

Library expands service horizons

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The library at the Queensland University of Technology currently offers services to the university's 25 000 students through four branches, situated on three campuses. Recently it has been expanding its client service through a number of initiatives.

E-Reserve

An Electronic Reserve module, developed in-house, provides access for Gardens Point campus students to library materials in high demand. The current project takes materials provided by academics for which copyright is held, via e-mail, on disc or in print format (these last are scanned into the database by library lending services staff). Materials are made available to clients within hours, through any PC connected to the university's World Wide Web server. Users have expressed great enthusiasm for the ease of use and accessibility of the system. It is planned to extend this operation to include copyright materials as soon as the current AVCC/CAL case is resolved by the Copyright Tribunal. At this point other campus materials will also be added to the service, which is expanding access to priority materials well beyond the library walls.

Indigenous student initiatives

Although the library had created a liaison structure and implemented special user education programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, it was still not confident that the special needs of these students were being effectively met. Funded by an Equity Grant, the 'You tell us' project sought a new approach to improve the library's efforts to facilitate the development of information literacy skills by these students. It was hoped new insights would be gained through discussions with students which focussed primarily upon cultural and motivational issues, and only secondarily upon use of the library.

A team consisting of Jan Novak, Associate university Librarian (Development), Sue Whatman, from the Oodgeroo Unit (which supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students), Gail Robinson, a consultant storyteller, and Wesley Enoch, consultant and Director of the Kooemba Jdarra Theatre Company managed the project. The two consultants both had extensive experience in community work. They used traditional storytelling methods to facilitate the students' participation in the process.

The strongest message gained from this exploration was that timing, location, method, environment, in short, almost everything but information content, were major issues for this particular group of students.

Various incentives were used to encourage attendance by students at focus group meetings. Financial incentives in the form of prepaid photocopying cards were accepted with indifference, but catering and a 'social' atmosphere were absolutely essential, valued and commented upon by the participants. Networking is critical when working with indigenous students.

Other findings with implications for the library include:

- feelings of intimidation, from the environment as well as psychological difficulties;
- the importance of links with the university's Oodgeroo Unit;
- user education, including orientation, delivery mechanisms, and a mentoring program;
- evidences of racism, particularly passive forms such as graffiti inscribed on carrels; and
- motivation of indigenous students.

The project has proved extremely valuable. It has focussed the library's attention in new directions, as well as pointing the way to potential means of improving the library's services to and communication with the university's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Community service enhancement

In mid-1995, recognising the university's strong commitment to community service, the library appointed Barbara Ewers to the newly created position of Community Services Librarian.

The library has always provided, and continues to provide, a diverse range of community service activities. Such activities are delivered by individuals and Sections throughout the library. The Community Services Librarian's role has been to co-ordinate the planning, development and



Associate lecturer, Sue Whatman, and associate university librarian, Jan Novak, discuss the success of the libraries 'You tell us' program

delivery of these programs, to identify and respond to commercial opportunities, and to co-ordinate library-wide public relations and promotional activities. The cost of most of these services, including the production of the very popular *IREL: the Australian Industrial relations Database* (available through *Business Australia on Disc*), provision of trainers for AIMA, and participation in reciprocal lending and membership schemes, is absorbed by the library. Others are undertaken as commercial activities, such as Expert Information (a reference and research service), consultancies and Internet and information skills training. Through the university's Community Services Grants Scheme, the library has received funding to pilot Internet access and staff training for three regional public libraries.

Initially, Barb undertook a review of existing and potential programs. She has since concentrated on developing policy and procedures, documenting and measuring the level of activity and integrating library mechanisms with university systems, especially the Community Services Database available on the university's World Wide Web server. By consulting staff at all levels through this process, a positive change in the library's culture concerning community services has occurred. Staff have come to recognise that the library's external focus complements the services offered to internal clients and the university's strategic focus.

In conjunction with the library's Promotions Committee, Barb also co-ordinates library promotional activities, client newsletters and manages publicity for significant library events. The centralised co-ordination resulting from the creation of this role has provided library staff with a point of reference for advice and assistance, and has built a firm foundation for the expansion of the library's community service. ■