

RESEARCH NEEDS AND RESEARCH SUPPORT:

The changing and challenging role
of the academic librarian

Overview



- SA's current research environment
- Why the need to increase research?
- How can libraries respond to current challenges?
- Why collaborate?
- Proactive redress – GET OUT THERE!

Background



- South Africa's research environment is complex & country-specific
- Research is a priority: NRF mandate
(National Research Foundation Act : 1998)
- NRF evaluates; obtains confidential peer evaluations
- NRF funding and focus areas

Our universities



- Space of focused and intellectual inquiry
- Due to our country's history, we have universities with different histories, different resources, different visions and missions
- All contribute to develop an educated and thoughtful citizenry, a critical element of a successful democracy

Why the need to increase research?

- Total number of higher education staff in academic/research related positions in SA
 - 2003 – 14 976
 - 2005 – 15 315

- Number of rated higher education researchers in SA
 - 2003 – 1 306 = 8.7%
 - 2005 – 1 501 = 9.8%

(NRF Evaluation and rating facts and figures : 2007)

- In comparison: research/instruction staff at Harvard 16 986

(Harvard University fact book : 43)

- At UCL 4 000 academic/research staff produced 36 349 publications in 2005, compared to UCT where 830 produced 4 507

Relative investment

- Current South African total (public and private sector) expenditure on R&D amounts to approximately 0.70% (government 0.29%) of GDP whereas the average OECD country expenditure is 2.15% of GDP. Finland, for example, with an economy the same size as South Africa, spends 3.50% (government 1.00%)
(South Africa's national research and development strategy : 2002)
- South Africa's current level of 0.70% is significantly lower than it should be to ensure national competitiveness in years to come. This fact is emphasized every year in the World Competitiveness Report.
(The Global Competitiveness report 2008 – 2009)

What do all these facts and figures illustrate?



- Lack of global competitiveness
- Our university research is too small; too under-funded and under-invested
- Not creating lead sectors and therefore the creation of wealth is not expanded

Other factors...



- ❑ South Africa has an aging, predominantly white male, scientific and engineering workforce.
- ❑ evidence demonstrates there are insufficient new entrants, including women - “frozen demographics” represent a significant, shared challenge
- ❑ Rising costs
- ❑ Technology and the increasing availability of digital information has had an impact on information-seeking behaviour

The role of the research library



- How can libraries respond to current challenges?
- How can libraries prepare for the academic programs they nurture?
- What do researchers want librarians to do?

Evidence



- SA still in the traditional librarians' role
- LibQUAL results gave tangible evidence that librarians:
 - ▣ Did not have the knowledge to answer user questions
 - ▣ Did not understand the needs of the researcher
- Not exclusive to SA, according to a similar study in UK
 - ▣ Significant levels of dissatisfaction and a perceived imbalance between serving the needs of teaching and research (Curl:11)

This leads us to the conclusion that



- Expertise by librarians may be the distinguishing feature of the future research library (Heath : 7)
- Subject competence will be required to help researchers navigate
- Collaboration will be pivotal & provide a rich resource in assessing your users' needs

How do we respond?



Determine the need for collaboration

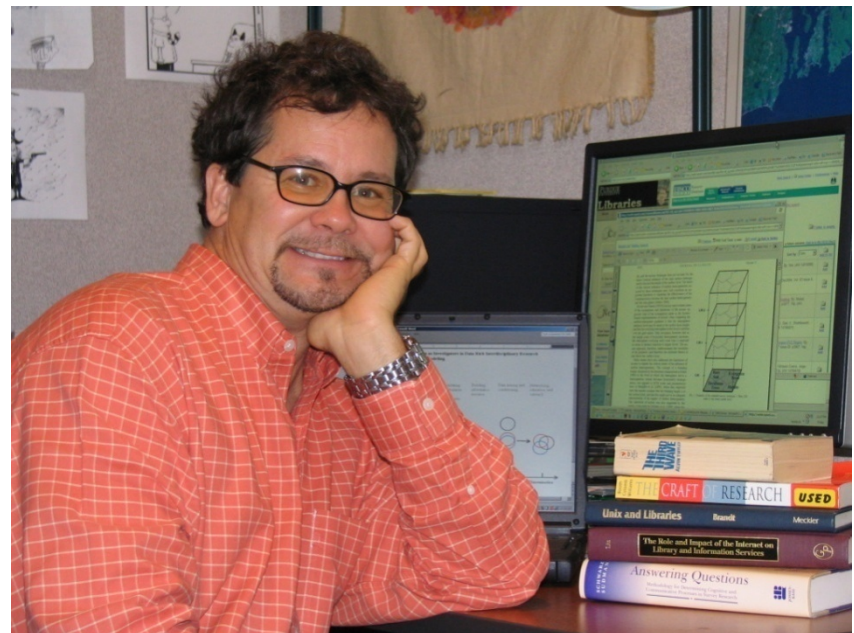


- Case Study: Purdue University
- Hypothesized that researchers have data management needs and that librarians can help meet them
- Brought skills to the table – apply library science knowledge and expertise to research problems;
 - ▣ **Collect, organise, describe, curate, archive, disseminate data/information**
- Engagement leads to collaborations which leads to you learning in much richer ways your users' needs

Envisioning new interdisciplinary collaborations

D. Scott Brandt,
Associate Dean for
Research,
Professor of Library
Science

Facilitates individual and
interdisciplinary research
efforts of the fifty faculty
librarians



Collaboration



- You need to keep abreast of what is being researched and published
- Researchers do not compete but work in harmony
- Dig for the truth and nail it down together
- Librarians: create and keep a real and virtual space to merge ideas
- Focus on the PhD

A doctoral thesis is “the most challenging, arduous task any person in academia is likely to undertake throughout his or her career” (Styles and Radloff:2000)

How do we prepare?



- Administration has to create awareness
- Move out of your comfort zone & engage in researchers conversation
- Increase your knowledge – seeking continuing education opportunities, workshops, conferences etc.
- Identify ‘hot’ research areas and prioritise liaison opportunities

Things to do outside of the library

- Get out there - attend research seminars, call-outs, etc. to identify collaboration and funding opportunities. If possible host such an event!
- Establish contacts and links
- Get involved in post-graduate orientation
- Understand the NRF procedures: assist with applications, know funding procedures
- Course management systems (Blackboard, WEBCT, Vula)
- Marketing and PR – brand your library

Motivation for librarians



- ❑ Directly related to work, and makes something difficult easier
- ❑ It's an extension of "our everyday job"
- ❑ Something new and exciting to do
- ❑ Breaking new ground, want to contribute to interdisciplinary initiative
- ❑ Force the issue of how it gets done (i.e. more people added to help out)

Librarians task



- ❑ Grandmaster at chess, knowing ten moves ahead what her professor will be asking, reading next (Christie:6)
- ❑ Good librarians enable research collaboration
- ❑ Not only do you collaborate but also produce your own research – papers, conferences, articles

Conclusion



- It's a whole new world out there for us
- Our assertive engagement WILL assist in not only the production of substantive academic research but also assist in its *quality*
- Our commitment to our institutions goes beyond the 'job', research adds value to this country and therefore your commitment is beyond vocation
- The quality of a university is fundamentally about the quality of its staff
- Forward looking and world class in our methods

Thank You!



Questions

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