

THE ROLE OF THE MUCG LIBRARY IN THE 10 YEARS OF METHODIST TERTIARY EDUCATION IN GHANA

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Abstract

The paper examines the contributions of the MUCG library since its inception to the role of Methodist Church Ghana in the provision of tertiary education in Ghana. It begins with the critical role played by tertiary educational institutions, particularly universities and goes on to national economies and societies. It also discusses the role played by academic libraries in university education. The background and the role played by the Methodist Church in the provision of tertiary education is also discussed. Finally, the paper discusses the various contributions of MUCG library to the success of the University College and the Methodist Church at large.

Introduction

Tertiary educational institutions play a critical role in supporting knowledge driven economic growth strategies and the construction of democratic and socially cohesive societies. Tertiary education assists in the training of competent and responsive professionals needed for sound macroeconomic and public sector management (Garder, 2002).

The academic and research activities of tertiary institutions help to provide crucial support for the national innovation system. Tertiary institutions often constitute the backbone of the country's information infrastructure, and serve as repositories and conduits of information through libraries, computer networks, and internet service, in addition to the norms, values, attitudes and ethics that tertiary institutions impart to students. They also provide the foundation of the social capital necessary for constructing healthy civil societies and cohesive culture (Harison and Huntington, 2000).

Universities serve as stores of expertise and knowledge capital. Students need to have their learning and development affiliated and accredited to a particular institution. Universities bring great economic benefits by attracting research, enhancing the skills and educational level of the population and connecting with the local economies and communities around them. Universities also provide opportunities for developing expertise and validating learning and bring prestige to those affiliated to them.

To successfully fulfill their educational functions in the 21st century, tertiary educational institutions need to be able to respond effectively to changing educational and training needs, adopt to a rapidly shifting tertiary education landscape, and adapt more flexible models of organization and operation (Gardner, 2002).

At present, tertiary educational institutions are organizing themselves to accommodate the complex learning and training needs of more diverse clienteles: working students, mature students, stay-at home students, part-time students, day students, night students, weekend students and so on. New patterns of demand are emerging whereby learners attend several institutions or programmes in parallel or sequentially, thus taking the initiative to define their own skill profile on the labour market. The learning process now needs to be increasingly based on developing capacity to find and access knowledge and to apply it to solving problems.

Libraries of the tertiary institutions therefore have an important role to play in the provision of higher education. The role of the library is necessarily depends upon the educational objectives of the institution. University libraries help to advance the mission of their parent organizations. These libraries provide physical space and collections, and develop services to support teaching, learning, research and community service.

Academic libraries face unprecedented challenges in the 21st century. Libraries are human organizations, so they are subject to the same sort of influences that many other organizations must deal with (Budd, 1998). The changing environment of academic life demands new competencies from academic librarians (Mahmood, 2003).

Academic libraries have to provide information services to users. They need to liaise with library users, faculties and staff to ascertain their information needs and provide these needs to support effective teaching, learning and research.

The challenge of this role of libraries is the fact that the information needs of the university system varies and are sometimes very sophisticated. However, the librarians who serve as knowledge managers must live up to expectation. The growing information needs of the university community should also make libraries change the

traditional way of simply adding to collections in order to understand the information/ knowledge needs of users and map out plans to build a collection that will meet the needs of the entire university community.

Academic libraries therefore must develop and provide resources, materials and services, such as current awareness service, questions and answers service, selective dissemination of information, referral and inter library lending services to support learning and research activities.

Ten Years of Methodist Tertiary Education in Ghana

Background of Methodist University College Ghana and the Library

The introduction of educational reforms that reduced the duration of pre-tertiary education in Ghana led to a sudden increase in the number of students from secondary schools who qualified for tertiary education. It soon became clear that the six public universities could not absorb the large number of senior high school graduates (Dolphine, 2009).

The Methodist Church Ghana therefore decided at the 36th Annual Conference held in Sunyani in 1998 to establish a University College to augment government effort at providing tertiary education in Ghana. The Methodist University College Ghana was therefore established in October, 2000. The University College currently has hour faculties which offer a variety of programmes at different levels, ranging from Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor, Masters and M.Phil. There are thirteen (13) academic departments offering twenty-three (23) programmes (MUCG Principal's Annual Report 2010).

The Library of Methodist University College Ghana on the otherhand was established in January, 2000 which precedes the formal opening of the University College in October, 2000.

The library started with an initial collection of 6000 books and 13 journal titles and a staff strength of four (4). The seating capacity then was 40. It was located at one of the ground buildings which is now part of the female hostel.

From that humble beginning, MUCG now has three libraries; the main library at Dansoman which primarily serves three (3) Faculties, namely, Business Administration, Social Studies, and Arts and General

Studies, while Wenchi branch Library serves Faculty of Agriculture and Tema Library also serves Tema campus.

The three libraries are fully computerized. The library presently has seventeen (17) full time staff at the main and branch libraries and the library holdings presently stand as follows; 27,000 volumes of books; 144 serial titles; 644 pamphlet collections; 928 DC-ROMs; 81 audio visual materials; 2338 dissertations & theses and 28 online databases (MUCG Manual for Library Users, 2010).

The role of MUCG library in the 10 years of Methodist Church Tertiary Education in Ghana

It is very difficult to separate the critical role of university libraries from that of the university, as the library plays a central role in the university business of teaching, learning, research and community service. However, the impact of libraries on the institutional goals of their parent organizations can be identified by the increasing student population, retention and graduation rate, increasing faculty research output and overall quality of academic work. Library statistics can also be used to measure and demonstrate the impact of the library on the institutional goals.

In order to ascertain the impact of university libraries on the institutional goals the following questions also need to be asked:

- Does the library influence student enrollment?
- How does the library factor into retention of students and faculty?
- How does the library enhance the quality of students?
- In what ways does the library influence student activities in the community?
- How does the library increase the amount for funding for research?

Answers to these questions will help determine the role the library plays in university education.

The critical role that MUCG library has played in the 10 years of Methodist tertiary education in Ghana is discussed under the following headings.

Provision of information resources to support teaching, learning and research

Academic libraries all over the world acquire, organize, store and disseminate information/knowledge to support the university core business of teaching, learning, research and community service.

The MUCG library since inception has systematically acquired relevant books/materials in various formats and subject areas to support the four (4) faculties, comprising thirteen (13) academic departments, offering twenty- three academic (23) programmes.

The breakdown of these collections is as follows; 27,000 volumes of books, 144 serial titles, 2348 theses/dissertations, 644 special pamphlet reports, up –to date past examination question papers, 81 audiovisual materials, 928 CD-ROMs, and 28 online databases, which provide electronic access to over 16,000 e-journals/books.

These information resources which represent the intellectual property of scholars/experts across the world on the various subjects that are taught in the university college have greatly contributed to enhancing academic work by augmenting the knowledge that is impacted directly to students in formal teaching activities. Indeed the use of these resources has reflected positively on the quality of graduates that are produced by the University College.

Provision of information literacy skills to students, faculty and staff

The MUCG library has assisted students, faculty and staff to improve upon their ability to identify, search, access, evaluate, analyse and use information from a variety of sources and formats effectively. It has also helped to equip students and faculty to take advantage of the opportunities inherent in the global information society.

Developing life-long learners is critical to the mission of higher educational institutions. By ensuring that individuals have the intellectual abilities of reasoning and critical thinking, and by helping them construct a framework for learning how to learn. Colleges and Universities provide the foundation for students' continued growth throughout their career as well as in their roles as informed citizens and members of the communities information literacy is a key component of and contributor to life-long learning.

Information literacy competency extends learning beyond the classroom settings and practice with self-directed investigations as individuals move into internship, first professional positions and increasing responsibilities in all areas of life. The library is at the centre of incorporating information literacy competency or skills among students, faculty and other staff.

The MUCG library has developed and provided instruction and services to users who seek information to assist them to acquire these life-long skills.

The effects of the provision of these information literacy skills on the students, faculty and staff are reflected in the following ways.

- It has provided the users with the understanding of the nature and extent of their information needs. The users will have the ability to identify a research topic or information need, use a background information resource to increase familiarity with the topic, and fix the research topic to a manageable focus. It also helps to identify a variety of types and formats of potential sources of information.
- It has provided them with easy and quick access to information. This will enable users to select appropriate information retrieval systems, construct and implement an appropriate search strategy, use various search systems to retrieve information in a variety of formats, such as library catalogue, reference sources, databases, web search tools etc.
- It has helped them to evaluate information and its sources critically. This will help them select relevant information based on understanding the main ideas from relevant, reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, and timeliness.
- It has helped users to understand how to organize information, using outlines and drafts and demonstrate an understanding of when and how to use quotations and paraphrase to support ideas and/or arguments.
- It has helped the users to use information ethically and legally. It also helps to demonstrate an understanding of plagiarism and appropriate documentation style (Adarkwa 2008).

Developing and providing services to support teaching, learning and research

The MUCG library over the short period of existence has developed and provided special library services, such as questions and answers service, selective dissemination of information, referral and inter-library lending services to support academic work at the University College.

It is not just enough to develop literary collections. The library has the responsibility of developing and providing specialized reference services that will give flexible and quick access to information to the University Community to enhance quality academic work.

- **Serving as learning and research centre for life-long learning for the students, faculty and staff and visiting researchers.**

The physical conducive space (environment) provided by MUCG library for studies has also played a major role in enriching academic work.

The physical library will continue to be an important feature on university campus for the simple reason that it is important social and community place, in addition to being depositories of books and other materials.

In a hybrid library where many media co-exist, space is essential to mediate between users, collections and services, even when everything has gone completely electronic, we will still have to use libraries as spaces for learning. Learning is a social and multi-dimensional activity that relies on human interaction, multiple senses, chance encounters and serendipity for it to be effectively carried out. Libraries provide these special spaces, with powerful symbolic and cultural connotation for learning, intellectual freedom and optimism (Cheong, 2005)

The MUCG library has served as a centre for learning and research which is a key component of the core business of the University. The library has provided a learning environment made up of space, resources, materials and services that support learning and research for the ten years of existence.

Libraries will remain an important facility in a university with the shift of focus from teaching to learning, because they will provide the space for the student centred and research based learning activities.

- **Serving as repository of accumulated knowledge**

Universities all over the world generate and manage information and knowledge. The MUCG library over the period of existence has served as the centre for collecting, organizing, storing and dissemination of knowledge generated both within and outside the University College. Indeed the present library holdings reflect the information and knowledge assets of the University College. This has contributed greatly to the increasing good image and quality of academic work at the University College.

One of the greatest assets of a University is the knowledge and information asset, the library contribution to the development, management and sustenance of this asset cannot be over-emphasized. The MUCG library has played a key role in the management of the internally generated knowledge of the University College as well as the externally acquired information. The library created an Institutional Repository that has captured all the publications of MUCG and staff of MUCG in one platform in an attempt to make the research output of MUCG visible.

Conclusion

In conclusion MUCG library will remain an integral part of the University College developing and providing resources, materials and services to students, faculty and staff and visiting scholars. The trained staff will continue to assist users and also help to preserve the precious information and knowledge asset of the University.

To a large extent, the MUCG library has played its role of providing relevant and timely information resources to support the academic work at the University College. Certainly, the library has contributed to the quality of graduates that have been produced into the society.

It is also well established that the library's present reputation has to a large extent influenced enrollment, student and staff retention and quality of students. Indeed there have been several occasions where prospective students, parents and employees come to assess the general state of the library before applying to study at MUCG.

The way forward is to increase funding to the library to strengthen the collections, facilities and services. The campus library project should be made a priority project. MUCG library is expected to continue to support the vision and mission of the University College.

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