

## Supporting the expatriate social scientist: Faculty research and information access in post-Soviet Kazakhstan

Celia Emmelhainz, Colby College

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**Abstract:** Librarians in America and Europe find that social scientists rely heavily on journal articles, specialized data, and feedback from colleagues in directing their research. This project uses 21 ethnographic interviews with librarians, students, and faculty at “Atameken University” in post-Soviet Kazakhstan to explore how social scientists adjust such research habits to a context of distant information sources and limited access. By developing technological adaptations to the local context, expatriate scholars can surmount most barriers to access—and yet librarians are then less able to effectively support research. Increased access to information and skilled librarians remains essential for Eurasian universities seeking to support world-class research in the developing world.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, expatriate faculty, research barriers, social scientists, workarounds

### Introduction

The social sciences, in covering most aspects of human life across time and space, have a breadth of subject specialty that can be challenging for researchers to effectively master—and for librarians to support (Kotter, 2002). Young scholars in fields such as anthropology learn to examine social practices across cultures, while also mastering multiple sets of cultural, linguistic, and research skills. Academic librarians therefore reach out to students and faculty to assist them in developing the thinking skills necessary for modern library research. Prior studies find that American college students often begin with course readings and only seek further sources if expected by faculty (Head, 2008), while their faculty use colleague feedback heavily in developing their research (Shen, 2013). Yet there are few studies of social science student and faculty research in Asia, or of how western expatriate scholars adjust their research to the developing world. Based on two months of ethnographic interviews with faculty, students, and librarians at a major university in Kazakhstan, here named “Atameken University,” this project examines how social science students and faculty adapt research practices from the West to their scholarly lives in a post-Soviet context, whether negotiating consumption of data at a distance, or developing creative workarounds for unavailable scholarly resources. This paper aims to contribute to the library science literature on the social sciences by examining the deployment of western research practices in post-Soviet contexts.

#### *Social science faculty research*

When it comes to social science research, many faculty search for information by discipline as well as in related geographic or topical areas (Hartmann, 1995), often seeking out “comparative, foreign, rare, and sometimes antiquated” resources (Bachand 2013: 176). Anthropologists, for instance, make heavy use of field data, pictures, and maps (Hartmann, 1995), ignoring museum documents while using monographs and journals quite evenly (Kayongo and Helm, 2009; Robinson and Posten, 2005). In contrast, sociologists, psychologists, and social workers

focus on journal articles rather than books (Sutton and Jacoby, 2008). According to the literature, social scientists often gather information via citation chaining and consulting colleagues, instead of looking to libraries as primary sources of information (Folster, 1995), and may seek articles via bibliographies before turning to databases and citation alert services (Robb and Janes, 2003). (It should be noted that some of these habits may have changed with the rise of remote-access and open-source resources.) Most of all, western social scientists use feedback on draft papers, conference papers, and conversation with colleagues as a key means of directing their research (Shen, 2013), while directing their students to use more impersonal database search strategies.

This article considers social science research practices in a post-Soviet library. In the Russian-speaking world, the *obshchestvennyy nauki* (social sciences) included economics, sociology, law, psychology, philosophy, and history (Goldberg, 1971). Soviet social scientists frequently visited libraries, requesting books much more often than periodicals (Goldberg 1971: 274). While both American and Soviet institutes provided strong support for research, social scientists in the region today continue to struggle for access to international research sources. As with scholars who study stateless nations and other niche topics (Meho and Tibbo, 2003), post-Soviet scholars may experience limitations in accessing material from America and Europe. In consequence, these scholars develop research habits in an environment dominated by personal information collections, sharing of information among colleagues, and grey-market sources of information.

#### *Social science research in emerging countries*

A special concern of this paper is how social science faculty who work outside of established scholarship centers approach their work. Those located in developing countries may lack access to the breadth of resources available at premier institutions, and thus turn to more creative means of accessing information. In spite of budgetary obstacles, de Tiratel (2000) finds that social scientists in Argentina seek information in much the same way as their “Anglo-Saxon” colleagues in the United States and Great Britain do; however, his library’s budgetary emphasis on periodicals limits the access of scholars to current monographs. Bhatti (2011) observes that social scientists in Pakistan use email, web searches, and listservs as key means of locating necessary information, while Kumar et al. (2011) find that some social scientists in India rely heavily on print textbooks (99%), print journals (91%), and informal sources such as personal contacts (86%) and conferences (81%) to offset their lack of good electronic resources. [1] Popoola (2008) similarly finds that Nigerian social scientists rely on abstracts, colleagues, and conference papers in instances when other resources are unavailable. For many world scholars, then, access to information is a critical challenge in conducting their scholarly research.

#### *Western scholarship in emerging countries*

While the scholars above have outlined how local social scientists gather information in emerging countries, there are few published sources that consider how the research habits of western scholars change when moving to a developing-world context. Expatriates use personal networks quite extensively for the “informational support” necessary to operate in new everyday settings (Farh et al., 2010), but such networks relate more to the challenges of daily living than to scholarship. American university libraries have begun to publish on full-text and reference services for study abroad students (White et al., 2009), yet often do not specifically address how full-text access could be provided for their students across great distance, given copyright limitations on scanning and transfer of print monographs. We do know that study abroad

students may have difficulty using local libraries, instead using professors and online searches in order to locate information (Kutner, 2009). When study abroad students cannot access good resources at host institutions, they may turn to home collections—including ebook versions of print books—to continue their research (Denda, 2013). In response, Connell (2009) recommends that academic libraries actively work to provide materials and library instruction to study abroad students. Hammond (2009) goes further, suggesting that American university libraries could not only support individual faculty and students abroad, but also establish international partnerships that allow scholars in two separate institutions to access each other’s collections and resources. Such a model could be an excellent one for post-Soviet and American university libraries to pursue. And while Wiberly and Jones (1989) briefly mention that professors working abroad may struggle to find resources, they do not otherwise report on the challenges of access at a distance. In sum, there is a growing focus on library services for American study abroad students, yet few library science publications consider how scholars trained in the West find information and conduct research after moving to take up research faculty positions in developing countries.

#### *Goals and behavioral models of library research*

Academic researchers may experience information needs in several areas, including the need to stay current in their field, the need to maintain research production, and the need for teaching materials (Matteson, 2012). To meet these needs, faculty members scan for information that helps them understand key works and authors, keep up in their field, connect with key people, locate print and web

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resources, and share their own work and commentary (Foster, 2010). Within such broad strategies for information absorption, Foster (2010: 2) notes that “using a library catalogue or database represents a small portion of a large number of tactics”—something for librarians to keep in mind as they integrate their services into the larger research strategies adopted by faculty and students.

In studying the information-seeking habits of social scientists, Ellis (1989) developed a six-step model, from *starting* work in a new area, to *chaining* of citations from one paper to another, *browsing* in an area of interest, *differentiating* between high-value and low-value resources, *monitoring* new research in a particular area, and *extracting* information systematically. While technology has changed tremendously since this article, his model still provides solid grounding for scholarly work on social scientists’ information seeking. Of course, social scientists with niche topics may need to adjust these strategies (Meho and Haas, 2001). After looking at the information-seeking practices of scholars who study stateless nations such as the Roma and Kurds, Meho and Tibbo (2003) recommend the Ellis model be expanded to include the habits of *accessing* difficult information, *networking* with other researchers, *verifying* accuracy of information, and *managing* what they find. In conversation with sociologists, Shen (2013) suggests that social scientists move back and forth between experiencing a need, selecting information sources, searching for information, and using that information. This paper adapts these frameworks to consider the information-seeking and research habits of faculty in a post-Soviet context.

### *Ethnographic methods in library research*

To understand the research habits of social science faculty who live abroad, this paper uses ethnographic interviews rather than survey-based or quantitative data. Ethnography involves substantial engagement in a “field,” where the researcher is “present and immersed in the culture or environment they are studying” (Goodman, 2011b: 48). Yet faculty research habits are hard to observe directly, as they are often squeezed in between teaching and administrative duties; for this reason, Ellis (1993) recommends interviews to supplement ethnographic immersion in a research context. Although ethnographic research on libraries has become commonplace (see Goodman, 2011a and Khoo et al., 2012), many studies remain on the surface, adding observation to standard questionnaires, while not examining the underlying dynamics of how patrons, librarians, and libraries interact and influence one another over time (Asher, 2013). Project summaries of ethnography-derived improvements are useful, and yet they often lack a broader perspective that could transform theoretical understandings in the discipline.

One outstanding exception to the “ethnography-lite” practiced by librarians new to qualitative research is an ethnographic project on community information needs undertaken in Romania in the mid-2000s. A team of American librarians, anthropologists, and student researchers set out to study information flow and control in Romanian villages. Their excellent articles on the contested control of village information resources (Whipple and Nyce, 2007), elite control of communities through information usage (Closet-Crane et al., 2009), and the power dynamics of cultural heritage movements (Klimaszewski et al., 2012) bring great contextual flavour to the conversation around libraries, cultural heritage, and information needs in the international context. Such collaboration provides a great model for librarians seeking to effectively understand research and information needs. Further partnerships between anthropologists and librarians may go a long way towards uncovering the social, political, and economic dynamics within which our current library and information structures are established.

### **Methodology**

This research project used a qualitative interviewing approach to study how researchers trained at western universities conduct research after moving into emerging economies, asking what limitations these researchers face in their geographic context, and how Eurasian university libraries might better support faculty and student research. In keeping with area studies terminology for the region, “Eurasian” is here taken to mean the countries of Eastern Europe/Russia, Central Asia, and the Baltics, all of which share the political and economic context of socialism in the 20th century, moving into a westward-oriented post-socialism in the present day; Central Asia refers more specifically to the five post-Soviet countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. For the purposes of this study, *information* is defined as the constructs of knowledge gathered by students or faculty during the research process. *Research* is the process of seeking and gathering information in order to meet a perceived academic information need. And *research habits* are the means by which students and faculty regularly seek resources that satisfy their scholarly information needs.

As the final segment of a Masters research project, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted at Atameken University in northern Kazakhstan. Over the course of two months, interviews were requested via snowball sampling, and conducted after IRB approval and discussion of informed consent. The project targeted 20–30 interviews over three months, and resulted in interviews with seven students, four librarians, and 10 faculty members in the social sciences and related

fields. Interviewees came from political science and international relations (5), economics (3), anthropology (2), communications (2), history and philosophy (2), and world languages and literature (3). [2] This article highlights the experiences of faculty in the

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social sciences at Atameken University, many of whom were born in Africa, Asia, Europe, or America, and then completed PhDs in America or Europe before relocating to Kazakhstan for work on short-term faculty contracts. When possible, the author typed notes during interviews, so as to preserve an accurate record of conversation. A resulting analysis of common themes uncovered differing concerns among faculty and students, and so a separate paper will address the experiences of faculty and librarians in providing *students* with information literacy in the post-Soviet context.

This paper refers to the location under study as Atameken University, or “AU”. Founded within the last 10 years through consultation with major research universities in America and Europe, Atameken University is located in post-Soviet Central Asia, a region that includes the countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Atameken University seeks to transform post-Soviet research via both recruitment of internationally ranked faculty and merit-based admission of local students through a rigorous nationwide entrance examination. A pseudonym was selected for Atameken University both to maintain ethical standards within ethnography and to decenter the university itself as the focus of research. While this paper discusses the experience of social scientists at Atameken University, in many ways this experience is common to expatriate scholars working across the former Soviet Union, and not only at this particular institution. The goal of outlining these experiences is to help librarians and administrators across the region to better understand and support the research needs of social scientists working in Eurasian contexts.

### **Expatriate faculty research in the social sciences**

Interviews with 10 expatriate scholars and four librarians at Atameken University suggest that these scholars use digital articles as well as locally published materials extensively in forming their research, while soliciting feedback from colleagues in order to refine their topics and information-search strategies. When asked about his research process, Laurence [3] says:

So in working in political science nowadays, we work with— we co-author a lot. So from my first year I started working with my friends in grad school ... we were basically writing papers literally together. Where we sit down and write, we bounce off ideas like, *is this the sentence we want?* Sometimes by word, we are selecting the best—the best ones.

Other fields involve more independent research; Frannie, in communications, describes her research method as “reading and then applying theoretical concepts to the experiments people have already done,” while Nathan, in ethnography, learns about new topics via Google searches, using the keywords he finds to explore scholarly debates on Google Scholar. It is only when Nathan has narrowed down a topic and is searching for specific articles, he tells me, that he begins to use library databases for his research.

Another faculty member, Alex, lets me view his information-seeking practices directly. When I ask him how he conducts research, Alex reports “being very specific by which journals and

subfields I want those citations to pop up with,” and describes his growing awareness of authors and journals as a sign of his mastery of the field. Seeking to show me a particular article, he finds his paper notebook is missing and goes to his computer to pull it up in his citation manager. When he cannot find it on his hard drive, he moves to Google Scholar to skim results for the article. After finding the article mentioned, he pauses our conversation to skim Google Scholar for further useful citations, saying:

I pulled up the article I just mentioned, and I clicked on the ‘cited by’ and I’m just kind of clicking through the articles that are citing on this ... and ... finding a few interesting things [begins to get distracted] that have just come out...

Alex explores one digital library linked from Google, but rejects it as “sketchy.” Returning to Google Scholar, he comments:

In fact as I’m looking through this, most of these citations at least so far ... are either things that I’ve read or things that aren’t necessarily interesting to me. Like here’s an article from 2010, but I already went through that, so ... and here’s something from 2012 called ... that could be pretty interesting.

After clicking through to the Chicago Journals database, he reads the abstract, commenting:

Nope. Yeah. So this was published in *Current Anthropology*, and actually looks very useful.

From here, Alex clicks through to JSTOR, accepts their terms, saves the PDF and closes his browser. Turning back to me, he comments:

In truth at this point, I’ve probably done enough reading I need to actually stop reading and start writing.

Watching Alex skim and sort information lets us see how social scientists move back and forth between print and online venues in their search for information, including Google Scholar, citation management programs, and research databases. It also highlights the material limitations on research, as Alex is limited by the fact that the citation is in his print journal, at home. Alex circumvents this limitation through an alternate world of folders, files, links, plug-ins, and clicks. Moving quickly from citation-management and cloud-storage to search for scholarly articles on Google Scholar, Alex finds his target article—and

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is then quickly distracted and begins skimming a set of related (“cited by”) material. For each article on the list, Alex quickly judges the title, author, and quality of the database or journal, as a proxy indicator for the article’s likely quality. His dismissal of most results as “either things that I’ve read or things that aren’t necessarily interesting to me” suggests that he has already mined his topic extensively. Yet Alex still walks away with a new article to read later. It is notable here how much Alex’s research process involves repetitive mining of a database for new materials, and then evaluating those materials closely before acceptance.

As Nathan highlighted earlier, many social science faculty use Google as a starting point before turning to the library for procurement of specific known items. This suggests that Eurasian libraries seeking to connect with their users would do well to integrate their authentication processes and holdings with Google Scholar. Although most of the social scientists interviewed were European or US citizens, I did interview one linguistics professor in Kazakh. Salta reports

learning about new research fields by looking up intriguing names or phrases from her reading. When asked about her process, she answers, “I searched for exactly that sentence on Google” (“*men sol del sol soilemde Googledan izdedim*”). Salta then saves links to relevant articles in a Word document, as well as storing English PDFs in nested folders in her computer. Given her limited fluency in English, Salta struggles to read academic materials from abroad. To work around this issue, she engages in information-seeking processes of *translation*: first skimming an article’s contents in English, then using Google Translate to render the most pertinent sections of a webpage or PDF in Russian.

As a part of her research process, Salta also goes to the National Academic Library, a digitally connected library in the center of Kazakhstan’s capital city, Astana. There, Salta sits in the reading hall and pulls citations (*silki*) from the bibliographies of Russian and Kazakh-language dissertations. While using citation chaining to locate further resources, Salta also scours local bookstores for print resources on linguistics. Our conversation encompasses a wider range of offline research practices than brought up by other faculty, and it is not clear if this is due to a broader conception of “research” (*zertteu*) in Kazakh, or the fact that locating meaningful scholarly resources in Kazakh often requires a broader offline search. In either case, Salta’s experiences point to the need for greater ethnographic study of scholarly information-seeking practices in developing countries, [4] especially among non-English speakers.

### **Assessing Ellis’s 1989 information-seeking model**

Such self-reported understandings of faculty research can help us to understand broadly how scholars acquire and process information, whether through collaboration, textual reinterpretation, citation chaining, Google searches, or searching of bookstore shelves. However, such reports can also be too general to be comprehensive. To better understand how faculty engage in research, I asked Atameken University faculty to comment on Ellis’s (1989) six-step model of information seeking in the social sciences, including *starting* work in a new area, *chaining* citations from paper to paper, *browsing* in an area of interest, *differentiating* between resources, *monitoring* developments in one’s area of research, and *extracting* information systemically. I also showed them Meho and Tibbo’s (2003) extended model of *accessing* information, *networking* for information, *verifying* the data, and *managing* large sets of information effectively. Like other researchers who elicited feedback from American faculty on this model (Ge 2010; Shen 2013), I found that having Atameken University faculty comment on a specific model expanded our conversation on research in useful ways. As the section below demonstrates, much of these faculty members’ information-seeking practices are similar to that seen in other regions; in the following section, I will highlight some of the contextual differences emerging from a location in Kazakhstan.

#### *Starting*

In looking over this list, Gloria highlighted *starting* as a key stage of research, when she relies on abstracts to orient herself to a new topic; Similarly, Nathan highlights how he is always adding new sub-components to what he is researching as he branches into new areas. However, none of the other faculty mentions starting as a critical point of research.

#### *Chaining*

Alex uses alerts from search engines and citation trackers, but dismisses these database results when he discusses the practice of chaining, noting:

I've never been a huge fan of search-engine based library research—I prefer working from bibliographies other people have done. I usually find I have a much better sense of a topic based on—looking at sort of a summary journal article and looking at their bibliography and grabbing random things.

### *Extracting*

Alex also ties this in to Ellis's *extracting*, commenting that:

to me extracting is the second step, in terms of intensively— well I intensively read it, and on the basis of my intensive reading I begin the process of chaining. And then chaining and extracting become these reciprocal steps that are constantly feeding back and forth, or feeding into one another.

In sum, then, Alex sees the reciprocal process of extracting information and linking to new articles as a core component

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of his research. In contrast, Conrad is critical of *extracting*, noting how important it is to go “systematically through electronic resources:”

One of the things you're always told to beware of is cherry-picking. Some of the search tools one can use now are very powerful – textual recognition, search all databases at once. What it can sometimes lead you to do, though, is that you only pick out those pieces of evidence that lead you to support your thesis. And you ignore the wider data in which it is embedded ... you end up with a distorted sense of how important your topic is.

As a historian, Conrad's warning is especially pertinent to scholars in fields that place *context* front and center in the process of browsing and locating information. In contrast, faculty in more quantitative fields were more likely to conceptualize extracting as a practice of pulling out only the *useful* parts of a wider conversation.

### *Differentiating*

In political science, Jake mentions abstracts as a key means by which he narrows down on what is essential. In contrast, Alex embeds differentiating in his reading over time, as:

I gain a sense of which authors are continually being cited by other people and are worth in turn reading carefully myself. And if I see their names come out I would obviously save that article and print it out. But from the very beginning I'm looking for particular journals and academic publishers, and away from others.

### *Monitoring*

When I ask Gloria, a quantitative researcher, about monitoring, she shows me the browser open on her computer screen. Her bookmark bar is filled with icons linking to key research resources, including an unauthorized library login, Google Scholar, four flagship journals in her sub- field, and Al Jazeera English. She says:

I know I could set up an RSS feed that tells you when they update, but I like to check them on my own. Monitoring is fun, I think because it keeps you in tune with what's new, it gives you new ideas.

Gloria mentions several times how monitoring is central to her research practice, with browser



icons reminding her to check for new developments in her discipline each day.

### **Discussion of the Ellis model**

Although each researcher pursued different strategies, multiple social scientists in this study highlighted Ellis's practices of *differentiating* high-value sources, *extracting* data systematically, and *chaining* to other high-value sources. In this, they act much like faculty members located in western institutions.

But in addition to the value of extracting, differentiating, and chaining, these faculty members also noted the importance of *access* and *networking* as critical aspects of their information search. This lends strength to Meho and Tibbo's (2003) arguments, suggesting that faculty who are physically located in developing countries may have information needs in common with their colleagues in world research centers who struggle to access information on minority populations. For instance, Laurence learns of new research by asking colleagues in his network to flag interesting papers at conferences, or by watching Facebook for re-posts of recent articles. Alex likewise seeks out colleagues when entering a new field, remarking that he can get "a breakdown of the bibliography in just a few minutes" and speed up his process of differentiating and extracting key information sources in a new area.

Along with the processes that Ellis, Meho and Tibbo have highlighted, many social scientists working in international or cross-cultural contexts find that *translating* is a crucial step, one that enables use of each of the other processes. As with Salta's regular use of Google Translate, Jake also indicated that he had difficulty using regional sources without a means of translating conversations and text to and from Russian. The lack of translation abilities or assistant support with translation also emerges as a concern for some faculty interviewed. One person notes that not knowing Russian is a barrier to understanding existing local publications or working with local colleagues, while another will not allow his students to do social science research in Russian, as he has no teaching assistant to help him check the accuracy of students' source choices and citations in Russian. *Translating* information could thus be considered as an aspect of information seeking, especially for those without full fluency in a language of study.

In general, then, the experiences of the social scientists at Atameken University match closely with the existing literature on the *steps* involved in information seeking (with the possible addition of *translation* when working in cross-cultural or multilingual contexts). And yet, the context of working in Kazakhstan does impact the research processes of these scholars, in a way that is not so easily captured in a sequence of steps. Below, I discuss some of the contextual strengths and limitations of conducting social-science research in Eurasian/Central Asian contexts.

### **Working in Central Eurasia: The strengths and limitations of research at Atameken University**

On the one hand, the research practices discussed so far suggest that expatriate social scientists function much like their colleagues in the United States, East Asia, and Europe. Yet expatriate social scientists do not research in a vacuum.

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Each of these scholars was trained in top American and European universities. Yet, by accepting faculty positions in a post-Soviet institution, they come to experience the opportunities and

limitations of scholarship in developing regions. Social scientists at Atameken University have significant opportunities for original research given their physical location in an understudied but richly textured area of the world—and yet they may find this research constrained by limits on access to scholarly materials. When asked about the benefits and weaknesses of doing research in the region, these social scientists expressed concern with limited access to physical and electronic resources, long seasonal delays in procurement of books to Central Asia, and limited access to colleagues and conferences in America and Europe. Such limitations must be addressed, and yet faculty also emphasized how working in Central Asia gives them unique opportunities to expand their research into new topics in the region.

*Key regional strengths: Access to primary and archival sources*

Since opening in 2010, the Atameken University Library has focused its collection development on resources for the study of Central Asia and for supporting introductory classes, areas that faculty recognize as well developed. Alex compliments the library's collection of Soviet and Central Asian monographs, while requesting more comparative sources on Asia, Africa, and Europe. Carla, a librarian, highlights the library's development of "post-Soviet or Soviet historical data, newspapers and—regional newspapers ... with all the microfilm and microfiche, and all of the [faculty-donated] books." Faculty appreciated the regional resources, yet those not working on Central Asian topics were surprised at the limitations in the collection. Nathan was surprised that a new flagship research university which poured money into buildings and technology would cut funding for the library, commenting that "Now they're saying the library takes too much money ... they say, we're gonna get the best faculty and we're not going to give money for research."

Yet in spite of these critiques, faculty highlighted how beneficial the location of Atameken University was for their research. While requesting more primary resources, Conrad praised the easy access and lowered costs of research trips to regional archives. Jake, Gloria, and Nathan all noted how much they appreciated working in the cultural and political context of Kazakhstan, as it gave them access to Eurasian and post-Soviet research topics they would never have considered without the opportunity to work in Kazakhstan in person. Nathan is quite expressive on this account, describing work in Kazakhstan as:

Kind of an ongoing ethnographic experience for me, that I'm absorbing and observing, talking to people, asking them questions, and that's what's informed my research questions [...] all these little seeds planted in me to start framing, or thinking of research questions to ask. I wouldn't get [that] if I was a faculty member in the US that would travel here occasionally to do a project .... And I wouldn't have all that kind of additional information if I was somewhere else. So I definitely think whatever limitations the library has here ... being embedded in the place in the culture is more valuable.

Nathan believed that working in Kazakhstan was worth the resource limitations, especially for his field-based ethnographic research. Yet in all of these conversations, access to local materials, people, and field sites emerges as a crucial benefit for scholars willing to work on regional topics. In other words, these expatriate scholars benefit from being situated at the intersection of American or European doctoral training, a Central Asian location, and the particularities of their own disciplinary research practices and information needs.

*Regional challenges: Limited access to scholarly sources*

Of course, working in a developing region presents challenges as well. The social scientists interviewed had been hired on the basis of their high-caliber research and teaching experience in world centers, and were all concerned about the impact that limited access to scholarly resources would have for them and their students. In the sections that follow, I would like to discuss carefully the limitations of working in a developing Eurasian country—yet with the reminder that this is not a critique of a new university, so much as a discussion of *regional* limitations (political, economic, cultural) which need to be addressed by education ministers and university administrators in Kazakhstan and nearby countries, and not only at Atameken University. Many limitations are the simple result of geography: in contrast to American scholars who can quickly order monographs or locate used books, scholars and librarians in Kazakhstan wrestle with limited access to English-language works, year-long delays in delivery, and high costs of shipping, import, and customs—if the library is even given the budget to import necessary works.

For instance, Peter, a librarian, describes his library's collection as “more of a teaching collection” than a research collection. He notes that Central Asian libraries are hampered by the unavailability of approval plans provided by major university publishers in the US and UK, “where they select for you and you pick which ones you want to keep and which you send back.” Instead, every book must be researched and each order placed separately. In a library which has not been funded to hire experienced subject specialists devoted to collection development and liaison responsibilities, this is a limiting factor on the growth of library services.

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Both librarians and faculty struggle with the lagging supply train, not knowing whether to blame the library or the wider transportation system. They express frustration with the shelving system and the cataloging as conducted by non-native speakers of English.<sup>5</sup> As Conrad notes, “the library is so small and the eccentricity of the cataloging is—sometimes books are in the wrong place, so—‘this ought to be in history, but if it’s filed under nuclear physics, where can I find it?’”

As a result of external limitations on staffing and funding, the librarians and faculty have had to be creative in locating and accessing necessary research and teaching materials. Since arriving in Kazakhstan, Alex reports switching to “a disproportionate focus on journal articles because there are no books,” while Peter notes that some professors no longer assign research papers, given the lack of supporting materials in the library. Vic, an environmental scientist, describes watching students use excerpts on Google Books to cobble together papers from multiple open-access sources. And even Carla, a librarian, notes that it is hard for skilled faculty members and librarians to maintain a “current awareness of information and technology” in Kazakhstan.

Of course this is not all negative—Atameken University has some of the strongest database subscriptions in the wider Central Asian region. Yet even at a university with strong database subscriptions, it can still be difficult to procure specific items. In response, some scholars have started to email authors directly to request their articles. Nathan reports finding articles in the library databases half the time, and otherwise maneuvering around their absence. With so many paywalls even in subscription databases, Vic has started using Google Scholar to locate PDFs that “will get the job done. Even though it’s not the best ... article, I pick the OK article for the class.” In response to these issues, the university authorized an international interlibrary loan (ILL) service to get PDFs scanned at American institutions—yet the low budget allocated to the

library makes this difficult. The net effect is one of delayed ILL requests and limited budget allocations resulting in a research flow that is substantially “disjointed,” as Frannie notes—strong in some areas and missing crucial resources in others.

In sum, each of the librarians and faculty express appreciation for their work in Central Asia and for the extensive resources that Atameken University provides to faculty and students alike. Yet as Carla describes it, working at Atameken University feels like being in “a remote location, even though it’s a virtual world.” This tension between tangible remoteness and virtual connection runs throughout scholarly activities in the region, and presents both challenges and opportunities for university libraries in central Eurasia.

## **Developing creative workarounds for research**

In response to such challenges, expatriate social scientists use “workarounds”—ways of maintaining access to the scholarly resources necessary for research and publication. Such workarounds involve skimming free search results on Google Scholar, locating resources via friends’ institutional logins and illegal download sites, or emailing out requests for electronic copies of scholarly works. In one sense, these methods “work,” as scholars located in Eurasia can use them to surmount systemic and geographic barriers to research. Yet in the long run, such necessary workarounds make no one happy—they are legally dubious, inefficient, and limit the range of items retrieved as well as the quality of resulting scholarship. One key disadvantage of such workarounds is that faculty may spend more time negotiating thorny issues of information access than actually thinking, discussing, teaching, writing, and publishing on their chosen research topics. For us to better understand these issues, this section outlines some of the ways in which social science faculty locating in a developing context seek to access resources, in the face of digital and material constraints on research.

First, when information cannot easily be located in subscription databases, scholars may check Google Scholar for links to pre-print or publically archived materials. Alex comments that he uses Amazon book previews to sort out which chapters to request from colleagues with university library access in America, or via Atameken Library’s fledgling international ILL system. [6] When I ask if he also uses “bootleg PDFs,” he responds:

Every time Google Scholar gives me one—it kind of like links to them. I mean, whatever, I’ll take that ... I do that more often with the texts I’m assigning in the class. In [one] case, I just randomly ran a search for it and someone had scanned it and posted it online as a class reading. So I was able to download it and chop it up and ... give it to my class. And that happens fairly often.

In such instances, when the university cannot provide materials to support the research and teaching of their scholars, scholars like Alex and Vic make use of teaching materials that were posted by others online, often in countries in which such information is more readily available. Yet while teaching materials are often available on public course websites, it can be more challenging to obtain scholarly monographs as background reading for one’s own publication. When he cannot locate PDFs online, Alex emails widely for help, but admits that this “has worked almost never,” explaining:

There have been problems when I sent a journal article out late last year and where the reviewer comments come back, was that I need to cite this book that had been published in 1989, because it was clearly relevant in my research. And how that was hard to get a

hold of. It was not available as an ebook, it was not—the library here did not have it ... But the author himself randomly passed through town [in Central Asia] ... It turned out he had a PDF of the book and he was able to give it to me. This was after giving out broadcast calls saying,

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‘who the hell has a copy of the book and can give it to me?’ It was very interesting.

Alex stands out as someone comfortable talking about his use of creative workarounds, but other voices dropped to a hush when asked whether they made use of resources in addition to personal and library materials. One scholar admits to downloading what he cannot buy, given that out-of-print books are often not for sale in this region, while another uses an institutional login at “blah blah university.” A third mentions “books on my hard drive which I should not talk about”—an illicit collection that allows him to work around the lack of physical resources and restrictions on electronic transfer of scholarly articles to the developing world.

A third workaround is to import a large personal collection of books. Marnus filled his shipping allowance with books, while Conrad imported 1000 monographs as his “basic reference collection” for a three-year stay in Central Asia. Nathan’s mother-in-law ships him care packages that include scholarly books, and Jake buys new titles every time he travels “to the West,” relying on articles in the interim. Some faculty noted surprise at this need to personally import materials, given the large library, extensive investment in a top research university, and significant database holdings. Laurence, for instance, told me that he expected plenty of research money in this well-resourced oil state, but instead finds himself “paying a lot of money out of my pocket for my research,” and using old institutional licenses for software from his student days. While individual experiences vary, a key takeaway here is that, in the absence of formal channels for research, faculty in developing countries use many different strategies in order to maintain access to scholarly works.

#### *Networks as a key enabler of research*

When faced with these obstacles, a key resource for locating information and ideas is via academic networks. Several social scientists maintained institutional logins from graduate school in America. Those who found their accounts shut down quickly turned to friends, colleagues, old roommates, and even research advisors in order to procure the materials they needed for international scholarship. One respondent uses her advisor’s login to access scholarly materials. When I ask how she finds articles, she answers:

Mainly on, uhh, okay, this is very tricky. The library here has limited resources, as you know, including subscriptions ... and I think that I find that challenging about this library ... so what I have maintained is my library login from University of Mid-America (UMA). That’s what I use. That doesn’t mean I don’t use the library here. There are some journals that Atameken has access to that UMA doesn’t. But I would say that for 80% of my online articles, the search comes or is for the UMA library.

By using the Atameken University library collection as well as someone else’s American login, this scholar cobbles together resources from multiple venues, including databases at Kazakhstani and American universities, as well as her personal PDF collection and the private collections of her colleagues in the West.

Yet such frequent requests for help come at a high personal and professional cost. Vic reports

that he is compiling a list of articles so that he can “hit” his old advisor “with all my requests at once.” Marnus goes out of his way to use ILL, so that he will not burden others, while Gloria hesitates to email well-known authors and ask for copies of their work directly. In one way or another, each of these scholars balances their need for information against their personal relationships. Such practices echo Meho and Tibbo’s (2003: 583) description of scholars who study stateless nations as engaging in “international invisible colleges or networks that aim at developing and maintaining a close relationship with a broad range of people such as friends, colleagues ... [in order] to build collections, access materials, and gather information.” It seems that scholars who study marginalized people may have information needs and strategies in common with those who live in marginal locations, engaging in a sort of Kula ring of exchange (see Malinowski, 1922), where requests for PDFs from America are later reciprocated with assistance in locating regional resources in Eurasian states. Each information-seeking interaction draws on professional relationships. Because of this, expatriate scholars spread requests as lightly and widely as possible, in order to access the materials they need without reducing the strength of these relationships.

With luck, of course, expatriate social scientists can retain a direct login to university databases. “To be honest, I sometimes don’t have access to papers,” Laurence admits, “and I still use my institutional membership at Blah Blah Blah University. And I’m always afraid it will be cut off!” In fact, this had just happened to Gloria at the time of interview, who reported a “crisis” of access to scholarly resources. When her grad-school login expired, Gloria used a colleague’s password to continue her research as well as help her Kazakh students develop “a high-quality project with good resources.” [7] Yet the friend’s computer was stolen in America and proxy access to that distant library was cut off. Now, when Gloria’s students check the libraries in Kazakhstan and cannot find an article, she tells me, she does not know where to turn.

#### *Access, networks, and librarians*

Who could advise Gloria on other information resources for her classes? Until now, we have barely spoken of the central figure of the academic library: the librarian. And perhaps, this omission reflects the shadowy figure of the post-Soviet librarian. As in other post-Soviet countries,

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Kazakhstan lives in the lingering shadow of Soviet information controls, given the USSR’s distortion of information (Knutson, 2009), Soviet controls on dissemination of information (Bone, 1999), and Soviet training of librarians to actively limit access to resources (Anghelescu et al., 2009). Although Soviet librarians were to be “well versed in [social science] knowledge and have specialized information facilities” (Goldberg 1971: 276), the role of the librarian was not respected under the Soviet system, nor is it well respected and well paid today (Benz, 2009: 238). As Maria Haigh (2009: 15) reports, “despite the shifts in library rhetoric from information control to information access and a user focus . . . changes in personnel and leadership practices are very gradual” in post-Soviet libraries. While Atameken University has hired a number of the brightest Kazakhstani librarians, who bring significant international education from abroad, most Kazakhstani librarians have not yet had the chance to study for the standard ALA-equivalent Masters in librarianship (Gibradze, 2001), nor are wages high enough to recruit and retain the most qualified young people into librarianship. Limited access to international training, as well as Soviet historical and economic factors, may limit the work of academic librarians in Eurasian

countries.

The gendered career prospects and information-restricting role of an earlier generation of Soviet librarians affects not only librarians, of course, but also the success of scholars in many regional universities. Regional education administrators are unlikely to realize the extent to which professional academic librarians are a key part of the institutional support structure for world-class scholarship in top American and European institutions. As Johnson (2013) notes, the services provided by academic librarians are “crucial to developing the next generation of [post-Soviet] leaders,” such as those future leaders educated at a place like Atameken University. Prior expatriate librarians have noted the challenges of providing library services in Kazakhstan (Dowding, 2014; King et al., 2013), while commending the talented post-Soviet librarians who focus on students above books (Dowding, 2014). These interventions are recognized and appreciated by faculty and students at Kazakhstani universities (Emmelhainz and Bukhtoyarova, 2012: 13), and yet attrition among talented librarians in the region remains high, given their limited career prospects.

Given the challenges that scholars experience with accessing information in the Eurasian context, the limited number of professional librarians hired to support world-class scholarship and teaching in Eurasian countries is problematic. American research universities typically hire librarians with advanced degrees in library science as well as in a research subject, and recruit these faculty librarians with competitive faculty status, faculty pay, and privileges such as sabbaticals, and research and conference funding. [8] Although it has the resources, Atameken University has not yet elected to recruit research and instruction librarians in the same selective manner. Without the investment in skilled librarians, the university struggles to recruit and retain those who could best advance student and faculty research. Laurence highlights how valuable skilled librarians are, recalling a recent visit to a librarian in Washington DC whose:

suggestions were extremely useful. I mean, he knew what was available, what they had and didn't have [worldwide]. He was certainly someone I could see going to over and over again, for suggestions about bibliography. And partly because he knew the primary material so well, and who the publishers were.

Along with Laurence, Conrad also highlights the need for librarians who are experts in his field, and can research and recommend appropriate resources for himself and his students, once he sends in his initial requests.

The real benefit of librarians with extended knowledge of resources and people in their subject field, of course, comes over time and through relations with faculty. Peter, an international librarian, finds that it is by meeting faculty in informal settings that he best understands their needs and can acquire the resources they need for research and teaching. Recruiting and developing the most skilled local and international librarians will go a long way towards putting Eurasian universities on a par with their peer universities in America and Europe. Strengthening the collegial relationship between professors and faculty librarians is an additional means of improving access to knowledge at Eurasian universities. Peter recommends that librarians have time to develop a broad research collection, research local information behavior, and invest in collegial relationship with faculty and students. Ultimately, he suggests, these are all activities that would increase access to research and effective instruction, and “raise the profile of the library and the school.”

## **Discussion**

In considering the challenges these faculty members face and the workarounds they deploy in order to access scholarly resources for research and teaching, then, we find that scholars at Atameken University benefit from regional resources and access to communities in the region, but struggle to access the full breadth of electronic and print resources needed for top-quality scholarship. Distance from key academic networks in America, Europe, and East Asia represents a challenge to scholars seeking to stay current in their field. In response to these limitations, expatriate scholars have developed ‘creative workarounds’ that include searching the Web, download sites, and Google Scholar for openly posted books and articles; requesting ILL assistance or library logins from colleagues in more central locations;

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importing a physical book collection of their own; maintaining software licenses or library logins from their student days; and contacting others in their social networks for assistance with locating PDFs or other resources. These workarounds vary in their degree of formality, legality, and the degree to which they rely on other institutions and extra- institutional relationships with colleagues.

In some ways, these workarounds represent a creative adaptation to the geographic constraints of scholarly work in Central Asia and the broader post-socialist Eurasian region—a region which is still adapting to a ‘market economy’ and considering how western-style higher education may or may not be suitable for local needs (Amsler, 2007; Reeves, 2004). Yet in other ways, such responses detract from the ability of post-Soviet and expatriate scholars to work sustainably and maintain strong social networks in the long run.

When it comes to networks, expatriate social scientists continue their scholarly work by drawing on privileged networks in America and Europe—yet find that each request represents a drain on existing collegial relationships. The longer their stay abroad, the more likely it is that prior connections and networks will not be able to sustain the distance, divergent paths, and requests involved. Access to information in an expatriate setting, then, becomes not just about barriers to information, but also about unequal relationships between researchers—and the mental and relational energy that faculty expend in balancing their search for resources across many connections. These challenges remind us how critical *access* and *net-working* are for the information-seeking behaviors of social scientists in any emerging economy.

Yet addressing the social and geographical context is not as simple as implementing new policies at Atameken University. The fact that these problems persist even at Atameken University’s well-resourced library, and given the faculty’s strong international connections, suggests that the problem of access is *not* just personal or institutional. This study demonstrates that access is not just a problem for “low-income” countries—with a corresponding solution of generous gifts and subsidies from publishers. Instead, access remains a critical problem even for privileged researchers in an “upper-middle” income economy such as Kazakhstan (World Bank, 2014). This research suggests that the ability to conduct quality research in developing countries will be limited until publishers, governments, and universities worldwide work together to provide full and equitable access for every researcher, regardless of a country’s supposed level of economic development. It suggests that information-seeking and social science research practices can never be separated from the wider social, economic, and political context in which they are embedded. Given the research expertise and current projects of Atameken University faculty members into topics as diverse as political stability, linguistic change, cancer research, and



nanotechnology, this is a project that should be of interest to us all. As countries like Kazakhstan push to develop their human capital, scientific innovation, and research capacity, we all benefit from finding ways to fully include their residents—permanent or temporary—in international networks of research and scholarly exchange.

## Conclusion

This paper has outlined how some expatriate social scientists approach their research while located in Central Asia, noting how researchers manoeuvre around barriers in order to gain access to colleagues and resources that could support their information needs. In response to the issues raised, Eurasian universities would do well to invest in expanding ILL systems and print acquisitions, and to bring in established faculty librarians to work with the teaching and research faculty on developing institutional capacity, library instruction, and library collections. As the literature on study abroad suggests, there may also be a role for further resource-sharing partnerships with the best American and Eurasian libraries.

Yet in spite of these regional challenges, there remains much hope for research in each of the post-socialist Eurasian states. The social scientists and librarians interviewed all reiterate how much they appreciate working in Kazakhstan, and how much it has helped them to develop as researchers. The barriers to access that they experience are not unique to Atameken University, but are faced by many professors and students at top schools in emerging economies. While the geographic context and international inequalities are real, many opportunities remain for Kazakhstan to take a leading role in improving regional access to libraries, librarians, and their scholarly resources—further cementing the country's growing efforts in innovation and scholarship in the post-Soviet world.

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## Notes:

[1] Interestingly, these authors cite high use of personal and library subscriptions in these countries (Pakistan, Argentina, Nigeria) but no instances of using colleague networks to obtain journal articles, something reported as common in other parts of the developing world.

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[2] All faculty members in the social sciences were individually invited to interview, including economists, but no economists were available for an interview and only one political scientist responded. That limits the ability of this study to address quantitative research practices such as working with datasets.

[3] All names are pseudonyms; in some cases respondents self-selected names of another gender or ethnic group.

[4] I am aware of no major scholarly databases in Kazakh. There are databases of some Russian newspaper articles, policy articles, and other academic sources. However, a much larger percentage of the academic literature in Russian seems to be based on underground translations of English articles into

Russian. Translated articles are then circulated by flash drive or email between colleagues, allowing Russian-speakers access to current research in the English-speaking world (personal communication, summer 2010, researchers at the local National Academy of Sciences).

[5] Sauperl (2005) notes that librarians trained in Slavic environments may have a different perspective on subject cataloging than western faculty are accustomed to; this could present challenges for end-users accustomed to American or European cataloging and suggests that institutions like Atameken University would benefit from a combination of highly-trained local and expatriate catalogers.

[6] Interlibrary loan has a long history in the post-Soviet region (cf. Lushchik et al., 2006), but does not seem to operate effectively between Kazakhstan, the USA, and Russia at the point this research was conducted (spring of 2014); however, I am aware that this is an area in which Atameken University is actively seeking to develop further relationships.

[7] It must be wondered, however, how much students can learn about the research process themselves when they must ask faculty to look up resources for them via logins in other countries—another reason that these access workarounds, while necessary in the short run, are not adequate in the long term for either scholars or students.

[8] The American Library Association reports an average librarian salary of over \$58,000 per year (ALA, 2014). New MLS graduates in international academic libraries have a median starting salary of \$50,400 (Maatta, 2014), while librarians at top American Research Libraries have a median salary of \$68,773 in 2013 (ARL, 2014), plus faculty benefits. This gently suggests the need for competitive salaries at any Eurasian institution seeking to recruit and retain skilled instruction, research, and cataloging librarians from abroad.

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**Author biography:** Celia Emmelhainz is the Social Science Data Librarian at Colby College. Her research focuses on library ethnography, international libraries, and qualitative data archiving, and she promotes data librarianship at [databrarians.org](http://databrarians.org). She previously worked in Kazakhstan as a school and university librarian.