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# Africana Resources in Four Selected U.S. Academic Research Libraries

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## Africana resources in four selected U.S. academic research libraries

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### **Abstract**

#### ***Purpose***

To explore the relationship between the importance of African Studies programs and the acquisition of African imprint titles in four selected American academic libraries.

#### ***Design/methodology/approach***

The paper examines the characteristics of the African Studies programs in four universities in comparison with library holdings including the percentage of holdings from four major English-language African publishers.

#### ***Finding***

The four research libraries acquire substantial numbers of African monographs in keeping with the importance of their African Studies programs.

#### ***Originality/value***

The paper provides information on major four African Studies programs and the library holdings that support them.

### **Keywords**

African Studies, Africana, Library acquisitions, Research libraries, African publishers

## Introduction

The purpose of the study is to explore the relationship between African Studies programs and the acquisition of African imprints in four selected American academic libraries. The authors examine the relative strength of programs in four universities known for their collections in African Studies. They describe the programs and the collections that support them with an emphasis upon the importance of monographs published in Africa. They provide comparative information on the four programs including faculty size, course offerings, and number of dissertations. The authors selected the following four universities that are known for their excellence in Africana Studies: the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), Northwestern University, Yale University, and Michigan State University (MSU). Data collection for the study included searching the OPAC's of the four selected institutions for holdings of four major African presses, comparison of these holdings with the number of available titles in WorldCat, an open ended questionnaire, Web site searches of the institutions for faculty size and course listings, and dissertation production for the last ten years.

## Brief History of African Studies

The discipline of African Studies covers the study of the African continent in general and includes history, politics, culture, literature, religion, and economics. Africa has 52 different countries. The African Union (<http://www.africa-union.org/>) is a loose continental organization. The African Union evolved from the Organization of the African Unity that was established in 1963 in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. African Studies deals not only with African history, culture, and politics but also with complex geographic and political orientations.

The history of Africa and African Studies has both internal and external dynamics. Africa was not isolated from the world even as far back as the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. The ancient Greeks had trade and diplomatic links with Egypt and the Axumite kingdom (in what is now Ethiopia). (Munro-Hay, 1991) The Romans had trade and military relations with the Nubian kingdoms in northeast Africa (present Sudan) and added much of northern Africa to the Roman Empire. (Thompson, 1969) There are ample references by ancient writers to Africa. Among other writers, Herodotus discussed Egypt and its influence on Greece and "Ethiopia." Herodotus writes about the "Ethiopians" that "their laws and customs are peculiar to themselves, and the strangest is

the method they have of choosing for their king the man whom they judge to be the tallest, and strong in proportion to his height.” (Herodotus, 1972, p. 211)

The history of Africa and its development fundamentally changed with the emergence of nation-states and industrialization in Europe. When Europeans ventured into Africa in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was not for diplomatic and cultural reasons but to facilitate the forcible transportation of millions of Africans to the New World. As W. E. B. Du Bois put it: “Nothing which has happened to man in modern times has been more significant than the buying and selling of human beings out of Africa into America from 1441 to 1870.” (Du Bois, 1965, p. 44) Modern African Studies thus became of interest to those people of African descent like Dr. Du Bois. Indeed, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, people of African descent, European colonial administrators, and Christian missionaries were the principal students of Africa.

After the end of trans-Atlantic slavery, most of Africa came under European colonial rule. African Studies reflected the colonial mentality. Anthropologists, missionaries, and colonial administrators perceived Africans as “uncivilized.” They denied the existence of African history and civilization. In 1963, H. R. Trevor-Roper, a prominent British historian at Oxford, stated to a BBC audience that “[p]erhaps in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness” (Appiah, 1998, p. 64) Much earlier, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel wrote “[w]hat we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical.” (Asante)

Hegel’s view was probably widely accepted in Europe during his time. But by the early 1960’s when Trevor-Roper announced that Africa had no history, this view was no longer dominant in Western scholarship. After World War II, African nationalists like Nkrumah of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, and Azikwe of Nigeria were organizing Africans to end colonial rule. Many African-American scholars and civil rights activists like Dr. Du Bois fully supported the African nationalists. By 1957, Ghana under Nkrumah won independence. In 1958, James Coleman, a prominent American academic, wrote about African nationalism. (Coleman, 1958) In 1959, Ndabaninge Sithole, an African writer, published a book on African nationalism. (Sithole, 1959) By the mid-1960’s, former colonial territories in Africa were gaining their independence at a rapid pace.

With the coming of independence and African nationalism, many academics in North America and Europe became interested in African history, politics, culture, literature, and religion. Unlike during the pre-colonial or colonial era, these scholars were interested in studying African society and

history with an open mind and with relative objectivity. Examples of such historians were Jan Vansina (1965) and Walter Rodney (1972) Political scientists attempted to apply modernization and development theories. (Apter, 1963) Interest in African literature expanded to include both written and oral aspects. For example, in 1985, B. W. Andrzejewski and S. P. Tyloch edited a book on literatures in African languages. (Andrzejewski, Tyloch, 1985)

Research libraries in North America reflected these changes by turning their collecting interests to materials published in Africa while continuing to collect imprints on African subjects from Europe and North America. The study below will provide evidence of this changed focus since the 1960's.

### **Background on Collecting Africana in American Research Libraries**

With rise of African nationalism in the 1950's, interest in Africa in the U.S. increased partly because of the significant African-American population in the U.S. and also because of U.S. foreign policy interests in Africa to combat its principal rival, the Soviet Union. In 1954, Northwestern University established a separate library for African Studies, the Herskovits Library of African Studies. This library became "the largest separate collection of Africana in existence." (Northwestern University website <http://www.northwestern.edu/african-studies/herskovits.html> )

Other universities also started collecting African Studies material. This is not to suggest that there were no existing resources related to Africa in American research libraries before this time; but, until the emergence of African struggle for independence, African history was simply part of colonial history.

A major challenge to the emerging Africana librarians was acquiring materials published in Africa. Traditional vendors such as Blackwell, Yankee Book Peddler, and others made readily available materials published in North America and Europe. No established vendors covered the whole African continent. In addition, the publishing environment in Africa was not strong. The authors, however, wish to stress that the history of publishing did not start with colonialism as some would suggest. The monasteries in Ethiopia and Eritrea had a long history of indigenous publication that goes back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Scholars and universities in Mali were publishing and engaging in religious and scholarly activities in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. But these endeavors were limited to church/mosque affiliated institutions and to the political elites. As Hans M. Zell states, it "was not until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that the book made its first real impact in sub-Saharan Africa, largely through the influence and activities of Christian missionaries." (Zell, 2003) During the struggle for independence, publication of nationalist newspapers and magazines flourished. Once independence

was achieved, the emphasis changed to educational text books, primarily for elementary and secondary school students.

Not much has changed since then. The 2002 seminar on scholarly publishing in Africa concluded that university publishing in Africa “has remained weak.” (Seminar on Strengthening Scholarly Publishing in Africa – Summary Conclusions <http://www.inasp.info/psi/arusha/summary.html>) Indeed, the weak publishing environment is also a factor in explaining limited vendor support at least as far as selling African published books and journals in North America and Europe. As Alfred Kagan succinctly put it: “Collecting Africana is unlike collecting most other materials because of the lack of well-known high-profile vendors and because of the low level of organization of much of the book trade in most of the countries of Africa.” (Kagan, 1996)

American research libraries do not extensively collect African materials. According to a study by Reed-Scott, African imprint represents only 1.6% of all foreign titles cataloged by OCLC for the years between 1988 and 1994. (Reed-Scott, 1999, p.57) In 2003, Dilevko and Gottlieb wrote that “there is little knowledge about the extent to which individual North American research libraries have collections of titles published in Africa”; and Africa published titles are “concentrated at a relatively small core of 111 large academic ARL university libraries.” The four institutions the authors selected for this study are ranked in the top five in Dilevko and Gottlieb study. (Dilevko & Gottlieb, 2003, pp. [10-12])

U.S. research libraries that collect materials published in Africa are likely to use the following vendors:

- African Books Collective (ABC), a cooperative group started by African publishers to promote their books outside Africa. ABC now supplies books from the 76 African publishers in 16 African countries;
- Africa Book Centre, a London based vendor;
- Hogarth Representation, another London based vendor now working in cooperation with MEABOOKS, a Canadian book dealer;
- Afrilivres, an association of francophone African publishers with headquarters in Cotonou, Bénin;
- Clarke’s Bookshop (Cape Town), a South African vendor;
- Frank Thorold (Johannesburg), another South African vendor.

Several research libraries in the United States have cooperative collection development programs for African Studies. For example, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University have a “joint approval plan to divide responsibility for their acquisitions from Africa systematically” to support “their combined programmatic and user needs” and to ensure “no topic of common interest falls through the cracks.” (Swindler & Hill, 2004, p.26)

### **Goals for the Descriptive Study**

The authors examined Africana holdings in four selected academic libraries with particular emphasis on acquisitions from four Africa-based publishers and compared the results with faculty size, course offerings, and the number of doctoral dissertations.

### **Data Collection**

The authors collected data in the following categories in order to evaluate the importance of African Studies in the four selected universities and the relationship between program strength and library collections:

- Faculty size;
- Number of Africa related courses;
- Number of PhD dissertations on African topics in the last ten years;
- An open-ended questionnaire sent to the librarians at the four institutions. Three librarians completed the questionnaire while one opted for a phone interview.
- Available statistics on collection support for African Studies
- Library holdings of the publications from four African publishers. Two presses are located in West Africa; one in East Africa; and one in South Africa;

### **Findings—Africana Studies Programs at the Four Universities**

To evaluate the relative strength of the four programs, the authors counted the number of faculty, courses offered, and dissertations related to African Studies submitted in each university in the last ten years. The number of faculty and courses was gathered from the Web sites of these universities.; Proquest Dissertations and Theses Abstracts provided information on the number of dissertations. (<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?RQT=403&TS=1112029865&clientId=17822>) Paulos used the advanced search to get the results from the database.

Michigan State University and Northwestern University have detailed and organized information on their faculty. Michigan State has “approximately 130 core and Consulting Faculty members” that teach and conduct research in African Studies; 21 of these are social science faculty and 16 are faculty in economics and agricultural economics. (<http://africa.msu.edu/afaculty.htm> ) Northwestern University has “over 40 faculty from 16 departments and programs” teaching and conducting research in the field of African Studies. (<http://www.northwestern.edu/african-studies/faculty.html>. UCLA listed 42 faculty members teaching and conducting research on Africa. (<http://www.isop.ucla.edu/africa/people.asp> ) Yale University lists the members of the Council of African Studies. The core Africana faculty number 30 although the list also includes faculty in the fields of African-American studies and some from epidemiology and public health without providing specific specialization information of those listed. The list also includes faculty from Wesleyan University and University of Connecticut; non-Yale faculty are excluded from the count given above. (<http://www.yale.edu/ycias/african/faculty.htm> )

From information on their Web sites, Northwestern offers 25 courses; MSU 44 courses; UCLA 51 courses; and Yale 31 courses. The overall size of the student body may affect the number of courses. In other words, schools with much higher student enrollment may offer more courses, provided that they have a robust African Studies program.

Paulos used the advance search functions of the Proquest Dissertations and Theses Abstracts database to get the data on Ph. D. dissertations. He used the school name, the time period of the last ten years, and “Africa” as a keyword in the citation and abstract. The searched produced the following results: Michigan State University 74 dissertations; UCLA 63 dissertations; Yale 44 dissertations; and Northwestern 32 dissertations. (<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?RQT=403&TS=1112029865&clientId=17822>) The statistics on dissertations may undercount their number because the search was done with “Africa” as a keyword. It is thus possible that the actual number may be higher if any dissertations on African topics did not include the word “Africa.”.

Table 2: Faculty size, number of courses, and dissertation production

Name of Institution	Michigan State University	UCLA	Yale University	Northwestern University
Number of African Studies Faculty	130	42	30	40
African Studies related courses	44	51	31	25
Number of Africa related Dissertations (1995-2005)	74	63	44	32

The authors initially thought that a larger faculty would result in more dissertations submitted. But Yale University has a higher number of dissertations than Northwestern although the faculty size at Yale is 25% smaller. Michigan State and UCLA have a larger number of dissertations, but it seems that UCLA has a much more robust African Studies program if one bases this judgment on the number of UCLA dissertations of the last ten years.

### Findings—General Description of Africana Collections

To repeat, the four libraries with strong Africana collections selected for this study are:

- Herkovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University;
- Africana collections at UCLA;
- Africana collection at Yale University; and
- Africana collection at Michigan State University Library.
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The authors will begin with a brief description of each collection and its collection development policy and then analyze the strength of their collections by examining the percentage of books purchased from the four specific African publishers.

The Herkovits Library at Northwestern was founded in 1954. Its “collection includes more than 270,000 volumes across all disciplines in African Studies; about 3,000 journals, newspapers, magazines, and other serial publications.” (<http://www.northwestern.edu/african-studies/herkovits.html> retrieved 2/21/2005)

The Africana collection at UCLA is distributed throughout the UCLA Library system. The Africana humanities and social sciences materials are housed primarily at the Charles E. Young Research Library. Its collections “include materials in about 70 African and 15 non-African languages. The Library collects original primary source materials, such as diaries, correspondence, official documents and field notes whenever possible.” (<http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/url/colls/ssafrika/> retrieved 3/5/2005)

The Yale University Africana collection has a “particularly strong focus on Anglophone southern, central, east, and west Africa.... Holdings on most southern African countries are close to exhaustive. Yale has one of the most impressive collections of indigenous-language material, particularly creative literature.” (<http://www.library.yale.edu/african/collection.html> retrieved 2/21/2005)

The Africana collection of Michigan State University is “one of the largest in the United States.” The MSU library started collecting Africana materials in 1960. The library’s Africana collection is “roughly 200,000 books, pamphlets, maps and microfilm units ...” The MSU Libraries collect “Africana at either level 4 (research level: “the major published source materials required for doctoral study and independent research”) or level 3 according to the Conspectus standard, except of North Africa and the Indian Ocean islands, which is between levels 2-3.” (<http://www.lib.msu.edu/coll/main/africana/CDP.htm> retrieved 3/4/2005)

### **Findings—Holdings of Four Selected English Language African Publishers**

Since one of the goals of this study is to understand the level of acquisitions of African published material by these four research libraries in the United States, the authors selected four African publishers to determine the percentage of the publishing output collected by these research libraries. The four publishers are: Ghana Universities Press (Ghana), Malthouse Press (Nigeria), Africa Institute of South Africa (South Africa), and Nairobi University Press (Kenya). Using advanced search, Paulos searched the online catalogs of Northwestern, UCLA, MSU, and Yale for books published by the four publishers. Holley then searched WorldCat using the advanced search function to obtain an estimate of the number of total publications for the period from each publisher. The result is only an estimate because it is possible that publications exist that are not held by any library that reports holdings to WorldCat. He also removed obvious duplicates to get a more accurate count so that the total number of publications is around 10% less than the initial search results.

The total estimated number of publications for Ghana Universities Press was 217. The search for Ghana Universities Press in the Northwestern University online catalog retrieved 206 items (94.9%) with publication dates from 1963 to 2003. Searching the online catalogues of the other three retrieved 162 (74.7%) for Yale Library, 153 (70.5%) for UCLA Library, and 159 (73.3%) for MSU. The average percentage for the group was 78.3%, the second highest among the four publishers.

Searching for books published by Malthouse Press yielded very similar figures with a total estimated universe of 163 publications. The results were 122 (92.4%) for Northwestern covering the years 1987 to 2003, 107 (81.1%) for Yale covering the years 1987-2004 (<http://orbis.library.yale.edu>), 112 (84.8%) for UCLA covering 1987 to 2004 (<http://catalog.library.ucla.edu>), and 103 (78.0%) for MSU covering 1987 to 2004 (<http://magic.msu.edu>). Since the Northwestern University Library online does not have books published in 2004, the library may have purchased books published in 2004 that are not yet cataloged. Overall, coverage was 84.1%, the best among the publishers.

For the Africa Institute of South Africa, the four libraries purchased books from an estimated pool of 163 publications. Once again Northwestern had the most extensive holdings. An online catalog search of the four libraries retrieved the following numbers: 134 (82.2%) for Northwestern, 121 (74.2%) for Yale, 110 (67.5%) for MSU and 86 (52.8%) for UCLA. The retrieved items had the dates 1962 to 2004 for Northwestern, 1965 to 2004 for Yale, 1965 to 2004 for MSU, and 1967 to 2003 for UCLA. There are two possible reasons why UCLA had fewer holdings: UCLA started collecting these items later than the other libraries, and items purchased in 2004 may be awaiting cataloging. Coverage was third best at 69.2% for this publisher.

The Nairobi University Press provided the smallest number of available publications with an estimated total production of only 39 titles. An online search of the four libraries retrieved: 19 (48.7%) books for MSU covering the years 1987 to 2001; 20 (51.3%) for Yale covering the years 1990 to 2001; 15 (38.5%) for Northwestern covering the years 1987 to 2001; and 21 (53.8% for UCLA covering 1987 to 2001. Overall coverage was the worst for this press at 48.1%

The total number of titles available from the four publishers according to the WorldCat estimate was 551. Northwestern University had the best coverage at 477 (86.6%) followed by Yale at 410 (74.4%), UCLA at 396 (71.9%), and MSU at 367 (66.6%). The authors believe that this is excellent coverage for these four Africa publishers.

The above analysis indicates that the four research libraries have acquired a large share of the books published by the four selected publishers. Some of the differences among the four libraries

may be due to unprocessed backlog material. It is unlikely that the differences are due to budget cuts or to changes in collection development policies.

Table 1: Selected publishers titles owned by the four institutions

Name of Institution	Northwestern U	MSU	Yale U	UCLA
Ghana Universities Press	206	159	162	153
Malthouse Press	122	103	107	112
Nairobi University Press	15	19	20	21
Africa Institute of South Africa	134	110	121	86

As for acquiring materials published in Africa, the survey results indicate that the Africana librarians at these institutions use vendors, publishers, and bookstores to obtain African imprints, with vendors as the main suppliers. As one librarian put it, “we get most from vendors who specialize in African imprints.” According to the survey, some of the obstacles the Africana librarians face in acquiring African imprints include “lack of information about publications,” poor communication, problems with banking/currency transactions, overpricing by some vendors, poor distribution within Africa, and high travel expenses for acquisition trips. The survey did not provide a consistent figure on the percentage of African imprints within the overall Africana collections in these institutions. In answering the survey, the Africana librarians estimated that the African imprint percentage of the total Africana collections ranged from 25% to 65%. Obtaining more accurate figures would be a fruitful future research project.

**Conclusion**

As the authors expected, the descriptive study indicates that the higher the African Studies faculty size and the more African Studies courses that are offered, the more likely it is that the libraries will have high level of African imprint titles in their collections. This is consistent with Dilevko and Gottlieb’s conclusion that “[I]nstitutions with five highest counts of titles published by SSA [Sub-Saharan Africa] publishers all have extensive African Studies programs.” ( Dilevko and Gottlieb, p.17)

The research libraries at Yale, MSU, UCLA, and Northwestern acquire substantial numbers of African monographs through vendors, publishers, and bookstores. This factor clearly indicates that the four institutions have recognized the need for indigenous information in doing research and teaching in African Studies. The descriptive study shows that the number of African imprints in the Africana collection correlates positively with more robust African Studies programs. Indeed, in this era of globalization, acquiring monographs from the African continent is useful not only for research and teaching purposes but may also have implications for policy decision-making at the national level by providing materials on the African perspective.

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