University Library Service Dedicated to Distance Teaching: The University of South Africa Experience

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ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES the role of the library at the University of South Africa (Unisa), one of the prominent libraries of South Africa in distance education. Unisa is totally devoted to serving off-campus students and has to cope with special conditions peculiar to the South African education environment. The article discusses a variety of services provided by the Unisa library to off-campus users. Identification of the users' library and information needs, and setting of clear objectives as to how the library should meet these needs has been a challenge. A user-education program has been devised and is being considered for implementation sometime this year.

THE CHALLENGE

All libraries aim to provide the best possible service to their users. In this endeavor they all have to cope with more or less the same challenges, the primary cause of which, it is generally agreed, is inadequate funding. The identification of the users' library and information needs, and the setting of clear objectives as to how the library aims to meet these needs is of crucial importance.

This article describes the way in which the library of the University of South Africa has been trying to meet these challenges. Unisa is entirely devoted to distance teaching and has no "on-campus" students. In addition to the problems experienced by all "regular" universities, the Unisa library also faces those specific to distance teaching institutions, such as the fact that the student is separated

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both from lecturers and from all the other facilities that a university provides. In the South African context, this problem is compounded because of the relatively large area over which students are distributed, not only within South Africa but also outside its borders. A further aggravation is that, although a fair number of students live in the few large urban areas, a considerable number are dispersed throughout rural areas and cut off from such basic modern facilities as electricity.

Many students do not have ready access to library services of any kind, much less those which could provide a service at a level required for basic undergraduate university studies. As a result, Unisa is obliged to provide a full library service to its students instead of relying largely on public and other libraries, as generally is the case elsewhere.

The University of South Africa must also cope with a number of conditions which are peculiar to the South African environment. In the first place the country is multilingual, with English and Afrikaans as the two official languages. These are, however, supplemented by a large number of African and Indian as well as European languages. The major problem, however, is the combination of first and third world conditions. Although the university has always been open to all, it has, until recently, provided mainly for the needs of the white population. As the number of blacks (including Asians and Coloureds) completing their secondary education has increased, so the number of black students at Unisa has also risen to a point where, in 1989, they outnumbered white students for the first time. The challenge to the university is that these students come from a third world background and are often the first generation in their family to be educated to this level. The combination of a poor education system and third world living conditions results in students who lack the abilities, knowledge, and insight which would be expected of a first world university student.

UNISA AND TERTIARY EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In 1873, the University of the Cape of Good Hope was founded as the parent institution for a number of university colleges. It extended its responsibility to the whole of the country in 1916 when it became the University of South Africa. The original colleges gradually developed into autonomous universities. During the 1950s, a number of ethnic university colleges were started by the government which similarly developed under Unisa's guidance into full-fledged universities. As Unisa's responsibility was mainly supervision of academic standards and the granting of degrees, no library service was provided at this stage. Once the last of the original universities was on the way to attaining autonomy, the university gave

consideration to its own future. Apart from its role as a federal university for the constituent university colleges, students not belonging to any of the colleges had always been allowed to write Unisa examinations. Under Section 18 of Act 12 of 1916 the University of South Africa was, in fact, legally bound "to make provision for examining every...student...not a student at a constituent college" (Boucher, 1973, p. 193). By 1944, more than 3,000 such external candidates had enrolled. The university provided examination facilities but no tuition. A number of commercial correspondence colleges emerged to cater for this need, but the quality of their work was cause for constant concern. A report by A. J. H. van der Walt recommended:

> [t]hat the aims of the University, namely, to ensure a satisfactory training for external students, thereby safeguarding the standard of the degrees, and to serve the general interests of university education, could best be realised by the institution of a Department of External Studies to undertake the training of students in the faculties where this is practicable. (Boucher, 1973, p. 216)

Despite strong opposition from the commercial colleges, as well as from within the federal university itself, the Higher Education Amendment Act, which promulgated the establishment of a Division of External Studies, received the assent of the governor-general on May 8, 1946. This signaled Unisa's transformation into a distance teaching university, but things did not go smoothly at the start. Initially the tuition offered by Unisa was optional and had to compete with that provided by commercial firms. During 1947, about one-third of those registered for examination purposes, or 1,250 students, enrolled for tuition. Significant numbers from all population groups were included in this figure (Boucher, 1973, p. 242).

As correspondence courses for a university education were at that time virtually unknown, at least in this part of the world, a lot of skepticism had to be overcome. In order to counter this, high standards were set from the beginning. Whereas the university had in the past been responsible for the standards of teaching and examination at its constituent colleges, it now used representatives of those same colleges, now autonomous universities, on its senate and study committees to supervise its own work.

Unisa had to struggle for acceptance and recognition during those early years, but a good indicator of its success in this regard was the steady increase in student numbers. By 1955, more than 75 percent of the students registered for examinations were also making use of the tuition offered by the university (Boucher, 1973, p. 286). By 1960, more than 90 percent of approximately 10,000 students received tuition, the annual growth rate was exceeding 10 percent and "there was no doubt that the institution was proving most valuable in

exploiting the nations untapped intellectual potential" (Boucher, 1973, p. 312). In 1962, enrollment was made compulsory, and from 1964 all students registered for examinations were obliged to receive their tuition through the university.

> With this amendment to the statute, lecturers were able to bring greater pressure to bear upon candidates for university examinations through the introduction of compulsory assignments of work. Learning could thus be directed to greater purpose and the gulf between student and teacher narrowed. It was a change long overdue. (Boucher, 1973, p. 333)

Although financial support from the government had gradually been increasing, it was not until 1966 that the university was treated in the same manner as other universities, with only some minor modifications in respect to its nonresidential character (Boucher, 1973, p. 334). This step can be seen as an initial high point in the university's journey toward recognition: its academic standing, together with its enrollment, have in fact increased since then. The improved financial situation has resulted in a number of important developments which have made Unisa a major force in South African tertiary education during the last twenty years. Improved finances have had a significant impact on Unisa's library services which from the inception of distance education in 1947 had been struggling along.

Boucher (1973) summarizes the early years of the library's development as follows:

> One of the first problems facing the Division of External Studies was the provision of adequate library facilities for students, many of whom lived far from Pretoria and all of whom, in the immediate post-war years, were faced with the chronic shortage of suitable text books. Both a loan library and a reference library would be needed. Arrangements were also made with the Department of Union Education to build up the holdings of its library on Church Square so that external students could use it for reference purposes. However, the scheme did not prove satisfactory and before long the reference section was brought under the control of the Division of External Studies itself. It was the beginning of the library as we know it today and, as the Librarian, H. O. K. Zastrau, pointed out in 1951, the new comprehensive library system gave every student the assurance that all his needs were cared for by a single authority. (p. 248)

The exceptional growth of the university to over 100,000 students in 1989 is clearly illustrated from the following table (University of South Africa. Bureau for Management Information, 1989, p. 2.1):

TABLE 1

Years	White	%	Coloured	%	Black	%	Asian	%	Total
1960	7,923	80	235	2	1,145	12	624	6	9,927
1970	17,870	82	582	3	2,420	11	1,014	5	21,886
1980	37,520	67	2,822	5	10,687	19	5,145	9	56,174
1985	46,281	61	3,872	5	17,556	23	8,210	11	75,919
1989	53,740	50	5,019	5	39,395	37	9,678	9	107,832

The table also shows that while the growth in the number of white students has, in line with demographic trends, slowed down, the number of black students has increased sharply. Many black leaders, including those of states bordering South Africa, have obtained their academic qualifications at Unisa. In spite of strong anti-South African feelings, Unisa has several thousand students in African states. Although the university does not encourage overseas students, during 1989 it had significant numbers of students from all the continents.

Unisa courses are offered in both official languages, and all course material, administrative publications, and publicity material have to be made available in both languages. As a result, the university has an extensive editorial and translation department. In 1989, 72.5 percent of students were enrolled in courses presented in English and 27.5 percent in courses in Afrikaans. An analysis of the students' home languages shows a much more complicated picture since more than one-third of the students are studying in a language other than their home language which manifestly adds to the students' as well as the university's problems (University of South Africa. Bureau for Management Information, 1990, p. 1).

The following figures may be of interest

Number of examination centers	457
Number of different examination papers	2,150
Number of teaching departments	57
Average age (students)	33
Teaching and research staff	1,392
Nonteaching staff	1,839
Female students (percentage)	47%
Physically handicapped	725

Of the total of 108,372 students, 8,198 were registered for nondegree purposes, 94,273 for bachelors degrees, 7,149 for diplomas, 2,392 for masters, and 578 for doctoral degrees (University of South Africa. Bureau for Management Information, 1989, p. 1.1). The enrollment was spread over the six faculties as follows:

Nondegree registration	8,198
Economic and management sciences	32,563
Arts	48,218
Science	6,227
Education	4,763
Law	7,135
Theology	1,268 (p. 3.55)

At the end of 1972, the university moved into a new more extensive campus on the outskirts of Pretoria. The physical development plan for the campus has since been revised twice and at present provides for the staff space necessary for the instruction of a maximum of 160,000 students. This is felt to be the limit as to what can be handled on the present campus and at the regional offices which have been developed in Durban, Cape Town, and Pietersburg. It should, however, be noted that the university's previous limits on growth have been adjusted, mainly as a result of the introduction of technological developments particularly in the field of computerization. These have enabled the university administration to expedite the time-consuming process of registering large numbers of students by post, as well as the compilation of an increasingly complex examination roster and the processing of examination results.

During this period, the library has developed from one of the smallest university libraries in South Africa to by far the largest. From the beginning, however, the main concern has been not so much with the size of the collection but rather the quality of the service. Until the mid-1960s, funding provided only for the acquisition of the most basic publications required by lecturers and students.

However, the subsidy formula for university libraries is based on a fixed amount per FTE (full-time equivalent) student, with a special provision of twenty times that amount for increases in student numbers (Willemse, 1986, p. 44). The continuous growth in student numbers has thus enabled the Unisa library to expand its collections quite rapidly over the last few years. It has become a major research facility of well over 1 million volumes concentrated in a relatively limited number of subject areas. These exclude all the expensive technologies and the applied sciences.

The library's growth has been so rapid that the second new building, occupied in 1972, had to be abandoned for a much larger building in 1987. The latter can, at present, house 2 million volumes but is designed to accommodate more than 4 million when fully utilized (De Beer, 1989, p. 105). In line with the library's dedication to service, the library staff attempted to ensure that during the move the service to the user would not be seriously disrupted. With the

assistance of rented transport and additional laborers, they planned and conducted the move themselves over a period of two weeks (De Jager & Malan, 1989, p. 122).

TRENDS AFFECTING THE FUTURE

The university has found it increasingly difficult to cope with the size of the annual increase in student numbers—around 10,000 per annum—particularly with regard to space for staff.

Following a world trend, subsidies to South African universities have been cut back during recent years. Limits have also been set by the government on the annual growth rate in the number of undergraduate students, in Unisa's case a figure of 3 percent. This means that while the university's enrollment may grow at more than 3 percent, it will not receive a subsidy on the number of students in excess of this amount. In light of the prevailing subsidy cutbacks, most universities have taken the obvious step of raising their entrance levels. Unisa did not consider such a step either appropriate or acceptable as its black students would be the most seriously affected.

The university has recently given considerable attention to strategic planning and has, as a result, formulated the following mission statement:

> The University of South Africa is an equal education and equal opportunity tertiary educational institution which provides highly trained academic and professional manpower, with the ultimate aim of assisting to satisfy the social, economic and cultural needs of Southern Africa. This is effected mainly through distance education, primarily in this region, through the medium of either Afrikaans or English. To this end it:
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> ● offers internationally recognised university education to suitably qualified persons;
> ● conducts sponsored and non-sponsored research and development;
> ● provides non-formal and other university supported training programmes;
> ● places the University's expertise and other resources at the disposal of the community. (University of South Africa, 1989, p. 4)

Means were sought to limit the university's growth rate, which has in the past averaged almost 10 percent per annum, to the desired 3 percent, while at the same time upholding the mission statement. While it was acknowledged that students with poor school grades had distinctly lower pass rates than students with better grades, it was also noted that a significant percentage of students with poor grades did, through perseverance and hard work, manage to pass. The university considered it essential that all students should be allowed the opportunity to study. Those with a poor secondary school record are allowed to register for a limited number of courses, usually one or two in the first year. If the student manages to pass, he is

then allowed to reregister for one course more than the number which he passed. A student who fails to pass any courses is, however, refused reregistration (University of South Africa, 1989, p. 41).

The above approach, which was introduced during 1989, allows the successful student to proceed, while it eliminates at an early stage those who cannot manage to pass even a limited number of courses at one time. The effect during the first year was that, despite a 9 percent increase in the total number of students, the FTE component increased by only 3.4 percent.

In a recent report of the Committee of University Principals, it is acknowledged that Unisa's mode of distance teaching is more cost effective and concludes that distance teaching should be a major part of a future program to bring the education of the developing component of the South African population up to parity (Komitee van Universiteitshoofde, 1987, pp. 47, 49).

The program described above, together with other moves made by the university, will, it is hoped, increase its cost effectiveness even more. The Committee of University Principals has recognized this fact and has recommended that other universities make use of the distance teaching mode in order to keep down the costs of higher education and to make it available to as many students as possible (Committee of University Principals, 1987, pp. 28, 39).

The Unisa library has, over the past few years, also focused on plans to increase its own effectiveness and efficiency (Willemse, 1989, p. 265). Assisted by colleagues of the University's School for Business Leadership, the library has been engaged in a process to set clear goals and objectives which will replace its original vague aim to offer the best possible service (Willemse, 1987, p. 270). The library's most recent mission statement aims and objectives read as follows:

Mission
The Department of Library Services, as a service organisation, furthers the mission of the University of South Africa by:
—providing information resources to meet the information needs for study, teaching (particularly distance teaching) and research programmes
—promoting the effective use of library services and information resources
—making the various resources of the Department of Library Services available to the wider community, where necessary.

Aims
—to support present and future research and teaching by the selective acquisition, cataloguing and storage of information resources required for this purpose, and to make these available
—to assist researchers, lecturers and post-graduate students in the identification of and access to relevant resources or information

—to assist students registered for structured courses by the timely
    provision of the necessary recommended literature
—to familiarise students, lecturers and researchers of the
    University with the use of the library and of library resources
—to cooperate with other libraries in the collection and provision
    of information resources in the national interest and also for
    its own benefit
—to make the library's resources available to research communi-
    ties other than the University, or those with which the library
    has reciprocal user agreements, selectively and on a cost-
    recovery basis
—to manage the library in a cost-effective way.

Long term objectives

Effective document delivery:

The maximum quantity of recommended literature for study and
    teaching, and information resources for research activities must,
    upon request, be available and retrievable.
Information resources which are not available upon request will
    be supplied, where feasible, as fast as possible.
The ability of students, lecturers and researchers to use the library
    independently and to maximally utilise its resources must be
    developed.

Effective provision of information:

To answer, upon request, the greatest possible percentage of
    bibliographic and information enquiries accurately and
    quickly.

In order to determine whether the library is approaching its ideal
of optimum performance, it has been necessary to formulate
measurable objectives within the context of the library's aims. It was
decided to develop performance measures which would determine
the effectiveness of the document delivery service since this was
considered to be of the utmost importance and absorbs a major part
of the library's financial and human resources (De Beer, 1986, p. 2).

The project has lead to increased insight into the nature of the
objectives and has provided the opportunity for continuous
refinement. Although members of staff are still not entirely happy
with the objectives, it is generally accepted that it is better to have
objectives which are approximately correct than to have none at all.
Regular surveys have been carried out to determine the success rate
of the document delivery system. Since the survey results also provide
an indication of the reasons for the failures, efforts to improve
performance can be directed to those areas which are the cause of
most of the failures.

During 1989, the library was able to provide 81 percent of the
known publications required by its users, with figures varying
between 78.7 percent and 87.9 percent for the four quarterly surveys.

Analysis of the failures (100 percent) indicates that only 14.4 percent involved publications which the library did not possess. The greater percentage of failures (31.6 percent) was due to books being out on loan. Significantly, however, of the books which users were unable to obtain, 23.4 percent were found to be available on the shelves by the library staff. The inability of users to locate required materials in the library is now receiving serious consideration, as will be discussed later. A further 3.8 percent of the failures were due to publications which were either missing or in processing. In 26.7 percent of the cases, the information supplied was, unfortunately, insufficient to determine the reason for failure.

A number of other performance measures for evaluating library services from the users' perspective have been developed (De Beer & Malan, 1989, p. 1) or are still receiving consideration (Dalton, 1988, p. 28). So far the measurement of the information function on a continuous basis has not been satisfactorily solved despite various attempts.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY AND THE LIBRARY

With the exception of research-related courses, virtually all courses use printed study guides. Study guides take the place of formal lectures such as those given at residential South African universities. When used together with the prescribed books that students have to buy for themselves, they contain the framework of the course content with which the students have to become familiar. Study guides for a subject are usually revised during a three year cycle so that, apart from courses which need more regular revision, a study guide is valid for three years. Guidance to students is provided by way of study letters. Study letters include, among other things, advice to students on ways of planning their studies for the year as well as the details of study tasks or assignments that students have to complete. Assignments serve a number of functions. They pace and monitor students through their work and constitute the only available gauge for measuring the development of the critical and analytical skills that are an essential part of a university education.

As many of Unisa's students live hundreds of kilometers from libraries of any reasonable size, the lecturer responsible for an assignment usually recommends a number of titles which the student should consult to supplement the information he obtains from the study guide and prescribed textbooks. These titles, known as recommended literature, are available from the Study Collection of the Unisa library. Shillinglaw (1988) states that:

> The reading programme is the centre of the teaching/learning process for most of Unisa's structured undergraduate and post-graduate courses. The success of the learning process, and, indeed, the ability to earn

the credit points needed to gain entry to the examination, are often
crucially dependent on access to books from the library. Problems
surrounding the supply of library materials to students of structured
courses are, therefore, of vital importance to teachers and students in
achieving their objectives, as well as to the library. (p. 17)

From the outset, it has been the library's primary responsibility
to provide the recommended literature needed by students, and this
is obviously the most actively used part of the library collection.
Although quite a number of students manage to visit the library
or its branches, many of the requests for literature are received by
post. Books are sent to students by certified mail at the library's cost
but have to be returned by the students at their own cost.
Undergraduate students can borrow eight books at a time while
postgraduate students may have sixteen. All material is sent by
certified mail which allows nonreceipt to be verified, since in case
of loss the postal authorities must carry the replacement cost.
Examination results are withheld until all library materials have been
returned.

As the provision of recommended literature is such an essential
part of the library service, considerable thought has gone into the
development of this service and many changes have been made over
the years. During the early 1960s student numbers increased and the
number of requests, particularly by post, soared. As money became
more freely available, an increasing number of copies of each title
could be bought. In order to process requests as quickly as possible,
it was decided to keep all recommended literature in a separate Study
Collection. This had the added advantage that staff could obtain
some feedback, for duplication purposes, on the use made of
individual titles. In order to provide students with required literature,
the library has two tasks. First, it has to obtain information on the
recommended literature from the lecturers early enough for orders
to be placed and delivered in time. Second, it has to decide on the
correct number of copies to be bought. In practice this has not been
as easy as it seems.

Lecturers were initially requested to supply the library, a few
months before the start of the academic year, with a list of books
which they would be recommending. A major problem with this
approach was that lecturers did not take cognizance of the books
already in the Study Collection and recommended different titles each
year. As the library could not afford to duplicate its stock in this
way, the Senate determined that a recommended title should be used
for a minimum period of three years to coincide with the normal
life span of a study guide. To assist lecturers, a course list of
recommended texts was provided for each department (first by way
of photocopied catalog cards and later by computer), with indications

as to the number of copies and the years for which the books had been recommended in the past. Lecturers could then simply indicate which titles were to be eliminated from the list and had only to supply information on any new titles to be added.

In spite of the above, study letters continued to refer to literature which had not been on the list supplied to the library. As all efforts to eliminate this problem failed, the Senate eventually agreed that information on assignments, together with the lists of recommended literature, had to be included in the first study letter for each course. As these study letters have to be handed in for translation, typing, and reproduction three to four months before the new academic year, it was further agreed that they should first be evaluated by the library. This arrangement ensures that the library is fully informed of the literature needs of students via the same source used to inform the students. Inconsistencies in bibliographic references, which used to cause serious problems for students using other libraries, can be rectified at the same time. A serious disadvantage of this procedure is that the ordering process and the evaluating of the study letters must be handled at great speed, since it takes, on average, three to four months for books to be delivered. As some of the more advanced courses may include various options, about 1,500 study letters have to be processed annually within a very short time. In a number of cases they have to be referred back to the lecturers because the information provided is insufficient, or when it has been established that the library will not be able to obtain a recommended title.

As some of the more popular courses have an enrollment of over a thousand students, it is essential that recommended literature should be readily available. Although it has not been easy to convince the academics, the Senate has eventually agreed to a number of pragmatic decisions. For example, out-of-print materials, including theses, may only be recommended if permission can be obtained to reproduce the required number of copies. In the case of journal articles, a standard procedure has been developed to obtain permission, with or without payment of royalties, and to copy and bind together all articles pertaining to a course, or a part of a course, in so-called "books of readings."

Extensive duplication is required for some courses to provide for the increasing demand. Unexpected increases in course enrollments can result in books not being available in sufficient quantities. The library has experimented with the use of microfiche as an alternative. Although this was relatively successful, the problems encountered in obtaining copyright permission and the lack of suitable low cost microfiche readers resulted in this experiment eventually being terminated (Willemse, 1974, pp. 26-29).

A few years ago the number of titles recommended per course had to be limited, originally to keep the reading requirements of students within bounds. More recently, however, it has become necessary to enforce these limitations in order to keep the total literature provision within the financial means of the library. The agreed norm is ten titles for a first year course, twenty for the second, and thirty for the third year. An increase in these totals may be considered by the deans after consultation with the library.

The library's buying power has been seriously eroded of late by the weakening of South African currency as well as the steep increases worldwide in book prices and journal subscriptions. The library is now able to buy only half as many book titles as it could at the beginning of the 1980s while it has to serve more than double the number of students. A number of teaching departments are now looking at limiting book provision in the first year to one book of readings which will contain carefully selected literature. Such a book could be sent to all students upon registration and be used by them during the full academic year. This would solve the problem of students who wait until the last moment to request books and are indignant when the library is unable to supply a copy until after the due date of the assignment has passed. Publishers have so far been most cooperative in making available out-of-print material. Whether they will be as willing to allow publications which are in print to be made accessible in this way has yet to be seen. The cost implications have also still to be determined.

Apart from the prescribed books which students have to buy for themselves, and the recommended books supplied by the Study Collection of the library, lecturers may also include a list of additional reading in either the study guide or the study letter. At least one copy of each title is ordered where the book is commercially available, but the library does not normally go to any great lengths to pursue the more elusive items which do appear on these lists. Experience has shown that only the most outstanding students, or those with ample time on their hands, request these books.

THE PROBLEM OF PROVIDING THE
CORRECT NUMBER OF COPIES

To provide a library service in a distance teaching situation requires extensive duplication, as postal dispatch means long loan periods. Whereas a few copies of a title on a short loan basis in a residential university library will supply the needs of many students, Unisa can seldom extract more than two to three postal loans from

each copy for an individual assignment. In the most popular courses, as many as 900 copies of a title have to be bought in order to supply the demand.

In order to eliminate postal delays as much as possible, branch libraries of the Study Collection, which stock copies of books for the more popular courses, have been established in a number of large urban areas (Cape Town, Durban, Windhoek, East London, and Pietersburg). Titles not in stock may be requested via the online computer system or by telex from Pretoria. A Study Centre with 350 seats has been opened in Johannesburg where books are available for reference only. There is a daily delivery service from Pretoria of books not available in the Study Centre or required for loan.

Limited financial resources necessitate a careful duplication policy. The library can ill afford to waste money by purchasing too many copies, whereas the acquisition of too few copies results in students being hampered in their studies. Early experience demonstrated that lecturers were poor advisers on the quantities needed as they optimistically believed that every student would request every title on the list from the Unisa library services. A fair number of students do, however, have access to other libraries which have copies of titles recommended by Unisa in stock, while some students unfortunately neither read nor do the assignments.

The library's staff have, as a result, had to take full responsibility for book ordering. Many factors are taken into account. The enrollment for a course is of primary importance, and the growth expected for each new year has to be estimated in advance, which is not an easy task. Although the university's growth has averaged 10 percent per annum, it has fluctuated from zero to 20 percent, with even greater variations in the rates for individual courses. Furthermore, demand is influenced by other factors such as the type of course and the requirements of the lecturer, the time of the year (far fewer requests are received for books for assignments that do not count toward examination admission), as well as the student composition.

The administration of the circulation system was computerized in 1967 in order to obtain historical data on usage as a guide to ordering (Willemse, 1969, p. 102). Although the initial batch system was far from perfect, it allowed the small staff to update the catalog of 10,000 recommended titles in two months, to order the required number of copies in time for the new academic year, and at the same time to produce a regularly updated microfiche catalog for all branches (Willemse, 1971, p. 99). At a later date, an enhanced version was implemented on the online ALIS system. ALIS had the added advantage that up-to-date information on holdings and availability

in the Study Collection in Pretoria, as well as in the various branches, could be made available throughout the system. During the last three years the library has been cooperating with the university's Department of Computer Services in the development of its own library system, UNIS. The Study Collection's special requirements have been taken into account and a reasonably sophisticated module now produces a recommended order list per course based on available information. Further refinements are being investigated.

Recommended literature consists mainly of standard commercial publications which have been verified as being in print so that it is cause for serious concern that, notwithstanding the special arrangements made with suppliers for the speedy processing of orders, most take two to three months to arrive and up to 25 percent of the orders are still outstanding after 120 days.

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SKILLS

For many years the library has accepted that, given its role in a distance teaching university, its predominant responsibility toward students was the supply of recommended literature. With the increase in the number of students from environments where library services are either very poor or nonexistent, the library has been made increasingly aware of the fact that many of its students do not know how to use libraries or their resources. The availability surveys provided confirmation of a suspicion that students were unable to find material independently in the library, even within the simplified arrangement of the Study Collection. Librarians from other libraries where Unisa students tried to obtain their recommended literature have also commented on the students' ignorance in the use of the catalog and other resources. More seriously still, complaints have been received from lecturers at other universities where Unisa graduates enrolled for postgraduate qualifications, that these students did not have the necessary library and information skills (Williams, 1986, p. 8). The library has, therefore, started to give serious attention to this, and has experimented with various ways and means to orient and instruct students in library use (Williams, 1989, p. 206).

In 1985, a post dedicated to the provision of education in the use of the library was approved, and, since 1986, attempts have been made to identify an appropriate methodology to teach library skills to students.

During 1986-87, in conjunction with study group visits, orientation lectures were offered to 1,745 students in selected first-year courses. This small-scale experiment demonstrated that an initial group visit to the university campus could be used to provide students with a basic introduction to the library service, provided that this

did not impinge on the time of the teaching staff. As it was impossible
for only one staff member to make the program available to all study
groups, it was decided that a short audiovisual program on the library
might provide a solution. A ten minute slide/tape program was,
therefore, produced to coincide with the move into the new library
building. Between 1988-89 this program was shown to 11,973
undergraduate students attending study group visits at Unisa.

There are many advantages in presenting library orientation by
this means. Separate English and Afrikaans versions can be provided.
Many copies are available so that the program may be shown
simultaneously to a number of groups. It is flexible in that the number
of viewers is immaterial and also portable, enabling it to be taken
to venues outside Pretoria, and copies are also available at branch
libraries. It can be shown at a time which suits the teaching staff,
either before or after a lecture, or during a break, thereby saving
the time of teaching and library staff. This program will be revised
in 1990.

During 1987, a workbook explaining the use of the library was
produced and posted to 5,493 students in selected first year courses.
The use of this workbook was not continued because it could not
be proved experimentally that it improved the students' knowledge
of library procedures.

From 1987 to 1989, at the request of teaching departments, the
library staff also organized workshop sessions which took place during
study group visits, on the literature of various subjects, for 398 third
and fourth year as well as honors students. Without exception,
students expressed great appreciation at being shown how to use
the catalog, how to use indexing and abstracting tools, as well as
the means to trace periodical articles.

In addition, during 1987 and 1989, pamphlets were distributed
on various aspects of how to use the library. In 1988, a library guidance
system, consisting of colored floor plans and shelf guides, was
installed. A video on how to obtain books from the Study Collection
was produced and shown continuously during 1988. Despite these
efforts, it is recognized that many students still cannot locate the
material they seek even when multiple copies are available on library
shelves.

Most of the methods employed so far have only benefited those
students who have visited the university or its branch offices during
group visits. It is now imperative that a methodology be developed
which will help all students. Learning how to use the library
effectively should not only increase the students' chances of academic
achievement but should also provide them with a lifelong advantage.

An investigation during 1987 by the Unisa Bureau for Management Information into the results achieved by students who attended library orientation lectures and received the workbook seemed to indicate that these students were more likely to become library users (University of South Africa. Bureau for Management Information, 1987, p. 1). They were also more likely to write and pass their examinations (p. 7).

As a result, the following plan to teach library skills to Unisa students from 1991 onward is currently under consideration:

—Library skills workbooks are to be developed by a multidisciplinary team of librarians, educational technologists, and other consultants. The workbooks will explain how to use library catalogs, reference works, and periodicals.
—The workbooks will be developed over a period of years on four levels. Levels 1 and 2 will be distributed to undergraduate students, and levels 3 and 4 are intended for honors and other postgraduate students.
—At levels 1 and 2, one workbook will be developed for all courses. The workbooks will be distributed to students upon registration for a particular degree or diploma along with their other tutorial matter. Upon the first release of a workbook, it will be distributed not only to the students at that particular level, but also to those beyond that level. At levels 3 and 4 the workbooks will deal with the reference sources of particular subjects.
—A form of testing, preferably a self-test, is at present being investigated.
—In addition to the workbooks, audiovisual programs and literature seminars will be offered on the campus to students who are able to attend.

It is debatable whether the proposal will provide a complete solution. It is hoped that it will contribute significantly to making students more library and information literate. At the same time, other alternatives, including the use of appropriate technology, will be investigated in order to overcome the serious limitations posed by distance education.

LIBRARY SERVICES FOR RESEARCH

Unisa has a prominent role to play in the advancement of research, particularly in the humanities, and in the training of competent business leaders and managers for a developing South Africa.

The Unisa library is currently providing considerable support to university research. This includes the needs of more than 3,000 master's and doctoral students and the university's almost 1,400

teaching and research staff. Unisa has, in addition, over twenty specialized research centers, bureaus, and institutes, and some teaching departments boast more postgraduate students than the total number in that discipline registered at all other South African universities.

In considering how best to provide for the researchers' needs, it was accepted that these were unique and largely unpredictable, as the topics to be researched can be any aspect of the subject areas covered by the university. The library obviously endeavors to obtain for its own collection as many of the publications that might be required as possible. As was explained earlier, it does accept that it will only be able to acquire a fraction of those published on any subject. The researcher, however, ideally needs to become familiar with all the available knowledge relevant to his topic of research so that he/she can progress from there. Due to the great costs involved in research, it is particularly important that this information is made available in a timely manner, in order to speed up research and to prevent costly and unnecessary duplication.

The library's alternative to acquiring all the needed information sources has been the acquisition of, or access to, those bibliographical tools—printed or electronic—that make it possible to identify the relevant publications available on any given topic. The library has further developed its interlibrary loan service to such an extent that it can obtain those required publications not available in its own collections with the minimum of delay. Few users, including members of the academic staff, are fully acquainted with the use of these bibliographical tools and are certainly not as knowledgeable as experienced librarians. This is, thus, an area in which the library can make an important contribution.

As each researcher has unique library and information needs, the library has built up a comprehensive subject reference staff consisting of sixteen subject reference librarians, each supported by an assistant, who provide an individualized service to researchers. The subject reference librarians will undertake literature surveys and provide bibliographies of existing publications on any research topic requested. This service is available free of charge to all staff and postgraduate students. The online costs, too, are borne by the library, although the library does not undertake specific computerized literature searches on request. The library's point of view is that it provides an information service and the library staff decides which source is the most appropriate to use. As the users do not contribute to the very high costs of some of the printed bibliographies, it seems inappropriate to make them pay for the online service.

The development of the service has been fully described (Poller et al., 1988, p. 9) and compared (Colenbrander, 1984, p. 24) with

others elsewhere. It is, in many respects, not unique to distance teaching. Although it is regarded as essential that students undertake their own literature searching, this is regarded as impossible for many. As has been pointed out by Poller (1988, p. 27), many of the students are employed full time, are often already in senior or managerial positions, and simply do not have easy access to the Unisa library or to any other adequate reference collection. The subject reference librarians do, therefore, also assist students in this respect. The bibliographies supplied by the library to students are of a nonselective nature so that the student has to make his own choices. The negative side is that, once again, the student obtains very limited personal experience in using the bibliographical tools in his subject field. The library compiles fairly broad bibliographies which can often be reused for other students at a later date. Currently, about 4,800 bibliographies are reissued and 800 new bibliographies are produced annually.

For the first three decades of the library's existence, it has concentrated on the development of a basic collection, regarded as essential for teaching purposes. Substantial effort has been expended on identifying and trying to obtain the core material needed. As student numbers have grown and the budget for acquisitions has increased steadily, attention has gradually been given to the acquisition of more specialized materials. The most recently available statistics (1988), produced by the Inter-University Library Committee of the Committee of University Principals, indicate that, of the subject categories indicated in the report, Unisa ranks first in thirteen out of twenty-three for books and seventh out of twenty-three for periodicals (Komitee van Universiteitshoofde, 1989, pp. 33A, 36A). The Unisa library has thus become one of the major suppliers to the interlibrary loan system.

The comprehensive library service to support teaching and research at the university is, therefore, also of benefit to researchers elsewhere in South Africa. In 1988, the Unisa library received over 35,000 requests for material required by libraries on the subcontinent of which 23,000 items were supplied. To meet the needs of the university's own researchers, 13,730 items were requested from other libraries. Of these, 10,144 were requested from local libraries and 85.9 percent were, on average, made available within twenty-one days. The British Library provided 79.5 percent of requests sent to them in an average of twenty-nine days. This performance is very favorable compared with publications obtained from libraries elsewhere in the world where 89 percent of 1,535 requests took an average of 91.4 days to arrive.

LIBRARY SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY

Apart from the normal interlibrary loan activities, the library accepts lecturers, researchers, and postgraduate students from other tertiary educational institutions, as well as users of other institutions with which it has reciprocal arrangements. This is in line with the mutual agreement of the Inter University Library Committee. As the library collection has grown in size, use by members of other institutions has increased to such an extent that it has started causing problems, and control of access to the library has had to be instituted. Bonafide researchers from organizations, other than those with which reciprocal arrangements exist, can obtain access at a cost equivalent to the registration fee for one course (1989 = R300 or about $120). The funds thus generated become available to the library and can be used to supplement the limited staff provision in areas where this is required most.

CONCLUSION

This article has endeavored to describe the essential aspects of the Unisa library for providing good service in the context of distance education. The library is, at the same time, also contributing to the strengthening of library facilities in the country as a whole. The major emphasis in the future will be placed on the improvement of its essential services and the elimination of existing weaknesses.

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