Doing it together: effective collaboration in scientific and technological university libraries

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• 1990 – 2000 declining research output in SA

• Underperforming post-graduate throughput & research output

• Interventions: National Research Foundation funding
• SA research libraries: more active role in research

• Results of 2005 LibQUAL+ survey at UCT:
  ◦ Undergraduates largely satisfied
  ◦ Postgraduates less so

• Libraries’ response: to look at roles & skill sets of research librarians
• Carnegie Corp of NY funding: for 3 university libraries, extended in 2009: 3 more research libraries

• Purpose of RLC Project:
  ◦ Enhance librarians’ understanding of research
  ◦ Develop capacity to support research activities.
• RLC addressed 3 dimensions of library research support

  ◦ Build, staff & equip sophisticated research spaces: “Research Commons”

  ◦ Improve & enhance mid career librarians’ understanding of research & skills in assisting in different domains

  ◦ Introduce integrated Web portal to facilitate resource searching.
• Five RLC Academies were held for 2 weeks at a time in a secluded venue

• Intent
  ◦ Expose librarians to research process
  ◦ Emphasise the importance of collaboration
  ◦ Produce own research project

• Academies subjected to both formative & summative review & evaluation
CALICO

- Consortium of 4 Western Cape academic libraries:
  - Cape Peninsula Technology of Technology (CPUT)
  - Stellenbosch University (SU)
  - University of Cape Town (UCT)
  - University of the Western Cape (UWC)

- Project of Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC): seeks synergies, economies of scale & knowledge production through resource sharing
CALICO

- Sustained by membership subscriptions
- Committee of Library Directors (CLD) advises CHEC Board
- CLD identifies & seeks activities beneficial to the consortium
- CLD encourages breaching of library silos not only for the greater good, but for enrichment of all participants from collaborative knowledge production
• **CALICO & RLC**
  ◦ Overlap of membership in SU and UCT
  ◦ Unevenness of library research capacity development

• **CLD recognition of continuing need in the region for staff development in the area of academic library research support**

• **Development of the CHEC Research Library Academy**
Curriculum principles & objectives:

- Balance between theoretical input & workshop activities
- Even spread of inputs from experts explaining HE sector & research landscape, & experts in LIS
- Expertise from CHEC institutions to reflect representativeness as far as possible
- Create opportunities for participants' interaction & active engagement
- Encourage networking, to create collaborative spaces for the participants from the different institutions.
• CHEC & CLD mandate:
  ◦ Advance preparation for the programme, e.g. pack of pre-readings
  ◦ Guided interaction among delegates during the programme to break down institutional silos
  ◦ Expectation that participants have a research question/matter to feed into group activity
  ◦ Post-programme process to maintain & strengthen bonds forged during Academy
Programme aims:

- Transmission of knowledge about research landscape & scholarly communication in SA, & understanding of research challenges

- Learning from participants’ experiences

- Identifying skills sets required, & opportunities to practise

- Uncover some habits of mind & attributes of the research librarian
More aims:

- Understand link between librarians’ problem solving in the library & opportunity to frame an activity as a research project

- Appreciate that a research librarian is an active participant in research process - a desirable & attainable goal

- To think about steps they can take to start research journey in their institution

- Promote opportunities for networking and collaboration across the institutions
• Programme drawn from previous experiences, insights and expertise

• Expert speakers from SA HE research landscape
  ◦ Specifically targeted presentations to research library context

• Participants
  ◦ Target group: Librarians interested in research librarianship / responsible for supporting research activities
  ◦ Selected by Library directors
  ◦ UNISA library staff included
- On-site accommodation for participants
  - Encouraged networking
  - Group cohesion
  - Idea sharing

- Venue identification liaising with staff, selecting meals, organising accommodation

- Arranging opening dinner

- Liaison with speakers, following up on their requirements including accommodation
• Communicating with participants, informing them of pre-Academy tasks & seeing to their needs during the Academy

• Setting up *Vula* site for Academy (UCT online learning environment) to facilitate communication

• Ensuring availability of ICTs & other technologies

• Troubleshooting
25 participants from 5 higher education research libraries in the W. Cape

- Highly motivated & interested

- Concerned about disconnect between supply (provided by libraries) & needs of researchers

- Different levels of active participation in open discussion
Opening dinner
  • Participant introduction
  • CHEC expectations of participants & outcomes

Four days, each a themed exploration of SA research landscape

  • Day 1: national research agenda with a focus on SA HE
  • Day 2: research policy formulation & role of performance management & assessment
  • Day 3: new & mainly electronic approaches to supporting research
  • Day 4: impact of new research resources & of digital collections in libraries
Afternoon sessions were earmarked for more practice-oriented activities

- Afternoon Day 1: *Becoming a researcher*
- Afternoon Day 2: A workshop on the *Librarian as Researcher: the reflective practitioner*
- Afternoon Day 3: Workshop - 4 *case studies* of researchers with specific but varied information needs
- Afternoon Day 4: Guided discussion - *What is a research librarian?*

Followed by final group session: participants worked with colleagues from same institutions to plot a way forward
• Common themes in institutional plans of action:
  ◦ Importance of collaboration & partnerships in the research enterprise
  ◦ Own and colleagues’ ongoing need for training

• Other activities mentioned more than once:
  ◦ Importance of enhancing research spaces & services
  ◦ Need for marketing new services

• Overall:
  ◦ The importance of librarians more involved in research agenda
  ◦ Committed to furthering that agenda in their own institutions
• Analogue tweets
  ◦ Participant feedback after each presentation, on sticky notes pinned to a communal notice board
    ◦ The comments included words like “insightful,” “challenging,” “thought provoking,” “informative,” & “interesting” appearing repeatedly
    ◦ “Disappointing” from one session fraught with technology challenges
• Online final exit survey
  ◦ Entire experience most positively received & highly regarded
  ◦ Noted contribution of the CALICO Coordinator
  ◦ Opportunities for networking & collaboration with colleagues valued
  ◦ Few negative responses:
    • Duration of the sessions – too short
    • Duration of the programme – too short
    • Size of conference room – too small
    • Internet provision after hours – not enough
    • Personal comfort due to power outage
Follow-up to strengthen collaborative bonds

- Opportunities for participants to engage in research activities in their libraries & inter-institutionally (for example via Vula)
- 2013 focus session arranged by CHEC
- Consideration of an Academy in 2014/2015
We found the Academy a worthwhile & fulfilling experience for all concerned, & believe that participants will be able to make some positive difference in supporting research in the Western Cape.

Thank you for your attention.


