Research Libraries Consortium and research support

In the last two weeks of September 2007, six subject librarians from UKZN attended a two week Library Academy or ‘bootcamp’ at the Mont Fleur conference facility in Stellenbosch. They were Margaret Bass, Anita Kromberg, Rosemary Kuhn and William Dansoh from the Pietermaritzburg campus; Rani Moodley from Medical School Library and Omesh Jagarnath from EG Malherbe Library. Praversh Sukram, Pietermaritzburg Campus Librarian who is chairperson of the Library Academy coordinating committee also attended. They were joined by an equal number of colleagues each from the universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand and two colleagues from Rhodes University. The bootcamp formed part of the Research Libraries Consortium project, a three year initiative sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation. The purpose of the Carnegie Research Libraries Consortium project is to facilitate access to, and sharing of electronic resources in particular as well as a range of support activities for researchers. The project aims to complement national initiatives to encourage and develop research potential in South Africa.

The vision for the project is to produce “a new model of proactive librarianship in which librarians will understand research, will be supported by the access tools provided by the latest technologies, as well as access to content that can be aggregated, organized and personalized. This seamless access to information will be underpinned by individualized and targeted support services”. Librarians need to be involved in all aspects of the research process in terms of providing support to emerging researchers in particular. It is expected that there will be a high level of cooperation between these three university libraries.

The Research Libraries Consortium project comprises three interrelated elements:

1. The development of a sophisticated web-based research portal to provide access to a wide range of resources which will include federated searching across multiple databases from a single interface (initially for a particular library and in the future across the consortium libraries) and bibliographic management software (see page 2 of this newsletter)

2. A ‘research commons’ – a physical space where computers and trained staff can assist researchers

3. Enhancement of skills of library staff particularly subject librarians through a two week ‘library academy’ for 6 librarians from each of the institutions (Sept 2007 and a second one in 2008); followed by a six week internship in the USA (the first one March – May 2008). This training is to be cascaded down and developed amongst all subject librarians.

The bootcamp aimed to present the bigger picture as regards research environments and processes and the need for academic libraries and subject librarians to redefine their primary role as a support for research activity into the future. In the first week, input was made by a range of eminent academics across many disciplines such as chemistry, physics, history, historical demography, psychology, sociology and media studies, to name but a few. These inputs revealed differing and contested approaches to and kinds of research. Issues facing research
such as funding and publishing and ethics as well as access to information and the role of technology in research – from the researcher’s perspective were also unpacked. Particular perspectives were also provided by the NRF, a publisher and librarians. Much of the second week was given over to topics such as copyright and plagiarism, writing, publishing, reference work, the impacts of technology on core library functions, the impact of the internet and the use of technology in libraries and what research support should comprise and associated challenges particularly in the electronic environment.

The two weeks also involved group work and individual presentations by participants on a range of topics. Participants were also trained in blogging as a format to maintain contact with each other and as a potential tool for communicating with users. Participants had to complete a research article for potential publication by the end of October.

Rose Kuhn

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Taming the Online Jungle

Do you despair at the constantly changing online information environment? A current library initiative hopes to address this concern. Improved access to our e-journal collection, seamless online linking to full-text articles and new ways of searching across multiple databases are just a few of the ways that UKZN Libraries’ participation in the Research Libraries Consortium (RLC) is providing students and researchers with better integrated information services.

In collaboration with libraries at Wits and UCT, a knowledge portal is being developed to support research and learning at the universities. For libraries, portals are gaining value as a means of bringing together in one place (in a networked environment), information from many different distributed sources. To develop and implement the portal, funding was obtained from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and a working relationship established with Israeli-based Teldan Information Systems, whose TDNet e-resource management system was able to provide the features and functionality required. Now eighteen months into this three-year project, the core elements of a seamless, integrated environment for the delivery of e-content are in place:

- **Electronic Journal Portal** – Finding journals has just become a whole lot easier. Currently over 23 000 e-journals (direct journal subscriptions, subscriptions to databases and open access titles) can be searched. The new journal service tracks the constantly changing content of various e-journal collections and regularly updates links to those to which UKZN has access. The search options allow researchers to either search article titles (5 year backfile only) or specific journals. A convenient A-Z browse option is also offered. The easy access to Tables of Contents of different journals and the personalised alerting service allow users to implement their own customized current awareness strategy. Although the e-journal holdings of both Wits and UCT can also be searched, access to full-text articles depends on UKZN library subscriptions and licensing agreements.
Federated Searching of Databases – In addition to searching databases individually, researchers can now opt for federated searching, which allows simultaneous searching of up to 10 databases. The Basic Search option interrogates only 4 pre-selected multidisciplinary databases. The Advanced Search option offers a comprehensive list of databases arranged according to subject categories, which helps guide users to select appropriate databases for their search. Search results are a merged list of citations from different sources which are automatically reviewed and grouped according to themes and concepts. This makes it easier for users to find what they need. Personalisation features are still to be implemented, but will soon allow personal profiles and alerting services.

Linking - More efficient linking from citation databases to full-text articles is now possible with open URL link resolving. If the full-text article is not available in the database being searched then this icon provides a link to UKZN options for the article required. In some cases full-text articles will not be available and then helpful links allow the search to be extended to the iLink library catalogue and print collections; or to the internet via Google Scholar. Implementation of these links is not standard in all databases, and vendors still have some way to go in adopting Open URL standards.

The portal system allows e-resources to be managed more effectively, particularly the e-journal collection. UKZN Libraries will glean valuable data on the use of electronic resources from usage statistics generated by the system which will inform the growth of these collections. Benefits for researchers and students include improved search options, integrated bibliographic management tools (RefWorks) and easier off-campus authentication, which should add up to a more efficient and rewarding experience in the online environment.

Greater collaboration with other libraries on current trends and initiatives will guide future development of the portal. However, the inclusion of more Africa-rich resources, a repository which will initially make UKZN theses available online, improved full-text linking to more databases and the seamless integration of all resources (including print), are some of the areas of focus for the future.
Staff news

New head of subject librarian unit

Lindiwe Soyizwapi has been appointed as Head of the Pietermaritzburg campus library subject librarian unit with effect from 1 March 2008. Lindiwe joined the unit in 1991 and has worked in both the main and life sciences libraries. She worked at Umgeni Water library for four and a half years in the late 1990’s before returning to UKZN in 2001. Congratulations Lindiwe.

Off to the USA

Omesh Jagarnath from the EG Malherbe library and Rose Kuhn from the Pietermaritzburg campus library will be visiting the USA for seven weeks from mid March until early May as part of the Research Libraries Consortium project. The development programme begins with two weeks at the Mortenson Centre for International Library.

Programmes at the University of Illinois, Urbana, and is ‘intended to expand their knowledge and understanding of information and research support as it is practiced in research libraries in the United States’. They will be joined by five colleagues from Wits and UCT. Omesh then moves on to work at the library of the University of Texas at Austin for a month whilst Rose will be hosted by Washington University at St Louis, Missouri. The trip also includes a visit to San Francisco and finishes with attendance at the “Living the future” conference in Arizona. These biannual conferences focus on aspects of library collaboration, organizational change, building learning environments and new developments in library and information technologies and practices.

Library orientation

Orientation in the use of the Library’s iLink catalogue will be held during the first few weeks of the semester at various libraries. Most libraries have provided orientation to new students during the Orientation Week programme. Detailed instruction in information retrieval and database searching can be arranged with subject librarians. Please contact the subject librarian for your discipline to arrange a programme.

Refworks

As part of the Research Libraries Consortium project, the on-line bibliographic management programme is now available and included in the Databases option on the Library’s website. The programme includes tutorials but training will be offered by the libraries which will be advertised on the Groupwise system.