

# Everybody's doing it

Kate Sexton, University of Sydney Library and Carolyn Wivell, Macquarie University Library review TQM in academic libraries

Washington, DC turned on some delightful Spring weather for the first international conference on TQM in academic libraries sponsored by the ARL Office of Management Studies. The famous cherry blossom had just finished but the dogwoods were out and the tulips were absolutely stunning.

Entitled *Total Quality Management in academic libraries: initial implementation methods*, the conference was designed to 'showcase' quality programs in individual academic libraries. It was very practical in nature and was mercifully free of the glibness and hype which sometimes surrounds TQM. It is difficult to give an overview of such a diverse and varied program but a number of general points emerged:

- quality programs are all-pervasive—everyone seems to be doing something;
- many libraries are still in the early stages of implementation of quality programs;
- the university library is often ahead of the rest of the university in introducing of quality improvement processes;
- a wide range of approaches are being used by libraries and the emphasis is on the practical application of techniques rather than ideological purity;
- there is little concern about labels and a recognition that the jargon or terms used are less important than the application of 'common-sense' principles;
- quality improvement is seen as a continuous process and not an end in itself. The cliché 'Quality is a voyage not a destination' was often stated;
- implementing a continuous improvement program is a lengthy process taking two to five years. It is not a quick fix;
- top management in the organisation must be fully-committed to the quality process and must devote adequate resources to the program.

The four keynote speakers were uniformly good, however Daniel Seymour was particularly impressive.

Daniel Seymour, a business ad-

ministration academic and the author of *On Q: causing quality in higher education*, gave the opening presentation which was built around five basic premises. The five premises (and Seymour's views) were:

*The customer is always right*

False. In the first place we are often unsure of who our customers are. Secondly, the customers rarely ask for innovations in service. Do they really know what they want?

*More than 90% of the problems in an institution are within the administration's power to correct*

True. Most problems in an organisation are process-related rather than people-related.

*If it ain't broke, you haven't looked hard enough*

True. The substantial lack of performance and feedback measures means that we are often unaware of what isn't working.

*Doing the right things is more important than doing things right*

True. Concentrating solely on process improvement may result in doing very well something which no one wants.

*If you cut my budget, you sacrifice quality*

False. Identification of substantial amounts of reworking can free up resources for more critical tasks.

This was a very thought-provoking session and Seymour achieved his goal of getting the audience to

think beyond the standard responses to these questions. The concurrent sessions gave much practical information in the form of reports from libraries on their experience with the introduction of quality improvement processes.

One presentation from Karyle Butcher at Oregon State University summed up the pragmatic approach very neatly with the phrase *TQM = TCS* (Total Quality Management = Total Common Sense). The techniques developed at Oregon have been adopted by many institutions, particularly the idea of a senior staff member sponsoring a particular quality initiative and ensuring it is carried through.

Ms Butcher identified a number of key elements for the successful implementation of TQM including: cultural change, top-level management commitment and involvement, focus on processes, employee-driven, customer-driven, structured analysis, and decisions based on fact and data.

Overall the conference offered many useful tips for those contemplating or engaged in a quality exercise. We left with a firm conviction of the value of quality improvement programs and the importance of being responsive to customer needs in the increasingly competitive education market. A second conference is planned in two to three years to evaluate progress. ■

## Kingston Library on the move—and changing names

The General Manager of the ACT Library Service, Vic Smorhun, has announced that the library services currently provided at Kingston Library, Leichhardt Street are to be transferred to a brand new location on Blaxland Crescent, Griffith, due to open as the Griffith Library on 22 August.

The library in Leichhardt Street has provided services to residents of Canberra's Inner South since 1970, when the initial public library on Kings Avenue, under the direction of the National Library of Australia, was closed. Kingston Library has played a significant role in the development of public library services in Canberra, and for many years was the 'Central Library', housing the largest reference and lending collection in the ACT public library system. The building has also accommodated all collection development and technical services functions since the early 1970s. ■