

The ALIA Research Mentoring Program

The ALIA Research Mentoring Program was established in 2009 to provide support for the development of research and scholarly enquiry among practising library professionals. The program is open to practising librarians or library technician members who have been personal financial members of ALIA for at least two years at the time of application.

The program provides an opportunity for the practitioner to research an area of interest and value to them while having access to research coaching and guidance. Research mentoring also presents the opportunity for professional members to develop and refine their skills, knowledge, and confidence in conducting research in a supportive environment.

Coordinated by Associate Professor Helen Partridge of the School of Information Technology at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) the initial participants began their research in October 2009. Tania Barry, the Mill Park Branch manager at Yarra Plenty Regional Library, is one of the first participants in the program. Tania is an active ALIA member and has a strong interest in continuing professional development which led her

to apply for the program. She hopes to conduct some initial research with the assistance of her mentor, Dr Mary Carroll, on electronic gaming in Australian public libraries. This will perhaps be a precursor to further study.

Mentoring has been provided through a number of channels including email and teleconferences. Tania has focused her research over the last few months on critically reviewing the current state of literature in her area of interest, looking at the issues and controversies surrounding electronic gaming, the benefits associated with gaming, as well as investigating the historical context. It has been a steep learning curve for all involved as mentors, facilitators, and mentees balance busy home, work, and research commitments, but ultimately the benefits to all involved and to the profession will be far reaching.

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Our future is in good hands

Janice Wilson and Eileen Dunstone, teacher librarians at Lake Tuggeranong College (a joint use secondary college and public library), identified a gap in the vocational education and training (VET) opportunities for aspiring library workers. They developed and wrote a Library and Information Services course. The course aimed to engage students in learning activities covering library knowledge and skills along with authentic, structured workplace learning. The course was piloted in 2009, with the first students graduating with a Certificate II in Library and Information Services.

This course provides a pathway to work and tertiary education. The local TAFE, CIT, does not offer the Cert II but does have a Cert III which is a natural progression from our course. No other school or college in the ACT offers this qualification, but others have expressed interest in doing so.

The course emphasises new technologies in libraries, with learning activities which engage young people in an authentic learning context. Flexible delivery, which has been something of a challenge within the school sector, is a feature of our course. In keeping with these aims, we have attempted to include our students in library promotions, displays, and activities.

A highlight of 2009 was "Cabinet in the Community," an opportunity for the ministers in the ACT Government to meet with members of the public. The Lake Tuggeranong College Library was chosen as the venue and presented the ideal opportunity for involvement of our library students, who assisted with organising and publicising the event and assisted on the day. We were happy for them to meet the Minister for Education and for him to see first hand what our students have achieved in this course.

A major part of the research unit requires students to research a library in Canberra, arrange to visit, speak with the staff, and prepare a presentation. Students must consider a range of aspects and compare and contrast their chosen library with the Tuggeranong Library. Libraries visited have included: university libraries, special libraries in the fields of pharmaceuticals, art, film, science, and Heritage. Staff at these libraries have been welcoming, helpful, and infinitely patient in their dealings with our library students. We thank them for their interest in the program and their investment in



the future of the profession. Some students have decided to pursue a library career as a result of their visits!

In March of 2010 the Tuggeranong Library celebrated its 20th birthday with a morning tea and displays. Our students were involved in the celebrations by sorting through photographs, preparing displays and assisting on the day. In conjunction with this, student Clare Reid produced a stunning photo-montage which involved layering many images to make one final image. This photograph depicted a young girl searching through an old book, "the lifeless book of hope," trying to find a page where she belongs. We used multiple copies of this image, including a poster-sized one, as the centrepiece of the birthday display.

Our aim has been to involve students in the library and in the many facets of library work, and to have them respond in a way which engages them while giving them transferable skills which will lead to future choices. If the results to date are any indication, then the future of the library profession is looking very healthy.

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