A delegation of ten CUNY librarians and archivists, representing CUNY colleges, Centro and the Dominican Studies Institute spent a week in La Habana meeting with Cuban colleagues in leading positions and other cultural officials. This journey, a unique educational opportunity, came as a result of the USA and Cuba’s normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The experience allowed the group to travel to the island and initiate a dialogue about the resources and services CUNY provides to their respective constituents. The delegation shared information about the professional formation and training in the field, current physical and technological conditions in CUNY facilities, ongoing and recently finished projects.

The journey was organized by the delegation’s leader Kenneth Schlesinger, Chief Librarian at Lehman College and co-leaders Sarah Aponte from the Dominican Studies Institute and Tess Tobin from City Tech. While in Cuba, the group met with high ranking officials and supporting staff from the most prestigious libraries and archives in La Habana: Universidad de La Habana, Casa de las Américas, Jose Martí National Library, Biblioteca Pública Provincial Rubén Martínez Villena, Cuba National Archives, Museum of Literacy, the Center for Medical Sciences Information, the National Museum of Fine Arts of Havana and the Library of Fine Arts. Centro’s Senior Archivist, Pedro Juan Hernández, mentioned that “they were generous with their time and candid to the many questions that we posed. Also, they were very interested and eager in learning about the City University of New York colleges system.”
Hernández also notes that, “Some of these national institutions are struggling with limited staff, and other budgetary problems and issues; technological challenges; and lack of appropriate equipment and software; and they are dealing with a high demand to digitize collections, keeping up with the expectations, and providing other services they are responsible for. As these institutions have different goals and missions, and provide services to different and broader audiences, they helped us understand how diverse information centers operate in the country too. Despite the problems they are facing, it became evident to us that they are dedicated and passionate professionals. They are a source of inspiration and excellent role models in the field. Without exception, all of the Cuban librarians, archivists and scholars we met were very warm and receptive to establish future exchange programs or work in collaborative projects.”

This visit provided a unique opportunity to start conversations about potential collaborative projects and exchanges between Cubans and CUNY professionals in the information services.