

Promoting professionalism

The importance of the library practicum

The library student practicum is the perfect vehicle to promote and encourage professionalism in librarianship. It also continues the valuable mentoring role into the next generation of information providers.

The following is a snapshot of this process from both sides of a practicum currently under-way — Kathy Wilk is the librarian at Murwillumbah TAFE Library, Yvonne Rose is studying at the Queensland University of Technology.

Giving something back

Practical work experience for library students can be an enormous first step into the real life, everyday world of information provision. My own student practicum days were undertaken at Brookvale TAFE NSW in Sydney (now Northern Beaches — Brookvale Campus) under the wings of Cathy Guy.

It was a powerful experience for me, with the overriding feeling that there was so much yet to learn. I am still enormously grateful for the time, effort and ever-willing patience of the staff to impart their knowledge to a student.

Throughout my career my professional colleagues have given so much of themselves to me — sharing skills and acting as mentors. When I was asked to supervise a librarian student on a work placement, I was more than pleased to be able to give something back.

I am the librarian at Murwillumbah TAFE library, a one person library in a rural area. The library is open for thirty-one hours over a five day week, has a book/av stock of 7000 items as well as internet and CD-ROM access. The library provides services to TAFE students and staff, reciprocal use university students, OTEN distance education students and the local community.

For a newly-trained librarian with little or no practical experience it may prove daunting to start his/her career in a one person library, but a small library can provide benefits to a practicum library student as they can experience, under guidance, a very large range of tasks that any librarian at one stage of their careers may undertake.

Although it may be easier (in any size library) to start a student off in ar-

reas requiring little supervision (such as filing or shelving!) I decided to take extra time to squeeze in all the interesting bits, and to share the repetitious tasks when they needed to be done. Strangely enough, I feel that by explaining some of the more complex procedures I am relearning the complexities of these tasks.

As personal contacts and links to professional activities are also important, we have, outside work hours, visited exhibitions, partaken in the regional ALIA group's activities and generally widened Yvonne's ideas about 'what is out there' for her in her future career.

I thoroughly enjoyed Yvonne's practicum visits, looking forward to Monday as they fuelled my enthusiasm for information services. My mentoring role has only just begun with Yvonne, I look forward to watching her progress. I have no doubt she will quickly assimilate into whichever career area she chooses.

Kathy Wilk

A positive experience

The professional practice unit of my Post-Graduate Diploma of Library and Information Studies at Queensland University of Technology requires the completion of two separate fifteen-day fieldwork placements. I have started the first of these at the TAFE Library, Murwillumbah. Kathy Wilk is the librarian at this one-person library.

Undertaking professional practice in a small library has been beneficial from the point of view that it provides an opportunity to experience a broad range of library work, including:

- reference work — instructing clients on the TAFE catalogue, CD-ROMs and the internet;
- processing the incoming serials;
- inputting new titles into the Dynix system;
- circulation;



Kathy Wilk and Yvonne Rose

- direct ordering of new titles from the internet;
- shelving;
- physical preparation of new items;
- processing inter-library loans using e-mail;
- copy cataloguing; and
- special project in the serials area with change-over to online.

It is gratifying for me to finally be 'in the library' putting into context theories I have been studying throughout the year. Kathy has helped me understand the complexities of library work — each task has its place in the overall function of the library.

The practicum has been a positive experience on three fronts; it has confirmed to me that a career in the library field fulfils my expectations; it has provided an opportunity to make some useful contacts in the library profession; and has provided the most invaluable 'hands-on' experience.

I would like to thank Kathy Wilk my supervisor and mentor for being professional in her attitude to this field work. This assistance has equipped me with new skills and a renewed commitment that I can take away with me and offer to future employers.

Yvonne Rose