

Summer 2000

The Library System of Brazil As Observed in Brasilia, Brazil

Jeffrey T. Bowen

University of North Florida, jbowen@loc.gov

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/library_facpub



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bowen, Jeffrey T., "The Library System of Brazil As Observed in Brasilia, Brazil" (2000). *Library Faculty Presentations & Publications*. 4.

https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/library_facpub/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Thomas G. Carpenter Library at UNF Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Library Faculty Presentations & Publications by an authorized administrator of UNF Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [Digital Projects](#).

© Summer 2000 All Rights Reserved

The Library System of Brazil

As Observed in Brasilia, Brazil

My wife and I visited Brazil in December and January this past year, spending the Christmas and New Year's holidays there. Since my wife is Brazilian, I have taken an interest in exploring Brazilian culture and history. This interest, and the fact that we were in Brazil for a month, prompted me to take a couple of days to visit various libraries and see how things are done there. I visited three basic types of libraries in the capital district of Brasilia. The Universidade de Brasilia, Biblioteca Central (the University of Brasilia Central Library), two different types of public libraries, and the government libraries of the Senado Federal (Senate) and the Camara dos Deputados (House of Deputies). I could not visit the National Library of Brazil, because it remained in Rio de Janeiro when the new capital was built in the 1960s. There has been some discussion of moving it to Brasilia, but to this day, that has not happened. I would still like to visit there anyway, but Rio was covered on our previous trip, and I don't know when I will get there again. My main objective was to visit each of these places, talk with the librarians, and discover what things are the same and what things are different from what we do here in the States. What I discovered is that, although there are many differences, there are also many things that seem very familiar or are just virtually the same as here. While talking with the librarians, through my wife who graciously translated, I asked several questions both out of general interest and in the areas I am most familiar. Of the three types of libraries, those in the government and academic libraries were the most willing to talk with me; whereas, those in the public libraries seemed more interested in getting rid of me. More on that later.

Library education

In Brazil, getting your library degree is not much different than here. However, it is a four-year BA program, not a graduate degree. You can continue on to get a master's degree, but it is not necessary. If you do continue on, you will focus in one of two areas, Library Planning or Library Resources. Those who focus on library planning are basically getting a degree in managing and running a library. Those who focus on library resources narrow things down even further and are basically getting a master's in either technical services or public services. There is also a PHD program, but I got the idea that this is not pursued very often.

The people who provide accreditation to the various programs nationwide are not an independent, national organization like ALA, but it is a government organization. In order to receive recognition in Brazil, a university must apply to the MEC (Ministry of Education), which is a government agency designed to maintain standards for the various universities and programs. They make the decision nationally about what goes on in the education system, including accreditation, but also including which professions are officially recognized within the country. This system is radically different from what we are used to, but in Brazil, receiving accreditation from someone other than the government would be unusual. There is one final thing worth mentioning about the system of educating librarians in Brazil from which I think we might learn. The library science programs in Brazil are usually located in the science and technology schools.

Library organizations and cooperation

Another major difference in Brazil was the national lack of professional organization. There are local library associations, ABDF (Associação de bibliotecaria do Distrito Federal) is the local association in Brasilia. Most of the associations interact at the individual state level. Apparently, there are some regional organizations as well, but nobody was able to give me the name of any of them. Even without national organizations there is still cooperation between libraries. There is a prominent inter-library loan program run by IBICT (Brazilian Institute of Science and Technology). However, their ILL system only lends periodicals, not monographs. IBICT also maintains a periodical database for Brazil accessible through the Internet, they create an index for all the periodicals in library science, they assign ISSN numbers and they publish a national catalog of periodicals. The Nacional Biblioteca (National Library) in Rio assigns ISBNs. There is also a cooperative cataloging system called CALCO, but it is almost a complete failure because it sits almost completely unused due to libraries unwillingness to pay for its services. Apparently, they do mostly original cataloging and they find this service to be too expensive on their limited budgets.

Brazil's libraries in three worlds

When viewing the world from an economic perspective, we see three distinct worlds. The industrialized and post industrialized nations being the first world, the nations on the brink of joining them, but with severe hindrances to their progress being the second world, and countries with little more than rampant poverty and little hope of changing their status comprising the third world. When viewing Brazil from this same perspective you discover that all of these exist side by side within the country. It is a nation of extremes; from stunning oceans, beautiful landscapes and abundant natural resources to extreme poverty and virtually unchecked political corruption. If you spend any time there, you will quickly realize that it is more than your typical third world nation. Those who live in the cities, work in the government or have life long careers in the military, and those who own their own businesses find themselves in the middle and upper classes in Brazil. If you go to Brazil and spend time among these people, you might never know that the majority (80%) of the country is poor, many of whom are living in third world conditions. However, while visiting and viewing their libraries, I experienced this contrast of worlds first hand.

The First World - The libraries of the Senado and the Camaro

Like the U.S. Congress, Brazil's congress has established their own library designed primarily to service them. This system is different from LC in that there are two separate libraries, one for the Senate and one for the House. The two libraries receive their budgets directly from the Congress and due to their mission, have little trouble getting the funds they need to stay current in practices, services, and technology.

The Biblioteca Academico Luiz Viana Filho, or the Senate library is smaller than the House library. Their collection policy focuses on current events within the country, focusing mostly on the interests of the Senate. They have a collection of 150,000 volumes in open stacks. Anyone can come in and use the materials, but only Senators can check out of the library. They have an online integrated library system called ALPH. They catalog using MARC and classify using Dewey. The library is organized into very familiar sections to all of us. The colecao de livros (book collection), the colecao de periodicos (periodicals collection) alphabetized by title on the shelves, the obras de referencia (reference), the recortes de jornais (journal records), the colecao de deposito legal (government documents collection), the multimeios: biblioteca digital, microfimes e outros suportes (multimedia collection: digital library, microfilms and other formats) this includes a familiar online subscription to many of us, ProQuest, the colecao do Senador Luiz Viana Filho (the collection of Senator Luiz Viana Filho) the man for whom the library is named, and finally the colecao de obras raras (the rare books collection) which consists of 4,000 volumes dating as far back as 1633. One of the major services provided by this library to the country is their periodicals indexing system. They currently analyze most articles from all the important periodicals. Of course, I would assume they mean what they consider to be the important periodicals, but I didn't want to push that. Also, they remove from newspapers, including all Brazilian and many international ones, current events articles which are kept in a vertical file format. The intent for this collection is that it will be digitized to more easily facilitate its use.

The Biblioteca da Camara dos Deputados (House library) is much larger in size, scope, volumes, and employees than is the Senate library. This is because it has to service 500 Congressmen as opposed to 56 Senators. It also is open to the public, but again, only the Congressmen can check out of the library. They are primarily a legislative library, with particular concentrations in law, political science, and public administration. They also use the ALPH online catalog system, which is kept up to date, but it is only available for staff use. There are no public ports at the library. Patrons are required to use a set of bound volumes separated by author, subject, and title to find their materials, but these are only updated every six months. The House library also maintains a newspaper clipping vertical file, which dates from 1967 to the present. They also maintain a collection in Brazilian legislation as well as an international special documents collection including materials from UNESCO, the UN, UNICEF, the World Bank and the WTO. Finally, they have a rare books library of over 2,000 volumes which dates back to the 16th century. The House library differs even more from the Senate because their stacks are closed and they classify using the Universal Decimal system. The impressive part of this library was its preservation facility. They have a very elaborate, fully equipped preservation laboratory where they do all of their binding, restoration, and conservation work.

The Second World

Brazil can easily be defined as a country with abundant resources and endless potential, always coming up short of breaking through to join the first world. It is at this level that the second of the three library types I visited can be found. The Biblioteca Central of the Universidade de Brasilia is a large academic library. All the different schools within the university have to use the same library, including the medical school library. I understand that the large academic library in the city of Sao Paulo uses a separate library system with the medical, law, and other libraries separate from the main university library, so this is not necessarily standard practice nationwide. The Biblioteca Central has four floors, the first floor housing the Dewey numbers 100-300, the reserves section, the maps collection, and the Carlos Lacerda Archives. The second floor is where you will find the main reading room, the reference collection, and the 500-900 Dewey numbers. The third floor houses the periodicals collection and the rare books collection. The fourth floor is actually a basement floor. This library has a rather unique reason for needing more space due to the basement floor having been closed down because an underground river invaded and flooded the entire floor. They do plan to restore and reclaim the basement level at some point in the future, but that story is extremely common in the nation's history. When it will get done depends entirely on when or if they ever get the funds. Even then, something else in the library would have to suffer. The library uses mostly Dewey, but has some things classified in the universal decimal system. They have a large card catalog, but only a few computers, which are reserved for staff use only. There is a public access computer, which is in a testing phase. Interestingly enough, the library uses AACR2 as their primary source for cataloging. They did not use MARC though, until only just recently. Switching over to MARC has been a problem for them due to difficulties in field mapping from their old computer system. They have an open stack policy throughout most of the library and even serve the needs of the surrounding community, being all things to all people. Government officials and students of the university can use the library and have check out privileges. However, the library serves as a public library as well, with the exception that public patrons can only use materials in the building, they can't check anything out. The library is organized into two main sections. There is the reference department, which contains the rare books, periodicals, special collections, reference, and ILL sections. Then there is the Service of Collections Development Department, which contains the acquisitions, cataloging, and registers sections.

The archival material kept by the library is separated into an archives section and special collections. The archives contains only professor correspondence and newspaper clippings about the university. The special collections department contains a plethora of material including anything written by professors, all thesis, entire collections about the city of Brasilia itself, an international publications collection, books on art, and an entire section on the Serrado, which is the forest region in which Brasilia was built. They have a media collection, which contains videos, microforms, and CD-ROMS. There are no electronic resources kept in the media section. The CDs found there are audio books only, not databases. For CD-ROM databases and electronic resources, you can find some in the research room. There are some, though not many and the students have the choice of using their own floppy discs or buying a disc from the library. If they use their own, then it must be run through an antivirus program before it is used. To use any electronic resource, they must make an appointment ahead of time. They can get up to 2 hours on a CD-ROM and 1 hour on the Internet. One of the major electronic resources that they have, for use mainly by their medical students, is MEDLINE, which they can search in Portuguese. Another medical database called LILACS coordinates all health publications in the Caribbean and Latin America.

The only place in the library that uses a closed stack system is the rare books collection. This, of course, makes sense. The collection criteria requires that they collect 1st editions, manuscripts, private collections and correspondence. However, due to having virtually all their funding taken away, they no longer buy anything new. All the funds they have go to attempting to preserve the collection they already have. They have a controlled environment to keep the materials, but most of the extremely valuable material is kept in a safe that is not located in this controlled facility. None of these materials are currently having anything done to preserve them because there is no money to do the work. Included in this material are things dating from the 14th century. The oldest book in the collection is from 1535 and talks about Hypocrites. You will also find a beautiful book of birds dating from the 14th century, a book of lullabies from 1849, a book owned by Princess Isabel of Brazil who freed the slaves. There is also a collection of Ex Libres, the America Meridional, and a South American map dated in 1775. The bibliotecaria (librarian) who showed me these works obviously loved her collection and was obviously disappointed that there was

no way to take steps to preserve these materials beyond locking them away in a safe. They also recently received a gift from Xerox of Brazil, which included 12,500 volumes containing 14,000 theses written in the United States about Brazil or Latin America. This entire collection was also microfilmed and is available at LC or from UMI.

The Third World

Finally we come to the third world, where poverty runs rampant and there seems to be little hope of changing that condition. The public library system in Brasilia is separated into two basic libraries. There is the national public library and the city public library. The city library is smaller than the national one, but that is mostly due to its having been built in 1989. The larger public library is actually a branch library for the national library of Brazil in Rio. There were no computers, except one behind the reference desk and they were obviously using their own system of cataloging even though they seemed to be relying on Dewey for classification. This is all the information I could get about this library because the librarian would not speak to me. Apparently it was lunchtime and she couldn't be bothered. The city library truly represented the problems often associated with the third world. When it opened in 1989, they had no cataloging staff whatsoever. Finally, they got a cataloger and an advanced computer system to do their cataloging and provide a catalog to their patrons. All the cataloging was placed into the computer. There never was a card catalog. A year and a half ago, this computer system crashed. No money was provided to replace it and without a card catalog to fall back on, the library now has no catalog. Over the past year, there has been no effort to catalog and many of the books are on the shelf with no classification numbers. They have now organized all the books by subject very much like a modern bookstore, so the books that do have classification numbers no longer necessarily sit next to each other, but in whatever subject section the person who shelves it thinks it belongs. Both of these libraries have an open stack policy and they rely on donations from patrons to add to their collection. My wife, who has used these libraries on many occasions when she lived there said that in the eight years since she had been there, it looked like little if anything had changed, meaning very few new books, no modernization, and little attempt to change.