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Sheila Nomathemba Ndlovu, "Embedded Librarianship: The Key to Unlocking the Research Potential at the Lupane State University."
Proceedings of the IATUL Conferences. Paper 1.
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/iatul/2017/research/1>

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EMBEDDED LIBRARIANSHIP: THE KEY TO UNLOCKING THE RESEARCH POTENTIAL AT THE LUPANE STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

A new era of developing a unique understanding of what Library clients need and delivering proactive results is upon us in Africa as well as the rest of the world. Embedded Librarianship offers a full engagement of the Librarian in the work of individuals, groups, teams and departments that they serve. This has proved a successful win-win collaboration for both the Librarians and their users.

Keywords

Embedded Librarians
Information Literacy Skills (ILS)
Lupane State University (LSU)
Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC)

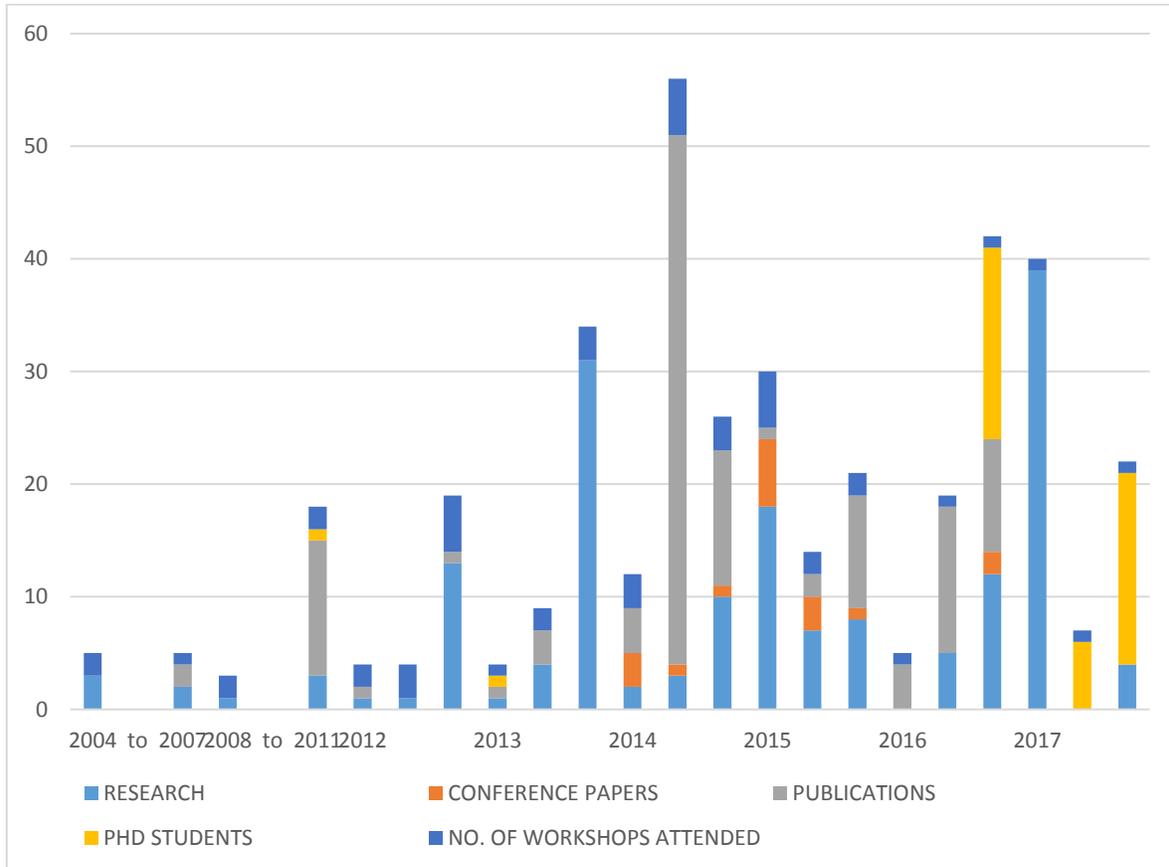
Conference sub-topic: Research Support Services

Introduction

When Professor Barbara J. Ford, the former American Library Association President visited Zimbabwe under the invitation of the Zimbabwe Library Association (ZimLA) in 2013. She gave a talk on 'Embedded Libraries' which was a new topic to all who were present. Following this lecture, it became clear that the traditional role of the Librarian had evolved for the better. Digital information is ubiquitous and clients do not have to come to the Library to get information. E-resources can be obtained from home, in offices, in the student's halls of residence, restaurants, etc. Library users use desktops, laptops, smart phones and tablets to access all their information needs. The original role of the Librarian of 'waiting to be asked' and be responsive, has completely made a turn-around as Embedded Librarians become 'go getters' of the needs of their academic communities that they serve; they anticipate and are pro-active. By definition, Embedding Librarianship is the act of immersing oneself in the academic community being served and seeking a deeper level of integration. Schumacher and Talley describe embedded librarianship as involving a focus 'on the needs of the one or more specific groups, building relationships with these groups, developing a deep understanding of their work, and providing information services that are highly customized and targeted to their greatest needs' (Shumaker & Talley 2009). The important aspects of the Embedded Librarians is to communicate the value of the Library service through increased research output.

LSU Research Background

LSU was established in 2004 and from that time the research history has not been impressive. The total number of academics is currently 84, serving 3 Faculties and just above 2 500 students. The Faculties are; Agricultural Sciences, Commerce and Humanities & Social Sciences. The graph below shows the research output trends of LSU.



Research Trends at Lupane State University 2004 – 2017

From the early years of 2004 to 2011, it is evident that little or limited research activities were taking place. Only the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences produced research articles that were published in international journals. During this period we had one PhD student who is now the Dean of the same Faculty in 2016. In this early period of the University, the LSU Librarians realized the importance of rethinking their role and revitalizing their approaches to our service delivery (Lin Wu and Misa Mi 2013). An introduction of Subject/Faculty Librarians was the immediate answer to close the gap between the campus community and the academic Library (Schulte 2015). The intervention of the Subject/Faculty Librarians yielded positive results as far as the research output was concerned. A marked increase of research activities, publications and increased enrolment for PhD studies has risen. From a total of 84 academic staff, 26 are enrolled for PhDs which translates to 30.95% of the total academic staff population. In 2014, the Faculty of Commerce lecturers were on an scholarly writing spree as they produced 47 peer reviewed journal articles from various publishers. The current scenario (2017) has the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences taking the lead of the research activities.

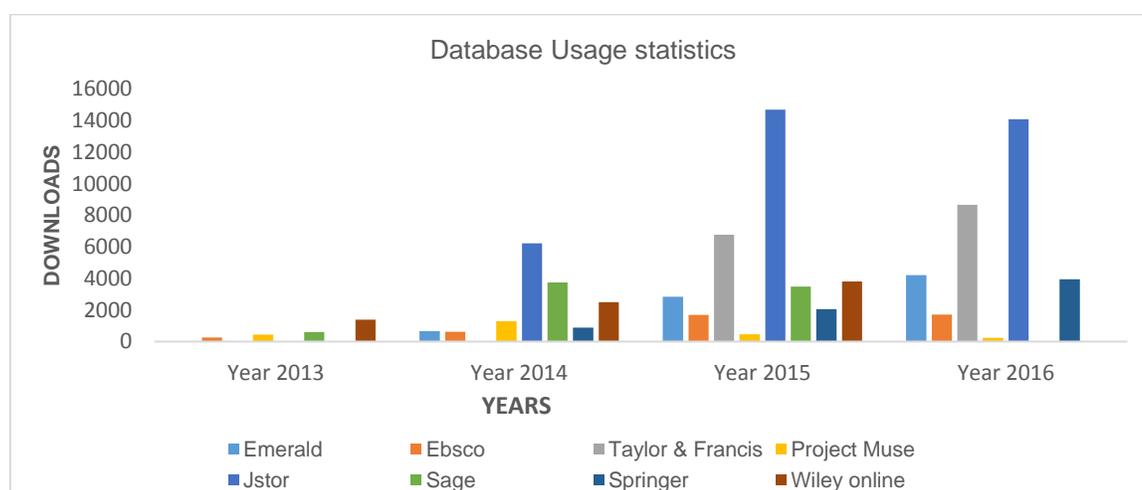
Electronic Resources Usage at LSU

According to the Emerald Publishing statistics of the Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium's usage in 2010, LSU was at the bottom of the log which involved 9 State Universities and 6 privately owned Universities. For the past 3 years the LSU usage of e-resources has been rising as follows:

| Institution | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|
| Lupane State University | 652 | 2970 | 4175 |

LSU e-resources usage statistics

In 2016, LSU has improved its rank to number 8 as according to the 2016 Emerald Publishing Consortia Usage Report for ZULC. The University will continue to do well with the promise of a formally established and examinable Information Literacy Skills (ILS) programme, LSU is assured of progressing steadily to the top. The Database Usage Statistics will testify to this effect:



LSU Database Usage Statistics

If the total number of students at LSU is 2 500 and the 2016 e-resources usage hits were 4 175, it almost gives the impression that at least all students and staff have used one of our online resources. Whether this is true or not, it is encouraging to us Librarians as it testifies to the fact that there is evidence of usage of the e-resources.

The Library has over the years held Open Access Essay competitions and World Café which have proved popular with both the students and the Faculties. The Open Access annual week of Celebration is a constant reminder to the LSU academic community to revive their research interests as well as participate in Open Access Publishing Journals.

INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORY: IR @ LSU

Another way of building in-roads with the Faculty is marketing and developing the Institutional Repository. As the LSU Librarians knock on the doors of the Faculty requesting for their current research, conference papers and books they write, faculties have slowly been won over by the Faculty Librarians to deposit their works to the Library. Despite the initial resistance of depositing their works witnessed over the past few years, this process of engagement has given an opportunity for the Librarians to assist in finding information for Faculty's current research and firmly establishing Librarians as professionals who are able to meet the users at their point of need. The LSU IR (IR@LSU) has been successfully registered on OpenDoar (The Directory of Open Access

Repositories), ROAR (Repository of Open Access Repositories) and DOAR (Directory of Open Access Repositories). These are platforms that allow LSU research to be visible and increase the Institutions' ranking.

New Research Strategic Direction

In 2015, LSU received new leadership whose burning desire was to see an upsurge in the research of various departments. New instruments were introduced that ensured an awakening and revival of research. Firstly, a Directorate of Research & Innovation Services Office was created which coordinates all the research at LSU. Secondly 4% of the total recurrent budget was allocated to the Research Board to ensure funding for research by academics. Thirdly, the University became a member of the National Research Database in Zimbabwe which is run by the Research Council of Zimbabwe. LSU sends all its research to this database with the hope of showcasing its intellectual output as well as seeking to attract local and international collaborators in the development of various research subjects and in pursuit of new areas of knowledge. The Research Council of Zimbabwe works hand in hand with the Library's Institution Repository. In 2016, the LSU Library hosted the Database of African Theses and Dissertations (DATAD) workshop, which is an Association of African Universities initiatives that promote the creation and development of Research in Africa. This linked the LSU's Institutional Repository with most of the research output being done in Africa. Last but not least, LSU has over the past two years increased the number of workshops that teach the academics on how to conduct research, analyse the data and the Library participates in offering citation tutorials.

In order to increase research potential at Lupane State University, our plan is to employ more Subject/Faculty Librarians who will build stronger relationships with both Faculty and students. Eventually, the Subject/Faculty Librarians will transform themselves to Embedded Librarians as they will offer focused, targeted, specialized research and produce information results which have an analytical approach and which enable the Librarians to be more integrated in the academic community. Our Embedded Librarians will have offices where the Faculty is and not in the Library. A few Subject Librarians would remain in the Library solely for the service of the students. All the Faculty Librarians have a background of Library qualifications for their undergraduate degrees but for future prospects, we will look for Embedded Librarians who have their first degree in the subjects their Faculties will be offering; for example, the Embedded Librarian for the Faculty of Commerce must have their first degrees in Commercial subjects. It is important for Librarians to have a background in both Librarianship and in the subject matter that is important to their customer needs. This approach for the Embedded Librarian would allow easy creation of building strong relationships with the Faculty and understanding the Faculty's work and information needs. The Embedded Librarian would share the Faculty's goals and be involved in Faculty and students research groups and actively contribute to the achievement of those goals and furthermore become an integral and indispensable member of the Faculty (Shumaker, D. 2009).

With this new type of Librarian, it would not be a difficult to see a Librarian as team player in the provision of education to both the Faculty and the students. The Embedded Librarian can integrate the Library instruction into a course/curriculum, be a collaborator with the students and Faculty in developing research projects, customize references and research consultation services for the Faculty being served and provide on-call or one-on-one research services. On a higher level, the Embedded Librarian can teach a credit-based course (ILS) and share work space with the Faculty. At the zenith of our careers, the Embedded Librarian's activities, the Librarians can be co-authors and co-teachers and partner with Faculty in developing educational programmes. There is so much the Embedded Librarian is able to offer such as collaborating with Faculty in grant writing and conducting research projects workshops. As LSU is a University based in the rural areas, community outreach programmes such as raising the standard of both Primary and Secondary Education in the Matabeleland North region (where we are based) by introducing education with technology, the Embedded LSU Librarians plan to create virtual learning centres in each of the five Matabeleland North districts. As our LSU motto is 'Building Knowledge through communities' the LSU Embedded

Librarians will offer the community information on areas such as semi-arid farming, pottery, horticulture, wildlife management and wood technology.

LSU Library Strategic Initiatives

The LSU Library has recently embedded 2 Librarians to the Faculties of Agricultural Sciences and Commerce to where the Faculties are located. Spending a significant part of their everyday work in these academic departments has resulted in purposeful interaction and in the creation of a more trusting relationship with the Faculties which is brought about by a good service ethic and the demonstration of expertise by our Librarians. Collaboration occurs after the Embedded Librarians gain the trust of the Faculty, staff and students. According to Martin Kesselman (2009) collaboration usually means taking part in academic endeavors such as teaching and research in which the Librarian serves as a major partner. The ultimate goal of the Embedded Librarian is to collaborate in research activities by conducting literature searches for Faculty grant applications and potential areas of Faculty research and may even serve as co-principal investigators with faculty on research projects (Bartnik 2007). Interaction with staff increases opportunities of invitations to do class instructions course guide (ILS) and to work on collaborative projects.

The advantage of collaborative initiatives for learning which includes Embedded Librarians is a clear one as Dewey (2004) articulated, 'Embedding Librarians brings the learning process in closer proximity to the scholarship on which the disciplines are based to those that service it namely the Librarians'. It has been known in most Libraries where Embedded Librarians are successfully operating that the results have been improved student learning and increased contact with Library resources and services. The presence of the Embedded Librarian in a department building serves as a visual reminder to patrons that the Library's resources and services are available to them. Carlson & Kneale (2011) argue that embedded Librarians 'move from a supporting role into partnership with their clientele.' No matter where there are, embedded Librarians have evolved beyond providing general reference and information literacy instruction to serving as research and teaching partners, (Schulte 2012).

Overn (2014) refers to these new types of partnerships as team – teaching, which involves faculty Librarian collaboration on 'planning the learning outcomes, assignments, assessment, as well as being present and participating in each other's lectures and sessions. Embedded Librarian transcend service because they become partners and therefore, the Librarian is fully engaged. The partner is a member of a team whose members are mutually responsible for the overall outcome. The outcomes of Embedded Librarianship fit in the academic goals of the institution. By tipping the balance towards the increased use of the Library and information resources, Embedded Librarians will truly achieve greater heights in as far as their effectiveness is concerned.

The fact that in the developed world, Embedded Librarians are team and co-teachers, it presents a lot of challenges with the academics in the developing world as Librarians are viewed with suspicion of interfering in the turf of the academics. The idea of having Embedded Librarians attend classes for the courses in which they are embedded, participating in class discussions is something inconceivable and might take years to be acceptable. Bureaucratic roadblocks will continue to draw back the aspirational goals of Embedded Librarians and make the aspirational goal of Faculty-Librarian problematic. The truth of the matter is that Librarians do not stand on an equal footing with Faculty in terms of general perception or professional development and scholarly opportunities. Academics should be encouraged not to miss the bigger picture and focus on how useful, necessary and important Librarians are to their education, research and everyday lives and work. (Schuman 1990).

Despite the challenges ahead, being an Embedded Librarian has never been so exciting, moving beyond service and becoming an active partner in the development of academic user needs, adding value to the academics, surrounding communities and enforcing the relevance of the Library which

further strengthens the Librarians' positions as key players within the University. Great things can only be expected from the Embedded Librarian initiative.

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