Options for College Formation in Higher Education: The Choice for East African School of Library and Information Science (EASLIS), Makerere University

Elisam Magara and James Matovu

EASLIS, Makerere University

Abstract

There are tremendous attempts in higher education institutions to restructure and merge academic departments in a directed move to improve service delivery. In such situations, institutions that want to move towards the merger need to reposition themselves to meet the changing socio-economic needs in a defined framework. This requires such departments and units to study their environment in order to understand what they do well to be able to discover anticipated customer needs, and to build unique, cutting-edge solutions that capitalise on their most marketable strengths to meet the socio-economic development challenges of the society.

In a strategic qualitative framework, a survey, which collected data to decide the way forward for college formation in Makerere University, was conducted among EASLIS stakeholders. The various stakeholders include students, employers, professionals, and EASLIS staff and administration. The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the different views of EASLIS stakeholders with regard to the expectations of the Library and Information Science (LIS) training school that they would wish to see in the next 10 years and beyond.

From the study, majority of the professionals believe that what is needed in the merger is the re-orientation of LIS programmes to accommodate the expectations of a knowledge and information economy in the globalisation era. Based on the facts obtained from the LIS stakeholders in the country, existing literature, practices elsewhere, and the previous attempts at college formation in Makerere University, LIS could comfortably merge with Mass Communication to form a College of Information and Communication Sciences. However, not withstanding the developments in information society in LIS, merging EASLIS, Mass Communication and FCIT to form a College of Information, Computing and Communication Sciences would be the best option.

1. Introduction

There are many attempts in higher education institutions to restructure and merge departments in a directed move to improve service delivery. In an attempt to adapt to this trend, institutions require plans and strategies to leverage their strategic competencies to redefine their business, harness their unique strengths to unlock their true market potential, and transform their institutions into solutions-providers to be more agile and proactive in their service delivery. In such situations, institutions that want to move towards the merger need to reposition themselves to meet the changing socio-economic needs in a defined framework.

2. Historical Background of College Formation at Makerere University

College formation through the merger of departments is not a new phenomenon in Makerere University. The repealed Makerere University Act, 1970 specified that any institutions can be made a constituent college of the University (The Makerere University Kampala, Act, 1970, Article 5). Based on that provision, a merger of two units, was started 1998 with the National College of Business Studies (NCBS) and the Faculty of Commerce to form Makerere University Business School. Although there are a number of legal documents that support college formation, including the Makerere University Statute for Constituent Colleges, May 2000; The Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001, most of them do not define the number of critical requirements, like the size and demarcations of colleges (Makerere University, Planning and Development Department, 2004:1). For instance, the Makerere University (the Establishment of Constituent College) Statute, 2000 does not define the power relations between the centre and the college or between the college and its constituent units. This, therefore, requires the development of a framework and guidelines for the formation of colleges in Makerere University.

The development a of a framework for college formation in Makerere University emerged from the Makerere University Strategic Plan that was drawn up in 1998-99, which enabled the Department of Planning and Development to get involved in a university-wide planning process, among which aspirations crystallised the setting-up of a High Reference Group, in 2000. Its specific objective was "to formulate guidelines on financial, organisational and administrative aspects of transforming faculties into Constituent Colleges" (Mamdani, 2007:212). A number of problems were identified, including demands for new skills, inadequate financial resources, infrastructure and staffing, inadequate facilitating technologies, among others. Other developments, such as passage of the Universities and OtherTertiary Institutions Act in 2001,thedevolution of power to initiate innovations in the university, and the financial support provided by development partners like Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, resulted in the university issuing a second document on 18 November 2004 (Mamdani, 2007), which proposed 7 colleges in which units would be organised as follows:

Table 1: Proposed Collapsing of all existing Academic Units

College	Faculties/units
College of Health Sciences	Faculty of Medicine and Institute of Public Health
College of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine	Faculties of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine
College of Humanities	Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Institute of Psychology and Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR)
College of Law, Economics and Business	Faculty of Law and Institute of Economics
College of Natural and Physical Sciences	Faculty of Science, Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (ISAE), Institute of Computer Science, East African School of Library and Information Science (EASLIS), MUIENR
College of Design and Engineering Sciences	Faculty of Technology and MTSIFA
College of Education and Distance Learning	School of Education, Institute of Adult and Continuing Education

Source: Reference Group and the Planning and Development Department, 2004

It is important to note from the above that EASLIS was put under the College of Natural and Physical Sciences. As Mamdani (2007:213) points out, a number of units did not welcome the proposed colleges to which they were allocated. Some of the mixed feelings resulted from the fact that there was to be increased autonomy that would also give them increased control over the internally generated financial resources. On the other hand, those who rejected the idea

of college formation were opposed to the idea of the number being restricted to the seven proposed colleges only, and instead urged for faculties and institutions that meet the agreed-upon guidelines to be allowed to grow into colleges. Although a top-down approach was used in the formation of colleges, some units like ISAE suggested that college formation should be left to take a gradual process. To motivate the process, the suggestion of a carrot and stick approach by the Reference Group was made: The carrot in the form of incentives such as greater financial and administrative powers and resources to those who adopt the college model; and the stick in that the bottom-up approach is replaced by the top-bottom approach in the management of those departments, thus circumventing the college model. However, Mamdani still believes that the bottom-up approach cannot generate the necessary consensus to enable the process to be accomplished successfully, since that requires a central force.

In the 101 st meeting of the University Council held on 24 March 2005, the Deputy Vice Chancellor (FA) was of the view that "Makerere [University] piloting the college model was not recommended because at that rate, the project would never take off". According to Council members, many studies have been made on the college model but no action has ever been taken. According to the Makerere University Council (2005), a faculty or department cannot on its own form a college. There must be a merger between two or more faculties or departments.The Council's position on college formation was thus as follows:

Colleges should start with three tiers or levels that can be increased to four after a period.

Faculties that were willing to merge could go ahead and merge to form colleges. As for faculties that would not have merged after a stipulated period, a decision would be imposed by Council as to which faculties should merge.

Colleges should be established in phases and for those that were ready, a report monitoring their progress would be given to Council.

Faculties that were ready to merge and form colleges should submit their proposal to Council for approval.

According to the minutes of Council, college formation by the School of Medicine and Public Health Sciences was approved and in December 2007 National Council for Higher Education approved the establishment of the college. According to the university statute, the functions of a college shall be to:

provide a place of learning, education and research as expected of a

3. The Need for a Merger

In the course of preparing the EASLIS strategic plan, EASLIS academic staff were required to indicate whether they were in favour of college formation or not (Matovu, 2007). Out of the 12 questionnaires administered to academic staff, 11 were returned, of which 10 were in favour of college formation. The benefits of college formation as provided by the respondents included: reduced duplication of courses and efforts; realignment of university programmes with their expertise and relationships; sharing of courses based on competences; and enabling EASLIS to concentrate on core areas. The only respondent who did not support the college formation noted that at the moment, there was no clearly defined structure to follow in the college formation process in the university. In a follow-up consultative meeting with the academic staff, a more pragmatic rather than prescriptive position in the merger process was recommended, and the EASLIS administration as requested to do more consultation with the LIS professionals. When the Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals were requested to comment on college formation, the majority of them insisted on the development of a working document for the merger by the school together with other units. For instance, one respondent, referring to his experience on the "recollections of the University of Tennessee process", suggested that the position paper would map out possible areas of 'synergy' with proposed merger partners. According to most of the LIS professionals, the position paper is the basis for action by the EASLIS Board. To most of the LIS professionals, EASLIS requires taking stock of the existing (and future) teaching and research needs of those units and those of EASLIS. What is crucial, according to professionals, is identification of what and where the areas of synergies are, to be able to better inform professionals where a merger is possible or not. As one of them noted "perhaps there is need to critically analyse the programmes offered in each of the three faculties, brainstorm on where a merger is/is not possible, and then make informed decisions, reflecting on the institutional and national goals". In this respect, the professionals feel that there is need to make the best opportunity to make a good decision for EASLIS. According to them, "a good decision must be a satisfying decision, which takes care of different facets of the problem that LIS is trying to solve". In fact, the majority of the professionals believe that what is needed more is the re-orientation of EASLIS programmes to accommodate the expectations of a knowledge and information economy in the globalisation era. According to Sanyal (1995) mergers are intended to improve control and management, and also to improve the supply and quality of education in the various disciplines.

4. Units to Merge with EASLIS in College formation

Before the EASLIS Strategic Plan Retreat, the academic staff were required to indicate the institution they would be willing to merge with in Makerere University. Those who supported college formation indicated the units to merge with to form a college. The units suggested included the Faculty of Computing and Information technology (FCIT), followed by the Department of Mass Communication and then the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty Social Sciences. In the retreat, that involved more stakeholders including professionals, employers, students, University administration and EASLIS staff, there was no consensus on which unit to merge with. The retreat, therefore, requested the EASLIS administrations to do more consultation with stakeholders.

(a) EASLIS with Faculty of Computing and Information Technology (FCIT)

A number of LIS professionals indicated that there was need for an IT/Computing and LIS merger. Advocates of this position believe that Uganda requires "LIS professionals, who are able to analyse and design systems, create software for libraries and information centres,

create the appropriate information systems and networked environments, package and pass-on information in most appropriate manner". Such a situation creates a sense of self-sufficiency and competence, which will undoubtedly improve the image of LIS, one respondent indicated. They [LIS professionals] believe that information management nowadays requires IT skills, and most professionals appreciate the role of IT in information management. For instance, the modern library management system thrives on IT. However, as noted by one respondent this does not make having a College of Computing and Information Sciences the best option". Other professionals noted that the greater part of information work today is being driven by the advent of technologies. In fact, in a letter written by the Dean FCIT on 29 November 2006, quoting a request made earlier by Director EASLIS in 2004 supports this. The reason is that there will be a lot to gain from this college, given the fact that Library and Information Science is more closely moving with IT in this era than any other subject.

To others, computing and information technology (CIT) is a tool that will inevitably have to cut across all disciplines, as correctly put by one LIS professional that"computing is [not] a specialised field but a generic area that touches each and every field, discipline, etc". Although most of the respondents believe that IT is essential in information work, they also suggest that EASLIS could incorporate the most relevant components into the training curriculum to impart the necessary skills. In fact, some of the professionals label the merger of CIT and LIS as a move to suffocate and eventually kill the LIS profession. As one of them suggested: "Please no merger whatsoever between EASLIS and FCIT".

(b) EASLIS with Department of Mass Communication
Despite the presentations made by Matovu (2007) during the EASLIS Strategic Plan Retreat that favoured a merger of EASLIS with FCIT, the majority of the retreat participants did not favour this proposition. The discussion during the retreat seemed to support forming a college with the Department Mass Communication. A follow-up consultative meeting with the EASLIS staff and the listserve discussion with LIS professionals expounded on the possibility of such merger. According to most professionals, EASLIS needs to take care of the expectations of employers. For instance,one LIS professional working with a prominent non-governmental organisation, provided reflections on his work experience, and on the trends in the employment sector, and did not hesitate to propose that EASLIS, together with the Department of Mass Communication should form a College of Communication and Information Sciences. According to him, "information and communication are two *wings* [sic] of the same bird". Referring to his work experience [which he noted may not apply to all professionals], he has found a very close link between information management and communication. As an information manager, he narrates that he has "often been asked to design communication strategies, develop information, education and communication materials, do public relations work, write press releases, newspaper and magazine articles, supplements, produce documentaries etc", which, he believes, colleagues in mass communication able to do.

The proponents of the merger between EASLIS with the department of Mass Communication urge that such an arrangement has worked for instance in the University of Oslo in Norway, the University of Tennessee, the University of Alabama, and the University of Southern California.

(c) EASLIS with FCIT and the Department of Mass Communication
To integrate both the communication science and the ICT needs, the majority of the professionals believe that there is need for the formation of a college by merging the three units. According to one respondent who is a lecturer in one of the public universities, such a reorientation requires

EASLIS to strengthen both the IT content in LIS training and at the same time borrow many ideas from Mass Communication, to be able to produce a competent information professional. In fact, the majority of them look at a merger in a broader perspective and believe that it is information that is the crux of the matter. They would prefer to see a professional who would fit very well in today's information and knowledge economy, thus it would not be prudent to trade a merger with the FCIT and forego one with Mass Communication, one professional explains. He thus thinks that the formation of the College of Information, Communication and Computing would be the way forward. The University of Brighton expanded the

(Benett, 1998:43). According to Kigongo-Bukenya (2000:83), the information professional must have successfully completed a prescribed programmeme of study to acquire special knowledge and skills; must have a monopoly of expertise, and must be characterised by full-time engagement, and affiliation to professional solidarity, bound by a code of conduct. According to him, this requires well-protected professional training, guided by a body of professional ethics.

It is clear from the findings that there is uncertainty regarding the mode and motives of college formation in Makerere University. The question of college formation through the merging of the units has continually created a negative connotation as an ambitious move by interested parties to become independent and develop into administrative and financial autonomy (Mamdani, 2007) which is not a new thing. From the study, the issues of organisational structure and professional development emerge as being very crucial for college formation, mostly when there are issues of merging more than one department/unit. For example, in a joint report by the Centre for Education and Industry and the University of Warwick (2003) on the mergers made in 17 institutions, it was noted that governance and management are the main areas that require detailed analyses in the merger process. This observation seems to agree with that of the report of the Visitation Committee to Public Universities (2007:3). In the committee's views, "proponents of the administrative innovations have not carefully thought through its cost and administrative implications, in terms of devolution of powers. According to the committee, "there are some resistances from some faculties, especially regarding which units belong to this or that college". In fact, as the committee points out, "it appears there is no publically available document on the proposed college system detailing the cost-benefit analysis of the proposal and the time frame in which the restructuring will be completed, it is unprofessional to allow the merger". Thus, the committee warns that Makerere stands the risk of adding a new layer of bureaucracy with no tangible efficiency gains in the administration of the university. The committee's observation supports Mamdani (2007:216), who points out that "although the bottom-up approach is democratic, experience at Makerere University is that it lacks a mechanism to deal with unjustified resistance". To the committee, unless the proposed system is carefully considered, planned and implemented,"it could plunge Makerere into wrangles that would make the ongoing MUBS saga look like a storm in a tea cup".

Following the University Council Decision on College Model, the Makerere University Strategic Framework, and the DVC's correspondence of 12th September 2007 to all Deans and Director, it is not clear whether it is a bottom-up or top down approach that is working. Whereas the Council recommends that faculties that are ready to merge and form colleges should submit their proposals to Council, the letter sent to all Deans and Directors seemed to demand proposals from all faculties within one month. Especially because of the fact that the proposed pilot College of Health Sciences has no supportive progress exhibited, Makerere University needs to take seriously Mamdani's (2007) recommendations and the Visitation Committee to Public Universities (2007:3) on warnings before proceeding with the college formation model. In any case, it is prudent that departments that have an interest in merging should first come out and form a consensus on the merger, before involving the central administration. Preparedness and readiness among the institutions which are merging in the process of college formation is required. In fact, giving crucial success factors in the merger systems, Swanepoel (2004:4) include among them, preparation, support and stability, complementary missions, communication, honesty, leadership, understanding cultural values and valuable and strong management.

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