"OPEN FOR 24 HOURS": LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on the lessons learnt by the Library Services of the North-West University (NWU), Mafikeng Campus in North-west province, South Africa, with regard to extending library opening hours for 24 hours (Monday to Friday) during the November/December examination period in 2015. The students' call for 24-hour physical library services was part of the much talked about demand for "free quality education" coupled with the popular hash tag, #FeesMustFall. In the case of the NWU Mafikeng Campus, the protests began when students staged a "sit-in" on 20 October 2015, demanding that the library remain open for 24 hours. Management acceded somewhat to the students' demands, having considered the time lost when the campus was closed due to continued student protests. Although the students were demanding permanent 24-hour physical library services, management only agreed to open the library on a trial basis during the delayed examination period. The major lesson learnt was that students were not primarily in the library for library transactions, but rather to study in conducive environment despite the existence of a separate 24-hour study centre located in the basement of the library. This shows the need for the reconfiguration of the library's 24-hour study centre into a space that supports independent study. The article suggests that libraries should be able to support students if they recreate the library environment in their 24-hour study centres.

Keywords: academic libraries; library spaces; library services; 24 hours; extended hours

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The availability of 24-hour electronic library resources like databases, e-books, e-theses and e-journals has brought with it expectations from library users for the libraries to serve them for 24 hours a day, seven days a week (24/7) (Sanders and Hodges 2014). The demand for academic libraries to be open for 24 hours now features prominently on students' demands in several academic institutions, such as the: University of Pretoria in 2012; University of Venda in 2015; North-West University (NWU), Mafikeng Campus in 2015 and 2016; and Central University of Technology in 2016. It should be noted that this demand is evident particularly at NWU when there are Student Representative Council (SRC) elections or even during students' strikes. University students expect their libraries to be available to them whenever they need them both in physical and electronic format. Despite these demands, no public academic library in South Africa was opening its physical library for 24 hours at the time of this investigation. The common response had been to effect marginal increases in library hours and in some instances also build or create 24-hour study areas (Ajala, Arinola and Adigun 2014). However, marginal increases in hours and the availability of 24-hour study areas does not seem to have deterred the students who keep on making the same demand for a 24-hour physical and electronic library. Some of the reasons advanced for not opening the libraries for 24 hours range from fears for the security of patrons and staff; lack of funds; doubts about the patronage of libraries during the extended hours; availability of 24-hour study areas; 24-hour accessibility of electronic resources; to a lack of research that supports the opening of the libraries for 24 hours.

The NWU Mafikeng Campus Library (hereafter the library) is located in the North-West Province, South Africa. It is located in close proximity to the lecture halls as well as on- campus student housing and is accessible through scanning the student or staff card to open the turnstiles that allow access into the library. The main entrance of the library is manned by security personnel who also patrol the library at fixed intervals. The library's main collection is held on the first floor and the Law Collection in the basement of the library. The Short Loan Collection is located on the ground floor of the library in the Loan Services Section. The entire collection is only accessible during the library's operational time. In addition, the library has two computer centres which are located inside the library. One of the computer centres is located in the Media Centre which houses the special collections of historical and rare books as well as thesis and dissertations. It is open on from 08:30–16:30 (Monday to Friday). The second computer centre which is used for training purposes is available to students whenever there is no scheduled training and is available when the library is open but for post-graduate students. Power supply points and unlimited internet access through Wi-Fi is available throughout the whole library. The library has a 24-hour study centre located on the basement floor and is not accessible through the library's main entrance. The 24-hour centre has two separate entrances which are neither equipped with any access control mechanisms nor manned by security personnel and students are expected to take

responsibility for its use. The layout of the 24-hour centre comprises individual study cubicles as well as group discussion areas which are located in the centre of the study centre. Wi-Fi and power supply terminals are available in the centre. The 24-hour study centre is open throughout the year except during the university recess in December.

The library increased its hours from 08:30–21:00 (Monday to Friday) in 2013, then to 08:30–22:00 (Monday to Friday) in 2014. The library also decided to open on Sundays from 08:00–13:00. The changes were made to address the students' demands for 24-hour library services. A pilot study was carried out to open the library till midnight during the examination period. Due to the success of the pilot study, the arrangement to open the library till midnight during the exams is now a permanent feature of the library's calendar. Students, however, are still not entirely happy with this arrangement. On 20 October 2015, students occupied the library just before its closure at 21:45 announcing the beginning of the 24-hour library service. This was the beginning of the #FeesMustFall campaign at NWU as the students barricaded entrances to the university the following day demanding free education and 24-hour library services among other demands. This resulted in the closure of the campus for two weeks, during a crucial time before examinations.

After a formal request by the NWU Mafikeng Campus SRC to the Campus Management to open the library for 24 hours to compensate for the time lost during the two weeks closure of the campus, it was decided that a pilot study, the current investigation, be carried out where the library would open from 08:30–07:00 (Monday to Saturday) during the 2015 final examination period (16 November – 13 December 2015). As per this arrangement, the library began operating from 08:30–07:00 with effect from 16 November 2015. Volunteers were requested from the permanent staff and the library intern to assist with the extended hours. A new shift with two staff members per shift began from 23:00–07:00 (Monday to Saturday). The staff members were stationed at the main circulation desk and Short Loans desk. This meant that full circulation services were available for the students during those extended hours. Limited information services were also provided by those circulation staff members as they had been trained to respond to at least the basic level of information services related queries. For remuneration purposes, the staff members' hours were counted at 1.5 hours per hour as required by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (No. 75 of 1997) (RSA 1997). This meant that only three hours for each person per night counted as overtime. Payment was determined according to each individual's rate of pay. The NWU Mafikeng Campus Rectorate agreed to provide funding for the overtime. Four security personnel were deployed to the library to assist with the security. Two of those security officers were stationed at the main library entrance with the expectation that they would patrol the library to identify any potential security risks, while the other two manned the 24-hour study centre.

The article reports on how the 24-hour library pilot study was conducted at the NWU Mafikeng Campus. The article also outlines the usage statistics during the pilot study

and concludes with a discussion of the successes and challenges faced and what should be done in the future to meet the students' study requirements in a library environment.

2. 24-HOUR LIBRARY SERVICE

The term "24-hour library" has different connotations to different role players. Missingham (2014) describes 24-hour libraries in the Australian context as referring to either of two models, namely: 24-hour access to designated areas without access to the print collections; or access to the library or part of the library and its collections. Arant and Benefiel's (2002) support this as their findings in the United States (US) libraries context found that libraries that advertise themselves as offering 24-hour library services refer to the availability of a reading room only at certain hours. Many academic libraries in South Africa, including all three campuses of NWU, provide 24-hour study areas without proclaiming those facilities to be 24-hour library services. It is clear in the context of South Africa that students and librarians do not consider 24-hour reading spaces as 24-hour library services. In the context of this study, therefore, a 24-hour library would mean that users have access to the physical library, physical shelves, and circulation services they require.

2.1. Rationale for the 24-hour library service

A 24-hour library service offers students flexibility in terms of studying. Students can choose the time that they would like to study, which suits their circumstances. Notably, Coldwell (2013) found that a 24-hour library service would suit students enrolled for evening classes; students who study part-time; and students who have to work part-time during the day to fund their studies and living costs. Thus, a 24-hour study service would be an essential asset for these types of students as it provides flexibility.

Furthermore, a 24-hour library service would provide access to resources to which students may otherwise not have access. Hayman (2015) established that students used the 24-hour library service for the university's wireless internet access, library printers, computers, and online databases and electronic resources. In a developing country such as South Africa, for many students who live off-campus, internet access remains a challenge, in particular for students from low socio-economic groups (Czerniewicz and Brown 2013; Rambe and Nel 2015). In addition, 78 per cent of South African students access the internet via their cell phones (Czerniewicz and Brown 2013). Furthermore, South Africa is a resource-constrained country where data costs are significantly higher than many developed countries (Mathur, Schlotfeldt and Chetty 2015). The high data costs, lack of internet access off-campus, and lack of computers and laptops are some of the challenges in developing countries that show the need for a 24-hour library service so as to enable patrons to access online databases and electronic resources.

The need for study places is another rationale for a 24-hour library service. Bowman (2013, 237) postulates that:

> Students just want a safe haven to study and thus, only a security presence is required. First and foremost, patrons want a quiet, safe place to study. The patrons appear to understand the 24-hour library service limitations and primarily view the library as a secure setting to occupy. In essence, patrons recognize that the library is always available to them, no matter how often they actually are using it.

This shows that the library is viewed as being a useful study environment. The security presence can be attributed to the patrons' safety needs. Thus, a 24-hour library service offers security and a quiet place to study.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were to:

- explain how the NWU Mafikeng Campus Library operated for 24 hours during the pilot study period;
- show the level of usage of the 24-hour library in terms of access to the library and circulation statistics;
- determine whether students require a conducive study area or the physical library;
- make recommendations on how libraries can be configured to enable an environment conducive to studying and learning;
- highlight the challenges faced by NWU Mafikeng Campus during the 24-hour library service.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section focuses on the literature on 24-hour library services in higher education institutions. The section will focus on extended, overnight, or 24-hour access to academic library buildings and will highlight the issues that dominate 24-hour library services, namely, safety and security as well as services.

The trend over the past 10 years has been on increased 24-hour access to library spaces in academic libraries (Scarletto, Burhanna and Richardson 2013). Some of the investigations that have been conducted on the topic include those by Smith (2008) at the Georgia Southern University in the US, and Lawrence and Weber's (2012) at the University of Minnesota in the US. Further, Coldwell (2013) reported that three universities in the United Kingdom (UK), namely, Leeds, Kings and Reading, were piloting 24-hour library services; Ajala, Arinola and Adigun (2014) reported that three public libraries in South Western Nigeria in 2014 were piloting 24-hour library services;

and in 2016, two libraries of the Rutgers University libraries in the US announced that they would open for 24 hours from Monday to Thursday.

The Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) Spec Kit reports that more than half of academic libraries in the US were open for extended hours in 2001 (Steele and Walters 2001). Arant and Benefiel (2002) point out that some of the libraries that proclaim to open 24 hours in the ARL report actually refer to a reading hall attached to the library (24-hour study centre). They observed a general pattern of libraries opening for 24 hours for only a few weeks towards the end of an academic term or during the regular term or semester. Of the 97 libraries they studied, only two offered access to the stacks and circulation services all year round.

The Georgia Southern University started opening its doors for 24 hours as far back as 1989. Initially, the library saw the security of staff during the evenings as a main priority. When few minor security incidents were reported during the evening/morning shift, however, the library realised that this concern was unfounded (Smith 2008). This finding was also noted in Lawrence and Weber's (2012) study at the University of Minnesota, which showed that few security incidences occurred at the library when it opened for 24 hours on a trial basis in 2007. There were also no major security incidences reported at the East Carolina University's Main Campus when it started opening for 24 hours (Sanders and Hodges 2014).

Eighty-four per cent of students surveyed in the current study indicated that they went to the library for the quiet space that was conducive to study. A pilot study was carried out in 2014 at an Urban Commuter College to determine the extent of library patronage and reasons for patronage during the late evenings and early mornings (Richards 2016). The study found that the largest number of students who visited the library were undergraduates (80%), followed by part-time students (10%). The most popular period was 22:00–23:00, and the numbers kept on decreasing as the night or morning progressed, only to pick up again between 07:00 and 08:00. The study found that 90 per cent of those who use the library during the late evening or early morning used it for studying (Richards 2016). Thus, the library could be described as offering an environment conducive to study. Students, therefore, typically use the library facility as a venue for study and not necessarily for physical access to resources or services (McDougal and Moore 2013 cited in Sanders and Hodges 2014).

In Africa, some universities in Nigeria have adopted the 24-hour library service iniative. In their study of 24-hour library services in Nigeria, Ajala, Arinola and Adigun (2014) confirmed that at last three university libraries open for 24 hours for five weekdays during the examination periods, namely, the: Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (opens three to four weeks during the examination periods since 2004); the University of Ilorin Library (opens for 24 hours during the examination periods since 2008/2009); and the Kenneth Dike Library (which opens for 24 hours on five days during the examination periods since 2011). Ajala, Arinola and Adigun (2014) found that most students see a positive correlation between the extension of library hours

and their performance in their studies: 80 per cent of the students saw the library as a space conducive for study in spite of the fact that security concerns like theft of laptop computers, bags and personal effects were reported during the extended hours; while 90 per cent of the students also wanted the 24-hour service in Nigerian universities to run throughout the semester. The issue of security is important in the present study since university campuses in South Africa have been found unsafe with incidences of theft and violence being reported (Cornell, Ratele and Kessi 2016).

Various searches on library databases did not yield any results of studies that were carried out about the 24-hour physical library services in South Africa at the time the study was conducted. The issue of 24-hour library services is not unique to South Africa as various studies in Nigeria, the US and the UK have shown. Students are mainly the drivers for the extension of library hours (Ajala, Arinola and Adigun 2014; Coldwell 2013; Steele and Walters 2001). Academic libraries in South Africa are under pressure from students to open daily for 24 hours. This has become one of the demands of student organisations manifestos. At the University of the Witwatersrand, an organisation called "Project W – to make Wits better", which was dedicated to improving the student experience at that university, promised to ensure the extension of library hours if elected to lead the SRC (Motsai and Toyana 2013). In 2014, the Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA) made a call "for 24-hour library services and study centres at all campuses" of the University of South Africa (UNISA) (Malepe and Matlanyana 2014). The Democratic Alliance Students' Organisation (DASO) cited the 24-hour library access, especially during examinations, as part of their manifesto (Williams 2014). DASO made the same demand in 2015 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Mungroo 2015). Therefore, the call for 24-hour library services seems to transcend individual students' organisations in South Africa.

At the NWU Mafikeng Campus, the South African Students' Congress (SASCO) led Campus SRC first made a request for 24-hour library services in 2013–2014. Towards the end of 2015, SASCO lost the Campus SRC elections to the Economic Freedom Fighters Students' Command (EFFSC). This resulted in aggressive campaigns by both the EFFSC and SASCO for 24-hour library services. A student protest in the form of a library sit-in began at 20:00 on 20 October 2015 and ended the next day at 08:00. The competition between the two student organisations may have resulted in that sit-in.

The current literature focuses on extended, overnight, or 24-hour access to academic library buildings with the recurring themes being staffing, safety and security, and services (Sowell and Nutefall 2014). This article seeks to contribute to the existing literature by presenting the findings from a pilot study of a 24-hour library service conducted at an academic library in South Africa. The data illustrates library usage during the days and hours of the overnight period; usage during specific periods of the semester; and not the demographic information of overnight users. Currently, there is a gap with regard to the literature on 24-hour library services in South Africa. The article also adds to the knowledge of the rationale and challenges that academic

libraries experience in providing 24-hour library services. These issues are important considerations for libraries planning to open for extended hours.

5. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using a quantitative approach. Babbie (2016) describes quantification as making observations explicit thereby making it easier to aggregate, compare and summarise data. It further enables statistical analysis to be conducted. In the study, quantification was important to enable the researchers to determine the usage of the library during the 24-hour service period as well as to compare the use of the library and the 24-hour study area.

The design was a survey method grounded on statistics and reports. The statistics taken and the reports sent to the campus management during the extended library hours were analysed. The statistics were collected using the library gate counting system, manual counting in the case of the 24-hour reading area, and transaction statistics from the library's circulation statistics. From the integrated library systems, the researchers extracted data for the number of books borrowed and returned from 16 November – 13 December 2015 during the extended library hours.

The first step of the analysis was to edit and encode the data. This was to ensure that errors were eliminated in the raw data and to place the data into categories to facilitate its tabulation and interpretation. This step encoded individual reports. Each response was reviewed in order to identify the category into which it fell. After encoding the individual reports, the data was typed into Excel. Once the data had been typed into Excel, tabulation began, which provided precise counts of each response.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings in relation to the objectives of the study. The findings looked at library usage statistics; book transactions; and usage of the 24-hour study area in relation to the library, during this period. The fourth objective of the study is covered under recommendations and conclusions. It must be pointed out from the outset that during the examination period, starting from 16 November to 10 December 2015, the entire library was open overnight for 20 nights. The findings discussed hereunder cover that period.

In order to determine the level of access to the library, the statistics were obtained through the gate counting system that is based at the entrance to the library. During the period from 23:00–07:00, the gate statistics indicated a total of 10 422 visitors. Table 1 shows the number of visitors per week.

Table 1:   Library usage statistics per week (Extended hours: 16 November – 10 December 2015)

Week	Mon–Tue	Tue–Wed	Wed–Thurs	Thurs–Fri	Fri–Sat	Total
1	792	706	810	601	358	3 267
2	1 147	838	927	1 001	284	4 197
3	895	671	566	506	137	2 775
4	67	55	61	Not open	Not open	183
Total	**2 901**	**2 270**	**2 364**	**2 108**	**779**	**10 422**

Unsurprisingly, most of the visits occurred during the first two weeks of the pilot study when the examinations had commenced. The last week when the majority of the examinations had ended had the least visitors. In addition, similar to the findings of Scarletto, Burhanna and Richardson (2013), Table 1 shows that Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were the busiest days.

An analysis of the usage of the library per hour indicated a clear trend which showed that as the night/early morning progressed, the number of users in the library decreased, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2:   Library usage statistics per hour (Extended hours: 16 November – 10 December 2015)

Week	Time									
	23:00	00:00	01:00	02:00	03:00	04:00	05:00	06:00	07:00	Total
1	910	757	612	403	256	140	105	48	36	3 267
2	1022	962	747	512	370	286	141	116	41	4 197
3	793	652	517	320	207	144	85	41	16	2 775
4	50	43	32	23	13	11	7	4	0	183
Total	**2 775**	**2 414**	**1 908**	**1258**	**846**	**581**	**338**	**209**	**93**	**10 422**

The number of users decreased with the lateness of the hour. The highest number of visitors was in Week 2 at 23:00. This is similar to the findings of a research by Richards (2016) who found that students preferred to use the library late in the evening. Lei (2015) has also pointed out that the evening is the ideal time that many students prefer to study. Table 2 also shows a decline in numbers from 02:00. This was also evident in the study by Scarletto, Burhanna and Richardson (2013). Possible reasons for this could be fatigue, or that the students would be resting in preparation for a morning examination. Most of the examinations were scheduled in Week 2 of the pilot study and the students were encouraging each other on Facebook to use the library in order to justify the need

for it to remain open for 24 hours. The lowest number of visitors was found in Week 4 when most of the students had completed their examinations. This shows that the main motivation for the need for the library to be open was due to examination study. This supports the findings of the study by McDougal and Moore (2013 cited in Sanders and Hodges 2014) who found the appeal for the use of the library for 24 hours was the need for an environment that was conducive to study.

In order to show the level of usage of the library for circulation transactions, statistics were collected using a manual system due to the challenges faced with the online library system. Table 3 confirms that the Short Loan Transactions were very low during this period.

Table 3:   Transactions during the extended pilot study

Week	Short Loan Transactions	Open Shelf Transactions	Total
1	N/A	N/A	61*
2	3	29	32
3	8	18	26
4	0	14	14
Total	**11**	**61**	****133**

*Distinctions between Short Loan and Open Shelf Transactions categories not made in the first week.
**Includes 61 uncategorised transactions in the first week of the extended hours pilot study.

Table 3 can further be used to support the finding that students were using the library for study purposes. The table clearly shows that there were very few book transactions during the pilot study. This shows that the need for library borrowing services was very low. Most recorded transactions involved books from the open collection. These were the books that were checked out of the library for study purposes. The Short Loan Transactions would have been expected to be high as these are recommended and prescribed books that students need to prepare for their examinations. The low usage of traditional library services was also found by Laaker (2011). It may be argued that students would have used electronic resources in the library during this period which was not possible to measure in the study.

The literature review showed that some libraries were referring to the 24-hour study spaces or reading halls as a 24-hour library. In order to determine whether the students require a conducive study area or the physical library, the statistics for the 24-hour reading area at NWU were collected. Table 4 shows the number of users who visited the 24-hour study area.

Table 4:   24-hour study area statistics by week

Week	Mon–Tue	Tue–Wed	Wed–Thurs	Thurs–Fri	Fri–Sat	Total
1	N/A	210	283	146	75	714
2	268	277	247	246	50	1 088
3	242	157	215	165	40	819
4	15	36	7	0	0	58
Total	**525**	**680**	**752**	**557**	**165**	**2 679**

With a capacity of 286 users at a time, the 24-hour study area usage statistics did not exceed 286 students at any stage from 23:00–07:00 during the extended hour pilot study. The statistics showed a preference for the library as compared to the 24-hour study area. Thus, the library is viewed as a study facility. Some of the possible reasons why students may prefer the library over the study area include: limited security measures; lack of access control; high noise levels; abuse of the 24-hour study area for activities other than study; and general lack of consideration for others. Other reasons could be that the library is more secure than the 24-hour study area due to increased access control measures. The 24-hour study area would be made similar to the library by improving access control, ensuring the entrance is manned by adequate security personnel, security personnel to monitor and control students to reduce the noise levels as well as the activities that are not study related. The space in the 24-hour library area would need to be reconfigured to create a study environment.

The question is whether there will still be a demand for the library to be open for 24 hours if the 24-hour study area could provide a similar environment that is conducive to study. In order to deal with the demand for 24-hour study services, the 24-hour library area can be reconfigured to offer an environment conducive to study. Some of the ways are discussed below.

Holder and Lang (2014) are of the opinion that libraries need to divide their study areas according to group study, quiet study, and lounging or relaxing areas. Currently, at the NWU Mafikeng Campus, the study area is not demarcated according into separate areas. The availability of the relaxing area would benefit students who reside off-campus but would prefer to study at night. Another important consideration that was found in the study by İmamoğlu and Gürel (2016) was to implement new tables with territorial markers as they had identified the problem of students' resistance to sharing tables. The findings also suggested that the presence of physical partitions by providing well-marked personal study spaces could be effective in creating a study environment in 24-hour study areas.

Cha and Kim (2015) are of the opinion that to reconfigure library spaces, the following attributes are important: amount of space; noise level; crowdedness; comfort of furnishing and cleanliness. Library spaces need to be able to accommodate diverse

activities which require that a student be able to participate in a number of activities whilst in the study space. The library should thus provide additional resources such as power outlets to enable students to utilise their electronic equipment within the study spaces. Noise level refers to the need for students to be able to have a quiet study space. Due to lack of access control and monitoring, the 24-hour study area at NWU has high noise levels. Crowdedness refers to students' need to have a personal zone that is associated with whether the space is crowded. Comfort of furnishing is also an important consideration as students require comfortable seating while they use the library for individual work considering that they spend a long time in the library space. Cleanliness is important as it leads to satisfaction with the study environment. These are important considerations in reconfiguring library spaces. The issue that is not addressed is the need for security presence in the study area. Similarly, Cunningham and Tabur (2012) identify the attributes that need to be considered in reconfiguration, which are comfort and image, sociability, uses and activity, and access linkages. Whilst the attributes are important, the issue of security needs to be included. Security is important to safeguard the property of the library and students; to ensure that the study space is not disorderly; and to ensure the safety of the students in the study space. Appropriate security measures should be employed within the study area.

6.1. Challenges encountered in extending library hours

Extending the library hours was not without challenges. Budgets for staffing were a concern. The demand for the 24-hour library service was made by students in October 2015. This was not budgeted for and required that the library obtain a budget for staffing from the University Management. Furthermore, due to the university policy on overtime payments, professional librarians could not be utilised during the extended library hours. As a result, the only services that could be provided were Loan Services in the form of lending services. This resulted in students not being able to access services that require the assistance of a Librarian and to use resources where there are security concerns such as university library computers which need to be monitored. Budgets and staffing issues therefore hinder the library from extending hours.

In addition to budget issues, the issue of security was a challenge insofar as safeguarding the library resources was concerned and to man the library. During normal library hours, four security personnel are allocated to man the library. The number of security personnel was not increased during the extended hours. This meant that two security personnel were allocated to either the library or the 24-hour study centre. With assigned duties to regularly patrol the library and the 24-hour study centre at fixed intervals, this left limited security presence in the library and the 24-hour study centre. The perimeters of the library were also left exposed as the security personnel was limited to the building interior.

As most of the students live off-campus and there was limited transport available, students would at times be found sleeping on the library desks. This was a usual occurrence in the early hours of the morning. This could also be attributed in part to fatigue. In addition, the student centre was closed during the extended hours and users were not able to obtain any refreshments.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The statistics were based on gate counts as well as physical counting. As a result of this, it was not possible to obtain data on the students with regard to whether they were postgraduates or undergraduates as undertaken in previous studies (e.g. Sanders and Hodges 2014).

Furthermore, the circulation system that is used does not archive the history of transactions by patron. This limits the ability to be able to determine who borrowed a book at a specific time.

The study also did not focus on the patrons' experiences in using a 24-hour library service. There is need for empirical research to be conducted to determine the years of study as well as the patrons' perceptions with regard to a 24-hour service and also to determine if they believe that an increase in library operating hours has an influence on their academic performance.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study findings, it can be concluded that students require a library environment which is conducive to study, particularly during examination periods. Transactions through the library assistants on duty were minimal, giving the impression that students only wanted to use the library as a secure environment for studying. In addition, the available 24-hour study facility was hardly full to capacity during the pilot study. Based on this, we arrived at a conclusion that the current 24-hour study centre should be altered to meet the demands of a 24-hour physical library. From the study, we also concluded that students do not prefer to use the library in the early hours of the day.

Thus, it is recommended that it is necessary to improve on the security of the 24-hour study centre by ensuring that it is manned by security officers throughout the night. There is also a need to improve the environment in the 24-hour study centre by reconfiguring the facility into quiet and collaborative spaces with a view to enhance Teaching–Learning and Research, which are the core pillars of the university. Furthermore, students should be encouraged to borrow required books during the library's normal working hours, which they can use in the 24-hour study centre and other study venues available on campus. An area for further study would be a comprehensive investigation of the use of electronic resources during the late night hours as alluded to earlier.

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