GROWING A UNIVERSITY LIBRARY IN AFRICA

By

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Introduction

The Adventist University of Africa came into existence in 2005, but the seeds were planted several years before that. As early as 1994, the General Conference Education Department leadership realized that the rapidly growing membership in Africa needed postgraduate education to train leaders, pastors, teachers, and other professionals. By the turn of the century, church membership in Africa was exploding. In 2007, with total membership in three African Divisions approaching six million, it was projected that in ten to fifteen years Africa would have 50 percent of the membership worldwide. Clearly, there was a desperate need to train church leaders.

Taking Root

The first definite steps toward a higher education institution for Africa were taken in September 2001 when Adventist leaders in Africa presented a proposal to the General Conference. It emphasized the growing number of universities and colleges in Africa, the dramatic growth of church membership, and the desperate need to train leaders. In response, the Church appointed a 14-member Africa Graduate Education Taskforce (AGET) to "plan and facilitate the establishment of graduate programs based in Africa."

Two years later, in October 2003, the Taskforce presented its report with several recommendations centering on establishment of a graduate educational institution that would serve the entire African continent. Aware that the church already operated 11 universities and colleges in Africa, the Taskforce favored a unique model with multiple delivery modes such as distance learning and teaching programs at various sites. By offering short sessions each year, the plan would enable students to attend without having to resign their work and move their families. Classes would be taught at extension centers on the campuses of Solusi University in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, Babcock University in the West-Central Africa Division, and University of Eastern Africa Baraton in the East-Central Africa Division.

By October 2004, it had been decided to locate headquarters of the new school in Kenya, while "lacking a full understanding on the expectations of the Kenya Commission for Higher Education to grant a charter." A site was chosen on about 100 acres of land near Nairobi at

Advent Hill, next to the East-Central Africa Division headquarters. An accompanying document included this interesting statement:

"Classrooms, library, computer laboratories, cafeteria, dormitories and other selected facilities of existing universities may be contracted during their long yearly break (thus avoiding expensive capital investments). Library holdings in contracted campuses may need to be supplemented, while being fully aware of internet-based library materials. … A comparatively small central administrative building is needed with the offices of the core, full time, administration, and space for admissions, academic records, finances, ordering library materials, and other basic services." With this in mind, there was a ground-breaking ceremony on September 13, 2005 for a relatively small administration building, three faculty homes, and a guesthouse. There was no provision for a library or classrooms.

But the writing was already on the wall. Three months before the ground-breaking, a small delegation of church leaders visited the office in Nairobi of the Kenya Commission for Higher Education, seeking a charter for the new university. The response from the Commission would force a significant shift in the nature and operational plan of the new institution. While granting AUA an interim letter of authority, the Commission made clear its requirement of a physical library, with books, on the university campus, as well as teaching faculty and classes.

While the AUA leaders were re-thinking their modus operandi during the next couple of years, the first classes were offered at selected universities. In 2006, AUA began offering a Master of Arts program in Pastoral Theology and a Master of Arts program in Leadership with classes being held at Solusi University in Zimbabwe, Babcock University in Nigeria, and University of Eastern Africa in Baraton, Kenya. The first graduation ceremonies were held in 2009.

Meanwhile, the Kenya Commission for Higher Education had presented its report to the AUA Board. The Commission also released revised "Standards and Guidelines for University Libraries in Kenya." Not only did the standards call for a library building on the university campus, but there were other specific requirements for the operation of a library in Kenya. The requirements included:

1. Use of the LC Classification.
2. A library website.
3. Membership of the Kenya Library Consortium (costing about $5,000 per year for private universities).
4. Having an Integrated Library System.
5. Cataloging by the current version of MARC.
6. Professional librarians (MLS) must make up at least 35 percent of library staff.

7   All librarians to have faculty status, be eligible for membership in the faculty senate, and be funded for research and professional development.

8   Library budget to be at least 10 percent of the total institutional operating budget.

9   Information literacy must be taught.

10   The University Librarian must report to the Vice Chancellor (President).

Clearly, AUA had to convert from an administrative center to a teaching campus. Under the leadership of Brempong Owusu-Antwi as Vice Chancellor, plans were put in place for construction of student accommodation, more staff housing, and a library building, funded from church allocations plus private donations. The library building would include space for classrooms. The concept of using other university sites for teaching programs was not abandoned, but the core of AUA operations would now be a full-fledged central campus at Advent Hill, Kenya.

AUA Library: Small Beginnings

The first classes at AUA's Kenya campus were scheduled to begin in June 2009. The university's administration building was undergoing renovation, so arrangements were made to utilize space at nearby Maxwell Academy. The need for a library was evident. During 2008 and 2009 faculty members visited bookstores in Nairobi to select and purchase books that were needed to support the Seminary program. By school opening day a collection of 3,000 volumes was ready for use on shelving acquired previously. To supplement the small collection, AUA made arrangements with two nearby Christian universities for students to visit their libraries. When urgent appeals were made for donations of books, several retired Adventist scholars and church leaders responded with generous donations of books from their personal libraries. The Biblical Research Institute contributed many books, and a request was made to ADRA International for books that might support the curriculum.

As soon as the AUA administration building was ready, classes moved there and a room measuring 1500 square feet was set aside for a library. A consignment of books from ADRA came in September 2009, followed by an even larger container in November 2010, totaling 1,107 boxes of books, most of them as multiple copies. In January 2011, a team of five contract workers began the task of opening the boxes, compiling lists of the book titles, identifying titles that would be useful to AUA, and finally processing and labeling them for the shelves. Since few of the ADRA books dealt with religion and theology, the vast majority were re-boxed for later distribution to other Adventist schools across East Central Africa. The team completed this mammoth operation in two months.

By the end of March, a collection of approximately 7,000 books, most of them in religion and theology, was shelved and classified more or less accurately by the Library of Congress Classification. In the absence of a catalog, a home-grown database was created, with author and title access, and software for circulation. A photocopier/printer was supplied for staff and student use. Additional study tables were borrowed from the nearby East Central Africa Division. All of this presented a very congested library facility in a room where hundreds of boxes of ADRA books were in storage, awaiting distribution to other schools.

Angeline Musvosvi, the wife of the Seminary Dean, took charge of the library, and though untrained in library science, used her education background plus a one-week seminar in library methods to oversee the development and function of the library. A library committee was established to give support and direction. Some local librarians gave advice, and in the first months of 2011 three experienced librarians came to help—Dr. Margaret Adeogun from University of Eastern Africa Baraton in February, Lawrence Onsager from Andrews University in March, and Keith Clouten from Canada late in March 2011 for a three-month term. The emphasis changed from building the basic collection to choosing an integrated library system, developing a plan for staffing, creating a website of online databases, preparing for and acquiring a security system, and making a small beginning with MARC cataloging. Volunteer help achieved tattle-taping and bar-coding of the collection. The library committee played an active role in establishing library policies. Following advertizing for an assistant librarian position, interviews were conducted and a qualified applicant was chosen to commence work in mid-June, 2011.

The physical situation improved marginally in May when hundreds of ADRA boxes were moved to storage elsewhere, and the existing desks were re-organized to provide some much-needed "library processing" space in one corner of the room.

Building Big

The site of the AUA Library is magnificent. Perched on the summit of a high hill overlooking the widely scattered community of Ongata Rongai, and with a striking view westward to the Ngong Hills, the large library structure commands attention from afar. Designed with a façade of monumental proportions, it certainly dominates the AUA campus where it overlooks the nearby single-storey administration building and the student residences down the hill.

When it was decided that AUA would become a full-fledged university, plans were formulated for a library that would be appropriate for a graduate institution serving an entire continent. A

private donation of one million dollars provided the incentive to proceed on an ambitious scale. With a floor area totaling 64,000 square feet on four levels, connected by three stairwells and an elevator, the building was designed to accommodate library functions and services, plus an auditorium, five classrooms and an Ellen G. White Resource Center. Building commenced early in 2010, with an anticipated official opening in April, 2011.

Unfortunately, the project was dogged by a sequence of delays and construction management issues. Despite a promise in November 2010 that the building would be completed and ready for an April 26 opening by the President of the General Conference, the structure was far from finished for the planned event, which turned out to be (in the words of Ted Wilson) a "pre-opening before the official opening." The contractors removed some external scaffolding for the occasion, and the library was named in honor of Judith Thomas, the major private donor. At the time of this writing (June 10, 2011), the building is still unfinished, and some doubt that it will be ready by August.

The library's open design accommodates many outstanding features. Large areas of glass on all sides, as well as skylights above the stairwells, provide excellent natural lighting throughout the building. Spaciousness is a feature of the design, beginning with the wide entrance and foyer open through the floor above, and continuing all the way to a large top floor area reserved for an Ellen G. White Center and an African Studies Center, plus a vault for storage of valuable documents. The tiled circulation desk is more than ample, as is the adjoining space for book storage and offices. The library director's office includes an en-suite restroom, and library offices are planned on each floor. An elevator connects all four floors.

Besides a multi-media center, there is space for an information commons. Wireless Internet access will be available throughout the building, but there will also be hard-wired locations for computers without wireless capability. Several OPAC "Information points" are planned in the public areas on each floor. Thirty individual doctoral study rooms are planned. An indoor garden on the ground floor, adjoining the main skylighted stairway, will feature relaxed seating among tropical plants. Throughout the building, floor surfaces and stairways are tiled. By procuring library shelving and most of the furniture from quality manufacturers in Malaysia, some significant cost savings are anticipated.

The walkout basement floor comprising over 12,000 square feet is reserved for library service operations, including offices, a kitchen, a delivery area, a room for a computer server, an archives room, storage room, staff rest rooms, and ample space for acquisitions and cataloging.

According to an old English proverb, "it's an ill wind that blows nobody good." One positive thing to come from an unfinished project is the chance to correct some errors. There was no provision for group meeting rooms; four such rooms are now planned. Some offices were able to be re-located to improve functionality. The plans showed a closet-sized office for the director of the White Estate, and this can now be rectified. The manuscript vault on the top floor is undoubtedly fire-proof, but one could wish that two huge water storage tanks on the roof directly above could be re-located in a different area.

Whatever the criticisms, there is no question that, when completed, the Judith Thomas Library of the Adventist University of Africa will be one of the most beautiful libraries on the African continent and one of the finest owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The challenge now will be to match the physical facility with an outstanding collection of learning resources and excellent library services. Vice-Chancellor Brempong says, "I want to see the AUA Library become the center of research, learning and knowledge for the whole of Adventist Africa."

Growing Pains

Developing a library in a brand new institution—anywhere--will always be a challenge. Doing it in Africa presents multiple challenges, especially when the university is to serve the entire continent with 53 independent nations and hundreds of languages, cultures, and economic environments; and all under the umbrella of three African Divisions.

What kind of library does all of this require? In the initial planning, AUA was envisioned to be an organization something like the European Union with a purely administrative center near Nairobi, and classes taught at remote locations around the continent. So you may envision a lone librarian sitting in a room at headquarters, managing a website that offers an array of digital resources for students that may never come to the place. In reality, the university adopted a very different model in 2007. The Nairobi campus would be developed as a full-fledged teaching campus, with AUA courses also taught at other sites across Africa.

The role of the AUA Library would now be complex and fourfold:
   - First: The physical facility at the Nairobi campus must develop print and digital resources to support Seminary and other graduate programs to the doctoral level.
   - Second: A library website must offer a range of databases and e-resources to support all programs, available to AUA students and faculty wherever they may be located.
   - Third: A program to teach information literacy must be in place, with face-to-face sessions at Nairobi and on-line tutorials for students elsewhere.
   - Fourth: An intentional program to encourage library development and information sharing among all Adventist university libraries in Africa is needed.

There are several characteristics of the African scene that create a dilemma for libraries. At the top of the list is the "digital divide" which will continue to be a reality in Africa for a long time to come. For Internet service the issues are availability, reliability, affordability, speed, and limitations of dial-up access in many localities. Adding to the problem is the unreliability of the electrical power grid in most parts of Africa. Even Nairobi experiences frequent power brownouts, so AUA has installed a generator in the new library building. Significant advances have been made in countries like Kenya, where the central government promotes the use of Information and Communications Technology in higher education and subsidizes fiber optic cabling for all universities. At the opposite end of the scale, though, are the many poor and developing nations with struggling economies and/or political upheavals. One can only hope and pray that for these "have-nots", the future will be friendly.

The "hybrid library" is a term used by librarians to describe libraries containing a mix of traditional print resources and the growing number of electronic resources. How will this concept work for AUA? In many parts of Africa, print is the only accessible medium, yet at the same time, almost unaffordable. A book sold in America for $35.00 will cost at least 3,000 Shillings in Kenya, without the additional cost of international shipping. That is expensive in relation to living costs. The Seminary Dean at AUA has prepared a million dollar list of books that are needed to support the programs; donations are solicited. The SAIL program at Andrews University continues to serve developing countries through its book distribution and acquisitions program. But periodical subscriptions are the real killer. Few university libraries can afford expensive journals. Fortunate are those institutions that have access to the Internet and can afford the cost of databases.

Where Internet access is available and affordable, the situation for digital resources is more encouraging. There are increasing numbers of open access databases covering most subject fields. *Online Books*, for example, offers free access to more than one million e-books covering all topics and conveniently organized by the LC Classification. The United Nations, through its UNBIS network provides access to a growing number of full-text resources. Several commercial vendors offer subscription databases at considerably reduced prices to African universities, usually through a national body such as the Kenya Library Consortium. AUA has budgeted for consortium membership in 2012.

The choice of an Integrated Library System presents a challenge for African libraries, mainly because of cost, but support is also a factor. TLC's "Library Solutions", for example, would cost AUA more than 2,500,000 Shillings for the installation fee alone. With so many urgent library needs facing the budget, AUA Library has chosen KOHA, an open source library system that is used worldwide, but especially in developing countries. At least four universities in Nairobi use KOHA, so there is a community of support. Thanks to the expertise of Edward Akoto, AUA's energetic IT man, KOHA was successfully installed at AUA during May 2011, with all modules ready, and cataloging commenced in June.

Finding library furniture and supplies is likewise a problem in Africa, due to quality issues and sometimes lack of vendors. The recently built library of the Adventist University of Central Africa in Rwanda was furnished entirely from Chinese companies, with direct shipping. AUA is exploring a similar idea, using manufacturers in Malaysia. The Chief Librarian at the University of Malaya provided the names of two or three companies that produce quality library furniture, including standard steel shelving, and it appears that direct buying, even with shipping, will result in a saving of 40 percent on the cost of purchasing the same imported items locally. AUA has purchased its library barcodes from South Africa, rather than use locally produced labels that lack good adhesive. These are the kind of issues that AUA faces as it sets up a new library.

Building a library staff from scratch is yet another challenge. Staffing a large building with four floors creates a dilemma right from the opening day. However, a staffing plan has been accepted by administration and budgeted, including professional positions for a library director, a head of acquisitions and cataloging, and a systems librarian. Fortunately, there is a small pool of Adventist librarians working in the Nairobi area. Six responded to the first advertisement for a librarian position.

Crucial to the successful growth of the new university library is a viable strategic plan which addresses all the issues and variables. The task is especially problematic in an environment where the only librarian on site is a visitor to Kenya. Despite this, a start is being made during June 2011, in collaboration with administration and faculty, by outlining some goals and directions that should be taken as the library faces the future. There are already exciting plans to develop an African Studies Center, which will collect materials Africa-wide relating to cultures, religions, and history. In association with the E. G. White Center, an African Adventist heritage collection is proposed. With these and other opportunities in mind, AUA library can look ahead to playing an active networking role with ASDAL and other Adventist libraries worldwide. Africa has much to share with the rest of us.

Growing pains there certainly will be, but with hard work and divine blessing, the Judith Thomas Library of the Adventist University of Africa will play a very significant part in the continuing advance of our Lord's work on the continent of Africa.

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