American University professors donate books to the University of Makeni library with the Gretchen Walsh Book Donation Award.

The 2019 Gretchen Walsh Book Donation Award went towards shipping books donated by professors at American University in Washington, DC to the library at the University of Makeni in Sierra Leone. Susan Shepler, an Associate Professor in the School of International Service at American University, organized the book donation drive among her colleagues. She did this ahead of spending the 2019-2020 academic year as a visiting professor at the University of Makeni (UniMak) in Sierra Leone, where she is currently lecturing modules on theories of development and on research methods in the postgraduate program on sustainable development.

Donating the books on behalf of her colleagues, Shepler said access to the latest materials is a necessary component of quality higher education. “These days, many of the prominent scholarly journals are available online but there is certainly still a place for old-fashioned books in the learning of any university student.” Professor Shepler said many institutions of higher education in Sierra Leone still struggle to access high quality printed materials.

Often, books sent to Africa from abroad are out of date or unrelated to the curricular needs of the educational institutions. With this fact in mind, before coming to UniMak Professor Shepler received from the administration a list of the degrees offered at UniMak and asked her colleagues at American University to donate recent books on the topics covered in the UniMak curriculum or books that dealt with issues related to Africa generally. The topics covered include Sustainable Development, Education Administration, Finance, Accounting and Banking, Agriculture and Food Sciences, Business Administration, Development Studies, Education, Human Resources Management, Information Technology, Law, Mass Communication, Philosophy, Public Administration, Public Health, Special Needs Education, Economics, Procurement Logistics and Supply Chain Management, Urban Planning, and Psychosocial Counseling.

Professor Shepler said, “I was really impressed with how generous my colleagues were and how quickly they managed to fill up the barrel with books. Some of them donated copies of books they themselves had authored, hoping that Sierra Leonean students would contact them if they were interested in the topics covered.”

The Gretchen Walsh Book Donation Award pays for the shipment of books to African institutions with whom members of the ASA have working relationships. The award was announced on November 23, 2019 at the annual meeting of the ASA held in Boston, Massachusetts.