

TAFE librarians — a bright future?

IN THE PAST, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) librarians were happy to belong to UCLS and some have been office bearers, or at least, active participants. Not that UCLS' program was geared to considering some of TAFE's problems, but most TAFE librarians did not, themselves, recognise the special needs of TAFE.

However, during the 1970s, Federal and State Governments discovered that most TAFE libraries were totally inadequate — that is, if a library existed in a college. This meant that in some colleges libraries were built and some existing libraries were revamped with new furnishings and equipment.

Of course, some libraries are still housed in classrooms, storerooms, cupboards, etc, but TAFE librarians now have so much hope for the future that they are looking towards 'active' participation in the teaching/learning process and are not prepared to accept the 'passive' role of the past.

TAFE librarians have taken a great attitudinal leap forward and are seriously looking at their identity, role and needs. UCLS (with a Special Interest Group attached to it) may still be the most appropriate section for TAFE librarians but time and the opportunity to explore the possibilities is needed.

In which ways are TAFE libraries different from other library services? When you consider the characteristics you will, no doubt, say to yourself — why that is not unique, we in public libraries, college libraries, school libraries, are concerned with that issue. What the author contends is unique to TAFE libraries is the combination of these characteristics.

Other important features are that there is unequal development between states; and there is no uniformity in development between states. Each state has developed its TAFE library services according to how it perceived its needs.

The characteristics of TAFE can also become the special problems of TAFE until strategies are evolved to meet the demands made by these characteristics. TAFE offers a large number of courses (in NSW there are more than 200) but all courses are not offered in the one college. Colleges with libraries come in all sizes: very small eg Forbes (student population 871), small eg Cooma (student population 1187), medium eg Seaforth (student population 3754), large eg Granville (student population 13,615) and very large eg Sydney (student population 41,202).¹ Students may be full time, part time, block release, sandwich or have unstructured attendance patterns, eg attendance at an individual learning centre depends on the student's individual needs.

The age of students can range from 15 to 80 — not at all like a secondary school where the student population may range between 12-18 years of age.

In order to cope with the particular attributes of students, the demands of industry and, more recently, the effects of a depressed economy, TAFE offers courses at many levels:

- associate diploma;
- certificate, post-certificate, higher certificate;
- trade, post-trade;
- special (which includes non-vocational);
- general education which includes Higher School Certificate, School Certificate, pre-vocational, pre-apprenticeship.

Many students come from non-academic backgrounds — homes where education is not greatly valued; few learning/study skills with

which they can reinforce classroom teaching; lack confidence in an educational situation; few or no aspirations for success and are subjected to peer pressure not to excel. This means that certain assumptions commonly held by university trained librarians must be stripped away before the TAFE student can be reached.

Colleges are located in all parts of the state. There are metropolitan colleges, regional colleges to which are attached a number of smaller colleges, circuit centres and even several mobile vans. Not all of the colleges in NSW have libraries and some of those with small libraries do not have trained staff, eg a clerical assistant staffs the library at Wellington Technical College.

The extremely scattered geographical location of college libraries means that most efforts at communication are fragmented. TAFE librarians operate in professional

isolation and most attempts to shepherd TAFE library staff into one neat comparison in the LAA will be doomed to failure. Many of the TAFE librarians in country districts meet with librarians from other library services in a regional group so that special interests become subservient to regional interests.

Against this background of TAFE colleges and students and with the increased funding of TAFE libraries that has resulted in more suitable accommodation, appropriate furnishings and increased staff, the TAFE librarian is attempting to establish his/her identity. We need your ideas and your support.²

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Notes

- 1 Student populations are based on student enrolments for 1977
- 2 Throughout the examples used are from NSW TAFE, but recognise that TAFE in other states varies quite considerably

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