

Academic Library Consortia in South Africa: Where We Come From and Where We are Heading

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The purpose of this article is to give an overview of the establishment of the five academic library consortia in South Africa, their status quo, and a summary of their successes and plans for the future. Although useful information can be found from the consortia Web sites, much of it is no longer current. Similarly, there is limited published literature on the academic library consortia in South Africa. Apart from the sources referenced, the authors therefore relied heavily on an unpublished conference paper by Thomas,¹ which included findings gathered during a short survey among the five academic library consortia. In addition, Rowley and Slack² and Sekabembe³ provide useful overviews of the library consortia in South Africa at the time of publication. Further information is available in published and unpublished sources.⁴

Establishment of Academic Library Consortia

In parallel with the political, social, and economic transformation in South Africa, similar forces were transforming the country's library and information services sector with the establishment of the first formal library consortium, Cape Library Co-operative (CALICO), in 1992. Apart from pressure from Government to streamline library and educational efforts, grant makers like the Andrew W Mellon Foundation indicated that proposals to fund learning institution projects, especially library systems, would be considered, but set down conditions that it would work with consortia rather than individual libraries. Table 1 provides a summary of both the higher education and academic library consortia in South Africa.

Table 1: Higher education consortia and academic library consortia

Higher education consortium	Geographic coverage	Library consortium (committee)	Library consortium formally established
Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) http://www.hec.ac.za/	Western Cape Province	Cape Library Consortium CALICO	1992
Eastern Cape Higher Education Association (ECHEA) http://www.echea.ac.za/	Eastern Cape Province	South Eastern Alliance of Library Systems SEALS	1998
Eastern Seaboard Association of Tertiary Institutions (esATI) http://www.esati.org.za/	Kwa Zulu Natal Province	Eastern seaboard Association of Libraries esAL	1997
Forum of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM) http://www.fotim.ac.za/	Incorporates the provinces of Gauteng, North West and Limpopo	Gauteng & Environs Library Consortium GAELIC	1996
Free State Higher Education Consortium http://www.uovs.ac.za/support/library/E_frelico.php	Free State Province	Free State Library & Information Consortium FRELICO	1996/7

In a period of six years (1992–1998), five academic library consortia were established. Funding is primarily through grants although some consortia generate income through membership fees.⁵ Initially, the work in each consortium focused very much on the traditional role of consortia, namely purchasing a common library system, resource sharing, joint purchasing of information resources, and licensing agreements. Darch and Underwood⁶ discuss some of the problems experienced by South African academic libraries during this period. The main problem was inadequate infrastructures. The early years of South African library consortia and networking are also captured in a special issue of *Innovation*, a South African journal.⁷ During the period 1998–2003, consortia further consolidated their roles and some increased the number of member libraries. The consortia were also affected by the Government's decision to merge institutions of higher education.

Library consortia in South Africa are characterized by different organizational and governance structures depending on the Governing Boards and consortia objectives in the various regions. In each case, the legal entity is the higher education consortium and the library consortium is a committee of the institutional parent body, i.e., the library consortia have no legal status.

Each consortium strives to meet with the needs of its region with particular focus on the academics, students, and researchers. Although they have many overlapping objectives, there are also marked differences as we will point out in the following sections. Some of the similar objectives include the following:

- Promote formal relations between members to foster collaboration and networking.
- Support optimal access to information for members through regional and national co-operation.
- Promote collection building and resource sharing.
- Provide support for the implementation and management of common library systems.
- Improve information literacy skills and to share training resources and expertise.

Each consortium will be discussed in more detail. For these discussions, the authors relied on the consortia Web site content and data collected during a short survey conducted by Thomas in September 2004.⁸ The authors also requested input on the article from representatives in the five regional academic consortia. It should be noted that the rapidly changing environment of South African higher education has resulted in altered landscapes within the consortia and that there may be further developments by the time of publication.

Cape Library Consortium (CALICO)

CALICO was the first formal South African academic library consortium. At the time of its establishment in 1992 with a grant from the Ford Foundation and seed funding matched by the Desmond Tutu Educational Trust, its main aim was to address the information literacy needs of the region, namely the Western Cape, and to promote economic development. The Cape Library Cooperative (CALICO) adjusted its vision and mission statements in 2004 and changed its name to Cape Library Consortium (it still kept the acronym CALICO). Since its establishment, other donors such as the Andrew W Mellon Foundation (systems), Open Society Institute (WAN connectivity), and Emerald Publishing have also contributed to projects.

CALICO represents four academic library services in the Western Cape, namely:

- University of Cape Town Libraries;
- University of Stellenbosch Libraries;
- University of the Western Cape Libraries; and
- Cape Peninsula University of Technology Libraries.

CALICO has had a number of achievements. These include the following:

- Implementation of a centrally managed library information system and information portal and linking service (the Ex Libris Aleph 500 Integrated Library System, MetaLib, and SFX systems).
- Introduction of the MetaLib Library Portal in 2003 which was gradually launched by the member libraries. It is anticipated that MetaLib will be fully implemented at all CALICO libraries by April 2006 (also discussed by Becker, Crowster, Lilley, and Proske).⁹
- Increased access to electronic databases for their users by virtue of CALICO's membership of the Coalition of South African Library Consortia's South African Site Licensing Initiative.
- Collaborative agreements among CALICO libraries to facilitate further access to information by the sharing of library resources either directly or by means of inter-library loan. Rapid and cost-effective delivery of materials among CALICO libraries is provided by means of a daily van delivery.
- Use of the Ariel Document Delivery Service (more detail can be found in Raubenheimer).¹⁰
- Introduction of a SFX Context Sensitive Linking Service to library electronic collections, both bibliographic and full-text.

CALICO is a member of the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) and International Consortium of Aleph Users (ICAU), and also maintains close ties with its principal software vendor Ex Libris. CALICO's governance structure consists of the CALICO Board, the Committee of Library Directors, the CALICO Agency, Task Teams, and Working Groups. Van der Walt¹¹ discusses CALICO's early experience with professional education.

Eastern Seaboard Association of Libraries (esAL)

The library consortium serving the KwaZulu-Natal province is known as esAL. When established in 1997, its aim was to create a common cost-effective, cost-efficient library resource for students and researchers in the region. It especially seeks to promote wider access to information. As a result of the higher education mergers currently underway, the eight members have been reduced to four, although the same numbers of campuses, students, and staff members remain part of the Association.

The members include:

- University of Zululand;
- Durban University of Technology;
- Mangosutho Technikon; and
- University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The esAL vision statement is: “To develop fully the information resources of the region for the purpose of promoting and supporting teaching, learning and research in the province.” The consortium lists its principles as follows:

- Academic libraries on the eastern seaboard will share electronic information which is available to all libraries, no matter how small, provided that they have the necessary communications infrastructure and provided the relevant license agreements allow for this.
- Increased articulation (ease of use and movement of resources) between libraries for staff and post-graduate students.
- Improved Interlibrary Loans services between libraries.
- There will be a broad consensus within academic institutions on the role of libraries in information literacy; agreed strategies for library development will be adopted and supported by institutions.
- Agreed programs for staff development will enable maximum human resource development.
- Agreed standards for user education will assist libraries in building learner-centered programs
- Funds will be sourced for projects that will benefit the region.

Since its establishment, esAL has focused very strongly on cross-institutional membership for staff and graduate students, shared staff development programs and modules jointly developed for student orientation. The consortium is recently the recipient of a further Andrew W Mellon Foundation grant to purchase and implement a common library system, after vendor failure was identified as a major cause of esAL not being able to meet its aims and objectives.

Free State Library and Information Consortium (FRELICO)

FRELICO was founded in 1996/1997 with an Andrew W Mellon Foundation grant. The consortium serves the Free State province and aims at the utilization of electronic networks to expand access to library and study material in the province, as well as expanding access to research materials. The Project Manager and an Executive Committee carry out the day to day administration of FRELICO. The Executive reports to the Board of Management. FRELICO comprises the following members:

- University of the Free State (UFS);
- Central University of Technology (CUT); and
- SASOL Library (also referred to as SASOL Infonet).¹²

The following reflects a selection of FRELICO's achievements since its establishment:

- The implementation of INNOPAC for the Free State University and the Central University of Technology.
- By subscribing to electronic periodical databases acquired via EBSCO's eIFL project and by integrating with GAELIC on the MCB and OCLC FirstSearch license packages, the availability of electronic journals for FRELICO members rose substantially.
- The SASOL Library acquired a ten-user license for South African academic libraries to utilize the Beilstein/Gmelin Chemical Database.
- With FRELICO's assistance, the hard- and software of SA Media, a press cutting service which became integrated into the UFS Library Service in 1998, has been upgraded. The digitization of 4.8 million news clippings and articles has been completed. The benefit of seven years of free access for FRELICO members is one of the major outcomes. An SDI service to clients was also developed and launched in May 2002 with 50% financial support from FRELICO.
- The establishment of computer laboratories at the Central University of Technology and the Free State University was successfully completed.
- The implementation of Aerial for mutual document delivery to its members is one of the major achievements of FRELICO.

Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium (GAELIC)

GAELIC, the largest South African academic library consortium, was founded in April 1996. Its early years are reported by Edwards.^{13., 14. and 15.} A useful report by one of GAELIC's members, Unisa, explores their experiences with the OPAC.¹⁶ Recently, a comprehensive survey of the GAELIC member libraries was conducted by a Research Team from the Centre of Information Literacy at UCT during 2005. It has provided the consortium with a comprehensive profile of facilities and infrastructure of the library services as well as insights into the expectations and needs of its institutions with respect to their membership and participation. GAELIC constitutes a large geographic region that includes the three provinces of Gauteng, Limpopo, and the North-West. Within the provincial boundaries, and after the mergers, the consortium has 9 South African institutional members. The tenth member is the University of Namibia Library Services which is currently implementing an INNOPAC system. Across the 10 institutions, there are 40 sites and 67 separate service points with 1267 staff.

The ten GAELIC members are the libraries of:

- North-West University;
- Tshwane University of Technology;
- University of Johannesburg;
- University of Limpopo;
- University of Pretoria;
- University of South Africa;
- University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg;
- University of Venda;
- Vaal University of Technology; and
- University of Namibia Library.

The GAELIC Governing Board (GGB), which reports to the higher education consortium called FOTIM, regulates and manages GAELIC, its projects and finances. Each member of FOTIM nominates its librarian (or other official) as a member of the GGB and, in addition, the FOTIM CEO attends the meetings. GAELIC reviews its structures regularly.¹⁷ During 2005, GAELIC Focus Groups replaced a former team and workgroup structure as a way to encourage broader participation in areas of specialist interest. They will share information and expertise through workshops and e-mail discussion lists. Current projects include closer co-operation with other South African library consortia, enhancements to the INNOPAC system in the form of specialized modules, collaborative research projects, conferences, and workshops.

Some of the broad achievements of GAELIC since its establishment include:

- The Millennium System of Innovative Interfaces (III) system was purchased with generous funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and implemented in all member libraries across three phases between 1997 and 2005.
- The facilitation of optimal use and support of the INNOPAC common library system.
- Resource sharing within and among the regions, e.g., the ARIEL system has been extended.
- A reduction in duplication of non-core materials.
- Project management for initiatives across members libraries, e.g., computer labs, Question Point e-reference services in 7 GAELIC libraries, investigation of ILL performance levels.
- A seed-bed for services that migrated to the national level, e.g., site licensing, e-reference services.
- Co-ordination of information literacy skills and specialist training programs for staff of the member institutions.
- Performing a facilitating and brokering role, e.g., during the merger process.
- Consultancy services by experts and specialists.
- At the international level, members are active in library system user groups, conferences, and consortia bodies such as eIFL and ICOLC.
- Improved communications infrastructure (Web site, e-mail list, newsletter) and awareness of consortia.
- Effective and efficient management of the organization through an office infrastructure.

In the future, there will be increased levels of co-operation between FOTIM and GAELIC where fund-raising and income generation are concerned. The member libraries will be encouraged to participate more actively in FOTIM conferences and other workshops.

South Eastern Alliance of Library Systems (SEALS)

The South East Academic Libraries System (SEALS), situated in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, was established in 1987 as a forum for cooperation between Rhodes University, the University of Fort Hare, and the University of Port Elizabeth, with the main focus being collaboration on the purchasing of journals. Membership was later extended to the Technikon libraries and the University of Transkei. SEALS became a formal academic library consortium in 1998. As a result of the higher education mergers in the region which reduced the number of members from seven to four, ECHEA has scaled down its operations. The SEALS office now comprises one full-time and one part-time employee. The governance of SEALS includes a Steering Committee and Standards Committee which operate under Terms of Reference. Due to distances in the Eastern Cape, the committees meet twice a year.

The constituent libraries of SEALS are attached to the following institutions:

- Walter Sisulu University of Technology and Science, Eastern Cape (WSU), comprising the former Border Technikon, Eastern Cape Technikon, and the University of Transkei (UNITRA);
- University of Fort Hare;
- Rhodes University; and
- Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) comprising the former University of Port Elizabeth, Port Elizabeth Technikon, and the Port Elizabeth Campus of Vista University.

The vision of SEALS is to create a virtual library for the Eastern Cape to promote and enhance information literacy, education, research, and economic development for all who need it. The vision includes:

- Building, and providing access to, an effective Eastern Cape distributed union catalogue by providing efficient, state-of-the-art electronic access to the various electronic databases held by the participating libraries.
- Facilitating cost-effective resource sharing via a reliable IT communications network.
- Providing easy access to SABINET Online through a state-of-the-art library system, in the interests of resource sharing nationwide.

The main achievements of SEALS include inter-alia:

- A grant received in 1999 from the Andrew W Mellon Foundation enabled SEALS to investigate, on behalf of the libraries, the provision of Information Literacy programs, IT, human resource development, and resource sharing. A further major grant was received in June 2000 from Mellon to finance the following projects:
 - Purchase of a common library system.
 - Development of a computerized Information Literacy program.
 - Establishment of a shared theses and dissertations database.
- In 2001, SEALS libraries implemented the Millennium System of Innovative Interfaces Inc. (III) which is run from a central server situated in Grahamstown. Databases from four different library systems were converted to MARC21 and loaded onto the system in phases, the last being in 2003. Currently, the central server is running the 2005 version of the Millennium software.
- A computerized Information Literacy Program was designed by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology for SEALS and installed at Rhodes University in 2004, and at the University of Fort Hare and the NMMU LIS in 2005. The WSU version will be installed at a later date.
- In 2003, SEALS purchased the Millennium Media Management software for a shared digital theses and dissertations system for its member libraries. To date, only a few libraries have utilized the software.

- In 2004, SEALS agreed to the Millennium Access Plus (MAP) software which includes a federated search interface MetaFind that enables one-stop access to the libraries' full-text databases. MetaFind has been successfully configured for Rhodes University and the NMMU. The interfaces for the University of Fort Hare and the WSU LIS will be loaded shortly.
- SEALS has hosted numerous training courses in system usage, workshops, and meetings on behalf of the member libraries.

Overview of Consortium Achievements

The following section provides an overview of the achievements of the regional academic consortia. Initial achievements (1992–1998) reflect the traditional roles of consortia, namely the establishment of regional academic library consortia across the country, using donor funding to promote best practices, improving interlending and document delivery services among members, implementing staff skills development programs, establishing committed leadership and staff in member libraries, stimulating the need for electronic communication such as e-mail, e-mail discussion lists, and Web sites, reducing the duplication of non-core materials through the joint purchasing of electronic resources, and enhancing the credibility and support provided by the consortium.¹⁸

During the period 1999–2003, the role of the consortia was expanded in all the regions. Broad achievements include the facilitation of the use of common library systems, resource sharing within and among the regions (e.g., through extension of the ARIEL system), improving access especially to electronic resources (e.g., the application of tools such as INNOVATIVE MAP and Media Management, MetaLib and SFX and portal technology). Various programs across member libraries were co-ordinated, e.g., information literacy skills and specialist training of staff. The consortia also filled the role of facilitation and brokering during the merger processes. Furthermore consultancy services by experts were made available, and agreements were made to benchmark service levels. An important collaborative project initiated by seven GAELIC members in 2004, in co-operation with the University of Stellenbosch Library, was the implementation of e-reference services using the OCLC product QuestionPoint. The GAELIC knowledge base (consisting of 1087 records of which 866 were added by the University of Stellenbosch) was created during 2004–2005. Currently, there are plans to establish virtual reference services for the academic libraries through the establishment of a national knowledge base in 2006 whereby the library services of the University of the Free State, Stellenbosch and all GAELIC member institutions will participate.

Key Issues Facing Consortia

Thomas¹⁹ and Henning²⁰ both identify a number of issues facing South African consortia. Firstly, the higher education mergers have impacted relationships, infrastructures, and finances, as well as the consortia membership. In April 2006, a conference will be hosted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal on the impact of the mergers on the LIS sector in South Africa.²¹ The consortia are also required to deal with changed and changing member needs—this includes new/revised services and research support. Henning,²² for example, points to the need for 24/7 customer services and support.

Another critical factor is that all consortia have to renew their efforts to ensure sustainability, and to rely less on the parent higher education consortium as a main source of revenue. GAELIC for example, together with FOTIM, will work collaboratively on conferences and workshops to ensure that the library staff participate actively in the debates and activities pertaining to higher education.

Academic libraries are experiencing staff shortages and some consortia members face serious challenges with regard to skills development and training as well as capacity building. Consortia members are also pressed by both library management and decision-makers in the parent institution to justify the continued costs of consortia membership fees.

Future

Based on the short survey Thomas²³ identified a number of aspects concerning the immediate future of academic library consortia in the South African context. These include:

- The traditional roles such as resource sharing and collaboration for mutual benefit are no longer sufficient justification for consortia. They need to expand their roles, e.g., central storage services, grant writing proposals, training services, and benchmarking.
- Consortia issues and plans should be aligned across the regions and with focused efforts to feed regional strategies into national agendas.
- Standards and benchmarks will become increasingly important.
- Consortia should not focus only on IT at the cost of other issues such as carrying out research to solve common operational issues across the libraries, e.g., ILL performance levels, shelving, and database quality assurance.
- Increased inter-consortia collaboration is needed.
- Innovation, leadership, and business principles should characterize consortia management models. This will require regular strategic planning, business plans, defined deliverables, and benefits.
- Metadata attribution and Open Access Initiatives require more attention.
- Data curation and preservation are becoming pressing issues that require regional and national collaboration.
- Ongoing surveys and needs analysis are essential to identify gaps in services and delivery.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to review the status of regional academic consortia in South Africa, including the establishment of the consortia as well as their broad achievements. The short survey conducted in late 2004 shows that South African academic library consortia should be working towards identifying steps to take them to new levels of service delivery, member participation/involvement, and strategic development. This will require them to:

- provide collective strategic leadership in the academic library sector;
- provide strong leadership to find research-centered solutions to common problems (encourage innovation);
- provide seedbeds/incubators for innovative projects and services;
- motivate members to improve support for researchers; and
- assist in the promotion of continuous improvement in member libraries.

In future, it will be important for the academic consortia to consider the ways in which they operate, how they are organized on behalf of their members, and how they deliver services to them. This will require clear statements of mission and purpose along with defined deliverables and benefits. Consortia will need to back up their strategic planning with transparent business plans for all consortia activities, which should then be co-ordinated to avoid duplication of effort, costs, and funds.

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