

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN THE SECOND DECADE OF DEMOCRACY: CRITICAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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1. INTRODUCTION

For South Africa, the political transition from a regime shaped by four decades of apartheid policies and brutal oppression, to a democratic society that embraces diversity, social justice and human rights demanded multiple coordinated interventions combined with political will, extensive resources, sustained commitment and courage to change mindsets, systems and institutions.

As will be shown in this chapter, the higher education sector and academic libraries did not escape the historical baggage of apartheid and separate development. In post-1994 South Africa, one of the most significant areas of “driven transition” was higher education, where the size and shape of the sector were radically transformed during the first ten years of freedom.

The chapter attempts to cover three broad themes. The first one looks at the South African higher education and academic library sector against the background of four decades of apartheid legacy and the national imperatives that drove the agenda-setting for sector reform and restructuring after 1994. The second theme considers the achievements of one-and-a-half decades of democracy, both at the level of national policy within the radically reconfigured higher education landscape. While the national restructuring plan has been fully implemented, it is still too early to evaluate the impact and benefit the “size and shape” reform process has had on South Africa’s academic libraries. The final section, therefore, considers the critical issues and challenges for our academic libraries in the next decade, as they find themselves between national priorities and global forces of technological innovation and increasing demands from their user constituencies.

2. TRANSFORMATION AND RESTRUCTURING IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1 Legacy of the past

During four decades of apartheid rule, the policies and funding across all sectors of society sought to support the development of the minority white population to the exclusion of all other race groups. Apartheid engineered a higher education system separated

by race by means of the Extension of University Education Act in 1959, which barred black students from the historically white institutions. The Act promoted the establishment of segregated universities and the following were established: the Universities of Durban-Westville, Western Cape, Zululand and the North.

At the time of the first democratic elections, South Africa's higher education was described as "a system separated by race and a binary divide between universities and technikons" (IEASA, 2005:19), which also reflected the social inequalities of race, gender and geographic location resulting in the broad characterisation of "historically disadvantaged institutions" (HDIs) and "historically advantaged institutions" (HAIs). The sector was made up of 36 higher education institutions comprising ten universities and seven technikons for whites; eight universities and five technikons for Africans; two universities and technikons for coloureds and Indians; and two open and distance learning institutions.

It was a sector plagued by huge inefficiencies, lack of effectiveness and shortcomings in quality. The challenge that faced the country is reflected in the following statement (CHE, 2000:10):

All higher education institutions are products of segregation and apartheid, of the "geo-political imagination of apartheid planners". It is also beyond dispute that under apartheid certain higher education institutions experienced a history of disadvantage.

2.2 Transformation agenda and national policy framework

In 1994, the need to create and implement an equitable education system was an urgent national imperative. The enormity of this post-apartheid task is captured in the following statement (CHE, 2000:10):

... the apartheid legacy imposes extremely onerous conditions on the process of transformation. The challenges have to be met without becoming paralysed by the legacy of the past. Higher education institutions need to be liberated from such a past to enable them to meet societal needs.

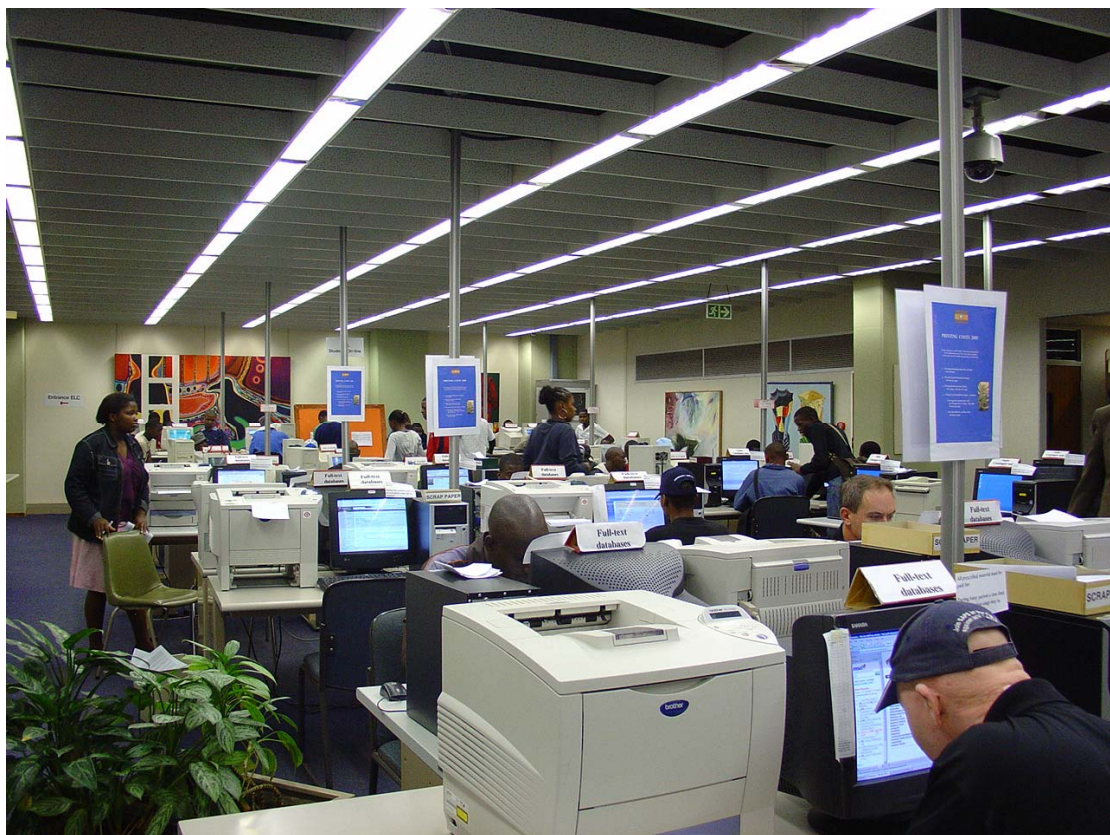
The consequences and difficulties created within the institutions are further elaborated by Badat (2006:6):

We inherited a HE "system" profoundly shaped by social, political and economic inequalities of a class, race, gender, institutional and spatial nature, and in which research and teaching were extensively shaped by the socio-economic and political priorities of apartheid separate development programmes.

Higher education governance was a priority point on the agenda and was addressed through a series of interventions that saw radical changes and the alignment of the institutions with new national goals. These included the 1996 report of the National Commission on Higher Education, followed in 1997 by the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (South Africa, 1997) and the

Higher Education Act, which provides for a national, integrated, coordinated and differentiated higher education system.

By the late 1990s, however, it was clear that the sector had largely failed to realise the goals and desired outcomes envisaged in the White Paper and that institutions were not going to produce meaningful coordination or collaboration if left to themselves. Sadly, the process of reform was stagnating, prompting the government observation that “many of the features of apartheid fragmentation continue within the system and between the institutions” (CHE, 2000:12). In 1999, the Minister of Education declared his intention to review the institutional landscape of higher education in collaboration with the Council on Higher Education (CHE), from which a national plan containing comprehensive proposals for the size and shape of the higher education system would arise.



The information desk of the library of the University of South Africa in Pretoria, one of the largest academic libraries on the continent. The library came into being in 1946 when Unisa adopted distance teaching.

(Courtesy of Unisa)

The Size and Shape of Higher Education Task Team of the CHE issued its seminal report in June 2000. It proposed a new national framework to reconfigure the higher education system “in a principled and imaginative way, more suited to the needs of a democracy and all its citizens, in contrast to the irrational and exclusionary imperatives that shaped large parts of the current system” (CHE, 2000:5).

The 2001 National Plan heralded the government’s intent to break from the inequalities and inefficiencies that continued to plague the higher educational system and

marked the advent of “driven transition” in the sector as radical changes began to take effect, including “stronger state steering, stressed implementation and a shift to the new funding framework, centrally determined programmes and qualification mixes, regional programme collaboration and rationalisation, and mandatory institutional mergers and incorporations” (IEASA, 2005:24).

Table 1: Summary of the new higher education landscape

Category	Institution type	Institution
Traditional universities with strong research capacity and high proportions of postgraduate students	Eight separate and incorporated universities	University of Cape Town (www.uct.ac.za) University of Fort Hare (www.ufh.ac.za) University of the Free State (www.uovs.ac.za) University of Pretoria (www.up.ac.za) Rhodes University (www.ru.ac.za) Stellenbosch University (www.sun.ac.za) University of the Western Cape (www.uwc.ac.za) University of the Witwatersrand (www.wits.ac.za)
	Three merged universities	University of KwaZulu-Natal (www.ukzn.ac.za) University of Limpopo (www.ul.ac.za) North-West University (www.nwu.ac.za)
Universities of technology oriented towards vocational qualifications with some postgraduate and research capacity	Three separate and incorporated universities of technology (formerly technikons)	Central University of Technology (www.cut.ac.za) Mangosuthu Technikon (www.mantec.ac.za) Vaal University of Technology (www.vut.ac.za)
	Three merged universities of technology (formerly technikons)	Cape Peninsula University of Technology (www.cput.ac.za) Durban University of Technology (www.dut.ac.za) Tshwane University of Technology (www.tut.ac.za)
Comprehensives – a new kind of institution, focusing on teaching but also conducting research and postgraduate studies	Two separate comprehensives	University of Venda for Science and Technology (www.univen.ac.za) University of Zululand (www.uzulu.ac.za)
	Four merged comprehensives	University of Johannesburg (www.uj.ac.za) Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (www.nmmu.ac.za) University of South Africa (www.unisa.ac.za) Walter Sisulu University of Technology and Science (www.bortech.ac.za ; www.tktech.ac.za ; www.utr.ac.za)
National institutes	New institutions to serve provinces with no previous higher education service provider	Mpumalanga Institute of Higher Education Northern Cape Institute for Higher Education

Source: Adapted from IEASA (2005:20).

Between 2004 and 2005, South African higher education went through a major restructuring intervention known as “size and shape”, which resulted in a consolidated sector reduced from 36 to 25 institutions through mergers and campus incorporations involving most institutions. Only one institution, Vista University, was dismantled and its multiple campuses around the country were incorporated into other institutions.

2.3 The way ahead in the next decade

It is clear that the transformation agenda will require a significant quantum of public funding to ensure its successful completion. Badat (2006:16) identifies six key areas of higher education that are in need of urgent additional funding:

- the current subsidy, which is inadequate;
- the current investment in the National Student Financial Aid scheme, which must be increased to provide access and equity of opportunity for talented and eligible students from working class and rural poor families;
- academic development initiatives to support students to succeed;
- curriculum innovation, renewal and transformation to enhance the capabilities of institutions to meet the human resource needs of the economy and society;
- the better remuneration of the current generation of academics and the production of the next generation of academics and researchers; and
- capital infrastructure, facilities and equipment.

With the restructuring process well under way in 2006, the Education Ministry released details of a R5.95 billion injection of recapitalisation funding into higher education institutions to be used for refurbishing existing buildings, acquiring new ones, improving teaching, learning and research equipment and library facilities, improving graduate outputs and producing more science, engineering and technology graduates.

An initial funding allocation of R2.1 billion was made to institutions for the period 2002/3 to 2006/7 for direct merger costs, such as the integration of academic and administrative structures, and for upgrading facilities through support for infrastructural development. These funds were also intended to bring a qualifying institution to a level of funding adequate for its operations by, among other things, addressing its debt so that the funds could be allocated elsewhere.

In the period 2007/8 to 2009/10, the balance of the funding, approximately R3.9 billion, will be released to universities for a range of infrastructural projects, based on institutional priorities but subject to approval by the Minister. Institutions have been informed of the Ministry’s intention to monitor, on an annual basis, progress and expenditure in relation to the input and output targets as agreed in the revised student enrolment plans. The balance of the funding will be allocated over a three-year period (2007–2010) and it is estimated that by 2010, historically black institutions will have received an average of R317 million each, white institutions R143 million and merged institutions R257 million (Gower & Pretorius, 2007:1).

3. CONTEXT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ACADEMIC LIBRARY SECTOR

Prior to 1994, the growth and establishment of academic libraries in South Africa have

been documented at several junctures (e.g. Dalton, 1988; Kesting, 1980; Lor, 1981), but it is not the intention here to repeat the history that was so closely entwined with the apartheid policies of the time.

In the years since 1994, there has been limited published literature about the impact of the transformation process on the academic library sector, or achievements with regard to innovation and development in the library and information services (LIS). Although some information can be found on the websites of the academic libraries or conferences, there is clearly a need for South African academic librarians to reflect on the past decade of achievements and give consideration to the critical issues and challenges that should be driving our national and institutional agendas.

Where institutions merged, often across multi-campus separated by geographical distances, academic libraries have grappled with issues of integration with respect to collections, catalogue databases and holdings, acquisitions and subscriptions, policies, human resource management, budgets, physical buildings and facilities. In this post-merger phase, as many of the academic libraries start to consolidate their services, they are establishing themselves as “reconfigured” institutions within the higher education sector.

Academic libraries that were not part of the formal merger process are “not exempt from the imperative system-wide reconfiguration, from the need to change fundamentally, and from contributing to the achievement of the new higher education landscape” (CHE, 2000:8). These libraries are required to participate actively in the “arena of reform” by addressing internal issues of equity and redress, quality, development, effectiveness and efficiency in order to be responsive to the needs of national policy imperatives, their constituencies and the educational challenges of South Africa.



The atrium of the library of the University of South Africa in Pretoria.
(Courtesy of Unisa)

While it is acknowledged that there are magnificent and advanced academic libraries within the sector, they are primarily located within the HAI category. Across the historically black institutions, academic library infrastructures became increasingly run-down, matched by poor information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, which meant that students and staff could not access ICT tools such as the Internet and email. As student enrolments increased, the pressures and demands on student seating and building facilities increased, making life hard for students, faculties and library staff.

The consequences of a legacy characterised by disparity in the allocation of resources and access to information and information technology infrastructure in higher education institutions prior to 1994 is addressed in a poignant article by Kaniki (1999). Similarly, Darch and Underwood (1999) discuss some of the problems experienced by South African academic libraries – in particular, inadequate infrastructure and access to ICT.

4. ACADEMIC LIBRARY SECTOR ACHIEVEMENTS

4.1 Library associations

A number of these are discussed below.

4.1.1 Library and Information Association of South Africa

Prior to 1994, the South African library and information sector mirrored the socio-political landscape carved out by apartheid policies. It was a period of tension and disunity marked by “racial, sectoral and political divisions since the early 1960s, also needed change; and the need for a new inclusive library association was great and many were in favour of unity” (Tise, 2007:16).

On 10 July 1997, the national Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) was launched and in attendance were many staff members from across the higher education libraries. It is worth mentioning that the first elected President of LIASA was an academic librarian, Ellen Tise, who held office for two terms from 1998–2002.

The establishment of the Higher Education Libraries Interest Group (HELIG) has provided academic librarians with an important platform from which to network and share experiences, especially during the challenges of mergers and the dominant role of technology in the libraries. HELIG meetings take place at the annual LIASA conference and a number of the branches have established regional HELIG structures.

4.1.2 International

Soon after its launch in 1997, LIASA affiliated to a number of international library associations, including the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), Commonwealth Library Association (COMLA) and Standing Conference of East, Central and Southern Africa (SCECSAL). Tise (2007:16) recalls that “LIASA became a full member of IFLA in time to vote at the Conference in Copenhagen in September 1997, which was one of the first milestones of LIASA and really marked the end of isolation and a new beginning for our profession in South Africa”. It is significant that a South African academic librarian, Ellen Tise, was elected President-Elect of IFLA (2007–2009) and will assume the mantle of IFLA President in 2009.

4.1.3 Academic library leadership development

One of the glaring inequities created by apartheid policies was the disproportionate allocation of funds towards staff development and leadership training. An important intervention, managed by LIASA in partnership with the Mortenson Centre at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, was the South African Library Leadership Programme (SALLP), which received a three-year grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

The purpose of SALLP was to develop middle to senior management leadership skills across both academic and public and community libraries. Between 2002 and 2005, a number of academic librarians, primarily but not exclusively from HDIs, participated in the programme.

4.2 Department of Education / European Union Higher Education Libraries Programme

An early and important response from the academic library sector to the transformation drive took place from 1997–2002. This was the DoE/EU Higher Education Libraries Programme, which formed a joint initiative between the Department of Education, the European Union and 17 historically disadvantaged higher education institutions. It represented “a concrete manifestation of the Ministry of Education’s commitment to redressing the inequalities of the past as part of the broader process of the transformation of the higher education system” (Allen, 2002:7).

The programme facilitated the development of learning resource provision and LIS provision, including human resources development. The focus was on gender equity and supporting teaching and research initiatives to improve quality in key subject areas (science and technology, economics, management and business studies) across the 17 HDIs.

In addition, the programme also strengthened the Departments of Library and Information Science in six institutions as a way to expand the training of skilled professional staff to meet the growing needs of LIS provision nationally. The 17 academic libraries participating in the project were scattered across both urban and rural areas.

The DoE/EU Higher Education Libraries Programme, managed on behalf of the Department of Education by the British Council, was highly successful. Project achievements included the following (Allen, 2002:44):

- Books delivered: 58 289, requiring nearly 2 km of shelving space
- Training places: 2500
- Journal back sets: 654 bound volumes and 100 single issues
- EBSCO host database: subsidised for 145 000 staff and students
- Sabinet Online search packages: 17 000
- Information technology equipment: 1000 workstations
- Subsidised photocopying: 145 000 staff and students

4.3 Committee for Higher Education Librarians in South Africa

The higher education institutions’ split along a binary divide between universities and technikons extended into the academic library sector, with separate associations for university and technikon library directors. In response to the national imperative to realise a rational and seamless higher education system, a series of collaborative discussions re-

sulted in the formation of a unified Committee for Higher Education Librarians in South Africa (CHELSA) in 2004, whose vision is “Transforming existing library practices to respond to the existing and new realities and laying the foundation of a learning society”.

In order to give substance to its goals, a Memorandum of Understanding, approved by CHELSA in May 2005, commits academic libraries to undertake “to collaborate with one another as implied in the Higher Education Act and to be of service to one another’s clients”. These services include, inter alia, special membership of other libraries and borrowing rights for faculty and registered Master’s and doctoral students, participation in the Interlibrary Loan System, regularly reporting on library holdings to the cooperative national bibliographic databases, and ensuring that appropriate statistics are made available, as may be requested by CHELSA.

CHELSA has initiated a number of national projects that warrant mention as achievements.

4.3.1 Quality assurance

The recurring theme throughout this chapter is the imperative that higher education institutions and academic libraries commit and contribute to the comprehensive transformation agenda addressing key issues of equity and redress, quality, development, effectiveness and efficiency. Quality in the national policy for higher education is simultaneously seen as an objective of, and medium for, the transformation of higher education.

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the CHE, established in 2001, implemented a national quality assurance framework, infrastructure, policies and mechanisms. Initiatives with respect to institutional audit, programme accreditation, quality promotion and capacity development have been implemented since 2004.

The production of good practice guides and manuals is part of the quality promotion and development focus of the HEQC. CHELSA was mandated to develop a set of guidelines to provide academic libraries with the means to highlight significant achievements, opportunities for improvement, assessment processes, evidence that the needs of users are being addressed, and areas where further improvement might be needed.

In 2006, CHELSA finalised the *Guide to the self-review of university libraries* (CHELSA, 2006:7), which is a framework for:

- academic librarians to conduct self-reviews and produce self-review reports on the management of quality in their libraries; and
- a proposed external panel of peers to verify, substantiate, corroborate or validate the claims and conclusions in the self-review reports.

In addition, the CHELSA quality assurance sub-committee has pursued methods for the accurate measurement of performance of academic library services. In 2005, it accepted a proposal that South African academic libraries measure their activities according to the performance indicators set out in the document entitled *Measures for quality (M4Q)* (CHELSA, 2005).

A serious shortcoming is that the Department of Education no longer collates and maintains statistics on the libraries. An important contribution by CHELSA will be to coordinate the development of a database that collects measurement data on academic library performance on a national basis. This will assist library directors and their staff to

benchmark services, identify best practice and improve access to management information. The measures contained in *M4Q* will provide the initial framework for the collection of data.

An important quality assurance project undertaken by six academic libraries (across seven campuses)(1) was a user survey, using the Web-based LibQUAL+™ survey instrument developed by the Texas A&M University Libraries, in partnership with the Association of Research Libraries. The decision by the academic libraries to collaborate was prompted by the need to benchmark their services against those of other South African academic libraries and overseas in order to fulfil the requirements of the institutional audits conducted by the HEQC.

4.3.2 National Electronic Theses and Dissertations Project

Alongside the private, government and not-for-profit sectors, higher education constitutes one of the four primary sectors responsible for generating research output, especially theses and dissertations. Since the advent of digitisation, metadata and improved network access, a number of South African academic libraries have implemented projects to make electronic theses and dissertations accessible both internally (Intranet) and over the Internet, using institutional repository technology and open source software.

With financial assistance from the National Research Foundation (NRF), CHELSA conducted a feasibility study on the requirements for extending the implementation of institutional repositories across all academic libraries, which will provide access to the full-text theses and dissertations for the research community in South Africa and internationally. The report, *Feasibility and requirements for a South African national electronic thesis and dissertation project*, was issued in 2006 for comment.

In response, a collaborative partnership between the NRF and CHELSA was established in late 2006 to drive this important initiative as follows:

- The NRF is committed at a strategic level to support the project and provide custodial support to academic libraries that do not yet have the capacity to host their own electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repositories.
- The NRF will provide funding to support the implementation of institutional repositories at three pilot sites (two universities and one university of technology), with the preferred choice to support HDIs.
- The NRF will create a national metadata repository that will integrate existing data on theses and dissertations. Academic libraries will be required to make their institutional repository metadata available for harvesting and inclusion on the central open source metadata repository. Links will be created back to the full-text ETDs on institutional repositories.

4.3.3 Information literacy collaboration

Mindful that one of the imperatives of the transformation agenda is the need to eradicate wasteful and uncoordinated efforts at all levels in the sector, CHELSA has embarked on

1 The seven South African campuses participating in the 2005 LibQUAL+™ were the Universities of Cape Town, Free State, North-West (Mafeking and Potchefstroom campuses), Pretoria, Rhodes and Stellenbosch.

an initiative to provide a national framework for coordinating information literacy services, programmes and training skills across the 23 academic libraries.

A recent audit of available programmes and services available in the academic libraries indicated varying levels of quality of information literacy provision. CHELSA will play an important role in providing direction for future development in this key service area and in aligning its outputs with national policy goals.



Student workspace in the Merensky Library at the University of Pretoria.
(Courtesy of the University of Pretoria)

4.4 Consortium development and participation

4.4.1 Regional academic consortia

By 2000, dismay was expressed (CHE, 2000:12) about the higher education sector, where evidence abounded that:

... there are only a few and limited examples of successful cooperative initiatives and programmes between the institutions. Many of the features of apartheid fragmentation continue within the system and between the institutions.

By contrast, one of the great achievements of the academic library sector in the post-apartheid era has been the establishment of regional and national consortia that have

produced meaningful coordination and collaboration. Apart from pressures by the government to collaborate, grant awarders like the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation indicated that proposals to fund learning institution projects, especially library systems, would be considered but that it would work with consortia rather than individual libraries.

In a period of six years (1992–1998), five regional academic library consortia were established, as reflected in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of South African higher education and library consortia

Higher education consortium	Geographic coverage	Library consortium	Library consortium established
Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) www.chec.ac.za	Western Cape	Cape Library Consortium (CALICO)	1992
Eastern Cape Higher Education Association (ECHEA) www.echea.ac.za	Eastern Cape	South Eastern Alliance of Library Systems (SEALS)	1998
Eastern Seaboard Association of Tertiary Institutions (ESATI) www.esati.ac.za	KwaZulu-Natal	Eastern Seaboard Association of Libraries (ESAL)	1997
Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM) www.fotim.ac.za	Gauteng, North-West and Limpopo	Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium (GAELIC)	1996
Free State Higher Education Consortium www.uovs.ac.za/support/library/E-frelico.php	Free State	Free State Library and Information Consortium (FRELICO)	1996/7

Source: Thomas & Fourie (2006:433).

The higher education consortia are characterised by different organisational and governance structures. In each case, the legal entity is the higher education consortium, while the library consortium is a committee of the institutional parent body, i.e. the library consortia have no legal status. It should be noted that the higher education landscape is constantly under review and by the time of publication the situation may have altered.

In a comprehensive review of the academic library consortia by Thomas and Fourie (2006), the purpose, goals and achievements of each consortium are set out in detail, as well as the shared objectives. For the purposes of this chapter, the focus is on achievements since 1994. Initially, the work in each consortium focused on the traditional role of consortia, namely purchasing a common library system using donor funding, resource sharing, joint purchasing of information resources, licensing agreements and academic library staff training. Initial achievements (1992–1998) included improving interlending

and document delivery services among members, implementing staff skills development programmes, reducing the duplication of non-core materials, and stimulating the need for electronic communication such as email, discussion lists and website development.

During the period 1999–2003, the role of the consortia expanded in all the regions. Broad achievements included the facilitation and use of the common library systems; improved resource sharing within and among the regions through the use of the ARIEL system; and improving access to a wide array of electronic resources using applications such as Innovative MAP and Media Management, MetaLib, SFX and portal technology. Various programmes across member libraries were coordinated, such as information literacy skills “train the trainer” courses and specialist training of staff. The consortia also fulfilled the role of facilitation and brokering during the merger process where library catalogue databases were affected.

Furthermore, consultancy services and experts were made available and agreements were reached to benchmark service levels across academic libraries in a region. An inter-consortial project was initiated in 2004 between seven academic libraries in GAELIC and one in CALICO to implement e-reference services using the Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC) product, QuestionPoint. During 2006, the virtual reference service was expanded to more academic libraries through the establishment of a national knowledge base.

4.4.2 South African National Library and Information Consortium

Another milestone in collaboration and cooperation in the library sector was the establishment of the Coalition of South African Library Consortia (COSALC) as an umbrella body bringing together all South African higher education consortia, the research consortium, the National Library of South Africa and the national library association LIASA. In 2004, COSALC was formally registered as a section 21 not-for-profit organisation and established a board of directors made up of these founder organisations.

Its primary project was known as the South African Site Licensing Initiative (SASLI), which was responsible for negotiating licence agreements and pricing electronic resources purchased on a collaborative basis across the consortia. It proved to be a highly successful service to the library and information sector and resulted in academic libraries being able to extend the depth and breadth of their e-resource collections. This was due to carefully managed negotiations and economies of scale made possible by the high participation level of academic libraries.

During 2007, a strategic decision was taken to change the name of the organisation to the South African National Library Consortium (SANLIC), which would reinforce its national commitment and better accommodate a variety of membership categories beyond the academic and research consortia.

5. CRITICAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Since 1994, the direction as well as the “size and shape” of the South African academic library sector has been determined primarily by the transformation agenda. Libraries are still, and for the foreseeable future will continue to be, preoccupied with national policy goals and bedding-down merged institutions. The final verdict on this intervention remains the topic of future history books.

Simultaneously, however, academic libraries are also required to respond to the dominant role that technology and user expectations are placing on libraries and which, to a large extent, are setting the agenda for the next decade of innovation and growth. This section of the chapter attempts to outline some of the key issues and challenges that wait ahead for the governance and membership structures of the South African academic sector in the next decade.

A useful predictor of challenges and issues has been the recent release by the Association of College and Research Libraries called *Top ten assumptions for the future of academic libraries* (ACRL, 2007:1), which outlines opportunities for academic libraries to move into the future. A number of the challenges identified are relevant for the South African academic library sector:

- There will be increased emphasis on digitising collections, preserving digital archives and improving methods of storage and retrieval.
- The skill set for librarians will continue to evolve in response to the needs and expectations of the changing populations (student and faculty) that they serve.
- Students and faculties will increasingly demand faster and greater access to services.
- Debates about intellectual property will become increasingly common in higher education.
- The growing demand for technology-related services will require additional funding.
- Students will increasingly view themselves as customers and consumers, expecting high-quality facilities and services.
- Free, public access to information stemming from publicly funded research will continue to grow.

In addition, the South African academic library sector also needs to give consideration to the following issues and challenges:

- There is a need to understand and deliver appropriate services to the new constituencies, which include the Millennial generation (born after 1981) and the Z generation (born post-1990). They have grown up “digital” in their thinking, working, learning, communication and socialising, and expect libraries to provide integrated educational spaces that are conducive to research and learning both in individual and group settings.
- Standards and benchmarks are becoming increasingly important.
- Metadata attribution and open access initiatives require more attention.
- Innovation, leadership and business principles should characterise academic library models. This will require regular strategic planning, business plans, defined deliverables and benefits.
- Ongoing surveys and needs analysis are essential to identify gaps in services and delivery.
- Build a national database of comparative data about academic libraries.

As consortia play an important role in meeting the national policy goals for improved collaboration and cooperation, there are a number of critical issues that need to be addressed:

- There should be less reliance on the parent higher education consortium as the main source of revenue, and efforts to ensure sustainability should be renewed.
- Academic librarians are being pressed by management and decision-makers in the parent institutions to justify the continued costs of consortia membership fees.
- Traditional roles such as resource sharing and collaboration for “public good” are no longer justification for consortia. The role of academic consortia needs to be expanded to collaborative projects such as central storage services, staff training services and benchmarking.
- Consortia issues and plans should be aligned with national policy goals across the regions and feed regional strategies into national agendas.



The JS Gericke Library of Stellenbosch University, built under the central Jan Marais Square so as not to mar the aesthetics of the historic buildings on the site.

(Courtesy of Stellenbosch University)

The issues and challenges outlined above will require South African academic librarians to continue to work on current and future initiatives in order to take their libraries and services to new levels. This will require that they:

- provide collective strategic leadership in the academic library sector;
- provide strong leadership to find research-centred and innovative solutions to common problems;
- provide seedbeds for innovative projects and services;
- motivate staff to improve support for researchers, learners and academics; and
- assist in promoting continual improvement and excellence in academic libraries.

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to provide a qualitative (rather than quantitative) review of the academic library activities in the context of the current transformation climate, and to highlight a selection of broad achievements. While recognising that the demands of this “driven transition” have absorbed significant amounts of time and energy across the sector, it is also important to acknowledge the achievements of academic librarians, both collectively and individually. They have not only provided leadership and vision to the sector, but also continue to revitalise, inspire and motivate higher education libraries to strive for improved measurable outcomes and successes.

As indicated, the academic library sector is faced by a myriad challenges and issues that will require commitment, together with their institutions and others, to support our faculty, researchers and students to engage and participate proactively in a highly competitive global economy with state-of-the-art library systems, deep and rich information collections and highly skilled staff.

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