

ZIMBABWE REFUSES TO LAG BEHIND: THE INTRODUCTION OF AN INFORMATION MANAGEMENT DEGREE PROGRAMME AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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“ ... do not embark on a sea of records with an inexperienced navigator and do not overlook training that is needed in keeping with advancement in the field” (Simpson 1975)

Abstract

The article looks at the introduction of a Library and Information Science programme at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Zimbabwe, as the first step towards paving the way for an introduction of a Records and Archives Management degree programme. In this article, the authors who are Third Year students and pioneers in the Department of Library and Information Science at the university lament the absence of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses directly linked to the field of Records and Archives Management in Zimbabwe. For a very long time, records managers and archivists were receiving on-the-job training, and in few cases, the subject was and still is housed in other fields such as the general arts, and library and information science. The article highlights that the subject should stand on its own and must be treated with the importance that it deserves. The call for degree programmes specific to archives management is based on the premise that the archives staff have to be fully qualified since they preserve information on the cultures of different societies, and the records they keep play an integral part in the running of any country including the decision making process.

The several problems faced by both staff members and students studying towards a qualification in Records and Archives Management at NUST are also highlighted. The article winds up by making some recommendations for dealing with the problems that were identified.

Background and context

It is an undisputed fact that an organisation without a set records management programme is destined for disaster. Likewise, a culture that is not preserved in any form is bound to perish. In that regard, McCullum (1998), a renowned Canadian journalist, said:

Information is power from whatever perspective you hold. Those who disseminate information, especially in the age of information revolution and the technology, which makes it possible, have enormous power – power for good or evil. Power to support democratic growth or subvert it. Power to influence lives. Power to bring down governments and raise up new political and economic ideologies. It is that power that must be used for the greater good of all citizens, all countries, all cultures, all societies (McCullum 1998).

It does not matter whether this information is on a piece of paper, microform or a magnetic disk, it must be managed if it is going to be of any use and be preserved in the best possible manner for future reference. What are needed, therefore, are fully qualified personnel to monitor and run the records management system in any given country. Mnjama (1996:31) notes, "the appointment of competent and qualified staff is the first practical step towards the establishment of an effective and efficient records service."

Records are often used as future reference sources to disasters that occurred in the past and look at the ways that were used to deal with such disasters in the event that such disasters recur. According to the Disaster Preparedness Manual for the Commonwealth Agencies found on the National Archives of Australia's (2002) website,

an excellent way of approaching disaster preparedness is to study previous disasters. The intention is ... to assess whether or not the disaster is likely to recur and to learn the experiences of others.

How then can one be able to study the previous disasters if their records were not preserved? Certainly there is no other way.

It is also important for archives personnel to be trained on ways of collecting, organising, preserving and retrieving the records whenever there are requests for them. Oral tradition is believed to be declining:

Oral culture depends on memory and must be passed on through the telling of its stories, through sacred narratives and foundation myths, as well as other tales relating to the more practical level of existence. The collapse of the oral mode of maintaining cultural processes is a trauma, a source of terrible anguish and deep guilt for a culture (Simonsuuri 1990).

The decline of oral tradition leaves written evidence as the main source of information, which underscores the need for thorough training in records and archives management.

Archives have an important role in documenting systems of governance in any given country. It should be every government's priority that its documents are preserved because loss of these records partly contributes to loss of sovereignty. Countries in Africa and some parts of the globe fought ferociously against colonialism and prospered. This history is known today because it was documented, protected and preserved mostly in an archival environment.

In schools, students are taught of the lives of great nationalists like Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela, Samora Machel, Eduardo Mondlane, Josiah Tongogara, Joshua Nkomo, Robert Mugabe and so on. Pictures of people like Chaminuka, Mbuya Nehanda, Sekuru Kaguvi, and Lobengula, who were involved in the fight against the colonisers in the then Southern Rhodesia in the 1880s and the 1890s, are still found in archives and museums. This serves to show the importance of archives in preserving the history of any given society.

In Zimbabwe, there has always been an essential missing component in the archival profession, that is, the need for permanent university-based training in the subject. It is on this basis that a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Library and

Information Science was introduced at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Bulawayo.

The Department of Library and Information Science hereinafter referred to as DLIS, started its operations in 2000 and had a staff complement of one Professor and four lecturers. All these were once in a library or archival working environment and they brought a lot of expertise that is needed in starting and running a programme of such importance. The Chairman of Department, Professor Stan Made, once worked for several university libraries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). At the time of his appointment, he was the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) Librarian. Mr. Samuel Njovana was once the Director of the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), Mrs. Rosemary Sibanda worked for the Bulawayo branch of NAZ at one point, Mrs. Gloria Kadyamatimba was an employee of NUST Library and Dr. Lawton Hikwa was with Rural Libraries and Resources Development Programme (RLRDP) and was also the Editor of RLRDP News Bulletin.

The first intake had seventeen students who came in straight from high school ("A" Level). The majority of these excelled in the subjects that had a direct link to archives in their first two years at the University. These courses included: Archives and Manuscripts Management, Management of Records, Management of Electronic Records and Management of Records Centres. Six other students, who were already practising librarians, later joined these students and they brought in ideas to nurture the first seventeen for a better future in the profession.

The DLIS falls under the Faculty of Communication and Information Science, one of the latest faculties to be established at NUST. Apart from this department, the faculty also houses the Department of Journalism and Media Studies and, in the near future, the departments of Information and Communications Technology and that of Records and Archives Management. The Department of Records and Archives Management is expected to start operations in 2004 (Made 2003). There has always been that need for a Records and Archives Management degree and it is sincerely hoped that the proposed degree programme is going to take off the ground.

Course design

The DLIS curriculum was designed with the aim to produce future librarians, archivists, records managers and information officers who understand the importance attached to documents and their continued use by society. First year courses introduce students to the issues pertaining to knowledge management and ensure that the students understand fully the field of information science. Visits to information institutions such as the Bulawayo Branch of the National Archives of Zimbabwe and other libraries are organised so as to equip the students with an introduction to the functions of archives, libraries and other information centres. These visits provide the students with the knowledge and appreciation of the country's information agencies and also help to instill in them, the element of recognition of the importance of the programme in the future of humankind's culture.

The second year courses focus deeper into the main purpose of the programme and they prepare the students for industrial attachment, which is undertaken in the third

year by all students. These courses look mainly at the management of records and information centres. This level contributes 30% of the degree classification system.

The third year is wholly reserved for industrial attachment. A student is required to submit a report of what he or she would have done or learnt during the industrial placement to an organization involved in the field of information management. It should also be noted that the placement period is taken with the seriousness it deserves since it contributes 20% of the degree classification. It also emphasises the importance of the abilities of students to apply theory to the practical working environment. This period is also taken as an opportunity for students to market the DLIS as well as marketing themselves to the different organisations specialising in information management.

The fourth and final year focuses mainly on introducing the student to management, administration and entrepreneurship aspects. This is based on the understanding that a student, having successfully completed and understood the practical side of the profession, through the industrial attachment programme, should be in a position to effectively and efficiently start and manage an information unit. This final year contributes the main chunk of the degree classification, that is, 50%. It also involves the submission of a research project or dissertation, with the expectation that the students will keep on researching in the future and, in the process, help boost the information base of the field.

Please refer to the Appendices at the end of this paper for the course outlines for existing BSc. (Hons) Degree in Library and Information Science and that of the proposed BSc. (Hons) Degree in Records and Archives Management (RAM).

Problems faced and proposed solutions

There are a number of problems faced by both the Faculty of Communication and Information Science staff and students at NUST. These problems need to be addressed as a matter of urgency for the betterment of both the department and society.

One of the problems faced is that of insufficient teaching staff. Competent and qualified staff can only come out as a result of a competent education system with competent and qualified teaching staff as well. The lack of teaching staff in tertiary institutions is perceived to be a result of the lack of the people with suitable qualifications in Archival training, either at Masters or Doctorate levels. Postgraduate archival training was and is still being obtained beyond the country's borders. Only those with the financial resources are able to obtain such qualifications. This situation can negatively affect the students and the growth of the programme at large as lecturers might be forced to take up courses that they might only be having abstract knowledge about.

This has always been a problematic area in the development of departments at tertiary institutions. It is recommended that the salaries and welfare of lecturers be reviewed so as to lure the well qualified to take up lecturing posts and also make those who are already practising lecturers to stay put. One of the reasons why

lecturers have not been staying at one station for a long time is the lack of financial appreciation they get and many of them have been leaving institutions and the country searching for greener pastures.

It has also been argued that the archivists themselves are not being financially recognised as other professionals in the civil service are. One disgruntled person writing to *The Herald*, a newspaper in Zimbabwe, is quoted as saying:

My query is that when teachers with the same qualification (as archivists) got a hefty salary increase in January (2003), archivists only got a tiny adjustment, resulting in them earning (ZW)\$30 000 less than teachers. My argument is that since these adjustments were not performance related, isn't it fair that all personnel in Government with the same qualification should be at par as was the case until December 2002 (Forgotten Rusape 2003).

Students can also be sponsored to take up courses at Masters level with anticipation that they will come back and pay service to the hand that fed them. A bonding system can also be used to ensure that the sponsored students will not abscond but will come back and take up the lecturing posts and serve the community. It is also recommended that after assessing the performance of the intakes so far taken in the departments, a Masters level Records and Archives Management course be introduced at NUST. This is meant to make it easier for those without sufficient resources to go and study abroad to obtain a higher qualification in the field being offered at home.

The other problem faced by both lecturers and students is the lack, or rather the non-availability of reading materials that are specific to the Records and Archives Management Programme. This lack of books has forced the students and staff members to rely mainly on material in journals, which are limited in scope, and on the Internet. It should also be noted that most of the information on the subject that is available is from articles presented mainly at seminars in the mould of this very conference which take long to come by.

Searching for information on the Internet demands a lot of evaluation skills on the part of researchers as they are supposed to evaluate the information from the Internet that has of late been threatened by a syndrome known as GIGO (Garbage In Garbage Out). This means that a person can upload "garbage information" onto the Internet and this information can easily be mistaken for useful facts. This is also a threat to the research process and takes a lot out of the researcher's time.

Most of the reading materials in this field are published outside the country and this makes them very expensive to purchase. This also means that the material will not be specific to the importing country's set up and environment, thus there is need for materials written by Zimbabweans about the Zimbabwean set up and for Zimbabweans.

Furthermore, many training institutions in developing countries also face the problem of having to do with outdated archival reading material. This makes it a problem for both the shepherd and his or her sheep. Both shepherd and sheep need to get hold of the latest information so as to keep abreast with any new developments.

Pertaining to the lack of reading materials specific to the subject, it is recommended that academics in the field write and publish some books on archives and records management and make them available to the training institutions in their societies. It should also be emphasised that the books should look at an environment that is familiar to that of the society they originate from. Our lamentation is that it has been long overdue to point out that materials that are made available to the tropical countries are usually meant for the non-tropics, and the truth holds also for the reverse. It is also our belief that future students and staff members in the DLIS and that of Records and Archives Management can also add research projects undertaken by undergraduate and postgraduate students onto the knowledge much sought after.

The locations of the National Archives of Zimbabwe Headquarters and that of the University have also contributed to the problems currently being faced by students and lecturers. It could have been expected that the DLIS be allowed access to the National Archives Library, which houses a lot of material on the subject. This, however, is practically impossible considering the fact that the National Archives headquarters are in Harare whilst NUST is in Bulawayo, cities which are more than four hundred (400) kilometres apart. This problem can only be solved by enabling an Inter Library Loan (ILL) system between the two entities or by lobbying the National Archives to set up a proper library at their provincial headquarters in Bulawayo. Hopefully, this problem will be addressed before the commencement of the Records and Archives Management degree programme in 2004.

There is also non-availability of laboratories for practical learning at the University. This hinders the process of learning and only restricts the learning process to the theory part of it. It should be noted that there is a real need for a hands-on-learning system that requires a conservation and preservation laboratory at the institution. This would help equip students with skills such as response and recovery skills in the unfortunate occurrence of a disaster.

The world today has been greatly transformed from the manual life to the electronic age. This means excessive usage of computers, which has also led to the boom in the production of paper documents. These documents require great skills of recordkeeping and management of records. Electronic recordkeeping skills require more time behind a computer terminal and this means that the faculty strongly requires a computer laboratory of its own which should house computers with the right software. At the present moment, the faculty's students share the Faculty of Commerce laboratory with the students from at least seven departments from that faculty. This has meant that it is a virtual impossibility for students to get as much time as they need to use the computers but have to endure the short time slots made available to them. This problem requires strong lobbying skills from the Faculty of Communication and Information Science to try to convince the Government and the University administration on the strong requirements of computers for the faculty.

There exists a dividing line between the students and those who are already practising professionals. There have been some attitude problems from both angles. The students argue that the practising professionals view them as threats in the

profession, whilst the latter view the students as lightweights in the field who pretend to be knowledgeable and yet they know nothing. This standoff that seems to exist should be dealt with as a matter of urgency. The two groups should both treat each other as fellow professional colleagues in a profession that needs a real face-lift.

There has long been a problem when students try to look for attachment places in private organisations. This is similar to the case that was reported by Moyo (1996) from Botswana, who said that efforts were being made to establish links with other organisations where students could be sent for practical attachments “although some organisations may be apprehensive about allowing ‘strangers’ to handle their records.” Many a time have we been told, “you cannot get into our Records Centre (or store room) because our records are private and confidential.” This has led to NAZ becoming the only choice available for students with a craving for archives and records management to approach and many, as a result of that situation, have now set their eyes on other types of information centres, both public and private.

Conclusion

It should be noted that even though Library and Information Science (LIS) and Records and Archives Management (RAM) are entities that cannot be offered in isolation, there is still need to separate their content and focus. Records and archival training needs much attention as compared to other fields in Zimbabwe, especially at the present moment since it has been ignored or left in oblivion for a very long time. Archival staff usually depended on on-the-job experience as compared to librarians who received their training at the Bulawayo and Harare Polytechnics since the early 1980s.

The introduction of the DLIS programme at NUST is applauded, but there is still that need to give maximum support to the RAM programme that is in the pipeline. The Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Records and Archives Management course outline seems to be commendable, but it still needs refinement so as to come up with a very exhaustive programme. It is recommended, therefore, that conferences and workshops should be used to campaign for the initiation of such programmes at many universities in eastern and southern Africa so that qualified professionals manage the archival heritage of the region.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Proposed outline of the BSc. (Hons) in Records and Archives Management (RAM)

PART ONE	
Semester I	Semester II
ILI 1101 Organisation of Knowledge I	ILI 1201 Communication and Mass Media
ILI 1102 Information and Society	ILI 1202 Information Sources and Services
ILI 1103 Introduction to Information Technology	ILI 1203 Information Retrieval Systems
ILI 1104 Collection Development and Management	ILI 1204 IT Tools and Applications
ILI 1105 Communication Skills	ILI 1205 Organisation of Knowledge II
PART TWO	
ILI 2101 Automation of Information Centres	IIC 2201 Management of Electronic Records
ILI 2102 Online Information Retrieval	IRA 2201 Records Management II
ILI 2103 Legal and Professional Issues	ILI 2203 Research Methods & Statistics
IRA 2101 Records Management I	IRA 2202 Archives & Manuscripts Management
ILI 2105 Principles of Management	ILI 2205 Design & Realisation of Internet Information
PART THREE: IRA 3000 Industrial Attachment	
PART FOUR	
IRA 4101 Management of Records Centres	IRA 4201 Conservation & Preservation of Archival Materials
ILI 4102 Human Resources Management	ILI 4205 Comparative Archival Systems
ILI 4104 Marketing of Information Products & Services	ILI 4203 Archives, Government & Information Centres
ILI 4104 Entrepreneurship Skills	An elective
IRA 4005 Project	IRA 4005 Project
Electives	IRA 4204 Management of Registries
	IRA 4205 Promotion and Publicity of Archival Materials
	IRA 4206 Information Management in the Health Services

Appendix 2: Course Outline of the current BSc. (Hons) in Library and Information Science

PART ONE	
Semester I	Semester II
ILI 1101 Organisation of Knowledge I	ILI 1201 Information Sources and Services
ILI 1102 Introduction to Information Management	ILI 1202 Information Retrieval Systems
ILI 1103 Information and Society	ILI 1203 Communication Skills
ILI 1104 Introduction to Information Technology	ILI 1204 Management of Records
ILI 1105 Collection Development and Control	ILI 1205 Organisation of Knowledge II
ILI 1106 Archives & Manuscripts Management I	ILI 1206 Archives & Manuscripts Management II
PART TWO	
ILI 2101 Automation of Library Processes	ILI 2201 Management of Records Centres
ILI 2102 Online Information Retrieval	ILI 2202 Database Applications
ILI 2103 Information Technology Tools & Applications	ILI 2203 Research Methods & Statistics
ILI 2104 Production and Publishing of Information Media I	ILI 2204 Production & Publishing of Information Media II
ILI 2105 Management of Electronic Records	ILI 2205 Systems Management
ILI 2106 Conservation & Preservation Management	ILI 2206 Design & Realisation of Internet Information
PART THREE: ILI 3001 Industrial Attachment	
PART FOUR	
ILI 4101 Management of Libraries & other Information Centres	ILI 4201 Academic Libraries
ILI 4102 Human Resources Management	ILI 4202 Public Libraries
ILI 4103 Legal and Professional Issues	ILI 4203 Archives, Government & Information Centres
ILI 4104 Marketing of Information Products & Services	ILI 4005 Project
ILI 4005 Project	ILI 4205 Comparative Library and Archives Systems
ILI 4106 Entrepreneurship Skills	An elective
Electives	LI 4206 Children's Libraries
	ILI 4207 Rural Libraries
	ILI 4208 School Library Media Centres
	ILI 4209 Information Management in the Health Services