

The Librarians: The Verdict

It was a case of books closed and 'shh' as the LIS world was glued to the TV on the night of Wednesday, 31 October as we all watched the much-anticipated premiere of *The Librarians* on the ABC. Around Australia, there were viewing parties and after parties.

ALIA and the National Library of Australia hosted a big-screen viewing at the NLA's Conference Room. The 50-strong gathering was even lucky enough to be farewelled briefly by ABC Managing Director Mark Scott who happened to be in the building for another function! A capacity crowd also filled the ABC's Ultimo Centre Library in Sydney for a special viewing of *The Librarians* followed by photos in the foyer with Big Ted from *Play School*.

The next day there was chat around water coolers, emails and blog entries. What did you think? ALIA members: share your opinions and check out others' on the ALIA blog at <http://www.alia.org.au/thelibrariansblog/>. Here you can also find an interview with Robyn Butler and Wayne Hope, the writers of the series.

One thing that has become apparent from reading blogs and emails is that the viewing public needed *no* encouragement to place 'non-library' material in the after-hours book return slot (in episode 1, Middleton Library staff have to clean up a 'human mess' deposit). One librarian says that the worst 'foreign object' she has had to retrieve from her library's return chute was a kitten (it lived).

Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, CEO of the State Library of Victoria was interviewed by Ramona Koval on ABC Radio's *The Book Show* to comment on the satire of our profession. A podcast is available for a limited time at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bookshow/stories/2007/2076736.htm>.



image courtesy of ABC Television
<<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/librarians/#/bio>>

A Review From the Coalface

It was with anticipation that the library staff at The Cathedral College, a co-educational secondary school set aside a quiet afternoon, after the students had departed, to watch the first episode of *The Librarians* together. It seemed like the perfect opportunity to have a fun professional development session and we were expecting something akin to a John Cleese training DVD. We were a little apprehensive that our profession, which has come such a long way, would take a beating for the sake of humour and we were spot on with our suspicions there. Luckily, we have a great sense of humour in our library and appreciated some of the better jokes which certainly detonated the prudish librarian stereotype of the past, despite Frances's efforts to remain one.

We were certainly not disappointed with the clear message on how NOT to manage a library and its staff. While Frances is not the ideal library manager, she obviously has reasons for her erratic behavior. Within this thirty-minute episode it became obvious that the creators wanted every single cultural and social boundary blown apart for all to see. From Frances's anxiety and leadership issues to Dawn's disability, the unsavoury behaviour of parents and children, learning difficulties, criminal activities, religion, bribery — you name it and it was packed into this half-hour show.

We certainly identified with some of the more frustrating areas of the profession which were highlighted in the show such as the insistent knocking on the door by clients even though the 'closed' sign is up, only to realise later that there really was an emergency somewhere for someone. As librarians we certainly know that feeling of expectation by staff to have the right answer there and then, and we are dragged around the library all day to solve all types of problems which often leads to feelings of frustration at some time or another. And yes, we sometimes do need time to think of a solution contrary to Frances's on-the-spot inconsistencies.

We all agreed that some of the gags certainly tipped over the edge of tasteful such as the Muslim and disability jokes, and did we really need to see Frances's husband in the shower? (We thought not). It seems that Dawn's disability may have upset some but really it is just a strong symbol of Frances's lack of team leadership skills and how she has let the team down (literally in Dawn's case).

Overall, we were all a little disappointed with the first episode, but that will not stop us from watching the next episode if just to see what Frances's worst nightmare, Christine, is going to get up to as the unqualified children's librarian. By the way, we do not discriminate in our high school library; everyone has to leave their bag at the door.

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