

SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING: THE MISSING LINK IN MUCG'S STRATEGIC PLAN (2006-2011)

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ABSTRACT

The four cardinal aims for the establishment of universities are teaching, learning, research and service to the community. Research has established itself as the pivot around which all academic life revolves in all universities and institutions of higher learning. scholarly publishing has also become the windmill that churns out research results to the end-user.

Since world University rankings take into account the number of articles published by Faculty members of each university it has become imperative for any university which wants to carve a reputation for itself to engage in and perform well in scholarly publishing.

The purpose of this paper is to survey the Scholarly Publishing landscape in MUCG during its first – ten years of existence and come out with the reasons for the slow progress in scholarly publishing in the University College. The paper will also make recommendations to help step up Scholarly Publishing.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The three original cardinal aims for the establishment of any university are teaching, learning and research; of late, however, service to the community has been added. In fact research has played a principal role in the life of universities and remains the fulcrum of all academic activity in these institutions of higher learning. For the result of any research to become available or accessible to those who need to use it, however, it must be published; and this is where scholarly publishing comes in. MUCG since its inception has engaged in scholarly publishing in various ways. This

paper will set out to explore why not much progress has been made in this regard within a decade of MUCG's existence, and make recommendations for improvement.

1.1 Background

The Methodist University College Ghana (MUCG) came into being in November, 2000. Since then the University College has been progressing steadily in the pursuit of all the now four aims of establishing a university viz: teaching, learning, research and service to the community. The University College has been doing a lot to encourage research and even has very good policies on research vividly spelt out in its first ever Strategic Plan (2006-2011). According to the *MUCG Strategic Plan*, "MUCG should immediately and strenuously seek research funding from donor agencies and especially the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). It was recorded under Funded Research that in the academic year 2006/2007 the University received almost 700 million cedis from TALIF and USAID. It was also stated, that carrying out the five-year plan would require obtaining a very large and **sustained increase in research funding, reaching 19 percent of MUCG's operating income in the fifth year. The projections assume 5 billion cedis in research by 2007 and 30 billion cedis by 2010.**"¹

The *Methodist University College Ghana Strategic Plan (2006-2011)* mentioned scholarly publishing as one of the activities to be carried out under the **Strategy** of advancing the dissemination of knowledge and its applications with the **Objective** to improve on quality and quantity of staff.²

1.2 Statement of aim and objectives:

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to find out why scholarly publishing could not make much progress in MUCG during the first ten years of existence of the University College.

Research Objectives: The objectives of this research are:

- (1) To ascertain whether MUCG has any policy on scholarly publishing and find out if this was incorporated in its first Strategic Plan.
- (2) To survey current literature and determine how effective MUCG's current approach to scholarly publishing had been over the ten year period.
- (3) To make recommendations for improvement in Scholarly Publishing at MUCG.

1.3 Statement of problem

Despite the serious attention given to research in the *MUCG Strategic Plan* not much has been achieved as far as scholarly publishing is concerned; and one would like to ask why? No policy has been drawn up for scholarly publishing in the *Strategic Plan (2006-2011)* and **there is no functional (departmental) level strategic plan incorporated into the main Strategic Plan to guide scholarly publishing.** Whilst issues like Gender and Setting Up a Centre for Moral, Character and Personality Development have policies clearly spelt out in the *Strategic Plan (2006-2011)*, it is not so with scholarly publishing. Since the University College has no policy on scholarly publishing, almost all decisions on scholarly publishing are taken on an *ad hoc* basis. This has culminated in the inconsistency in the timing of publications. For example, *GLOBUS: Journal of Methodist University College Ghana* has been published only once even though the *Strategic Plan (2006-2011)* is in its very final year of implementation. Some individual academic staff, eager to publish for promotion have started doing so in journals of other universities like the *PENTVARS: Journal of Pentecost University College*, *IPS Journal OF Business Research*, *Journal of the Trinity Theological Seminary* and foreign academic journals.

After the publication of *GLOBUS* no one was sure of who should be responsible for the distribution or marketing. Quite a number of copies are still at the warehouse gathering dust almost a year after publication. Two books, *Methodism in Ghana Today* and *Wesleyan Heritage in Ghana*, both written by The Very Rev. Dr. Richard Foli and published by MUCG are also suffering the same fate. More than

two years after the publication of the two books, huge quantities of both are still lying in the warehouse, leaving one to ask the question ‘Who is responsible for marketing them? There are many copies of *History of the METHODIST UNIVERSITY COLLEGE GHANA: The First Ten Years (2000-2010)*, by The Very Rev. Dr. Richard Foli , The Very Rev. Dr. E.K Marfo and The Very Rev. J.M.Y Edusa-Eyison in the Public Relations Unit, Publications Unit and the warehouse without any particular unit being given a clear-cut mandate to be responsible for its distribution, marketing and sales. The University spent money to publish this journal and books and, after this, if they are left to gather dust and be destroyed, those responsible for the University College’s accounts may think publication is just a waste-pipe draining the University College’s financial resources and is nothing but MUCG’s financial “blackhole”.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly publishing is mostly associated with scholars who teach and/or conduct research in institutions of higher learning and other institutions of research. Castells (2004) looks at the university as being critical for the generation of knowledge, technological innovation and the development of human resources. *Scholarly publishing normally refers to published research output of the higher education sub-sector as well as that of government and science councils (De Beer, 2005)*. Some corporations in the private sector are also involved in research and publication. Maher (2006) argues that when a research university decides to hire or promote a Faculty member, the university has to make sure it is hiring or promoting a very good scholar and a person who will do a very good job in both research and instruction of students. **Maher** further argues that those *evaluations of a good scholar are not easily separable from the evaluations of the quality of the scholarship in journals, given that it is the scholarship that the particular Faculty member puts into journals that will give the best measure of how that Faculty member is contributing*. The four main parties usually involved in scholarly publishing are scholars, editors, publishers and subscribers. Large academic and/or research institutions are the major subscribers of scholarly publications.

In the twenty-first century, scholarly publishing should be expected to serve the purpose of disseminating knowledge besides the traditional purposes of communicating results of research and enabling scholars to keep abreast of the latest developments in their disciplines or sub-disciplines. Scholars seeking promotions are also evaluated on the strength of the number of scholarly articles they have published and the reputation of the journals in which they publish their research findings. Journal rankings may also be used by university authorities to gauge the progress and impact of Faculty members. World university rankings also take into account the number of articles published by Faculty members of each university.

Scholarly publishing is an important manifestation of knowledge generation and diffusion (De Beer, 2005). The United Nations Institute of Statistics' (UIS) *Bulletin on Science and Technology Statistics* (UIS, 2005) indicates that the whole of Africa represents 1.4 percent of the world scholarly publications in 2000. However, scholarly publishing in sub-Saharan Africa is faced with challenges in the twenty-first century. Scholarly publishing does not have a long history in sub-Saharan Africa and the larger African continent. Journals have been largely acknowledged by scholars as the most effective means of disseminating scholarly research findings. Even though journals have been around for the last three centuries, the history of scholarly publishing and journals in sub-Saharan Africa largely dates to the second half of the twentieth century. The twenty-first century also brings with it technological, political, social-economic challenges that scholarly publishing in sub-Saharan Africa must contend with. Challenges aside, the twenty-first century is also expected to present numerous opportunities to the scholarly publishing fraternity in the sub-Saharan Africa region with Ghanaian Universities and MUCG, for that matter, as no exceptions.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Secondary research was the main research method used for gathering data for this paper. Secondary research was preferred over primary research because it was seen

to be more reliable as information needed on publications of scholarly articles, books and monographs among others by academic staff could only be credibly obtained from official sources like the University College's *Principal's Reports and Basic Statistics, Congregation Programmes, Methodist University College Ghana Strategic Plan (2006-2011), GLOBUS: Journal of Methodist University College Ghana*, journals of other private universities and foreign academic journals. The period chosen for the research covered only five years out of the ten years of the University Colleges existence. This was to allow the paper to situate itself only within the period of MUCG's Strategic Plan (2006-2011). Facts and figures were used from documents that served as secondary research material and there was graphic representation of the research findings in the form of bar graphs. These kinds of graphs were chosen for the sake of simplicity and clarity of expression.

4.0 FINDINGS ON RESEARCH INTERESTS AND PUBLICATIONS OF ACADEMIC STAFF AS RECORDED IN THE MUCG *PRINCIPAL'S REPORT AND BASIC STATISTICS*

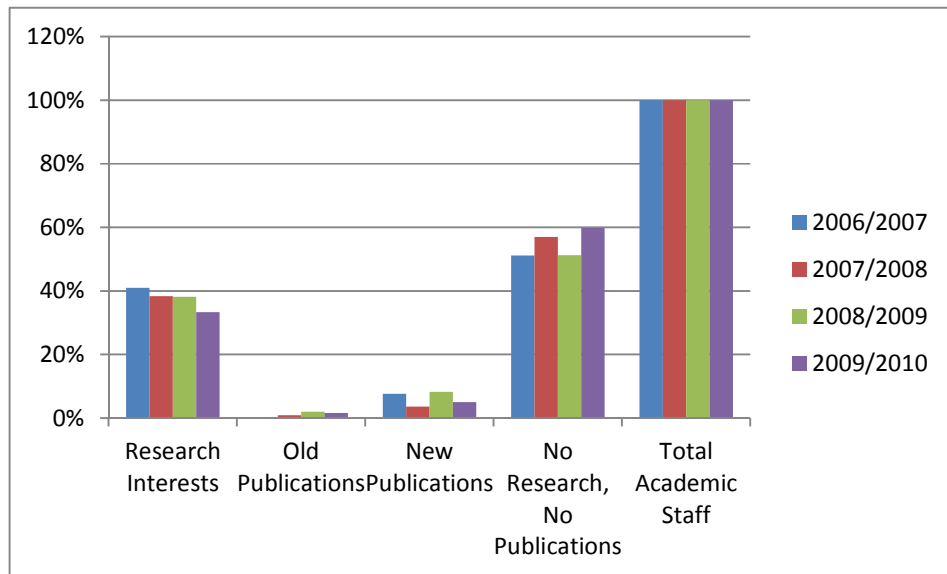
Research Interests And Publications Expressed As A Percentage Of Total Academic Staff

2009/2010	Frequency	Percentage
Research Interests	59	33.3
Old Publications	3	1.6
New Publications	9	5.0
No Research, No Publications	106	59.8
Total Academic Staff	177	100.0

2008/2009	Frequency	Percentage
Research Interests	55	38.1
Old Publications	3	2.0
New Publications	12	8.3
No Research, No Publications	74	51.3
Total Academic Staff	144	100.0

007/2008	Frequency	Percentage
Research Interests	41	38.3
Old Publications	1	0.9
New Publications	4	3.7
No Research, No Publications	61	57.0
Total Academic Staff	107	100.0

2006/2007	Frequency	Percentage
Research Interests	32	41.0
Old Publications	0	0
New Publications	6	7.7
No Research, No Publications	40	51.2
Total Academic Staff	78	100.0



5.0 DATA ANALYSIS

The tables in item 4.0 above show research interests and publications expressed as a percentage of MUCG's total academic staff for each year with effect from the 2006/2007 academic year to 2009/2010 academic year. The final year of the Strategic Plan (2006-2011) which forms the 2010/2011 academic year could not be added because the academic year was still in progress when this paper was being written. Facts and figures which could be used for the 2010/2011 academic year were only obtainable from the *Principal's Report and Basic Statistics* which would be compiled at the end of the academic year.

'Frequency' in the table depicts the number of academic staff in MUCG in a particular year, the number that expressed research interests, the number that did some publications and the number that did no publications.

5.1 Research Interests: From the tables and bar-chart in item 4.0 above, it could be seen that research interests were quite high at the advent of the Strategic Plan (2006-2011) in the 2006/2007 academic year; that was 41.0%. This, however, fell in 2007/2008 to 38.3% and further down to 33.3% in 2009/2010. The relatively high rate of research interests in 2006/2007 could be attributed to the enthusiasm with which academic staff embraced policies on research at the advent of the Strategic Plan (2006-2011).

5.2 Old Publications: in the 2006/2007 academic year, no MUCG academic staff reproduced an old publication for the records. Hence the figure 'zero' for *Frequency* and *Percentage* respectively. From 2007/2008 we can see that a few academic staff started reproducing their old publications for the records. In 2007/2008 it was 0.9%, in 2008/2009, 3% and in 2009/2010, 3%.

5.3 New Publications: 7.7% of total academic staff made new publications in 2006/2007. That fell to 3.7% in 2007/2008 and rose again to 8.3% in 2008/2009 before re-falling to 5.0% in 2009/2010. The increase in new publications in 2008/2009 could be due to the enthusiasm whipped up in academic staff by the introduction of the maiden issue of *GLOBUS: Journal of Methodist University*

College Ghana, which had started soliciting articles from staff for publication. The series of Writers' Workshops organized by the then newly appointed Assistant Registrar (Publications), Mr. Wisdom Kwesi Ayitey for staff and students could have also been a contributory factor. The Writers' Workshops brought in people like Mad. Akua Sena Dansua, who was one time African Journalist of the Year (Feature Articles Category), to be a resource person. The Workshops also brought in a group of renowned African writers of the Pan African Writers Association (PAWA), some of whom were professors in English from universities in the United States of America, South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria. A lecturer at the Department of General Studies in MUCG, Mr. A.P Achampong's workshop on writing academic articles might have also helped in stimulating academic staff to write. In fact, if the new publications were to be added to research interests, it could even be said that research interests were at their all time highest in MUCG in 2008/2009.

5.4 No Research, No Publications: As much as 51.2% of MUCG could neither express any research interests nor make any publications in 2006/2007. It increased to 57.0% in 2007/2008 and fell briefly to 51.3% before hitting an all time high of 59.8% in 2009/2010. What this means is that almost 60% of MUCG academic staff were not able to even choose a research interest, let alone produce a publication in the 2009/2010 academic year. This could partly be attributed to the fact that certain academic staff got discouraged by the long time-lag between the publication of the maiden issue of *GLOBUS: Journal of Methodist University College Ghana* and the next issue. Some had submitted articles for publication in the next issue and others were still waiting for the publication of the next issue so they could submit theirs for the subsequent one.

6.0 CHALLENGES

Six challenges have been identified as factors militating against scholarly publishing in MUCG. They are:

- (i) Over-estimation of staff competence
- (ii) No critical path analysis

- (iii) Internal resistance to change
- (iv) No incentives to members of editorial board and internal referees of academic articles
- (v) No marketing plan for published academic journals and books.
- (vi) Inadequate logistics to help in marketing academic journals and books.

6.1 Over-estimation of competence: A look at the editorial board of the maiden issue of *GLOBUS: Journal of Methodist University College Ghana* showed that most of the members were senior academic staff who had experience of scholarly publishing either because they had written articles which were published in academic journals or they had served on editorial boards of academic journals of public universities in the past. Expectations were high that they would bring their expertise to bear on the *GLOBUS* editorial board but other factors that could either contribute to their success or failure were not anticipated.

6.2 No critical path analysis: This is the order of work that should be followed to complete a project as fast and as cheaply as possible. This critical path is yet to be discovered for scholarly publishing in MUCG.

6.3 Internal Resistance to change: Referees of academic articles took time to do the refereeing at their own pace and when editors tried to ‘push’ some of them to hurry up, they responded that saying came out saying they had even lost the articles altogether and would need to be given another copy to start all over. They would simply not tolerate any external attempt to change their established habits of work.

6.4 No incentives to members of editorial board and internal referees of academic articles: Initially, it was assumed that members of the editorial board of *GLOBUS* and the internal referees of academic articles (that is referees from MUCG) would just be pleased and willing to do the editorial work and refereeing for free. Experience, however, proved that this assumption was far from correct. Most

members of the editorial board and the internal referees had actually expected some kind of financial reward for their effort after the maiden issue came out but their expectations could not be met. This could serve as a disincentive to their commitment.

6.5 No marketing plan for published academic journals and books: No provision was made in the Strategic Plan (2006-2011) concerning how scholarly publishing should be marketed. No Department or individual was mandated to be responsible for marketing MUCG's scholarly publishing and no marketing plan was in place to guide the University College in marketing its scholarly publishing. The Publications Unit published the academic journal and deposited it in the University College warehouse which was under the Finance Office. The Finance Office only had a Purchasing Unit, not Purchasing and Supply Unit and so could not go supplying the journal to customers. There was a Business Development Office but they were not sure if it was their duty to market or sell the journals. The Publications Unit had to come in sometimes to use its discretion, with the approval of the Registrar, to at least sell some of the journals.

6.6 Inadequate logistics to help in marketing academic journals and books: After publishing *GLOBUS*, the Publications Unit took the initiative to market and sell, at least, some copies. The Unit was, however, confronted with the challenge of transport. There was one pick-up truck which was supposed to be used by the Principal's Office, Vice Principal's Office, the Publications Unit, Public Relations Unit, Office of the Dean of Students and the Library. This pick-up seemed to be inadequate for running all the errands of the six offices. Most University College Publications, including scholarly publications, are time-bound and if they are not distributed or marketed within a specific period, a lot of them risk remaining in the warehouse to gather dust.

7.0 OPPORTUNITIES

Despite all the challenges, one could still mention five great opportunities, among others, that exist for scholarly publishing in MUCG. They are:

- (i) Management passion for scholarly publishing
- (ii) Latent reservoir of intellectual capital.
- (iii) Sound financial support for research
- (iv) Expanding market (customer base) for academic journals
- (v) A pro-active Publications Unit.

7.1 Management passion for scholarly publishing: There is no gainsaying that MUCG management, especially the Chief Executive Officer, has been and is still very passionate about scholarly publishing. The strong passion of the current management and the Chief Executive Officer, in particular, of MUCG, offers a good opportunity for scholarly publishing in the University College.

7.2 Latent reservoir of intellectual capital: Intellectual capital is the investment an organization has made in knowledge. It is composed of human capital (the knowledge inside the heads of staff). MUCG has invested a lot in intellectual capital by way of recruitments and staff training and currently the University College can boast of one of the finest crop of academic staff in Ghana. This serves as a powerful reservoir of intellectual capacity which gives a bright opportunity for scholarly publishing.

7.3 Sound financial support for research: MUCG made adequate provision in its Strategic Plan (2006-2011) towards sound financial support for research and this offers a great opportunity for scholarly publishing. According to the *MUCG Strategic Plan*, “MUCG should immediately and strenuously seek research funding from donor agencies and especially the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). It was recorded under Funded Research that in the academic year 2006/2007 the University received almost 700 million cedis from TALIF and USAID. It was also stated that carrying out the five-year plan would require obtaining a very large and **sustained increase in research funding, reaching 19 percent of MUCG’s operating income in the fifth**

year. The projections assume 5 billion cedis in research by 2007 and 30 billion cedis by 2010.’³

MUCG is one of the few private universities in Ghana which have remained very faithful in the payment of research allowance to its academic staff.

A number of academic staff, coming under five research groups have so far received funding from the University College or have been directed by the University College to where they could receive funding for their research projects. The various research groups are as specified below:

- (i) The Psychology Group, including Mrs. Charlotte Kwakye-Nuako and others, researching into the topic: “*Substance Abuse and Academic Performance among Senior High School Students in Accra.*” The research has been completed; an article has been written on it and submitted to the Editor of *GLOBUS* for publication in the next issue. The same article has also been submitted to the *Ghana International Journal of Mental Health*.
- (ii) The Economics Group comprising, Mr.C.D.KOpoku, Mr. BigglesPetershie, Mr. OseiGyimah and Mr. D.E Adenutsi.
- (iii)The Statistics Group consisting of Prof. O.A.Y Jackson, Mr. Christian.A. Hesse and Mr. Dominic Buertey, researching into the topic: “*Correlation between Methodist University College Ghana Admission Qualifications and Intermediate and Final Degree Results.*”
- (iv)Mr. Mac-Anthony Cobblah: Researching into “*Information Seeking Behaviour of Academic Staff.*”
- (v) The Agriculture Group led by Prof. Francis K. Fianu and supported by Mr. E.Y Boampong, Rev. Francis Aboagye-Nuamah and Mr. S. Annor are researching into the “*Influence of Fertilizer (NPK) Application on Nodulation Growth and Yield of*

Cowpea (VignaUnguiculata L).” They have been directed to seek funding from the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA).

All the afore-mentioned show the massive financial support MUCG has been giving and is still willing to give to its academic staff for **research**, which **is a vital ingredient for scholarly publishing**.

7.4 Expanding market (customer base) for academic journals

With the proliferation of private universities, sod-cutting for the establishment of two more public universities and accreditation being granted to some polytechnics and other tertiary institutions like the Institute of Professional Studies (IPS) among others to offer Masters’ Degree Courses, there is obviously an expanding market for scholarly/academic journals. Research institutions in Ghana and even abroad are potential markets for scholarly publishing and offer opportunities for scholarly publishing. The African Studies Centre in the Netherlands, for example, has already subscribed to subsequent issues of *GLOBUS* after buying a copy of the maiden issue in Ghana.

7.5 A Pro-active Publications Unit

A Publications Unit so sensitive to scholarly publishing is an asset for the University College. The series of Writers’ Workshops organized by the Unit for staff and students during the 2008/2009 academic year really aroused interest in staff for writing. The collaborative efforts of the Unit with writers, editors and printing presses to ensure that a good job is done is something that can be counted on for good quality publishing which is essential for any sustainable effort in scholarly publishing. Also, the burning desire of the Publications Unit to see every MUCG publication well marketed and distributed is an opportunity for growth in scholarly publishing.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Get a Policy on Scholarly Publishing and Incorporate it into the Next Strategic Plan

It is recommended to the University College to get a policy on scholarly publishing and incorporate it into the next Strategic Plan. By this Management should ensure that when the main Strategic Plan is being drawn, a Functional (Departmental) Level Strategic Plan is made for scholarly publishing and incorporated into MUCG's central Strategic Plan. Management should also ensure that there are policies on scholarly publishing which will give the parameters within which every stakeholder in the scholarly publishing process should operate, the time frame within which they must operate and what remuneration they must expect. Management should ensure that every activity involved in the scholarly publishing process is effectively planned right from writing, refereeing, editing, publishing, marketing and distribution.

8.2 Tracking of progress against plan

There must be effective tracking of progress of work against plans through the development of reporting and control relationships at every stage of the scholarly publishing process. Effective evaluation and monitoring is essential at every stage and must not wait until the expected end of the final product.

9.3 Critical path analysis

From the very onset, there must be a clear picture as to where we are going, how we are going and when we are getting there. If we are not sure of any of these, then it is not yet time to take off. We must be able to chart a clear course of action that will give us at least 90 percent certainty of getting to where we want and how we want it at the right time.

8.4 Get adequate understanding of internal resistance to change

It is very important to study and be able to predict not only the external environment but also the internal environment. The ability to predict the reaction of people who are going to be assigned certain responsibilities that call for **new challenges** and

sacrifices is key to the success of the task at hand. Here experience and competence alone might not be enough.

8.5 Give incentives to editors and referees to embrace the new strategy

Motivation is that necessary lubricant that keeps the wheel of hard-work running. The psychology of any group of editors or referees at any point in time must be carefully studied and understood so as to get a handsome package of incentives, whether a financial reward or otherwise, so as to boost their morale in order not to do a one-off job but to keep the process flowing smoothly.

8.6 Designate and mandate a particular unit to be responsible for marketing scholarly publishing

A particular unit or department needs to be designated and mandated to be responsible for marketing all scholarly publications in MUCG. This department should liaise with the Editorial Board, Publications Unit and the Finance Office to ensure that scholarly publications are promptly marketed and not kept at the warehouse to gather dust.

8.7 Let The Unit Produce A Marketing Plan

The unit or department that will be designated and mandated to be responsible for marketing scholarly publications must be made to come out at the beginning of every year with its marketing plan for approval by Management. Steps should be taken to ensure that the unit/department follows this marketing plan through. Any deviation from the plan must be with prior permission from Management; giving satisfactory reasons. If this is done, scholarly publishing will no longer be just a cost-centre; it will become possible to break even with scholarly publishing and even make profit.

8.8 Provide adequate logistics to market and distribute publications

An Additional and more flexible means of transport like a motor-bike could be bought and a dispatch-rider employed to improve upon the delivery system of mails and publications by the University College. If this is done, all MUCG publications

could be effectively and efficiently marketed and distributed to avert loss to the University College.

9.0 CONCLUSION

It can be said that scholarly publishing has taken off in MUCG in a modest form but it is yet to be managed as a strategic function. As a result, it has encountered challenges such as over-estimation of competence of members of editorial board, no critical path analysis, internal resistance to change, no incentives to members of editorial board and internal referees of academic articles, no marketing plan for published academic journals and books; and inadequate logistics to help in marketing academic journals and books. These have culminated in inconsistency in timing of publications and a slump in research interests. However, opportunities still abound like Management passion for scholarly publishing, latent reservoir of intellectual capital/ capacity, sound financial support for research, expanding market (customer base) for academic journals and a pro-active Publications Unit.

Looking at the opportunities that abound, it can be said that scholarly publishing in MUCG has a future and can really make great strides if certain structures are put in place.

10.0 Endnotes

1. *Strategic Plan (2006-2011), Page 6, Item 2.5.1; and Item 3.4.2.*
2. *Methodist University College Ghana Strategic Plan (2006-2011), Page 21, Table 11, ACTIVITIES' (item 1.2.1)*

10.1 REFERENCES

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