

REPORT ON THE PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE ACADEMIC STATUS OF LIBRARIANS

WCHELIG ended their year's activities with a well received panel discussion on the academic status of librarians. Thirty- five people attended the event and the chair Fatima Darries welcomed everybody. She introduced the chairperson, Johan Engelbrecht from Stellenbosch University Library Service and the programme for the morning.

Johan Engelbrecht set the scene for the morning with an interesting introductory speech on the international perspective of the academic status of librarians by referring to the Guidelines for Academic Status for College and University Librarians of the Association of College & Research Libraries' (ACRL)¹ the Policy Statement on Academic Status and Governance for Librarians at Canadian Universities by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)², as well as the Reveling in Reference RAISS 2001 Symposium³. Johan confirmed that the debate on this crucial issue has been ongoing for many years by referring to a book discovered in the Stellenbosch University Library, published in 1970.

The speakers' informative and lively presentations were well received by the audience. The first speaker, Pazuna Stofile, from the Human Resources Department at the Cape Technikon, noted that the key question one should ask as a support service trying to remain relevant in higher education was "what is the library doing to contribute to the institution's output?"

The second speaker, Sally Witbooi, lecturer in Library Science at UWC, gave a very lively run-down on what exactly constitutes academic status in terms of the job title, job description, remuneration, fringe benefits and the relative rating of the discipline with other disciplines. She followed her presentation with the responsibilities of an academic, namely: teaching, research, publishing, administration and working in the community, etc.

Amanda Barratt, Law Faculty Librarian at UCT, started with a declaration that librarians should have academic status because "we deserve it". She made a comparison between the work that librarians and academics do and juxtaposed the two viewpoints. Both groups do research (librarians by reading professional and subject literature), teach (librarians by bibliographic instruction and mainstream integration of information literacy) and administration (librarians doing "mysterious library things"). She concluded her presentation by giving a couple of reasons against academic status for librarians namely time constraints, academic qualifications, that the users will suffer and that there are enough professors at the university anyway! The librarian aim should be "the very best cats of our breed"!

Time was given for some questions from the floor and an interesting discussion ensued. Fatima Darries thanked the speakers and chair for presenting the different viewpoints and the trouble they took to prepare their presentations. Annemarie Maritz, PRO, presented them with a token of appreciation.

Of the 25 attendees, 22 returned evaluation forms. Attendees listed the quality of and the combination of speakers as the most-liked features of the event. Many would have liked a longer session.

¹ <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/guidelinesacademic.htm>

² <http://www.caut.ca/en/policies/academicstatusandgov.asp>

³ http://www.library.qut.edu.au/contacts/staff/RAISS-2001_Final-paper.pdf