

“A Report to an Academy”, by Sunette Steynberg

Carnegie Research Academy, Mont Fleur, Stellenbosch, Monday, 10 October 2011.

“Honored members of the Academy!

You have done me the honor of inviting me to give your Academy an account of the life I formerly led as an ape.

I regret that I cannot comply with your request to the extent you desire. It is now one year since I was an ape, a short space of time, perhaps, according to the calendar, but an infinitely long time to gallop through at full speed, as I have done, more or less accompanied by excellent mentors, good advice, applause, and orchestral music, and yet essentially alone, since all my escorts, to keep the image, kept well off the course. I could never have achieved what I have done had I been stubbornly set on clinging to my origins, to the remembrances of my youth. In fact, to give up being stubborn was the supreme commandment I laid upon myself.”

Ladies and gentleman, I have just quoted from Franz Kafka’s Report to an academy, because I thought this was the best description for what I experienced over the past year.

Overview

- The Academy
- Research support
- Information literacy
- Spreading the news
- How do I see my role now?

Here at the academy I have learned to read again, or perhaps for the first time. I have been a science and engineering librarian for 10 years. During this time I have concentrated so much on those sciences, that I completely neglected my original studies in librarianship and the humanities. I seldom read any articles or books on these subjects anymore and became a bit out of touch with the theory of what I was supposed to be a specialist on. Here I learned not only to read articles on a variety of subjects, but also to critically evaluate and discuss them. This was a mind stretching experience for me and I was amazed at the ability of the mind to think.

I was a complete novice at academic writing when I started the academy. I knew the elements of an article and research report, but never put this into practice. At the University of Pretoria all information specialists were trained by dr Erik Hoffstee on the writing of a thesis or dissertation. But, because I never had to apply this knowledge, I was not able to advise students with confidence. Immediately after the academy I was able to advise students from own experience. This really makes a difference.

Research Support

Megan Sapp Nelson

EPICS (Engineering Projects in Community Service)

EPICS: Projects of at least one-year in duration are intended to solve real problems that are defined in consultation with "customers" from not-for-profit community and education organizations.

In all the elements of this project; interview, defining a problem, literature survey, etc., the librarian can assist and lecture, because these are all skills she has already mastered in being a librarian.

- Conduct an interview
- Conceptual design/process
 - Define problem
 - What exists? (literature survey)
 - What is still problematic?
 - Find a link between literature and problem solving

Implementation of new mindset

- Chemistry meeting
- Assessment problem
- Calibrated peer review/ Michael Fosmire
- I am a research partner, not support staff

Information literacy

Teaching and training are my passions. Therefore I did my research report on this. With this background and a keen interest I went to the US. At the Mortenson Center we had workshops on information literacy and learning styles amongst other things. The ACRL conference had a lot of sessions on information literature. They are currently even busy rewriting their standards for information literacy.

At Purdue University libraries information literacy is so important that they appointed a person on their executive with the sole responsibility to do research on information literacy and to suggest applications for Purdue libraries. She does not do the trainings herself, nor does she coordinate the trainers; she does research and make sure that the students do receive proper training in this regard.

Many of the faculty librarians have full credited courses in information literacy. These have not fallen into their laps. They had to build a relationship of trust and respect with the department first. They had to present a full course outline and convince the department that they knew what they were doing. It is interesting to see how different subject librarians taught information literacy to their students. In one instance it is even called a critical thinking course. I picked up many wonderful tips and even full courses were shared with me. My experience was that American librarians are very cooperative and do not mind sharing at all.

My implementation

- Start by finding already existing material on the internet and YouTube.

- Get permission and use these.
- Then create the rest as needed.
- Short 'How do I's'
- Choose information sources
- Evaluating internet sources
- Avoid plagiarism
- Integrate sources
- Choose a topic
- Find local and regional information
- Researcher savvy workshops
- Citation management tools, e.g. Refworks, Endnote, Zotero
- Where to publish, citations and h-indexes
- Critical thinking
- Intellectual property and patents
- In my information literacy lecture I now make use of interactive techniques with great success, such as the human boolean, voting and the one minute assessment paper. Wherever possible I also include experiential hands on training.

Spreading the news

In order to communicate what was learned while the Nine SA librarians were in the USA, a decision was made at a meeting in New York to speak to as many SA colleagues about these experiences and possible implementations as possible.

Firstly Hilda Kriel, Marguerite Nel and Sunette Steynberg organised an American Day at the University of Pretoria, where feedback was given and conversation stimulated. Even members of the Faculty attended and it was a huge success.

In September 2011 six of the initial nine SA librarians that went to the USA in 2011, presented at the RETIG group meeting at the LIASA conference in East London.

How do I see my role now?

- I am a constant learner
- I am a research therapist
- I am proud to be a university librarian
- I am an educator of information literacy
- I am a research partner, not support staff
- I want to inspire students to help build the country and keep it effective