

A professional development journey

Professional development has been a bit of a journey for me. For the first 13 years of my professional career, I worked primarily in Melbourne theological libraries. My connection with ALIA was limited and most of my professional networks were with members of the Australian & New Zealand Theological Library Association (ANZTLA). Managing small special academic libraries provided me with the opportunity to develop a broad range of skills and to gain experience in a number of areas. However, managing work demands along with a busy family life meant that there never seemed to be enough time left in the day to take a more intentional approach to my own PD.

All this changed in 2003 when I resumed my ALIA professional membership after a break of several years. I think that this decision was influenced by the mini life crisis of turning forty around this time. I had been thinking about where I wanted to be in the future and what steps I needed to take now in order to get there. This kind of questioning ultimately led to some significant changes in both my personal and professional life.

I took my ALIA membership a step further in 2003/4 by becoming a member of the Association's PD Scheme. Initially, this was a way of focusing on my career and being more intentional about goal-setting. Some of my personal professional goals were quite scary for me and included things like overcoming my fear of speaking in public. Joining ALIA's PD Scheme helped me to step out of my comfort zone. It gave me the confidence to try new things and encouraged me to seek support for initiatives I would not have previously attempted.

One of the first things I did was complete ALIA's Career Development Kit. This gave me 20 of the 30 points required each year to be a part of the scheme. The huge range of eligible activities meant that it seemed relatively easy to accumulate the required points. In 2006 I was able to apply for the ALIA Certified Practitioner Certificate and in 2007 I was awarded an ALIA Associate Fellowship. These were practical benefits of joining ALIA's PD Scheme. Having the extra post-nominals after your name looks good on your CV and certainly helps when you are taking that next step on your career path.

My career development plan influenced my decision to seek formal qualifications for the work-based research project I was undertaking at the time. The outcome of this process was that I eventually completed a thesis as part of a Master of Arts by Research. I was extremely fortunate to be awarded an Australian Postgraduate Award and this scholarship enabled me to work full-time on my research during 2006. Often one opportunity seems to lead to another and this research project ultimately gave me the opportunity to present my first ever conference paper and have my first peer-reviewed article published. And when it was all over I had the confidence to apply for my current position as Team Leader, Resource Services at Southern Cross University in Lismore.

Only a few years ago I would have considered myself a quiet-achiever in my own small library. By making the decision to take my PD more seriously I have been able to tackle some personal scary things and achieve success in (for me) previously uncharted waters. I hope that my journey might encourage others to tackle some of their own 'scary things' and embark on PD journeys that they, like me, never previously imagined themselves being able to undertake.

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New graduates and the new economy: how to find work in challenging times

If you had asked us a year ago how to find work as a new graduate, our answers would have been simple: be the best. High achievers all of our lives, when we started our library qualifications we sought opportunities for experience like cats stalking mice: with skill, cunning, and determination.

Now with five or more years of library experience under our belts, one of us is unemployed due in part to the current economic crisis, and the others are wondering what comes next. Looking for work in a shrinking marketplace requires a more interactive approach than that of even 12 months ago. Here are some of the strategies we have used:

- Adapt your résumé for each role, and work on your selection criteria.
- Seek advice from friends, colleagues, and employment agencies.
- If you have a friend who has recently got a new job, look at their resume and selection criteria and see how they tailored it for the job.
- Visit the libraries in your local area and find out more about the types of jobs that the employees have – good for increasing your professional network at the same time.
- Seek contract opportunities. Part-time, casual, and contract work is an excellent way of building up your experience and skill base.
- Consider moving. Regional areas may be more willing to take on a new graduate with less experience. Similarly, moving interstate or to a larger city may increase your chances of finding work. Do Australia-wide searches and don't be afraid to take a leap.
- Sign up with relevant agencies: Zenith, One Umbrella, and Resource Options specialise in the LIS field. However, smaller cities may not have local offices for these agencies, so sign up with some generic agencies too. In fact, these may be preferred by State Government staffing agencies and local councils for their short-term staffing needs. Find out who they are, and get on their books.
- Gain experience in library and information roles, no matter what the title. Working as a library assistant, officer, or technician will give you valuable experience which may then lead to a professional position.
- Construct an e-portfolio or website to market and develop your skills.
- Increase your familiarity with emerging web trends and technologies. Experiment with web 2.0 and increase your marketable skills in the process.
- Identify your transferable skills, and market them in your résumé, selection criteria, and e-portfolio.
- Volunteer to gain experience. Many larger libraries and organisations do not have the facility for volunteers, so approach special libraries and non-profits. They are likely to welcome the assistance.
- Research non-traditional roles. Information architecture, corporate information and knowledge management, and community development are alternatives that require networking and information collection, reporting, and dissemination skills.
- Search across all media. Seek.com has the majority of library roles, however mycareer.com and careerone.com are not to be discounted. Broaden your search outside of 'library' to include information, research, knowledge, perhaps even publishing. Check the ALIA job pages, and create bookmarks