

Tropical notes...

Yvonne Brock, president of the Queensland Library Technician Section

It seems like only yesterday that I accepted the role of president of the Queensland Library Technician Section. The section has been extremely busy this year, both the socially and professionally.

In February our vice-president Trish Darcy gained some practical public-speaking skills when, at very short notice, she presented a seminar on the Queensland mentoring program. In April, two of our most popular and highly-respected 'Duchesses of document delivery', Bev Wedge and Elaine Mortimer, presented a seminar on the finer details of interlibrary loans and document delivery, from both an academic and government perspective. Both seminars were well-attended, and presented an excellent opportunity to promote ALIA to the many non-members who came along.

The month of May presented a bit of a challenge to several of our executive members, including myself. This challenge was the official visit to the South Bank Institute of TAFE to address library technician students on the value of joining a professional association. Part of the challenge was presenting a positive win/win solution — very difficult when the students are aware of the shrinking employment market, the continuing increase in graduates, and the expense involved in joining a professional association. I must congratulate my team: as a result of our visit we had eighteen students join us at our annual dinner and presentation night in June, and gained two student representatives.

Our annual dinner was very successful. Queensland University librarian Janine Schmidt gave a very positive and supportive lecture on the future of library technicians in the

world of 'cybrarian' libraries. We hope to post Janine's speech on our homepage shortly [<http://www.alia.org.au/sections/libt/qltd/>] and an edited version appears on page 20 of this issue.

Many presentations were made during the evening, the most important being to the 1999 Queensland Library Technician Student of the Year, Lesley Hartman, from Moreton Institute of TAFE.

The section has been very fortunate this year in gaining two new sponsors for our annual award. Our very own Queensland Library Supplies donated both cash and a perpetual trophy for the occasion and DANKA Australia donated a substantial quantity of paper in order to carry out full-page promotional supplements in *QUILL*, our branch newsletter.

An issue that the section would like to see addressed as part of the review of the Association is the way that sections receive funding. We have requested that this issue be addressed at the national conference in September.

Another serious issue that has once again surfaced is the 'Identity crisis: what's in a name?' Our New South Wales colleagues are proposing to lobby ALIA General Council for a change in the official definition of library technicians from 'para-professional' to 'library staff'. They have requested input from all state presidents. I have had universally-positive responses from our Queensland members to keep the 'para-professional' identity.

Library technicians are the library's 'nuts and bolts' specialists. The *Oxford Concise Dictionary* defines a technician as 'an expert in the practical application of science'; para as 'beside'; professional as 'engaged in a specified activity'; and profession as a 'vocation or calling one that involves some branch of advanced learning.' Library technicians as para-professionals fulfil all of the above criteria, and we stand beside para-medics and para-legals.

ALIA defines library technicians as 'para-professionals who have a distinct operational role in the provision of library and information services. Library technicians have completed a course of study which qualifies them for admission to the library technician's membership of ALIA, as set out in the Association's constitution'. The definition would read with the proposed change: 'Library technicians are *library staff* who have a distinct role in the provision of library and information services...'

The nature of today's working environment requires that we work as part of 'the team'. This does not mean losing our identity. A team is two or more people working together, and teamwork is the combined action of the team. Whether the team is comprised of a librarian, library technician, and library assistant; or professional, para-professional, and skilled worker, each level contributes to the overall success of the team. I am proud to be a para-professional. Its time to 'bury the hatchet'. We no longer have an identity crisis.

If you have the time, it is worthwhile visiting the following web page: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/ssp/alaisue/issue4.htm> — there is an excellent article 'MLS librarian/para-professional communication and mutual respect'. ■

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Adelaide 98: Pathways to knowledge, the 5th Biennial conference and exhibition of the Australian Library and Information Association was held in Adelaide in October 1998. Over 1000 delegates participated in the conference, selecting to attend plenary and parallel sessions and workshops from 140 papers presented by more than 210 authors.

The conference proceedings include papers for all except six sessions, and the abstracts of these recalcitrant papers are included. The papers are arranged with the opening and plenary sessions in the first section followed by all other papers in alphabetical order by main author.

The proceedings are available from ALIA National Office at a cost of \$75 to ALIA members and \$105 to non-members, including postage.

Orders for both publications should be mailed or faxed to ALIA, PO Box E441, Kingston 2604, fax 02 6282 2249.