

TOWARDS ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES FOR PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL OF SUBJECT LIBRARIANS IN KWAZULU-NATAL ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

A common theme emerging in the library world today is that quality service in the library and information centre is dependent on the quality performance of personnel. Prior to conducting performance appraisals, managers need to ascertain the core performance criteria for quality service provision. Research was conducted among subject librarians in KwaZulu-Natal academic libraries to ascertain what key performance areas (KPAs), job tasks and competencies were considered important in the work of subject librarians. The purpose of the study was to develop initial guidelines for performance appraisals of this group of librarians. Using the survey method and the self-administered questionnaire, findings indicated that performance appraisal guidelines would need to take cognisance of the following KPAs of subject librarians' work: Instruction and teaching, Reference services, Communication, Management and organisation, Cataloguing and classification and Information technology. The most important competencies identified were Interpersonal skills, followed by Knowledge of the total information environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

How well are you doing your job? This is a question often posed by managers and peers. Quality service in the library and information centre depends on quality performance of personnel. Assessing performance of library personnel has been a central tenet of human resource management thinking for a number of years. While much of the literature is about the need for performance appraisal, the challenge really begins when we attempt to do something about it. Performance appraisal provides a vital mechanism for subject librarians to evaluate their performance outcomes, as well as for realigning service provision. However, for effective performance appraisal to take place, guidelines are needed. The value of performance appraisal guidelines are stated succinctly by McElroy (1989, 98) that

if libraries are to flourish and serve their organizations well, we need to secure a better understanding of function, and how we should be judged. Sensitive guidelines can help libraries in the short term by improving resources; that is their traditional role. More important, they can better the long-term management of libraries, both internally by librarians, and from top management, by putting questions of role, service, resources and judgement of performance on the agenda in an informed environment.

2. RESEARCH PURPOSE

Despite the generally recognised importance of performance appraisal it is evident that PA is often a neglected aspect of human resource management. The reasons for this are many. Communication with library managers and subject librarians in academic libraries in KwaZulu-Natal suggested that there were no specific guidelines for performance appraisal of subject librarians in these libraries. Furthermore, few, if any empirical studies relating to performance appraisal of subject librarians in the South African context have been done. Also, performance appraisal guidelines which do exist in the American, British and Australian contexts are not necessarily appropriate for the South African situation. It is with this in mind that the study investigated performance appraisal among subject librarians in academic libraries in KwaZulu-Natal with a view to developing initial guidelines which would assist in underpinning future performance appraisal initiatives for this category of library employee. While it is acknowledged that library managers in particular are largely responsible for performance appraisal, the study focused on the views and perceptions of the people who were being appraised, namely, the subject librarians in academic libraries in KwaZulu-Natal. Therefore issues relating to library managers involved in performance appraisal – such as the method, the timing and the format of performance

appraisal – were not investigated. Specifically, the intention of the study was to:

- determine the status of PA guidelines for subject librarians employed in KwaZulu-Natal academic libraries
- determine the important aspects and job tasks of subject librarians employed in KwaZulu-Natal academic libraries, for purposes of performance appraisal
- establish a set of key performance areas (KPA) for subject librarians employed in KwaZulu-Natal academic libraries
- identify the critical competencies for subject librarians employed in KwaZulu-Natal academic libraries.

The study was conducted in the following KwaZulu-Natal academic libraries: Durban Institute of Technology (DIT) Library; Mangosuthu Technikon (Mantech) Library; University of Durban-Westville (UDW) Library, University of Natal, Durban (UND) Library and University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg (UNP) Library;¹ and the University of Zululand (UniZul) Library. The findings and conclusions thus relate to subject librarians in KwaZulu-Natal and any generalisation to subject librarians in other provinces would need to be made with caution.

The study's importance needs to be seen in the light of a context in which academic libraries generally are undergoing radical changes with an increased emphasis on accountability. 'Higher education at the turn of the century is faced with dwindling resources and an increased emphasis on accountability' (Christensen, Du Mont and Green 2001, 1). The authors stress that 'librarians must justify the importance of programs, collections, facilities and staff with more than vague statements or an emotional defense . . . We must be able to answer the question "How well are you doing your job?" with measurable information.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this brief overview of performance appraisal in the academic library context the focus will be on issues relating to the appraisal of the performance of subject librarians with a view to developing guidelines for such appraisal. Note is taken of Poole and Warner (1998, 527), who state that the issue is not whether performance should be measured, but how.

3.1 PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL IN THE ACADEMIC LIBRARY

Performance appraisal for academic librarians is not new. Dalton (1988, 29) emphasised that we live in an 'age of accountability' where academic

libraries, especially the public service divisions, are no exception. Dalton (1988, 29) stated that the professional literature of the 1970s and 1980s indicates that the topic has become a hotbed for discussion. 'Today public sector accountability gives added impetus. The desire to reduce government expenditure has led to an increasing pressure on higher education and its libraries to justify their performance in terms of efficiency and by comparison with other libraries.'

Reasons for performance appraisal are numerous. These include:

- to change or modify inappropriate or inferior work behaviour
- to initiate and routinise dialogues between employer and employee concerning perceptions of quality and quantity of performance
- to stimulate and further develop both the appraiser and the appraised in terms of their efficient and effective job performance
- to assess potential of the employee with regard to training and development opportunities
- to determine appropriate compensation levels for the employee
- to provide documentation of work behaviour in cases where disciplinary action may be warranted (Sluss 1986, 85; September 1988, 106–7; Verrill 1993, 98).

There are probably as many problems associated with performance appraisal as there are reasons for it. A major problem of performance appraisal in libraries is the dichotomy between quantity and quality of work. September (1988, 107) highlights the danger of a quantity-orientated appraisal system in academic library practice in that it does not always evaluate the abilities of librarians: 'It is improbable that conclusions about quality can be based only on quantitative measurement. It is relatively easy to record the quantity of work performed in the library but not so easy to estimate the quality of work performed.'

In commenting on the problems experienced with PA in academic libraries, Kroll (in September 1988, 107) suggested some solutions which are important to the present study:

Clear and precise job descriptions which spell out expectations of the supervisor, the library and the institution, and which provide an opportunity for discussion of appraisal results can negate many of the problems. Other solutions include the requirement that the employee be able to control the quality and quantity of his or her work, which helps to validate the appraisal system. The employee's performance must not be affected by environmental or organizational conditions such as lack of resources.

3.2 APPRAISING THE PERFORMANCE OF SUBJECT LIBRARIANS

Issues relating to performance appraisal of subject librarians which need to be taken into consideration when developing guidelines are briefly discussed below:

3.2.1 Job descriptions

According to authors such as Stueart and Moran (1998, 180) and Stueart and Sullivan (1991, 9) all job descriptions, including subject librarian job descriptions, contain five general areas:

1. tasks or duties and behaviours that are important to the job
2. standards or performance measures which are expected for each duty
3. skills, knowledge and abilities (SKA) required to successfully perform in the job
4. conditions which make relationships and the performance of responsibilities easy or difficult
5. qualifications: education and experience necessary to ensure successful performance of responsibilities.

Job analysis helps to identify the critical duties and tasks of a subject librarian's job. The job criteria are elements of a job to be evaluated during performance appraisal. Each job criterion should be compared with a performance standard which is the expected level of performance. The multiple job criteria for subject librarians should also be weighted to reflect the relative importance of criteria to service objectives and quality information services (Stueart and Moran 1998, 180).

Performance appraisal is conducted by understanding the core job tasks (or key performance areas – KPAs) and appraising subject librarians on these core tasks. Tycokson (2001) and the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA 1996) list the following core job tasks for subject librarians (and these are arguably applicable to subject librarians in KwaZulu-Natal):

- Bibliographic instruction or user education
- Reference services
- Reader's advisory services
- Collection development
- Promotion of the library services.

3.2.2 Performance competencies of subject librarians

The competency approach is a relatively new method of performance appraisal. Competencies measure the capability of individuals in a job task.

More specifically, it is the analysis of what behaviours, skills, knowledge, understanding and personal qualities determine a competent performance, that is at the heart of using a competency approach (RUSA 1996, 2). Poole and Warner (1998, 527) state that ‘What is different about the competency approach is that in addition to assessing achievement (the what) the behavior of the employee in meeting targets is taken into account (the how)’. What then, are the competencies for subject librarians?

Marshall et al. (1996, 1–2); Buttlar and du Mont (1996, 47); Braun (2002, 46) and Bender (1994, 109) distinguished two main types of competencies, namely professional and personal competencies.

3.2.2.1 Professional competencies

‘Professional competencies relate to the knowledge in the areas of information resources, information access, technology, management and research, and the ability to use these areas of knowledge as a basis for providing library and information services’ (Buttlar and Du Mont 1996, 42). The authors identified the five most highly rated professional competencies of academic librarians as:

1. knowledge of information sources in all formats
2. collection management skills
3. conducting a reference interview
4. communicating effectively in writing
5. ability to apply critical thinking to library problems (Buttlar and du Mont 1996, 45).

3.2.2.2 Personal competencies

Personal competencies represent a set of skills, attitudes and values that ‘enable librarians to work efficiently; be good communicators; focus on continuing learning throughout their careers; demonstrate the value-added nature of their contributions; and survive in the new world of work’ (Marshall 1996, 1–2). Prozesky and Cunningham (1986, 109) identified some of the qualities necessary for a subject librarian as adaptability, initiative, a challenging spirit, genuine interest in people and their research needs and a capacity to act as a facilitator.

Interpersonal skills are highly valued in the literature. Studies conducted by Odi and Rockman in Buttlar and Du Mont (1996, 47) and Braun (2002, 46) considered the following interpersonal skills as the most important for the training of subject librarians:

- two-way communication skills
- a positive and confident professional behaviour style

- leadership and team work
- understanding human behaviour and interpersonal relationships.

3.2.2.3 *Core competencies*

A combination of professional and personal competencies are also referred to as core competencies (Bender 1994, 109). Giesecke and McNeil (1999, 159) defined core competencies as the skills, knowledge, and personal attributes which contributes to an individual's success in a particular position. Cullen and Calvert (1995, 438) list core competencies pertinent to subject librarians:

- User interfacing skills – service orientation
- Knowledge of traditional and automated reference sources, knowledge of core reference materials in subject discipline, knowledge of bibliographic tools
- Data retrieval skills – ability to demonstrate and explain the use of major subject-specific indexing and abstracting services
- Human relations skills/interpersonal skills – manage operations and supervise staff
- Information technology skills
- Instructional skills
- Organisational skills
- Business management skills.

4. METHOD

The survey method was adopted for the study. According to Powell (1997, 58), survey research is better suited to studying, exploring and analysing relationships among a large number of the population, and to geographically dispersed cases. This latter point was appropriate for this study, given that the five libraries involved were located in different areas of KwaZulu-Natal.

Data were collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire which was distributed via e-mail. The use of e-mail for survey research and data collection is increasing (Selwyn and Robson 1998). The advantages and disadvantages of using e-mail are outlined in detail by Munoo (2000, 31–36) and these are not going to be repeated here – suffice to say e-mail transcends global geographic boundaries for those with access to the Internet. Given that all subject librarians in the province had their own e-mail addresses, this made it a cheap, quick and easy method of questionnaire distribution.

A five-page questionnaire consisting mainly of limited option questions with some open questions was designed. Apart from determining whether PA guidelines existed in their libraries or not, the bulk of the questionnaire consisted of questions establishing what subject librarians considered to be

important performance areas in their work as well as the competencies required for that work.

The questionnaire was pretested on four subject librarians in Gauteng and the Western Cape. No problems were encountered and thus no changes were made to the instrument.

4.1 POPULATION

According to Busha and Harter (1980, 55–57), the word *population* refers to any group of persons, objects or institutions that have at least one characteristic in common. The population in the present study consisted of 43 subject librarians employed at the five academic libraries. All had professional training in librarianship and all fell within the following broad definition as being: ‘staff who interact with students and staff, either in the form of one or a combination of answering reference queries, bibliographic instruction, faculty or (academic) department liaison such as collection development or cooperative cataloguing, etc.’ (Kaniki 1996).

The small size of the population made sampling unnecessary.

4.2 DISTRIBUTION, RESPONSE RATE AND DATA ANALYSIS

A covering letter and the questionnaire were mailed electronically to all the members of the population in October 2003. Initial return of the questionnaires was poor but after reminders and an extension of the deadline a total of 39 questionnaires were returned, yielding a good response rate of 90.6 per cent. Data were analysed using the software package SPSS.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Given that no similar empirical studies were identified in the literature, the findings and discussion (and subsequent conclusions) which follow relate largely to the results of the survey itself.

5.1 EXISTENCE OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL GUIDELINES

A vast majority (35 or 89.7%) of the respondents indicated that their libraries did not have guidelines for performance appraisal of subject librarians. As indicated in the literature, performance appraisal is an essential practice for effective personnel management in academic libraries. The absence of guidelines to underpin such performance appraisal is surprising and underscores the importance of this study.

5.2 MAIN TASKS OR DUTIES PERFORMED BY SUBJECT LIBRARIANS

In order to understand what a subject librarian's performance should be appraised upon, one must examine the main tasks and duties performed by the subject librarian. Respondents were provided with a list of performance areas relevant to subject librarians (as gleaned from the literature). For each performance area, detailed specific job tasks were given. Respondents were asked to rank these job tasks in importance on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not important and 5 being very important. The results are presented and discussed below.

5.2.1 Reference services

TABLE 1 _____
REFERENCE SERVICES

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	16	41.0	8	21	1	2.6	3	7.7	2	5.1	9	23	39	100
B	9	23.1	10	26	5	13	5	13	1	2.6	9	23	39	100
C	13	33.3	9	23	4	10	3	7.7	1	2.6	9	23	39	100
D	20	51.3	7	1	2	5.1	1	2.6	0	0	9	23	39	100
E	22	56.4	7	18	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	9	23	39	100

Key:

- A Reference enquiries
- B General policy/service/directional enquiries
- C Literature searches: manual
- D Literature searches: computer
- E Assistance with information retrieval in a variety of formats.

In general, subject librarians in KwaZulu-Natal identified reference services as either very important or important in their job duties. Stilwell (2002, 1) argues that the development of knowledge and skills essential for information searching, plus the analysis, synthesis, ordering and management of that information, is crucial for service to the user. In the reference services category it was interesting to note (see Table 1) that assistance with information retrieval in a variety of formats was rated highest (56.4%) by the respondents.

5.2.2 Instruction and teaching

TABLE 2

INSTRUCTION AND TEACHING

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	19	48.7	7	18	1	2.6	3	7.7	0	0	9	23.1	39	100
B	21	53.8	6	15	1	2.6	2	5.1	0	0	9	23.1	39	100
C	26	66.7	4	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	23.1	39	100
D	20	51.3	8	21	1	2.6	1	2.6	0	0	9	23.1	39	100
E	12	30.8	13	33	2	5.1	1	2.6	0	0	11	28.2	39	100
F	9	23.1	8	21	7	17.9	3	7.7	1	2.6	11	28.2	39	100
G	18	46.2	9	23	1	2.6	2	5.1	0	0	9	23.1	39	100
H	13	33.3	11	28	6	15.4	0	0	0	0	9	23.1	39	100

Key:

- A Information skills programme and the ability to give presentations
- B Bibliographic instruction conducted for class groups
- C General orientation of the library services and usage of resources
- D Advanced orientation of library services and usage of resources
- E Informal instruction and orientation to individual users
- F Refresher courses for users
- G Training and development courses for library or academic staff
- H Individualised library services, for example, courses for postgraduates.

A majority of subject librarians (66.7%), identified general orientation as very important to their job tasks and 51.3 per cent stated advanced orientation of library services and usage of resources as very important, while 53.8 per cent considered bibliographic instruction conducted for class groups as very important to their job duties. These findings could be attributed to increased student numbers which have spread existing subject librarian staff more thinly. Widening modes of access have brought in more part-time students; more student-centred learning demands a greater range of teaching skills; and furthermore, the explosion of electronic information (from CD-ROM to the Internet) requires continuous updating of knowledge and skills (Bluck 1996, 97).

5.2.3 Current awareness

TABLE 3 **CURRENT AWARENESS SERVICES**

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Current awareness services	8	20.5	15	38.5	6	15.4	1	2.6	0	0	9	23.1	39	100
SDI (Selective dissemination of information)		20.5	13	33.3	5	12.8	2	5.1	0	0	11	28.2	39	100

Twenty-three (59%) of the subject librarian respondents considered current awareness services as either very important or important to their job tasks while 21 (53.8%) thought the same of SDIs. Interestingly, over 20 per cent of respondents did not respond to these performance areas. It is important that the subject librarian understand the general interests of the academic institution and meet the specific needs of each patron. Knowledge of prevalent reading levels, language skills and educational backgrounds of users, as well as awareness of sources, all provide the foundation for good information service delivery (Tyckoson 2001, 189).

5.2.4 Statistics and reports

TABLE 4 **STATISTICS**

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Statistics	9	23.1	15	38.5	5	12.8	1	2.6	0	0	9	23	39	100

More than 60 per cent of the respondents believed that the compilation of statistical reports was important in performance appraisal. Library managers, however, need to provide effective formats in order for subject librarians to generate meaningful statistical reports. Feedback is crucial for improved communication and service excellence.

5.2.5 Management and organisation

TABLE 5 _____
MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	22	56.4	5	12.8	3	7.7	0	0	0	0	9	23	39	100
B	13	33.3	13	33.3	4	10	0	0	0	0	9	23	39	100
C	9	23.1	17	43.6	1	2.6	3	7.7	0	0	9	23	39	100
D	10	25.6	16	41	2	5.1	2	5.1	0	0	9	23	39	100
E	8	20.5	10	25.6	6	15	2	5.1	4	10	9	23	39	100

Key:

- A Collection management and development
- B Planning and designing information services including virtual library services
- C Planning and designing library promotional material
- D Planning and designing teaching material
- E Supervision of staff.

While the number of no responses was again surprising, the various aspects relating to management and organisation were generally rated as either important or very important with collection management specifically being rated as very important by 56.4 per cent of respondents. This is in keeping with the literature: collection management and development is very important to a subject librarian's job (Bluck 1996). Planning and designing materials for promotion or teaching of information services in academic libraries was highly valued by subject librarians in KwaZulu-Natal.

5.2.6 Information technology

The ability to use information technology systems and databases was rated as very important by 48.7 per cent of the respondents and apart from the 'no responses' (23.1%) the remainder (28.2%) considered such ability as important. These findings are not surprising given that it is widely recognised in the literature that there is a need for librarians who are well trained in information technology (Hoskins 2002).

TABLE 6**INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Evaluating software/ Websites	14	35.9	11	28.2	3	7.7	0	0	2	5.1	9	23.1	39	100
Ability to use IT systems and databases	19	48.7	11	28.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	23.1	39	100
Ability to create IT systems for library	5	12.8	11	28.2	5	12.8	4	10.3	3	7.7	11	28.2	39	100

5.2.7 Communication**TABLE 7****COMMUNICATION**

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	15	38.5	12	30.8	0	0	0	0	1	2.6	11	28.2	39	100
B	14	35.9	13	33.3	2	5.1	0	0	1	2.6	9	23.1	39	100
C	15	38.5	11	28.2	3	7.7	1	2.6	0	0	9	23.1	39	100
D	13	33.3	11	28.2	2	5.1	4	10.3	0	0	9	23.1	39	100

Key:

- A With other staff for integration of library resources into academic curricula
- B For personal development in job tasks
- C To network internally for the purpose of customer focus
- D To network with the external library and information services (LIS) sector.

Communication with both colleagues and academics for efficient and effective integration of library resources into information service provision was mentioned as either important or very important by just under 70 per cent of respondents. In general, communication was seen as important. The literature review (Prozesky and Cunningham 1986, 109 and Marshall et al. 1996, 1–2) indicated that good communication skills are essential for effective information service delivery.

5.2.8 Professional development and continuous education

TABLE 8 _____
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTINUOUS EDUCATION

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	6	15.4	14	35.9	6	15.4	3	7.7	1	2.6	9	23.1	39	100
B	9	23.1	12	30.8	4	10.3	5	12.8	0	0	9	23.1	39	100
C	6	15.4	10	25.6	8	20.5	2	5.1	4	10	9	23.1	39	100
D	8	20.5	14	35.9	2	5.1	3	7.7	3	7.7	9	23.1	39	100

Key:

- A Attendance at personal development seminars
- B Attendance at LIS related seminars/activities/programmes
- C Presentation of LIS papers at conferences/meetings
- D Attaining further qualifications.

While subject librarians in the survey indicated that professional development was an important component of their work (and thus of performance appraisal), the average percentage of those considering it very important was only 18.6 per cent. What is of concern is the quite significant percentage (at times over 50 per cent) of respondents who considered it either fairly or not important and who were uncertain or did not respond.

5.2.9 Cataloguing and classification of resources

TABLE 9 _____
CATALOGUING AND CLASSIFICATION OF RESOURCES

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Cataloguing and classification	14	35.9	9	23.1	3	7.7	2	5.1	1	2.6	10	25.6	39	100

A majority 23 (59%) indicated that cataloguing and classification were important or very important to their job tasks.

5.2.10 Performing other duties

TABLE 10 _____
PERFORMING DUTIES IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS OF THE LIBRARY

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Perform duties in other departments of the library	3	7.7	8	20.5	6	15.4	10	25.6	2	5.1	10	25.6	39	100

The level of importance attached to performing duties in other departments of the library was not that high with 11 (28,2%) respondents rating this as either very important or important.

5.2.11 Representation

TABLE 11 _____
REPRESENTING THE INSTITUTION OR LIBRARY

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Representing the library	5	12.8	10	25.6	9	23.1	4	10.3	1	2.6	10	25.6	39	100

Fifteen (38.4%) of subject librarians indicated that representing the institution or library was of importance in their job tasks.

5.2.12 Other job performance areas

Respondents were asked if they could suggest other important job performance areas or tasks for a subject librarian. Fifteen respondents made suggests and the results are reflected in Table 12.

TABLE 12

OTHER IMPORTANT JOB PERFORMANCE AREAS OR TASKS FOR A SUBJECT
LIBRARIAN

Other suggestions for important job performance areas or tasks for a subject librarian	Frequency	Percentage
Attendance of Faculty Board meetings	4	10.3
Willingness to go the extra mile	3	7.7
Building a collection	2	5.1
Mentoring	2	5.1
Marketing of Library Services	2	5.1
Drafting of policy	1	2.6
Attend workshops, but not present paper	1	2.6
Electronic journals	1	2.6
No response	23	59.0
Total	39	100

Mentoring (mentioned by two respondents) was the only new area mentioned which was not listed in the questionnaire.

5.2.13 Summary of Tables 1 to 12

The 'Very important' ratings for all the specific job tasks under each KPA (see Tables 1–12) were averaged with a view to determining which KPA achieved the highest very important rating overall. The results are reflected in Table 13 below.

Instruction and teaching emerged as the most important KPA. It is interesting to compare the top five KPAs with those listed in Table 14 below, which depicts the results of an open-ended question in which respondents were asked what they considered to be the three most important KPAs. In each instance Instruction and teaching, Reference services, Communication, and Information technology were listed among the top five.

TABLE 13

SUMMARY OF TABLES 1-12 IN TERMS OF KPAs RATED 'VERY IMPORTANT'

Key performance areas (KPAs)	Percentage
Instruction and teaching	44.2
Reference services	41.0
Communication	36.6
Cataloguing and classification	35.9
Information technology	32.5
Management and organisation	31.8
Statistics	23.1
Current awareness services	20.5
Professional development and continuous education	18.6
Representation	12.8
Performing other duties	7.7

5.3 MOST IMPORTANT KPAs FOR SUBJECT LIBRARIANS (AS PER OPEN-ENDED QUESTION)

In contrast to Table 13 above, Reference services were rated the most important KPA by the subject librarians. This was closely followed by Instruction and teaching (which emerged first in Table 13). These results are in accordance with the literature: see, for example, RUSA (1996) and Bluck (1996) in which both KPAs figure prominently in the role of the subject librarian.

5.4 SUBJECT LIBRARIAN COMPETENCIES

The researcher asked respondents to rate the importance of various competencies needed to perform tasks. The findings are reflected and discussed in the Tables below.

TABLE 14**MOST IMPORTANT KPAs**

KPAs	No.	Percentage
Reference services	10	25.6
Instruction and teaching	9	23.1
Management and organisation	5	12.8
Communication	4	10.3
Information technology	3	7.7
Cataloguing and classification of resources	3	7.7
Professional development and continuous education	2	5.1
Current awareness services	2	5.1
Statistics	1	2.6
		100.0

5.4.1 KNOWLEDGE OF THE TOTAL INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

TABLE 15**KNOWLEDGE OF THE TOTAL INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT**

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	31	79.5	8	20.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	100
B	32	82.1	7	17.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	100
C	32	82.1	7	17.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	100
D	32	82.1	7	17.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	100
E	17	43.6	16	41	5	12.8	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	39	100
F	17	43.6	17	43.6	5	12.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	100

Key:

- A Within the total information environment, the SL should be skilled and literate in information technology and communication
- B Within the total information environment, the SL should exhibit a thorough knowledge of varied information resources to meet the needs of users

- C Within the total information environment, the SL should provide assistance to users, at their level of need
- D Within the total information environment, the SL should be proficient in planning and executing effective search strategies
- E Within the total information environment, the SL should plan and design biannually, proactive value-added services aimed at both users and potential library users
- F Within the total information environment, the SL should display a thorough understanding of library policies and services to inform users and potential users.

Knowledge of the total information environment competency was ranked as very important to subject librarians' performance for service excellence. The data revealed that 79.5 per cent or more of the respondents believed that it is very important for the subject librarian to exhibit a thorough knowledge of varied information resources to meet the needs of users; should provide assistance to users, at their level of need; should be proficient in planning and executing effective search strategies and be skilled and literate in information technology and communication. The competencies of planning and designing of pro-active value added services and displaying a thorough understanding of library policies and services were not as important as the above competencies mentioned as very important, in both instances, by 43.6 per cent of respondents.

5.4.2 Customer services

TABLE 16

THE PROVISION OF ACTIVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	24	61.5	11	28.2	1	2.6	1	2.6	2	5.1	0	0	39	100
B	9	23.1	14	35.9	9	23.1	5	12.8	2	5.1	0	0	39	100
C	29	74.4	10	25.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	100
D	25	64.1	14	35.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	100
E	11	28.2	21	53.8	2	2	4	10.3	0	0	1	2.6	39	100

Key:

- A When providing active customer service, the SL is poised and ready to engage approaching patrons and is not engrossed in other activities that detract from availability to patrons
- B When providing active customer service, the SL roves through the reference/subject collections offering help wherever possible

- C When providing active customer service, the SL provides prompt and timely information resources or services
- D When providing active customer service, the SL offers the user other relevant resources or use of other information services
- E When providing active customer service, the SL follows up with the user.

A prominent finding was that the provision of prompt and timely information resources and services to the user was ranked as very important for customer service by the highest number of respondents (74.4%). Roving the reference/subject collections was the least mentioned competency in terms of customer service – rated as very important by 23.1 per cent of respondents.

5.4.3 Managerial skills

TABLE 17

SUBJECT LIBRARIAN MANAGERIAL SKILLS

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	15	38.5	18	46.2	3	7.7	2	5.1	1	2.6	0	0	39	100
B	21	53.8	18	46.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	100
C	26	66.7	12	30.8	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	100

Key:

- A The SL should have the ability to influence and motivate other team members in implementing policy or planning pro-active services for the library
- B The SL should have the ability to analyse and solve problems
- C The SL should have the ability to provide high quality services by carefully analysing and planning both information sources and services

While management skills were rated as either very important or important by the vast majority of respondents, the ability to analyse and solve problems in particular was a skill rated as important or very important by all the respondents.

5.4.4 Interpersonal skills

TABLE 18

RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS OF THE SUBJECT LIBRARIAN

Statement	Very important		Important		Uncertain		Fairly important		Not important		No response		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	32	82.1	6	15.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.6	39	100
B	30	76.9	8	20.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.6	39	100
C	30	76.9	7	17.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5.1	39	100

Key:

- A The SL should communicate in a receptive, cordial and encouraging manner with all
- B The SL should display a positive attitude and demeanour towards users
- C The SL should exhibit good listening skills towards users and colleagues.

Apart from the small number of no responses, interpersonal skills were rated as very important or important by all the respondents in the study. Interpersonal skills are highly valued in the literature on librarian competencies. Studies conducted by Odini and Rockman (in Buttlar and du Mont 1996, 47) and Braun (2002, 46) considered the following interpersonal skills as the most important for the training of subject librarians:

- two-way communication skills (oral, written, listening, questioning)
- a positive and confident professional behaviour style
- leadership, team work
- understanding human behaviour and interpersonal relationships.

When an average of each competency rated as very important in Tables 15 to 18 was calculated, Interpersonal skills was rated as very important by 78.6 per cent of the respondents followed by Knowledge of the total information environment with 68.8 per cent of respondents seeing it as very important.

5.4.5 Other subject librarian competencies

An open-ended question was given for respondents to complete. Table 19 outlines the results.

TABLE 19**OTHER IMPORTANT SUBJECT LIBRARIAN COMPETENCIES**

Statement	Count	Percentage
Be knowledgeable in academic courses	6	15.4
Knowledge of different cultures and behaviour	3	7.7
Staff development	1	2.6
Marketing skills	1	2.6
Customer confidentiality	1	2.6
Ability to serve outside of job description	1	2.6
No response	26	66.71

The majority of respondents 26 (66.7%) did not provide any further competencies. Of the 13 (33.3%) who did, just under half of the respondents indicated that the subject librarian needed to know the academic curricula within their job designation. Knowledge of different cultures and behaviours was ranked as second to subject librarian knowledge of academic environment with three of the 13 respondents (7.7%) indicating this. These findings are supported by Buttler and du Mont (1996, 44).

6. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to contribute to initial guidelines for appraising subject librarians in academic libraries in KwaZulu-Natal. The core job tasks, KPAs, and competencies were identified and these were then rated in terms of importance for their jobs by the subject librarians in the Province. It is evident from the findings of this study that the most important KPAs relating to the work of subject librarians were Instruction and teaching, Reference services, Communication, Management and organisation, Cataloguing and classification and Information technology. On the basis of the findings of this study these KPAs (and the job tasks associated with each) must be taken into consideration when establishing guidelines for the PA of subject librarians in academic libraries. In terms of competencies, it is evident from the findings that Interpersonal skills across the board (see Table 18) are considered very important by subject librarians. This competency is followed by Knowledge of the total information environment and within this broad competency subject librarians should

- be skilled and literate in information and communication technology

- exhibit a thorough knowledge of varied information resources to meet the needs of users
- provide assistance to users, at their level of need
- be proficient in planning and executing effective search strategies.

The study advocates that performance appraisal should be conducted in a nurturing environment which enhances continuous development. In identifying the above KPAs, job tasks and competencies related to the work of subject librarians, it is hoped that an attempt will be made by both manager and employee to build a high level of competency and also to realign service provision in academic libraries via performance appraisal. As Lipow and Carver (1989, 87) point out, staff are the most important resource in a library: they constitute the largest budget, they deliver the library's services, they operate the library's equipment, they shape the library's image. It can be argued that the evaluation of their performance is a critical management function.



1. 'As from 2004 the University of Durban-Westville, University of Natal (Durban) and University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) merged to form the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

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