

Rewarding careers in the TAFE sector

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Librarianship, in the vocational education and training sector is an enormously challenging and interesting field of practice for a number of reasons. Not least of these is the rate of change — organisational, educational and technological, which shows little sign of abating and which has characterised TAFE at both state and national levels since the late 1980s.

Indeed, the vocational education and training sector is arguably one of the most volatile operating environments in Australia at present. Concurrent with major structural organisational and funding changes, including the introduction of the competitive training market, there have also been substantial shifts in educational practice with an increase in work based learning, flexible delivery initiatives, competency based curriculum development and an emphasis on educational partnerships of all kinds.

A diverse customer base

Another factor distinguishing TAFE libraries and learning resource centres from other educational libraries is the remarkably diverse nature of its customer base. TAFE draws its students from all strata of society and from a wide range of educational backgrounds. This means that TAFE library staff require highly developed interpersonal and communication skills and an ability to quickly adjust communication levels and styles in response to differing customer demands.

Responding to curriculum requirements

The nature and diversity of TAFE curricula are further factors which enrich the TAFE working environment. The scope and diversity of TAFE programs and the range of delivery modes is impressive. The curriculum drives all aspects of library and information work in TAFE and gives TAFE libraries many of their distinguishing features. In the area of collection development, for instance, TAFE librarians need to develop an understanding of the literature of many trade and technical areas, not a feature of other libraries. Few other libraries would provide access to materials on scaffolding and rigging, locksmithing, floor and wall tiling, panel beating, mortuary practice and so on. TAFE libraries are also characterised by diversity in the range of media available, including print, AV and electronic with probably greater emphasis on AV formats than many other libraries. Librarians in TAFE therefore need to be versatile and confident in providing access to learning resources and information services in all their forms. CD-ROM and multimedia formats are particularly highly-valued sources of learning

support within TAFE and TAFE librarians may well find themselves the main source of expertise within their campuses in terms of the management and use of these resources.

Flexible delivery

The growth in flexible delivery methodologies has also required that TAFE libraries adjust their services to ensure that the needs of independent learners are addressed. Libraries are increasingly providing a wide range of learner support services particularly in relation to technology access. A number of TAFE libraries already provide access to satellite broadcasts, PCs, the Internet, CD-ROM networks and multimedia products. In some cases, TAFE libraries also include Open Learning Centres which provide extended access to technology and learning resources potentially on a 24 hour basis. As the concept of the virtual classroom is put into practice, new challenges are emerging regarding the provision of access to learning resources and information services to students who may attend campus infrequently or never, including those enrolled in workplace learning programs.

Librarians in TAFE therefore need not only to have the ability to manage technology and liaise effectively with information technology specialists within their campuses but also to be able to actively seek information technology and other solutions to enable effective responses to these new challenges.

Information literacy

Concurrent with the increasing emphasis in TAFE on communication and information competencies, TAFE librarians are taking a more active role in the development of information literacy skills in students, and in many cases are working in close partnerships with teaching staff to ensure that these skills are learnt within the context of the curriculum. Inevitably, and relentlessly it seems, the role of the librarian is increasingly one of teacher and facilitator, so this is an important consideration for those contemplating a career in the TAFE sector.

Many of these factors influencing the role of the library staff in TAFE are clearly enunciated in *Focus on learning: a framework for the provision of learning resources and information services in vocational education and training* (Brisbane, National TAFE Chief Executives' Committee, 1995) which provides national guidelines for TAFE libraries and learning resource centres. Anyone considering a career in TAFE libraries would be well advised to read and digest this document carefully as it maps out very clearly the priorities, challenges and opportunities for TAFE library professionals into the 21st century. ■

Libraries, even today, remain places of calm and subdued tones. They appear places of complete organisation, with all things having a place and an order. That was attractive. Now with greater 'inside' knowledge, the attraction is offering users that sense of calm and order, despite the frenetic activity necessary to achieve it. Also, dare I say it, I love books, the smell, the feel, the solidity of books.

Susan Rudd (Curtin University)

Following an undergraduate degree in Records Management, I am eager to commence my Graduate Diploma in Library and Information Studies. Having both qualifications will give me the total picture and will equip me to be the keeper of, navigator to and facilitator for all business information, whether corporate records or published material. What power!

Josette Mathers (Curtin University)

