Balancing Tertiary Institutions’ Expansion Drive with Conservation Needs of their Libraries: The Case of the Book Binding Unit in the Library of the Midlands State University in Zimbabwe

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Abstract
The Book Binding Unit at the Midlands State University’s library has an uphill task of conserving books in the midst of the university’s expansion drive. The university is one of the biggest in Zimbabwe with an approximate enrolment of 23,000 students up to date. It has adopted a multi campus system in different cities across Zimbabwe. The unit repairs all the books from all of the university’s campuses. Due to limited staff, it is overwhelmed with huge volumes of books in need of repair. Without a purpose built conservation laboratory and adequate storage facilities, the university is overwhelmed with the ever increasing number of books in need of repair. Students doing courses in Conservation of Archives and Records and Archives Management are engaged to equip them with practical conservation skills. This noble idea has helped in ensuring efficiency in work operations in the unit, however it is still struggling to cope with the demands of the conservation work for books due to lack of resources. There is need for the university to prioritise resourcing of this vital conservation unit in its expansion drive so that it matches its multi-campus status.

Key Words: Book repair; Conservation; Tertiary Institutions

Introduction
Colleges and universities across the globe have huge collections of books in their libraries. Due to access and use, these books deteriorate with time. With a particular focus on expanding their services, in some cases universities’ budgets are constrained by other priorities which mean that it may take longer to replace such books. To ensure continued access and use of these books in libraries there is need to conserve them. Libraries are central to the core functioning of universities and colleges and any expansion initiatives in these tertiary institutions should also capacitate the functioning of these libraries, which include the conservation of books.

The Expansion of the Midlands State University into a Multi Campus System
The Midlands State University is one of the biggest institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe with an approximate enrolment of 23,000 students up to date. The university has adopted a multi campus system, with campuses located in different cities and towns across Zimbabwe, namely Gwenu, Harare, Mutare and Zvishavane. Each campus has its own library. The Book Binding Unit which is based at the main campus in the City of Gwenu, is responsible for conserving all the books from all of the university’s libraries across the country. See figure 1 for some books that have been repaired. Huge volumes of books that are in need of repair are deposited at this unit.

Figure 1. Repaired books at the Book Binding Unit

Shortage of Conservation Staff in the Book Binding Unit
The conservation unit is understaffed such that it is failing to cope with the ever increasing number of books that need to be repaired. With only one qualified paper conservator and two members of staff, the Unit is overwhelmed with a difficult task of working with huge volumes of books that need to be conserved. There is a backlog of books that are awaiting repair. This negatively impacts access and use of the bookcollections the university’s library. Books that are awaiting repair cannot be utilised by students and this affects the delivery of quality education by the university. This challenge is also experienced in other tertiary institutions, for instance in Karnataka (Ambika and Begum 2017).

Figure 2. Books awaiting repair at the Book Binding Unit

Figure 3. Shortage of space for book conservation

Conclusion
As universities embark on expanding their services, it is vital that they consider to fully capacitate their libraries as they are a key component in their functioning. The capactiation of the libraries should include the conservation of books to support learning. This should cover recruitment of conservators, purchasing of conservation equipment and the building of conservation infrastructure such as laboratories and storage facilities for books.

References
