

NEWS

Hitch in varsity accommodation

By Alex Kazungu

University of Nairobi's postgraduate students are being forced out of the halls of residence to accommodate the rising number of undergraduate students.

Since the normalisation of the academic programmes by most colleges, only few postgraduate students can now be accommodated at the university's halls of residence.

The crisis has partly been created by the normalisation policy which if fully implemented will obviously push out those postgraduate students who are still under university accommodation, the Student Welfare Authority (SWA) assistant customer relations officer, Mr. Fred Oluoch has said.

The normalisation programme will end the previous system where students reported for their academic year at different intervals. The semesters will now run concurrently from the first to the final year.

SWA has been offering accom-

modation to postgraduate students in Hall 4 but this will no longer be the case with the introduced system.

Mr. Oluoch, reacting to postgraduate students' complaints that there is favouritism in the allocation of rooms, said the policy of the Student Welfare Authority states clearly that SWA does not offer accommodation for postgraduate students.

Postgraduate students have expressed concern that while SWA claims to safeguard the welfare of all students, they have deliberately decided to exclude them. The students insist that they are part of the students' body of the University and it is their right and not privilege to be accommodated.

The postgraduate students are challenging SWA's policy that shuts them out of the university accommodation.

"If SWA is serious about its stand on the postgraduate accommodation issue, how come some students are accommodated while others are not," Mr Daniel Aghan, a journalism stu-



SWA Offices: The right to accommodation stops here.

dent at University of Nairobi, poses.

Mr. Aghan, citing the example of Kenyatta University where both the undergraduate and postgraduate students are offered accommodation, laments that SWA's policy of not providing accommodation to postgraduate students inconveniences them.

A postgraduate student complains that SWA's policy on accommodation is subject to abuse as halls officers and custodians take advantage to exploit students who are desperately in need of accommodation.

But according to Mr. Oluoch, SWA decided to offer accommoda-

tion to postgraduate students against its policy on humanitarian grounds and it considers each needy case on merit giving those badly in need the first priority. So the issue of students being exploited when seeking accommodation does not arise.

However, the customer relations officer concedes that undergraduate students in session are given first priority. Other groups are considered for accommodation only after all the undergraduates have been accommodated in the university halls of residence.

The SWA administration says that it is not only the postgraduates

who are not accommodated at the campus but also the parallel and graduate students.

Most of the postgraduate students interviewed by *The Anvil* felt that the Student Welfare Authority should revise its accommodation policy to cater for postgraduate students.

Unless this is done, then the university academic standards are bound to nose-dive. Graduate students will shift priority from academics to accommodation and transport welfare. This will impact negatively on the academics as some of the postgraduate students assist lecturers handling undergraduate classes.

J.K.M.L. Library goes Technical

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In a two months' pilot study between December and January, the service proved "extremely popular" especially with engineering students, says the librarian.

"Even without the Internet, the library can download material for students from the United States Information Services, says Ms Mathangani, adding that plans are underway to create a web-site for the giant library in the premier institution of learning.

She is optimistic that Internet services will resume soon. With more surfers, the project will be able to stand on its own because one surfer use the same telephone time as five surfers networked from the same frame. "However, it will be a process because we need some networking from the Institute of computer Science," she said.

Observers are skeptical about the promise that Internet services will resume 'soon'. In the digital communication age, there is nothing like soon. To a computer, soon means a fraction of a second, but to a university bureaucrat it may mean a millennium.

Dubbed the "nervous system of society", the Internet is a must to any university that considers itself not yet dead. Most courses in the university are taught in one semester, and

the students will never have a chance to go back to them in a lifetime on campus. This means that a student who has no access to the Internet for a semester will have no on-line information for the more than eight units covered in that period.

In an ideal university, according to Prof. Felix Gutierrez, whose views *The Anvil* got on-line, a student does not have to depend fully on the professor for knowledge and evaluation. As the new millennium approaches, "students come to class with different technological knowledge obtained in different ways... and the students may know something the faculty doesn't." Not so in Nairobi. Professors, some of whom do not know the difference between a byte and a browser, are still the uncontested sources of knowledge.

While other universities are instructing students to submit their work electronically, and the work is, in turn, graded electronically, University of Nairobi still depends on paper and pencil methods. This outdated method should be replaced by the computer.

Further, in a university where the exchange programme at the level of students is uni-directional (foreign students come to the university but very few local students have ever been to an airport) the Internet can be used to team up students with others in the country and around the world.

Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library 'well stocked'

By Rachel Alwala

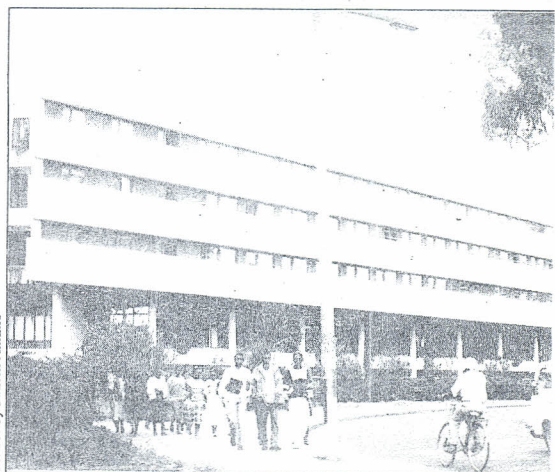
Students are not making proper use of the books in the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library (JKML) on allegations that the books are archaic. There has been complaints over unavailability of current reference materials in the Library.

Contrary to the accusations that the books in the library are old and out dated, there are thousands of new books that have progressively been purchased or donated by well-wishers over the last few years. This was said by Mr. Joseph Mulwa, Deputy Chief Librarian at JKML.

He pointed out that the library had just completed a *World Bank* book project that has lasted eight years. The World Bank donated an estimated Ksh.80 million to facilitate the purchase of books to the library. A total of 22,515 books have been bought so far and the entries are still being made. This adds to the current stock of over 500,000 in the JKML.

He cited the School of Nursing as one of the prime beneficiaries from the World Vision books, a constant donor, and added that they even had a surplus to give to the associate colleges of the School.

"To most students, books have lost meaning. They no longer value them as a source of background knowledge. Besides their lecture notes and references on the reading list, they make no further efforts to seek other sources," the librarian said.



JKML library: A "granary" of knowledge - students take a break after a "filling."

Part of the blame for this reluctance is the financial crisis facing the students since the Structural Adjustment Programmes in Kenya were imposed on university which have forced students to find ways of surviving at the expense of their studies.

Mr. Mulwa said that unlike countries in the West that have employment opportunities for students, Kenya does not offer avenues when it comes to jobs and the means to survive therefore remain the sole responsibility of students.

He said that the JKML has an inter-library network and is linked to research institutions like ICRAF, ILRI among others. "Students who

express interest in material that is unavailable in JKML can refer to the partner libraries," he said.

Going by the purchases in the bookshop, the Bookshop Manager, Mrs. Margaret Muriuki, admitted that the reading culture at the University has declined.

She advised students utilise available means to achieve and maintain high academic standards. Meanwhile, the United States Information Services (USIS) has donated 42 boxes to the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE)/School of Journalism. The donation was initiated by Mr Zeke Waweru of the School of Journalism.