Chapter V

Preserving institutional memory and facilitating access to knowledge

The act of teaching and learning itself builds bridges among people.

The Secretary-General’s remarks at the launch of the United Nations Academic Impact (18 November 2010).

Founded with the League of Nations in 1919, the UNOG Library continues to “serve as a centre of international research and an instrument of international understanding”, according to the wish of its donator, John D. Rockefeller Jr. It is a source of enduring knowledge and the custodian of the institutional memory of the organization.

The Library also fulfils its mission to facilitate access to information resources and to ensure that up-to-date documentary resources related to all topics relevant to the work of the United Nations are made accessible to its staff members, diplomats from the permanent missions, conference delegates, NGOs, accredited journalists as well as external researchers.

In 2010, the Library served 62,643 users, in person or online. It handled 36,271 questions and more than 17,760 loans were made.

Technology continued to be increasingly applied to library services with access to a larger number of collections in digital form being provided. The Library not only acquired more than 3,450 books and subscribed to...
more than 900 different paper magazines and journals, it also increased its collection of electronic journals and databases, thus giving access to more than 72 information databases and 50,000 books and electronic journals.

- Adding new online resources

The UNOG Library continues to update its online resource guides in specific areas of United Nations work, such as international relations, human rights, economics, statistics and refugees. This year, the Library put together an entirely new portal on disarmament in close collaboration with experts from UNODA, UNIDIR and other major institutions in the disarmament field. The portal was presented to UNIDIR and participants in the United Nations Disarmament Fellowship Programme. Its contents, ease of use and design were well received. It is now available both on the Library and the Disarmament Branch Internet pages of the UNOG website (http://www.unog.ch/library/resource-guides).

The same was done for the resource guide on statistics through active collaboration with UNCTAD in preparation of World Statistics Day on 20 October 2010. A working group comprised of members from both the UNOG Library and the UNCTAD statistics branch was set up to identify possible synergies between the two entities for the evolution of their respective statistical information resources and also to foster sustained cooperation in knowledge-sharing. As a result, users now have access to a broader spectrum of statistical resources and both entities have established a sustained collaboration.
Sharing knowledge

The UNOG Library continued to share knowledge via numerous training and coaching sessions, such as the Library information sessions and the Personal Knowledge Management Programme. This Programme targets small United Nations groups and individuals for private coaching on specific library services and resources according to their different needs, to facilitate their daily work. This year, an effort was made to reach targeted audiences within UNOG with specialities in substantive areas, such as refugees (UNHCR), social and humanitarian affairs (OCHA), UNRISD and economics and development (UNECE and UNCTAD). The Library provided a total of 85 different training and coaching modules, including OPAC, Loans, iSeek, UNdocs, E-Resources, and RSS feeds. There are now 940 users recorded in the database created for that purpose.

Fostering interest and public outreach

The year 2010 was one of heightened activities for user services especially in terms of UNOG Library tours. The flow of visitors continued to grow, reaching a total of 1,875 people. The tour service has enjoyed great success and even more so this year, thanks to the enriching addition of the newly renovated League of Nations Museum, which was visited by 1,050 people. This service contributes to the Library’s reputation, with visitors coming from all over the world, some with very different profiles. They include students, librarians, historians and civil servants from other organizations. The guided tours are often a prelude to longer stays for research purposes which give readers the opportunity to consult the international law, economic and social affairs collections that the Library possesses and is continually developing.

In 2010, the UNOG Library continued its communication activities to raise awareness about its resources and services, including those related to archives and records management. In addition to issuing new communication tools such as leaflets about the Library, archives and cultural activities as well as new knowledge pointers about different tools and services, the Library organized an important number of events and activities in connection with international days.

On the occasion of International Women’s Day (8 March) an audiovisual presentation on the papers of the Austrian pacifist Bertha von Suttner (1843–1914) was displayed at different locations in the Palais des Nations.

World Book and Copyright Day (23 April) was the occasion for the Library to organize in its cyberspace an exhibition on “Landmark books in economics from Adam Smith to the twenty-first century”, in which rare book editions on the subject were displayed from May to October 2010.

For World Press Freedom Day (3 May), a special open house event was organized for accredited journalists.

World Refugee Day (20 June) was an opportunity to have activities organized both within the UNOG Library and at UNHCR: videos produced by UNHCR were displayed at door 20 and a slideshow of UNHCR photos was set as the desktop background for all public workstations in the Library. At UNHCR a slideshow on refugee collections, developed by the UNOG Registry, Records and Archives Unit, was presented and Library information sessions offered to UNHCR staff members.

On the International Day of the World’s Indigenous People (9 August), the Library organized, with the help of DOCIP, a presentation entitled “Through documentation, we can prove our existence” (Avec la documentation, nous pouvons démontrer que nous existons vraiment). In addition, several specialized bibliographies were prepared in connection with the themes of international days or other events organized at the Palais des Nations.

(For more information on the observance of International Days, please refer to Chapter II: Providing a platform for the multilateral process.)
Preserving and enabling access to the institutional memory

“Key principles and values of our Organization, such as the peaceful settlement of disputes and the primacy of the rule of law, found their early expression in the League of Nations.”

The Director-General, Inscription of the League of Nations archives in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register (28 April 2010).

The UNOG Library plays a unique role in helping the world remember, and learn from, the efforts of the United Nations and the League of Nations. Careful, selective conservation of key documentation is central to the institutional memory of the Organization. The unique role that the Library archives play in preserving the institutional memory was highlighted on 28 April 2010, when UNOG, with the participation of more than 400 guests, celebrated the inscription of the League of Nations archives in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register (see Highlight on the inscription of the League of Nations archives in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register).

Throughout 2010 the UNOG Library focused on increasing access to its archives, while preserving the original documents. Two record series were digitized to this end:

The series of treaty maps, pertaining to international conventions and agreements deposited with the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, was digitized in collaboration with the United Nations Cartographic Section, Department of Field Support, United Nations Headquarters. The maps are an invaluable source of authoritative information on international boundary delimitation, and the digital copies are used as a unique resource in discussions concerning border disputes and similar political questions.

The papers of Bertha von Suttner (1843–1914), an Austrian peace activist whose ideas found fruition in the League of Nations, consist of manuscripts, photos and personal material. Each of these documents was described and digitized, and the digital images are available online through the archives catalogue at http://biblio-archive.unog.ch/detail.aspx.

To facilitate retrieval of these and other historical archives maintained by the UNOG Library, the search interface of the online archives catalogue has been made more user-friendly. Descriptions of record series, files and digitized full-text documents can be found by keyword, subject search or by visually browsing the archives plan.

Accessible historical archives are generated through the coherent management of institutional records at the
time of their creation. The UNOG Library coordinates records management activities and provides advisory services to UNOG staff. Sound records management immediately increases transparency and efficiency within the Organization. In pursuit of these goals, new filing plans and retention schedules were established and implemented in five UNOG services in 2010.

United Nations official documentation also represents an essential part of the memory of the Organization. To facilitate access to these documents, the UNOG Library has continued to provide indexing services for documents and publications produced by United Nations entities and meetings in Geneva. This includes all the current documentation of UNCTAD, UNECE, the International Law Commission, the Human Rights Council and United Nations human rights treaty bodies.

In addition, the retrospective digitization and preservation programme of United Nations documents which the UNOG Library continued to carry out in 2010 in cooperation with the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, made possible, in the Official Document System, access to all of the Security Council general series, verbatim and agenda documents from 1946 to 1992. Upon completion of this very important project, the two libraries continued their joint collaboration with the retrospective digitization of General Assembly documents prior to 1992. The UNOG Library also provided support to the World Meteorological Organization, in digitizing the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for the period from 1990 to 1995, now available on the IPCC website.