

A very special collection

Jeremy Hodes

The Far North Queensland Institute of TAFE comprises eleven Campuses across Far North Queensland, including the Torres Strait, covering an area twice the size of Victoria. We have 2000 indigenous students amongst our 25 000 students, making us the largest indigenous education provider in Australia.

We have always had an outstanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collection in our library, but by 1994 it was apparent that we were having difficulty meeting the specific resource needs of our students when seeking information on their local communities and culture. At the same time, the introduction of Australia's first Heritage and Interpretive Tourism TAFE Course meant that to satisfy client resource needs we would require a new approach. We therefore created a Far North Queensland special collection with an emphasis on indigenous, local history and eco-tourism materials. Three years on, this unique collection continues to grow rapidly, with over 35 000 items.

A special database was set up to facilitate the retrieval of information considered

important by our users. As well, every one of the 1.5 million words in the database is searchable and most of the 18 000 records entered have abstracts.

Future plans include hosting the database on the Internet to improve access for our off-campus and remote users. Pending resolution of copyright issues, we intend to progressively load most of the collection on the Internet in a combination of full-text and image formats. This new proposal will position us as the premier content provider for resources in this region. It is a unique opportunity to generate income through harnessing our region's comparative advantages. I am often asked if a special collection of this sort is appropriate for a TAFE Institution. Given our special client base, mix of courses and geographic location, I and most of our users would answer 'yes'.

Roxanne Missingham, in *The Australian*



Tracey Budgen, collection co-ordinator, with part of the Far North Queensland Collection

Library Journal ('The On-line conference runs like a well-oiled machine', *ALJ*, vol 46, N° 1, February 1997, p71) suggests that to move our library into the 21st century we need to, inter alia, move from managing collections to specialising in content and access and to provide tailored solutions rather than 'one size fits all'.

Our collection provides the improved service delivery outcomes that our clients have now come to expect.

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