TITLE:

Management of Distance Library services with reference to learner support

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ABSTRACT

The **purpose** of the article is to share information on the management of Open Distance Libraries with special reference to learner support as developed at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Information on the changing roles of Academic Libraries with specific reference to the requirements of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is also provided.   It focuses on the practical management experience of the University of South Africa (UNISA) library in support of the implementation of a new ODL model at the university.

Design/ methodology / approach. A review of the relevant literature was conducted to provide an overview on the topic and a context for the information provided on the UNISA Library.   Information gathered from the planning, policies and procedures of UNISA in general and the UNISA library specifically as well as experience gained by participating in workshops on ODL at UNISA is included in the article.

The **findings** indicate that research and literature on leadership in distance education in general (Beaudoin, 2002) is limited and this is even more so for Open and Distance Libraries. It is however evident from experience and the required standards for distance library services, that structured management and planning of these services is important to ensure success and future developments of the services. Furthermore, leaders in Open Distance Libraries also need a variety of skills that are constantly updated to ensure optimization of resources, for suitable strategic planning, policy formulation and suitable in terms of new technology developments.

In addition to the literature survey and analysis the information gathered for the article is **original** in that it captures the experience gained from management of an Open Distance Learning Library.   Although focused on Open Distance Learning, the information is also of **value** to residential institutions as the border between online services and open distance services is becoming blurred.

1. INTRODUCTION

Current trends in ODL internationally display the use of resources, especially technology in a radically different way than the first and second generation approaches. The trend is further to create an environment of participation and self help, away from the industrialized, centralized, counter service type of approach. This goes hand in hand with the shift from remote learning to a learner centered approach to learning. It is acknowledged that a more technology-enabled environment is necessary for successful ODL and that it presents specific requirements and challenges for the management and services of ODL Libraries.

Modern ODL institutions also have to establish systems for the distributed facilitation of learning after registration, this include provision of tutors, equipped learning centers, libraries, information and communication technologies. Specific transformation leadership qualities are required for the success of this instructional model.

The article provides a brief overview of ODL, required standards for ODL libraries, the access entitlement principle with special reference to management requirements for distance libraries. The role the Library plays in supporting the ODL Business Model at UNISA as *the* African University in service of humanity is provided with practical examples of responses from the library with regards to the student cycle (enquiry,

information, application, registration, study package, orientation, distributed learning facilitation, assignments and examination).

Whilst information on the rapid evolution of distance education delivery systems is readily available, not much is published on the new roles required of leaders in these institutions (Baudoin, 2002). Furthermore, information on management of libraries in ODL is not readily available.

The paper therefore focuses on the practical experience of the management of the library and its services to support ODL with specific reference to the application of technology and the practice at UNISA.

2. OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

Open Distance Learning (ODL) applies a set of methods or processes for teaching a diverse range of students[1] located at different places and physically separated from the learning institution, their tutors/teachers as well as other students. An ODL model entails a student-centred approach that is built on integrated systems and engaged learning. ODL involves learning-teaching interaction, and students actively engage and interact with the institution, their lecturers, study material and fellow students. This complements well-designed independent study packages as well as the required learner support throughout their studies. Some institutions use the terms ODL and Distance education / learning interchangeably. However, UNISA chooses to combine the characteristics of distance education (a mode of instruction) and the approach of open learning into open distance learning. This will be discussed in the next section.

ODL is a multi-dimensional concept aimed at bridging the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication distance between student and institution, student and academics, student and courseware and student and peers. Open distance learning focuses on removing barriers to access learning, flexibility of learning provision, student-centredness, supporting students and constructing learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed.

The development of ODL is based on the evolvement of Distance education and is usually described in 5 generations. The literature describing the rapid evolution of distance education delivery systems categorize these in generations (Beaudoin, 2002).

First Generation: Correspondence model. This is a single medium of delivery in print and offers no direct student interaction. It is a one way instruction and students learn from the printed lectures.

Second generation: Multi-media model. Printed material is considered as the most reliable and affordable medium and in this generation it is complemented with communication via mail and assignments. This generation starts to use radio to inform, telephone for communication. Audio and video tapes are provided to supplement print. Television broadcasting is introduced as well to provide instruction and content.

Third generation: Tele-learning model. With the growth in number of institutions offering distance education and the growth in learner numbers, tele-learning is introduced in the third generation. Print materials are still used, but a shift to the focus on learner support is made. New media is introduced to support learners. The introduction of direct and immediate communication is introduced and two way communications is introduced as against earlier generations with one directional communication.

Fourth generation: Flexible learning. Print is complemented and ICT enhancement enables more flexibility in this generation. The focus on Leaner Support is also enhanced and one to one communication is extended to include group work and communication. Channels of communication

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[1] Note: While the international literature on ODL favours the use of the term 'learner', feedback from UNISA learners indicates that they prefer to be known as 'students'

introduced include the internet, satellite, World Wide Web, chat rooms, etc.   The access to worldwide information sources is used to complement print materials. Face-to-face teaching is introduced and some institutions apply a combination of distance education and face-to-face. This generation implements a convergence of print, audio, video, computer and computer and classroom created flexibility options. It is also named blended learning.

Fifth generation: Intelligent Flexible learning. This generation takes the advantage of computer mediated technologies of the fourth generation and introduces automated response systems.   Technologies to facilitate interactive responses and immediate automated responses are included.

Trends in technology and how it can be applied to facilitate distance learning is an important aspect to consider and many developments are available to enhance this mode of education. UNISA embarked on a series of workshops for senior management with an expert in online teaching to assess technologies available to facilitate Open Distance Learning in the University.

For example, today, we must decide if we should communicate by using Blogger, Wikispaces, or Twitter. We have the option to upload lectures and experiments to YouTube. We can send RSS audio or video feeds to facilitate the distribution of information / alert to information.   We can also join Linked-in or Zoom-info to facilitate communication. Collaboration with other academics can be done through Ygma, Google Docs, or Ning. We can also create a presence in Face book, MySpace or Second Life and publish using Creative Commons, Flickr, SlideShare or Merlot.

We can teach asynchronously using Moodle, Desire2Learn or Blackboard to enhance the learning process. We can conference synchronously using Ellumninate, CentraLive, Wimba, or Adobe Connect.

We can reflect using OSPI, FolioLive, or ePortConsortium e-portfolios and map content using FreeMind, MindGenious, or MindChart.   We can enter into discussions using skype, MindsPRING, Google Talk or Jabber voice over IP services – to mention a few.

It is very important to consider the needs of and preferred modes by the learners and also to ensure that staff is fully capacitated and enthusiastic about applying these technologies to support learners and facilitate teaching and learning.

## 3.	MANAGEMENT OF DISTANCE LIBRARY SERVICES

With the rapid development and increase of distance education research and information on Library services in ODL is readily available. Libraries have also been very successful in acquiring and promoting their online resources, enabling students to access these from any location (Jones Roccos, 2001).

Since the sixties developments on guidelines for these services also received attention. Various guidelines were developed by different Library Associations and the main concern was to ensure that library and information services is provided on an equal basis to clients that are not resident on the campuses of institutions providing distance education.

The foundation of these guidelines is the principle of access entitlement and a prerequisite for any successful ODL institution.   This principle entails that every learner, lecturer, research or any other staff members of the institution is entitled to have access to the library and information services of the institution despite their geographical location. This will include direct communication with the library staff in an appropriate medium of communication and regardless of the location of the library staff members and the client.

ODL libraries should therefore manage and plan its services in such a way that they meet the information and resource needs of clients wherever they are located.

The guidelines developed by the Committee of the distance Learning Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (a Division of the American Library Association) had been reviewed on an ongoing basis since their inception in 1963 (ACRL: Standards for Distance Learning Library Services). The guidelines were developed into standards due to the critical factor that non-traditional study has rapidly become a major element in higher education. Furthermore we found a growing number of unique environments for educational opportunities, an increased recognition of the need for library resources and services at locations other than main campuses, an increased demand for equitable services for all students in higher education, no matter where the "classroom" is and a bigger demand for these services at distance learning sites. The advancement and developments in technology have also required the setting of standards for the delivery of library services for distance education.

The standards are designed to apply to all categories of distance users and in addition to the entitlement principle it is founded on the precepts of access for achievement of superior academic skills, direct human access, additional investments to the services and support (funding, staffing, etc.), provision of technical linkages between the library and other resources bases, complying with other standards, written agreements with partnerships, strategic planning for the services, assessments of outcomes and provision of information literacy instruction programmes.

The standards includes specific requirements regarding the fiscal responsibilities of the institution towards distance library services, allocation of staff to the services, facilities and equipment, resources, services, documentation and management. The requirements for management of distance libraries specify specific functions whether it is undertaken by a dedicated librarian-administrator (in an institution that offers both residential and distance teaching) or is dispersed between a number of librarians. In the case of UNISA offering only ODL and no residential teaching, the library provides dedicated distance education library services. The management, resources and services of the library is therefore totally assigned to distance education library services.

The key issue for distance students, whether library services provided to them is comparable to those of on campus students, acts as a focus for the management and provision of distance library services (Brophy, 1997). As a minimum requirement for the management of the distance library services standards, the library should pursue, implement and maintain the following areas of management in order to ensure equal access and services for distance students.

4.   MANAGEMENT OF THE LIBRARY'S SERVICES AND ITS ROLE IN ODL AT UNISA

UNISA has adopted an agenda for transformation with a vision to become *the* African University in service of Humanity. Most of the university's students live on the African continent and to enhance the services in other countries in Africa, the university has many partnerships and has opened a campus in Ethiopia.

To achieve its objectives of the university UNISA acknowledges that integrated library and information services and access to information resources and services are essential for the attainment of superior academic skills in higher education. It has therefore made ample provision for the development, expansion and maintenance of the library and information services. The UNISA Library is a valued asset of the university and draws on the best models of university libraries worldwide. The library and information services of UNISA are developed according to international guidelines for distance education services. The fundamental principle of distance education library services is that the services and resources must meet the needs of all learners, researchers and academic, professional and administrative staff, regardless of where they are located. The library must therefore manage and plan its services and resources to serve the students on the African continent and beyond.

UNISA started offering correspondence education in the nineteen forties. The international changes mentioned in this mode of learning have also impacted on the development and changes in teaching, learning and learner support at UNISA. A major influence was with the transformation of the Higher Education Landscape in South Africa when UNISA was authorized as the only dedicated distance education institution in the country. Another challenge as part of the transformation was the demand to improve on throughput and retention rates. The Council has endorsed the development of an updated ODL model and has approved the policy on this mode of teaching.

As part of its strategic planning the UNISA library management participates in the institution's strategic planning to ensure that the services are planned and developed in line with the strategies and goals of the institution. The library also participates in the curriculum development and in course planning to ensure appropriate library resources and services for the students. The institution's strategic and operational plans inform the library's strategic and operational plans which serve as the management plan of the library.

The management plan includes a statement of immediate and long-term goals and objectives for the distance education library services with measurements. The Library Management is also responsible for ensuring and demonstrating that all requirements for distance library services are met through needs and outcomes assessment and performance measures. The library manages the collection development to reflect the needs of the students, manages effective delivery of materials and services and promotes the services to the clients.

The UNISA Library's strategic and operational plans include goals, targets and performance measures for the delivery of the services in regional libraries, collaboration with partners, utilization of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) to enhance service by ensuring optimal retrieval of resources and short turnaround times for requests, enhanced research services, institutional repository services, e-strategies, online services (including Web 2.0 and other technologies), automation of manual processes, capacity building and quality assurance measures to ensure equitable services to distance learners.

The library manages collaborative relations with faculty and partners to enhance the services. An element that will impact on the future of distance library services is the increased number of collaborations between institutions that are driven by politics and financial considerations as institutions become more cost-conscious (Adams, 1997). Libraries are concluding agreements to underwrite the high cost of technology orientated services such as networked journals indexes and full-text resources. The UNISA library participates in a national consortium for this purpose and this has led to increased access to information for clients.

UNISA has designed a new approach to Open Distance Learning and has developed a policy and implementation plan accordingly. The university combines the characteristics of distance education (a mode of instruction) and the approach of open learning into open distance learning. ODL at UNISA has a student-centred approach that is built on integrated systems and engaged learning where students are active participants in the learning experience. This is complemented by well-designed independent study packages as well as the required learner support throughout the process, called the "Student Walk in ODL" at UNISA which consists of 5 levels. In general these levels can also apply to residential institutions, but it has been defined and developed at UNISA with the aim to find suitable ways to address the needs of the decentralized students. In turn the library has integrated the principles in the management and planning of the services and mapped out its role in the stages of the cycle to ensure access to services and resources for all students within the principle of access entitlement as defined in te standards for distance library services. It includes a technology-enabled environment to support the administrative, psychosocial and academic aspects of student experience at UNISA, financial assistance services, flexible options for study material and an excellent library to a comprehensive study guide and the opportunity to engage with lecturers, tutors and peers. UNISA is South Africa's only comprehensive dedicated distance education university. Therefore the conceptualization of Open Distance Learning open learning is central to achieving its vision.

To implement the new model, UNISA has established various task teams to focus on the various aspects of the model and is also embarking on a road show to create and awareness on the model at the university. The Library actively participates in these task teams to inform the management and planning of the library services. Task teams on registration, learning development, learner support, assessment, professional development and policies. The library's management includes these aspects in its planning and development of the services as described earlier.

The implementation plan also includes a major staff training component to prepare staff for the mode of delivery and required support services. The University embarks on regular workshops to report on progress and to map out the way forward as required and is currently updating the implementation plan of the policy to ensure success. The information gathered by the task teams was integrated in an Academic plan for the implementation of ODL and is now led by the Vice-Principal: Academic and Research. The library continues to participate in the development and teams.

Based on the approach to optimise transactional processes between the institution, its services and students the library is responsible to provide access to information services and resources. Addressing the student learning process the following services are to be provided as part of the "UNISA Student Walk" which is decrypted in the following section. The library integrated this in its strategic and operational planning and manages these services to students on the continent and beyond.   As part of its strategies to improve delivery services and turnaround times for decentralized students, the library is implementing RFID technologies to improve the stock management systems library that will result in optimal retrieval of materials.

4.1   Student Walk, Level 1: Awareness and information

UNISA's Department of Corporate Communication and Marketing, the College Marketers and Regional Communication Managers compile materials to create an awareness of ODL and courses available at UNISA for students.   These are specifically developed for use in and ODL in appropriate formats and distribution methods for decentralized students. The materials include "Your choice @ UNISA", College brochures, calendars, UNISA DVD, marketing CD, website and wall charts. The university also undertakes advertising, dissemination of information at national and international career exhibitions, focused school visits, face to face meetings, local information sessions, workshops with training managers, sessions on radio stations, meetings with career counselors and life orientation educators as well as presentations at international information sessions in distributed locations to afford students easy access these opportunities wherever they are..

A knowledge bank is set up with a brochure cart for general enquiries. Course Information (dispositions, career, programme, module learning pathways guidelines) is provided and information on admission, application, registration and RPL is provided to prospective students in this level.   Career guidance is provided on the Bureau for Career Counseling's Website and a prospectus CD is available.   College brochures and student newsletters are also provided.

4.1.1 Management of the Library's services and role in Level 1

The library pro-actively provides information on the services, resources and facilities for prospective students in suitable formats wherever they are. This includes an overview of the services and specific information on resources and services in the various publications (Your choice @ UNISA, UNISA DVD, Marketing CD, Website and MyUNISA – the UNISA student Portal).   The library participates in local and international information sessions and participates in promotional events / career exhibitions.   The library manages and plans the provision of general information on library services and resources in brochures, on the UNISA DVD and on the Website and these include the following.

- Information services and information resources
  Information to prospective students on the reference services, services of personal librarians,

customer training, tuition support and technologies available to facilitate these is provided.

- Access to information (locally and globally)
  Information to prospective students on electronic access services (including full-text databases, catalogue, e-Reserves, the student portal – MyUNISA, Airpac – access to the catalogue, databases and patron records via mobile devices) is provided. Additional information for the decentralized students on the access to information and resources in branches, through postal and courier services is also provided.

- Delivery of information services and resource
  Information to prospective students on the replicating services, alerting services, search services, reference seating services, browsing services, collection and dispatch services and lending services (request services, inter-library loans and issues) with special reference to access for decentralized students is provided.

- Information on resources available on career guidance
  Information on these resources provided to Career Counseling Services and prospective students in the required formats is provided with an emphasis on how to access these from remote locations.

4.2   Student Walk, Level 2: Application

To facilitate the registration process, UNISA has introduced an application system for prospective students. During this phase applications for subject exemptions, recognition of prior learning, support for special needs and funding can be submitted to the university. This is a very important level in the student walk for ODL as it eliminates delays in the registration process which can be a challenge when students are not on campus.

There is no specific role for Library in Level 2 of the student walk.

4.3   Student Walk, Level 3: Registration

Once the student's application is approved additional registration information is provided in the required formats for ODL students. This includes information pamphlets such as "Your registration@Unisa, a registration brochure, a registration CD, a registration form, a fees brochure, an exam brochure and a student newsletter (UNISA Inspired). At registration the student should select the preferred method of delivery, select modules and pay their fees. Online registration facilities are also available to students.

4.3.1   Management of the Library's services and role in Level 3

The library manages physical presence at registration in the larger registration facility in Sunnyside and plans the roll out to all registration sites. Information on services, resources, technologies available and facilities is provided and an awareness of support from the library created with special reference to ODL library services. For Master's and Doctoral students information services and support is made available during the registration /proposal writing.
An Information desk at registration is attended to by Library staff to meet with students, provide information and library marketing materials. A DVD on library services is displayed for students in queues for Library Desk. Online information is provided for students who register online.

4.4   Student Walk, Level 4: Teaching, learning and assessment

In this level, the study material with orientation material (general information) is dispatched to the student. Materials include "Your service guide@Unisa", Tutorial Letters and study material. Generic

orientation is provided by the General Information Brochure (including general guidelines on studying through Open Distance Learning. Discipline and College specific information is provided in the Tutorial letters.

Individual learning, tutoring, peer collaborative learning and academic literacy is provided in the study material.

This is followed by compulsory and voluntary assignments to assist students to pace themselves through the work. Formal examinations are taken at a local examination centre. Results are published and perpetual failure intervention is done.   If required re-registration is done and letters are sent to students indicating the correct outstanding modules required in the programme.

During the study year regular updates on UNISA activities are provided on the Website, MyUNISA and the student publication, "UNISA Inspired". Ongoing student and tutor feedback is also provided. Feedback from students is provided in an annual Student Satisfaction Index.

4.4.1   Management of the Library's services and role in level 4

Induction and orientation. The library manages and provides general orientation (induction) information in various formats and in different delivery channels to new students wherever they are located. Information literacy training is integrated in the literacy programmes of the university. It serves to navigate information, guidance to appropriate information in required formats (and locations) to optimise the information resources and services of the UNISA Library. A general orientation to services and facilities optimizing Web 2.0 (social networking) technologies to reach distance students is provided.

Customized College (Faculty) information on services and resources is provided with client training services by Personal Librarians to students, lecturing staff and researchers. An electronic library tour facility is made available on the web available for students 24/7.

Learning and teaching. Information resources and services in required formats and locations throughout the learning and teaching cycle is managed and made available. Continued education to navigate the information environment and search information services and resources is provided. Research support, learner support, access to global information and digital resources / information in relevant formats and location within academic courses is offered in the required formats. Development of an institutional repository of academic and research outputs of the University has been done to enhance access to these resources. Electronic collaborated learning spaces in regional hubs, learner centres and partners are planned. The following services are made available in the required formats, employing technologies such as Airpac, Web 2.0, portals, etc to enhance the service delivery.

- Information services customized for decentralized students
    - Access to other libraries (access to their physical facilities)
    - Reference services (incl. services of Personal Librarian and reference work; on-line tuition support)
    - Customer training services
    - Tuition support services (in support of on-line and print course development)
    - Services to tutors to provide access to information

- Access to information (locally and globally) for decentralized students
    - Electronic access services (including data bases; catalogue and e-Reserves,)
    - Access to information services and resources in branches
    - Access to information resources through postal and courier services

- Delivery of information services and resources (on request through the preferred delivery channel for the decentralized students).
  - Requests for library material supplied through replication services (scanning; photocopying)
  - Alerting services (alerting clients to information items of potential interest)
  - Search services
  - Library reference seating services
  - Browsing services (incl. browsing of shelves; closed collections)
  - Collection and dispatch services for requested materials
  - Lending services (incl. request services; inter-library loans; issues)

Assignments and examination. Access to reference materials and recommended works in required formats, delivery channels and locations is provided to enable students to prepare and compile assignments and to prepare for examinations and assessments wherever they are.

4.5   Student Walk, Level 5: Graduation, certification and life-long learning

Upon successful completion of studies the certification of qualification in a Graduation letter is sent to the student.   At the local Graduation Ceremonies, Graduation Certificates are awarded. UNISA keeps contact with Alumni with a general introduction letter and regular Alumni newsletters (also electronically and via a link from the Website). Alumni Promotional Items are on offer. Life long learning is promoted by College specific initiatives and Brochures offering further studies via ODL whilst students continue working. Information on employability skills is made available on the Bureau for Career Counseling's website. Regular decentralized careers fairs (recruitment events) and career development workshops are on offer.

4.5.1   Management of the library's services and role in level 5

Lifelong learning. Information services as described in the support for level 4 (set of services) is made available for students for lifelong learning wherever they are.

Conclusion

ODL applies a set of methods or processes for teaching a diverse range of students located at various locations and physically separated from the institution, lecturers and other students. To facilitate the student learning process, UNISA provides a set of services in each level of the "Student Walk" (learning cycle) in required formats and delivery channels for decentralised students. It is clear that the library is a major role player in the support for students and can contribute to improved throughput and retention. Therefore, the pro-active planning and management of the library's role in the "Student Walk" at UNISA is important to ensure that the library fulfil its role in this process and ensure equal access to services and resources regardless of the students' location.   The library applies Web 2.0, Mobile services, student portal, website, etc. to provide awareness of information (Level 1), for support at registration (Level 3), to deliver resources and information services (Level 4) and to provide support for lifelong learning (Level 5).

Open Distance Learning provides additional challenges for the library, but also exciting opportunities to enhance the information services.   These services are managed and planned according to international guidelines and standards to ensure optimal services for students wherever they are.   The library also collaborates with other role players (ICT, HR, Finance, Tutorial Services, Regions, Academics, Student Counseling and the Office of the Dean of Students) to ensure appropriate service in the required format for students.   Students are usually early adapters to change and to explore technology developments. Therefore the library is well positioned to apply these to enhance library services for distance students.

The library manages the deployment of technologies carefully to ensure that it remains appropriate and enhance the services to the students.

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