

# THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA LIBRARY, 1946 TO 1976

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the early history of the University of South Africa (Unisa) Library from its tentative roots in the 1940s to maturity in the mid 1970s when South Africa was confronted by dramatic political upheaval. It traces its growth and examines its strategies to achieve a comprehensive information service for students studying by correspondence. The peculiar modalities of such 'distance education' led to various innovations. For example, the Unisa Library pioneered computerisation, a comprehensive subject librarian service and an elaborate study collection organised through a number of branch libraries. The intriguing political struggles of Unisa to maintain its identity as a bilingual (Afrikaans–English) institution offering working adults, both black and white, the chance to study part-time are also analysed, and the rapid expansion of the Unisa Library's book, journal and archival collections is discussed. Rapacious apartheid education depended on, but also had to contend with, strong university leadership under A.J.H. van der Walt, Samuel Pauw and Theo van Wijk. Unisa's growing stature in the 1970s allowed its library to punch above its weight in information circles. Its sponsorship by mainly Afrikaner big business demonstrated close links with the white establishment, which proved beneficial in transforming the Unisa Library into a premier research facility by 1976.

**Keywords:** Universities, academic libraries, higher education, apartheid.

## INTRODUCTION

Various university histories have been written in recent years in South Africa as scholars have taken stock of their intellectual heritage and tried to situate higher education in the context of knowledge production and the wider

political economy of the country (Murray 1997; Phillips 1993). Libraries also boast a growing historiography. Irene Owens (2002), for instance, examines the effects of protest movements on libraries in South Africa during the 1960s and 1970s and Jacqueline Kalley (2000) describes public library services for Africans in the Transvaal during apartheid. WHPA Tyrrell-Glynn (1983) wrote a detailed history of the South African Library (now the National Library in Cape Town) for his University of Stellenbosch DPhil degree. These writings built on the foundations of R.F. Kennedy's (1970) classic history of the Johannesburg Public Library. Academic libraries have received less historical attention, except in relation to technological innovation, funding, computerisation and professionalisation (Kesting 1970; Lessing 1970, & 1983; Shillinglaw 2003). Reuben Musiker's *Aspects of Wits Library history* (1982), however, attempts a dedicated historical account and as a former university librarian, his contribution to the profession produced a *festschrift* that contains valuable essays on the development of university libraries (Sherman, 1993). Another *festschrift* to Heinz Zastrau (Blom et al., 1987), the first Unisa university librarian, also includes some essays on the wider profession. Against this background, therefore, this article on the history of the Library of the University of South Africa between 1946 and 1976 tries to fill a lacuna in the history of information in the apartheid era.

## **ORIGINS, 1946–1958**

During the 1940s the University of South Africa (Unisa) was confronted with a growing number of external African students who wanted a university education and could not be accommodated at the South African Native College. Through the efforts of the Dutch Reformed churches, the Pretoria Kolege ya Bana ba Afrika was established in 1946 to supplement the work of the Fort Hare Institution in co-operation with Unisa (Unisa 1946: 120–121; *Pretoria News* 1946; Boucher 1974: 239). Facilities for African students were poor and in many cases the costs of education were also high. Only study by correspondence seemed affordable. But most of all, Unisa had the advantage of offering segregated education under conservative white academic tutelage, which accorded with the pragmatic agenda of higher education before the aggressive nationalist reforms of the mid 1950s (Beale 1994:98–99).

From as early as 1936, however, debates had raged in the Senate of Unisa about the status of external students who were mainly Africans. Mabel Palmer of Natal advocated the establishment of a separate university correspondence college, the introduction of vacation schools, itinerant tutors and the recognition of approved colleges. It was at this point that a Pretoria State Library loan service was mooted (Boucher 1974:240). Drawing on the experience of the University of London's external study system, Unisa

expanded its library service through the State Library. By 1942 the huge increase in non-collegiate enrolments put a strain on this newly introduced facility which was unable to cope with the demand.

When Professor A.J.H. van der Walt, a historian at Potchefstroom University, was appointed Director of External Studies in 1944, the stage was set for the future development of Unisa, based on research he conducted on correspondence study abroad. His view was that external study would become popular in post-World War II South Africa, but his report and subsequent higher-education legislation elicited criticism and even hostility. Captain S.A. Chadwick was among the critics who singled out the State Library's inadequate resources, thus provoking an angry response from the librarian, M.M. Sterling (Boucher 1974:251).

The Higher Education Amendment Act was passed on 8 May 1946 and saw Unisa take charge of correspondence education across the country, to the disdain of private colleges which had vied for students since the 1930s. Unisa, as a federal institution, was thus set on a new path that would ultimately lead to the establishment of what J.R. Sullivan, Member of Parliament for Berea in Durban, called 'a great national university – a people's university – in South Africa' (*Hansard* 1946; Boucher 1974:252).

In October 1946, van der Walt chaired the new enterprise, and began expanding its limited library facilities with the help of the University of Pretoria and the Transvaal Education Department, which were willing to augment the earlier, perfunctory, State Library system (Unisa 1946a: 1; Boucher 1974: 252, footnote 195). In 1948, when Unisa moved to its new home at 222 Proes Street in Pretoria, the fledgling library found a temporary home, even though the building was in a state of poor repair (Boucher 1973:236).

The most pressing problem facing the Division of External Studies was the provision of adequate library facilities for students who lived far from Pretoria and who, in the wake of war, faced a shortage of suitable books, especially up-to-date textbooks. A loan library was set up on the basis of a grant which allowed the purchase of nearly 10 000 books in its first year of operation. External students were also permitted to use loan facilities in other libraries, including the Johannesburg Public Library, the National Students' Library of the Department of Union Education in Pretoria, as well as Denny's Student Library in London, for those studying from abroad. The Department of Education agreed to build the reference holdings of its library in Church Square for use by external students. This venture was unsuccessful and it was decided that the reference section should come under the direct control of the Division of External Studies itself. This represented the first step in the establishment of the Unisa Library as it is known today and the new

comprehensive library service was properly operational by 1950, under the supervision of the librarian, Heinz Zastrau (Boucher 1973:248).

As Boucher (1973:248–249, 272, 276) points out in the official history of Unisa, annual grants for the purchase of books were rather meagre in the early years, and the precarious financial position of the Division of External Studies limited the growth of the library, and even placed Unisa in jeopardy as more and more sceptics queried the viability of correspondence education. By the early 1950s the library budget amounted to about £3 000, which resulted in a deficit that had to be made up by donations. The French government donated 840 volumes in 1950. The library budget was divided among academic departments on the basis of their size and special requirements in each field of teaching and research. The allocations were often questioned by heads of department, but the system was retained.

Related to the fortunes of the Unisa Library was the status of librarianship as a discipline. At the end of van der Walt's term as principal, the Department of Bibliography and Librarianship was inaugurated. The courses were offered by the head of the Department of Philosophy, Dr H.J. de Vleeschauer, and the Unisa Librarian, H.O.K. Zastrau. De Vleeschauer, an ardent supporter of national socialism, had been condemned to death by a Belgian military court in 1946 for his collaboration with the Nazi occupation forces. He escaped to Switzerland and emigrated to South Africa where he was appointed by Unisa in 1951. Like many other Afrikaans universities at the time, Unisa was publicly acknowledged as a *volksuniversiteit* (people's university) by government officials (Dick 2002).

The library was expanding and boasted 45 000 items by 1953. Boucher (1973: 291) explains that in a comparison with the Merensky Library at the University of Pretoria, the facilities of the Unisa Library were used more extensively by staff and students. Staffing, however, remained a perennial problem throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In 1953 Unisa moved to 263 Skinner Street in Pretoria and by 1955 the Division of External Studies enjoyed better representation on the Senate of the university. The late 1950s saw considerable expansion of the library's activities which anticipated the move to the new building, also in Skinner Street, in 1959. The book stock had grown to nearly 60 000, plus about 6 000 textbooks. Various private collections were also donated during these years, including those of prominent politicians.

Significantly, the library realised the need to focus on Africa and in 1958 began systematically to organise a special collection, segregated from other literatures. This was in line with apartheid policy, which was concerned to define South Africa's relations with the rest of the continent and to understand contemporary developments to the 'north of the Limpopo'. This concern with

a separate Africa library also became a feature of Unisa policy for the next decade and provided particular ideological content to collections development in the Verwoerd era. A.J.H. van der Walt was appointed in a temporary capacity to oversee the expansion of the Africa section of the library for research purposes. This would be undertaken in consultation with the Africa Institute in Pretoria, and the Unisa Library would be represented by professors S. Pauw, van der Walt and E.F. Potgieter, and Messrs B.F. van Rensburg and H.O.K. Zastrau. An amount of £1 000 was voted by the executive management (*dagbestuur*) for new acquisitions (Unisa Archives 1958).

### **FLEDGLING LIBRARY, 1959–1962**

The new library building was opened on 6 March 1959. This expansion meant a growth in staff, especially temporary and part-time librarians, for which a special salary fund was allocated. The staff had grown to 21 plus 5 temporary librarians and five typists. A pattern of high staff turnover also emerged, which became a feature of employment at Unisa up to the 1980s. The library committee therefore regularly reviewed the personnel structure, the hierarchy of posts and salary scales. In 1959 the approach was to recommend parity with various academic ranks, so that the university librarian would be remunerated at the same level as a professor, and the deputy on par with a senior lecturer (Unisa Archives 1959).

By the end of 1960 the book stock in the Unisa Library had reached 80 799 monographs, apart from 6 000 textbooks and various other items, such as official publications. The backlog in classification had taken its toll on the staff who had worked solidly for more than two years to bring the catalogue up to date. Re-cataloguing was not only laborious but also expensive because it required professional experience and subject knowledge at an advanced level. Salaries were not attractive in terms of these requirements, and even though they had – on average – increased from £5 330 a year in 1954 to £19 698 in 1959, they were not competitive enough to retain the skills of experienced librarians. The university therefore allocated an additional £3 000 to expedite the elimination of the classification backlog. The staffing quota was set at 27 permanent librarians. Job reservation for whites during the 1960s permitted the change in status of *blanke bodes* (white messengers) to permanent members of staff. A Standard 8 education assured them of employment as photocopers and technical assistants (Unisa Archives 1959).

A major initiative to introduce the Dewey system was pioneered by Mrs M. Werth. She debated its merits with various subject specialists, especially in areas related to African Studies, where it was felt that the Dewey system lacked sophistication by not recognising apartheid constructions, such as

*Bantu Administration*. The peculiarities of apartheid intellectual discourse had somehow to be incorporated into the imported American classification rubric.

The Lending section of the library experienced a significant decline in student requests for books in 1959 mainly because textbooks had become compulsory for all courses and study guides began to look more and more like textbooks. The racial breakdown of library usage is also suggestive: 660 black and 1225 white undergraduates had contact, while 41 black and 320 white postgraduates requested books and journal articles. This translates to a mere 22 per cent of white undergraduates compared with 39 per cent of black students, which indicates a relatively high level of black library use. The annual report of the library (Unisa Archives 1959) explained this in terms of poor incomes among black students, which required them to use library textbooks. The effects of Bantu Education were not as pronounced in the late 1950s as they were to become under the more strenuously segregated system of 'separate development' in the 1960s, and the African elite of mission schools still represented an intelligentsia that would have been aware of the value of research in a library of higher education. The low numbers of black postgraduate registrations at Unisa in 1959 – evident in the library statistics – was, however, symptomatic of expanding white privilege.

The audio-visual library was officially opened in 1959 and the cataloguing of records began. A donation from the British Council was used to fund the core of the *Diskoteek* (audio-visual library), but more equipment, such as headphones, record players and loudspeakers, was required to make the collection accessible. As the library expanded its information facilities, the German Africana collection was extended by Dr A.O. Hesse from funds he had canvassed; it became a mainstay of Unisa Library's Africana holdings, bearing his name in later years (Unisa Archives 1959).

In line with the research focus on Africa, it was decided in 1960 that journals relating to Africa would be made available by the Africa Institute to Unisa Library users and subscriptions for such periodicals borne by the university would in some cases be transferred to the Institute (Unisa Archives 1960a). A strict division between South Africa and Africa was thus implemented in the expansion of the Africa section. This did not, however, preclude academic departments from ordering books on Africa for the Unisa Library. A principle decision was made to order all relevant works on South Africa within the constraints of the library's budget, thus defining its collections (Unisa Archives 1960b).

The Sharpeville shootings of 1960 received no mention at all in any of the Unisa Library documentation of that year, despite its huge political significance for South Africa. The reason for this is not apparent from minutes or reports, but since it did not have an immediate bearing on

segregated higher education, the violence passed without comment, unlike the Soweto uprising of 1976.

During 1961 the Unisa Library appointed some well-qualified librarians, including a deputy university librarian, John Willemse, whose association with the library was to become extremely important during the next 30 or so years, and whose skills as a manager were demonstrated while Zastrau was on leave. But there was a general lack of experience among those who were appointed, which meant that the library also became a training institution for information specialists. A staff manual was compiled to provide clear job descriptions and guidance to new librarians. It represented a first attempt at specialisation which marked an emerging sophistication in the workings of the library. This was confirmed by the presence of 12 students of Librarianship who completed the practical requirement of their degree course in the Unisa Library (Unisa Archives 1961).

As the library grew in stature it also attracted more donations, mainly from European, Australian and American agencies and embassies but also from South African sources. Increasingly, private collections became part of the library's holdings. A marked increase in the use of the journals also indicated the gradual shift towards research that was beginning to take place at Unisa. A project to index journal articles in various fields of research also got under way and it was hoped that a comprehensive abstracting service would be available at some future date. The journal collection grew by 134 titles and Unisa's library science journal, *Mousaion*, published nine issues (Unisa Archives 1961).

The annual report of the Unisa Library for 1962 recorded its greatest development since inception, especially the strides made in the complete classification of its holdings (Unisa Archives 1962). The classification comprised an alphabetical author catalogue, a systematic, bilingual (Afrikaans–English) Dewey catalogue, which was due to be completed in 1963, and a keyword and subject catalogue for the Africa collection (in English only). The staff invested most of their time in this achievement, which meant that acquisitions were fewer than in the previous years. Another major activity was the compilation of bibliographies, which were regarded as an essential research tool. In fact, more and more energy was expended in this area as the Unisa Library moved towards a sophisticated subject reference system.

The library also had various publishing enterprises, apart from *Mousaion*. These included a textbook and reprint series, mainly related to African topics, such as language manuals and out-of-print Africana works, most notably R.H. Massie, *The native tribes of the Transvaal* (London, 1905) and J.P. Verloren van Themaat, *Deelname van verskillende dele van die bevolking van die unie*

*aan sy staatsregtelike instellings*, which had originally appeared in the *Tydskrif vir Hedendaagse Romeins-Hollandse reg* in 1960.

The limitations of the Dewey classification system were noted in respect of Law and 'Native Administration'. Two librarians were appointed to modify the American system to accommodate the peculiarities of these ethnographic academic fields. The general catalogue also drew on the resources of the librarians who produced 'the only and fullest bilingual catalogue (*register*) in South Africa, and probably 'the only one of its kind in the world' (Unisa Archives 1962: 665). Zastrau regarded the composite catalogue as the most effective instrument for unlocking the information resources of the Unisa Library.

The annual report of 1962 also recorded the research and study activities of the Unisa Library staff, mainly specialised diplomas or degrees in librarianship, but also some study visits abroad and professional service on various boards or committees nationally. Willemse's activities were particularly impressive and H. van Broekhuizen contributed to T. E. W. Schumann, *Die abdikatie van die witman* (Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers, 1962). More than ever before, Unisa Library became 'the laboratory for the student of Librarianship' (Unisa Archives 1962: 669). But, as in previous years, the staff turnover was high and experience was lacking; 75 per cent of the librarians had less than two years' service.

As the activities of the library expanded and it celebrated its fifteenth anniversary, a function in the Philadelphia Hall, Pretoria, on 21 November 1962 launched the Society of Friends of the Library. Its constitution was encompassing and designed to link the Unisa Library with other libraries and library associations. The library also undertook a comprehensive survey of the strengths and weaknesses of its study and research materials in an attempt to predict the most important needs in the next few years. Its findings were presented to the principal in the hope that it would influence the new state subsidy formula due to be implemented in 1964 (Unisa Archives 1962a).

## **POLITICAL INTRUSION; RESOLUTE GROWTH, 1962-1967**

Unisa was drawn into the whirl of nationalist politics that accompanied the plan to allocate extra resources to the needs of Afrikaans-speaking students, which led to the eventual establishment of the University of Port Elizabeth (UPE) and Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) in the wake of strong lobbying by the Broederbond. Early in 1962, Piet Meyer, later head of the Broederbond, asked Senator Jan de Klerk, the Minister of Education, to approve moving Unisa from Pretoria to Johannesburg and to expand its



functions to include both its distance education role and an Afrikaans residential university. This, he argued, would suit the apartheid government as it would avoid the establishment of a new university, but ‘fulfil the deeply felt desires of the Rand’s Afrikaners’ (Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit 1968).

But in September 1962, Samuel Pauw, the Principal of Unisa, reminded de Klerk that the council had taken a decision not to become involved in the establishment of any new university for whites. He defended the pioneering work that Unisa had undertaken on behalf of all working adults who sought a university education (National Archives 1963:4). This clash between the Pretoria and Johannesburg Broederbonders prompted de Klerk to send a team of three secret investigators to the Transvaal to resolve the impasse. Unisa was deemed to offer lectures in both Afrikaans and English, which was likely to be attractive to the growing number of English speakers ‘opposed to the liberalism of certain English universities’ (National Archives 1962).

During 1963 Pauw remained implacably opposed to the scheme to move Unisa to Johannesburg, so much so that the Unisa Council decided on a highly visible denunciation of the government’s plan. He argued that Unisa had never striven to be a residential university and defended Unisa’s bilingual character. The Cabinet eventually rejected de Klerk’s plan, the Broederbond suffered a setback and the Rand Broederbonders had to re-group (National Archives 1963:4). Such developments naturally impinged upon the workings of Unisa as a whole, as rivalries sought expression in institutional control.

At the less contested library level, the book stock increased by 11 559 in 1963, which brought the total holdings to over 100 000. The library budget doubled to R62 000. The audio-visual library also grew to 825 records. The journal section added 87 new titles to its collection. A notable trend in the early 1960s was the significant increase in lending over the counter as opposed to postal requests, which remained fairly constant: in 1959 the Lending section issued 6 322 books; in 1963 the number had more than doubled to 14 716. Contact with the Russian National Library in Moscow and the Leningrad Library resulted in the acquisition of 68 items on the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902. The Bindery came into existence in 1963, and 2 808 books were bound during the year. The expanding services of the library also led to the publication of the *Library Information Bulletin*, a circular designed to inform staff and postgraduate students about the library’s facilities, holdings and new acquisitions. The reprint series also reproduced H.R.G. Howman, *African local government in British east and central Africa (principles and practice)*, a well-known text (Unisa Archives 1963).

Despite the approval of 18 additional posts from April 1964, personnel resources remained stretched because 13 staff resigned. Only by December did the staff number 54, from 36 in March. The main difficulty was finding

suitably qualified senior librarians. A major development was Zastrau's appointment as head of the Department of Librarianship (1965–1967) and University Librarian, and Willemse's promotion to Joint University Librarian (Unisa Archives 1964).

In 1965 the Broederbond conflict to relocate Unisa to the Rand as an Afrikaans institution took another turn, following a new set of demands from the leadership in Johannesburg. These included one that required black university colleges to take over responsibility for correspondence tuition on an entirely segregated basis, so that Unisa's correspondence section would be for whites only. In June 1965 heads of department at Unisa rejected these demands by an overwhelming majority. The *Sunday Times* (1965) summed up the government's dilemma as follows: 'His [de Klerk's] trouble has been that a decision would antagonise either the Broeders of Johannesburg or those of Pretoria . . . on the merits of the case the Minister must give judgement against Big Broeder and keep the University of South Africa in Pretoria.'

Finally, in August 1965 de Klerk announced that Unisa would stay in Pretoria and that a new Afrikaans university would be opened on the Witwatersrand. This episode suggests that it is too simplistic to view the relationship between Unisa and the National Party government in purely ideological terms, as this was a time when the size and capacities of universities were expanding rapidly around the world. They were therefore much more able to defend their own interests against the will of governments. The elite character of universities was also changing: the expectation that students would leave home to take up residence in a university was giving way to a model in which students stayed at home or worked part-time, thus facilitating access for poorer students. This constituency of students was crucial to the viability of Unisa and its services had been designed to meet their needs (Beale 1998, ch 6).

The study collection (short loan) of the Unisa Library was established in 1965. It housed all the recommended books for assignments and resolved many of the problems that had been experienced before. To enhance this service, all undergraduates were sent a questionnaire testing their views. The results were reviewed and interpreted by R. de Wet, the deputy university librarian, and the head of the Acquisitions section, M.C. Boschhoff, as part of their respective Master's degree research. There was an appreciable increase in undergraduate use of the library – 25 per cent of those registered, up from under 20 per cent in 1964. The Lending section also reported significant increases in loans to staff – up by 2 501, which meant a total of 43 573 issues for the year (Unisa Archives 1965).

Lecturers benefited from a new system of journal circulation in individual departments before the periodicals were placed on the shelves in the Library.

It was well received and only five departments did not avail themselves of this privilege. The bequest to the Unisa Library of J.L. van Schaik's Africana library represented a significant acquisition, since it filled many of the gaps in the South African history, literature and art collections. Many other donations also swelled the library's shelves; 1 473 volumes were acquired in this way. Donations from foreign legations added to the official documentation in the library. The result of a campaign to increase the circulation of *Mededelings van die Universiteit van Suid-Afrika* (Bulletin of the University of South Africa) had disappointing results; only 1 193 were sold, 341 more than in 1964. *Mousaion* fared better. Together with the textbook series, a total of 9 438 university publications were distributed, either through purchase, exchange, review or free issue (Unisa Archives 1965).

The university's new subsidy formula in 1966 resulted in an increase in the library's budget to R185 000. A record number of books were added to the holdings, increasing the total to 180 752 books and 194 808 items. Eleven temporary posts, instead of the eight of the previous year, added to the staff contingent and despite some rotation among sections, senior staff remained fairly constant. This allowed progress with a number of special tasks that had been neglected before, such as the classification of Unisa theses which had been received from the Department of Education, Arts and Science Library, the modification of the Africa collection catalogue following the withdrawal of the Africa Institute's books, and the refinement of policy relating to the German–Africana collection (Unisa Archives 1966).

The establishment of library facilities for students in South West Africa indicates the neo-colonial nature of the political relationship of former German colony with South Africa. The Library of the South West Africa Administration provided space and staff for 800 Unisa books, which were shipped to Windhoek for the use of Unisa students. It also undertook to post books to other parts of South West Africa. Such access to higher education was to attract a sizeable number of students to Unisa from the region, despite the small and rather fractured beginning in 1966 (Unisa Archives 1966).

Subject librarians were introduced to build bibliographical capacity for the research needs of Master's and doctoral students and lecturers. This service would be available from 1967. Subject librarians represented an 'important link between the library and the departments for whose disciplines they were responsible, especially in respect of orders and sample books for review' (Unisa Archives 1966:2). In future they would provide annotated bibliographies in specialist fields, drawing on the resources not only of the Unisa Library but also of other libraries in South Africa.

An important change in 1967 was the resignation of Heinz Zastrau as the university librarian 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 (Blom et al., 1987). He and three other senior librarians left Unisa to begin the library at the newly opened RAU in Johannesburg. This was a severe blow to the Unisa Library. Professor S.I. Malan was appointed as the new head of the Library, as well as head of the Department of Librarianship, and John Willemse became the university librarian. The connection between the academic department and the library represented a profound change in the management structure.

The Africa collection was integrated into the general library stock, thus losing its separate identity, and its own catalogue and budget. The growing study collection led to plans for a branch library in Cape Town, in imitation of developments in Windhoek. A manual on referencing technique was compiled by P.J.A. Roux of the Department of Librarianship, which became a staple guide to students of the university for years to come. Law students had experienced problems in accessing older law reports. Through the good services of Judge V. Hiemstra, the library of the Supreme Court (Hooggeregshofbiblioteek) was opened to law students. A portable microfilm reader was placed in the South–West African Administration Library to make this material available to students in Windhoek. Microfilm collections were also added to the Unisa holdings in Pretoria, including publications of the Early English Text Society and various old journals, such as the *Economist* from 1843 to 1912 (Unisa Archives 1967).

## **YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION AND AUTOMATION, 1968–1972**

After the year-on-year growth of Unisa Library since 1964, 1968 proved a year of consolidation. The budget increased incrementally rather than dramatically. Consolidation meant reorganisation at one level, so the classification section was renamed ‘Cataloguing and Classification’. The Cataloguing section was confined to the technical maintenance of the catalogue. Subject librarians were constituted as a separate section tasked with liaising among staff, postgraduate students and the library. They were therefore relieved of classification duties and given more responsibility for collection development. The Lending section was divided into two: Administration and the Study Collection, each with its own deputy head. Similarly, the Acquisitions section was divided between Orders and Administration, mainly around financial control and analysis. This all represented a new managerial system that was designed to improve efficiency. It also reflected a growing bureaucracy and hierarchies of power. Layers of graded librarians emerged under the deputy university librarians, designed to facilitate a proper promotions structure as an incentive to librarians to stay at

Unisa, in response to the huge turnover of staff since the early 1960s (Unisa Archives 1968).

The new automated loan system was finally implemented in April 1968 after extensive testing and refining, but despite all the modifications that had taken place, problems abounded. Particularly irksome to some students were the cascading demands for the return of library books – each written in stronger language than the previous one – that filled their post boxes. The system also required adjustment by the staff of the Lending section who found themselves solely responsible for evening duty because they had been trained to use the ‘punch machine’ to issue books. A start was made with the automation of the Study Collection catalogue in 1968, to bring it into line with the rest of the library. The entire catalogue was codified and punched, and subject lists for each course printed to serve as a guide for determining the number of recommended books for 1969. Unisa had become the first computerised university library in South Africa and remained a leader in this field until the new millennium (Willemse 1988).

The library’s holdings passed the quarter-million mark in 1968. Donations continued to fill the stacks; Professor S.P.E. Boshoff presented 2 000 volumes of his personal library to Unisa which included valuable older works. Santam donated R1 000 to purchase material in the field of economics, especially journals and microfilm. Special collections were placed under the head of the Cataloguing section, who was given the brief to reorganise this mushrooming part of the library (Unisa Archives 1968).

After the growth of the late 1960s, the Library had to tighten its belt in 1970. Library management experienced a dramatic change in its structure following the resignation of R. de Wet, who moved to the University of Natal in Durban to head the Department of Librarianship, and S. I. Malan’s decision to uncouple the university librarian’s post from that of the head of the Unisa Department of Librarianship. A second deputy librarian’s post was therefore advertised to fill the leadership vacuum. This heralded a complete reorganisation of the personnel structure of the Unisa Library which became operational during the early 1970s. Generally, the library had experienced a malaise as it entered its third decade, exacerbated by a net decline in resources and usage (Unisa Archives 1971).

By 1972, the library had become a much more complex organisation, the staff had increased and the sophistication of the services it offered had improved enormously. This had also 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 demanded its own library. Although this was not possible at the time, the subject librarian division was commissioned to provide a more

dedicated service to students enrolled for advanced business degrees (Unisa Archives 1974).

The main preoccupation of 1972 was, however, the imminent move to the new campus and the upheaval this presented, which was compounded by the resignation of 44 of the 110 members of staff in the library. The university librarian, John Willemse, ascribed this to the fact that most of the librarians were women who resigned for domestic reasons. Staffing was particularly difficult in specialised areas, including the Law Library, which struggled to find an appropriately qualified head (Unisa Archives 1972).

The library also investigated the feasibility of providing students with literature on microfiche during 1972, as its correspondence mode of instruction matured into 'teletuition' after other methodologies had been introduced. The library was amenable to such innovation and often participated in experimental teaching programmes. The microfiche pilot project involved 333 students, of which 247 received 3 476 books on microfiche. The experiment was therefore a qualified success. Its implementation for all registered students was very expensive and copyright proved an unexpected problem (Unisa Archives 1972b). These obstacles notwithstanding, the university set up a separate microfilm division as part of an aggressive expansion of services the following year.

## **DEVELOPING A RESEARCH LIBRARY, 1973-1976**

By 1973 the Unisa Library had developed a staff structure similar to other administrative departments at the university – very hierarchical in nature, with each rank firmly linked to a salary scale and employment levels cascading downwards from the director, deputy and assistant directors to middle-ranking senior administrative officers to lowly assistants and African messengers on the bottom rung (Unisa Archives 1973).

The new Sanlam Library on the Muckleneuk Campus presented a range of challenges in terms of the arrangement of books, periodicals and other materials on each of the floors; the incompatibility of architectural design and practical library requirements was palpable. It was officially opened by the Principal, Theo van Wijk, who told the audience that the Unisa Library was special among university libraries; its growth had been unbridled and its resources had come to rival those of much older libraries (Verwey 1988:47–48). Sponsorship had been an important factor in the development of the library and significant support had come from Afrikaner big business which had had close links with Unisa since 1958 when Sanlam first became a major

donor and which relationship was hugely strengthened in 1972 (Van Wijk 1980:123–126).

Unisa's Senate appointed an archives committee on 11 May 1973 to oversee the inauguration of the library's proposed archive. This was given substance by the centenary celebrations of the university (from its inception as the University of the Cape of Good Hope) and the opening of the new campus overlooking Pretoria. The prosperity of the institution was underscored by plans to open a branch library in Durban and Windhoek in South-West Africa. The library now also attracted high-calibre staff, who increasingly pursued further studies to gain higher qualifications, served on professional bodies and published academic articles. The head of the library's own profile grew as Willemse presented more and more papers at a range of international conferences often receiving funding to do so from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The standing of Unisa Library improved and careerist librarians competed for posts.

In tandem with the library's achievements, various new mechanised systems were introduced to increase efficiency. In June 1973 a loan system came on stream, combined with a smaller Burroughs computer programme for the study collection. Various other cataloguing systems used by the Library of Congress (US) and the British National Bibliography were considered in order to thrust Unisa to the forefront of library practice; more and more international models informed Unisa's development. In the Subject Reference division, lecturing staff became the main beneficiaries as librarians provided them with more research bibliographies than their students. Subject librarians also tested their book selection practice against the opinions of reviewers in *Choice* and *British Book News* as they advised departments of trends in their particular disciplines. These measures formed the basis of a new, strict book selection policy that was introduced in 1974 and probably accounted for UNESCO's positive assessment of the Unisa Library's holdings. Increased specialisation also created demand for a Science Library, similar to the Law Library and in this sense, Unisa was also following trends in other academic libraries (Unisa Archives 1973).

As South Africa's political landscape changed in the wake of student activism, African trade unionism and strike action, as well as international opposition to apartheid, so Unisa tried in the era of Theo van Wijk after 1972 to construct itself as an 'open university'. The appointment of van Wijk himself represented a setback to Broederbond control of the university when the professor of librarianship and head of the department, S.I. Malan, lost the Senate vote in favour of Van Wijk (Muller 1988:18). Unisa was to be open, in the sense of providing higher education to black and white, but still conceived in the narrow framework of Afrikaner nationalist ideology. Van Wijk

preached open access to university education, but within the boundaries of segregation. Separate classes for black and white students were maintained, lecturing staff were all white and predominantly Afrikaans speaking. Moreover, meetings were conducted in Afrikaans and minutes were also recorded in Afrikaans. Unisa had a positive image with government in the 1970s and its budgets grew as more and more state and parastatal money supported its enterprise (Unisa Archives 1973).

South Africa's attempts to reduce its political isolation had since the late 1960s focussed on diplomatic ties with African countries. In 1974, therefore, Unisa's Senate proposed the establishment of a Documentation Centre for African Studies (Dokumentasiesentrum vir Afrikanistiek) to collect material related to Tswana, Venda, Tsonga and Sotho literature, thus also drawing on anthropological, historical, theological and legal scholarship. The intention was to set up a complementary research agency to the HSRC's National Documentation Centre for Language and Literature. Unisa was intent upon imitating state-sponsored initiatives and building an acceptable research capacity that could promote its reputation in fields that enjoyed government approval (Unisa Archives 1975b).

Despite Van Wijk's attempts to construe the university in apolitical terms (Van Wijk 1980:241–254), its projects betrayed its pro-government credentials. The library, no less than the rest of the institution, proved amenable to apartheid policy and built a formidable repository of archives, books and journals within the political culture of the ruling party. In line with such compliance, the library worked within the parameters of apartheid censorship, notwithstanding John Willemse's application to the Minister of Justice for permission to bypass censorship laws and add to the Unisa holdings of banned publications in the interests of assembling a definitive collection. In 1948, 100 titles were banned by the new apartheid government; by 1971 this number had grown dramatically to about 18 000 (McKerron, 2004:10; Dick, 2004:32). Banned material was placed under embargo in the Unisa Library and the deputy director, Pieter de Jager, was in charge of the process of doing the state's bidding (Switzer 1988) and later published a detailed manual on banned publications (1984). The Unisa Library committee complained that it was difficult to root out all banned items because there was 'also certain pretentious material which creates opportunities' for undermining the law. It was therefore decided to police such publications by employing research assistants to liaise with specialist scholars in identifying academic works that covertly conveyed anti-apartheid ideas (Unisa Archives 1975a).

Unisa's policy was more compliant, for example, than that of the library of the University of the Witwatersand (Wits), whose committee chair, Glyn Thomas, canvassed government to indemnify universities against legal action arising



from possession of banned books. The upshot was a system that allowed staff and postgraduate students (who were classified as *bona fide* researchers in terms of the law) access to cupboards and rooms of banned literature in the Wits Library and at other liberal universities (Murray1997:165). The irony of censorship policy at Unisa was that it had among its students many of the emerging leaders of the liberation struggle who were in prison, exile or underground politics at this time (Unisa Archives. Documentation Centre for African Studies).

Unisa concluded an agreement with the United Party to curate its collection of documents following talks between van Wijk and Sir de Villiers Graaff. This archive was regarded as an important acquisition because party-political collections were housed at other universities and attracted research by historians and political scientists. Identification with formal political processes in South Africa informed archival collection policy until the mid 1980s. No attempt was made to collect extra-parliamentary material and students were encouraged to write theses in political history that constructed the past in terms of white power (Unisa Archives 1975a).

The Unisa Library began to play a more and more prominent part in national policy regarding information in the mid 1970s. Willemse, de Jager, H.F.G. Neethling and Malan, as well as J.G. Kesting and R.B. Zaaiman served on a commission of inquiry to investigate the role of academic libraries in the provision of information to students in higher education. Although Unisa performed well in terms of new book titles, its subscription to academic journals was relatively austere – about 4 000 titles out of about 26 000 prescribed in terms of international norms (Unisa Archives 1975). The inauguration of the Inter-University Library Committee as a permanent feature of the Committee of University Principals in 1975 gave Unisa's library the chance to influence decisions in the field of information, especially since Theo van Wijk chaired the committee between 1977 and 1984 (Willemse 1988:60).

The library experienced huge pressure on its resources in 1975; book issues increased by 37 per cent and the stock grew by 58 461 items. The book collection reached the 500 000 mark by early 1976 (Willemse 1988:56). The archival collections also expanded significantly and collaboration between the library and academic departments improved. Unisa participated in the inquiry into machine-readable cataloguing (MARC) information in collaboration with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and other libraries (Unisa Archives 1975).

The National Library Advisory Council supported the establishment of special collections in narrow fields of academic specialisation, based on national research priorities and beneficiaries of state funding (Unisa Archives

1976a). Part of the pragmatic widening of the outreach of Unisa Library after the Soweto Uprising of June 1976 extended to the St Anthony's Cultural Centre in Boksburg which was designed to service African students in Anthropology, African Development Administration and Accounting, as well as more popular subjects such as Economics, Education, History and English. The St Anthony's project was coordinated by Gary Nader in the Study Collection of the Unisa Library and was designed to address the more aggressive demands of black students in their open rejection of inferior apartheid education (Unisa Archives 1976).

## CONCLUSION

The Unisa Library had fairly shaky beginnings as it tried to justify university study by correspondence, a methodology that aroused suspicion among academics, librarians and policy-makers in higher education in the 1940s and 1950s. It, nevertheless, managed to carve out a niche after World War II as ex-servicemen sought to improve their qualifications in order to re-enter the labour market. Moreover, an increasing number of African students chose to work and study at the same time, which meant that as segregated education became entrenched in the discourse of 'separate development' in the early 1960s, Unisa gained a strong foothold in higher education. Its library became an integral feature of the correspondence teaching model, which also strengthened its profile and improved its resources.

As budgets grew, the library increased its holdings and its reputation improved. The university's status remained intact as the political impulse to change it into the RAU failed, and academic librarians began to view it as a place of permanent employment that offered career potential. Unisa's principals and university librarians fought to achieve recognition from donors, businesses, academics and a wider public. Important relationships were forged with government and the private sector. Unisa's Sanlam Library was emblematic of its connection with big business and strategically positioned it at the centre of an emerging 'national university'.

Unisa's financial well-being allowed larger allocations to the library, thus achieving unprecedented growth in the 1970s, as student enrolments increased and it moved to its new impressive campus on Muckleneuk Ridge. Unisa exploited its role as a South African university boasting a racially mixed student body, and it was tolerated – even approved in many quarters – by the apartheid government because it was not a residential university and could therefore construct itself as 'everyone's university'. It was convenient for the apartheid state and the university managers to parade Unisa as a 'non-racial' national university. This ambivalent identity became a feature of

Unisa's role in higher education, able to juggle compliance with a greater openness – conforming to the spirit of the law without having to adhere to its letter. It diversified its staff, allowing some individualised dissent, but discouraged views or actions that were likely to implicate the institution in any direct challenge to government policy. The Unisa Library was able, therefore, to provide services to a larger constituency of South African students, irrespective of race, which in turn attracted a loyal following, especially as student unrest exploded on the campuses of 'Bantustan' universities after 1976.

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