Library collaboration with China strengthens scholarship

By Gwen Glazer

Cornell University Library and Tsinghua University Library in China -- both leading research institutions -- cemented a formal collaboration during an Oct. 29 ceremony on Cornell's campus.

Leaders from both libraries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) detailing the new agreement, which outlines several areas for exploration and formalizes a relationship maintained for the last decade.

About 20 people attended the ceremony, which was held at the A.D. White House. A five-person delegation from Tsinghua University, led by Vice President Xie Weihe and Library Director Xue Fangyu, visited Ithaca last week.

"Signing this agreement opens up myriad new possibilities for both of our libraries," said Anne Kenney, Cornell's Carl A. Kroch University Librarian. "We can learn a tremendous amount from one another, and we're thrilled to be entering into this mutually beneficial relationship."

During the ceremony, Cornell Provost Kent Fuchs praised the "long tradition" of cooperation between the two universities, noting that the newly minted library partnership is a "great example of a relationship that is purposeful, meaningful and will benefit both institutions."

The libraries will collaborate on staff training; participate in an exchange program; share scholarly resources, professional networks and support for collection building; develop and test programs and software; and embark on joint investigations to advance research library theory and practice.

"Our libraries have the same missions… and face the same challenges," Xue said. "We will learn a lot of new ideas and technologies from each other. It will be very useful and very fruitful for us."

In addition to the MOU, the ceremony kicked off an exchange program for two librarians from Tsinghua, who will spend November 2009 exploring Cornell Library's services and operations. Cornell will likely send a few members of its staff to Tsinghua in the near future. Kenney said the exchange "represents the first formal act in this compact."

Tsinghua also signed an agreement to purchase 95,000 duplicate titles from Cornell Library’s collection. These volumes will serve as the core humanities collection in Tsinghua's new humanities library, scheduled to open in 2011.

"Cornell and Tsinghua are bound by common qualities and interests: We are both dedicated to service excellence, and we are both viewed as thought leaders among major research libraries in our respective countries," said Xin Li, assistant university librarian for strategic initiatives at Cornell. "This partnership will strengthen our ability to serve research and teaching in our universities."

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