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Towards an exceptional Undergraduate Personal Learning Experience: the Personal Librarian Programme, a pilot project at Rhodes University Library.

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a record of a unique intervention for enhancing the Undergraduate learning experience at Rhodes University. It will focus on the establishment of the project, the experiences encountered and lessons learned thus far.

In April 2013, a vibrant team of 13 librarians embarked on a Personal Librarian Pilot Project at the Rhodes University Library. The Personal Librarian Programme is primarily directed at undergraduate students at Rhodes University. In an attempt to bridge the information literacy skills gap that exists between Senior School and University in South Africa, the idea behind this programme is that each incoming first year student is assigned a Personal Librarian who will remain that individual’s contact in the library throughout his/her academic career at Rhodes University.

The project came about as a result of research exploring the perceptions of both students and lecturers in the Commerce Faculty at Rhodes University with regard to Information Literacy practices and needs (Gontshi, 2011). The study revealed and recorded a shortcoming in the Information Literacy ability of students between Senior School Level and University Level. It became clear that new University students were not aware of the important link between their academic studies and the Library which in turn suggested the need to make Rhodes University librarians and the role that they play in the academic world more obvious to these new students (Gontshi, 2011). The Personal Librarian Programme was devised to fill this need.

The Librarians involved in this programme include staff from all sections of the Library: circulation, faculty liaison and bibliographic/technical services. The training needs of staff who did not work directly with students were identified and the relevant training provided. The staff from Circulation and Bibliographic/Technical services sections identified a need to advance their knowledge on the use of library from a users’ perspective. The training focused on the following: “Brainstorming a research topic with a student”; “Identifying relevant databases to conduct a research topic” and “Conducting a search on relevant databases for the research
topic” – this included ‘different ways of devising an effective search technique’. The training ensured a good foundation for these librarians to develop their confidence to work with users.

The project, modeled on a similar programme at the Yale University Library in America, was also a direct result of Rhodes University Library’s involvement in the Carnegie Research Libraries Consortium (2009 – 2011) and a ten-week internship in the United States, seven weeks of which were spent at Yale University.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

“One of the most important projects undertaken in Rhodes University's 106-year history came to triumphant fulfillment on the evening of 4 November 2010, when the new Library was officially opened” (Rhodes Library website: The grand opening report).

“The building has been designed according to international best practice standards with features, such as an Information Commons, a Research Commons and group study areas, which will bring a strong user focus into the services provided. The creation of this high tech library with its new facilities and new services has necessitated an extensive revision of the existing library staffing structure in order to ensure that the services supplied from a bigger and better library building continue to be of the best quality” (Rionda, 2010).

After the opening of this state of the art building, it became necessary for the Library to change its service model and so the Faculty Liaison services model emerged. This was designed to improve both user services and support as well as to provide researchers with access to information at levels which had not been experienced previously. The aim of improving the support provided for academics and researchers was consistent with the Vice Chancellor’s goal of attracting more researchers to the university (Rionda’s unpublished Research Library’s consortium report, 2010).

In 2009, Rhodes University was included in a second group of three, making up the six South African Academic Libraries chosen to take part in the Research Libraries Consortium (RLC) which was funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The six research intensive Universities in South Africa in the consortium were the University of Cape Town; Wits University; University of Kwazulu Natal; Rhodes University; Stellenbosch University and the University of Pretoria. The purpose of the project was to “model transformation and enrichment in the support offered to researchers by South African academic libraries” and to do this by “taking advantage of existing strengths in South Africa’s leading academic libraries to sustain, improve, and consolidate the troubled research enterprise in our country”. The project had three components:

i) the Library Academy which focused on developing the research skills on existing library staff;

ii) the creation of the Research Portal which aimed to bringing digital resources together and made appropriate resources more easily accessible;
iii) The building of Research Commons, a popular space in the Library that provided both technological facilities and personal support for emerging researchers. (Darch & De Jager, Academy Roadshow, Feb. 2010).

Participation in Library Academy component of the project required the production of a research report. Later, a number of librarians were chosen to be part of a 10 week internship in the United States. Rhodes Library sent a total number of five librarians in 2011 and 2012 to participate in the United States internship.

The Rhodes University Personal Librarian Programme came about as a response to the unmet information literacy needs documented by the author (Gontshi, 2011) and is modeled on a similar programme at Yale University Library in America. The author spent seven weeks observing the programme at Yale during her 10-week Library Research Consortium internship to the United States in 2012.

In order to introduce the Personal Librarian programme, it is important to describe the work that was undertaken before the author travelled to the United States. In 2011, a study was conducted on the Economics 1 class at Rhodes University which sought to elicit the stakeholders’ perceptions of both Information Literacy and the interventions that were happening at Rhodes University at the time. In 2011, an Information Literacy intervention aimed at linking the development of Information Literacy to actual assignments set for students in an Economics 1 class was designed.

When students, who had participated in the new Information Literacy intervention were asked if they felt confident enough to approach a librarian and ask for help, some students indicated that they did not see the value of using the Library and that they did not feel they could ask the librarians for anything other than a book that was lost. The following comment was made by a student who had been quiet for most of the interview period and who spoke only in response to a direct probe:

Well we don’t really see the library, if you feel you are lost about where the book is, I don’t feel I could ask the librarians anything other than a book that I can’t find, ‘otherwise ‘what could they tell me?’; so that would be good to know.

It was the question ‘otherwise ‘what could they tell me?’ together with evidence that had been recorded in the study which suggested the need for further research, exploring the extent to which Librarians are visible to individual students. It also became important that librarians’ roles should be made more obvious to the students. (Gontshi’s unpublished Academy research report)

In order to answer the question posed by the 1st year student, a greater understanding of what the Undergraduate students were saying about Rhodes University Library became necessary. The 2012 Rhodes Library LibQual survey was especially valuable here when the Undergraduate comments section was analyzed revealing areas of dissatisfaction.
The LibQUAL+® survey results were processed initially by the Association of Research Libraries in the United States and then returned to Rhodes Library so that they could be further analyzed by library staff.

“The LibQUAL+® responses drew attention to a number of problem areas in the way services are offered in the library. These areas include professional services, study spaces, opening hours and off campus access to the Library’s information resources. As a result, the library staff has set about analyzing the three different dimensions in the survey (Affect of Service, Library as Place and Information Control) in detail so as to pinpoint those areas that are not meeting user expectations and to come up with solutions to the problems.

The graph below shows both the 2005 and 2012 overall desired and perceived mean scores for each of the three dimensions of library service quality measured.” (Rhodes Library website) accessed 22 August 2013.

**Library Service Quality**

![Graph](http://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/library/documents/newsletters/newsletter-v2issue1.pdf)


The shortcoming revealed in the affect of service measurement supported the author’s findings in her study. The LibQual results suggested that students were not only just looking for workshops that cater for their immediate needs, but were instead needing to develop a relationship with the librarians in order for learning of any nature to take place. Because of the diverse nature of the student body at Rhodes University, it is difficult for standard library workshops to meet the needs of every student. What was needed was a unique intervention that catered for everybody’s needs (Gontshi, 2011). The Personal librarian programme filled this need.
WHAT IS THE PERSONAL LIBRARIAN PROGRAMME?

Do you have a personal doctor, a personal banking consultant, a personal mechanic or a personal preference on where you shop? Are you happy to just go to any doctor you have heard about? If your answer is yes then this conversation might take a very different direction altogether. Let us base this discussion on the assumption that everybody achieves better results if they were to have personal relations in life. In all walks of life the personal relationship seems to be crucial. So why can’t it be applied to books or personal learning environments?

Can books talk back? Sometimes, in order to access, interpret, engage or use information you need somebody to mediate that process. In the classroom, the mediator could be your tutor or your lecturer but in the library it is more likely to be a librarian.

Many children still see a librarian as an intimidating figure. Some young university students have carried those perceptions over to university. Going to the public or school library as a child to find a nice novel to read for the holidays is vastly different from going to the university library to find resources that are critical to your academic success.

WHY THE PERSONAL LIBRARIAN PROGRAMME AT RHODES UNIVERSITY?

One of the distinctive features which evolved as early as 1905 in Rhodes’ history was the tutorial system, which was adapted from the Oxbridge model. Each student was assigned to a staff member who took a personal interest in his or her work and welfare. “As numbers increased, students were assigned tutors and tutorial groups within academic departments, providing a forum for the lively debate characteristic of a Rhodes education”. Despite steady growth, Rhodes is still the smallest university in South Africa whose excellence is in part a product of its smallness. Classes are still small enough to make individual tuition in tutorial groups feasible. (Rhodes University website) http://www.ru.ac.za/rhodes/introducingrhodes/historyofrhodes/.

To continue with the personal element described above, it is now the responsibility of librarians to go the personal route with Rhodes students. What is interesting here is that the university academic departments recognized the need for personalization by matching a student to the tutor. The above system is no different from the Personal Librarians’ idea of matching a student to a personal librarian.

As has been discussed in the introduction, the journey to launching the new Personal Librarian programme at Rhodes University Library has been a lengthy one. We hoped to achieve the following with the programme:

- To bridge the information literacy gap between the classroom and the Library;
- To provide a less confident student with a safe platform to explore their learning;
- To accommodate different learning styles which the classroom environment may fail to address;
To foster an understanding in the mind of the student of the role the library plays in the success of their academic pursuit; and

To encourage Rhodes Library Staff to keep abreast with global research practices.

However, there were questions to be asked. Some of these included:

- Are we not already providing the personal librarian services by having our Faculty Services model?
- How is Personal Librarian unique to the whole range of interventions that the libraries have implemented over the years in their efforts to reach students?
- If this a unique intervention, why have South African Libraries not discovered it yet? Or has it really not been discovered?
- If somebody in South Africa has discovered it, why have they not implemented it in their library?

As a result of these important questions a familiarity with the literature that has grounded the programme over the years in universities in the United States was essential.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to answer some of the questions referred to earlier, it is important to take account of earlier studies, look into the history which shaped our library services and then move gradually into the current situation in South Africa before arriving at what we envisage to be an ideal model. The desire for a personalized library service became apparent in the early 1980s as was recorded by a short article arguing the need for a personal service (Bailey, 1984).

In the early 80’s there was evidence of “libraries going personal” (Bailey, 1984). The model of library services as cited by literature during the 80s is perceived to be a rigid structure. Historically, library collections were often physically separated from the users. The above scenario presents some obvious challenges if library services were to continue the way they were in the past. One might pose a question: “how did the 80s student succeed if libraries were an inflexible structure that stored wealth of information without facilitating access for the users?” However, it is important to note that the librarians were not actively trying to be barriers to knowledge; instead a librarian was often perceived by a user as protecting the library collections from the users. The desire was to develop library collections that would serve the needs of its users. Carefully following Rhodes University Library’s history, the focus was strategic to the success of the users. Reading Rhodes Library history, it is evident that libraries constantly focused on improving library spaces, and incorporated library services within new structures that emerged. Library spaces were critical criteria that informed the library services.
“A significant achievement of the new library building is its response to meeting the needs of the new generation of student and researchers who, having never known a world without the Internet or mobile connections, are seeking new kinds of study, learning and work spaces as well as using new ways to seek and find information. A marvel of the library is that it is so much more than a repository of printed collections” (Thomas, 2010).

Thomas cites a critical issue in the above quote, as she presents a hybrid library. She immediately invites libraries to be forward thinking, with the type of user in mind, and highlights a critical point about the library, ‘it is so much more than a repository of printed collections’ (Thomas, 2010).

Before discussing Bailey’s article it is important to illustrate diagrammatically what literature describes as the 80s model of service. The following diagram was created with the intention of providing a visual presentation of the users’ perceptions of library services in the past. Whilst the frowning face in the diagram is an unfair representation of a Librarian, it does give a clear picture of what might have been the user’s perceptions at the time; it is those perceptions that prevented the users from actively engaging with the librarians. In turn, the librarians might have been focusing more on improving library collections for the user and overlooking the important component of library services of taking the library to the user by actively seeking to find a space in the users’ territory in order to meet the needs of the user. Another question arises; “whose responsibility was it to recognize the need for information, and then taking the step of finding that information?”

The 80’s model of library services

Bailey describes this model service by comparing it with the visit to the bank. In the bank he suggests that a loan seeker might be more successful in obtaining the loan if there was some personal guidance from an expert in the banking services (Bailey, 1984). In a similar manner a student looking for information might not be able
to find it without the personal assistance of a librarian. Students’ perceptions of libraries were a barrier to recognizing the assistance that the librarians could provide and consequently they were not able to access the information efficiency on their own. Therefore, it is evident in Bailey’s article that the students needed a personal librarian to facilitate the process of not only finding information, instead giving the user an exceptional personal learning experience just by being available to discuss the students’ needs that might arise at any given time.

As mentioned in the introduction, Rionda’s article becomes critical in demonstrating how the Faculty Liaison Librarian (FLL) model was introduced at Rhodes University Library. She indicates that the introduction of the FLL services were a response to the building of a new Library.

In an interview with Gwenda Thomas, the previous Director of Rhodes University Library, Rionda was given the following information regarding the thinking that led to the introduction of Faculty Liaison services: “One of the main strategic objectives behind the establishment of the Faculty Liaison Librarian services model was the need to include a more robust user focus into the Library services. Before the introduction of this model, the Rhodes Library had an effective grouping of administrative staff and a lesser percentage of professionally trained librarians. For example, 50% of the staff in fairly senior positions were working in Technical services while 25% of the remaining 50%, who dealt directly with library users, did not have library training at all. There was a need for the library to be proactive and research supportive through a vibrant subject librarian service. As a result, the Faculty Liaison Services model (FLS) was born” (Rionda’s personal communication with Gwenda Thomas, 2010).

Therefore, it makes sense to introduce the Faculty Liaison Services model as a development arising out of the 80s model of library services which is illustrated above. Nevertheless, library management should be aware that users’ needs are constantly changing, requiring a change in library services. In addition to the staffing requirements dictated by the new library space, the FLL model was introduced as a direct result of these changing user needs. Mbali describes a Faculty Liaison Librarian as the librarian who liaises with one or more academic units, departments or faculties to ensure that their library-related needs are addressed. The needs of faculty members and graduate students include research, teaching and collections. Drawing from Mbali’s study and the nature of the questions that she sought answers to, the Faculty Liaison Librarian can be described as a link between Faculty, students and information.

The FLL connects students to information, encouraging the students to become independent researchers. Kotter’s study on “Bridging the great divide: Improving relations between librarians and classroom faculty” articulates “a rationale for seeking improved librarian faculty relations, explores various methods for evaluating quality librarian faculty relations”. Kotter argues that “once librarians and classroom faculty are committed to building and maintaining good relations, the benefits will interact and reinforce one another, with numerous positive ramifications for everyone involved. Perhaps in this way the library, no matter what its future form, can
move closer to becoming the heart of the university” (Kotter, 1999). A few years later, in his student newspaper article, “The library just got personal” Ndima, a 1st year student at Rhodes University, supports Kotter’s argument. “The library is arguably the heart of any tertiary institution and at Rhodes University it is no different” (Ndima, 2013).

The Faculty Liaison Librarian services model below gives a fair picture of the current situation in libraries as discussed above. In the FLL model, the student is expected to work through the Faculty Liaison Librarian in order to access information, with the aim of encouraging them to become independent researchers.

**Faculty Liaison Librarian services model**

![Diagram showing the Faculty Liaison Librarian services model]

As has been described earlier, the Faculty Liaison service model was introduced at Rhodes University library to provide a more pro-active, user-focused and research supportive library service. It is primarily aimed at delivering services that supported academics and post-graduate researchers in their research, writing and scholarship (Rionda, 2010).

Before introducing the Personal Librarian service model, it is important to note that the Personal Librarian programme was introduced at Rhodes with the primary aim of targeting 1st year students in an attempt to bridge an Information Literacy gap that has been observed to exist between high school and university. To ensure an easier start for the 1st year student at university we set out 3 goals which focused the pilot project in 2013:

i) Introduction of the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC);

ii) Off-campus access; and

iii) Introduction of libguides.
The pressures that the students experience when they first enter university were taken into careful consideration when the Personal Librarian service model was introduced. Fitzgerald’s article “Making the leap from High School to College” became important in setting the above mentioned goals. “Many high school graduates, accustomed to easy access in high school, struggle in college. In their first semester they must read reams of difficult text, take comprehensive exams that require analysis not covered in class, and write papers that synthesize ideas from multiple resources. Unprepared to handle the volume and level of academic work, they fail” (Fitzgerald, 2004). Based on the understanding of the battles 1st year students are faced with together with the author’s findings in her previous work, previous experiences of working as a faculty Liaison Librarian and the discussions with the current Rhodes Library Director, we arrived at the above goals in 2013.

**HOW IS PERSONAL LIBRARIAN DIFFERENT FROM FACULTY LIAISON MODEL?**

This has been a common question for the Personal Librarian Team at Rhodes Library since the inception of the Project in April 2013. Other South African academic libraries have shown interest in knowing the difference between the Faculty Liaison model and the Personal Librarian model. We will start by discussing the Faculty Liaison model as it has been structured at Rhodes University Library. We will do this by taking into consideration some of the documents that have been written by Rhodes librarians, an important resource that provides a story about Rhodes University and its relationship to the library. These include the unpublished research reports of Rhodes library staff members who attended the Research Libraries Consortium (RLC) as described above. We will discuss two important unpublished reports, one of these reports has already been discussed in the introduction as it documents the inception of the Faculty liaison model together with the building of a new library. When the new library was built, the Faculty liaison model was incorporated into the new structure (Rionda, 2010). The second report, Mbali’s unpublished research report, documents a case study of how supervisors and Postgraduate students experience the role of Faculty Liaison Librarians at Rhodes Library. Mbali interviewed 12 Psychology Masters students and 4 Psychology Masters supervisors. When the twelve Masters students were asked if they knew about faculty liaison librarians and their roles, 2 said “yes” and 10 said “no”’. Further questions were asked about how often they interacted with the faculty liaison librarian of which 9 said “never” and 3 said “occasionally”. Again, judging from responses from further questions about the library of whether it has met their research needs, 9 of the 12 students said “yes”.

Interestingly, the responses from the research supervisors were not significantly different from those of their students. When the four supervisors were asked if they knew about the faculty liaison librarians and their roles, 2 of the 4 said “yes”. Out of the 2 who indicated that they knew about the faculty liaison role, only 1 indicated that the use the FLS regularly. When they were asked if their FLL knew the research agendas of their departments, all 4 supervisors indicated that they “did not know”.

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It is difficult to draw conclusions from the above discussion about the Faculty Liaison Librarian at Rhodes library as many other factors need to be considered here, for example, both groups might have had many interactions with the Faculty Liaison Librarian without them knowing what they are called. It must also be considered that the Faculty Liaison model at Rhodes University Library had only been introduced in the previous year (2010). Additionally, the way in which the questions were asked might have affected their answers, as well as the sample size. Mbali’s interpretation of her results suggested that the Faculty Liaison Librarians needed to be more visible especially in the academic departments. Here again, it should be borne in mind when these studies were conducted; the Faculty Liaison model at Rhodes University Library was still in its infancy (Rionda, 2010). Whilst the Faculty Liaison model focuses on providing services to the faculty, the Personal Librarian Model compliments these services by making what the library can offer more obvious to the students. In his article, “Personal librarians: the answer to increasing patron contact may be simpler than we think”, Nann suggests that libraries introducing a Personal Librarian programme should not even see it as a new programme, but rather as a “tweak” to existing efforts to reach students (Nann, 2010).

The Personal Librarian model does not wait to be discovered, it is an outreach programme that caters for 1st years as they enter university. The programme is introduced to students even before they identify that they have a need. The programme does not impose itself on the students; but instead invites the students to participate and provide feedback with the view of tailoring the services according to the needs of the students; hence the programme takes a pro-active approach.

**WHO IS A PERSONAL LIBRARIAN?**

In the light of what has been discussed above, a Personal Librarian is someone who has come to remove the barriers that prevent students from finding help. The attributes of the Personal Librarian who is in the making at Rhodes University Library will depend on the expectations communicated by the students themselves in the information that has been collected by the team through surveys conducted this year.

Ideally, a personal librarian should have the following:

- Good interpersonal skills,
- Professionalism – whilst deciding to go personal, one needs to remember that the relationship needs to be kept as professional as possible in order to achieve and maintain trust.
- Open-mindedness and be able to go an extra mile to help the student or be able to refer them to the relevant help. For example, Nann stresses that at Yale Law Library the personal librarian programme does not expect that the personal librarian will be the person who actually provides assistance to the student in every instance, but the personal librarian is rather the student’s point of contact to help the
student identify who could best help with the particular issue she or he is facing at the time (Nann, 2010).

- An ability to value the uniqueness of the individual – the personal librarian should respect and understand the individual context and history a particular student brings to university. It is through the above that a comfortable environment for learning is created.

The following model demonstrates the envisaged relationship between a student and a personal librarian. As mentioned above, the Personal Librarian (PL) does not wait to be approached by a student; but instead reaches out to the student by telling them what the PL can do for them.

**Personal Librarian model – Ideal model of service 2013**

The following promise was adapted from Yale University Library website to fit the Rhodes Library situation:

**My promise to you as a Personal Librarian is to:**

- Keep you informed about Library Events with periodic e-mail messages highlighting new resources and programmes, as well as with notices and timely reminders, for example about extended Library hours during Swot week and exams
- Answer your questions about Library policies, procedures and services, such as RefWorks workshops etc
• Assist you with finding information for research assignments, by helping you articulate your research question, formulate search strategy and identify the best information sources
• Provide you with information on how you can contact the RU IT Help Desk should you need assistance in setting up your computers on the RU network

ARE WE SITTING BEHIND THE REFERENCE DESK WAITING TO BE DISCOVERED?

The reference hubs at Rhodes University were designed to break the barriers between the students and the librarians, it was hoped that the student would find it easier to approach a librarian when in need of help.

Nann’s study to determine whether or not to retain the reference desk reveals surprising results. In the study, the librarians asked the students to talk about the manner in which they preferred to approach a librarian, whether the desk was seen as a help or a hindrance, or whether they preferred to go to the librarian in his/her office. He indicates his surprise at the number of people for whom the desk was a hindrance. These students were shy about being seen asking for help (Nann, 2010). Could this be the case with our Rhodes 1st year students? It was suspected that this might be a problem that affects the entire undergraduate population at Rhodes University. As a result of this suspicion together with the request by the students themselves to have the PL programme extended to the entire undergraduate population, the team have decided to extend the programme to the entire undergraduate population in 2014.

Snippets from a student’s perspective

“The transition from high school to university is sometimes a daunting one. First years find themselves thrown into the deep end, drowning in tuts, tests and assignments”

“A librarian here at Rhodes University, implemented a pilot project that seeks to bridge the gap between librarians and students”

“As a first-year student, if you realise you need some support with all those soul-crushing tuts and assignments, you can send a simple email to any of the 13 librarians requesting a personal librarian of your own. A librarian will then contact you to arrange when you want to meet and discuss how he/she can assist you”

“One thing to remember about the program is that the librarians will not do the work for you. They will, however, discuss effective ways to research, reference and everything else that that significant in reaching your academic excellence. The personal librarians are friendly and supportive, removing any reservations students may have about meeting them”

“The program aims to show students that librarians are there for more than just taking out books. They are ready to support students from their very first day all the way to graduation”

“The personal librarian program aims to equip students with the knowledge of how to tackle academic concepts, but also seeks to make the library environment a little less intimidating”

Source: The library just got personal by Lwazi Ndima a (1st year Journalism student at Rhodes University and Nicolene Mkhathali is his personal librarian). The article was written as a result of the interview with the
If the personal element in the degree programme of an undergraduate student is compared to that of a postgraduate student, it is evident that postgraduate studies are automatically designed to include the personal element. When a student registers for an Honours or a Master’s degree at University, he or she is assigned a Supervisor. A relationship is built over the period of time between the two parties: the relationship has to be based on trust, professionalism between the two parties and has to be characterised by two-way communication. On the other hand, an undergraduate student does not often get a personal lecturer or even a personal tutor who will provide support to them while they complete their degree.

SETTING UP THE PERSONAL LIBRARIAN PROGRAMME AT RHODES UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

The programme was introduced to the entire Rhodes Library staff in the form of a presentation after discussions and presentations to the Rhodes Library’s management. The aim of the presentations was to introduce the theory behind the programme, sharing what the author had observed in the United States including the seven week stay at Yale University. It was decided that Principal Librarians would continue providing services to the Postgraduate students whilst Librarians and Assistant Librarians joined the programme with the aim of strengthening the services to the undergraduate students. Immediately after the presentations, the programme saw 13 Librarians signing up to set out on the 2013 pilot project. 1st year students lists were obtained covering 1300 1st year students. The lists were divided amongst the 13 Personal Librarians; each librarian was assigned an average of 100 students with the exception of the undergraduate librarian who allocated about 250 students.

METHODS USED TO ASSESS THE PERSONAL LIBRARIAN PROGRAM

We conducted a survey during the Personal Librarian’s main launch of 19th of April 2013. This period happened to be very critical in the life of our programme because the needs of our 1st year students were largely unknown to us. How could we even begin to understand what to provide for our 1st year student if we didn’t know what these students’ experiences with libraries had been before they joined university? If our 1st year student has had encounters with librarians before and whilst at university, what informed those interactions and at what stage did these occur? Who started the conversations? Has there even been a reason for these conversations to take place whilst at university? If yes, whose responsibility was it to start and to maintain these conversations?

Even though, we had hoped to launch the programme immediately after the Orientation week (O-week), this was not possible as we were still busy organising the logistics of our launch, establishing how best to introduce the programme to the 1st year students in a way that would meet their needs. Whilst we decided to go personal,
it remained crucial to note that the relationships we created with the 1st year students were of a professional nature.

A study at the University of Rochester by Foster & Gibbons talks about a ‘black box’ that largely conceals the processes undertaken by the student between the time they receive a research assignment and the finished, submitted product. The aim of the research was to take a peep into that box to see what they could find and then tailor library services accordingly (Foster & Gibbons, 2007).

The Rhodes Personal librarians also wanted to put aside assumptions and embark on a journey to learn more about the 1st year students, gaining an understanding of their academic challenges in order to tailor library services according to the findings. To find out more about the students, we invited them to a launch to meet their Personal Librarian and asked them a question “what do you expect from your Personal Librarian?” The actual responses were also retained, as they provided the Personal Librarians with an insight into the students’ individual needs.

One form of assessment of the Personal Librarians program was through surveys. In the following section my colleagues, Sue Rionda and Philip Clarke describe the survey process.

**Personal Librarian Assessment Surveys by Sue Rionda & Philip Clarke**

The Personal Librarian project has been a learning curve. The initial launch and survey, held on the 19 April 2013, was aimed particularly at First Year students. Each Personal Librarian was given a list of 100 First Year students and, using the Contacts option on Microsoft Outlook, was asked to set up a mailing list including the name of each of these students. An email introducing the Personal Librarian programme was then sent to each student by their own Personal Librarian. A week later this was followed by an invitation to attend a launch and meet their Personal Librarian “in Person” in the Main Library Foyer. When setting up the first launch, the Personal Librarians felt that while they believed that they knew what the Students wanted, it would be best to put the question of “What do you expect from your Personal librarian” to the students themselves. Although the setting, a launch table in the Main Foyer of the Library, didn’t allow the students much time to consider their reply, it was hoped that because of the short notice, the students would respond with their genuine feelings. One of the negative effects of this was that there was a risk of “Silly” answers.

When the results were initially received, it was decided that the analysis should be simple, letting the responses speak for themselves. After reading through the answers carefully, the results were grouped into 4 broad categories on an excel spreadsheet:

1. **Friendliness and willingness to help**

2. **Research & Study guidance**
3. Assistance in finding information – OPAC; Online resources

4. Practical assistance: photocopying, printing, loan procedures

Once the grouping had been completed, a graph was generated giving an indication of the trends. The actual responses were also retained, as they provided the Personal Librarians with an insight into the students’ individual needs.

To maintain the momentum begun by the April launch, and with the discovery that the Extended Studies students had somehow been left off the list of First Year students who had been invited to the April Launch, it was decided that 3 further launches would be held on three consecutive Fridays starting the second week of term (July/August 2013). As the Personal Librarian Programme hadn’t been in operation for very long and to see if the expectations of the Programme by the students had changed after they had written their first examinations, it was determined that the same survey question, “What do you expect from your Personal Librarian”, would be asked. The first of these launches, particularly aimed at the Extended Studies Students, was held in the Library Foyer on the first Friday of the Second term (26 July 2013). On the Monday of that week, an e-mail invitation was sent to the Extended Studies students by the librarians responsible for coordinating their library courses and this was followed up with a reminder sent out on the Thursday. Unfortunately, very few of the Extended Studies students were able to attend the Friday launch due to busy lecture schedules and suspected delays in receiving the invitations. Nevertheless, it was hoped that the students who missed out at this launch would be able to attend the launch on the following Friday (02/08/13).

This launch on the 2nd of August became known as the “Day Kaif Launch”, because it was held in the area outside the kiosk that opens daily to serve food and beverages to the students. A cake in the shape of the Personal Librarian badge was used both to encourage the students to participate in the survey and to market the Personal Librarian programme: once the students had answered the survey question, they were given a slice of cake. Earlier in the week, an invitation and reminder were sent to all First Year students, this time making sure that the Extended Studies Students were included! This particular launch was a resounding success. In fact the opportunity to have a slice of cake for tea proved to be so popular that it became very difficult to limit the survey to just First Year students which resulted in it being extended to include First, Second, Third, Fourth year students and even postgraduates. The responses to the survey were analyzed in the same way as those of the April survey but according to the year of study of the student (2013, 2012, 2011 and 2010 respectively).
Results and discussion

The Personal Librarian pilot project in 2013 was primarily directed at 1st year students. The discussion will only focus on the comparative graph.

Pre & post-exam comparison – 1st year students 2013

The results support the findings reported in the Information Literacy intervention conducted by Gontshi in 2011. In this research, Gontshi reports that when students were asked “How would you want the Information Literacy course to be offered differently?”, they said it would have been better if the librarians understood them and considered their career needs before they “taught them anything” (Gontshi, 2011).

One hundred and thirty-three comments were received from 101 1st year students before the exam. The question asked was: “what do you expect from your Personal Librarian?” The comments were grouped thematically as follows:

Friendliness & Willingness to Help – 34.6%

Assistance in Finding Information – OPAC; Online Resources – 29.3%

Research & Study Guidance – 23.3%

Practical Assistance: photocopying; printing; loan procedures – 12.8%
According to these findings, 1st year students are shown as caring about open, friendly relationships in order for them to be able to learn. This need is human nature. Majority of Psychological Human needs studies seem to agree that humans are needs beings. Deci & Ryan’s article “The ‘what’ and ‘why’ of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior” discusses the concept of needs. Deci & Ryan consider needs to be innate rather than learned and therefore to give motivational content to life (Deci & Ryan, 2000). It should be understood that, the timing of the survey might have contributed to the type of feedback received. Before exams, and only in the beginning of the 2nd Semester, students’ experiences are vastly different after being engaged in processes like exams.

Sample survey comments from 1st years before exams:
- “Must be kind and help when struggling, be patient when asked questions”
- “I expect that my personal librarian will be willing to help me anytime and not get tired”
- “Be there when I need help. So far I am happy; they are doing a great job”
- “I expect them to have a smile on their faces then only will I be happy to ask for help”
- “Assistance with research with digital and physical records and with academic work”

Post-exam – 02 August “Day kaif launch” 1st years to 4th or Post-Grads
In total, 541 comments were received (270 comments from non-1st year students, 265 from 1st year students and 6 folded "blanks" (without comment)). Students were asked the same question that was asked before they wrote exams “what do you expect from your Personal Librarian?”

The same thematic structure that emerged from the previous survey to the same students emerged. Feedback received presented as follows:

- **Friendliness and willingness to help** – 39%
- **Assistance in finding information** – 41%
Research & study guidance – 5%

Practical assistance: photocopying, printing, loan procedures – 15%

In comparison, between the post exam and pre-exam for the 1st year student, it is clear that when 1st year students were still new at university, they longed for a friendly, comfortable environment in order to enable a conducive learning environment for them. Even though these students are at university for study, 40% said they wanted assistance in finding information followed by a close 39% of students who were still asking for a friendly environment. Nonetheless, these findings were not new to us, they were confirming previous studies of studying 1st year students. The results were not different from our suspicions of 1st years needs changing but still valuing friendliness of the Librarians.

The post-exam situation produced different results from the pre-exam period. The graphs show us that having written exams the students’ needs changed. The 2013 new students which are presented as 1st year students still informed our findings that they wanted friendliness and assistance in finding information close to each other. Again, Gontshi’s findings on previous study of 1st year Economics students, students expressed a need for a personal approach when they asked the librarians to understand and consider their needs before they teach them anything, are confirmed. It seems that a relationship is what these students are looking for (Gontshi, 2011). Even though, we were looking for something new in the findings, the students confirmed the human nature of needs.

Sample students comments after the exam, some verbal and some written on the survey form during the cake day (02nd August 2013):

- Just because we weren’t made friends with librarians during our 1st year does not mean that we must be excluded from your programme – heartbroken postgraduate student verbal comment

- Provided with guidelines on research material – 2012 student (2nd year)

- Helpful, Friendly and Approachable – 2012 student (2nd year)

Analysing the results above were not clear cut as we also discovered 4 blank folded survey forms during the analysis of results, which might suggest that people wanted the incentive more than providing us with feedback.
The graph below shows the trend across the entire student population surveyed after writing exams.

Similarly, the law results on 2013 new students are not different from the main library results except that the Law sample size was smaller than the main library sample. What is evident across the scope of the student body is how much students value friendships with librarians; this is mainly followed by the need for assistance in finding information.

**Law Library graph showing a trend according to the level of study**

A total of 105 comments were received and grouped, further analysis was created with the aim of presenting the trends across the entire student population at the Law Library.

Some comments from the Law Library students:
- Friendly, smile, helpful librarians who appear to enjoying their job. A thorough knowledge of resources and technology always helps, Rhodes law librarians rock! - mature student 4th year
• Lucky and Sindi are fantastic, they always know which books are on short loan, they are always friendly and willing to help - mature student 4th year

• Friendliness, Efficiency, helpfulness, Law library scores highly on all 3 counts – mature student enrolled in 2005

• I think this is a good program that will be useful to first years mostly. I expect them to be available when needed always, smiling so they can be approachable - 1st year student

• To be visible at all times for the easy reach to anyone who needs help to know the ins and outs of the library and not to delay students finding information needed

The trend that emerges from the law library students’ analysis again is similar to those results discussed above.

The next section records the experiences of the Personal Librarian Team. Each personal librarian was asked to comment as shown in the appendix 2

Debbie Martindale, a Personal Librarian, was instrumental in organizing the “Day kaif launch” and she reflected on her experiences as follows: As one of the outreach activities, the team planned for an event to be held outside the Library. We chose to host the event at the Day Kaif which is the student café zone below the Library, and to provide cake as an additional draw card.

I approached Pick & Pay (our local supermarket) with a letter requesting quotes for eight slabs of cake to be decorated on-site. The team was delighted to hear that Pick & Pay offered to sponsor the cakes and decorators, as they viewed the program to be an essential benefit for all students.

Each Personal Librarian emailed their students to invite them to meet their Personal Librarian and the team at the Day Kaif on 2nd August 2013, and to bring their invite so as to receive their slice of cake.

Early morning of the ‘Cake Day’ dawned with the head baker and his assistant arriving with three large trestle tables, loads of tinfoil, buckets of purple or green butter-cream, and 18 slabs of cake (ten more than requested). They used our ‘Personal Librarian’ badge logo to decorate with the butter cream. On-site decoration of the cake created intrigue and discussions from the growing student crowds as the morning progressed. Sponsorship banners were set up as the cake was cut into over 500 pieces.

Students were content to answer a short questionnaire before they received their slice of cake. It appeared they enjoyed meeting with various personal librarians in this informal way. The quad became a space filled with chatter and a vibrancy that only an outdoors event can create.
The event was initially planned for first year students, but the team decided early on during the event, that we should include all students because of the realization that all students need Personal Librarians.

The ‘cake day’ was as event that involved the Grahamstown Business community. Their sponsorship meant that we had more cake to offer, which ultimately led to a ‘policy’ change to open the program to all students. Feedback has highlighted what the students expect from their Librarians, and also how the first years needs differ to the second years, third years and postgraduates. This feedback will allow us to refine our activities and services. It is evident that the huge success of this event was based on the ‘cake’. It is hoped that this event will become an annual event at the start of each academic year, especially as our Pick & Pay has indicated they would like to sponsor the event annually.

**MEASURING THE IMPACT OF THE “DAY KAIF LAUNCH” AS OUR MAJOR MARKETING STRATEGY**

This section explores the impact of what our undergraduate librarian, Personal Librarian coordinator nicknamed as “cake day”. Bearing in mind that Rhodes University make up half of the small rural Grahamstown, it is easy for librarians and students to bump into each other in shopping malls and recognize each other. Most of this is due to the smallness of the town and the university itself.

Immediately after Personal Librarians experienced the success of the “cake day” as the major marketing strategy, it became very difficult for some of us to walk around town without being approached by students who were offering ideas for our future “cake days”. What was most intriguing to us was that some of these students were Postgraduate students who are in their 1st year of study at Rhodes University. During the initial launch of the programme we discovered that the winner of the 1st prize was an Honours student who because she joined Rhodes University in 2013 and has a 2013 student number, was included in the 1st year undergraduate list.

*Measuring the impact of the “Day Kaif, cake day” by Nabisa Mbali*

After the cake day I had a number of students coming not so many though but it was a turnover which was much better because after the initial launch I had about 3 students. After the cake day I had an influx of about 5 students.

This year I had also set out to attend lectures at the on Journalism class where I acknowledged our 1st year student who wrote and published the article on Personal Librarian programme. Because of my lecture attendance, in addition to being their Personal Librarian in the Journalism class, I was getting a number of students each day. Some students wanted to chat generally and sought advice regarding their work; some specifically wanted help for their academics because for the first time this year Journalism & Media Studies class was required to submit an assignment. They were also required to submit reports and articles for
publishing in the first semester. They informed me that if they knew that I was their personal librarian at that time they would have approached me for help during the first semester already.

My Personal Librarian experiences by Nabisa Mbali, Faculty Liaison Librarian – Humanities & Education

One of my Key Performance Areas as a Faculty Librarian is User Education. Each year I am required to provide Information literacy training workshops for Postgraduate and Undergraduate students. Some classes are fairly big and I would be required to go and do a workshop in the classroom during a lecture period. Even though the relationship I developed with the students was a professional one, it was far from being personal and even students approached me with academic queries. When the Personal Librarian programme was introduced and when I sent emails to my assigned list of students, the relationship changed drastically because the students were encouraged to come and talk to their Personal Librarian in a more informal environment. That is when the students felt free to come and talk about the challenges they experienced daily regarding their academic performance.

I recently left Rhodes University to join the University of the Western Cape, but before I left Rhodes University, I experienced an unusual encounter with one of the students referred to me by the Principal Librarian (Ms Mtshizana). The student happened to be one of my Personal Librarian students registered in the Journalism & Media Studies (JMS) which I am the subject specialist for. The student was clearly devastated, emotional and was in tears. I invited her into one of the conference rooms, which provided privacy as she was crying uncontrollably.

After being made comfortable, the student reported that she was not coping academically and she wanted to give up at that moment. I discovered that the student was an 'A' student in JMS and she was somewhere in the region of 60% achievement in her other subjects. The student basically felt that she was underperforming with her other subjects and could not understand why that was the case. She was feeling overwhelmed with a number of assignments due. The student felt that the transition from High School to University has been challenging for her because she no longer had the support from her mother and family in order to ensure that she achieved the high scores she needed. “At University, we are so pressurised, we are expected to achieve, but I find it difficult to continue at this stage, I want to go home to my mother where I will get the support.” The student continued by saying that she is the baby of the family and because of that, she finds it difficult to cope at a university that is close to 1000km away from home. With the help of other Personal Librarians, the student was given some library related counselling. This involved us extending a personal invitation to the student to visit the library again once she had been to Counselling Services at Rhodes. I walked with her across to the
Rhodes Counselling services after making an appointment for her and also followed up after the counselling session.

Later, the student acknowledged the Personal Librarian programme and explained that she did not know that the programme would also allow for discussing other personal issues that could affect the success of her academics. “I think this is a very good programme, the fact that it allows us to talk and cry about issues at the same time”.

_Nabisa Mbali, the Faculty Liaison Librarian, has left Rhodes and joined the University of the Western Cape. She is planning to replicate the Personal Librarian at the University of the Western Cape._

**Personal Librarian Law Library Report by Lucky Xaba & Sindy Gule**

The Law Library, known as the Alastair Kerr Law Library, is named after a former Head of Department at the Law Faculty. It is mainly a reference library, and most items may not be removed from the library by undergraduates. Resources include law reports, legislation and other government publications, reference works, books and journals. This library is a small branch library with larger number of law students. These students include the students who major in law subjects but doing other degrees i.e. Social Science, Commerce, humanities etc, together with the LLB students who are now in their fourth and fifth year.

With regards with the Personal Librarian experience, the Law Faculty Librarians have discovered the following; due to working closely with law students librarians have become close to students as friends, the structure forms one big family. It is easy in this library for the librarian to know most of the students by their first names because they see the same set of students using the library every day. The set up automatically makes the librarian a personal librarian because students do not come only for books, but also for personal and academic challenges. The structure makes the students and the librarian comfortable with each other and the environment is friendlier.

During the Personal Librarian Launch at the Law Faculty Branch Library, the aim was to use all Law students (i.e. undergraduate students who major in Law courses, but are doing other degrees as well as the LLB students who are in their fourth and fifth year). It was difficult to only target the undergraduates. The result of the survey shows that most of the law students are happy with the librarian’s service provision, but they are not happy with the lack of physical resources in the library, i.e., not enough computers, staplers, photocopier and the absence of a cash machine etc.

**Undergraduate Librarian experience by Pelisa Vanda**

The Personal Librarian programme (PLP) came to my attention in Dec 2012 after Vuyo Gontshi introduced the concept to me and asked me to be the co-ordinator of the program. On the 24 January 2013 we presented the
concept to Rhodes University Library staff (RUL) and it received an overwhelming positive response. On 19 April 2013 the Personal Librarian Programme was launched.

As the undergraduate librarian, after several calls for on-going Information Literacy workshops for undergraduates, I discovered that Rhodes University (RU) students do not respond to a call for library training/workshops if those workshops are not arranged through their lecturers but they will only respond in numbers when their lecturer is involved. I have also learnt that, undergraduate students at Rhodes University who are using Information Commons do not understand that they need to consult librarians unless they have been instructed by the lecturer. They rely on self-help service i.e. internet, and they will ask for help only when they are stuck in printing or when the network is unstable.

As the undergraduate librarian, I have also discovered that the study times of students differ from those of the librarians. This was also noted by Foster and Gibbons 2007 that “There is growing evidence that undergraduate students study in different ways than we do and they approach research in a different fashion than the professional librarians. By their own account, they stay up much later than we do, fit many more activities into a day, and stay in constant touch with each other via cell phones, instant messaging, and other electronic tools. By the time they are ready to do research and writing in the library, the librarians have gone home. Google, of course, never sleeps.” (Foster & Gibbons, 2007). Students most productive hours tend to be outside the librarian’s normal workday.

Cake day has made a quite significant impact towards the recognition of the programme, however, students still continued with their daily routine as before. They are aware that there is this program but they do not effectively use it in my section.

I had 2 students that came to me before the cake day i.e. first two weeks after the launch of PLP. I sometimes come across those students on campus or in the library, I greet them and ask if everything is still going well and their response will be yes everything is well. I did not have any students coming to me after the ‘cake day’.

**Social Media tools as marketing strategies**

*Facebook by Thandiwe Menze, Faculty Liaison Librarian, Science & Pharmacy*

Social media tools may be considered as indispensable to one’s life, either on a professional or personal level. Most recently, studies have found that a growing number of academic institutions, academic libraries in particular, are adopting social media tools in the delivery of information services to their patrons. The adoption of social media tools, towards the delivery of information services, is still fairly new at the Rhodes University Library; but the use thereof has seen a steady uptake.
The Personal Librarian programme, similarly to all initiatives at Rhodes University Library, has been featured at Rhodes University Library Facebook Page. The features in the Rhodes University Library Facebook Page have taken the form of calendar events and post of Personal Librarian events.

**Personal Librarian blog by Nicolene Mkhathali, Faculty Liaison Librarian: Humanities & Education**

A Personal Librarian (PL) blog was created to address the challenges faced by the Personal Librarian programme (PLP) after it has been launched. A blog as one of the social media tools is basically a journal that is available on the web, where individual or group of people records their opinion and information on a regular basis. Although the PL blog is currently not live to the public yet, it is anticipated that it will work at full capacity by the end of 2013. All the Personal Librarians have been made authors of the blog, giving them permission to post information regarding the PLP. The main purpose of this blog is to promote the Personal Librarian programme to our students, particularly our 1st years. A blog is designed to be a two way communication, so the PLs will be able to share and exchange information and ideas with the users through the use of commenting, as commenting is the most important feature in blogs. The idea is to open the blog to the public, meaning it is also going to be viewed internationally. To that end, people as far as Yale University and other libraries that have the same programme will be able to comment on the posted information. Furthermore, the PL team still needs to look at ways to market this blog.
Widening our scope: a realised opportunity of wearing many hats by Circulation and Technical services staff

These staff members do not work directly with the users in their job. They gained user experience because they joined Personal Librarian pilot project in 2013.

My experience as a Personal Librarian by Jabu Nene, Librarian in charge: Circulation Desk

I have been a Circulation librarian for over eighteen years, and have never had a chance to work in other sections of the library. I am now one of the 13 librarians who are participating in the Personal Librarian Programme. As these librarians are from all sections of the library, e.g. Faculty Liaison services, Technical Services as well as Circulation, the leader of the Personal Librarian programme developed a training program for all the librarians who form part of the Personal Librarian team and who do not work directly with the users. The training focused on how to help a student make sense of their research topic; and to construct a search.

The Personal Librarian Programme in 2013 is directed at 1st year students with the aim of supporting and helping them in their academic work. This has enabled me to widen my professional scope and I am now feeling more confident with handling queries that are directed to me without the need to refer all the time. I am also able to assist the group of students that is assigned to me with their research, referencing and more. I have found the PL programme to be significant to both students and librarians because of the relationship that it crafts between the two groups. I recommend that other librarians who need to grow in the librarianship profession join the Personal Librarian programme and take this opportunity as an advantage to broaden their expertise.

Roelen Clarke, Principal Librarian, who is in the Technical Services department and who normally does not work directly with the users has joined the programme and reflects on her user experience as follows:

A 1st year, one of the students in my Personal Librarian group, contacted me after the official launch of the PL Programme earlier this year.

She experienced problems with referencing techniques that formed part of an assignment she was busy with. She is a 1st year History student. At Rhodes University most departments use their own referencing styles. History students use the Oxford Referencing Style, with additional footnotes, and she had specific problems with creating footnotes on her tablet with the software available on her tablet. She came to the Library to see me and with the assistance of one of the faculty librarians for History we were able to help her to master the specific referencing style required by the History Department. She was very pleased with the assistance and personal attention we offered her to solve this problem. The outcome of this request by a student regarding referencing techniques for a specific department led to the incorporation of the different referencing styles required by the departments in the Library LibGuides.
CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

The following section records the moment of silence as our main challenge that the programme went through. All these experiences were reported 6 weeks after the initial launch (19 April 2013). It also records the lessons we learnt along the way as we continued to evaluate the programme after each event. Each person below shares their experience and feeling as it is. Nothing has been edited.

A moment of silence recorded by Sue Rionda

After I had sent out the letter introducing the Personal Librarian Programme to the 100 first year students that I had been assigned, I only received one response. Nevertheless that student came in to see me and find out more about the programme and so I was able to make personal contact. I was a little disappointed at this poor response rate until I heard from other Personal Librarians that they had also had a poor response rate. The project leader explained that other libraries had had similar experiences. It had been found at these libraries that the students had kept the e-mail and then had contacted the librarian when they needed help at a later stage.

A moment of silence recorded by Philip Clarke

After sending out the introductory PL letter, I received three requests for assistance from post-graduate students. I was concerned that the introductory e-mails that I had sent out were not being delivered to the students, possibly because of full inboxes or mailing errors, as after sending out about a 100 email I only received notification that about 20 had been received and read.

A moment of silence recorded by Nicolene Mkhathali

I have not received any response from my group of students except for a Journalism student that was referred by the project leader. The student requested assistance with his assignment but it turned out that he had no assignment questions. He promised to come back with the questions but never returned.

A moment of silence recorded by Fiona Charlton

- The student initially e-mailed me as he needed help on using webmail attachments. I showed him how to attach on webmail and then had a brief chat to him. He said he was really pleased to have had a chat and would contact me if he needed help in the future. I then received another e-mail from him and asked him to come and see me the following day so that I could help him. He never arrived.

- I also got another email from another student – I invited her to come and see me but she never turned up and I never heard from her again.
ACKNOWLEDGING SUCCESS FROM THE VOICES OF THE STUDENTS RECORDED

These were the very first comments that looked like success to us after we had introduced ourselves to students. Only a few contacted us, and we experienced an uncomfortable silent moment of only receiving 10 email replies from the entire 1300 students before the launch. The above situation pushed us to seek other ways of reaching out, for example, the “Day Kaif launch”.

"He said he was really pleased to have had the chat and would contact me if he needed help in the future”

“The session on the background about databases has been so helpful”

“My Personal Librarian is so cool”

“I’ve heard about this programme from my friend and would like to have a Personal Librarian too”

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The Personal Librarian programme at Rhodes University Library was introduced primarily to bridge the information literacy and info gap that has been observed to exist between high school and university. The Personal Librarian project has been a personal journey for each member of the 13 librarians who made up the Personal Librarian team in 2013. The road travelled has not been smooth and we had to learn how to work together as a team. The willingness and commitment of the librarians to the project has been evident. It is believed that 2013 has laid a solid foundation for the programme to build on. The primary aim of working together in a team was to bring into the programme the uniqueness of each individual in order to create a conducive and a comfortable learning environment for the 1st year student.

In her undergraduate publication “RU learning” Prof Chrissie Boughey stresses the importance of introducing a 1st year student to university. Boughey discusses the new kind of learning at university that is vastly different from high school. She says “coming to university is a challenge – and so it should be”. Boughey introduces universities as institutions of higher education that will push the student to think and work in ways which are different to those that they are used to. Boughey’s publication provides support for the establishment of the Personal Librarian programme, she educates the students on why they are at university and stresses the importance of student seeing themselves as ‘knowledge producers’ rather than ‘knowledge consumers’. It is hoped that this understanding will foster a culture of good scholarship and will assist the Personal Librarian programme to iron out some of the following issues that are facing 1st year students: plagiarism, understanding the need to reference, taking information at face value without criticizing it. Therefore, the Personal Librarian programme aims to help undergraduate students cope with these challenges in a friendly, supportive manner.

Judging from the expressed needs of the entire undergraduate student body, together with understanding the literature that emerged in the early 80s citing the formalization of the Personal Librarian programme for post-
graduate research students because of the level of scholarship they were engaged in, the Rhodes Personal Librarians have decided to open the programme to the entire undergraduate population in 2014.
Bibliography


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The Personal Librarian team: Pelisa Vanda, undergraduate Librarian at Rhodes University; Thandiwe Menze, Faculty Liaison Librarian, Science & Pharmacy; Fiona Charlton, Assistant Librarian, Humanities, Debbie Martindale, Faculty Liaison Librarian, Humanities; Nicolene Mkhatshali, Faculty Liaison Librarian, Humanities & Education; Philip Clarke, Librarian, Technical Services; Roelien Clarke, Principal Librarian: Digital Library Services; Sindy Gule, Assistant Librarian, Law; Lucky Xaba, Faculty Librarian:Branch Library Law; Jabu Nene, Librarian:User Access services;

Sue Rionda, Faculty Liaison Librarian, Commerce & Law – your encouragement and assistance in editing this work. Sue Rionda is also part of the Personal Librarian team; and

Nabisa Mbali, Faculty Liaison Librarian, Humanities & Education (Nabisa moved to the University of the Western Cape and her Personal Librarian students were transferred to a new Personal Librarian – she is planning to replicate the program at the University of the Western Cape).
• Ujala Satgoor, *Library Director, Rhodes University Library* – who provided us with a safe platform to explore, and for asking me difficult questions about the Personal Librarian programme from the start, forcing me to think outside the box, what an experience, thank you.

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• My girls, Kuhle & Iviwe – you had to have an absent mother for a while but your bravery and understanding was my strength.

• To God - without YOU, nothing would have been possible

Appendix 1

Name: …………………………………………………….

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Student Number: …………………………………

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What do you expect from your Personal Librarian? What do you expect from your Personal Librarian?

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Appendix 2

The following schedule was sent to the Personal Librarian team with the intention of bringing the uniqueness of each voice to the Personal Librarian report.

• A silent moment recorded, disappointments – Fiona Charlton (it is because of your questions that led to us thinking of creating a blog so as to invite the international audience, particularly Yale experiences so please conclude by saying that and Nicolene’s page will come under yours) & Please chat to each other throughout your writing.

• Everyone’s experiences on silent moments please (should feature in your own individual pieces)
- Undergraduate Librarian: Personal experiences of the Personal Librarian pilot project (how has Personal librarian added value in your new position of Undergraduate librarian?) – by Pelisa Vanda

- Audience (on social media): Facebook, Twitter etc & Mobile devices (can Personal Librarian be separated from mobile devices at Rhodes University Library? - by Thandiwe Menze

- Personal Librarian blog: conversations with Yale Library - by Nicolene Mkhathali (what led us going this route? What did we hope to achieve with this blog? The future projected etc …)

“**The aim of this blog is to invite the international audience to share their experiences with us during the early stages of our project especially Yale University library**”

- Methodology: Surveys as main research method – Sue Rionda & Philip Clarke (Talk about the different events and whether there were significant differences in the results.) I will draw in the component of what the mature students are saying from the survey

  This will come in the results discussion section as an opening page and everything else will be reference to it.

  - Launch surveys - categories (patterns)
  - Extended Studies programme

- “Getting to know your Personal Librarian” cake day as a creative marketing strategy (benefits of forging the local community relationships explored) – Debbie Martindale

  - Challenges/Lessons learnt – Everyone’s unique experiences as Personal Librarians

  - Law Library’s unique experiences Lucky Xaba & Sindy Gule

  - Results discussion & conclusions drawn – Intro by PC & SR

  Analysis by Vuyo Gontshi

  - Extending our scope: a realised opportunity of wearing many hats – by Roelien Clarke, Philip Clarke and Jabu Nene (This, I need you to talk about your own unique experiences of working with the users which is something that is outside your usual environment) this should be interesting and will encourage other staff out there to see the possibilities in the profession

  - My own Personal Librarian journey: a case of 1st year class lecture attendance at Rhodes University Journalism School by Nabisa Mbali (I need you to think about the impact your classroom attendance had on you and your students as a personal librarian) Bring in the aspect of your moving to UWC and whether you plan to replicate the idea at UWC – affecting other South African universities).

**Appendix 3**
The following questions were asked during the scheduled recorded interview between Lwazi Ndima and Vuyokazi Gontshi and an article was produced for the student newspaper at Rhodes University. It is hoped that the article promoted awareness about the Personal Librarian programme.

20 April 2013

Good day

My name is Lwazi, Journalism student, and I am doing some research on the implementation of the programme at Rhodes University.

I basically need you to explain how you view this new programme,

Do you think the programme is going to boost student performance in terms of academics.

Seeing that there is a small number of personal librarians. (13) I am wondering If you think that this will have an effect on the success of the programme.

The library is a very interrogating environment are you expecting people to take heed of this new opportunity?

Lastly, are you excited about the programme if so, why?

Thank you in advance

Warm Regards

Lwazi Ndima