

After hours access

Recently our library decided go ahead with the idea of an after-hours access area. This area will provide access to computers, internet, and photocopying and printing facilities during the evening when the library is closed. Being an academic library we provide this access through the student cards which prevents community users entering after hours. While this area is great in theory and has been known to work in other libraries I do have reason to question the thought behind it. What is it that students are crying out for when they ask that the library stays open for longer hours?

Those who live on campus already have wireless access to the internet in their rooms. Those who live off campus have 24hr access to computer labs with the same technology as the after-hours area will provide. So this leaves three services that the library provides that are not available when we close: customer service, access to a librarian, and books. Considering the afterhours area will have none of these, it is a wonder that we are prepared to go to the extra effort given the security risks of the equipment contained in the area. Are we responsible as a library for the actions of students in this area when we are not in the library? We have a standard of service that is maintained during opening hours; will students be upset if this service is not maintained when the main library is closed?

So why provide this service? I feel that besides the staff and access to print material, people see the library as a safe, quiet work space. Take the staff away and it is still ingrained in many students' minds that you can find help and a comfortable

workspace in a library. The computer lab is a cold and often messy area where students sit in silence with the sole purpose of finishing that essay that is due tomorrow. The library offers lounge chairs grouped around tables and assistance from other students when the printer makes that worrying noise as it eats your assignment. More often than not during opening hours students will ask someone near to them for assistance before approaching a staff member. The reason for this, I believe, is that they know the people around them are there for the same reason: the carpeted area and non sterile environment provides the security of home. They know that those in a library share their idea of being able to get help with access to databases and general knowledge about referencing and many other things that will give them a few more minutes sleep rather than slaving over their assignments well into the night.

This leads me to believe that it is not necessarily access to the library as we see it, with its rows of books and the busily working librarian in the corner, which students require but access to an area that they know is secure, quiet, and comfortable where they can muddle along at 2am knowing that they will not be kicked out of their sanctuary by the recorded message when we go home for the dinner at the end of the night.

Jacinta Anderson

jacinta.anderson@canberra.edu.au



The banner features a teal background with a blue and white graphic of a building on the right, labeled 'NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA'. The main text 'libraries australia' is in white, and 'electronic collection sets' is in blue. Below this, the title 'Improve Access to Electronic Resources' is in blue. The text describes the service as enabling libraries to purchase MARC records for electronic full-text collections. It lists three service features: an easy way to acquire bibliographic data, improved access to electronic resources, and automatic quarterly update files. It provides a link to find out which E-collection sets are available at www.nla.gov.au/librariesaustralia/products/esets.html. At the bottom, it says 'Contact Libraries Australia for further information at www.nla.gov.au/librariesaustralia/contact/' and 'NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA'.

libraries australia
electronic collection sets

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