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### **Promoting diversity and democracy in new democratic societies- the Unisa experience**

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I would like to give a brief overview of South Africa with regard to the workshop theme as background to our discussion here this morning.

South Africa covers a vast area at the southern tip of Africa and the country has nine provinces. There are densely populated urban areas where approximately half of the people live and also vast rural areas. Some of these areas are sparsely populated with no basic technological infrastructure such as electricity and telephone lines. Although many people live in poor conditions, some well developed parts of the country can be compared to first world countries. South Africa ranks for instance the 16<sup>th</sup> largest user of the Internet in the world and is high in terms of cell phone usage (Raubenheimer and Van Niekerk,2002:17).

The population of 41,000,000 is composed of Africans (76 per cent), whites (13 per cent), mixed race coloureds (9 per cent) and Indians/Asians (2 per cent). Most of the white population is Afrikaans (people of Dutch origin) or of British origin. Other smaller groups are of German, French, Italian and Portuguese descent, among others. The black population is also diverse. The major nine ethnic groups are Zulu (the largest), Xhosa, South Sotho, North Sotho, Tswana, Venda, Ndebele, Swazi and Tsonga. In accordance with the South African Constitution, the use of 11 official languages is permitted i.e. isiZulu, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, Sepedi, English, isiNdebele, Setswana, Sesotho, Xitsonga, isiSwati and Tshivenga. However, English is more commonly used in business and education. Religious diversity is also significant. Approximately 80 percent of the people is Christian. The Muslim and Hindu faiths are widespread amongst the Asian communities and Hindu communities (Ocholla,2002:61).

The socio-economic profile of the country is also reflected in the library and information services (LIS) field, with more sophisticated libraries being mostly in urban areas and large parts of the country being relatively poorly served by library services.

The country has 35 tertiary education institutions. Three of these are distance education institutions- the others are residential institutions. The biggest is the University of South Africa (Unisa) with approximately 135,000 students. Although the country has so many tertiary education institutions, the illiteracy percentage is relatively high.

### **WORKPLACE DIVERSITY**

The question is how diverse is the workplace with regard to population groups?

The composition of the population groups in academic libraries is in some instances still based on the former racial and ethnic divisions relating to the geographical location of the library. The white population group dominates the Historically white Universities (HWU) and the same pattern is reflected at Historically Black Universities (HBU). Ocholla (2002:63) writes that the proportionality of the workforce by the population groups varies with the demographic area where the library is located.

Workplace population statistics of the largest tertiary education institution library in South Africa, the Unisa Library (Unisa Library, 2002:2-5), however, reflects the following:

- Total number of filled posts: 224
- Male: 84 (Male African 60; male coloured 4; Male Indian 2; Male White 18)
- Female: 140 (Female African 34; Female Coloured 0; Female Indian 1; Female White 105)
- Staff with disabilities: 2
- Other forms of diversity in the Unisa Library is within the type of posts i.e. professional /administrative posts. The staff profile of 2002 indicates that 31% of these posts are filled by professional staff and 52% by administrative staff (Unisa Library, 2002:6).
- As is the case in many libraries it can be noted that female employees also in this library dominates the workforce.
- Although there has been no survey done to ascertain diversity with regard to married and unmarried staff or regarding sexual orientation, these aspects should contribute to a more diverse workforce.

### **DIVERSITY IN LIBRARY COLLECTIONS**

Each of the 35 tertiary education institutions in the country has its own academic library with library collections and infrastructure to support its services. These libraries vary substantially in terms of size and resource support - to name but a few. The stock of the Unisa Library, as an example of a sophisticated library, compares well with that of a well developed library in a first world country as follows:

Books - a total of 15,5 million (2001) and periodicals 5100 (2001).

Within the consortium of which this Library is a member, some other member libraries have a book stock consisting of 15 000 titles. Many of the collections of the historically disadvantaged libraries do not compare favourably with this library's collection, especially in terms of quality or size.

### **STUDENT POPULATION DIVERSITY**

Statistics on the headcounts of students enrolled at South African universities during 2001, indicated that approximately 35% of all South African students are enrolled at Unisa, followed by 8% of the total at Pretoria University, 6,5% at Vista University and 5% at the Rand Afrikaans University. An analysis of the student profile of Unisa reflects the diverse profile of a large student body.

- Age: The majority of Unisa students is between 25 and 40; 25% of the students is under 25 years of age and 15% is older than 40.
- Geographical distribution: Students are geographically distributed i.e. 92% reside in South Africa, 6% in the rest of Africa and 2% outside Africa (Unisa, 2002). In South Africa, these students are distributed as follows: 43% in Gauteng, 21% in KwaZulu-Natal, 10% in the western Cape, 8% in the Northern Province, 5% in Mpumalanga, 5% in the Eastern Cape, 4% in the North West province, 3% in the Free State, 1% in the Northern Cape. Students enrol at

the University for either formal qualifications or certificate courses offered by the University in support of life long learning.

- Reasons for studying at Unisa: The number of students per faculty is as follows: Economy and Management 43%, Arts 21%; Education 13%; Law 8%; Non degree 8%; Science 5% ;Theology and Religious studies 0,9%. Library services to these groups are in support of the University's tuition programme and may include structured course tuition, research theses etc., resulting in different services and information needs.
- Reasons for visiting the Unisa Library: A Library survey conducted revealed that students visit the Library for diverse reasons. The sample used for the survey consisted of 92% undergraduates; 7% postgraduates; 0,5% Certificate students and 0,1 other clients. Of these students, 89% indicated that they visit the Library on a daily basis; 92% of the students are full time students. Use of the Library facilities is as follows: Study-100%; Study Collection-66%; Discussions (informal)-62%; Photocopying-48%; Computer workstations-44%; Newspapers-39%; Telephone lecturers-39%; Information services-16%; Audiovisual Collection-11%; Research Collection-10%;Periodical Collection10%; Archives5%.
- Library literacy: Students differ much in terms of the acquired level of library literacy as many did not attend schools with a well equipped school libraries/information age school libraries or media centra.
- Other disparities are often attributed to individual experiences or educational background (Unisa Library, 2002:2).

This overview aims to provide a broad answer to the question "how diverse is South Africa?" and "how diverse is the Unisa library?".

### **SOUTH AFRICA - a new democracy**

The first democratic election was held in South Africa in 1994. During the first year a start was made to ensure that all forms of government was restructured , including the library and information services (Nassimbeni, 1996:359). Many policies and legislation have been passed in order to steer the country towards a multicultural society. These serve as instruments to establish equality in a united, non racial, non sexist society where all may flourish. Library reports reflect a desire to move away from the fragmented and inequitable system which privileged only certain areas or constituencies and to transform library information services into a coherent system that will meet the needs of all citizens and to contribute to the reconstruction and development of the country. The restructuring of the library and information sector is done in the interest of democracy and redress (Nassimbeni, 1996:367).

Instruments implemented to create democracy/diversity:

- Reconstruction and development plan (RDP): The vision of South Africa is incorporated in the RDP. It states that South Africa should be moved from apartheid to a developed social and economic environment for the benefit of all (African National Congress,1994).
- Education legislation: The education system faces new challenges and serves as instrument to advance equal opportunities. Key policy directions for Higher Education indicate a focus on lifelong education and training, open access and improved equity, democracy and accountability, cost effectiveness and efficiency.
- Workplace legislation

In this regard the most important was the White Paper for Affirmative Action in the Public Service

(Republic of South Africa, 1998). Affirmative action is an instrument to create diversity in the workplace (Ocholla, 2002:63) in order to enable every member to perform to his or her potential (Norris, 1997:2) .

Workplace legislation in South Africa further include the Employment Equity act (Republic of South Africa:1998) and the Promotion of Equality and prevention of Unfair discrimination act (Republic of South Africa, 2000). The Employment equity act was enacted with the recognition to achieve a diverse work force broadly representative of all our people. Both these acts aim to promote the constitutional right of equality and consolidate true democracy. As a result of Government legislation and policies, tertiary education institutions and subsequently academic libraries are compelled to diversify itself.

### **DIVERSITY IN THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES FIELD**

With regard to the library and information services of South Africa, the diversity of the country is also reflected in this field. I would, however, like to point out what academic libraries and in particular the Unisa Library has done to promote diversity and democracy with regard to the workplace, the collections and the services.

#### **- Workplace:**

Unisa is committed to transformation and as part of the transformation plan it appointed an employment equity officer early in 2000. The role of this person is to ensure the promotion of diversity/democracy through the appointment of staff of diverse cultures, and the addressing of imbalances of the past, specifically with regard to senior positions. It also aims to balance the workplace in terms of gender and acknowledge physically challenged persons as an important component of the composition of the workforce. All appointments are made in view of the current staff profile. It is important that the academic library supports the University's Employment Equity Plan. The Unisa Library commits itself to ensuring that Unisa HR and EE policies, procedures and practices are supported, that aggressive steps are employed to identify all existing barriers and to make an indelible effort to develop strategies aimed at removing barriers (Unisa Library, 2002). It is further important that the library undertakes a skills audit of tasks to be performed and subsequently a staff training audit linked with the performance appraisal exercise in order to ensure that appropriate training programmes are developed and implemented to address the individual developmental needs of a diverse workforce (Human, 1996:49). This is currently done as part of the Unisa Library's Re-engineering project. Human states that the individual developmental plan should be based not only on the competences required for effective job performance but also on the overall workforce plan, and that line managers should be playing a role in on the job coaching and the development of staff. Training opportunities should continuously be created in terms of all work to be done in the library. The Unisa Library ensures that training opportunities are identified and provided whenever possible, ie in the case of project work. The project leader and project participant are appointed in accordance with the skills and competences requirements. There are then also provision for the appointment of learning partners of the project participants. Staff who would like to take up such positions, apply for the positions on the basis of being willing and able to participate in the project with a view to learn. This is done in an official manner and learning partners are performance appraised with regard to the development plan. The internal library policies of the academic library are much focussed on the creation of opportunities for disadvantaged groups of the past. In the case of the allocation of travel bursaries, the policy states that at least one of two travel bursaries should be allocated in terms of the University's affirmative action policy.

In the United States of America much has been written on the using of professional development as a retention tool for under-represented academic librarians. As the number of under-represented individuals enter the profession, academic libraries are challenged to compete for and retain the skills and competencies of these persons. Libraries that succeed in recruiting must simultaneously focus on retention and promotion (Acree:2001:1). This aspect should be considered by academic libraries as important in order to retain the diverse workforce in which much has already been invested.

Acree(2001:49) accentuates the fact that the diversity that different groups bring to the workplace creates a stronger workforce and better work environment. It is therefore important to have not only a recruitment plan, but also a retention and promotion plan.

Musser (2001:71) states that if organisations are truly committed to improving diversity in their workplace, the needs of employees for support beyond recruitment cannot be ignored. The Penn State Faculty Survey pointed out three important concerns in this regard i.e mentoring, climate and time for research. These contribute positively in retaining quality employees of all backgrounds within that environment. Other influential factors for retention revealed by the survey are networking, career and learning opportunities and a balance between home and work life. As part of the Unisa Library's newly implemented leadership structure, mentors will be appointed to perform the mentoring function as a secondary role. This should offer tremendous support to employees of historically disadvantaged groups in future.

Thistlewaite (2001:32 ) points out that The Code of Ethics of the American Library Association states that "we treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect , fairness and good faith and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions". Librarians should therefore logically embrace a diversity inclusive of all as well as sexual orientation and marital status. She argues that academic librarians as providers of lifelines to their campus constituencies, have excellent position and authority as well as professional imperative to lead and to contribute to ensure benefits to domestic partners and families of unmarried employees (Thistlewaite :2001:33).

In light of diversity in the workplace, it is important to consider the approach to management, eg Anglo Saxon protestant style which is consistent with western value systems, an Afrocentric approach based on African home base and the inclusivist Ubuntu based value system or a synergistic inspirational approach ie a dualistic approach to workplace management that embraces traditional management practices, values and philosophies with western management techniques (Ocholla, 2002:61). The latter approach is consistent with a multicultural/diversity ethos. Further more, people should participate in the decisions that affect their lives and management should include participative decision making.

## - **COLLECTIONS**

In order to address imbalances of the past regarding collections, five academic library consortia were established in South Africa in order to ensure synergy of the resources of the member libraries of the consortia.. Most interlending and document supply activities of the country are in the academic libraries, in particular the university libraries which hold the bulk of the national book stock of a scientific nature and scholarly nature and half of all titles ( Lor, 1992). The total number of national interlending transactions indicates that transactions between university libraries amount to 73% in terms of requests sent and 85% in terms of requests received (Raubenheimer, 1998). A very important benefit for consortia members is that a common library system is used which allows members access to a wider range of research materials than is available in one library via a virtual access catalogue. They also benefit from the speed of interlibrary loans -performance objectives are implemented in order to ensure effective resource sharing, access to jointly owned electronic text and databases, and the maintenance of service levels despite severe cuts in information resource budgets (Raubenheimer 2002:20).

The Coalition of Library Consortia in South Africa was established in 1999. Its strategic focus is to promote and support national co-operative initiatives in order to ensure equity in services to all. In 1999, South Africa , as a member of the Open Society, also became a member of the Multi-country library consortium eIFL Direct. This is the world's largest information consortium established by the Open Society Institute. This Institute promotes the development of open societies around the world.

This compliments the collections of the consortia much, for example, through its participation in eIFL Direct , 94 sites in South Africa have gained access to international scholarly journals in five full text

databases. This database endeavours to bridge the digital divide by providing economically disadvantaged countries with electronic access to information that was previously unavailable. This would not be possible for a single library as the subscription per single institution is very costly especially in light of the value of South African currency. In 2001, South Africa's usage was measured as 33% of the total usage of eIFL. Usage statistics for the period January -July 2001 indicate a total of 360 000 searches and the retrieval of approximately 270,000 full text searches. (EBSCO in Raubenheimer, 2002:21).

This development regarding collection development benefits in particular the Unisa library's postgraduate students and academics and contributes positively to research in the country. Shared collection development strategies among member libraries may also contribute to promoting diversity .

### **SERVICES TO A DIVERSE STUDENT BODY**

The academic library of the University of South Africa has to address the diverse needs of a student body of different ages, cultures, urban/ rural/ national/international background, and the reasons for enrolment at the University which impacts on their needs for library material as part of its service provision

### **LENDING SERVICES**

Lending regulations should be drawn up, taking into consideration the diversity of the borrowers, eg visiting clients borrow material over the counter, others via the post nationally/internationally, and the diverse needs of undergraduate/postgraduate students. The Unisa Library 's lending regulations make provision for extended loan periods for distance learners. It also implemented online mechanisms to be used for the ordering of books/journal articles.

### **INFORMATION SERVICES**

Access to information:

The South African Higher Education National Plan , goal 2, section 3, p.5 states that it is important "...to promote equity of access and fair chances for success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities . Constitutionally, librarians are being called upon to rectify serious inequalities in access to libraries and information (Raubenheimer,1998:71)." This was achieved in the library and information services field through the formation of consortia and improved resource sharing policies.

The Forum of University Librarians of South Africa (FULSA 2002:2) however expressed concern to the Minister of Education in warning that the South African Society cannot be transformed without education and resources to equip students to compete in a global knowledge based economy (FULSA 2002). The Forum further stated that it believed that if explicit reference in the National Plan was not made to the place, task and resource allocation issues of libraries, there is no obligation on Higher Education institutions to develop and maintain quality information content resources and that the National Plan on Higher Education will subsequently be seriously compromised. The Forum accentuated the fact that resources should be accessible. Open libraries cannot be maintained while resources dwindle and an African Renaissance will not work without the core resources for empowerment. This serves as an example of leadership to be taken by the academic librarian in the interest of democracy and diversity.

Furthermore, the advent of electronic media allowed us to enter into an information revolution and become a global society through a networked environment. It compelled the librarian to change roles from preserver to facilitator of access to information.

Developing countries are ready to take advantage of this connectedness. In providing access to

information, academic librarians in South Africa should however be sensitive to the fact that the required infrastructure need to be in place to accommodate electronic access. Statistics on telephone connections indicate 9 telephone lines per 100 people; urban/rural bias is significant with phone lines as urban dwellings outnumber those for rural dwellings. Statistics on electricity supply indicate that 78% of urban households have electricity and 27% of rural households (Chippis in Brammage,1997:5). It is clear that significant numbers of people across all sectors will not be able to become online computer users. In order to promote diversity in this regard, academic librarians should establish hybrid libraries to ensure that printed material reaches clients who cannot receive information electronically,

speedily enough so that it can be received “just in time” to be useful for assignment work and research that needs to be done. Furthermore, partnerships should be formed with other institutions from where access to or delivery of material can take place.

Diaz (2002: 38) , a champion of diversity and democracy propagated through his writings that he will ensure that the information needs of the community be met . He requests that librarians must provide free and easily accessible materials to the public and encourages librarians to be defenders of the freedom of expression. In the interest of democracy, redress and research, the academic librarian should facilitate this sector(Nassimbeni, 1996:367) .

Academic librarians often make the assumptions that information is only a public good, primarily in the area of education and that access should therefore be free of charge to the user. This is much in line with South Africa’s RDP which argues the need for improving information flow in society as an informed citizenry is better equipped to participate in the transition process. It also supports the principles of historical redress, democracy, unity, and non-discrimination. South African librarians therefore feel uncomfortable that the theory with regard to public good be examined. However, it is necessary to fundamentally rethink the economic role of library and information services once the policy objective of redress is achieved, ie when the difference between the information poor and information rich is eliminated. The focus should then be on effective, autonomous and sustainable library services (Darch,1995:9) being made possible through the commodity value of information. Through this, the library will gain access to the financial and technological resources necessary for the vast job of reconstruction and be in a position to address the diverse needs of its environment. Delivery services of material not available on-line:

Access to information should be balanced by prompt delivery services. In this regard the diverse needs of both the students in rural and urban areas should be addressed. The Unisa Library implemented courier services to compliment the postal service and speed up deliveries to rural areas.

## - **TRAINING SERVICES**

In 1996 Prof S Bengu, the former Minister of Education, stated that there should be a shift in the library and information services from the custodial approach to a role in which librarians become more involved in programmes to ensure library literacy so that all citizens may enjoy the benefits from an information society (Nassimbeni, 1996, 1996:369).

The diversity of the student body should be considered in the development of training programmes . Academic librarians are increasingly instructing targeted groups within the academic environment. Such groups include freshman learning communities, international students, graduate students and faculty. Each of these groups is far from homogeneous because of the diversity of their expectations of libraries and their information seeking experiences. Their levels of knowledge differ eg the Internet knowledge of students visiting the Unisa library was measured in 1996 and 1999. Although there is a growth , the levels of knowledge of undergraduates/postgraduates differ substantially. For example, undergraduates 27% and postgraduates 44% (1996) and undergraduates 46% and postgraduates 69% (1999) ( Unisa library survey results, 2000). These facts should be taken into consideration in developing training courses. Even today, faculty staff are reluctant to use electronic resources and we will subsequently have to develop instruction of programs that will address the shared need of such

groups and the diverse needs of the individuals. It is important to determine how we can identify groups that are being underserved and develop assessment tools to measure the success of the programs.

The Unisa Library (Ten Krooden, 2002:1) caters for diverse computer skills by providing basic training in the use of the mouse and keyboard, and for those with advanced computer skills training in subject-specific databases and a course on the Internet. The diverse understanding of the function of a library is also considered. For students from disadvantaged communities lacking public libraries or school libraries, basic library skills training is provided on how to find your way around the Unisa library. For students from advantaged communities with sophisticated media centres, training in the use of essential information and reference sources (print and electronic) is provided. Diversity in understanding of the Internet is catered for in three courses *Internet for New Users, Conducting research on the Internet, and Using Webmail*.

Diverse Knowledge in depth of subject knowledge is catered for by means of training in the use of subject specific databases and training for specific groups is offered with the emphasis on subject specific relevant training eg for Psychology Honours students. Chemistry Honours students registers for the Research Information Skills module in collaboration with the University's department of Information Science and attend a hands on workshop. Diverse levels of Information Literacy are dealt with in the new world of work, ie mostly in a personal coaching mode rather than formalised training courses.

With regard to the student development programme, it must be borne in mind that universities have to articulate a role in the university's system for student learning and development. Academic librarians should promote continuous learning and in light of student diversity, include the complexities of the intellectual environment as part of the student development programme. They should also investigate and use opportunities that exist for collaboration between academic libraries and other agencies of diversity on campus that shape an effective response to the special kind of intellectual environment and are communities of learners. Today's academic libraries are challenged requirements for student learning in an information age (Simmons-Welburn, 2001:7).

Universities also endeavours to resolve disparities in attending to the transition from high school to university through bridging programs, and the offering of programs to improve performance. Academic librarians should ensure that the role of the academic library and the quest for an information literate student body figures prominently in discussions on the effect of the university on students' cognitive growth and academic success. Libraries can have a significant impact on preparing students for their desired futures by recognising the importance of programmatic interventions, then persuading program administrators of the benefits of exposure to information rich environments to students' academic training. Students should be taught strategies for locating, evaluating and using information in response to vast array of academic, professional and personal needs (Simmons-Welburn, 2001:16).

## **CONCLUSION**

Much has been done by the Unisa Library to promote diversity and democracy. The time has, however, come to take an audit on diversity inclusive of all matters as indicated by Thistlewaite, in order to determine which aspects need further attention in the promotion of diversity in the workplace.

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