

Chapter One

Library Studies at the University of Cape Town: an Historical Overview

Karin de Jager

Library and Information Studies Centre, University of Cape Town
Email: karin.dejager@uct.ac.za

Mary Nassimbeni

Library and Information Studies Centre, University of Cape Town
Email: mary.nassimbeni@uct.ac.za

Peter Underwood

Former Head of the Centre for Information Literacy, University of Cape Town
Email: pgunderwood@wol.co.za

Review status: Peer reviewed

Introduction

In 2015, the Library and Information Studies Centre (LISC) marked its 75 years of continuous existence at the University of Cape Town (UCT) by arranging a two-day conference, styled the LISC75 Commemorative Conference. The invited speakers reflected on current and future trends in Library and Information Services (LIS) and emphasised the prospective rather than giving a retrospective. This chapter provides a retrospective view, charting in broad terms the evolution of the Department, highlighting key moments and considering how the Department reflected in its programmes the influence of external environmental, political and economic factors.

Early years: 1939-1989

The establishment and history of the development of the School of Librarianship at UCT during its first 50 years was discussed comprehensively by Dorothy Ivey, a member of staff at the time (1989). The overview of the first fifty years that follows is based on her thoughtful article unless indicated otherwise.

The development of libraries in South Africa before the Second World War had been slow and intermittent, so that there had not been much

need for educating librarians. The few qualified librarians in South Africa had obtained their qualifications either at the University College of London's School of Librarianship, which was the only university in Britain providing library education at the time (Kesting, 1980:230), from Columbia University in the United States of America (USA), or through the correspondence courses administered by the Library Association in Britain.

In 1928 South Africa was visited by a delegation from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to advise on the situation of libraries in South Africa. This delegation realised that the country as yet had no library schools, but at the same time expressed doubt whether there was sufficient demand to sustain a library school in the country. A decision was subsequently taken to establish the South African Library Association (SALA) which would be responsible for the examination of students enrolled for correspondence courses that would be designed for the particular needs of the country, but modelled on the Library Association courses. Curricula to this effect were constructed by 1933, the first SALA examinations were held in 1934 and the first diploma awarded in 1937.

Although SALA initially regarded it with suspicion, a small department was established at UCT in 1939 to teach and qualify librarians. According to Kesting (1980:230) this was the first library school in South Africa that actually set out to provide certification; the school that had been started the year before at the University of Pretoria, was specifically meant for its own library staff and “did not lead to open certification” (Kesting 1980:230). SALA regarded itself as the only body able to provide certification at this time, and was concerned about a possible oversupply of librarians. The issue was resolved in 1940 when it was eventually agreed that the UCT qualifications would be equated with SALA’s final diploma examination.

In 1939 the first head of the School of Librarianship was the University Librarian, the Rev. G.F. Parker, but shortly thereafter his successor to both positions from 1940 was René F.M. Immelman, one of the pioneers of librarianship in South Africa. He was firmly of the opinion that library education should be offered by universities, as university qualifications raised the status of the profession and focused on education rather than training. UCT offered a first basic professional qualification that prepared students to work in libraries of all types. Originally there was no demand for a degree as a minimum qualification before enrolment, although students often were graduates. A minimum of four Bachelor’s degree courses were however specified, and then as now, many students seemed to work while studying, thus often taking more than the two years that were stipulated for completion while studying part time. From 1952 a degree was required as an entrance qualification.

Between 1939 and 1945, the first basic qualification was known as the *Certificate in Librarianship*. Upon completion of two years of experience, candidates were granted a *Diploma in Librarianship* and as a result of the previous agree-

ment with SALA, this qualification allowed candidates to become Fellows of SALA after another year of experience and matriculation level passes in two foreign languages. The librarianship curriculum in this period underwent minor changes, but dealt with cataloguing, classification, bibliography, reference work, book selection, and administration and organization. In this period the original curriculum entry for “practical training in library procedure” became “principles of library service” and a practical training component of four weeks’ duration in approved libraries was added to the curriculum in 1945.

From 1941 until 1965 the compilation of a bibliography on a subject of the student’s choice was a prerequisite for obtaining the qualification. A number of interesting bibliographies were produced, some of which were published in the *Bibliographical Series* of the School of Librarianship. The UCT catalogue still lists more than 100 unique entries for these bibliographies which are stored in the African Studies Collection. The subject matter is wide ranging and Ivey noted that “despite their imperfections, [these bibliographies] had provided much useful information since they were first instituted in 1941” (1989:287). In browsing through the catalogue entries, a number of names which were to become famous in the South African library world may be noted among the authors.¹

By 1946 a one-year paraprofessional qualification was instituted. As this qualification was to be known as the *Certificate in Librarianship*, the nomenclature of the original qualification had to change in order to distinguish it from the new one-year course. It thus became the *Higher Certificate in Librarianship* with the same entrance qualifications as before; either a degree, or matriculation together with four Bachelor’s degree courses. This changed in 1952 when only graduates were accepted into the Higher Certificate course. As before, the qualification could be upgraded to the Diploma.

¹ Examples include J.G. Kesting; Reuben Musiker; Barry H. Watts; Dorothy Amyot (later Ivey); Julie te

Groen; Dirk L.Ehlers, Gerald D.Quinn, and Paul M. Meyer.

The Higher Certificate was offered until 1965 when the name of the entry level professional qualification was changed once more to become the *Higher Diploma in Librarianship*, nomenclature that lasted until 1979 when it became the *Higher Diploma in Library and Information Science* and was retained at UCT until 1990 when it became the current *Postgraduate Diploma in Library and Information Studies*. By 1988 after 50 years, a total of 849 students had obtained their first professional qualification in library studies from UCT. The 50th anniversary of the School of Librarianship was celebrated in a two-day Symposium in November 1989 which had as its title 'The future of library and information science: social technological and educational challenges' and which included in its programme presentations by a number of leading South African intellectuals such as Francis Wilson, S.J. Terblanche Peter Lor and Clem Sunter (Nassimbeni and De Jager, 1990).

Staffing

The first teachers in the School of Librarianship had been full-time members of the library staff and the lectures were held in a seminar room in UCT's Jagger Library gallery. The university librarian was responsible for the new unit although he was only assigned the title of Director of the School of Librarianship in 1949 when Immelman was in the post. When the School was established in 1939, the librarian had been Parker, followed by Immelman whose name was synonymous with librarianship at UCT for many years. The first full time lecturer in librarianship, Loree Elizabeth Taylor, was appointed in 1945: and with the assistance of two part time tutors, M.E.Green and Varley, ran the School until 1951 although the university librarian remained responsible for the School until the end of 1973 when the positions of university librarian and Director of the School were separated. Initially M.E. Green was appointed as acting director of the School until a decision was made to create an independent Chair of the School and in mid-1977 Prof. J.G. Kesting became its first full time Director; a position he retained until his retirement in 1991.

By 1982 the staff complement consisted of five academic posts: the Director; a senior lecturer, three lecturers, and a part-time professional assistant. After the retirement of Kesting, Ivey was appointed Acting Head of the School until the beginning of 1993 when Peter G. Underwood was appointed Professor and Director of the School of Librarianship (later the Department of Information and Library Studies and then the Centre for Information Literacy); a position he retained until his early retirement at the end of 2008. The staff complement of five academic posts, with the occasional assistance of professional colleagues, remained unchanged until the retirement of Ivey at the end of 1995 when the full-time staff complement was reduced to four.

Higher degrees

While the School was located in the Faculty of Arts probably from its inception, (but first noted as such in the Calendar for 1940) the nomenclature for the Master's degree in Librarianship was Master of Arts (Librarianship). The first of these degrees was awarded in 1974. The School moved to the Faculty of Education in 1982, after which the degree was known as the MBibl. In order to equip qualified librarians with the necessary expertise to conduct independent research, the Honours degree was instituted and the first students were registered for the BBibl (Hons) in 1984. A basic four-year BBibl degree had been established in 1983 as, according to Ivey 'neither the BBibl (Hons) not the MBibl could, technically be offered in terms of the Joint University Statute' without it as a foundational degree qualification. In 1983 the School also offered the PhD qualification for the first time and the first enrolment took place in 1984. By 1988 only one PhD degree had been awarded; another eight qualified in the next twenty-five years.

The trajectory towards a mature academic department is clearly visible in the rate of growth of advanced degrees (Figure 1). In the years 1939 to 1989; 18 master's degrees were awarded, 16 of which were awarded in the period 1965 to 1989.

Figure 2 compares the Master's and PhD output of the final twenty-five year period with the two preceding periods where the output was significantly lower.

This growth can be seen against the background of the greater emphasis on research at UCT from the 1980s when more demands started to be made of academic staff, with respect to university expectations that they should all have a PhD. The National Research Foundation (NRF) started its system of rating the quality of the research of individual researchers in 1983, with the humanities and social sciences (the category covering LIS) joining the system only in 2002. Two members of staff obtained their first NRF ratings in 2003. From 1989 a total of eight students including two staff members were awarded the PhD, while the first PhD from the School in 1988 had also been awarded to a member of staff.

Threats to survival: 1990-2010

In 1988 the Academic Planning Committee of the Committee of University Principals had started a national process of reviewing departments of librarianship, as they were regarded as too numerous (Raju, 2004:77) and therefore too small to be viable. The resulting Bunting Report (named after the chair of the review committee) published in 1990, concluded that library education in South Africa had to be rationalised and that a number of departments should be closed (Raju, 2004:77). At UCT therefore, the early 1990s was a period of introspection, mostly dominated by concerns about future viability and whether its primary focus on the education of librarians was in accord with the development of what had become an "information profession". After much argument and energetic debate within the School, the departmental name was changed from School of Librarianship to Department of Information and Library Studies' (DILS) to reflect its new orientation and the curriculum was enlarged to incorporate information – and later – knowledge management.

A thorough review of the Education and other faculties at UCT during the late 1990s resulted in

amalgamation of several into a new 'super Faculty' of the Humanities, which came into being in 1999. Several departments from the former Faculty of Education moved to the Upper Campus to form the Graduate School of Humanities. DILS also moved to Upper Campus in what was the first of several moves: its location changed four times in the period 1999 to 2012. The year 1999 also saw the foundation of the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED), under the direction of Professor Martin J. Hall, with the specific remit of being an academic organisational unit to provide a cross-faculty focus on academic development. Hall also proposed that DILS should join CHED in a different guise: a newly recreated Centre for Information Literacy (CIL) with the additional role of researching and facilitating the campus-wide adoption of information literacy as an aspect of academic development. The newly forged CIL would also retain a "shadow" departmental status in the Faculty of Humanities for the purpose of continuing to validate its existing qualifications. The move was implemented at the beginning of 2000.

CHED proved a largely happy home for CIL and something of the academic cognacy experienced in the Faculty of Education was restored. It also meant that CIL had an expanded brief because its professional education activities were now partnered with the development of information literacy and techniques for its teaching. The latter was to prove difficult to manage. CIL was a pioneer of information literacy initiatives in South Africa and had to develop a *modus operandi* that would enable information literacy initiatives to percolate through UCT. Early on it was recognised that, given the staff available in CIL, the notion of individual, one-on-one teaching could only work to a very limited extent. It was decided that a portfolio approach would be tried, with each staff member being responsible for trying to develop contacts with a particular faculty. In addition, CIL decided to develop strong links with the Subject Specialists on the Library staff by sharing information literacy teaching with them.

Figure 1: Master's degrees awarded: 1989-2014

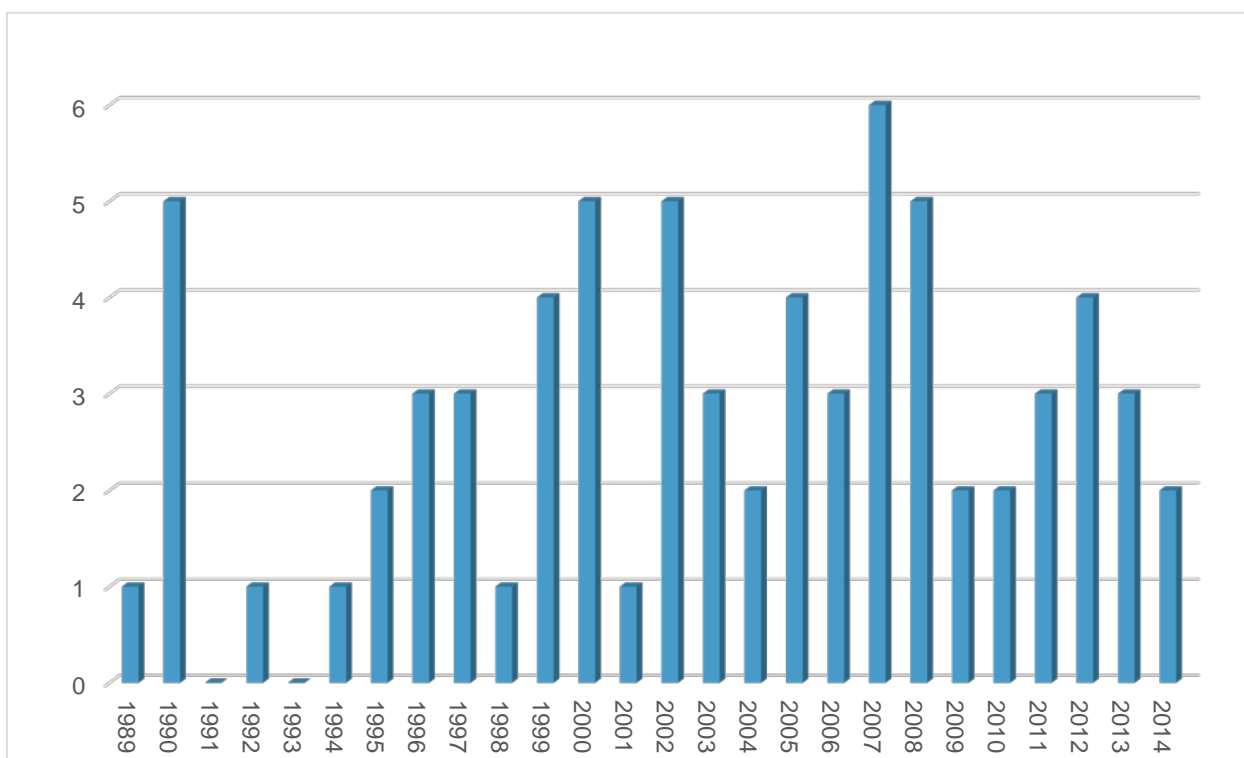
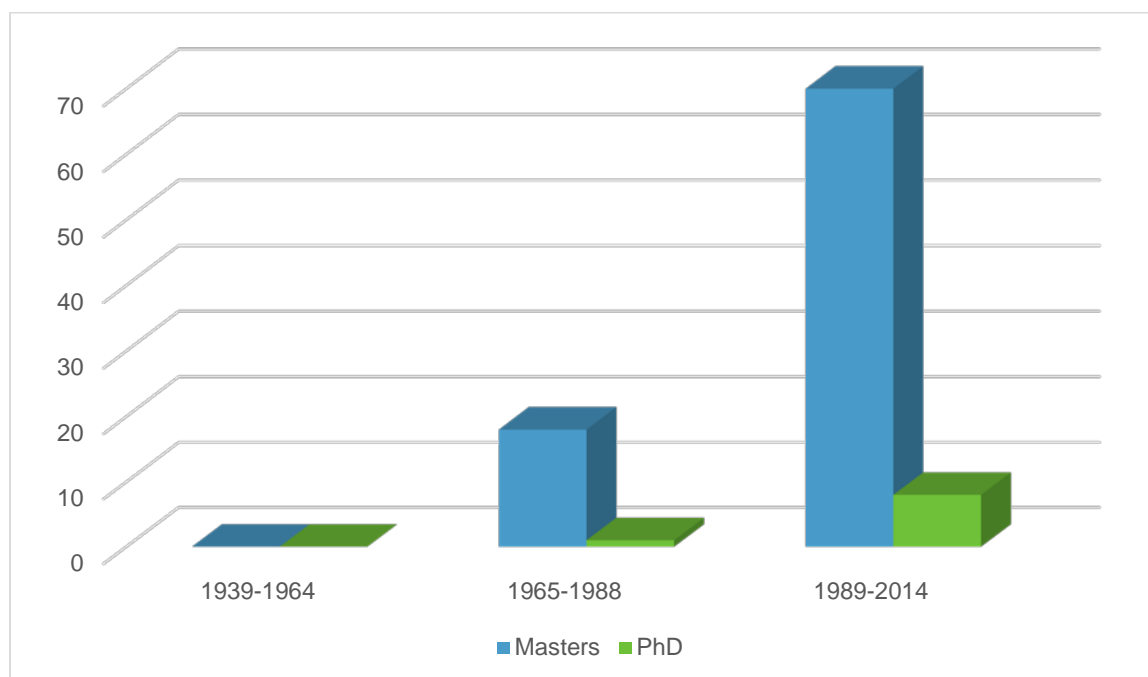


Figure 2: Master's and PhD degrees awarded: comparison of three 25-year periods



Maintaining a balance between the demands of teaching the Library and Information Science programme and developing the information literacy programme proved difficult and CIL occasionally attracted criticism for concentrating on the former at the expense of the latter, this being expressed as CIL operating too much as a Department of LIS rather than on *development* (the main

thrust of the work of CHED) of information literacy techniques. In retrospect, it is clear that this criticism had merit when we reviewed the scope of the development contribution we had made to CHED and compared it with the time spent on our teaching in the formal academic programme.

However, the information literacy focus was to take a greater prominence in the work of the

Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC), which comprised the five higher education institutions in the Western Cape. Early in its existence, CHEC developed INFOLIT, a research and development programme for information literacy. It was supervised by Cathy-Mae Karelse, a member of DILS staff on secondment to CHEC and, later, by Underwood, also on secondment. The INFOLIT Project was assessed as having achieved its objectives and concluded in December 2002.

Two factors were of growing concern in this period: the low number of applications to study and the resulting threat to the survival of a small department within the University. The first presented an almost intractable problem because, despite several campaigns to recruit students, the number each year remained small. The major changes in South Africa, consequent upon its move to a democratic government, included a definite slow-down in recruiting for posts in the LIS professional domain. Without the prospect of jobs after qualification, prospective students proved difficult to attract. This problem was to continue through the early post-millennial years. The problem of declining enrolment was that the new SA government neglected the funding of public libraries the biggest employer of LIS graduates. This situation was corrected in 2007 when special and generous funding was ring fenced for the development and upgrading of public libraries. The reason for the early neglect can probably be attributed to the very pressing needs of a new government compelled to find solutions for the consequences of decades of apartheid government - e.g. clean water for all citizens.

The second area of concern was governance within the University structures. The early location of SOL/DILS within the Faculty of Education had been an inspired choice: the Department was grouped with others with a similar ethos, spread of academic domains and professional orientation. There was a strong cognacy and a sharing of similar and complementary research interests: this proved fruitful to academic discourse. Perhaps the first indication of the turmoil to come

was the assertion by the university administration that the Education Faculty building on Middle Campus was not being used to the optimum because the Faculty was too small and would as explained above shortly be incorporated into a much larger Faculty of Humanities comprising of an amalgamation of the previous Faculties of Social Science, Arts and Education.

The new Faculty of Humanities – larger than at many universities after a major restructuring at UCT – had quickly proved a cumbersome beast to manage and one of the early pronouncements by its first dean, Professor Wilmot James, was that the days of small, independent, departments were past: the future was in multi-disciplinary clusters with executive managers. Left in no doubt about the likely fate of DILS, considerable thought was given in the Department to “escape” strategies. One route, amalgamation with its sister department at the University of the Western Cape, was pursued. The academic staff of both departments had often worked together and shared research, and there was little objection to the idea of an amalgamation. However, the administrators at both institutions seemed incapable of coming to an agreement – perhaps not understanding the professional sense of the move – and no merger took place.

In the period between 1977 and 2010, the fortunes of the department fluctuated from a high point when the first professor was hired in 1977 marking its maturing into an academic department independent of the library, to a very low point, when after an institutional evaluation, the decision was made by the Executive of the University to close the department at the end of 2010, a date by which most of the permanent staff members would have retired.

In 2008 a new Vice Chancellor was appointed at UCT and shortly after his appointment, he started a process to revise the University Strategic Plan (UCT Strategic Plan 2010-2014). The Plan proposed six strategic goals, each of which was accompanied by a number of action plans that

eventually also affected the future of librarianship at UCT.

While the Plan was designed to direct university activity and focus attention, it was also the basis of a measurement tool reflecting the global and national movement towards increasing managerialism and the decline in collegialism (Ramphele 2008). Adams has found links between the economic rationality as the driving force behind the establishment of various systems of governance, funding and assurance underpinning academic planning in South Africa after 1994 (2009: 9). As early as 2003, Cloete and Kulati had already argued that "... market competition and the emergence of new public management" were in part responsible for the rise of managerialism that is characterised by increasing power for administrators, declining influence of academics, and changing lines of responsibility (2003: 243). Typifying this manifestation of managerialism is "the shift in the authority of faculties from the academic unit to the managerial complex" (Jansen 2009). Jansen noted that the re-styling of the title of "Dean" to "Executive Dean" in universities was further evidence of this bias towards centralizing authority and diminishing the faculties' influence (2009).

It is arguable that this prevailing managerialism played a role in the eventual decision taken by the Senate Executive Committee to close the Department. In 2003, Hall had recommended in the Medium Term Budget Framework that the department be wholly transferred from CHED to the Humanities Faculty on the grounds that the great majority of the department's activities were LIS-related as opposed to developmentally-focused information literacy work, and that all the fee and subsidy income generated by the department accrued to Humanities. Moreover, it had become apparent that the dual mandate of CIL – op-

erating as a developmental entity, while simultaneously running academic programmes and delivering short courses for third-stream income – stretched staff capacity to the limit. The Humanities Faculty however, was not persuaded by the Business Plan that set out the case for the re-location of CIL (or DILS) to the Humanities Faculty and would not sanction such a relocation².

The result was stalemate. By now the department was seen as too small to survive as a stand-alone department which in the interests of efficiency and presumed cost savings needed to be of a critical size. A new review of CIL was ordered instead and took place in late 2004. The outcome of this academic review was the recommendation, made in 2005, that CIL would continue in CHED but would close at the end of 2010 as staff were all nearing retirement and student numbers were low. This was an Executive decision that was not tested at the Humanities Faculty, the forum that would normally receive a recommendation of this nature.

The Phoenix Years: 2011 onwards

During the period of the announcement of closure and 2011 (the date at which the last member of staff would have reached retirement age and all students should have been seen to completion) the staff continued to seek ways of reversing the decision to close. At the eleventh hour in November, 2011, after a routine visit by the Vice Chancellor on one of his regular tours of academic departments that fortuitously included CIL that year, a chink appeared. At the meeting the Vice Chancellor received a final document outlining a plan to keep the department open, pointing out the imminence of a Carnegie programme offering generously funded professional education to public librarians. At the same time the professional body, Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), had made

² Based on the unpublished document "Library and Information Studies as a professional discipline: making the case to the Faculty of Humanities for the continuation of LIS teaching and research programmes

at UCT," written by the then Head of Department, Mary Nassimbeni in 2009.

representations to the University urging the continuation of CIL on the grounds of its excellence. In response the Vice Chancellor asked a Deputy Vice Chancellor to investigate the possibility of keeping CIL open.

In November 2011 at a meeting attended by a representative from LIASA, CIL was given the go-ahead to continue its teaching and research programmes. This, however, would involve a major change to becoming administratively located under the aegis of the UCT Libraries instead of CHED which at that stage was also undergoing reconstruction and could no longer incorporate the presence of CIL into its strategic objectives. CIL was therefore reconstituted as the Library and Information Centre (LISC) with its academic home, as before, in the Humanities Faculty and its organisational location in the UCT Libraries where the newly appointed Director was willing to house and provide administrative support to LISC. Even at this early stage however, the possibility of eventually being fully incorporated into the Humanities Faculty was not ruled out. In January 2012, Associate Professor Jaya Raju was appointed as Head at Associate Professor level on a three-year contract to take LISC forward as an academic project within UCT³. Initially the Head was supported by the recently retired members of staff on one-third contracts, with the assistance of a part-time administrator. Since 2012, the staff complement has been strengthened each year; in 2013 by the appointment of a lecturer on a three year contract, and in 2014 by the appointment of two further lecturers. At the end of 2014, the position of the Head of LISC was confirmed as permanent.

A decision was taken to follow the existing curriculum in 2012 but this year would also see the continuation of a process of curriculum renewal which had already begun. The new curriculum was informed by trends redefining the LIS

sector and delivery of information and information-related services, particularly those in the academic and public library sectors which were identified in its newly developed strategic framework as LISC's sector specialisations. This culminated in the establishment of a new Postgraduate Diploma in Library and Information Studies (PGDipLIS) at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 8, allowing direct articulation to Master's studies.

In addition it became obvious that it was necessary to exploit a variety of curriculum delivery models to accommodate students coming from a diversity of contexts. In 2012 a new approach to course delivery led to the design and adoption of a 'block release' option to accommodate ten scholarship recipients in the PGDipLIS from the City of Johannesburg Public Library Services. This scholarship programme was the Carnegie funded 'Next Generation Public Librarian Scholarship Programme,' which had been instrumental in the decision to revive the department. This development reflected a pleasing symmetry in the Carnegie influence on the department, as the head of the School in 1940, Immelman, had been awarded a travelling visitors' grant by the Carnegie Corporation to enhance his qualifications at the School of Library Service at the University of Columbia, New York (Taylor 1970:2).

LISC's new synergistic relations with UCT Libraries quickly revealed the need for deeper level skills and competencies in new areas such digital curation, research librarianship and leadership and management in library and information services. These high level skills required master's level study with options for specialisations in these areas. With support from the Humanities Faculty and the University Administration, LISC was able in 2012 to design a new-look coursework master's programme, the Master of Library and Information Studies, which addresses the skills and competencies required by the modern

³ This section is based on the LISC Annual Report for 2012 written by Raju.

LIS sector. Furthermore, in 2014 the Humanities Faculty approved the introduction of a new MPhil in digital curation. Another innovation in the Master's degree programmes has been the introduction of a blended learning model, whereby courses are delivered both remotely (online) and in occasional contact sessions.

In spite of the increased activities associated with the design and delivery of new courses, LISC continues to maintain a focus on research productivity and excellence. Currently 16 masters and four PhD students are working to complete their dissertations. Members of staff are all active and productive in research and regularly present their findings at national and international conferences on themes including skills for LIS, knowledge management, digital curation, research data management, LIS policy, library evaluation and impact.

Conclusion

The commemorative conference gave academics, researchers and practitioners an opportunity to reflect on the current trends in LIS in order to map a way forward for a new generation of professionals, and to recognise that in the evolving information landscape, driven by technological advancements, information and knowledge are central underpinnings for socio-economic development. This event provided an opportunity for LISC to engage with leading scholars and colleagues to explore the critical areas of higher education, change and dynamics, research imperatives and the information landscape – the four broad themes that framed the conference programme and will inform LISC in its continued search for excellence in teaching, research and social engagement⁴. This chapter has provided a retrospective view to enable LISC to learn from the past and further enrich its search for excellence.

References

Adams, F. 2006. Managerialism and higher education governance: Implications for South African universities? *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 20(1):1-2

Buhlungu, S. 2014. Welcome Address to LISC at the LISC75 Conference, by the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, 27 November.

Cloete, N. and Kulati, T. 2003. Managerialism within a framework of cooperative governance? In: *The higher education managerial revolution*, edited by A. Amaral, V. L. Meek and I. Larsen Dordrecht: Kluwer Press, p. 229-252.

Ivey, D. L. 1989. School of Librarianship of the University of Cape Town, 1939 to 1988: overview. *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science*, 57(3):284-296.

Jansen, J. 2009. Intellectuals: the state and universities. *University World News*, 43. 13 December 2009. Available: <http://www.universityworldnews.com/> (20 March 2015).

Kesting, JG. 1980. South Africa, Libraries in the Republic of. In: Kent, A., Lancour, H. and Kent, K. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*. New York: Dekker, Vol. 28:129-259.

Nassimbeni, M. 2009. Library and Information Studies as a professional discipline: making the case to the Faculty of Humanities for the continuation of LIS teaching and research programmes at UCT. Unpublished.

Nassimbeni, M. and De Jager, K. 1990. The future of library and information science: social, technological and educational challenges. Proceedings of the 50th Anniversary Symposium of the School of Librarianship, University of Cape Town, 20-21 November.

⁴ This final section draws from the Welcome Address by the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Professor

Sakhela Buhlungu, to LISC at the LISC75 Conference, 27 November 2014.

- Rahu, J. 2004. LIS education and training in South Africa: a historical overview. *South African Journal of Libraries & Information Science*, 71(1):74-84.
- Raju, J. 2012. LISC Annual Report for 2012. Unpublished.
- Ramphele. M. 2008. *Laying ghosts to rest: dilemmas of the transformation in South Africa*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Taylor, LE. 1970. R.F.M Immelman. In: *Libraries and people: essays offered to R.F.M Immelman*, edited by JG. Kesting, SI Malan, AH. Smith. Cape Town: Struik, p. 1-8.
- University of Cape Town. 2014. The strategic plan for the University of Cape Town, 2010-2014. Available: http://www.uct.ac.za/downloads/uct.ac.za/about/goals/uct_strategic%20goals.pdf. (20 March 2015)