

Library and Information Service

BENCHMARKING VISIT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND 3 MAY 2019

1 Background

The visit to Wits weaved a golden thread into a transformative and innovative dialogue that resulted to a flow of ideas that brought about building collective meaning and a growing sense of enriching unity. The visit was a joint effort between the Library and Information Service (LIS) and the Disabilities Rights Units (DRU) to benchmark services, infrastructure and resources for students with disabilities. In the context of the project goals, Transformation is interpreted to be the change in thinking, change in practice, change in behaviour, change in engagements with the objective of nurturing a culture of innovation for a vibrant and better individual and contributor to community, national and global imperatives. The library as the epicentre of knowledge production and innovation must stimulate transformation for an improved quality of life.

2 Objectives of the visit

The White Paper emphasises the importance of institutional collaborations and partnerships as a means to achieve a range of social, educational/ academic, economic and political goals (National Higher Education Plan, 1997 and White Paper 2002). It was also in the spirit of libraries working together to achieve a common goal that staff members undertook the trip.



Left to right:
Vida Mutlaneng – Manager DRU, MC
Erika Rood – Info. Services Manager, PC
Tiny Moripa – Loan Services Manager, VC
Martie Esterhuizen – Info. Services Manager, VC
Sam Andrews – Adaptive Technologist, DRU, Wits
Tsholofelo Thulare – NW Project Coordinator
Hendra Pretorius – Director: Client Services
Neli Kaunda – Director: Shared LIS Services
Gloria Ramaboea – Librarian: Information Commons, PC
Dr Anlia Pretorius – Head DRU, Wits.



- To continue to address students with disabilities access and challenges.
- To benchmark on resources and services to support students with disabilities.
- To seek opportunities to share expertise and knowledge as outlined in the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between NWU, the South African Library for the Blind (SALB) and the Department of Arts and Traditional Affairs (CATA) North-West (NW) Provincial Library, Information and Archives Services.

3 Objectives of the tripartite partnership

The objectives of the tripartite partnership is to:

- Render support and extend some of the existing services of the North-West Province Community Libraries at the North-West University;
- Establish and strengthen strong public-private partnership through information sharing and knowledge transfer;
- Set up Information Hubs in the most accessible libraries.

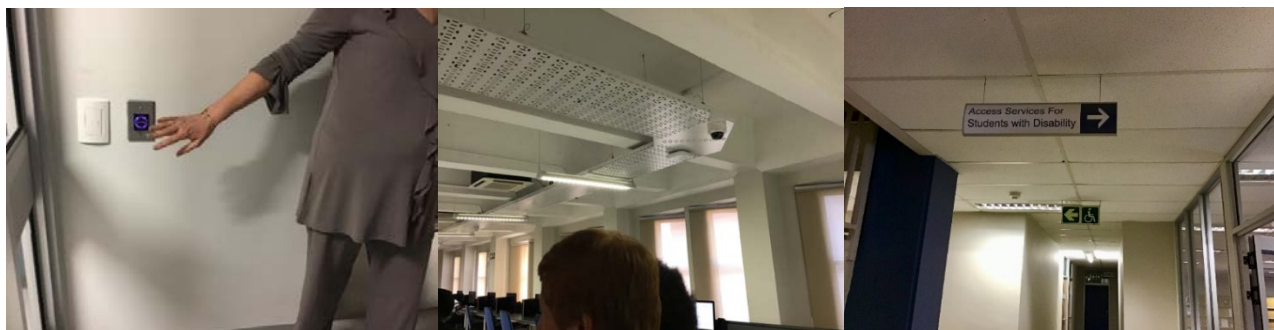
Facilities at Wits DRU and library are modern and addresses learning and research needs of students with disabilities. Ten Accessibility Golden Rules and Universal design principles were integrated throughout the design process of their facilities. These principles are applied in various ways in different practices (Architecture, finding directions, product design and web/interface design) but the fundamentals are the same. Click to read more:

<http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/>

<http://www.edf-fehp.org/edfs-electronic-resource-web-accessibility>

4 Pictures of the visit

Pictures below depict the following: - Universal designs that are all at arm level, electrical switches, door handles, etc. Smoke dictators that flash when the alarm goes off. These are very useful especially for deaf students. Signage that is clearly marked and visible inside and outside buildings, such as at the library entrance and lobby:



5 Students with disabilities

The biggest percentage of recorded disabilities is the students with learning disabilities. Amongst others is the big three disabilities, hearing, sight and mobility. The DRU advocates for greater mobility on campus. There is strong liaison with the library especially on copyright matters. The library purchases an e-book of every printed copy. This is based on availability of e-copies from suppliers. E-books are easily converted to audio format. The Warternweiler library, which is the main library has dedicated integrated Disabilities Section on the ground floor. Plans are underway to renovate the library building and have the Disabilities facilities integrated in all floors of the library. The project will commence later in the year.

The capacity of computers and assistive devices were increased since 2018 through external funding in order to cater for the increasing number of students with disabilities registering with DRU. Wits' learning spaces are flexible, student-centred and accessible to diverse students, and include the provision of appropriate technologies to enhance learning and teaching. The launch of the Digital Learning Spaces Programme introduced two new learning concepts to the Wits community - Learning Innovation Centres and Smart Classrooms. The main aim of this programme is to enable academics to use blended learning approaches in their teaching and aid in the improvement of students' success, with the focus on quality through effective

structures. NWU and Wits will promote and foster collaboration between the institutions and looks forward to maintaining partnership both within and outside of the university community. Dr Anlia Pretorius and Mr Sam Andrews are involved in the planning and facilitation of the CATA Librarians' workshop on 10 July 2019 at the NWU Mahikeng Library and Information Service.

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