'Making a Difference in the Research Community': South Africa's Library Academy Experience and the Researcher–Librarian Relationship

by Colin Darch and Karin de Jager

The paper analyzes problems of theorizing and evaluating a short series of 'Library Academy' events within a Carnegie Corporation-funded project to improve library service to researchers in six South African universities.

Colin Darch,
African Studies Library, University of Cape Town, Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
<*colin.darch@gmail.com*>;
Karin de Jager,
Department of Information and Library Science, University of Cape Town, Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
<*karin.dejager@uct.ac.za*>.

> For a librarian to become mired in a non- or even anti-intellectual environment with no avenues for learning is a crime. The worst of all crimes is for the librarian himself [sic] to have lost interest, or hope, in working out of the mire.[1]

INTRODUCTION: THE LIBRARY ACADEMIES, 2007–2011

The Research Libraries Consortium of South Africa (hereafter RLC) was founded in mid-2006. This ambitious project, generously funded over two three-year cycles by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, was designed to improve university library service to post-graduate students and faculty members in South Africa's leading research universities. A key component of the RLC concept was the improvement of librarians' research skills and domain knowledge, as librarians in South Africa frequently hold undergraduate degrees in librarianship, do not have much subject expertise and are not well-equipped to provide specialized support to researchers. At the time of writing in mid-2011, the RLC had held four 'Library Academies', in September 2007, October 2008, April 2010 and October 2010, with the fifth and last of the series scheduled for October 2011. These events were two-week residential courses for mid-career professional librarians. This paper describes the development and implementation of the Library Academy concept in South Africa, and analyzes some of the problems involved in developing rigorous—as opposed to anecdotal—evaluation criteria both for the Academy as an intervention and for the performance of individual participants.

Other components of the RLC project included the building of dedicated physical spaces, the Research Commons, already reported in the literature[2]; a virtual Research Portal, which was under continuous development from 2006 when the project began; and a program to create Africa-oriented digital content. Three universities (the University of Cape Town, the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the University of the Witwatersrand) took part in the first phase of the project from 2006 to 2009. In the second phase, starting in mid-2009, three more institutions joined the RLC as full members (Rhodes University, Stellenbosch University and the University of Pretoria). The University of Johannesburg, although it was not a member of the Consortium, sent four staff members as participants to two of the Academies, and earlier Rhodes University sent two librarians at its own expense to the first Academy in 2007, before becoming a full RLC member in mid-2009.

The Library Academies were held at an exclusive conference venue in the wine country just outside Stellenbosch, about 50 km from Cape Town. Participants had to apply for admission, and were selected by their own institutions; they were normally subject specialists who worked in public services supporting students and researchers, although catalogers, archivists, IT specialists and some others in supervisory positions also graduated from the program. Participants were given a bibliography of about twenty articles from academic journals that they were expected to have read by the time the Academy sessions began.

The Academy differed from comparable initiatives in its strong emphasis on exposing participants to research content and methodologies in a wide range of non-LIS subject domains, and in requiring the production by each individual of an original and publishable research paper.[3] By contrast, most continuing professional education initiatives in LIS have focused explicitly on *leadership development* within the structural and managerial framework of the university library. They have not generally looked outwards at the broader environment; examples of such initiatives have included the Leadership Academy hosted by the Carnegie Centre for African Library Leadership in Pretoria, South Africa; the ARL Academic Library Leadership Fellows Program[4]; or the Peabody Academic Library Leadership Institute.[5] The focus on managerial leadership is now a well-established tradition, especially in the United States, but the need to upgrade domain knowledge and research skills for non-assessment purposes *per se* has not commonly been emphasized.

The Academies had several explicitly defined objectives: to improve participants' understanding of how research works, not only within a positivist paradigm, but in a range of epistemologies; to gain an understanding of the latest developments and trends in academic librarianship; to facilitate the building of peer networks; to *experience* research by writing a potentially publishable paper; to gain professional distinction by taking part in a prestigious program; and last, to begin developing a cohort of trained research librarians to confront the serious challenges that academic librarianship will face in the coming decades.

By mid-2011, 78 librarians from the seven universities had attended the different Academies; 63 of these were women, and 34 were black (i.e. they belonged to race groups that were discriminated against under the *apartheid* system). Furthermore, three groups totaling 24 participants, selected by their institutions on the basis of their active participation in and performance at the Academy sessions, spent periods of between 6 and 8 weeks at major ARL research libraries in the United States. These were effectively residential internships, and began with a 2 week orientation at the Mortenson Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. By June 2011, of the cohort of 78, 11 librarians (ten of whom were black) had left their RLC posts for other employment, often to more senior positions or at higher salaries, leaving 67 in post at the time of writing.

The Library Academies present problems of evaluation for several specific reasons. The first of these has to do with the conditions in which the Academy was conceived and theorized. Library education in South Africa is in crisis, with programs under threat and different models—minimalist, technological, managerial, and so on—competing in a shrinking marketplace. In this context, the Academy concept makes some large assumptions: that the academic librarians who support researchers are likely to be subject specialists; and that the pro-active academic librarian can—and possibly should—be a full partner in the university's research process, and not merely the provider of a range of 'services'.[6] The Academy therefore constituted an intervention in what is, admittedly a low-key debate about what LIS education in South Africa needs to become if the profession is to survive.

Second, the Academy can also be theorized and evaluated in a different framework, as an example of 'continuing professional education' or CPE, sometimes also called 'continuing professional development' or CPD. A definition of CPE/CPD that has been widely accepted among European professional associations is that it consists of a

> set of learning activities that are followed after the studies that have led to the professional practice and that are fundamental to increase all the necessary theoretical, practical and interpersonal capacities to the development of the professional activities.[7]

More specifically in the information professions, CPE has been defined as 'educational activities primarily designed to keep practicing librarians and information professionals abreast *of their particular domain* in the library or information centre, and to provide them with training in new fields'.[8] There seems to be no reason not to permit a reading of the term 'domain' in this definition as meaning subject knowledge; the Academy was in this sense certainly an exercise in CPE.

The now venerable 'Guidelines for Quality in Continuing Education for Information, Library and Media Personnel' adopted by the American Library Association in the late 1980s, identified criteria for quality evaluation in considerable detail, under such headings as needs assessment, timeliness, program design, definition of objectives, facilities, and financial resources.[9] However, the guidelines emphasize skills training rather than subject 'education' in the broader sense of the word:

> The goal of continuing education is to improve information, library, and media services by maintaining or improving competence of practitioners.[10]

Two statements on CPE in the context of African library practice, from the same period, place a similar emphasis on the acquisition of skills and competence through training.[11]

We consequently recognize that locating the analysis of the Academy within CPE theory is not without problems. At the level of practice, CPE is currently accepted as necessary in a range of professions, including the law, medicine, architecture, accounting, and engineering. Many professional associations around the world, and not only in industrialized countries, make some level of CPE mandatory. At least some of this broad acceptance may be credited to the pioneering work of Cyril Houle in his book *Continuing Education in the Professions* (1980), as well as to other scholars.

The main problem lies in the symbolic and arbitrary nature of what we mean by the term 'professionalism', which as Woll argues, embodies 'a vision, a set of ideals … beyond the narrow goal of self-interest' and including, importantly, 'the liberating power of knowledge and learning'.[12] Woll criticizes Houle for his implicit emphasis on professionalism as occupational control—'the institutionalized form of the control of [an] activity' such as the law, medicine, or librarianship—rather than a broader set of occupational characteristics.[13] In the context of South African academic librarianship, this is an important issue, given the weakness of the only professional association (in other words, the absence of the exercise of control) *alongside* contested visions of the future of research librarianship as a specialty in the profession. Anderson, emphasizing the importance of perceptions about information abundance, has pointed out that 'so many of the functions and structures to which we [librarians] cling play … a marginal role in the real lives of our patrons', and believes that the research library could even 'go out of business'.[14] Without either a unifying vision or effective control, it may well be that little is left of librarianship's claims to professionalism, at least in the South African context.

Other recent studies have emphasized the need for research librarians to acquire or develop 'diverse skill sets', quite possibly through 'ongoing formal training'.[15] The possibility of 'bridging the scholar/practitioner divide' was considered in a recent futures study conducted in the United States, with one respondent arguing that

> Libraries will need to reconsider what their relevance is in the research process. We need to start considering what our 'deeper meaning' is to researchers to ensure that we fit into this new model … we will have a role—it will look different from our role now, and we need to be careful not to cling to past practice for nostalgic reasons.[16]

Designing the Academies

In the first project proposal to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the then three member institutions of the RLC argued that there was evidence that library users—both in South Africa and elsewhere—wanted to deal with 'librarians who have a real command of the subject matter under study' (page 38). The Academy itself, wrote the RLC, would focus on

> … the research process, broken down into such topics as the 'shape' of a field or domain of knowledge, the literature of the field, both print and digital, how to be published, research methods and ethics, and peer review and its functions … Other important topics covered in depth will be academic writing and discourse, including building an academic argument, abstracting, carrying out a literature review, and source evaluation, especially in the absence of the usual quality markers (page 42).

Thus, the most basic aim of the Academy was to expose participants to high-level research and expertise in as much depth as time allowed and in a broad range of disciplines. Houle refers to this as the principle of 'concentrated impact' which means 'exposure to knowledge in some depth during a relatively short period of time'.[17] This was the most significant characteristic of the Academies and participants found the approach interesting, but also at times unsettling and challenging.

The cross-institutional team that put the program together worked for several months to structure sessions and identify potential speakers. The first planning team in 2007 was chaired by the RLC project manager and consisted of representatives of the three participating university libraries, including the authors. In the first week of each Academy, South African researchers of international standing were invited to speak about their own work. They were asked to locate their research in the overall range of disciplines, outlining its significance and explaining its epistemology and methodology. In the second half of the course the nuts and bolts of research production—the writing process, the political economy of publishing in the developing world, the problems of quality evaluation, the financing of research, and the impact of new technologies on scholarly communication—were discussed in detail. The main task was to identify first-class senior researchers who would be willing to talk to a small audience about their own research journeys. As it turned out, the opening sessions were addressed by a senior biochemist who presented a positivist view of scientific research; subsequent sessions in other disciplines introduced a range of much less tidy epistemologies.

Speakers were grouped, as far as possible, under broad themes. Thus, typically, in the first week of a given Academy, under a rubric such as 'Different Domains, Different Epistemologies', a dean of science would speak about research in physics and chemistry; a professor of mechanical engineering introduces materials research; another engineer talks about radio telescopes; a young political scientist describes her research journey, followed by a museologist; an economics professor would extol the virtues of the market, and a forensic entomologist describes his narrow specialty. Other speakers would present their work in art, law, literature, gender studies, sociology, and psychology; subject coverage varied from academy to academy according to the availability of speakers.

A second theme that was employed asked 'Is the Library a Place?' and speakers addressed issues around educational technology and perceptions of the need for libraries. This might be followed by 'Becoming a Researcher', a series of sessions on the experiential and emotional nature of the research journey, and to round off the week participants would hear about 'The South African Research Environment', introducing the utilitarian South African approach to guaranteeing research quality through such bodies as the National Research Foundation and the Academy of Science of South Africa.

In the second week, the focus shifted to the question of what librarians need to do to support researchers, especially in a South African context where post-graduates may not have completely mastered necessary technical skills. Topics covered would include the nature of subject or domain knowledge; genre; how to publish a paper; bibliometrics; data sets and how to conserve them; archives; research ethics; intellectual property; and research motivation. Other sessions would be devoted to the evaluation of library research support; freedom of information (the citizen's right to demand information from the state); and how research library services might need to differ from services to undergraduates.

The aspect of the Academy that participants regarded as most difficult was what Houle terms 'self-directed study'.[18] Weingand argues along similar lines that writing a paper, should be considered an integral part of CPE since these activities involve 'considerable research and study'.[19] The original project proposal in 2006 required that participants carry out a research project of their own design in any field of interest and competence:

> After the end of the course [i.e. the Academy], participants will produce, under supervision, a short research-based essay on a set theme … (page 42).

However, minimal support was provided for the participants who attended the first Academy in 2007 and it quickly became clear that many of them could not cope with this requirement, finding it daunting or even overwhelming. They were especially unprepared for any substantive criticism of their work in the form of written peer review. Consequently, from the second Academy onwards, the authors of this paper were identified as 'research mentors', and visited each institution, speaking to participants both collectively about the program and the formal requirements, and individually about the design and implementation of each specific research project. During the Academy, each participant had a scheduled session with the two mentors to discuss progress in detail.

Houle identifies mentoring as a requirement for successful CPE; he describes it as providing 'on an interactive basis instruction that is directly related to the specific needs of the person who seeks assistance'.[20] In fact, one participant in the first Academy chose the implementation of a peer-mentoring project among librarians at her institution as her research project, in what could be seen as an explicit response to the already identified need for more support in developing research competence.[21]

Another characteristic of a successful CPE intervention is what Houle terms 'varied and complementary learning patterns', which he explained as 'not itself a major guiding principle for the design of education but a useful corrective to a too-heavy reliance on any specific principle'.[22] The IFLA principles of best practice in continuing education programs for librarians also specify that 'those responsible for providing CE programs or in-service training and development [have to] create and/or make available a wide range of activities and products designed to meet identified learning needs'.[23] Especially after the first Academy—when feed-back from participants explicitly noted that the program had been over-reliant on the lecturing mode and that more variation would have been preferable—we attempted to enhance learning by 'providing varied patterns of instruction'.[24] We opted for a wider variety of learning platforms in addition to lectures and presentations, including workshops, conversations, self-directed working groups, reading circles, and individual research interviews.

Houle advocates a 'broadening of content' to include a 'recreational component' in order to provide 'refreshment and repose'.[25] The tranquil and secluded setting of the conference venue and the high level of service provided, certainly went a long way to meeting this requirement. We included activities such as voluntary basic yoga, picnics, mountain walks, games of volleyball, competitive quizzes, professionally-led drumming sessions, dinners at outside restaurants and a sightseeing expedition during the weekend break, in an attempt to test whether we could provide a platform for 'transformative learning to occur'.[26]

Approaches to Evaluation

Houle has argued that every 'consideration of continuing professional education must ultimately be concerned with the appraisal of its quality'.[27] Weingand characterizes evaluation of CPE as the 'final piece of one event and the first piece of those to come', and certainly the planning of each Academy relied heavily on participant feedback from previous iterations.[28]

Our overall impact analysis is based on three kinds of data. The first of these was the experience and outcomes of the research carried out by the participants. As mentioned earlier, a major requirement of the Academy was that each participant produce an independent research paper which was expected to be potentially publishable and which was critiqued in a process designed to resemble peer review for a journal. The second and third sources of data were self-evaluation by the participants, and a post-Academy assessment survey completed by line managers. The self-assessment component of our evaluation was extensive and was carried out in real-time as well as retro-spectively. Participants were asked to write down their expectations on the first morning, and to evaluate the extent to which expectations were met in the final session. A process of real-time feedback was developed, using *Post-It* notes on a wall during or at the end of sessions. These were collected and transcribed. After each Academy, participants were asked to provide a critical evaluation of their own experience, and some time later they were required to produce a report detailing the impact that participation had had on their work performance. In mid-2011, an impact assessment survey was addressed to library directors at the institutions, to evaluate the progress that each participant had made.

The Impact of Writing Research Papers

As a condition of acceptance into the Academy program, each participant agreed to produce a 'potentially publishable' research paper; this exercise began well before the Academy sessions started and continued for some months afterwards. To be eligible for consideration for the US visits already mentioned, participants had to have completed and submitted their papers. Evaluation of each paper was carried out separately by the authors, and a short peer review was then sent to each participant and to the library directors. A special issue of the peer-reviewed South African journal *Innovation* was published in December 2009 under the rubric 'Papers from the Library Academy' consisting of eight of the best texts produced by this process during the first two Academies in 2007 and 2008.[29]

The absence of methodological rigor in LIS research has long been identified as a problem worldwide. Nearly all library students and practitioners

> … struggle, for example, with understanding how to formulate a coherent problem statement, to pose researchable questions or hypotheses, to identify and implement appropriate procedures to gather data, and to interpret the findings to address their study problem.[30]

There are specific reasons why these difficulties arise, linked to the practice of what is termed 'evidence-based' or 'research-based' librarianship. The concept of evidence-based management derives from the utilitarian idea that library managers need to be able to use 'formal research skills and methods to assist in decision-making and establishing best practice'.[31] However, there are some fundamental differences between research carried out for managerial assessment purposes and research *per se*.[32] Assessment research describes the status quo in order to change it, is almost always in some sense politicized, and often goes ahead even when there are serious design flaws. Non-assessment research, however, is rigorous, open-ended, and seeks to solve questions to which the answers are unknown.[33] Much of the work produced in the context of the Academy was firmly situated in the assessment tradition, although the original intention

was that the participants should gain a deeper insight into the rigors of pure investigation.

The observation cited above exactly matches our experience at the four Academies. Nevertheless, out of the 37 participants in the first two iterations, a total of 35 completed and submitted research papers. Although the submissions varied considerably in the quality of research and writing, all bore evidence of the considerable effort that had gone into the work. An unanticipated but significant additional benefit was that of experiential learning: by actively engaging in research the librarians became frustrated or irritated, met obstacles and dead ends, produced null results, and generally went through the gamut of emotions familiar to most post-graduates and faculty members:

> '[p]articipants reported that, having carried out the Research Report writing exercise they were far more sympathetic towards the researchers in what they experience, the support they need, and the continued guidance necessary' (unpublished assessment report, page 13).

The papers selected for the special issue of *Innovation* were each sent to two anonymous peer reviewers. A total of six full-length papers and two research notes were eventually published. One paper and one note were from participants in the 2007 Academy and the rest from 2008.

Further research papers were submitted after the third and fourth Academies (both held in 2010); in reviewing the papers, the potential for publication was taken as seriously as before. From the 36 completed papers, 17 were considered good enough (with revision) to be submitted to specific journals, and the research mentors encouraged the participants to take this further step. One of these papers has already been published.[34] In itself, this is a statistically insignificant contribution to institutions' overall research productivity; but an entire cohort of librarians now have some grasp, intellec-tually as well as experientially, of the research journey and are in a better position to support students and faculty members than they were before. We hope that some, at least, will continue to produce research.

The Short-Term Value of Self-Assessment Channels

During and after the Academies, feedback was continuously required of participants in a variety of ways. The exercise of assessing whether individual expectations were met produced few surprises. Most expected to learn more about the research process, the rationale of the whole intervention. Other expectations concerned professional development; networking; understanding the role of librarians in research; and improving service. Encouragingly, almost all partici-pants at different Academies reported that their expectations were met or exceeded.

At all the Academies it was made clear to participants that they were required to engage in the activities on the program. Each person was given *Post-It* stickers, which they could use to comment on what was happening in real time and anonymously if necessary; the *Post-It* was simply stuck on the wall of the room in a kind of 'analogue tweeting' back-channel. When specific practical issues emerged, they could be responded to immediately. One participant noted:

> I like the idea of posting comments after each session as I noticed that some of the comments had immediate action. If something was not right and within reason, the organizers attended to it immediately.

Stickers were removed at the end of each day and filed sequen-tially to provide a record of perceptions of the program as it unfolded. Unsurprisingly, the comments were mostly immediate and personal responses to individual speakers, and were useful to the organizers in planning and selecting speakers for subsequent iterations. But their

analytical value was low, and they told us nothing about medium or long-term impact, as others have found in similar situations:

> [a]lthough the daily evaluations provided good insights into program strengths and weaknesses, they did not provide information on what happened after participants returned to their campuses.[35]

Each participant was also required, after the final session of each Academy, to submit a reflective evaluation of the professional impact of the experience. All these responses were characterized by animated expressions of gratitude, and acknowledged that a great deal was learned, not only about research and the support of research. Participants affirmed that they had been motivated and inspired, and that they had gained insight into their own positions and the roles that they played. Many of these responses matched the expressed aims of the Academy and demonstrated the extent to which these objectives were perceived—by the participants at least—to have been achieved.

The first and most important objective was for participants to gain a concrete understanding of how research is conducted and how it differs in various disciplines. This was the main focus during the first week of each Academy. Evaluations of these sessions were enthusiastic and showed that participants had appreciated the expertise of the presenters and understood (some with surprise) that there was no single, transferable, or 'correct' approach to the research enterprise:

> The presentations … gave me an insight into the processes and relevant issues in the knowledge production process … I also learnt about the different theories which underpin research. Equally important were the different viewpoints on the same issue from different presenters …

The sessions in the second week focused on actually supporting research, and developments and challenges in academic librarianship. In the main, participants responded positively to this material, acknowledging that they had gathered new insights into their own work:

> … the Academy was successful in exposing me to 'cutting edge' issues and practices within academic librarianship, such as changing collection practices and paradigms of information access (e.g. commercial publishers vs. 'open' paradigms), digitization and other publishing initiatives, the library as 'place', multi-disciplinary research, and, of course, the challenges of providing quality academic research support.

One of the obvious consequences of a small group of colleagues living and working together for 2 weeks in an isolated setting is the building of community, a fluid network of supportive relationships. This was the third Academy objective and was recognized and appreciated by the participants:

> To meet with our counterparts at other universities, to interact and build professional relationships is a long term investment and a win–win situation.

Allied to and building upon such networking is the longer term objective of developing a new cadre of research librarians, able in the best of all possible worlds to *participate* in research projects, but also competent to provide meaningful support. It would be over-reaching to claim that a handful of two-week interventions could by themselves achieve such an ambitious goal. Nevertheless, the assessments from the participants showed that the Academies had in several instances been a transformative experience, with a significant impact on patterns of work:

> Before going to the academy I was just a librarian doing my job. After the academy I am no longer just a librarian. My job has purpose and meaning. I know now that I can make a difference in my institution that will have an influence in my country … When I returned home I was a transformed librarian. I know now what I am meant to do to make a difference in the research community …

Medium-Term Personal and Professional Development

The data from the self-assessment exercises needed to be articulated with an assessment of the medium- to long-term impact on workplace performance. An impact assessment instrument was therefore designed to collect data from directors or senior line managers charged with Academy liaison in each institution. The decision to design a survey instrument to collect responses from these informants was based on our understanding that they had the clearest insight into attitudinal and behavioral differences in the workplace.

Data was collected in June 2011 using an online instrument developed by the authors on the *Survey Monkey* website. The instrument was designed to assess behavioral and other changes in individual participants since attending the different Academies, along the lines of growth originally identified by the RLC as key target areas, namely professional and personal confidence; improvements in subject knowledge; proactive contact with researchers; job promotion; presentation at conferences; publication; use of internet and web technologies; and communication skills. We added a question about leadership. Directors were requested to evaluate by name their own institutional subset of the 67 Academy participants still in post.

The intention from the beginning had been for the Academies to provide a transformative experience for the participants in terms of their competence to support and take part in research and their personal and professional growth. Accordingly, the survey focused specifically on these three axes. *Personal development* was addressed in two dimensions; a perceived increase in confidence, and development of leadership beyond the immediate demands of the job. *Research proficiency* was addressed in four dimensions: publication, the development of subject knowledge, increased contact with researchers, and presenting papers at conferences. *Professional development* was addressed in three dimensions: proactive use and promotion of new technologies, more effective communication with other library staff, and job promotion. Table 1 below summarizes the extent to which these objectives were seen by the respondents to have been achieved.

In analyzing these data it is important to acknowledge, as some respondents explicitly pointed out, that it is impossible in many cases to ascribe these developments *solely to the Academy*. Professional librarians are expected to grow and develop over time; and 36 participants had spent several weeks in top research institutions in the United States, quite likely a transformative experience in itself. Isolating the impact of the Academy in purely quantitative terms in an environment with so many variables is difficult. In spite of this caveat, it is nevertheless *highly probable* that some of the evident differences are attributable to the Academy experience, and this was acknowledged in the free text comments to each question. Participants were generally described as more willing to initiate and participate in new projects, to develop training initiatives, and to improve their service to researchers.

Personal Development

The most remarkable change in all the participants was in the development of their leadership qualities. Directors were asked to establish whether each of the Academy participants on their staff had:

> … shown an improvement in leadership since the Academy? Examples include but are not limited to: initiating activities beyond the immediate scope of their jobs such as assessment measures, new/improved services, further developing Research Commons and Portal services …

The responses showed that 56 (84%) of participants had improved. Interestingly, leadership development had not originally been an explicit objective of the Academy, and was not mentioned as such in the proposal documents. As the Academies progressed, it was gradually recognized as a likely outcome. The proposal for phase 2 of

Table 1
Research proficiency and personal and professional development

	N = 67	%
Personal development		
Leadership	56	84
Much more confident	48	72
Slightly more confident	15	22
Research proficiency		
Active contact with researchers	44	66
Informal gain in subject knowledge	43	64
Conference presentations	20	30
Publication	18	27
Promotion	17	25
Some contact with researchers	15	22
Professional development		
Promotion of new technologies	40	60
Active communication	28	42
Proactive communication	24	36
Job promotion	17	25
Passive communication	13	19

the project acknowledged that several participants in the first two Academies had 'subsequently assumed leadership positions in their own institutions' (page 23). Leadership development may therefore be regarded as a significant if unanticipated outcome of the Academy.

An increase in participants' confidence showed the second largest change. Senior line managers were asked to rate each of their staff members as follows:

In your judgment, have the following participants shown a significant increase in professional and personal confidence since participating in the Academy? This might be in an area such as public speaking, participation in meetings, pro-active relations with faculty.

Respondents were required to choose one of the following options: much more confident; slightly more confident; less confident; or no change. Only four respondents (6%) were rated not to have changed at all; 48 (72%) were much more confident and 15 (22%) slightly more confident.

Research Proficiency

The most significant score in this dimension was in participants' initiating active contact with researchers. The question was whether participants had 'become proactive in pursuing closer contact with researchers and/or graduate students, up to and including active collaboration in research projects'. Options were no contact; some routine contact; actively seeking contact; or participation in researchers' projects. Results showed that 44 librarians (66%) were actively pursuing research contacts and 15 (22%) were making routine contacts. Only 4 (6%) were actually participating in researchers' or graduate students' projects; but it is unclear at this stage to what extent opportunities for such participation are available.

As far as the development of subject knowledge was concerned, the question to the directors was:

Have any of the persons listed taken steps to improve their subject (not LIS) knowledge or expertise since they attended the Academy? E.g. enrolment in or auditing of a course or for a degree; attending inaugural lectures, seminars, etc.

Possible responses were that no steps had been taken, informal steps, or that participants had enrolled in a course, i.e. formally engaged in improving their subject knowledge. Disappointingly, a large minority of 17 participants (25%) had not taken any steps at all to improve their subject knowledge, but a total of 50 (74%) had taken informal steps.

The other two dimensions of research proficiency were identified as the presentation of papers at conferences, and the publication of journal articles. Here the numbers were smaller, but some Academy participants had clearly become enthusiastic about taking part in such activities. The participants at the most recent Academies had not yet had time to present at conferences or to complete their papers for publication, but several were preparing to do so.

Professional Development

Professional networking, communication and sharing were objectives that were explicitly built into the Academy program and participants were encouraged from the outset not only to establish networks among themselves, but also to share their Academy experiences with colleagues when they returned. The question that we asked in the survey was:

Have the participants … shown an improvement in communication skills and sharing with colleagues since the Academy? Examples include but should not be limited to: initiating or participating in staff development activities— reading circles, workshops, seminars.

We offered the respondents four options: no change; passive participation; active participation; or taking the initiative in changes, i.e. proactive participation. Here the results were encouraging: 28 (42%) communicated actively and 24 (36%) proactively for a total of a 78% increase in engagement and sharing with colleagues, thus pointing to the development of a cadre of vigorous professional librarians. Disappointingly, a substantial minority of 13 participants (19%) had not yet developed beyond passive participation, and two (3%) were judged not to have changed at all.

There is some evidence from outside South Africa that older librarians in less developed countries may be generally suspicious of change and slow adopters of new technologies.[36] To test this, we asked whether participants had 'pro-actively used existing or emerging web or internet technologies to promote library or research activity' and our results showed that 40 participants (60%) were in fact doing so. One of the key components of the overall RLC project is the development of a state-of-the-art research portal, underpinned by a sophisticated technological research infrastructure. It was encouraging to find that such technologies were being used by the majority of participants, although with 27 (40%) of them not yet fully engaged there was some cause for concern and scope for further improvement.

Our final dimension in the area of professional development was whether participants' progress had been sufficiently recognized by their institutions to award them with formal job promotion. Seventeen participants (25%) had been promoted. It has to be acknowledged that this indicator is not completely dependent on individual performance, especially in the absence in South African university libraries of any form of *ad hominem* promotion. Institutional circumstance is most likely to determine whether or not promotional positions or structures that allow for salary increases are available. Indeed, in one case it was pointed out that

[t]he promotions are not necessarily a consequence of the Academy. They are part of a larger library reorganization exercise as well as an appointment to a vacant management position. The Academy experience may have contributed but it is difficult to establish the link.

Nonetheless, 17 participants (25%) had been promoted since attending, and we believe that this—when combined with all the other evidence—shows that the Academies have had an impact on the professional development of librarians in South African research universities.

Conclusion

A recent article points out that the academic research library worldwide is under threat in three important ways. First of all, perceptions are important, and if researchers believe that they can get all the information resources that they need by themselves, free of charge over the internet, it does not matter for libraries whether they are right or not, *the effect will be the same*. Second, researchers *really do not need librarians* as much as they used to—and this is borne out *inter alia* by the drop in reference transaction statistics. Third, if researchers do not consider library services to be valuable, then in reality they *actually have no value*.[37]

In the context of South African university libraries, this generalized crisis is aggravated in other significant ways. Many academic librarians have no formal training in any academic discipline other than library and information science, and often have an undergraduate professional degree. Subject bibliography is not taught in South African library schools. Consequently, South African academic librarians are often—though not always—ill-prepared to provide specialized research support to postgraduate students and faculty members.

In these difficult circumstances, these results indicate that a short, intensive intervention such as the Academy can make a difference to the way librarians perceive their role, as well as to the way they perform it, and the impact that they can have on the national research enterprise. Some of this impact may occur within an unpredictably longer time-frame; in 2011, one participant from the first Academy in 2007 commented that 'it doesn't crystallize immediately … the journey of discovery is still going on for me'. Consequently, we intend to continue to monitor the activities and careers of the participants into the future.

References

1. Stanley D. Gutzman, "Career-Long Sabbatical", *Library Journal* 94 (17) (1 October 1969): 3414.
2. William Daniels, Colin Darch, and Karin de Jager 2010. "The Research Commons: a New Creature in the Library?" *Performance Measurement and Metrics.* 11 (2) (2010): 116–130.
3. Colin Darch and Karin de Jager, "Editorial", *Innovation* 39 (2009).
4. Lisa German, Victoria Owen, Jill Parchuk and Beth Sandore, "RLLF in the Rear-View Mirror: a Report on the Impact and Value of the ARL Academic Library Leadership Fellows Program", *Journal of Library Administration* 49 (8) (2009): 795–809.
5. Sharon A. Weiner, Patricia Senn Breivik, Dennis Clark and Timothy Caboni, "Understanding the Higher-Education Context: the Peabody Academic Library Leadership Institute", *Journal of Library Administration,* 49 (8) (2009): 837–846.
6. David Shumaker, "Why Embedded Librarians are not like Embedded Reporters", *The Embedded Librarian: Exploring New, Embedded Roles for Librarians in Organizations of All Types* (20 August 2010). Available: http://embeddedlibrarian.wordpress.com/2010/08/20/why-embedded-librarians-are-not-like-embedded-reporters/ (20 September 2011).
7. CEPLIS, *Training Working Group: Presentation of the Research Report (Roma, 28 May 2010).* (Brussels: Conseil Européen des Professions Libérales, 2010) p. 3.
8. Niels Ole Pors and Trine Schreiber, "Continuing Education and Information Technology: a Study of Content and Deliverables", in *Human Development: Competencies for the Twenty-First Century: Papers from the IFLA CPERT Third International Conference on Continuing Professional Education for the Library and Information Professions*, edited by Patricia Layzell Ward and Darlene E. Weingand (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1997), p. 133, our emphasis.
9. "SCOLE Guidelines for Quality in Continuing Education for Information, Library and Media Personnel", in *Continuing Professional Education: an IFLA Guidebook*, edited by Blanche Woolls (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1991): 143–157.
10. Ibid., p. 145.
11. S.M. Made, "Continuing Professional Education in Zimbabwe", in *Continuing Professional Education: an IFLA Guidebook*, edited by Blanche Woolls (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1991) p. 107; C. M. Vink, "Continuing Education for Library and Information Personnel in South Africa", in *Continuing Professional Education: an IFLA Guidebook*, edited by Blanche Woolls (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1991) pp. 105–106.
12. Bruce Woll, "The Empty Ideal: a Critique of *Continuing Learning in the Professions* by Cyril O. Houle", *Adult Education Quarterly* 34 (3) (1984): 176.
13. Ibid., p. 169.
14. Rick Anderson, "The Crisis in Research Librarianship", *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 37 (4) (2011): 290.
15. ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee, "2010 Top Ten Trends in Academic Libraries: a Review of the Current Literature", *College and Research Library News* 71 (6) (2010): 287.
16. David J. Staley and Kara J. Malenfant, *Futures Thinking for Academic Librarians: Higher Education in 2025.* (Washington DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2010), p. 10.
17. Cyril O. Houle, *Continuing Learning in the Professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980), p. 217.
18. Ibid., p. 211.
19. Darlene E. Weingand, "Describing the Elephant: What is Continuing Professional Education?", *IFLA Journal* 26 (3) (2000): 200.
20. Houle, *Continuing Learning in the Professions* (1980), p. 212.
21. Avenal Finlayson, "Electronic Mentoring and Academic Librarians: a Case Study", *Innovation* 39 (2009): 58–72.
22. Houle, *Continuing Learning in the Professions* (1980), p. 223.
23. Jana Varleijs, Continuing Professional Development: Principles and Best Practices.IFLA. (2008). Available: http://archive.ifla.org/VII/s43/pub/cpdwl-qual-guide.pdf, (September 20, 2011).
24. Houle, *Continuing Learning in the Professions* (1980), p. 224.
25. Ibid., p. 214.
26. Weiner et al., "Understanding the Higher-Education Context" (2009), p. 838.
27. Houle, *Continuing Learning in the Professions*, p. 237.
28. Weingand, "Describing the Elephant" (2000), p. 201.
29. "Papers from the Library Academy", *Innovation: Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa,* 39 (2009): 1–99.
30. Danuta A.Nitecki, Reflections on Preparing Librarians for Research-Based Management.Keynote paper, Asia-Pacific Conference on Library and Information Education and Practice, 'Preparing Information Professionals for International Collaboration', 6–8 March 2009, University of Tsukuba, Japan. Available: http://www.slis.tsukuba.ac.jp/~atsushi/a-liep/proceedings/Symposium/001.pdf, (September 20, 2011).
31. Helen Partridge and Gillian Hallam, "Educating the Millennial Generation for Evidence Based Information Practice", *Library High Tech* 24 (3) (2006): 400–419.

32. Megan Oakleaf, *The Value of Academic Libraries: a Comprehensive Research Review and Report* (Washington DC: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2010), p. 30.
33. Ibid., pp. 30–31.
34. Tertia Coetsee, "RefShare: a Community of Practice to Enhance Research Collaboration", *Ariadne* 66 (2011). Available: http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue66/coetsee/ (September 20, 2011).
35. Weiner et al., "Understanding the Higher-Education Context" (2009), p. 843.
36. Nosheen Fatima Warraich and Kanwal Ameen, "Perceptions of LIS Professionals Regarding Use of Pakistan National Digital Library databases", *The Electronic Library* 28 (1) (2010): 111.
37. Anderson, "The Crisis in Research Librarianship" (2011), p. 289.