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Bitner Research Fellowship at Cornell Law School, Ithaca, New York, by Oludayo John Bamgbose, the Librarian at the Law Library at Ajayi Crowther University in Oyo, Nigeria

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The following is an interview with Mr. Oludayo John Bamgbose.

What process did you go through in getting your experience at Cornell?

One of the things that have helped me in my career development is the privilege of riding on the shoulders of giants. I was actually informed by my mentor- Professor Femi Cadmus, Associate Dean for Library Services and Professor of the Practice, Cornell University of the fellowship. Then, I sent an email to the officer-in-charge of the fellowship to ask salient questions about the fellowship application procedure. I submitted the completed application and ensured that all my referees sent-in their recommendation letters before the deadline. I was later scheduled for an extensive telephone interview which lasted for about ninety minutes. The interview focussed on my work as a law librarian and the personal project I intended to do while at Ithaca and the anticipated benefits the project would have on my community. As a matter of fact, the interview was going to be my first telephone interview. In the weeks that followed, I was so anxious about what would be the outcome, because I knew it was a keenly competitive process. Finally, the good news came: I had been accepted! The next step was to make arrangement on the preferred time for the fellowship. One of the things I enjoyed about the application procedure was that it took into cognizance, the expectations and preference of the applicants. Eventually, Cornell and I arrived at a suitable time frame of four weeks.



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What travel documents did you need to make the visit happen?

Cornell Law Library was very generous. This is to the extent that I was given the privilege of visiting with my spouse. Unfortunately, she was unable to make the trip partly because we had just welcomed our son -*Iretomide*. Meanwhile, I had secured multiple entry visa to the United States while planning to attend IFLA conference which held the previous year in Columbus, Ohio. Therefore, I did not need to make fresh application for visa again.



What were your major duties/ activities while you at Cornell?

The fellowship was in two parts: the first being the three weeks stay at Cornell and the fourth week was at Emory for the International Association of Law Libraries (IALL) meeting. At Cornell, I visited all the units in the law library to understudy their daily routines. I spent considerable time understudying the daily schedules in the library. I found very amazing, the role technology plays in the management of information resource. From the building of the institutional repository, to the technical and readers' services, to the other activities. I was also part of the meetings of the professional law librarians and the other general staff of the library. At occasions when there were seminars within and outside the library, I participated at

these events. The last week of the fellowship was spent at Emory.

The Fellowship covered the expenses incurred during the IALL conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The 36th annual course on International Law and Legal Information of the IALL held from 22nd to 26th of October, 2017 with the theme: Civil Rights, Human Rights, and Other Critical Issues in U.S. Law held at the birthplace of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which is equally acclaimed internationally as a major centre for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. While at Emory, I networked with law librarians some of whom I had longed to meet for a while. I also took advantage of my participation at the conference to write a blog on the pre-conference workshop with the theme: *Well, Isn't That Special? A How-To Workshop on Creating and Using Archives and Special Collections in a Legal Research Context* for the FCIL Special Interest Section of the American Association of Law Libraries.

When you were not working, what did you do? Did you do any travelling, or try and see some cultural sites?

I had some lovely moments outside working hours. I had time to move round the beautiful city of Ithaca in company of Mr Cosmas, a PhD candidate at Cornell Law School. Also as I, lover of music, I was always eager to move to my apartment where I had access to grand piano. I moved around with some of the law librarians who volunteered to take me around to various grocery stores. I had time out with the family of Professor Femi Cadmus. We were in Church together at Syracuse and had fun picking some pumpkins.

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Ithaca being a beautiful, serene and great town was a place for me to hang out in the evening. Down towns and college town were my favourite spots in the evening. At one of the weekends, at the invitation of Nina Scholtz of the Friends of the Library, I volunteered at book sales. The book sales would be the biggest sales I would event witness with the proceed in the region of \$500,000.

What challenges or difficulties did you have to overcome?

There were no major challenges really, but then, acclimatizing to the new environment took some time for me. I recall that I had to select fruits and vegetables were my favourites any time I was given food to eat. It took almost two weeks before I started acquiring the new taste. I was lucky I spent four weeks in all, so I still had time to enjoy the sumptuous delicacies in Ithaca and Emory. The other experience I had, had to with acclimatizing to the changes in time. It took almost a week before I got used to the time difference. Sometimes, I dozed off while in the office. I felt so uncomfortable about this and had to speak with my supervisor Amy Emerson who assured me it was a natural phenomenon. After about three days of the experience, I decided to walk around at internals until I got used to new environment in just about a week.

What is the most memorable moment from your time?

I had fantastic moments in Ithaca and Emory that it becomes challenging to actually state the most memorable one. Since I have to identity one: I recall the time I spent with the law librarians teaching graduate students in courses ranging from Legal Writing to Social Media and Legal Practice.

Do you have any tips for other librarians looking to gain experience in another country?

I encourage other librarians who desire to have experience in other climes, to at first, identify their fellowship goals and to reach out to libraries with the potentials of helping them actualize these objectives. In my case, I needed to have exposure on how legal information is disseminated to patrons in the United States and Cornell being an ivy league was a big way to achieving this.

For applicants who do not have institutional or other forms of supports, access to partial or full funding (like the Bitner Research Fellowship) provided by the host institution could help a great deal. I recall my IFLA 2016 experience: despite the partial institutional and other supports I got from friends and colleagues, I still had to pay up for the expenses I incurred during the process for about six months after the conference. However, the Bitner Research Fellowship covered all the expenses and made the experience a worthwhile experience for me.

Having identified a suitable platform to undertake such fellowship, the next is to look at the conditions of grant. For example, many funders would require that a report of the experience is presented within a certain period of time after the exercise. It may also come with other conditions. It is important that an applicant considers his/her ability to fulfil the conditions before applying for the grant.

The next stage is to put up a convincing application. Most calls, particularly, with funds usually have high number of applicants. The quality of application is essential. It is important to be

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able to articulate one's reason of attending to fellowship and align same with the objective of the fellowship. The quality of recommendations from the referees also counts. It is essential that only persons who can give unbiased assessment of the applicants are those contacted by an applicant to write on his/her behalf.

Finally, in between the time the full application has been submitted and the time the outcome of the application is to be communicated, it is advisable that an applicant exercises restraint in contacting the institution, as such an act even if well intended, may be misconstrued, and then, lead to the disqualification of the applicant. The question that may arise is that, what should an applicant do within the period? For me, it was time to pray for positive outcome.