

Background and Overview of the US Internship programme Marguerite Nel

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Summary

In this presentation Marguerite sketched the origins of the consortium and discussed the internship in detail. She also highlighted the differences in the US higher education system as well as the way in which the roles of American university librarians differ from ours. She was particularly impressed by the ease with which US librarians simplify problems and implement effective solutions.

PRESENTATION:

Sunette and I were very fortunate to participate in this wonderful learning experience – I want to highlight the word “experience” – because it indeed was an experience!

Maybe, some of you are not really sure where it fits in, but, I hope by the end of this session, you will understand how it fits into the whole system of research support and enhancing academic librarianship in South Africa.

The research environment in SA has a variety of challenges. The main goal of the Research Libraries Consortium is therefore to address these challenges.

The Carnegie Corporation of New York invested millions of dollars to enhance research and research support in South Africa. Several projects are part of this investment.

This project consists of 3 components. The Project components are interdependent and fully integrated. The first one is the refurbishment and equipment of a research commons at each member institution.

The second component focuses on a research portal for access to digital content. The research portal involves the acquisition and development of new software for federated searching. PRIMO is therefore implemented at all the participating research institutions.

The research librarians are addressed in the third part. During the whole project, 92 librarians will participate in Library Academies presented in SA. Of these 36 will get the opportunity to go to the USA for further training.

The following institutions participated in this project: University of Pretoria, University of Cape Town, Rhodes University, University of Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch University and the University of KwaZulu – Natal.

I will however focus on the Research Librarians part of the project.

The Research Academy was presented to a large group of librarians in Stellenbosch. The main focus of the Stellenbosch academy is to introduce librarians to the SA research environment – and helped us understand the research process as well as the researcher as a person in the whole process better. Participants also needed engaging into the research process by completing a research project and writing a research article. Some of these articles were published.

Currently 10 information specialists of UP attended the academies and 4 are on their way to Stellenbosch in October this year.

Our programme in the USA kicked off with two weeks at the Mortenson Centre for international librarianship at the University of Illinois, Urbana Champagne. We also attended the ACRL Conference in Philadelphia as well as a week in New York, where we had a midterm meeting at the Carnegie Foundation.

The largest part of the programme was devoted to our internship at the different host institutions.

Starting off as a group together at the Mortenson Centre, introduced us to the USA and the USA Higher Education system, and orientated us with the USA in general. Here a valuable foundation was laid that ensured easy adjustment at the different host institutions. The programme covered a large variety of topics, such as project management and copyright; research support; responsible scholarship practices, library instruction and the implementation of social networking services – to mention only a few. Workshops on Information literacy and different learning styles; the DISC personal profile system and team roles were also part of the programme. Another valuable part here was the visits to other libraries. This made me realise that not one library is the same and one cannot generalize.

From here we all spent 3 weeks at our different host institutions – but I will address this later in this presentation.

Then we all met again in Philadelphia to attend the ACRL conference. Hilda will tell you more about this in the next session...`

We were also very fortunate to spend a week in New York. We had our mid-term meeting at the Carnegie Foundation – it was very interesting to hear about the experiences of peers at their different host institutions as well as to meet all the different mentors.

Each one of us visited a different host institution – and most participants were very satisfied with their host institutions. The placements were very carefully and thoughtfully done – Sunette went to Purdue – due to its innovative and excellent engineering faculty and I got UC Davis. Their Veterinary Medicine faculty is rated

second in the US. If I had to choose between the available host institutions, I would definitely choose UC Davis for myself!

We visited a large variety of academic libraries – Sunette can even add more to this list. Making visits to a large variety of academic libraries part of the programme was an excellent way to broaden our perception of academic libraries. It provided insight into the trends in academic libraries in general, but also made one realize that not one library is the same, and that it will be unfair to form opinions based on limited perceptions.

The needs of students are really important for the university and they are actually spoiled with wonderful, modern and comfortable facilities. We also visited the residence library with fiction and nice audiovisual material for students to borrow.

The visit to the ALA building and ACRL offices and library was indeed a wonderful opportunity. We learned how such a successful professional association interacts and communicates with its' nearly 12 500 members using different methods, such as publications, events, conferences, and other e-learning opportunities (Blogs, Facebook, twitter, website). They have for example every week an "ACRL Member of the Week". They are also involved in a variety of research projects, which are communicated on the website (<http://acrlog.org>). Other useful information for academic libraries, such as standards and guidelines, Joblists, a scholarly communication toolkit and open access journals can also be found here. There are also several online courses available for librarians worldwide (Information available on the ARCL webpage).

There are several differences between libraries in the US and libraries in SA. Librarians here are much more qualified and skilled to serve researchers. I learned a lot about collaboration and sharing as well as to be much more involved in the profession.

The American education system is unlike that in many other countries. Education is primarily the responsibility of the state and local government and they are also responsible for the funding of schooling. There is huge variation regarding courses, subjects, and other activities – it always depends on where the school is located. Still, there are some common points, as e.g. the division of the education system into three levels: elementary/primary education, secondary education, and postsecondary/higher education (college or university).

Formal schooling lasts 12 years, until around age 18. Compulsory schooling, though, ends by age 16 in most states; the remaining states require students to attend school until they are 17 or 18. All children in the United States have access to free public schools. Private schools (religious and non-sectarian) are available, but students must pay tuition to attend them.

In high school, students in their first year are called *freshman*, in their second year *sophomore*, in their third year *junior*, and in their last and fourth year *senior*.

Students must earn a certain number of credits (which they get for a successfully completed course) in order to graduate and be awarded with a High School Diploma – there is no final examination like in South Africa.

Study at a college or university completed with a Bachelor's Degree is known as "undergraduate" education. Study beyond the Bachelor's Degree is known as "graduate" school, or "postgraduate" education. Advanced or graduate degrees include amongst others law, medicine, M.B.A., and Ph.D. which can only be attended after earning a Bachelor's Degree.

Students in America may choose to enter a four-year university program to earn a bachelor's degree or choose to attend a two-year community college first to earn an associate degree.

After earning an associate degree, a student may transfer to a university program to continue study and apply his or her credits toward earning a bachelor's degree.

What is a community college?

Many students choose community colleges because of smaller class size, lower tuition, and the increased ease of transferring into a top university after successfully earning a degree at an accredited two-year school

Community Colleges have a common mission to promote and support learning and student success. Almost 50% of all U.S. undergraduates begin their study at a community college - one reason why U.S. community colleges are becoming more widely known to international students worldwide as "the gateway to U.S. higher education." These 2-year institutions, also known as technical or junior colleges, award associate degrees (or certificates) upon completion of a 2-year program of study. An associate degree enables you to Transfer to a 4-year college or university where you can obtain a bachelor's degree, usually after 2 additional years of study.

Staff vs Librarians

Master's degrees in information science have diversified to reflect different disciplinary interests and career goals. Program curricula range across the disciplinary spectrum, from traditional library science--archival and manuscript preservation, for example--to technological data management and systems analysis. On the professional spectrum, programs may lean towards traditional academic research and scholarship or career-focused training.

Some academic librarians have faculty status – not everywhere – not at UCDavis.

Every member of the library faculty, during his/her probationary period must undergo at least one full reappointment review. At the time of employment, faculty members

are normally offered a two-year appointment, and will be evaluated for reappointment in the fall of the second year of employment.

Although the Americans do things a little bit different, we are not really so far behind. One thing that I realized is that they approach problems different. Sometimes a solution is obvious and not very complicated.

One must also remember that we also have our unique problems and challenges in SA. But, by evaluating and customising some of the ideas we got from the Americans, we might be able to apply it successfully and in the process address the needs of our users.

DISCUSSION

1. The quality of the SA 4 year degree in Library Science qualification differs from the American 4 years (general B. Degree + 2 year (M-Degree) in Information Science (MLS or MIS). America took the “Library” out of Information Science. Information Specialist must have more subject knowledge of their departments, but not necessarily a second degree.
2. In response on the above remark (1), Sunette mentioned that she found that she can be as good an Information Specialist in her subject field (chemical Engineering) without a second degree.
3. It was suggested that some of the experienced Information Specialists could “couch” or “mentor” the younger inexperienced ones.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Closer collaboration between the Library and the Department of Information Science – to discuss and address needs in the profession in order to develop more skilled and qualified students to enter the profession.
2. We need to develop mentorship programmes.