



**THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
OF EASTERN AFRICA (CUEA)**
A.M.E.C.E.A

Consecrate them in the Truth

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found them very appropriate in describing the person of Prof. Maviiri, and a summary of who and what he has been to CUEA for the past 16 years. Prof. Maviiri, we can confirm that while in CUEA, you have fought the good fight. You have finished the race. You have kept the faith. And indeed what remains is the crown. But the latter is the Lord's to grant.

REALIZING THE VISION OF A LEARNING RESOURCE CENTRE (LRC) AT THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

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Introduction

The concept of a Learning Resource Centre (LRC) is a global phenomenon in response to the emerging knowledge-seeking society and its impact on educational delivery systems (Sundberg, 2008). The vision of establishing LRC at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa was the brainchild of Rev. Prof. John C. Maviiri, the Vice Chancellor of the University (2002-2011). He has guided, supported and coordinated all efforts towards the realization of this vision, as he remarks:

The Learning Resource Centre shall improve the Research, Teaching and Learning within the University and support community service activities. It shall be the hub of information and communications technology on campus and will serve neighbouring institutions, schools and learning centres.³

From the ground-breaking ceremony on 27th February, 2008 to its commissioning on 28th June, 2011, this great idea has been transformed into an architectural marvel that is gradually transforming the skyline of the University in a unique way. At the time of writing this paper (July, 2011), the project is at the completion stage which includes, installation of data networks, equipment and furniture. Almost all the equipment for the various components of the LRC is already on site or in suppliers' warehouses' waiting to be installed. Parallel to this completion process, models of functioning of the various components are being finalized. In the near future, the project shall come to an end.

³ Maviiri, J. C. 2011. CUEA Commissions the 24 hour Learning Resource Centre: Speech delivered at the Commissioning Ceremony on 28th June, 2011 at Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Karen Nairobi.

Rationale for Establishing CUEA Learning Resource Centre

Academic support services are widely acknowledged as critical in the provision of quality research, teaching and learning in any university (Harrison, 1994). Although there is no consensus on what academic support services are, some of the elements include library and information services, Information Communication Technology (ICT) services (e.g. internet connectivity, statistical and modelling software packages, and media services (e.g. curriculum aids, printing, photocopying) and staff services (e.g. publishing). According to Cowan, academic support services have a leading role in the core processes of the university alongside the teaching fraternity. Accordingly Cowan further observed,

Too long has the phrase 'teaching and learning been glibly used, when the speakers or writers merely meant 'teaching' - and instruction at that [...] teaching - dare I suggest it - as the purposeful creation of situations from which motivated learners should not be able to escape without significantly learning or developing as a result of our efforts. That definition covers instruction ... and facilitation and student support in all forms, including libraries and information centres.⁴

The concept of a LRC hinges on the need for a convergence of the portfolio of academic support services as opposed to the prevailing paradigm of separate uncoordinated services. The underlying focus is to provide an integrated working environment, allowing staff with different backgrounds such as library and information science, computing, media and communication science and curriculum design, to work together to develop new knowledge products.

The idea of academic support services; CUEA LRC is part of the ongoing efforts to achieve the vision of the University to be "a world class University producing transformative leaders for Church and Society."⁵ In its mission statement, the University is committed to being innovative in the pursuit of truth through scientific research, teaching and community service. Secondly, it is part of an effort to achieve the goals of the University, which include: promoting ethical scientific research, quality teach-

⁴ Cowan, 1994: 16.

⁵ The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (2011), *Learning Resource Centre (LRC) appeal*. Nairobi: CUEA Press

ing and community service, preparing authentic qualified leaders and upright personnel capable of contributing to sustainable development according to God's plan and enhance a conducive environment for sharing the joy of learning, discovering and communicating knowledge.⁶

To realize these goals, the LRC was embedded in the CUEA's Strategic Development Plan (2002-2011) whose strategic objectives included reinforcing the quality of teaching, providing more opportunities for more access to university education through increased student enrolment, improving support resources for research and scholarship, enhancing community service objectives and diversification of financial resources of the university.⁷

Goals of the Learning Resource Centre

The broad aim of the CUEA LRC is to:

...to deliver high quality learning resources to support the achievement of excellence in research, learning and teaching across the university as well as support the university in its community service within the East African region and beyond.⁸

The goals of the LRC can be divided into two categories: research, teaching and community service goals. The basic function of the university across the world is to generate new knowledge and innovations through research and teaching, and ensure its dissemination for benefit of people. The research and teaching goals include:

1. Develop student's skills and attitudes that are essential in the 21st century knowledge economy and labour market e.g. appropriate ICT skills, information literacy skills, problem solving skills, communication skills, and an attitude of lifelong learning.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ The Catholic University of Eastern Africa. 2005. *Strategic development plan 2002-2011: a commitment to provide quality education, research, and community service*. Nairobi: CUEA Press

⁸ The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (2011), *Learning Resource Centre (LRC) appeal*. Nairobi: CUEA Press

2. Reinforce the University's capacity to deliver excellent research, teaching and learning through provision of appropriate library and academic information resources and multimedia services.
3. Provide cost-effective resources for print and e-publishing for the University and the East African regional community and beyond.
4. Support CUEA academic staff adapt to the shift towards independent learning, and use of modern information and communication technology that is now emerging as an education technology.

Since its inception, CUEA has pursued a strong community service policy based on a philosophy of providing services of practical nature to the less privileged and the downtrodden people in the society. This philosophy of community service is embedded in the LRC concept to enable the University to reach out to the neighbouring community especially the poor and the marginalized. As such, the LRC will be open to the external community including students, researchers and other interest groups. The community service objectives entail:

1. Address library and information needs of primary and secondary communities from needy segments of the surrounding communities.
2. Develop the artistic talents of young people by providing them with facilities for performing arts and audio/video recording facilities e.g. music recording.
3. Provide Internet access to the surrounding community at reasonable fees.
4. Provide state-of-the-art conferencing facilities for CUEA, the wider East Africa community and beyond.

Components of the LRC

The LRC consists of eight (8) components whose functions are as follows:

1. **The Information and Communications Technology Centre (ICT).** This centre will develop and manage the University's ICT infrastructure as well as provide support to the academic programmes.
2. **Language Laboratory.** The language lab will support teaching of various applied language courses that will be offered by the University.

3. **Multimedia and Curriculum Centre.** This centre will host multimedia production and training facilities which will be used to:
 - Support teaching and learning through the provision of audio-visual materials and equipment.
 - Support teaching of relevant courses such as Communication science among others.
 - Produce teaching and learning materials in collaboration with teaching staff.
 - Collaborate with the library in supplying learning materials, particularly stored on video and photographic media, to staff and students.
 - Assist upcoming young artists to record music and other artistic performances.
 - Engage in income generating activities for the University.

4. **The E-Publishing Centre.** This centre will support the scholarly, research and pedagogical objectives of CUEA through print and electronic publishing of CUEA scholarly journals, teaching modules, and academic works by CUEA lecturers as well as institutions and authors across the region. Particularly, it will provide support for a very low-cost alternative to conventional academic publishing threatened by escalating costs and diminishing sources of income.

5. **The Cafeteria** will avail meals and other services to the occupants of the LRC.

6. **The University Bookshop.** This will acquire and sell at competitive prices academic, spiritual and motivational books, materials to parents, students, schools, churches, colleges and the community at large e.g. primary, secondary, higher education textbooks, print and digital media equipment, computer equipment, computer accessories, and stationery and branded goods.

7. **Archives, Electronic and Virtual Museum.** This centre will house cultural and historical documents of the East African region, and maintain an image gallery both at its premises and online where the public can view pictorial histories and cultures, especially of the Eastern African communities and beyond.

8. **Conference Facility.** It has a Plenary Hall with a capacity of 1200 people, and meeting/discussion rooms for 350 persons. This shall provide an enabling environment for meetings, workshops and seminars.
9. **The University Library.** CUEA student enrolment has increased through innovative strategies from 23 students in 1984 to the current 7,000 students in 2011. The targeted student enrolment in the next 5 years is 10,000. The new library is part of the University's commitment to provide quality academic support to the learning and teaching activities of CUEA students and lecturers, and the surrounding academic communities too. Among other services, the library will:
 - Provide fast Internet connectivity to CUEA community and beyond.
 - Provide access to academic information materials both in print and e-formats e.g. books, journals, databases, e-books, e-journals, e-databases.
 - Provide access to learning support software e.g. word processing, and statistical packages.
 - Provide information literacy training for students and community in line with the requirements of the emerging knowledge society.
 - Provide access to CUEA's institutional repository of Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDS): Masters' and Doctoral Theses, over and above the internally produced scholarly information.

Key Characteristics and Technologies Installed in the Learning Resource Centre

One of the key characteristics of the LRC is that it will be open 24-hours. This is in line with the philosophy of the University to provide flexible modes of operation to suit the needs of students:

My heart is full of joy as CUEA commissions the 24 hour learning Resource centre. In CUEA we believe in student-centred services. i.e. the university has to give service to the students when the students are available. Therefore this concept of library is in line with the flexibility of The Catholic University of Eastern

Africa in closing gaps where they exist. And the concept of 24 hour service of the library is very important and is aimed at adopting to the current style of life.⁹

Another characteristic of the LRC is that it will be open to the wider community. This is because the LRC is part and parcel of CUEA's efforts to achieve its community service objectives. Students from the neighbouring institutions i.e. primary, secondary and university as well as lecturers, researchers will be able to access the LRC. Indeed the library has a children's section which will address the information needs of the primary school children.

University students, lecturers and researchers will be able to access quality printed scholarly books and journal collections in various disciplines. They will also access wide variety of electronic information in the form of e-journals, e-books, electronic theses and dissertations, and conference proceedings. All the reading tables of the library will have an internet capacity whereby individuals can connect to the information superhighway. Besides, there will be over 500 internet PC work stations available for use by library patrons, and collections of multimedia such as CD ROMs, DVDs, VHS cassettes and the equipment to use them.

The operations of the LRC are installed with the latest ICT technologies in all its operations. For example the conference facility is equipped with video conferencing e-voting capacity, language translation booths, media gallery technologies, and performing art facilities. The multimedia/curriculum centre is furnished with ultra modern media equipment, teaching facilities and audio and video production studios.

The library is stocked with:

1. High speed Internet connectivity (optic fibre and wireless technologies). This will facilitate setting up of 2500 Internet-ready table places, for use with personal laptops, 120 private reading carrels with plug and play Internet capability, and 500 PCs with Internet connection for library customer use.

⁹ Maviiri, J.C. 2011. CUEA Commissions the 24 hour Learning Resource Centre: Speech delivered at the Commissioning Ceremony on 28th June, 2011 at Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Karen Nairobi.

The Language Laboratory will be maintained by funds generated from research and consultancy services, training students and practitioners in language using the language laboratory and availing the language learning equipment to the nearby institutions.

The Conference Facility shall be let for use by organizations and groups to host academic seminars, public lectures, etc.

Conclusion

CUEA has the undying resolve of becoming a world class University providing premier education to an increasing number of students. The establishment of a Learning Resource Centre at CUEA is a noble innovation which shall bring about a paradigm shift in the way research, teaching and learning is conducted at the University. It will support CUEA students in independent and information resource based learning. Conversely, it will develop among CUEA graduates, transferable skills very useful in the labour market such as problem solving, effective communication, use of modern information and communication technology, and information literacy skills (how to find and use information). Moreover, it will support CUEA academic staff adapt to the shift towards independent learning, and use of modern information and communication technology. More importantly, it will assist the University to realize some of its community service by providing opportunities for personal growth and empowerment, through ICTs and knowledge to all and sundry.

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