.14%
(966) West Africa & offshore islands	0	40	40	0.00%
(967) Central Africa & offshore islands	1	56	57	1.75%
(968) Southern Africa; Republic of South Africa	2	23	25	8.00%
(969) South Indian Ocean islands	0	2	2	0.00%
(970) History of North America	4	2129	2133	0.19%
(970) History of North America	0	82	82	0.00%
(971) Canada	0	120	120	0.00%
(972) Middle America; Mexico	1	279	280	0.36%
(973) United States	3	1076	1079	0.28%
(974) Northeastern United States	0	107	107	0.00%
(975) Southeastern United States	0	111	111	0.00%
(976) South central United States	0	85	85	0.00%

(977) North central United States	0	69	69	0.00%
(978) Western United States	0	95	95	0.00%
(979) Great Basin & Pacific Slope region	0	105	105	0.00%
(980) History of South America	1	220	221	0.45%
(980) History of South America	0	48	48	0.00%
(981) Brazil	0	47	47	0.00%
(982) Argentina	1	21	22	4.55%
(983) Chile	0	23	23	0.00%
(984) Bolivia	0	12	12	0.00%
(985) Peru	0	30	30	0.00%
(986) Colombia & Ecuador	0	22	22	0.00%
(987) Venezuela	0	8	8	0.00%
(988) Guiana	0	4	4	0.00%
(989) Paraguay & Uruguay	0	5	5	0.00%
(990) History of other areas	0	32	32	0.00%
(990) History of other areas	0	4	4	0.00%
(994) Australia	0	4	4	0.00%
(995) Melanesia; New Guinea	0	4	4	0.00%
(996) Other parts of Pacific; Polynesia	0	18	18	0.00%
(999) Extraterrestrial worlds	0	2	2	0.00%
Grand Totals:	42	6,547	6,589	0.64%

Figure 2: Overview of core history collections at Dubai Women's College. Retrieved March 21 2011 Bowker's Book Analysis

What sort of conclusions can we come to after an examination of the above statistics? The DWC has serious gaps in coverage across all subject areas, but a notable lack of coverage in the history collection. Take for instance the collection's coverage of Europe: there is none. There is one core record covering all of South America and a paltry few spread across the other Dewey class subdivisions. This is not to mention the quality of the extant records: many are out of date, are of general rather than academic sophistication and there is a distinct and serious lack of reference works, atlases and comprehensive histories.¹¹ The history of Egypt, arguably the most prominent Arab state in the history of the region, is covered with such illustrious titles as *The cat in ancient Egypt* and *Egyptian mummies*. Similar records one would expect from an elementary or middle school library in the United States are typical of the collection in its present state; there is clearly a statistical preference for "edutainment" titles. Clearly the collection cannot serve in any systematic or conventional academic sense and instead might only offer a transitory, incomplete and ill-corroborated knowledge of the past. While the core collection is lacking, the breadth of the collection is nearing 1200 records and it must be stated that several authoritative Cambridge and Oxford encyclopedias give decent coverage of the Middle East. The breadth of the collection abruptly drops off when covering subjects outside of the Middle East and even in studying that region is supported by few core titles.

The author's work with the collection was focused on weeding irrelevant records, and developing a significant expansion of the collection, a process which is ongoing as the time of this writing. The author's intent has been to help develop a collection which

is capable of virtually any historical query and has especially focused on expanding ancient history, Asian, Central Asian, African and European coverage. A special emphasis is also being made for securing historical atlases and world history reference sets. A good general history collection is capable of answering most historical inquiries with at least basic coverage, and that should be the ultimate aim of collection development at DWC: complete subject coverage.

As it is right now the collection does nominally meet the information needs of the college in the sense that there is no history program to read from it and it need only inform general lower undergraduate readership. Nevertheless the collection does not fulfill the information needs of an expanding college library collection which should be capable of covering most subjects, least of all history; serious academic study is impossible without considering the past. Another notable aspect of the history collection is historical geography: in this domain, the collection is insufficient even for current demands. While there are a few atlases in the collection, several are outdated, and the coverage is incomplete. This is especially important for purposes of the greater DWC's goal of creating business professionals who are able to manipulate and master a globalized, technological, and to mime Thomas Friedman, "flat" world. Finally the collection, although giving coverage of modern history, offers incomplete coverage of ancient history with the exception of Egyptology. Ancient history is especially relevant to Arabs, as their lands and lands adjacent played a major role in ancient accounts; to limit coverage primarily to Egypt is ill-advised. A library's collection should be able to study the region it serves, and in this regard, there is little support for ancient Mediterranean, Levantine or pre-Islamic history. As a general note it must also be said that a notable

minority of the records in the collection treat subjects with such a brief, elementary coverage that they endanger proper understanding of the subject matter.

Discussion

Ultimately while DWC library is an institution with gaps in coverage, we can take comfort in the fact that it's not for lack of caring or attention. It's clear that recent projects, the author's internship included, have taken on the task of finally bringing the UAE up to par with western standards in education, a lofty goal which has been in the mind of the leadership of the UAE since the federation was first formed. Married to the advancement of education is developing high quality library collections, for they nourish increasingly sophisticated course curricula.¹² In the years to come the prospects for the UAE and the DWC in particular appear grand, as continually informed by the liberal policies of the federation's president and royalty, but only time will tell.

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