

**THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF STUDENT LIBRARY USERS AND THE  
FULFILMENT THEREOF  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

BY

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that research for the topic:

“The information needs of student library users and the fulfilment thereof at the University of South Africa”

is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....

**(Signature)**

**(Ms B Ramasodi)**

.....

**DATE**

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my husband, Tyrron, and our children, Tsholofelo, Katlego and Ofentse, who missed so much of me while this study was underway, and to my loving parents, Ruth and Anthony Maphanga.

## **ABSTRACT**

In this study, research was conducted on the information needs of Unisa students. Most distance students do not personally visit the library, which makes it difficult for librarians to determine whether or not they are meeting their needs.

The library plays an important support role in any university, especially in the open distance learning context. It is therefore important for librarians serving distance learners to continually evaluate their services in order to see if they are still meeting their client's needs.

The aim of this study was to determine if students are aware of the library services to which they are entitled, and if the library is successfully reaching and assisting remote students, and how its services can be improved. Questionnaires were posted to students, and interviews were conducted with on-campus students and staff.

Chapter 1 covers the orientation and background to the study. Chapter 2 discusses the research methods used to collect information. In Chapter 3, the library needs of distance learners were discussed, while Chapter 4 presented a discussion of the findings drawn from the questionnaires and interviews, and Chapter 5 makes recommendations based upon these findings.

It was found that some of the students surveyed were not aware of their library privileges. It is recommended that the Unisa library employ better strategies to market the library services available to students. Furthermore, the library needs to find better ways to reach out to remote students who have no access to information and communications technology upon which the modern library is so reliant.

## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ACRL</b>	Association of College and Research Libraries
<b>ANC</b>	African National Congress
<b>CHE</b>	Council on Higher Education
<b>ODL</b>	Open and distance learning
<b>SBL</b>	School of Business Leadership
<b>TSA</b>	Technikon Southern Africa
<b>UNISA</b>	University of South Africa
<b>VUDEC</b>	Vista University Distance Education Campus

**Key Terms:** Academic libraries, distance learning, distance learning library services, full-time student, needs, part-time student, Unisa Library

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The University of South Africa (Unisa) is the oldest university in South Africa. It is also the first distance teaching university in the country. It was established in 1873 as the University of the Cape of Good Hope, which was purely an examining body. Its name was changed in 1916 to the University of South Africa, and under its umbrella, several colleges became fully autonomous universities (Harris, 1996:45).

In 1947, Unisa assumed a distance teaching function, and was therefore one of the first universities to be entirely devoted to distance teaching (Willemse, 1995).

In May 2001, the Minister of Education announced plans to merge the two large distance education institutions in our country, namely the University of South Africa and Technikon Southern Africa, into a “single dedicated distance education institution”. As a result, the merger between the old University of South Africa and the Technikon Southern Africa, and the incorporation of Vista University’s Distance Education Campus (Vudec) occurred on 1 January 2004. A decision was taken to keep the name ‘University of South Africa’ after the merger. The National Plan for Higher Education (February 2001) argued that the plan would achieve the following:

- Develop a clear focus and strategy for the role of distance education in contributing to national and regional goals;

- Develop a national network of centres of innovation, which would enable the development of courses and learning materials for national use, thus enhancing quality within the higher education system;
- Develop a national network of learning centres, which would facilitate access and coordinate proper learner support systems;
- Enhance access and contribute to human resource development within the SADC region in particular and the continent in general;
- Facilitate economies of scale and scope, in particular, ensuring that advantage is taken of the rapid changes in information and communication technology (Department of Education, 2001).

Unisa offers degrees from undergraduate to doctoral level in 5 colleges, viz: Law; Human Sciences; Agriculture & Environmental Sciences; Economic & Management Sciences; and Science, Engineering & Technology. Unisa also offers a variety of certificate and diploma courses. As a leader in the field of distance education at the tertiary level in the Western world, Unisa continually strives to upgrade its services to its students (Harris, 1996:46).

Distance education is growing throughout the world. The economic and market needs of higher education are the two main driving forces of distance education. Information and communication technologies, continuing education and the emergence of non-traditional students also play a role in promoting distance education (Wolpert, 1998:22, 39).

In the past, Unisa was the only university in South Africa that offered distance teaching. Lately, however, universities such as the University of Johannesburg, University of Pretoria and University of the Witwatersrand have also begun to offer distance teaching. This means that students have a wider choice when it comes to selecting a distance teaching institution for furthering their studies. To keep its present students and attract new ones, Unisa needs to have excellent support

services for its students. The library is one of the most important support services that distance teaching institutions can offer their students. A library, according to Haider (2004:231), is the central organ of a university and plays a significant role in achieving the objectives of higher education. Excellent library services can encourage students and staff to join an institution.

Currently, undergraduates receive a list of recommended books that have been selected by their lecturers. The library buys multiple copies of these books, which students can borrow from the library. It only buys a few copies of prescribed books, because students are expected to buy their own copies. Lecturers also submit lists of articles that are scanned and placed on the library's electronic reserves, in order that they can be viewed electronically by students wherever they are and if they have access to the Internet. The library also subscribes to many databases, which include numerous full-text and bibliographic sources. Students can request library materials by personally visiting the library, phoning the library or accessing the Unisa Library's homepage on the Internet. Students who have access to the Internet are at a distinct advantage, because they can immediately access many library services. Students without Internet access struggle because they have to use the postal system, which can often be very slow. Even though Unisa was meant to be purely a distance teaching institution, there have been some changes over the past few years. There are full-time students who come to the library every day and expect services that academic libraries in dual-mode or contact institutions are providing. Students who come to the library on a daily basis are at an advantage because they can contact library staff at any time for assistance. This study focused on remote students who, for many reasons, cannot visit the library.

Postgraduate students have access to Personal Librarians who specialise in different subject areas that are taught at Unisa. They are responsible for contacting all registered Unisa postgraduate students and informing them of the library services to which they are entitled. Postgraduate students can also request librarians to conduct a literature search for them on their research topics. Training students in the use of

different resources is also the responsibility of Personal Librarians. They have to ensure that there are online tutorials that remote students can access in order to use all the library's resources.

Several studies have been conducted on the satisfaction of students with regard to academic libraries. In this study, research was conducted on whether or not the information needs of student library users at Unisa are being fulfilled. The performance of the Unisa library was measured in order to determine, as Willemse (1995:11) suggests, how well the library is doing and which of the library's services need to be improved. All academic libraries play an important role in the learning of students. A full library service is offered to both students and staff at Unisa, which is in contrast to other distance teaching institutions (Willemse, 1995). Unisa students depend on the library to provide them with relevant material for their studies. They also rely on the library to provide this material timeously.

## **1.2 DISTANCE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Education policies changed significantly after the advent of the first democratic government in South Africa. One of the changes was the emphasis on distance education. Distance education plays an important role in South Africa, especially in teacher and higher education. In 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) document entitled *A Policy Framework for Education and Training* described its vision for a future 'well-designed and quality distance education system based on the principles of open learning' (ANC, 1994:78).

Distance education provides access to education and training for those people who have not had the opportunity to study full time. It enables people who do not meet the entry requirements of campus-based institutions to get access to higher education (CHE, 2004).

Distance education institutions have not succeeded in enabling learners to perform to their maximum potential (1995 National Commission to Distance Education report). Some of these students come from schools that are poorly resourced. They have not therefore been prepared for higher education. Some of them perform badly due to a lack of skills to enable them to adjust to a university environment.

Support services can be useful to distance students, especially those from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. Library services that promote literacy skills as well as lifelong learning can empower these students. As a comprehensive higher education institution, Unisa needs to take a lead in helping students to perform to their full potential. Qakisa-Makoe (2005:46) mentions that learner support improves the performance of distance education learners, and challenges distance education institutions to provide sustainable and integrated learner support.

### **1.3 THE UNISA LIBRARY**

During the 1940s, Unisa experienced the challenge of growing numbers of students who wanted a university education but could not be accommodated at the Native College. African students were faced with poor facilities and the high cost of education. Therefore, only distance education seemed to be affordable.

In the early part of 1936, there were debates about the status of external students, who were mainly African. Mabel Palmer from Natal suggested that a separate correspondence university college be established. The State Library lending service was started at this time. Unisa expanded its library services through the State Library, following the example of the University of London's external study system.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1946, Unisa took charge of correspondence education in South Africa. In October 1940, Van der Walt began expanding the limited library facilities with the help of University of Pretoria and the Transvaal education department.

The Division of External Studies was faced with the problem of providing adequate library facilities to students who lived far from Pretoria and who experienced a shortage of suitable and up-to-date books in the wake of war.

External students had permission to use lending facilities in libraries such as the Johannesburg Public Library, the National Student's Library of the Department of Union Education in Pretoria, and Denny's Student Library in London, for those who were studying abroad. The Department of Education agreed to build the reference section of its library in Church Square for use by external students. This venture never succeeded, which led to the reference section coming under the direct control of the Division of External Studies. This represented the establishment of the Unisa library as it is known today, and the new, comprehensive library service was fully operational by 1950, under the supervision of Heinz Zastrau (Suttie, 2005:8-100).

Around 1965, the elite character of universities was also changing - the expectation that students would leave home to take up residence at a university was giving way to a model in which students stayed at home or worked part-time, thus facilitating access to poorer students. This constituency of students was crucial to the viability of Unisa, and its services had been designed to meet their needs (Beale, 1994:106).

In 1965, the Study Collection of the Unisa library was established. It housed all recommended books for assignments and solved many of the problems that had been experienced in the past. To enhance this service, all undergraduates were sent questionnaires to determine their views. The results were reviewed by R. de Wet and MC Boschhoff as part of their respective Master's degree research. There was an appreciable increase in undergraduate use of the library – 25 percent of those registered, which had risen from under 20 percent in 1964. The lending section also reported a significant increase in loans to staff – this was up by 2 501, which meant a total of 43 573 issues for the year (Unisa Archives, 1965).

Subject librarians were then introduced to build bibliographical capacity for the research needs of masters and doctoral students and lecturers. This service became available in 1967. Subject librarians represented an important link between the library and the academic department for which they were responsible, especially in terms of ordering material and obtaining specimen copies of books for review (Unisa Archives, 1966:2). In the future, they provided annotated bibliographies in specialised fields, drawing on the resources not only of the Unisa Library but also of other libraries in South Africa.

In 1967, Heinz Zastra resigned after 20 years' service. He was credited with transforming the Unisa Library from a textbook collection to one of the fastest-growing libraries in the country.

The Unisa Library was automated between 1968 and 1972. Unisa became the first university library in South Africa, and remained a leader in this field until the start of the millennium. By 1972, the library had become a much more complex organisation, its staff had increased and the sophistication of its services had been significantly increased. This led to increased expectations among lecturers, who demanded greater access for students in a growing number of disciplines and fields of research. The School of Business Leadership was beginning to flex its muscles and wanted to have its own library. Although this was not possible at the time, the subject librarian section was commissioned to provide a more dedicated service to students enrolled for advanced business degrees (Unisa Archives, 1974).

The Unisa Library went through a re-engineering process, which was completed in 2002. The implementation of the new library structure was delayed until the merger with TSA and incorporation of Vudec had been finalised. The 'new' library was implemented on 1 April 2008.

The Library's redevelopment project was intended to review the purpose and processes of the library. The aim was to look afresh at customers, products, processes, staff and structures, in order to improve services and make the library a more efficient and stimulating place of work (Henning, 2005).

#### **1.4 PROBLEM FORMULATION**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not the information needs of Unisa students were being met. If the library services are not effective in supporting students, this might have a negative impact on their success rate.

#### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study was undertaken in order to:

- determine if Unisa students are aware of the services rendered by the Unisa Library.
- determine if students are aware of their library privileges
- find out if the library is effectively marketing its services
- investigate whether or not the communication channels being used to communicate with students are effective
- determine whether or not students' information needs are being met.
- determine whether or not the Unisa Library is reaching all its students, as Unisa students can be found all over the world.
- find out how students who are situated far away from branch libraries and regional offices, and who have no access to the Internet can be helped.

- identify if and how the Unisa Library's services to students can be improved.
- determine what services students expect from the library which are not currently being provided.
- find out if it is possible for the library to provide these services.

## **1.6 AIMS OF THE STUDY**

The main aim of this study was to ensure that the Unisa Library offers the best possible service to Unisa students, in order to facilitate their learning. To effectively support Unisa students, the library needs to achieve the following:

- A better understanding of Unisa students and their circumstances
- Knowledge with regard to whether or not the Unisa Library is satisfying the needs of its students
- Determine how best to serve both on-campus and remote students
- Empower librarians in terms of the development of library services for distance learning programmes
- Improve library services for existing distance learning programmes
- Emphasise the need for the parent institution to assume full responsibility for ensuring that remote and on-campus students have equal access to library services.

## **1.7 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY**

This study made the following hypotheses:

- Not all Unisa students are aware of the services rendered by the library. More marketing therefore needs to be done in order to heighten this awareness.
- Students in Gauteng, especially those in Pretoria/ Tshwane and Johannesburg, are better off when it comes to library services, because they are closer to the main campus in Pretoria. Students in other regions struggle because branch libraries do not render all the services that are offered by the main library.
- Technology is enabling the Unisa Library to reach more students. However, there are still students who cannot be reached because they are in remote areas without access to technology. Better ways of reaching remote students without Internet access are therefore needed.
- Library and information services at a distance learning institution play an important supportive role.

## **1.8 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

This study began with the emergence of the new Unisa. Interviews for this study were only conducted with staff from the old Unisa. Questionnaires were also sent to students from the old Unisa. Unisa is an international university, which means that its students can be found all over the world. However, questionnaires were only sent to a sample of South African students, and interviews were only conducted with a sample of South African on-campus students. There are many categories of clients at the Unisa library. However, this study only focused on students, as the researcher

felt that Unisa staff are able to contact librarians when they need assistance. Remote students may not even be aware of the existence of library services.

## 1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will be valuable for the following reasons:

- Unisa clients will be able to get better library and information services from the Unisa Library.
- The Unisa Library will be able to improve its services to students, which will lead to more satisfied students.
- The Unisa Library will be able to retain its reputation of being one of the best academic libraries in Africa.
- Other academic libraries at distance teaching institutions will probably be able to learn from this study and improve their own services.
- The Unisa Library will be able to reach out to more students.

## 1.10 DEFINITION OF TERMS

The purpose of this section is to convey the meaning that the researcher attaches to the following terms used in this study:

**Academic libraries**, also known as university or college libraries, refers to libraries that are attached to academic institutions above the secondary school level, in order to support the teaching and research needs of students and staff. Academic libraries

exist to serve the educational needs of students, support the teaching staff in terms of material needed for their teaching role, as well as provide support to academic staff in terms of their research needs (Feather & Sturges, 2003:3-4).

**Distance learning**, also known as distance education, correspondence or open learning, refers to a method of study that is pursued by students who are not required to attend classes at the institution offering the course of study. They learn from a location of their choice, and often at a time of their choosing. The effects of barriers such as geographical isolation and personal and work commitments are thus minimised (Feather & Sturges, 2003:142-143).

**Distance learning library services** refers to those library services in support of college, university or other post-secondary courses and programmes offered away from a main campus or in the absence of a traditional campus, and regardless of where credit is given. These courses may be taught in traditional or non-traditional formats or media and may or may not involve live interaction between teachers and students. The phrase is inclusive of courses in all post-secondary programmes designated as: extension, extended, off-campus, extended campus, distance, distributed, open, flexible, franchising, virtual or synchronous (ACRL, 2000).

**Full-time student** is “a student who is carrying a full course load, as determined by the state, a local school system, or an institution. A college student is generally considered to be full-time when he or she carries at least 75 percent of a normal student load” (Shafritz, 1988:205).

**Needs** refers to required elements for students to achieve an educational objective (Hawkins & Baker, 2005: 470).

**Part-time student**, also known as a distant or remote student, is a student who is carrying less than half of a full course load, as determined by the state, local school or institution (Shafritz, 1988:340).

**Students** refer to those people who are registered for courses at Unisa. They include diploma and certificate students, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate students.

## 1.11 SUMMARY

In this chapter, some background information to the research problem was presented, and some historical background to the Unisa Library was provided, as well as an outline of the aims and significance of the study. The next chapter will provide information on the research methods and design used for this study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this chapter is to describe the research methods that were used in this study, and to explain the reasons for the choice of methods. Important topics that will be covered in this chapter include the following: a brief overview of qualitative and quantitative research methods, data collection techniques, and population and sample selections.

The triangulation model was identified as being suitable for this study. Triangulation refers to the use of two or more methods of data collection. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were used in this study. The researcher was of the view that gathering information from remote students, as well as personally communicating with on-campus students and staff working with students on a daily basis, would assist in obtaining all the necessary information in order to measure the effectiveness of Unisa Library's services.

#### **2.2 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES**

This study aimed at determining whether or not the services offered by the Unisa Library are beneficial to its students. It attempted to answer the following question: Are the information needs of Unisa students being met?

According to Morgan & Smircich (1980:491), in the past, quantitative methods were viewed as being superior, but lately, qualitative methods are becoming more accepted. Jacobs (1996:139) agrees that qualitative research is emerging within library and information studies as a serious methodological paradigm with practical benefits for the library manager.

The qualitative research methods that were used in this study were the literature review and the face-to-face interview. The quantitative method that was used was the questionnaire. Using both of these methods has an advantage, in that the two methods complement each another. They can be combined to produce differing but mutually supportive ways of collecting data. Different kinds of data can therefore be generated on the same topic (Denscombe, 1998:84).

The difference between the qualitative and quantitative approach is in terms of how the data is collected and analysed. After both the qualitative and quantitative approaches have been described, it will be clearer why both methods are useful in the context of this study.

### **2.2.1 Qualitative research**

The qualitative approach is often used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, usually with the purpose of describing and understanding these phenomena from the participant's point of view (Leedy, 2005:94). Qualitative researchers believe in documenting phenomena from the point of view of the people being studied.

Leedy (2005:96) lists the following distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research:

- Purpose: to describe, explore, interpret and build theory
- Process: holistic, unknown variables, flexible guidelines, emergent methods, context-bound, personal view
- Data collection: textual and/or image-based data, informative (small sample), loosely structured or non-standardised observations and interviews
- Data analysis: search for themes and categories, acknowledgement that analysis is subjective and potentially biased, inductive reasoning
- Reporting findings: words, narratives, individual quotes, personal voice, literary style

The characteristics of qualitative research that are relevant to this study are the following:

The qualitative approach was useful because it can be used for gathering information about information users' behaviour and information needs. This helped the researcher in collecting information about the library-related needs of students. In this study, interviews were conducted with staff working with students on a daily basis, in order to identify the challenges that distance students face. On-campus students were also interviewed, in order to obtain their views regarding the effectiveness of services rendered by the library.

Qualitative research methods provide an insight into how people make sense of their experiences. They are useful in understanding how individuals perceive their world, showing how individuals' perceptions and intentions in certain situations determine their behaviour, exploring phenomena in order to arrive at explanations, and providing concrete and detailed illustrations of phenomena. The qualitative approach involves understanding the people being studied and how they act on this information (Krathwohl, 1998:225; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005:5).

Qualitative researchers focus on examining experiences from the perspective of those involved. In a library setting, librarians, users or administrators should therefore be the subjects. The researcher attempts to understand why participants react as they do. In the qualitative research model, the researcher does not remain remote and detached, but instead enters the context, collecting data and enhancing raw data collected through insights gained from actually being in the field (Krathwohl, 1998:237). In qualitative research, the meaning of events, occurrences and interactions can only be understood through the eyes of actual participants in specific situations.

In qualitative research, one wants to find out not only what happens, but also how it happens and, more importantly, why it happens the way it does. One does not only look at the actions of human beings, but also tries to determine how they represent their feelings and thoughts through these actions. In qualitative research, the aim is to give as clear and detailed an account of actions and representation of actions (in speech, music, visual art, artefacts and spoken and written text) as possible, so that one can gain a better understanding of one's world, with the hope of using this understanding to bring about a measure of social change (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:3).

Leedy (2005:135) describes the qualitative approach as serving the purposes of evaluation, thereby providing the means with which a researcher can judge the effectiveness of particular policies, practices or innovations.

Qualitative research has its own approach to the collection and analysis of data. Qualitative data are in the form of words and are information-rich. Qualitative methodology rests on the assumption that a valid understanding can be reached through accumulated knowledge acquired first-hand by a single researcher.

Qualitative researchers use the following instruments to gather data - observation, interviews, archival material, documents, photographs and artefacts.

### **2.2.2 Quantitative research**

Quantitative research may be defined as an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables measured with numbers and analysed by means of statistical procedures, in order to determine whether or not the predictive generalisations of the theory hold true.

Leedy (2005:96) lists the following characteristics of quantitative research:

- Purpose: to explain and predict, confirm and validate, and test theory
- Process: focused, known variables, established guidelines, predetermined methods, some what context-free, detached view
- Data collection: numeric data, representative, large sample, standardised instruments
- Data analysis: statistical analysis, stress on objectivity, deductive reasoning
- Reporting findings: numbers, statistics, aggregated data, formal voice, scientific style

Quantitative research methods can be described as follows:

Quantitative research is more formalised and explicitly controlled, and its range is more precisely defined. It is relatively close to the physical sciences (Mouton and Marais, 1990:155-156).

Krathwohl (1998:23-24) describes it as follows:

The quantitative researcher is concerned with an objective reality that is “out there to be discovered.”

Quantitative studies describe behaviours by means of measures or observation scales (or both).

The quantitative study focuses on a cause-and-effect relationship between two variables.

The researcher’s role is that of an objective observer whose involvement in phenomena being studied is limited to what is needed in order to obtain necessary data.

Quantitative studies are focused on relatively specific questions or hypotheses that remain constant throughout the investigation.

Plans regarding research procedures are applied in a standardised manner – for example, all participants may answer the same questionnaire.

Data collectors, such as interviewers or observers, are expected to obtain only the data needed, and to avoid adding their own impressions or interpretations.

Measurement is normally focused on specific variables that are, if possible, quantified by means of rating scales, frequency counts and other instruments.

Analysis proceeds by obtaining statistical breakdowns of the distribution of variables, and by using statistical methods to determine associations (or differences) between variables.

It is therefore clear that it was important to use both approaches in this study. According to Mouton and Marais (1990:169-170), a single approach cannot successfully analyse human beings in their full complexity. The breadth, depth and richness of human life can only be grasped if both approaches are used.

## **2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review is useful because a researcher can see how other researchers have handled similar problems. It can also reveal sources that one never knew existed, and can help one to evaluate one's work from a historical and comparative perspective (Leedy, 1993:87-88). A literature review can also help a researcher to obtain suggestions about how to conduct the study, which previous mistakes to avoid, and which new methods might be effective (Krathwohl, 1998:103).

For this study, the following sources were consulted: books, journals, theses and dissertations, conference proceedings and the Internet, in order to gather information about and research the problem in question.

The literature review for this study was effective in collecting information on the following topics:

- Research conducted on library services to distance learners
- Information needs of distance learners
- Challenges faced by librarians in serving distance learners
- Marketing of library services to distance learners

In chapter three of this study, a detailed description of the literature review on the needs of distance learners will be provided.

## **2.4 INTERVIEWS**

The interview is another method of collecting information. In the interview method, information is collected from respondents through verbal interaction between the researcher and respondents. The interviewer prepares a list of questions that are relevant to the research, and the interview is like an oral questionnaire (Aina, 2002:23).

It is important to plan properly for an interview so that the desired information can be acquired from interviewees. It is also important to select suitable interviewees. Interviews can fail if there is no proper planning and preparation (Denscombe, 1998:110).

A good interview is like a good conversation – it is a two-way affair. One person talks while the other listens, responds and encourages. In a good interview, the person

who does most of the talking is the interviewee. While the interviewer asks questions and may talk a little about him/herself, he/she just listens most of the time, and the focus of the conversation is on the experiences of the interviewee. A good interviewer may not say much, but he/she is working hard at listening to what is being said. Careful listening will lead to the interviewer asking questions that make the interviewee think, thus exposing what the person does and how they understand (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005:55). Good interviewers are not passive and distanced, but are instead active and encourage respondents to talk about the issues at hand (Holstein & Gubruim, 2003; Wengraf, 2001). In the interview conversation, both the interviewer and interviewee are important.

Bourdieu's examination of the principles that the best researchers put into practice in the interaction between the researcher and the person interviewed offers many insights for the researcher who is about to embark on research interviews. Bourdieu questions the usefulness of traditional methodologies, because they propose techniques of inquiry that mimic and borrow the standard procedures and empirical rigour of such established scientific disciplines as ethnography and sociology, and overlook the successes of researchers who are "most respectful of their object and attentive to the almost infinitely subtle strategies that social agents deploy in the ordinary conduct of their existence" (Bourdieu, 1996:17). They are, he contends, more "scientific than scientific" (Bourdieu, 1996:17-18).

A structured interview involves all interviewees receiving the same questions in the same order, and it is like an oral questionnaire. The structured interview was used in this study, and the researcher had a list of predetermined questions. In a structured interview, clarifications, prompts, elaborations and any needed additional information is built into the interview plan.

The face-to-face interview involves direct contact between the researcher and the respondent. This type of interview was used in this study. Library staff that have

contact with students on a daily basis were interviewed in order to find out about students' behaviour. Most staff who were interviewed worked at the main library in Muckleneuk, Pretoria, and this made it easy for the researcher to interview them. Only three branch librarians, from the School of Business Leadership (SBL), Cape Town and Johannesburg branches, were interviewed. The researcher interviewed the SBL and Johannesburg branch librarians when they came to the main campus for meetings. An e-mail interview was conducted with the Cape Town librarian. On-campus students were also interviewed to find out how the library could make their learning easier.

Staff and students who were interviewed received their questions before the interview. This was done in order to help them prepare, and also to save them time, because whatever was not clear could be clarified before the interview took place. The interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The aim of the interviews was to obtain information about the information needs of distance learners, the challenges they face, as well as the challenges faced by librarians serving them and the marketing of library services.

The interview questions sent to students and staff had a covering letter. This letter contained information about the importance of the interview, as well as the information that would be required by the interviewer.

During the interview process, a tape-recorder can be used to record the conversation. In this study, the researcher only took notes, because both students and staff felt uncomfortable having a tape-recorder there. With staff, the interview discussion was e-mailed to them for clarification purposes. Some of the responses were returned with changes. No e-mails were sent to students, as clarification was done during the interview itself.

The following are some of the advantages of the interview method:

The interview helps to encourage or put more pressure on persons to respond more fully. Interviews enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world from their own point of view. Face-to-face interviews are advantageous because they allow the researcher to establish rapport with potential participants, and to therefore get their cooperation. Personal interviews allow the researcher to clarify ambiguous answers and, when appropriate, to get follow-up answers (Cohen, 2001:267; Leedy, 2001:196, Powell & Connaway, 2004:84).

The following are some of the disadvantages of interviews:

There are competing distractions, as interviews require a lot of energy from both the interviewer and the interviewee. Stage fright, the use of the recorder and open-ended questions can make participants feel vulnerable. The manner in which questions are asked also has an impact on the interview process. Interviewers should avoid asking questions in an illogical manner. Furthermore, interviews are time-consuming and it can be difficult to analyse the data (Denscombe, 1998:136; De Vos et al, 2002:295-296).

## **2.5 QUESTIONNAIRES**

The questionnaire is the most commonly used data collection method in the field of library and information science. It is used to obtain the views of respondents on a series of issues pertinent to the research problem (Aina, 2002:23). In survey research, questionnaires are used as the primary data collection instrument. It is important that the questionnaires that are developed are accurate measures of what

the researcher wants to measure (Busha & Harter, 1980:61; Van House, Weil & McClure, 1990:14).

Questionnaires are easier to arrange than personal interviews. They are usually sent out without prior notification, and there is no need to prepare for them. There are, however, researchers who contact respondents before sending the questionnaires, as a way of improving the response rate (Denscombe, 1998:105).

A mailed questionnaire is sent by post, with the expectation that respondents will complete it and return it by mail. The mail questionnaire was used in this study. One of the reasons for this is that Unisa students are scattered all over the world, and mail questionnaires were therefore considered to be the best way in which to communicate with them. It would have been difficult, if not impossible, to arrange for interviews with 400 students.

A questionnaire was viewed as suitable for this study for the following reasons:

Questionnaires are economical, because large amounts of data can be collected from many respondents at minimal cost (Krathwohl, 1998:159). They can be sent to a large number of people, including those who live far away. The researcher's travel and telephone costs are thus saved, as postage is cheaper than long-distance telephone calls or visits. In this study, 400 questionnaires were posted to students. The questionnaires included a stamped return envelope that was addressed to the library's research section. To make it easy for students to understand them, the questionnaires were written in a clear and understandable manner (Powers, Meenaghan & Toomey, 1985:12). The questionnaire consisted of 6 pages, since, as Van House, Weil and McClure (1990:26) state, users do not like lengthy questionnaires.

The questionnaire is a totally impersonal probe (Leedy, 1996:187). According to Powell and Connaway (2004:84), it tends to encourage frank answers because the respondents are guaranteed anonymity by the researcher. Respondents are free to be truthful and frank, because they are anonymous. In the questionnaire that was sent to students in this study, the confidentiality of their responses was emphasised.

Questionnaires are also relatively inexpensive to administer. Nowadays, software systems make it easy to analyse closed questions.

Some of the problems with questionnaires are as follows:

“Designing comprehensive, clear questionnaires is difficult” (Van House, Weil & McClure, 1990:26). It is therefore important that researchers ask other people to read the questions in order to ensure that they are clear and unambiguous. In this study, the researcher asked several colleagues and students to read the first draft of the questionnaire, and both students and staff agreed that it was too long. Some of the questions were viewed as being ambiguous. A second draft was written, and both staff and students were happy with it.

Questionnaires have a very low response rate, according to Denscombe (1998:8), who suggests that there is about a 20 percent response rate. He states, however, that a low response rate will still provide the researcher with sufficient information for analysis (Denscombe, 1998:8). Leedy (2001:197) states that the majority of people who receive questionnaires do not respond to them, and people who do respond are not always necessarily representative of the original sample. The questionnaire response rate for this study was also poor. This is why interviews were conducted with students and staff, in order to supplement the information obtained from the few students who responded to the questionnaire. The literature review was also used to obtain more information. As previously mentioned, Mouton & Marais (2003:169-170)

suggest that the breadth, depth and richness of human life can only be grasped by using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Leedy (2001:197) states that even when people are willing participants, their responses will reflect their reading and writing skills, and will also perhaps reflect their misinterpretation of one or more questions.

There are two main types of questions, namely open and closed questions. Open questions are good, as they allow respondents to express their views in their own words (Denscombe, 1998:101). Closed questions allow the respondent to select an answer from a number of options provided. The advantage of closed questions is that they are quick to respond to, as respondents only need to choose their answer. However, the disadvantage can be that some respondents may want to express their views on particular issues. The questionnaire in this study contained one open question, in order to allow students who wished to express their views on library services the opportunity to do so. Closed questions are advantageous in that the results of the investigation can become available fairly quickly. This is because it is easy to analyse quantitative data.

It is important for a questionnaire to include a cover letter. The purpose of the cover letter is to indicate the aim and importance of the research, and to assure respondents of confidentiality and encourage their response (Cohen, 2000:259). This cover letter should be written in simple language and be easy to understand. It should also have a letterhead to show professionalism, as well as providing confirmation of consent to conduct the study. A second letter from the Acting Executive Director of the Library (see Appendix 3) was useful, as it could possibly improve response rates. It is also important to thank respondents in advance for their cooperation.

## 2.6 SURVEY RESEARCH

The survey research method was also regarded as being relevant for this study. Quantitative researchers use this particular strategy, and the social survey is one of the oldest methods in the field of library and information science. Library surveys have always been used to collect information about a particular problem, in order to solve it. Leedy (2005:183) defines survey research as involving the acquisition of information from one or more groups of people, “perhaps about their characteristics, opinions, attitudes, or previous experiences”, by asking them questions and tabulating their answers. The ultimate goal is to learn about a large population by surveying a sample of it. Thus, one might call this approach a descriptive or normative survey. Aina (2002:19) supports this by stating that the principle used in survey research is to seek the opinions of certain individuals on a particular problem. In this study, for example, the purpose was to determine the opinions of Unisa students regarding services rendered by the library.

According to Busha and Harter (1980:54), survey research methods are used to obtain three broad classes of data, “which is information about incidents and developments (events about a given period), information about distributions and frequencies (data concerning the possessions or characteristics of each member of subject group) and information about generally known rules and statutes (data about institutional norms and conditions)”. He further states that community and library surveys are used to collect information on many aspects of libraries, in whatever setting these institutions might be located. Community surveys are conducted in order to gather recorded and unrecorded data about various social, political and economic facets of the library’s community, so that more intelligent decisions can be made concerning the planning, development and delivery of services (Busha and Harter, 1980:53-54). In this study, in order to be able to meet the needs of Unisa students, the researcher explored the characteristics of distance learners.

There are many types of research methods that are used in the area of library and information science. Most of these methods have been borrowed from other disciplines, and common research methods here are: social survey research, historical research, case studies, Delphi studies, bibliometrics, citation analysis and experimental research (Aina, 2002:19).

Survey research was used in this study for the following reasons:

- Library surveys are systematic, in-depth examinations of libraries, library systems or networks of libraries (Busha and Harter, 1980:53). By using a library survey, the researcher investigated the library services offered in order to find out if these services did in fact help students with their studies.
- Survey research, if properly carried out, allows one to generalise from a smaller group to a larger group from which the subgroup has been selected. Survey research methods allow investigators to gather information about target populations without undertaking a complete enumeration. In some inquiries, scholars are unable to interview or question an entire group of librarians, library users or other subjects. Instead, they select a small portion of the population (sample), and then generalise their findings to the larger group. In this study, because there are many students at Unisa, it was impossible for the researcher to send questionnaires to all students. What happened was that questionnaires were sent to a well-selected sample of students, and the results were then generalised (Busha and Harter, 1980:54; Powell & Connaway, 2004:83).
- Survey research is characterised by the selection of random samples from large and small populations, in order to obtain empirical knowledge of contemporary nature (Busha and Harter, 1980:54). In support of this, Leedy

(2001:196) states that survey research looks closely at the phenomena of the moment.

- Survey research is better suited to studying a large number of geographically dispersed cases (Powell & Connaway, 2004:84). Unisa students are geographically dispersed all over the world, and the survey method was thus the best way to study them.
- Survey research is considered to be more appropriate for studying personal factors and for the exploratory analysis of relationships.
- Survey research techniques can save time and money, without sacrificing efficiency, accuracy and information adequacy in the research process.
- Surveys are particularly useful for describing the characteristics of large populations (Babbie, 2001:268).
- The characteristics of the social survey are its wide and inclusive coverage. In the social survey, research should have a wide coverage – a breadth of view. A survey should take a panoramic view and take it all in (Denscombe, 2003:7).
- The purpose of the survey is to bring things up to date – it provides a snapshot of how things are at a specific point in time (Denscombe, 2003:7)

- In survey research, face-to-face interviews, telephonic interviews or written questionnaires are used. A written questionnaire, as well as face-to-face and e-mail interviews, were used to collect information in this study.

St Clair (1997:132) lists the advantages of customer satisfaction surveys:

- During and after the survey, the information services' operation is perceived throughout the organisation or community to be part of the enterprise team.
- The customer satisfaction survey enables the unit to build good will, as well as raise awareness about the department and its products and services.
- Preparing and conducting customer satisfaction surveys and supplementary interviews provides a splendid opportunity for the manager of a department to review his or her contribution to the organisation.

## **2.7 POPULATION**

Krathwohl (1998:160) refers to a population as “the piece of world to which we wish to generalize in sampling.” He states that populations and universes are made up of units, and in social science research, units are people or behaviours. Babbie (2001:95-96) refers to a population as a unit of analysis. He distinguishes between four categories of units of analysis: the individual, groups, organisations and social artefacts (i.e. products of human behaviour).

The population in this study consisted of students registered at Unisa. The Unisa student population can be divided into the following categories:

Undergraduates (full-time / part-time)

Postgraduates (full-time/ part-time)

Certificate/ Diploma students (Full-time/ part-time)

The population for this study consisted of all male and female Theology students. Undergraduates, postgraduates and certificate students were included. Questionnaires were only sent to Theology students residing in Gauteng and Western Cape.

A description of the Unisa student will be provided in detail in chapter 3, which deals with the needs of distance students.

## **2.8 SAMPLING**

In social research, there is always a challenge, in that data cannot be collected from everyone in the category being researched. Social researchers therefore “rely on getting evidence from a portion of the whole in the expectation and hope that what is found in that portion applies equally to the rest of the population” (Denscombe, 2003:11). At Unisa, for instance, it might be difficult and expensive for a researcher to send questionnaires to all students registered at Unisa. What happens is that a portion of the students is selected as a sample. It is very important to select the sample carefully. In order to select an unbiased and representative sample, sampling techniques are used (Aina, 2002:20).

Social researchers use two types of sampling, namely probability and non-probability sampling. In probability sampling, people are chosen because of the assumption that they might be representative of the whole population. Non-probability sampling is

used with no information as to whether or not the chosen people will be representative of the whole population.

There are different types of sampling techniques. The stratified random sampling method was used in this study. Here, the population is composed of layers (strata) of discretely different types of individual units. Generally, the stratification layers are somewhat equal (Krathwohl, 1998:209). The researcher selected a sample from undergraduates, postgraduates and certificate/ diploma students. In this way, information could be collected from each of the student groups.

## **2.9 SUMMARY**

This chapter described the methods that were used by the researcher to collect data for this study. In this case, the literature review, interview and questionnaire were used. The library needs of distance learners will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE LIBRARY NEEDS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Distance learning concerns students who study from a distance. These students do not have to physically go to the institutions at which they are registered in order to attend lectures. Technology has enabled distance students to have contact with their lecturers and librarians without being on campus. Time, geographical location and space are not a problem for the distance learner.

Verduin and Clark (1991) describe distance education as:

The separation of teacher and learner during at least a majority of each instructional process;

The use of educational media to unite teacher and learner and carry out course content;

The provision of two-way communication between teacher, tutor or educational agency and learner.

Oladukon (2002:293) describes distance education as a “system that takes knowledge and training to the marginalised, isolated, underprivileged and the unreachable.”

Distance learning is being undertaken by more and more students these days. Trends indicate that an increasing number of students are pursuing their studies

through distance education systems (Jagannathan, 1996; Holowachuk, 1997). Willis (1992) mentions the following as some of the reasons for learners choosing distance learning: “constraints of time, distance, finances, the opportunity to take courses or hear outside speakers who would otherwise be unavailable, and the ability to come in contact with other students from different social, cultural, economic, and experiential backgrounds.”

Distance learning students often do not attend lectures, which means that they depend heavily on library services in order for them to succeed in their studies. Jagannathan (1996) states that the needs of distance learners for library services can neither be disputed nor denied. He adds that library services are important for distance learners if they wish to succeed in their studies, but are also important to the university which offers the courses. Holly-Heller (1996) argues that there are a number of reasons for library support to distance learners. These include “... curriculum requirements, student and faculty research, library standards for equity of student support, accreditation criteria, and the importance of information literacy.” She points out that the ACRL has written guidelines for the provision of library services to distance learners. These guidelines state that “The Parent Institution ... should provide library services to the extended campus community equitable with that provided to the on-campus community. In addition to library and university accreditation, individual academic programs may have their own accrediting organizations which evaluate library services provided. Librarians must be aware of the changing trends in education and the impact these have on the delivery of library services.” Library support services thus play an important role for distance learners.

Popoola (1992) maintains that the library plays a central support role in the educational programme, and must be responsive to curriculum development, group and individual learning needs, and changes in teaching methods. Librarians have a crucial role to play in assisting students to become critical thinkers by helping them to develop research skills and to critically analyse information they retrieve.

Librarians have to equip students with lifelong learning and information literacy skills. Due to the fact that a distance learner's success depends largely on course materials, library services to these learners are crucial. They do not have classroom lectures, seminar discussions or the informal learning experience of the traditional student. It is therefore clear that library services to these students are very important.

### **3.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS**

It is essential for librarians to know who distant learners are in order to serve them effectively. It is equally important for the former to know the latter's unique needs for the same reason. Elayan and Younis (2005:32) believe that the best way to understand library user needs is to listen to them and to know them as individuals. Librarians normally assume that they know what students need. It would be helpful to their clients if they just listened to what their expectations are. The general characteristics of distance learners will be useful to Unisa librarians in terms of improving services to this group.

Cooper and Dempsey (1998:43) maintain that it is important for library staff to differentiate between on-site and remote users. They emphasise the importance of recognising the categories of remote users. According to Cooper and Dempsey (1998:43), "the user who may be a few buildings away from the library on campus encounters a situation different from the student or faculty member participating in a distance learning curriculum involving a distance of hundreds or thousands of miles". Likewise, the user who has never used electronic information resources brings a different set of needs and expectations than does the veteran user who may have established an effective relationship with library staff. Thus, staff will realise that a one-size-fits-all approach is likely to fail.

The characteristics of distance learners have an impact on the services they need from the library. Kularatne (1997:119) argues that “Many information provision plans fail because not enough attention is paid to the target population.” He recommends that the characteristics of the target population be recognised, studied and assessed in terms of the planned communication activity - size, age, sex, distribution, accessibility, educational level, occupations, needs, disabilities, cultural characteristics, customs and traditions are all important factors to be considered in order to work out a strategy.

Wilson (2002:65-67) describes the characteristics of the Unisa student as follows:

- Racially diverse
- Geographically distributed
- Different age groups
- Different experiences in life as professionals
- Prior knowledge
- Varying autonomy as learners
- Feelings of isolation and stress
- Multiple responsibilities as adults
- Clashing needs with changing relationships
- Low pass rates and long study periods
- Varying degrees of study discipline

There are many characteristics that can be used to describe distance learners. Only three characteristics that are related to library needs will be described in this section.

Distance learners can be described according to the following characteristics:

### **3.2.1 Employment**

Most distance learners are defined as students who are working on a full-time basis. Shohat (1990:23) describes distance learners as learners with full-time jobs. Oosthuizen (1997:70) maintains that distance learners come from a variety of institutions, most of which (for example, work and family) take precedence over the institution providing the course. She further states that distance learners have other commitments which reduce the amount of time they have available for study purposes. According to the latest Unisa statistics, the majority of Unisa students are employed (139 388), while 6 326 are unemployed.

Some employed students will not be able to visit the library in person due to time and geographic constraints. It is therefore important for the library to support these students by making it easier for them to access material they need for their studies. It is also important that they are able to get their material in time. Employed students will definitely need 24/7 electronic access to library services. The Unisa Library catalogue and databases are available 24 hours for students who have access to the Internet.

### **3.2.2 Geographical isolation**

Shohat (1990:23) describes distance learners as people who are unable to leave their homes for various reasons, for example, physically disabled people and mothers with young children, people living in remote areas, and even prisoners. It is clear from the above that distance learners are geographically isolated from their

fellow learners, lecturers and the library, not having fellow students who can help them with their studies. Adey et al (1991) maintain that some students choose to study from a distance because they prefer the isolation and do not want to be in a classroom or group situation. However, there are other students who are forced into isolation because of the remote areas in which they live or by personal circumstances.

According to Thornsteindottir (2001), most distance learning students live far away from the institution at which they are registered, and therefore do not have the same opportunities as on-campus students with regard to using the library. Distance learners end up requesting various services from their local public libraries or any other institution that is available.

The majority of Unisa students can be found in South Africa, followed by students residing in Southern Africa. Students who are in remote areas or who are unable to visit the library personally will definitely need the following services from the library: a 24-hour help desk, electronic information resources, access to other libraries, and a personal relationship with library staff. At the moment, there are Personal Librarians at the Unisa Library. However, these librarians only have a personal relationship with postgraduate students, whereas Branch Librarians have a relationship with undergraduate students. This normally happens with students who are able to visit Unisa branch libraries. There is no 24-hour help desk at the Unisa Library. Staff is only available until 18h00 during the week, and till 16h00 on Saturdays. However, students with access to the Internet have access to the Unisa Library website 24/7. The problem is that when they have questions, these can only be answered during office hours.

Cooper and Dempsey (1998:62) state that distance learners need to use a variety of libraries in addition to the "home" library in order to complete their academic assignments. They also need to know what other libraries can do for them. Access to

other libraries is important for distance learners. Unisa students are scattered all over the world, and Unisa therefore has to ensure that its students are able to access library services at other institutions. The Unisa Library does have a consortium agreement with some libraries – however, many students are unaware of this service.

Remote users need to have a personal relationship with library staff in the form of a customer-business relationship (Cooper & Dempsey, 1998:62). Burge (1991) argues that one key principle underlying the relationship between the learner and librarian is that it must be collaborative in nature. It is very clear that the relationship between distance learners and librarians needs to be improved. A student who cannot come to the library needs to be able to contact a library staff member who is willing and able to help with students' needs. Postgraduate students at Unisa do work closely with their Personal Librarians. Branch librarians work with all students, especially undergraduates.

### **3.2.3 Age**

In the available literature, distance learners are described as elderly and mature individuals. Shillinglaw (1988:66) describes distance learners as being older and more experienced than residential students, whereas Shohat (1990:50) views them as adults with full-time jobs. Cooper and Dempsey (1998:50) maintain that “List serve discussions of the demographics of distance learners in urban/suburban and rural settings show anecdotal support of the demographics noted on Peterson’s Distance Learning Web Page – most students who enrol in distance education are over twenty five years old, are employed, and have previous work experience”. Thorsteindottir (2001) views the distant learner as a mature student who has different needs to those of the on-campus student. However, in recent times, distance learners have not necessarily been only older adults. At Unisa, for example, there are students who come straight from secondary school. They register at Unisa

for various reasons, one of which is that they are unable to afford the high residential fees at other universities. Cooper and Dempsey (1998:50) describe distance learners as ranging in age from high school through traditional community college, undergraduate and graduate students, to adults and older adults. The latest statistics on Unisa students describe them as having an average age of below 30 years.

With regard to library needs, the age of students has an impact due to the fact that most adults have not been in a classroom for a long time and have no previous experience with computers. Such students will definitely need individual assistance in using technology and identifying resources (Canepi, 1999).

### **3.3 THE LIBRARY-RELATED NEEDS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS**

#### **3.3.1 The nature of needs**

A need, according to Hawkins and Baker (2005:470), refers to “required elements which students require to meet an educational objective”. Elayan and Younis (2005:31) believe that information needs “represent gaps in the current knowledge of the user”. They stress that users do not articulate all their needs, even though they are aware of them. They believe that it is the function of libraries or information systems to anticipate these needs and meet them, in order to encourage users to express them.

Services are required to provide for needs. Library services are needed to meet the information needs of distance learners. Distance learning library services refer to those library services in support of college, university or other post-secondary courses and programmes offered away from a main campus, or in the absence of a traditional or non-traditional format or medium, and which may or may not require

physical facilities and involve live interaction between teachers and students. The phrase is inclusive of courses in all post-secondary programmes designated as: extension, extended, off-campus, extended campus, distance, distributed, open, flexible, franchising, virtual, synchronous or asynchronous (ACRL, 2000).

Kascus and Aguilar (1988) maintain that library support is an integral part of quality education and a vital service that should be available to all students, whether on-campus or off-campus. Library services to distance learners are very important if they are to succeed in their studies. Rodrigues (1996:22) states that the provision of information resources for courses offered by the university is the main role of an academic library, including academic libraries which serve off-campus students. Library support to distance learners, according to Holly-Heller (1996), is vital because of curriculum requirements, student and faculty research needs, and the importance of information literacy. Lebowits (1997) also supports the idea that there is as great a need for library services to students who live on or near the campus as to those who can only visit the library after hours. Aitchison (1998:43) further contends that a library at a higher education institution has the responsibility of seeing to the needs of its users.

Barron (2002:26) argues that the library needs of distance learners are the same as those of on-campus students. They want fast, easy and convenient access to information. However, he highlights the fact that those students, who are truly “distant” learners, i.e. more than an hour’s drive away from the campus, need specialised library services and have information access concerns that on-campus or near-campus students may not have. On-campus students and near-campus distance learners can come to the library if necessary, seek face-to-face assistance from librarians, access the physical print and non-print library collections, receive in-person library instruction, and request and pick up items through interlibrary loan and document delivery services. Truly distant learners do not have these advantages.

Rodrigues (1996:23) states that the library needs of distance learners are not unique. Their needs are similar to those of on-campus students, except for the manner in which the services are accessed, requested and delivered. The same resources are required, the same questions are asked, and the same quality of service is expected. Cooper and Dempsey (1998:58) support this by stating that in a survey they conducted, students who registered for distance learning courses did not expect them to be different from other classes they had taken on campus, and they did not change this expectation by the end of these courses. All the students expected to make moderate to extensive use of library services, and those expectations were met. The on-campus students surveyed in the same interactive video class had the same expectations as remote students. Kascus and Aguilar (1988:29) point out that off-campus students pay the same (or higher) tuition fees as on-campus students, and are therefore entitled to the same services. Riggs (1992:209) states that “the distance learner has to be perceived in the same value structure as the on-campus learner and should be able to expect the same level of services as that provided to their peers on campus”. Holly-Heller (1996:57) maintains that the parent institution should provide library services to the extended campus community that are equal to those provided to the on-campus community.

### **3.3.2 Services required to satisfy information needs**

Watson (1992:19) recommends that services offered to distance learners should meet their library and information needs. Distance learners cannot come to the library, and library resources and services must therefore be delivered to them electronically or by other means. Libraries are in the business of helping students get the information “they want, when they want it and getting it to them regardless of where they are physically located” (Barron, 2002:24). Information services for distance learners, as stated by Holowachuk (1997), include bibliographic information about reference sources, books, journals and non-print materials available at their own library or through interlibrary loans, information on other organisations’ distance courses, and information on regional study centres or libraries and the services they

offer. He states that the need for user services includes guidance for library staff regarding how to use the library collection and equipment, choosing reading material, planning learning and using study skills for independent learning. Librarians should provide materials for bibliographic instruction in the form of written materials, instructional videos or electronically via CD-ROM tutorials or the Internet. Barron (2002:27) supports this by stating that these services should include the basic library services that are offered to intramural students, such as: reference services, consultation services, the production of library literature guides to support the programme offered via this medium, interlibrary loans, prompt document delivery, photocopying services, and access to information resources (including non-print) to support the bibliographic needs of each student.

### **3.3.2.1 Electronic information services**

Distance learners want to be able to do the following: search periodical indexes, abstracts, CD-ROMs and bibliographic services such as ERIC; do electronic book check-outs and renewals over the telephone (toll free); receive photocopies; obtain literature search results, government documents and microfiche photocopies; find answers to research questions; access tables of contents from academic journals; internally track and deliver all interlibrary loan services; and have access to an electronic feedback system. An electronic information bulletin board would permit librarians not only to solicit feedback from their learners, but would also provide access to online services from remote sites and enable them to manage e-mail communication (Niemie, Ehrhard & Neeley, 1998:68).

Kascus (1994) states that it is important for libraries to be more user-centred than library-orientated. This means that librarians should focus on finding out what users need, rather than what they think users need. This can be done through surveys and interviews. Niemie, Ehrhard and Neeley (1998:68-69) further state that distance learners want to know how to log in to the main campus library. Electronic

information resources will be helpful to distance learners, as they will be able to get access to library resources at any time. The delays caused by postal services will thus be limited.

### **3.3.2.2 Materials and facilities needed**

The need for materials and facilities, according to Holowachuk (1997), includes not only resources such as reference material and textbooks, but also non-traditional resources. The latter includes audio-visual equipment, computer equipment and photocopiers. In developing countries, materials and facilities are important because not all students have access to personal computers. At Unisa, students in remote areas without access to computers are allowed to use computers at branch libraries, as well as public libraries close to where they are staying.

### **3.3.2.3 Twenty-four hour help desk**

Cooper and Dempsey (1998:62) believe that remote users need constant, around the clock access to online databases mounted on user-friendly systems. They maintain that remote students need a twenty-four hour help desk or technical support. Ghandi (2003:142) supports this by stating that distance learners expect reference assistance and other library services to be available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Distance learners usually work outside office hours which makes it a challenge for librarians to serve them. Through technology, students can search for information electronically 24/7 - however, students do not have access to librarians 24/7, and this is a need that distance learners are increasingly expressing. Most libraries serving distance learners do not have a twenty-four hour help desk, and it is important that this need be seriously investigated.

#### **3.3.2.4 Personal relationship with library staff**

Burge (1991) argues that one key principle underlying the relationship and responsibilities that operate to maintain effective graduate level distance learning is that the relationship between the learner and librarian must be collaborative in nature. It is very clear that the relationship between distance learners and librarians needs to be improved. Remote users need to have a personal relationship with library staff in the nature of a customer-business relationship (Cooper & Dempsey, 1998:62). Having a personal relationship with library staff means that distance learners will be able to contact librarians at any time. A student who cannot come to the library needs to have the contact details of a library staff member who is willing and able to help with his/her needs.

#### **3.3.2.5 Access to other libraries**

According to Cooper and Dempsey (1998:62), distance learners need to use a variety of libraries in addition to the “home” library in order to complete their academic assignments. They also need to know what other libraries can do for them. Access to other libraries is important for distance learners because a student might be registered at Unisa, which is in Pretoria/ Tshwane, but reside in Johannesburg. If Unisa and the University of Johannesburg are in partnership, then the Unisa student will be able to make use of the University of Johannesburg’s library services. Oladokun (2002:297) suggests that the collaboration between libraries will be strengthened if it is arranged at the institutional level, rather than leaving students to make these arrangements themselves.

Marketing the library’s services is important for the remote student. It is essential for librarians to ensure that distance learners are aware of the services that the home

library provides, as well as other libraries collaborating with the home library. However, it is also important for students to read the marketing material provided by the library – if they do not do this, they will not know what they are entitled to from the library.

### **3.3.2.6 Information literacy skills**

The University of Botswana views information and literacy skills as being paramount among its services to university students. Information and literacy skills are aimed at “empowering students with life long skills that are necessary for accessing, analysing and using information regardless of where the information may be found. The students are being offered general information literacy skills that emphasize theory as well as skills in the use of printed and electronically based information sources, including OPAC, CDROM Databases and Internet” (Oladokun, 2002:298). Training sessions are usually held at the main library at Unisa for students. In order to reach remote students, it is important that the library web page has tutorials which remote students can use to learn how to use the library. Since we live in a developing country, it is important to think of students who are in remote areas with no access to a computer. These students have to be catered for by our branch libraries. They should be able to go to other libraries and access the information they need for their courses.

## **3.4 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING LIBRARIANS**

Librarians supporting distance learners encounter challenges and issues that are different from those faced by librarians working solely with on-campus users (Lebowits, 1997:304). The services provided to on-campus and distance learners are the same – however, they are provided in different ways, thereby altering the roles and responsibilities of librarians.

### **3.4.1 Technology**

Niemie, Ehrhard and Neeley (1998:65) state that the phenomenal growth in the number of adults enrolled in graduate level classes that are delivered through distance education methods such as video teleconference technology has implications for library support services. As higher education moves into the twenty-first century and is forced to reach outside the physical boundaries of the university or college campus, technological change is impacting on the delivery of education to distance learners. Holowachuk (1997) states that librarians encounter certain problems in their efforts to meet distance learners' library needs. These problems are as follows:

### **3.4.2 Interlibrary loans and document delivery**

On-campus students have the luxury of walking into the library and accessing the material they need. With distance learners, this luxury does not exist. Therefore, document delivery and interlibrary loan services are even more important to these students. Shillinglaw (1988:66) states that if the item that the student needs is not available in the library, or if it is not available in sufficient quantity or in time for the due date for which it is relevant, the student experiences a learning problem.

Shillinglaw (1988:66) indicates that the post was previously the only method used for document delivery. The post is a slow method of sending material to students who have due dates to adhere to. Jagannathan (1996:167) points out that the "Lack of infrastructure facilities at resource centres, staff shortages, limited resources, the proliferation of literature, increased cost and the complexity of demands from users" are some of the problems faced by librarians. These problems have an impact on document delivery and access to materials. Technology is playing an important role in document delivery these days. The challenge for librarians, especially in a Third

World country such as South Africa, is that not everyone has access to a computer. The challenge for librarians is to ensure that, for example, Unisa students have access to a computer through cooperation with other libraries such as public libraries. The other alternative would be to have computers at learning centres so that students can have access to a computer. Other institutions offer laptops on loan to their distance learners.

The manner in which library services are delivered to distance learners will depend on whether or not the student is able to visit the library in person. Locally networked CD ROMs can be an option for students able to visit the library. Students who cannot come to the library can access library services via the World Wide Web. Cavanagh (1997) points out that librarians who are serving distance learners will have to consider two different approaches to the way in which they provide services. Librarians should either consider providing services electronically and do away with traditional services as they know them, or they should embrace both the traditional and electronic medium, retaining conventional delivery of material when appropriate, but also using the best of what information technology can offer for accessing and supplying materials.

Remote access to full-text electronic databases and resource-sharing and reciprocal borrowing agreements assist in increasing the availability of library resources to distance students. Nevertheless, all the material needed by a distance learner may not be available at a local library or campus. Efficient, customer-oriented interlibrary loan and document delivery systems can help tremendously in improving access to library materials for distance learners. Academic libraries face two principal challenges in this area: (1) delivering materials directly to distance learners, and (2) timeliness (Gandhi, 2003:148).

### **3.4.3 Door-to-door delivery**

Traditionally, interlibrary loan material is collected by students from the campus library when it is available. Unfortunately, distance learners may not be able to pick up their material because of distance limitations. A suggestion by Cervone and Brown (2001:149) is that the articles be emailed directly to students. However, due to copyright restrictions, this solution may not be feasible. Another solution is that the articles and books from other campuses be sent directly to the distance learner. The University of South Carolina Libraries post electronic documents that they receive via Ariel directly to the individual accounts of users.

### **3.4.4 Timeliness**

“Timeliness is crucial in document delivery to distance learners” (Holowachuk, 1997). Distance learners usually require the material they requested quickly, in most cases within a week. The biggest challenge for librarians providing document delivery and interlibrary loan services to distance learners is being creative in developing and trying out different processes and methodologies to ensure that material reaches students within a week. Material that is electronically delivered to students can reach them timeously. At Unisa, courier services are used for students who are close to its branch libraries. The material is sent by courier to the nearest branch and the student can collect it within a week. Students who are far away from branch libraries have to collect their books from the post office, which can take a long time or be time-consuming.

### **3.4.5 Cost and access issues**

According to Kascus (1994:32), “the single most important contribution that librarians can make in support of off-campus programs is to ensure access to the resources required by the curriculum”. Holowachuk (1997) stresses the importance of having access to adequate library resources as being key to the success of distance learners. He states that the World Wide Web can solve a lot of document delivery problems. However, it will not help if people do not have access to computers. The challenge for librarians is to ensure that there are computers which can be used by students who do not normally have access to computers, and to train students on how to use these computers. The challenge is therefore to have good electronic tutorials which students can use to learn how to use the resources they need for their studies. All the databases to which the Unisa Library subscribes have online tutorials. Personal Librarians are presently busy working on tutorials that are easy enough to be used by all students.

Holowachuk (1997) states that the cost of providing library services to distance learners is still an unresolved issue. The reason for this is because no one is certain about how much it costs to run an electronic library. With aggregated databases, libraries do save costs by providing access to large numbers of journals (Gandhi, 2003:145). However, since it is a relatively new concept, there are some librarians who think it is cost-effective to run an electronic library, but there are others who feel that it is expensive.

### **3.4.6 Reference and referral services**

Providing reference services to distance learners poses some unique challenges. The fundamental concept of good reference services remains constant for both on-campus and off-campus students. However, major differences may exist in the

execution of reference work (Peace & Power, 1994:43). The provision of reference services to distance learners presents three opportunities and challenges for academic librarians: (1) globalisation, (2) increase in student expectations, and (3) the reference interview.

- **Globalisation of information**

“The advent of virtual libraries and electronic resources, and an expanded repertoire of reference tools, even basic reference tasks have become more time-consuming. Librarians have to check sources in myriad formats – printed books, e-books, print journals, electronic databases, and the Internet. Librarians must be well versed in all formats and know which format will serve as the best information source for a particular question. They must all be able to guide students to specific libraries that have the information students are seeking. Librarians therefore, must now possess more detailed knowledge of not only their own resources, but also the resources available at other libraries. This is especially critical in helping distance learners who may not be able to use the library of the institution where they are taking courses” (Gandhi, 2003:142). It is important for librarians to keep up to date with the latest available resources so that they can serve students to the best of their ability.

- **Increased student expectations**

Distance learners are non-traditional students who try to balance work, family and educational demands. Most of these students do their library research during the evenings and on weekends, hours when the reference desk of the library is closed. “They expect reference assistance and other library services to be available twenty four hours a day, seven days a week” (Gandhi, 2003:142). The challenge for academic librarians is to meet these increased expectations and provide a 24/7 service to students.

Libraries are doing their utmost to meet distance learners' expectations. The Unisa Library has electronic forms and electronic 'ask us' forms that students can complete 24 hours a day. These do help to a certain extent. However, there is also a need for immediate service from the library, something which librarians still have to work on. Gandhi (2003:143) concludes that "as distance learning becomes more pervasive and the demand for around the clock library services reaches critical mass, academic librarians will seriously have to consider the issue of willingness to work 24/7 flexible schedule. Hopefully as demand rises, so will the salaries of academic librarians, making it a more attractive choice for people who are willing to work non-traditional shifts. Academic librarianship may very well evolve into a 24/7 service professional just like nursing".

- **The Reference interview**

The reference interview is one of the most difficult services that distance librarians have to provide. It is difficult in the distance learning environment because librarians cannot communicate with distance learners face-to-face. Instead, they have to rely on Internet chat, paging and instant messaging, email, audio and videoconferencing, fax, Web forms, regular mail and the telephone (some libraries have toll-free numbers) to provide reference assistance to distance students (Gandhi, 2003:143). Librarians can provide this service via email and Web forms. "The biggest challenge librarians' face is to make remote reference services convenient and personalized enough so that distance learners will use the service. In the absence of a face-to-face reference interview, librarians have to rely on written or verbal communication with students to negotiate reference questions. Since librarians receive no nonverbal clues such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice to indicate student understanding uncertainty, or confusion, question negotiation becomes difficult and more time-consuming. The librarian and the student may need to trade a number of e-mails or chat messages to clarify the student's information needs,

making the reference question negotiation process lengthier and more time-intensive. It is easier to demonstrate the use of a reference resource than to explain it in writing or over the phone” (Peace & Power, 1994:49).

The most significant challenge faced by librarians is that of maintaining visibility and overcoming the ‘out of sight, out of mind’ syndrome (Gandhi, 2003:143). Distance learners cannot see librarians and may not be aware that a librarian exists to help them. It is therefore important for librarians serving distance learners to be, as Cote (2001:71) puts it, “proactive in creating a more visible and sustained presence in distance education courses by actively participating in bulletin board and e-mail discussions so that students and faculty can feel their presence and feel comfortable enough to ask questions.” As librarians keep in touch with students, it will become easier for students to interact with librarians when they need library-related information. Having a personal relationship with librarians will therefore help students.

### **3.4.7 Books and monographs**

Library collections consist primarily of books and monographs. The paper collections can be easily accessed by on-campus students, but not by distance learners. There are three important developments that are helping librarians to improve access to books and monographs in the electronic format: (1) the availability of reference books in aggregated or stand-alone electronic databases, (2) e-books or electronic books, and (3) full-text books on the Internet. The availability of electronic books on the Internet presents several challenges for librarians. They must constantly be on the lookout for books available on the Internet and in e-book format. Very few e-books are reviewed in journals, and librarians cannot get recommendations from faculty and students. Librarians also have to be concerned with licensing agreements, copyright issues, remote connectivity issues, and teaching students how to access and use e-books (Gandhi, 2003:145).

### **3.4.8 Serials and electronic journals**

Full-text electronic journal databases such as those provided by Ebsco, Gale, Lexis-Nexis and Proquest have a phenomenal impact on library collections. They are popular with faculty and students because they can be accessed remotely at any time and from any computer with Internet access. As Albanese (2001:52) states, “today’s student simply demands access to aggregated databases and e-journals”. Palmer and Sandler (2003:26-27) further mention that faculty prefer electronic access to journals due to its convenience, 24/7 availability, ease of searching and navigability. Faculty also state that they do not have to worry about whether or not the journal is missing, in the bindery or being used by someone else, and they have the ability to print, save and download articles, and can send them to colleagues right away.

There are several ways in which electronic journals impact on the work of librarians. Firstly, librarians must be familiar with the different search and retrieval interfaces of various databases and be able to exploit them to the advantage of distance learners, possibly with the help of user guides. Since the search, display, and retrieval features of databases change frequently, librarians have to constantly learn and re-learn how various databases work. Secondly, librarians have to be aware of the contents of each database and be able to keep track of journals, magazines and newspapers available in each database, as well as the embargo periods and nature of the content (full text, abstracts or citations) for each journal. This can be a daunting task, since some databases may have thousands of journals, and the same journal may be in several databases with varying levels of coverage. Products such as Serial Solutions can make it easier to identify databases in which a specific journal is available in citation, abstract or full-text format.

### 3.4.9 Other formats

Cervone and Brown (2001:148) recommend that librarians focus on acquiring or converting library materials to digital or electronic formats as far as possible, in order to improve access for distance learners. They suggest that libraries should scan or digitise some of their unique paper and archival collections, replace or supplement slide collections with digital images, replace microform with digital media, and replace videotapes with new video formats such as video streaming. This will require librarians to be aware of cutting-edge technologies available for replacing or converting materials from traditional to digital formats, and to possess technical expertise to understand the conversion process, as well as to troubleshoot, use, explain and teach digital formats to users. According to Beagle (2000), this means that there is an increase in workload in electronic environments, as well as staff training in new technologies, putting materials on the web and handling electronic requests. To support this, Kavulya (2004:25) emphasises the importance of appropriate training and retraining to ensure that library personnel have the appropriate skills. An example is the skill in web design and electronic publishing in the case of web-based library services. There is no doubt that remotely accessible electronic resources significantly improve access to library materials for distance learners and faculty and are, in fact, the preferred medium for both students and faculty. However, since most libraries serve both on-campus and distance learners, the primary challenge for librarians is to maintain a balance between adequate print and electronic collections to cater for the needs of both on-campus and distance students (Gandhi, 2003:146).

### **3.4.10 Electronic reserves and copyright law**

Distance learners face a major barrier when attempting to access course materials placed by lecturers on “reserve” at the library. Academic librarians can help to mitigate this barrier by scanning or digitising reserve materials such as assigned course readings, practice exams, sample papers, problem sets and solutions, and placing them on the electronic reserves so that students can access material remotely and download or print reserve items. To ensure compliance with copyright laws, access to electronic reserve readings must be restricted to students enrolled in the course, copyright notices must be displayed prominently on all readings, and permission from the copyright holders must be obtained every semester for readings to be used for more than one semester (Corner, 2003:8).

Electronic reserves can only be successful if librarians and faculty work together. The challenge for librarians is to convince faculty to adopt electronic reserves and submit lists of reserve material in a timely manner. Librarians also need to obtain a clear understanding of the Copyright Act pertaining to electronic reserves and distance education. Librarians do have some knowledge of copyright and intellectual property issues, and an understanding of the nuances of ‘fair use’ exemptions applicable to e-reserves. The challenge for librarians is to make faculty aware of these issues. Librarians need to educate faculty through orientation sessions, tutorials, dedicated web pages, and how-to guides. They can also educate faculty on the kinds of material that can or cannot be placed on e-reserve, and can assist faculty in acquiring the materials they want to place on e-reserve, obtaining permission, negotiating licences, digitising or scanning articles, and archiving copies of materials to be used for more than one semester (Ferullo, 2002:33-35). Unisa faculty are working with Personal Librarians and Collection Developers to ensure that electronic reserves are available for students to access.

### **3.4.11 Reciprocal borrowing and resource-sharing**

Virtual libraries with remote access to online catalogues, electronic databases, e-books and library web sites are important assets for serving distance learners and educators. However, virtual libraries provide only a fraction of library services to distance learners and seldom fulfil their needs completely. “Only 6 percent of all academic journals – typically those recently published- are available on-line” (Hansen, 2001:1010). Digitising or scanning entire library collections for electronic transmission to distance learners would be prohibitively expensive and in violation of intellectual property laws. Consequently, access to print and non-digital library collections, face-to-face reference assistance and library instruction are vital components of library services to distance learners (Kirk and Bartlestein, 1999:42). Saunders (1998:45) reports that distance learners are likely to use the academic or public libraries that are most conveniently situated. Reciprocal borrowing and resource sharing agreements between libraries can improve access for distance learners to print, non-digital and digital collections. Many libraries are forging cooperative agreements in an effort to serve distance learners and due to political and financial considerations.

Reciprocal borrowing agreements between academic and public libraries allow students and other users to borrow material from each other’s libraries. Resource sharing agreements can take the form of consortiums for sharing resources and reducing overall costs for licences, data and storage, and the system/contact administration of electronic resources. Resource sharing and reciprocal borrowing agreements enable academic libraries to significantly expand the availability of resources to distance learners, but present many challenges for academic librarians. Firstly, librarians need to explicitly craft and define resource-sharing and reciprocal borrowing agreements. A critical question is whether or not all participating libraries provide reference assistance, library instruction, interlibrary loans and other services to each other’s students, or whether they only provide access to physical library collections and/or electronic resources. To develop workable agreements, librarians

have to be detail-oriented, knowledgeable about legal frameworks and budgetary issues, and skilled in negotiation and consensus building. Secondly, librarians will be providing library services and reference assistance to distance learners from other institutions, and this requires them to be aware of the information needs of students enrolled in academic programmes at institutions other than their own. Thirdly, librarians need to consider the impact that distance learners from other institutions have on their library collections, and decide what part of the budget, if any, should be devoted to catering for their needs (Gandhi, 2003:17).

The geographical dispersion of distance learners makes it vital for academic libraries to forge reciprocal borrowing and resource-sharing agreements with other libraries. The biggest challenge for academic libraries lies in getting past the notion of the physical building as “the library”, and developing a new perspective of the library as a more nebulous and distributed space. Most distance learners are not concerned about where they get the information, only that they get what they need when they need it. By fulfilling this customer expectation through cooperative resource sharing agreements with other libraries, academic libraries have the opportunity to provide enhanced library services to distance learners and gain some positive publicity in the process (Gandhi, 2003:147).

### **3.4.12 Bibliographic instruction and information literacy**

The ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services state that:

The instilling of lifelong learning skills through general bibliographic and information literacy instruction in academic libraries is a primary outcome of higher education. Such preparation and measurement of its outcomes are of equal necessity for the distance learning community as for those on the traditional campus (ACRL, 2000).

Bibliographic instruction and information literacy is the responsibility of librarians. Caspers, Frists and Gover (2001:127) emphasise the importance of having “consultancy services and programmes of library user instruction designed to instil independent and effective information literacy skills”. It is not difficult to provide library instruction to on-campus students. The challenge is in providing such a service to distance learners. The first challenge is teaching these skills to students who librarians may never see in person. It is also a challenge for librarians to design library instruction sessions without having some idea of the competency and comfort level of distance learners in using libraries and various information technologies.

Hobbs and Bunnell (1998:9) suggest that the “delivery of library research instruction may be the most challenging task for distance education programs in the next few years”. Dugan (1997:316-317) questions how distance learners can learn research and information filtering skills, because they usually give their topics to the librarian who does the research and selection of relevant material for them. Online tutorials are one of the ways in which distance learners can receive library instruction.

Zastrow (1997:10) suggests that academic librarians should take advantage of technologies such as compressed video streaming, streaming audio, interactive web sites, interactive tutorials, and online text-based user guides to deliver library instruction in the online environment. Teaching library instruction to distance learners will require a more proactive and creative approach. The challenge for librarians is to harness the power of technology to teach library research skills to students who they may never meet in person. Since face-to-face instruction is not feasible with distance learners, librarians have to develop online tutorials and research guides or send library instruction modules to distance students through CDROMs or interactive, self-paced web tutorials. Tutorials should be kept simple and without too many technical gizmos, in order to cater for students with varying technological capabilities. The second challenge lies in actually determining if students accessing online tutorials are able to understand the library research concepts presented. To assess if learning has occurred, academic librarians must work with teaching faculty to integrate

tutorials into courses and make them a required part of the course. Specific assignments based on material covered in tutorials will help to reinforce concepts. Alternatively, librarians can teach information literacy skills through focused library research credit courses or non-credit courses that all students are required to take (Gandhi, 2003:149). A proactive information literacy programme in the online environment will require librarians to be “tool literate, resource literate, research literate, publishing literate, emerging technology literate, and critically literate” (Tenopir, 2000:45).

### **3.4.13 Faculty awareness and course support**

Cote (2001:70) points out that distance learners receive most information about library services and information resources from their instructors. Therefore, in order to inform distance learners about library services, it is imperative to first increase faculty awareness of services that the library provides to distance learners and educators.

Librarians must become active members of the “education team” and work aggressively toward educating faculty teaching online courses about library services and collections (Holowachuk, 1997). Since librarians are extremely familiar with the information-seeking behaviour of distance learners, as well as the types of information available in different formats, they can assist faculty in understanding the special information needs and limitations of distance learners. Lebowitz (1997:306) suggests that librarians assist faculty in developing assignments that are do-able in the off-campus environment. Cote (2001:70) recommends that librarians collaborate with teaching faculty in systematically integrating library instruction into various courses. Cote (2001:70-71) argues that integrating library course assignments can increase student motivation to use the library and learn more about information resources. Librarians can also work with faculty in developing course-specific web sites and subject research guides.

For academic librarians, the most significant challenge is trying to convince faculty that librarian-faculty collaboration in terms of course development can yield positive results for distance learners.

Since faculty-librarian collaboration is a two-way street, librarians should also involve faculty in improving the services they provide to distance learners. Librarians should strengthen their liaison role with distance education faculty, and actively consult them regarding collection development. They should involve faculty in the design and evaluation of virtual library web sites, as well as other library services provided to distance learners. Academic libraries can provide links to faculty course pages from the virtual library web site and vice versa.

#### **3.4.14 Marketing and public relations**

In an on-campus environment, the library has often been the heart of an academic institution. Students, faculty and administrators are aware of its existence and have no trouble finding their way to the library. The close proximity of the library to on-campus students, faculty and administrators has been a marketing tool in itself. Academic libraries have therefore not had to market their services to their on-campus clientele.

However, the role of the library in the distance learning environment is not as well defined. Due to the lack of physical proximity, most distance learners are neither aware of the library services available to them from the parent institution, nor do they use them, until they are faced with the need to access library services to complete assignments. Beagle (2000:367) stresses the importance of information personnel promoting library services to the distance learning community, including documented and updated policies, regulations and procedures for the systematic development

and management of information resources. Lebowitz (1997:303) points out that “Most students do not think about library services until they encounter a problem or realize that they do not know how to use the library and its resources effectively. Without the benefit of automatic exposure due to proximity, librarians need to aggressively market and publicize library resources and services they provide to distance learners. Marketing and publicity efforts should be geared toward three principal constituencies: (1) distance learners, (2) faculty, (3) administrators.”

- **Marketing to distance students**

Librarians serving distance learners “cannot afford to be reactive since distance learners cannot afford to physically approach them with questions” (Kirk & Bartelstein, 1999:42). Instead, academic librarians have to proactively promote their services to distance learners, so that they feel comfortable in seeking assistance. Distance learners should be aware of the fact that, despite their physical distance from the parent institution, they have access to a full array of library services provided by concerned staff (Lebowitz, 1997:303). Academic librarians can publicize their services by including a mailer/brochure about library services in the orientation packets or course materials that each student receives before beginning an online course. The mailer can include information about the URL of the virtual library; the purpose of the virtual library; procedures for students to get library cards and passwords; description of and access requirements for electronic databases; information about resource sharing and reciprocal borrowing arrangements; information about interlibrary loans and other library services; and contact information of the librarian responsible for coordinating library services to distance learners. Another alternative is to link this information directly to each online course or to web pages dedicated to student orientation. Starr (1998:10) suggests that academic libraries provide several contact mechanisms for distance students, including a librarian to serve as a contact person for off-campus issues, an email address and phone number, and office hours in case distance students do want to come to the campus.

- **Marketing to faculty teaching distance courses**

The majority of students use the library to complete assignments required by faculty (Lebowitz, 1997:304). However, Cote (2001:69) emphasises that “it is a rare student who independently seeks out avenues to information resources that are not clearly recommended by their instructor. Therefore, if academic librarians want to reach distance learners, they must first market their services to faculty teaching distance education courses. At the State University of West Georgia, librarians send a packet of information at the beginning of each quarter to all faculties scheduled to teach off-campus or satellite courses. This packet contains a summary of library services available to distance learners; forms for faculty to request joint borrowers for all enrolled in the class; forms for faculty to request reserve materials; and email account applications for each student” (Goodson, 1996:). Librarians at the University of Wyoming meet with online faculty each semester to promote library services and answer questions. Online faculty also receive a flyer at the beginning of each semester alerting them to new library services (Kearley & Lange, 2001:276).

- **Marketing to administrators**

College and university administrators gravitate toward providing distance learning courses for three reasons: (1) a desire to boost declining enrolments by attracting non-traditional students; (2) the perception that it is cheaper to develop online courses than on-campus courses; and (3) a crunch for classroom space on campuses leading to scheduling headaches. More and more academic institutions are jumping on the distance-education bandwagon. However, library services are seldom considered in either the planning or implementation stages of distance programmes at colleges and universities. To ensure adequate funding for library services to distance students, it is crucial that librarians market their services to college and university administrators. Since all academic programmes are driven by accreditation requirements, academic librarians should make administrators aware of

accreditation requirements pertaining to library support for distance learners. Rodriques (1996:27) suggests that librarians “take a proactive role in the entire distance education process by joining committees, making recommendations and learning the technology.” Increased visibility will ensure that librarians have a seat at the table when important technology and fiscal decisions related to distance education are made.

Academic librarians have not needed to market or publicise their services in on-campus environments. The very presence of the library building on campus has been an effective marketing tool in itself. The sense of place associated with the physical library building has no meaning for distance learners, who may never set foot on campus. Without proactive and effective marketing efforts, academic libraries and librarians run the risk of fading from the consciousness of distance students, faculty and administrators. To avoid being marginalised and ensure that they have adequate budgets to support the library needs of distance learners, academic librarians need to publicise their services and be intimately involved in distance education programmes from their inception. Academic librarians must provide a high level of customer service to distance learners and faculty, in order to build trust and loyalty, and demonstrate the positive impact that their services have on students’ scholastic achievement (Cooper & Dempsey, 1998:77).

### **3.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter dealt with the needs of distance learners, with particular reference to Unisa distance learners. The challenges and opportunities brought about by distance learning were also discussed in detail. The next chapter will discuss the findings obtained from the questionnaires and interviews.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Academic libraries cannot ensure the optimal utilisation of their resources for meeting the needs of their users without assessing their performance. Through performance measurement, appropriate performance indicators can be formulated in order to ascertain how well a service is doing in terms of meeting its objectives (Roslah & Zainab, 2007:36)

It is thus important for librarians to continuously evaluate their performance. The measurement of performance is an essential part of good management practice, and is used to describe the use of performance indicators (Abbott, 1994:2).

Three methods of data collection were used in this study: the questionnaire, the interview and the literature review. Responses from the questionnaire and the interview, as well as data obtained from existing literature, will be presented in this chapter.

#### **4.2 RESPONSE RATE**

400 self-administered questionnaires were mailed to Theology students in Gauteng and the Western Cape. Most of the questions were close-ended, which made it easy

to use the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software to enter and analyse the quantitative data.

Only 82 usable questionnaires were received from students, which amounts to a response rate of 20.5%. This poor response rate could be due to the following reasons:

- "...the questionnaire response rate is usually very low" (Denscombe, 1998:8).
- Questionnaires were sent to students during the month of October, when undergraduate students were busy preparing for their exams in November.
- Students do not understand the importance of the library in relation to their learning.

### **4.3 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS**

The pertinent questions in the questionnaire will be discussed in the following section. 200 questionnaires were sent to Gauteng students, and another 200 were sent to Western Cape students. This was done in order to compare the responses from students in Gauteng, where the main library is located, to those from the Western Cape. The researcher's belief was that Gauteng students are better off when it comes to library services, because they are close to the main library. If librarians know what students expect from the library, they will be able to serve them effectively.

The questionnaire was divided into 4 sections, namely:

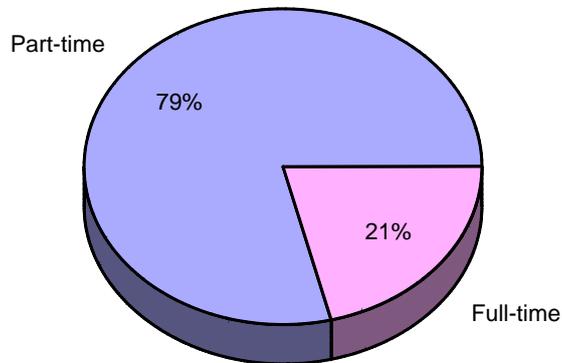
- Personal Details, in which students' attributes were highlighted.

- Computer Technology, which was used to find out whether or not students were computer literate.
- Library Use, which attempted to determine students' behaviour with regard to library use.
- Marketing, which investigated whether students were aware of their library privileges.

#### **4.3.1 Personal details**

The respondents ranged in age from 20 to over 59 years old. Among the respondents, 15 (18%) of the students' ages were 20-29 years old; 17 (20%) were 30-39 year old; 25 (31%) were 40-49 years old, and 15 (19%) were 50-59 years old. Therefore, the majority of the respondents fell into the 40-49 year age group. This makes sense, as most people within this age group are employed. With regard to gender, 47% of respondents were male, and females made up 53% of the respondents.

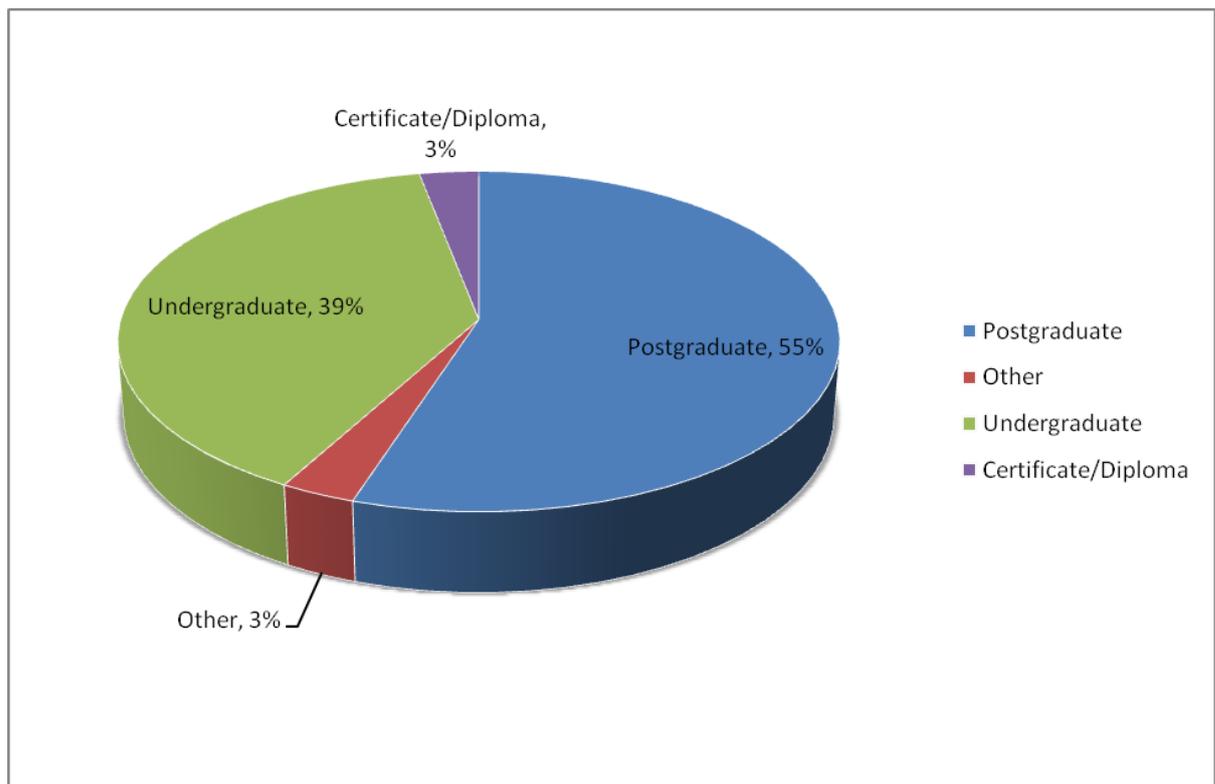
## 1. Part-time / Full-time students



**FIGURE 1**

In an ODL institution, it is important to know if students are studying full-time or part-time. Figure 1 above indicates the status of respondents from both Gauteng and Western Cape provinces. 79% of the respondents were part-time students, while 21% were full-time students. It is understandable that most respondents were part-time students, since UNISA is an ODL institution. This means that Unisa's library services should cater for distance learners, since the majority of its students are part-time students. Even though UNISA has full-time students, as an ODL institution, the majority of its students are studying on a part-time basis, hence the importance of catering for them as well.

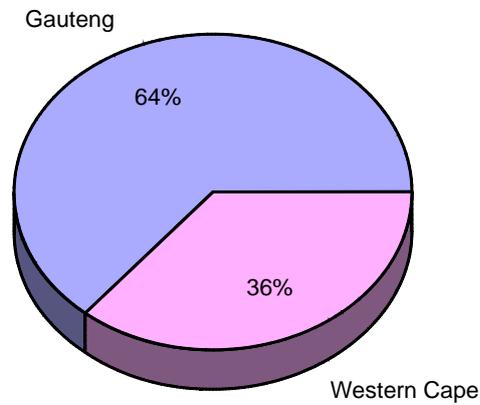
## 2. Level of study



**FIGURE 2**

The majority of respondents were postgraduate students (55%), with undergraduates making up 39% and certificate/diploma students 3%. For the purpose of this study, undergraduates and postgraduates were represented, as the researcher was able to obtain views regarding library services from both categories of students. Some undergraduates are vulnerable, as they have never used a library before. They do not even know how to use a library, and it is therefore essential that library services cater for such students.

### 3. Province



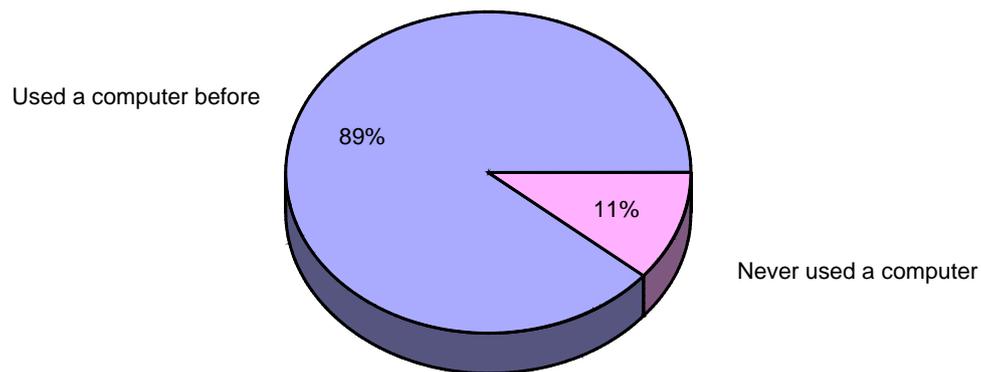
**FIGURE 3**

It was important to determine how many students from Western Cape and Gauteng provinces responded to the questionnaire. This helped the researcher to compare the responses from students in these two provinces.

There were 64% of respondents from Gauteng and 36% from Western Cape. It was difficult to compare the responses of 64% of the students to those of 36% of the students. However, the researcher attempted to obtain a general idea of how Western Cape and Gauteng students felt about Unisa Library services. The researcher wanted to see if distance played a role in the provision of library services.

### 4.3.2 Computer technology

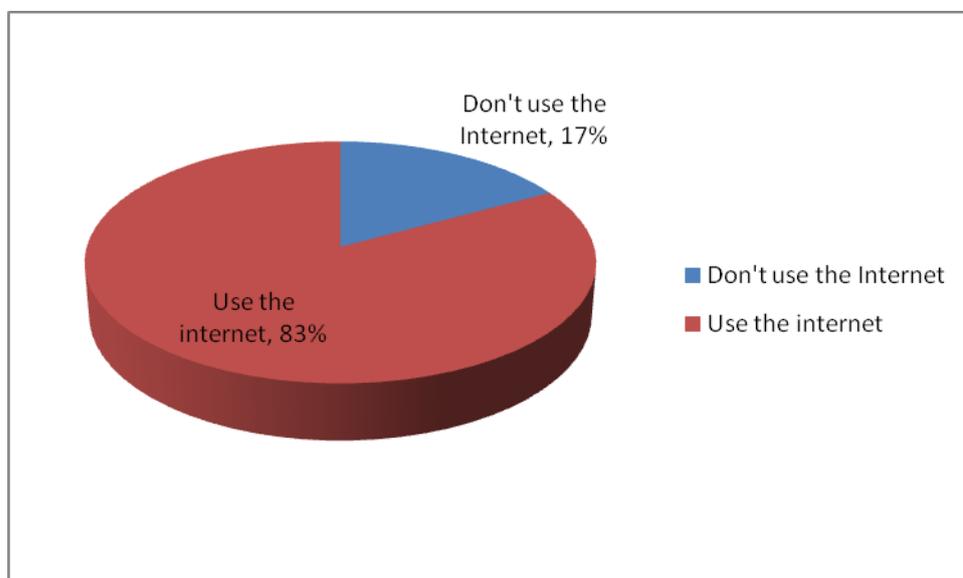
#### 4. Computer usage



**FIGURE 4**

The intention here was to ascertain whether or not students were computer literate. For the purpose of this study, computer literacy refers to a basic knowledge of how to use a computer. It was positive to note that 89% of the respondents had previously used a computer, and only 11% had not. This is important because in an ODL institution, technology is an important means of communication and access between students and the library.

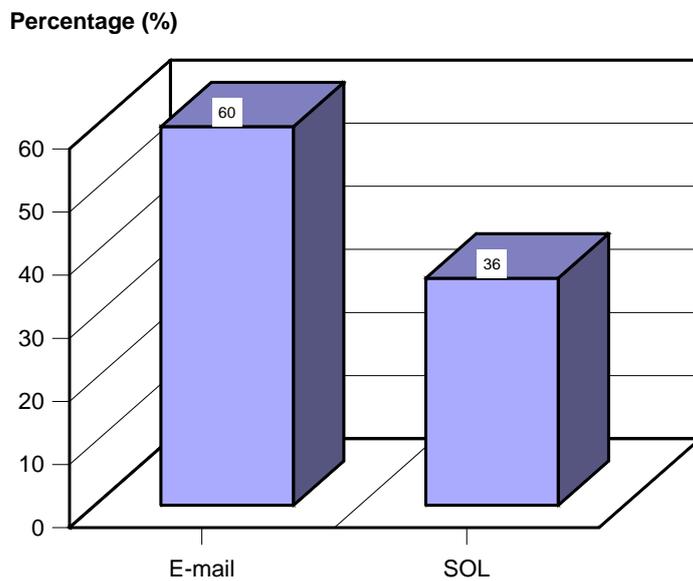
## 5. Internet / email / myUnisa usage



**FIGURE 5**

Respondents were asked if they had ever used the Internet, including email and myUnisa. Figure 5 above indicates that the majority of respondents had used the Internet. This is good, as the Internet plays an important role in distance education. Remote students are able to access library services through the Internet. Distance from the main library, which the researcher is concerned about, does not become an issue if students have access to the Internet.

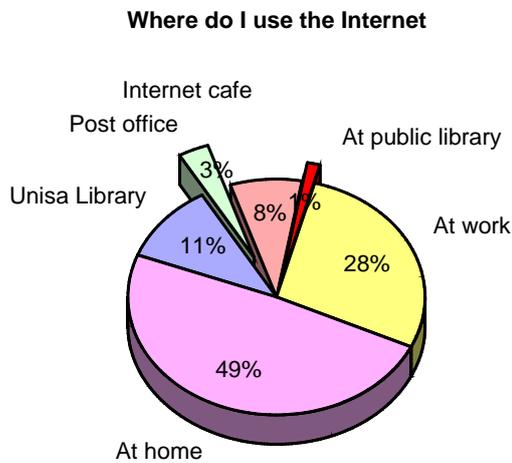
## 6. Communication with Unisa Library via email / MyUnisa



**FIGURE 6**

The intention here was to find out if students used the electronic medium e.g. email or the Internet to communicate with library staff and request library material. It was found that 60% of the respondents did communicate with the library using email. It is essential for librarians to market the use of MyUnisa, since only 37% of students had used it before. It is encouraging that the majority of the respondents do use the electronic medium to communicate with the library. These results correspond with those on the use of Internet by students.

## 7. Location/ place of Internet usage

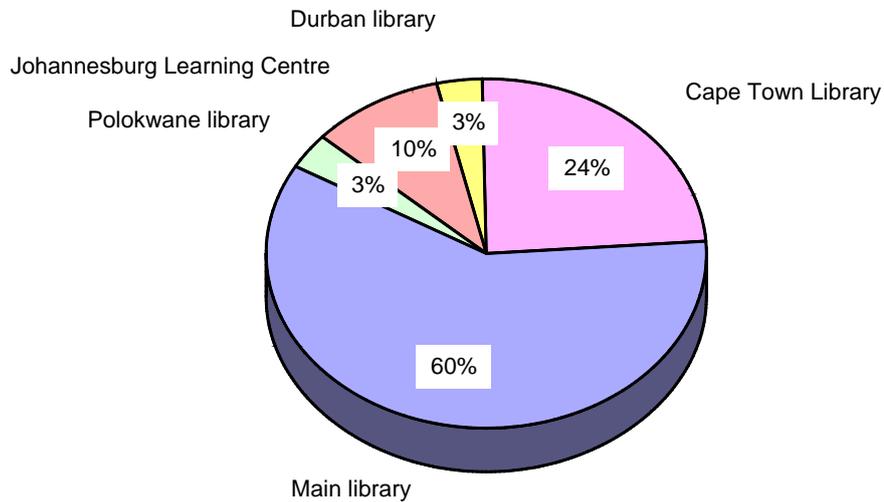


**FIGURE 7**

Sixteen respondents did not answer this question. The majority, which was 49% of the respondents, used the Internet at home, 28% used it at work, 11% at a library, 8% at an internet café, 3% at a post office and 1% at a public library. It is clear that most of the respondents had access to the Internet. It should be noted that people who use the Internet from all these locations, except for at a Unisa library, have to pay for the service.

### 4.3.3 Library use

#### 8. Personal visit to a Unisa library during 2003 and/or 2004



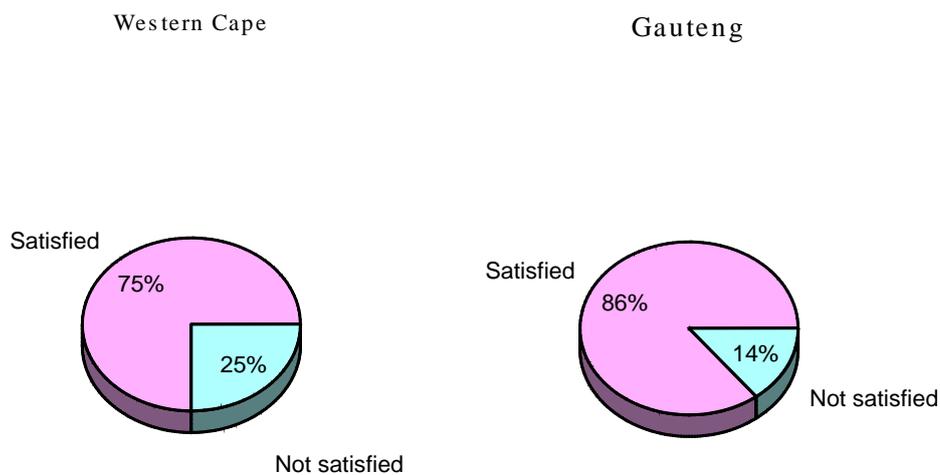
**FIGURE 8**

In this section, the aim was to find out how many students had personally visited the library during 2003 and/or 2004. 65% of the respondents had visited the library in person, while 35% had not.

This question was asked in order to find out which libraries were visited by students. The intention was also to find out if the majority of ODL students do visit UNISA libraries in person. The majority of the respondents had visited the main library in Pretoria. The deduction here is that even at an ODL institution, students still want to have personal contact with librarians. ODL students also want to visit the library, like students at residential universities do.

It was interesting to note that 64% of the students had used other libraries, while 36% had not. This clearly shows that students who are far away from branch libraries used libraries that they could more easily access.

## 9. Satisfaction with library hours



**FIGURE 9**

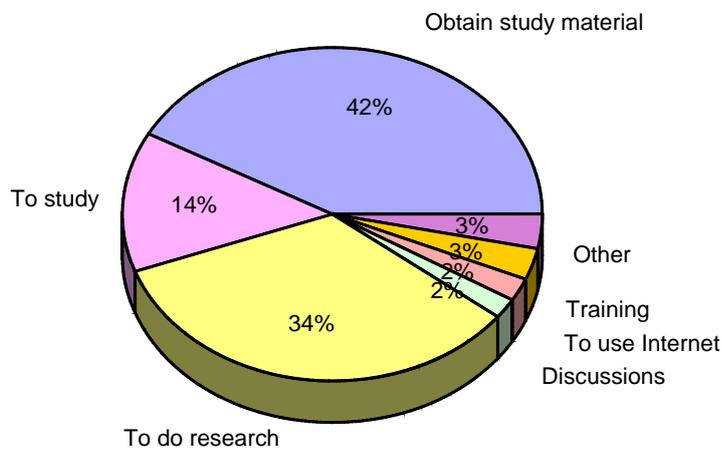
**FIGURE 10**

The students were asked whether or not they were happy with the hours during which they could visit a library. In the Western Cape, 75% were happy with the library hours, while 25% were unhappy.

Figure 10 above illustrates that among Gauteng students, 86% were happy with the library hours, while 14% were not happy. This indicates that Unisa students, even though the majority are part-time students, do visit the library. Most Unisa students are employed. This means that they are only able to visit the library after hours when they are not on leave. The Unisa Library hours are 7h45-18h00 during the week, and

from 08h00 -16h00 on Saturdays at the main library. The Cape Town library opens from 7h45-17h00 during the week, and from 08h00-16h00 on Saturdays. The issue regarding the 14% of Gauteng and 25% of Western Cape students who were unhappy about the library hours needs to be re-examined and followed up on.

## 10. Purpose of Unisa library usage

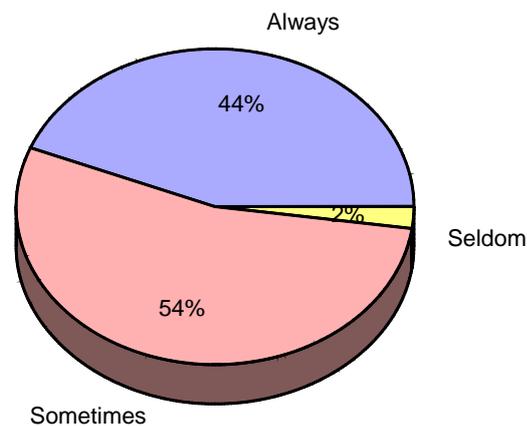


**FIGURE 11**

Students were asked about their reasons for visiting a Unisa library. They could choose more than one option from the following: to obtain study material, to study, to do research, to have discussions with other students, to use the Internet and to attend training courses. The purpose of this question was to find out if students were aware of the library services to which they were entitled. The researcher also wanted to determine which services were mostly used by students.

Figure 11 above indicates that students are using library services. It is also interesting to note that even though Unisa is a distance teaching institution, 14% of the respondents used the library for study purposes. This means that even though Unisa is an ODL institution, it is important for it to cater for full-time students, as well as part-time students, who use the library for study purposes during exam times and on weekends. Extending library hours could enable part-time students to use the library after hours as well.

### 11. Knowledgeability of Unisa library staff



**FIGURE 12**

Students were asked if they thought that Unisa library staff were knowledgeable enough to help them obtain the information they needed. In order to provide a high quality service, library staff should always be able to help students or refer them to the correct person. It is not a good sign when 54% think that library staff can only sometimes help them.

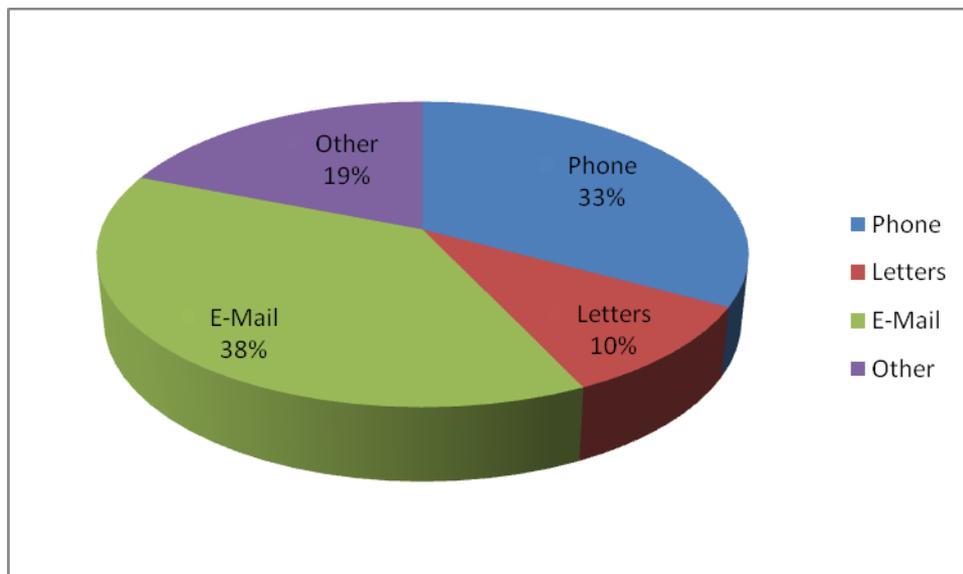
## 12. Satisfaction with Unisa Library visits

It is important to determine whether or not students are satisfied with their visits to any Unisa library. 27% were very satisfied with their library visits, 51% were satisfied, 20% were moderately satisfied and 2% were dissatisfied. It is important to ensure that the 20% and 2% are satisfied with their visits to Unisa libraries.

## 13. Usage of book/periodical request services at Unisa Library during 2003/2004

69% of the respondents made use of the book/periodical request sections of the library in 2003/2004, while (31%) did not make use of these services. It is evident that Unisa students are aware of the essential services rendered by the library.

## 14. Method of contact with the library

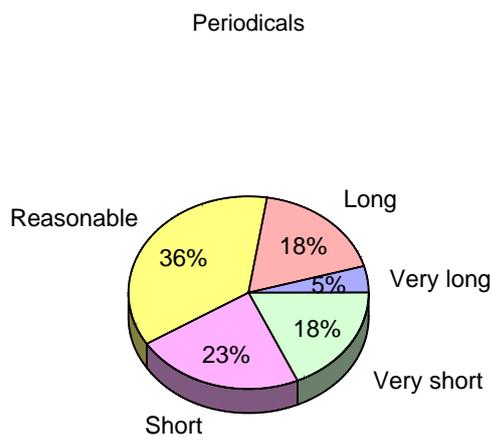


**FIGURE 13**

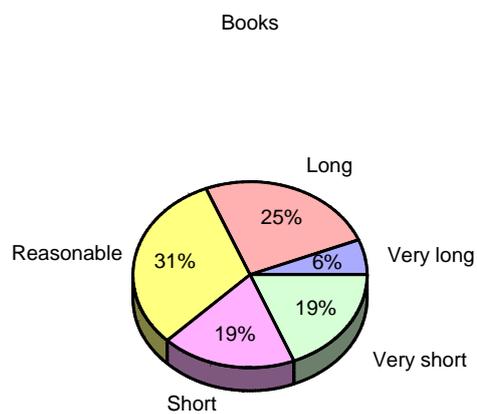
Students had to indicate any method that they used to make contact with the Unisa Library. They could choose more than one option. It was encouraging to note that email was used by the majority of students when contacting the library. This clearly indicates that students do make use of electronic media when communicating with the library.

## 15. Waiting period for books and periodicals

### GAUTENG



**FIGURE 14**



**FIGURE 15**

## Western Cape

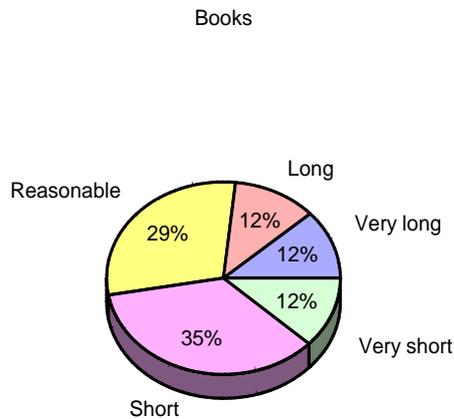


FIGURE 16

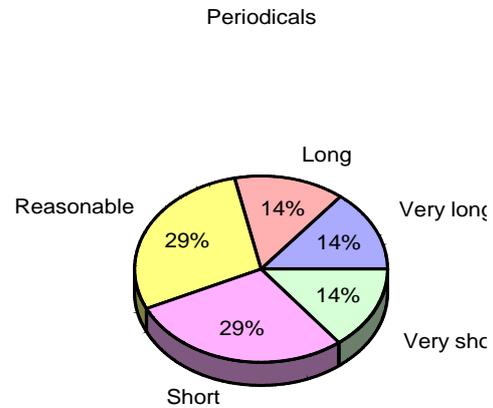


FIGURE 17

Western Cape and Gauteng student responses were compared. The researcher did this in order to determine if Gauteng students were more satisfied because of being closer to the main branch. From the graphs above, it is clear that Western Cape students received their material after a long period of time. Gauteng students received their material sooner, because the main library is in Pretoria. Distance does therefore make a difference when it comes to posting library material. Technologies such as the e-reserves and e-books will solve some of these problems. Online tutorials will also help by enabling students to find library materials, especially articles from databases. They will therefore not need to request material from the library, as they will be able to access the materials themselves. It will however be important for librarians to train students to be able to help themselves.

## 15. Use of the Subject librarian service

Subject librarian services at the Unisa library are only available to Unisa staff and postgraduate students. Due to changes in the Unisa Library's services, subject librarians are now called Personal Librarians. It is good to see that a large percentage of students did make use of the subject librarian service. The marketing of the Personal Librarian (PL) service to all postgraduate students should contribute to use of the PL service. 44% of the students felt that the subject librarian service was useful.

### 4.3.4 Marketing

## 16. Library marketing

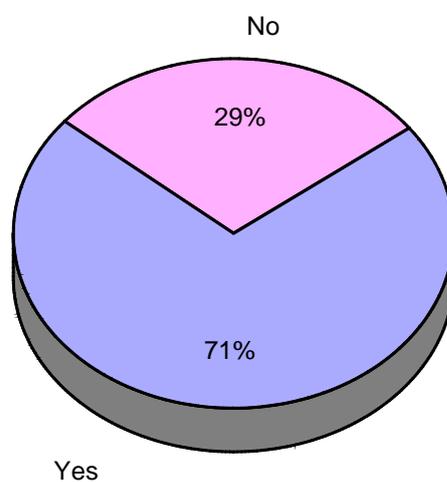


FIGURE 18

The aim of this section was to find out if students felt that the library was doing enough to market its services. The majority of the respondents felt that the library was doing enough to market its services.

The following are some of the positive comments made about the marketing of the library's services:

“a great effort is always being done but solutions are not always practical.”

“there is always space for improvement.”

“Unisa se boeke is van goeie gehalte en kwaliteit en met meer advertering sal meer van Unisa gebruik maak.”

The following are some of the negative comments made about the marketing of the library's services:

“I'm from Paarl and this is the first time I'm hearing from the library. So obviously the marketing isn't that good”.

“I did not even know that Unisa had a library.”

“For postgraduates the services should be more extensively marketed.”

“I don’t really know what I can get from the library for my work.”

“Did not know about the subject reference service.”

“I’ve received very little in a way of marketing.”

“Where is the Western Cape Unisa library?”

“There is no obvious document in the study material about the library and where to find it.”

“Obvious documentation for library services, especially for first year students. Asking too much is an embarrassment.”

“As a plain student I don’t know what I can get and how to go about it without getting frustrated.”

“Although I do not require the use of a library perhaps a booklet outlining what I can gain from using the library.”

From the above comments, it is quite clear that a lot more can be done with regard to the marketing of library services. The marketing of the library is done through the booklet entitled “Your service guide @ Unisa”, which all students receive when they register. If there are students who do not know that Unisa has a library, it means

that this booklet is not effective. A better method of marketing Unisa library services thus needs to be found.

#### **4.4 STAFF INTERVIEWS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

Interviews were conducted with library staff from the main library and branch libraries. In Chapter 3 of this study, it was mentioned that interviews were held with 13 library staff who liaised with students on a daily basis. The interviews were confidential and lasted from 20 to 30 minutes. Library staff from the following departments and branches was interviewed: archives (1), lending desk (1), book requests (1), study collection (1), information desk (2), periodicals (1), audio visual (1), subject librarians (2), training (1), and branches (3). Interviewees were chosen because they had contact with students on a daily basis, be it personally, telephonically, by fax or electronically. They were asked the following questions concerning their experiences in serving distance learners. The researcher then consolidated these responses.

##### **Question 1: Please state the services rendered to students by your division/branch**

Answer: Archives: To make available and preserve records of historical, legal, fiscal and/or administrative value to Unisa and its clients for research purposes. To preserve and make available the library's special book collections (rare, unique or out of print material) for researchers.

Lending: Issuing admission cards, borrowing, return and renewal of books.

Book requests: To deliver requested books by post to patrons, or via courier services to the branches for collection by patrons.

Study collection: Ordering of recommended and prescribed books, withdrawal of outdated titles, updating of loose leaf publications, admission of study collection books that must be bound, sending of new books to branches, study collection information desk.

Information desk: Information provision, training on how to use the databases and the catalogue, providing prescribed and recommended articles on e-reserves, answering telephone queries, doing literature searches for students who are not computer literate or who are not Unisa students (external users), help with the Internet, MyUnisa and reference works.

Audio-visual: Lending, request and information services.

Periodicals: Supply of prescribed/recommended and additional articles to mostly remote library users.

Subject librarians: Comprehensive information service for postgraduate students and staff at Unisa. This service includes doing literature searches for students using a variety of relevant databases, training on how to use library databases, and collection development.

User Education: Information literacy skills training, fieldwork/ practical training for library science students. Focus group courses, structured information literacy training.

SBL: Literature searches for assignments, publishable articles, research scripts and dissertations. Depot for the receipt of books, which are then returned to the main library. General information and reference service. Training in the use of library databases, assistance with evaluating information, assistance with referencing and citing sources.

Johannesburg branch: Closed library collection lending services (issuing, renewal and returns), information inquiry services, photocopy facilities, audio-visual and seating facilities.

Western Cape branch: Book issues, waiting lists, study carrels, law reports, reading areas, one-on-one Oasis training, part of CALICO consortium, and therefore the branch distributes books to Gaelic libraries.

**Question 2: Do you think that all students are aware of the services rendered by your division/ branch?**

Answer: This question was important because library staff sometimes take it for granted that students are aware of the services that are rendered. The subject librarians and SBL branch librarians believed that students were aware of their services. This is because they normally received lists of students who are registered for subjects for which they were responsible. Letters of introduction were then sent to students, informing them of the subject librarian service. The SBL branch also conducted study schools, at which time students were informed of the services rendered by the library.

Library staff from other departments felt that not all students were aware of the services rendered to them. The reason they gave was that the library uses the

“Services and Procedures” booklet (now called “Your service guide @ Unisa”) to market its services, and their view was that most students do not read this booklet. They also agreed that most students from remote and rural areas were not aware of library services. The majority of library staff who were interviewed thought that students were not aware of all the services that the library renders.

### **Question 3: How do you market your services to students?**

Answer: Marketing is done via the following mediums: the print medium, which is the “Your service guide @ Unisa “booklet, as well as brochures and letters sent to students; the verbal medium, which involves “word of mouth” from staff to students, from students to other students and lecturers to students; and the electronic medium, which involves the Unisa website. Most library staff felt that the “Your service guide @ Unisa” booklet was not useful enough to market library services. They also thought that the electronic route was useful. However, not all students have access to the Internet.

### **Question 4: Do you think that your marketing strategies are working?**

Answer: This question was asked to determine whether or not library staff believed that they were doing enough to market their services, especially with regard to remote students. Library staff from the subject librarian’s section, branch libraries and the training unit felt that their marketing strategies were working to a certain extent, but that there was room for improvement. Most library staff believed that walk-in clients seemed to receive more marketing exposure. Remote clients received the “Your service guide @ Unisa” booklet, which staff believed was not as useful as it should be.

### **Question 5: What challenges do you face in serving distance students?**

Answer: There are challenges that library staff serving distance students encounter. These challenges fall into the following categories: age of students; poor postal services; technology; and communication. In terms of the age of students, staff mentioned that they served adult students (working) and traditional students (fresh from high school). They felt that they served all levels of students, from researchers to computer illiterate students. They therefore had to package information differently for each student.

Library staff believed that poor postal services had an impact on the turnaround time in which students receive requested material. The staff felt helpless because they had no control over postal delays. The poor postal services resulted in students getting fined for the late return of books.

Communication problems exist because some remote students are in areas where there are inadequate telecommunication systems.

The Western Cape branch is situated in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, and the main body of Unisa students live in the southern suburbs. Access to the library is thus difficult for students, who complain that the library is far away. Technology is also a challenge for staff. Library staff agreed that as a distance learning institution, the library has to cater for its students by using various methods of training and education. The problem with online tutorials is that some students do not have access to computer facilities, nor do they have the skills to use computers. Students with access to the Internet have a problem with downloading full-text documents, and library staff end up having to download/print the articles for them. Staff also complained about the lack of adequate bandwidth and a poor information technology

infrastructure. The archival staff experienced a great demand for the digitisation of rare and archival materials.

**Question 6: What challenges are faced by students in relation to your division? / What are the problems that students experience in terms of Unisa library services in general?**

Answer: Students expect the library to send reminders to them when books have to be returned. The library does send reminders, even though it is not obliged to do so.

The library does not have an adequate infrastructure for students to practice what they have been taught. Students receive training on using the Internet, but the library has only a few workstations where students can use the Internet.

Students also expect the library to order more prescribed books, which the library cannot do. It is the responsibility of students to buy their prescribed books. Students have proposed that the library should keep at least one or two copies of a prescribed book, which cannot be taken out on loan.

Old exam papers are needed by students, which the library does not provide.

Too many changes and too much information that is changing overwhelm students. Many students need to be given computer literacy training.

There is a lack of alignment between the services that are offered and what students actually want. It is sometimes impossible for staff to provide what students want. For

example, in the library, students want a place where they can type their assignments, but such a place does not exist.

The unavailability of books borrowed by staff members is another problem. Unisa staff members can borrow books for the whole year, and students complain that this is unfair to them. They are not aware that if they request a book that a staff member has taken out, it will be made available to them within two weeks.

### **Question 7: How can problems faced by students be overcome?**

Answer: Library staff made some suggestions to help alleviate the problems faced by students. The archival section believed that the digitisation of the archival collection would give remote users access to archival materials. Staff felt that if students read the “Your service guide @ Unisa” booklet, most of their problems would be solved. They felt that user education and the decentralisation of the library’s training programme would also help solve students’ problems. Currently, training is only done in the main library. If all branches provide library training, most students would know about the services rendered by the library.

If information literacy skills training become a credit-bearing part of their modules, students will realise the need for attending library training. The university will provide more support to the IT infrastructure if literacy training is part of a credit-bearing portfolio.

Staff believed that colourful brochures sent to students would also help.

The lack of alignment between the library and students needs to be addressed. Language does pose a problem for staff at the Information Desk. For White staff members, fluency in a Black language would be useful, whereas for Black staff

members, fluency in Afrikaans would be useful. A good knowledge of French would be an added advantage, since there are many French-speaking students at Unisa.

Students must be informed that they have to request study material well in advance. Audiovisual study material should also be housed at branch libraries. Staff members must borrow prescribed material using their student number.

The document delivery service to students needs to be significantly improved, so that students receive their material on time. The distance factor is difficult to overcome, but ensuring that information requests are quickly and efficiently dealt with will help a lot.

The workflow system, as mentioned above, will eventually eliminate the waiting period for both books and articles. Essentially, it has to work on a turnaround time of 24 hours. Users should know within 24 hours whether or not the books / articles that they have requested are in the post. This workflow system is now being used in the library.

Delivery of online services to students with poor Internet connections has a long way to go, especially in Africa, unless governments do something in their respective countries about the Internet infrastructure.

Students need to undergo a mind-shift from merely wanting to pass an exam to understanding and developing skills for life-long learning, and how to find and use information in libraries. To derive maximum benefit from the learning experience, dedication and commitment on the part of lecturers, librarians and students is essential. They should form a learning partnership for the duration of any course presented, and for which the student has enrolled.

### **Question 8: How can Unisa librarians improve their services to students?**

Answer: A friendly, helpful and willing attitude will enhance the image of the library. Responding timeously to emails/ correspondence from clients will be appreciated by them, and telephone calls should be answered promptly. Students should not only get voicemail messages when they call the library. Staff needs to be trained and knowledgeable with regard to the holdings, rules and regulations of the library.

Since students do not usually read the “Your service guide @ Unisa” booklet, some staff thought of having a separate information pamphlet which stated the services rendered by the library. Students probably do not read the booklet because it has too much information. Hopefully, students will read the proposed pamphlet. Unisa Library as a whole should be aggressive in the marketing of the library, in order to make it more visible.

With regard to prescribed books, it would be helpful to students if the library had a closed collection where books could be issued to students for an hour at a time.

In order to improve our services to students, the library needs committed and well-trained librarians, and this involves holding workshops on customer service. Committed librarians need a competitive working environment with fully-equipped workstations which have the latest technology.

Staff need to advocate strongly for library training to become part of the student’s curriculum. They need to make use of the information commons model, whereby students are trained to help other students to use the library.

By putting service first whenever any decision needs to be taken.

Librarians need to ensure that their services are properly marketed to all students, so that students know from the start of their studies what to expect from the library and are not left in the dark. Requests for information need to be handled as quickly as possible, so that students can proceed with their work, and all librarians must provide proper training to students visiting them and asking for assistance.

Subject librarians felt that they needed to extend their services to a wider group of students, i.e. undergraduates. Undergraduates need to be prepared for postgraduate level studies, and learn how to approach their research topics. This will help them when it comes to writing research proposals. Librarians should also have effective, ongoing communication with M and D supervisors, so as to eliminate hiccups when a student has to publish his/her research.

As a distance learning institution, Unisa has to reach out to all its students through multi-modal learning opportunities such as WebCT and a virtual library.

Librarians need to have a change of mindset in order to be able to understand library users' needs. There is a perception that they know their clients and what they want, which is not always the case.

Librarians need to get involved by attending tuition meetings with lecturers, so that they can better anticipate needs and identify problems early in the process of developing course material. Librarians must have an input when the course material is being developed.

Students must empower themselves by learning how to maximise their use of available library resources.

Improving services is not a one-sided process. Students must also do their part as far as planning is concerned. They need to have realistic expectations if they leave things until the last minute. A librarian is more able to assist a student who is adequately prepared.

Branch librarians need to be trained in the use of databases. This will help them to provide a much more efficient service to clients.

#### **4.5 STUDENT INTERVIEWS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

##### **Question 1: How often do you study in the library?**

Answer: Full-time students studied in the library for 5 to 6 days a week. Part-time students studied in the library during exam time and on some Saturdays.

##### **Question 2: Why do you study in the library?**

Answer: The atmosphere in the library makes it easy to study in the library. It is difficult to study at home because there are a lot of interruptions. Studying in the library also helps one to meet other students doing the same subjects. Studying on campus also enables one to have easy access to lecturers, as well as books for courses.

**Question 3: Is there anything that is hindering you while you are studying?**

Answer: It is sometimes very noisy in the library. There are staff members who are also noisy. Noise monitors are very rude – they have bad manners and do not know how to communicate well with students. It is sometimes difficult to go out of the library to meet lecturers because of the queues outside. I wish that the queue problem could be sorted out. It is such a waste of students' time.

**Question 4: Do you think that there should be discussion areas for students?**

Answer: It would be helpful to have discussion areas in the library. At the moment, students get into trouble with noise monitors when they try to hold discussions. It is also disturbing when you are trying to study and other students have a discussion. Discussion classes will really help to reduce the noise in the library.

**Question 5: How can this library help you with your studies?**

Answer: We were encouraged to study at the Sunnyside campus, but the conditions there are not conducive to studying. The place is very hot, because there is no air conditioning. It is also very dirty. The university should take care of the place, and then students might want to use it.

Extending library hours, especially during exam times, would be helpful. Something must be done about the queues, as they are a waste of students' time. There should be computers where students can type their assignments. The Vudec campus has no computers at all. The number of Internet computers should also be increased. Noise monitors should do their job - the library is sometimes noisy, even though they are there.

The library is not as clean as it should be - the desks we use for studying are sometimes not regularly cleaned.

#### **4.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The aim of this chapter was to present comments made by students and library staff. It was interesting to note that some information obtained from the student questionnaires was the same as that obtained from staff interviews.

Staff believed that the “Your service guide @ Unisa” booklet, which is used to market library services, was not effective. They felt that walk-in clients get more services than remote students. Librarians need to reach out to remote students through better marketing strategies. Staff felt that information literacy as well as lifelong learning skills were needed in order for students to be able to use the library effectively. Staff believed that students need to do their part in this regard. They need to read library marketing material, and also need to plan for their studies. They should not leave things until the last minute, as it is easier for librarians to help well-prepared students.

Students needed more services from branch libraries, and they were not aware of all library services. Better ways were needed for informing students of services to which they are entitled. Postgraduates do obtain information from Personal Librarians, but undergraduates do not, except for the “Your service guide @ Unisa” booklet. Unisa is an ODL institution, but students do sometimes visit the library in person. Some students felt that the library hours needed to be extended, especially during exam time. Students also needed to have contact with library staff. The majority of the students do use electronic media to access library services. Students who studied in the main library asked for a quiet place to study. Noise monitors needed to do their job of ensuring that the library is a quiet place.

Distance did, to a certain extent, play a role in the provision of library services. Students who depended entirely on postal services, as well as those who stayed far away from the main library e.g. Western Cape students, received their material after a long time. Unisa does have e-books, but students still preferred using print books. Some prescribed and recommended books were also not available electronically. Students would therefore need print books to be posted to them. This needs proper planning on the part of students. They have to request material in time in order to allow for postal delays.

Technology helps, but there are challenges for students and staff in this regard. Problems with bandwidth, for example, frustrate both students and staff.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not the information needs of UNISA students were being met. This chapter provides recommendations based on the findings from the interviews and questionnaires, as well as recommendations from the literature.

#### **5.1 MARKETING OF LIBRARY SERVICES**

UNISA is being aggressively marketed in the media. Students are encouraged to register with the best university in Africa. In an open and distance learning (ODL) institution, it is difficult to market services because the majority of students do not personally visit the library. The Unisa Library has a marketing team, whose role is to 'ensure that the Unisa Library has a high standard of marketing and service promotion in its Muckleneuk branch, remote branches and Archives, as well as in its Web sites and electronic publications.'

The questionnaire and interview findings indicated that not all students were aware of library services, as they requested services that the library already offered. For example, one student requested a library in Johannesburg, and others asked that there should be reciprocity between libraries. It is therefore clear that the library needs to improve its marketing strategies. Wolpert (1998:33) encourages libraries to become more sophisticated about packaging, advertising and promoting their valuable resources. They must work together with faculty to develop course material that reflects positively on the faculty, institution and the library. Lecturers have a

relationship with students, and are therefore able to provide invaluable information about students' needs.

The library's marketing material should be brief and easy to use. Presently, only postgraduate students receive a letter about library services. It is important for undergraduates to also receive letters or some form of correspondence.

There are brochures in the library. It would be a good idea for the marketing team to compile a brochure with all the essential library services. This brochure could be made available in print as well as electronic format. It should also be available on the MyUnisa library page, and should contain the following information:

- Services offered by the library
- Branch information
- Opening and closing hours
- How to request and renew library books
- Number of books that students can loan, as well as the loan period
- UNISA library website (library catalogue and databases)
- Library contact details for staff working with clients, e.g. Personal Librarians, Branch Librarians, etc.

A marketing strategy that works well at residential universities is library orientation. At an ODL institution, only on-campus students can attend this. Off-campus students could perhaps attend library orientation after hours or over weekends. This is a service that would be helpful to distance students. An online tutorial for distance

students could also be compiled. This would be helpful to students who cannot attend the orientation at Unisa branch libraries.

## **5.2 LIBRARY LITERACY SKILLS**

Librarians have the important role of educating customers. An introductory course on library skills should be developed, and this course should only be done by first-time Unisa students, both undergraduates and postgraduates. It should empower students with library literacy as well as lifelong skills in searching for information. It is important that faculty be included in decisions about this course, and in order to encourage students to participate in this course, it should be a credit-bearing course.

Literacy and lifelong learning skills are important for students at higher education institutions. Dzakiria and Hanafi (2008:103) mention that learning support should produce distance learners who are able to progress through their programmes successfully, and to be independent learners who have good learning skills and strategies. Libraries have the role of educating students who are expected to learn traditional values of critical assessment, independent discovery and rigorous thinking (Wolpert, 1998:31).

## **5.3 STUDENTS' LIBRARY NEEDS**

In an ODL institution, most students cannot personally visit the library. Librarians therefore need to make it easy for distance students to get access to library services. The student interviews and questionnaires revealed that Unisa students need the following services:

- Longer library hours
- Branch libraries to provide services offered at the main branch in Muckleneuk
- More branch libraries
- Quiet place to study
- More marketing of library services
- Keeping in touch with latest technology
- More computers for students in the library

The workgroup that is looking at extending library services should definitely consider extending library hours. Part-time students stated that they would love to use the library after hours, but cannot because it is closed. Library management will have to hire more staff to cater for extended hours. Another option would be to open the Sunnyside campus library for 24 hours. The library could have computers where students could help themselves. Distance learners require library services to be available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They also require a twenty-four hour help desk (Cooper and Dempsey, 1998:62; Gandhi, 2003:142). During the 2009 May/June exams, library hours at the Muckleneuk branch were extended until 20h00 during the week.

#### **5.4 REACHING OUT TO REMOTE STUDENTS**

Unisa students can be found all over the world because UNISA is an international university. One of the ways that UNISA uses to reach out to remote students is through branch libraries. There are branch libraries situated in the Western Cape, Durban, Ethiopia, Florida, Johannesburg, Polokwane, Muckleneuk (Pretoria) and Sunnyside. Students in the above regions can visit the branch to obtain library services. Students expressed dissatisfaction with the limited services that are

available at branch libraries. The re-engineered Unisa Library principle is that branch libraries need to provide the same services that are available at the main library. It is essential that this happens soon, as students are unhappy with the limited branch library services.

Students who need a literature search have to consult Personal Librarians at the main library. Student training and orientation also only takes place at the main library. By speeding up the training of branch library staff, Unisa will be reaching out to those students who visit its branches. Personal Librarians should ensure that branch librarians receive database training as soon as possible.

Unisa Library also needs to reach out to students who are far away from branch libraries. As an ODL university, all Unisa's library services are accessible electronically. There are students who have no access to a computer and the Internet. Unisa students also need to be empowered with the skills to use a computer. Without computer skills, students might encounter problems in the workplace. The university should investigate the possibility of offering remote students laptops at a reasonable price. This is one of the ways in which remote students will be able to access all library services.

## **5.5 LIBRARY STAFF TRAINING**

There are many changes in the library profession. Most of these changes are a result of technological advances. It is important for library staff to receive appropriate training and retraining to ensure that they have the relevant skills. An example is web design and electronic publishing. Library schools - for example, the Information Science Department at Unisa, will need to include techniques on distance learning library services in their curricula (Kavulya, 2004:25). Libraries and archives have to digitise their material, and library schools do not train librarians to do this.

Libraries have to function like businesses in order to survive. Customers should be respected, and a course in customer services for all library and Unisa staff would be helpful in this regard. It is important for staff to always answer their telephones, since for some students this is the only contact they have with the library. Customers should always get the best service.

It is difficult to be a distance student. However, with proper planning by the student, working hand-in-hand with the lecturer and librarian, it might not be so difficult.

In concluding, Unisa Library staff needs to be complimented. There are students who are happy with the services they are getting from Unisa Library. However, it is important to continuously evaluate and improve client services. During 2008, the Unisa Library was the number 1 service department at Unisa, and the library's executive director, Dr Buhle Mbambo-Thata, praised and encouraged library staff to ensure that the library keeps this number one spot.

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## Appendix 1

### The information needs of student library users and the fulfilment thereof at the University of South Africa

Please answer the following questions by marking the appropriate box with a tick.

#### A. Personal details

Please select only One option

##### 1. Gender:

Male	Female
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

##### 2. Age group

Under 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	Older than 59
<input type="checkbox"/>					

##### 3. Home language

African language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Afrikaans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please specify: .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. What studies are you registered for?

Undergraduate		
Postgraduate		
Certificate/ Diploma		
Non-degree purposes		
Other, please specify: .....		

5. Which province do you reside in?

--

6. Are you a

Part-time student (i.e. working and studying)		
Full-time student (i.e. only studying)		

**B. COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY**

7. Have you ever used a computer?

Yes	No

If YES, please proceed to question 8.

If NO, please proceed to question 11.

8. Have you ever used the Internet (including e-mail, SOL, etc)?

Yes	No

If YES, please proceed to question 9.

If NO, please proceed to question 11.

9. Where do you use the Internet?

(You may mark more than one option)

Unisa Library	
At home	
At work	
Public library	
Internet Café	
Post Office	
Other, please specify: .....	

10. Have you ever communicated with Unisa Library via:

E-mail	Yes	No

SOL	Yes	No

C. LIBRARY USE

11. Did you personally visit a Unisa Library during 2003 and/or 2004?

Yes	No

If YES, please proceed to question 12.

If NO, please proceed to question 20.

12. Which library did you visit?

(You may mark more than ONE option)

Main Library, Pretoria		
Cape Town		
Durban		
East London		
Johannesburg		
Polokwane/ Pietersburg		

13. Are you satisfied with the hours during which you can visit a Unisa Library?

Yes	No

If NO, please explain why not.

.....  
.....

14. For what purposes did you make use of a Unisa Library?

(You may mark more than ONE option.)

To obtain study material	
To study	
To do research	
To have discussions with other students	
To use the Internet	
To attend a Unisa Library training session	
Other, please specify: ..... .....	

15. If you cannot usually find what you are looking for in the Unisa library, who do you ask for help? (Please mark only ONE option.)

Library staff		
Friends or other students		
Other, please specify: .....		

16. Are the Unisa staff members always willing to help?

Always		
Sometimes		
Never		
Not applicable		

17. Are the Unisa Library staff members usually available when you need their help?

Always		
<b>Sometimes</b>		
Never		
Not applicable		

18. Do you find the Unisa Library staff members usually have the necessary knowledge to help you find what you need?

Always		
Sometimes		
Seldom		
Never		

19. How satisfied are you usually with your visits to a Unisa Library?

Very satisfied		
Satisfied		
Moderately satisfied		
Unsatisfied		

If moderately satisfied or unsatisfied, please explain your answer:

.....

.....

.....

20. Did you make use of any other library, excluding the Unisa Library, during 2003 and/or 2004, eg a public library?

Yes	No

21. Did you make use of the book and/or periodical request services of the Unisa Library during 2003 and/or 2004?

Yes	No

If **YES**, please proceed to question 22.

If **NO**, please proceed to question 31.

22. How did you make contact with Unisa Library?

(You may mark more than ONE option.)

Through request cards	
By letter	
By phone	
Per e-mail	
Other, please specify: ..... .....	

23. Did you use the book request services of the Unisa Library during 2003 and/or 2004?

Yes	No

If **YES**, please proceed to question 24.

If **NO**, please proceed to question 31.

24. Did you receive the correct books as requested?

Always		
Sometimes		
Seldom		
Never		

25. How long did you wait between requesting and receiving the book?

Very long (more than a month)		
Long (4 weeks)		
Reasonable (3 weeks)		
Short (2 weeks)		
Very short (less than 2 weeks)		

26. Are you satisfied with the loan period for books?

Yes	No

27. Did you use the periodical request services of the Unisa Library during 2003 and/or 2004?

Yes	No

If **YES**, please proceed to question 28.

If **NO**, please proceed to question 31.

28. Did you receive the correct periodicals as requested?

Always		
Sometimes		
Seldom		
Never		

29. How long did you wait between requesting and receiving the periodicals?

Very long (more than a month)		
Long (4 weeks)		
Reasonable (3 weeks)		
Short (2 weeks)		
Very short (less than 2 weeks)		

30. Are you satisfied with the quality of the photocopied articles?

Yes	No

If **NO**, please indicate why:

.....

31. Did you use the subject reference services of the Unisa Library [available only for postgraduate students] during 2003 and/or 2004?

Yes	No	I'm NOT a postgraduate student

If **YES**, please proceed to question 32.

If **NO** (or not a postgraduate student), please proceed to question 36.

32. How often do you use the subject reference services?

Once year		
Two times a year		
Three or more times a year		

33. Do you find the subject reference service useful?

Very useful		
Useful		
Moderately useful		
Not useful		

If moderately useful OR not useful, please explain you answer

.....

34. How long do you wait between requesting and receiving help?

Very long		
Long (4 weeks)		
Reasonable (3 weeks)		
Short (2 weeks)		
Very short (less than 2 weeks)		

35. Do you find that your subject librarian has sufficient knowledge to help you?

Yes	Partly	No

If **NO**, please explain your answer

.....

36. Do you need any other library service that is not provided by the Unisa Library?

Yes	No

If **YES**, please indicate which services you need

.....  
.....

**D. MARKETING**

37. Do you think the library is doing enough to market its services?

Yes	No

If **NO**, please explain your answer?

.....  
.....

Any further comments on the quality of the Unisa Library services would be welcome

.....  
.....  
.....

Thank you for your cooperation.

## Appendix 2

Busisiwe Ramasodi (Ms)

Library Services

Level 06-17

Unisa

1 October 2004

Dear Student

As part of the requirements for a Master's Degree in Information Science, I am conducting a study on "The needs of student library users and the fulfilment thereof at the University of South Africa."

The research is intended to gather information on whether the services offered by the Unisa Library are adequate for the needs of student library users. The research is also intended to find out if there are better alternatives for serving students of the Unisa Library.

The time and effort it takes to complete this questionnaire is much appreciated and it will make a significant contribution both to my research and to the Library.

Thus, you are kindly requested to spare some time to answer, as carefully as possible, all the questions in this survey. Please rest assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of your completed questionnaire.

I will be grateful if the completed questionnaire can be returned by 30 November 2004.

Thank you for your time and input.

Yours sincerely,

Busisiwe Ramasodi



## Appendix 3

**UNISA**  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Technikon SA Corner of Christiaan de Wet and Pioneer Avenue Florida  
Private Bag X6 Florida 1710 South Africa  
Telephone 011-670-9000 Facsimile 011-471-2987 International prefix +27  
E-mail client@tsa.ac.za

### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Attached please find a questionnaire compiled by Ms BC Ramasodi, Subject Librarian, Unisa Library.

The questionnaire is part of research for the MInfsc at the University of South Africa with the topic: "The needs of student library users and the fulfillment thereof at the University of South Africa".

Your input will contribute to the outcomes of the research and will be highly appreciated.

The research is intended to gather information on whether the services offered by the Unisa Library are adequate for the needs of student library users. Also to find out who the students are in order to cater for their needs and to see if there are better alternatives for serving students of the Unisa Library.

Kind regards



**DR JC HENNING**  
**ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: LIBRARY**

2004(03) integrated letter