An educational change-agent

Dr Alan Bundy, university librarian, University of South Australia library

A characteristic of many of the Dawkins' universities — those established since the end of the Binary system during 1987–1990 — is that they are a consequence of institutional mergers, are large, and are multi-campus. The University of South Australia is no exception, with 24 000 students on six campuses, five in the Adelaide metropolitan area and one in Whyalla 400 kilometres northwest of Adelaide. The newest of the university's campuses, City West, features a state-of-the-art four-level library and was opened by the Governor General Sir William Deane on 26 February 1997. The university library has 160 staff, 750 000 volumes and an annual budget of $10.5 million.

Although one of the last universities to be established, with the university librarian not appointed until 1992, the library was able to build on the client service, automation and staff development strengths of its antecedent libraries and early decided to focus on the role of librarians as educators, by emphasising information literacy as the key competency for university and lifelong learning. This is encapsulated in its mission 'To be the university's key facilitator of information access for student centred learning, research and information literacy'. The library promoted the importance of information literacy through the conduct of national Information Literacy conferences, in 1992, 1995 and a third planned in 1997 — it also funded the information literacy www site (InfoLit_Aust@listserv.csu.edu.au) maintained by Charles Sturt University.

The library's strongest emphasis is on why it exists — its clients — and it was one of the first university libraries worldwide to publish a Client Charter containing performance indicators. Liaison librarians work closely with academic staff and students to facilitate the progressive, if uneven, shift from lecturers supported by libraries to resource based learning supported by lecturers. Its Electronic Information Team is responsible for its www site <http://www.unisa.edu.au/library> and for training academic staff and students in the use of the Internet and other electronic resources.

Special attention has been given to meeting the information needs of the vice-chancellor, Professor Denise Bradley, (a former teacher-librarian) and her senior colleagues through the establishment of SMART (Senior Management Research Team) — a practical and profiting advantage for the university and the library.

Serving the community

The university has as part of its mission 'Serving the community'. The library's response to this expectation has been proactive, broad, and targeted at three communities — the library community, at a state, national and international level; the wider educational community; and the general public who make considerable use of the library.

Service to the library community is focused on providing fast interlibrary loans, ABN training and less directly by the maintenance of ACHLIS — the Australian Clearing House for Library and Information Science which with over 12 000 fully abstracted records gives Australia more complete coverage of its library and information science publishing than any other country has achieved. The three university libraries in the State share in a courier service, development of the Dynix system used by all three, and provide reciprocal borrowing for all students and staff — they are ahead of their institutions in co-operating and resource sharing.

The library is also involved in assisting university libraries overseas, particularly in Indonesia where it has a twinning agreement with one of that country's foremost universities, Bandung Institute of Technology.

The University of South Australia library's service to the wider educational community has two major thrusts. One is its National Periodical Service for Schools which, backed up by the National Library of Australia, supplies faxed fastrack journal articles to some one-hundred-and-sixty schools throughout Australia for about ten per cent of the normal cost of a fastrack interlibrary loan. The other, to commence in March 1997, is a quality postal and reference service to Open Learning Agency students throughout Australia. This contracted service will be based on the library's long experience in providing for distance education students.

And the library's challenges?

To remain focused on clients, committed to staff development, risk taking and co-operation at a time when national fiscal insanities and institutional turbulence and competition will be major distractions. And most importantly not to lose sight of, in the face of increasing demands and limited funds, the myriad opportunities for educational leadership in developing self sufficient learners — something which requires an even better awareness by the library and its staff of how teacher-librarians, TAFE librarians and public librarians are responding to the same national agenda. ∎