

# Not drowning, immersing...

## ACRL Information Literacy Immersion '00

The ACRL/ILI Information Literacy Immersion '00 was an opportunity for librarians around the world to gather and immerse themselves in discussions, presentations and dreams about information literacy. The program was held over five days in August at the University of Washington — but our work started long before then, as we read designated articles and prepared our institutional case study or instruction scenario.

We three from Australasia joined with another eighty-seven of our international colleagues. A team of six 'experts in the field' guided us and it was a wonderful opportunity to work with those inspirational teachers/librarians/library managers (thank you Debra Gilchrist, Joan Kaplowitz, Susan Barnes Whyte, Karen Williams, and Anne Zald).

The schedule for our week was intense. After the welcome reception on our first evening, we were given an opportunity to mingle and meet our fellow participants. However, this relaxed approach was an unrealistic introduction to the week, as the remainder of the program consisted of eleven to thirteen-hour days.

The program was divided into two 'tracks' — with track 1 designed for new librarians or instruction librarians who were interested in 'enhancing, refreshing, or extending their individual teaching skills', while track 2 was designed for instruction librarians wanting to 'further develop, integrate or advance an information literacy program within their institution'. It was an intense experience involving lots of small group work, reflection and feedback.

The following themes were central:

- an understanding of information literacy;
- leadership/management/creativity;
- assessment and evaluation;
- teaching, learning and technology;
- learning styles/learning theory and its applications in information literacy (track 1);
- teaching skills, presentation techniques, assignment designs (track 1); and
- instructional design/program development (track 2).

We were immersed in the learning

process, and were constantly challenged as we examined our teaching and learning ideas and practices. The program combined theoretical frameworks and conceptual knowledge, with practical and useful skills that we can apply back in our work environments.

Prior to the *Immersion*, the track 1 group looked at a current teaching situation from their institutions, then during the program planned how they would change it to incorporate their discoveries and new ideas. They then had to submit the new and the old teaching scenarios at the end of *Immersion*, for assessment by a 'team of experts'. For those in track 2, the immersion preparation required the development of a case study — based on an issue of concern at their institution. A key focus of the week was to prepare an 'action plan' — based on these individual case studies — that participants could bring back to their institution.

Despite being aware of the educational differences between Australia/New Zealand and America, it was a surprise to discover how often we use terminology in different contexts. Did you know that a 'tutorial' in America relates to a self-paced activity or CAL, while 'seminars' refer to small discussion groups? This 'cultural illiteracy' caused much hilarity, and resulted in the development of an Australian/American glossary.

It was interesting to note that many issues were common to the whole group, and much discussion focused on the following areas:

- how to achieve a common philosophy across all library (and university) staff in relation to information literacy;
- how to develop information literacy structures and activities that fit with our local environments;
- how to support librarians who are not comfortable with, or who are being forced into a teaching role; and
- how to address the information literacy needs of our students/clients within the online environment.

Our discussions and planning served to highlight the need to engage in research on information literacy and to share the results of this research beyond the library literature. We need to look at information literacy within theoretical frameworks, as well as to

disseminate practical applications for teaching and learning. We need to determine (if we can) the impact of our information literacy programs on students, and explore the tangible values of addressing information literacy within the university environment.

Perhaps the greatest value of this immersion, was the opportunity to concentrate our entire focus on information literacy for five days. It was marvellous to be able to listen, think and reflect (and talk — we did our fair share of talking) about the issues and problems that face information literacy in our various environments. It was also affirming (reassuring?) to discover the commonality of those issues and problems — even if no-one has the solution to those problems. Immersion means to feel both exhausted and exhilarated — daunted and excited — all at the same time!

As a result of attending this program, we would like to recommend the development of an Australian/New Zealand information literacy immersion program. We believe that it would be of greater benefit to Australasian librarians to have this type of program offered locally. We are also convinced there is enough talent in Australasia to conduct a very effective program. Stay tuned for exciting announcements!

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## Who's where — in brief

**Elsevier Science has opened an office in Sydney. Sally Stone will be working from this office as senior account manager for Australia and New Zealand. She will be representing Elsevier Science for all product ranges, including ScienceDirect, ScienceDirect Web-editions, Adonis, BioMedNet Reviews and the bibliographic databases. Sally will work closely with the Elsevier Science Regional Sales Office in Singapore, as well as the freelance ScienceDirect trainer for Australia and New Zealand, Frances Bluhdorn.** ■