A guide to student success

Scholarly & Research Capabilities

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Scholarly & Research Capabilities: A guide to student success.

Published by:
UCT Libraries Press
University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa
Rondebosch, 7701

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ISBN: 978-1-991247-01-8
DOI: https://doi.org/10.15641/978-1-991247-01-8

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PREFACE

The impetus for this monograph stems from a deep commitment to educational equity and the transformative potential of libraries in supporting student success. As South Africa continues to navigate the legacies of an unequal education system, academic institutions must critically re-evaluate their approaches to learning support. This work responds to that need, exploring how libraries can play a central role in dismantling barriers and fostering a more inclusive, student-centred learning environment. The focus is on centring context to a changing learning environment.

In an era of rapid digital transformation and evolving pedagogical practices, information literacy has become a cornerstone of academic success. However, internationally recognised frameworks—such as SCONUL's Seven Pillars, the ACRL Framework, and CAUL's information literacy standards—are often built on assumptions of well-resourced learning environments, consistent educational preparation, and stable digital infrastructures. These conditions do not always align with the realities of South African higher education, where institutions must navigate deep structural inequalities in an unequal schooling system, varied levels of academic preparedness for higher education, and the ongoing challenges of digital inclusion.

At the University of Cape Town (UCT), calls for decolonised curricula and a shift towards African-centred knowledge production have reshaped academic discourse, demanding a more contextually relevant approach to research and learning. In response, UCT Libraries has critically re-examined traditional models of information literacy and developed an alternative framework—Scholarly and Research Capabilities (S&RC)—that moves beyond deficit-based perspectives. Unlike conventional approaches that often frame students as lacking essential skills, S&RC builds upon the knowledge, lived experiences, and intellectual strengths that students already bring into the academic space. This approach aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by ensuring that no student is left behind, regardless of their starting point.

This shift from Information Literacy to Scholarly and Research Capabilities represents more than a terminological change—it reflects a fundamental reconceptualisation of how students engage with knowledge. Traditional information literacy models often prioritise a linear, skills-based approach to acquiring, evaluating, and using information. While valuable, such models do not always account for the dynamic, iterative nature of scholarly inquiry or the complexities of knowledge production within diverse epistemic traditions. The S&RC framework, by contrast, is integrated into the research life cycle, ensuring that students receive structured, progressive support throughout their academic journey—from developing foundational research mindsets to critically engaging with and contributing to global and local knowledge systems.

The Research & Learning (R&L) team at UCT Libraries has undertaken a rigorous process of adapting global best practices while embedding principles of social justice, epistemic diversity, and decolonial scholarship. This monograph captures that effort, providing both a theoretical foundation and practical guidance for implementing the S&RC model within academic libraries. By embedding scholarly capabilities within the research continuum, this approach aligns with UCT's broader institutional commitments to accessibility, decolonisation, and excellence in higher education.

This work is the result of collective and collaborative engagement, shaped by insights from students, faculty, and library professionals who have contributed to its evolution. It is our hope that this monograph serves as a valuable resource for academic libraries, educators, and policymakers seeking to develop inclusive, locally relevant frameworks that empower students and advance the transformation of research and learning in the global South.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

Acknowledgements

UCT Libraries extends its sincere gratitude to all who contributed to the development of this book. Special appreciation goes to Jaimee Reid, who has since left the employ of the University.

Thereafter, after the last sentence of the first paragraph, please add the sentence: In addition, we extend our sincere appreciation to Jamie Hendricks and Sariana Faure for their meticulous work on the typesetting of the monograph.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of our colleague, Alexander D'Angelo, who contributed significantly to the conceptualisation of scholarly and research capabilities. His contributions continue to inspire, and his legacy lives on through the ideas and efforts that shape this book.

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