

The ALIA Research Committee: research and practice coming together

Research is all about finding out answers to questions or problems in an organised, systematic, critical, and often scientific way. Good research gathers information, reflects on its meaning, arrives at conclusions, evaluates them, and then puts forward an interpretation. Outcomes of research can be new discoveries; the creation of understanding or knowledge; theory building, testing, confirmation or refutation; and/or investigations of local issues and problems for decision making. Good research properly applied has the ability to improve our practice as library and information managers.

Many people think that research is conducted only by academics, but in fact much research can be, and is, conducted by practitioners in the workplace. Accordingly the Research Committee is comprised of a mix of librarians and information professionals who come from both practitioner and academic backgrounds. Members of the Committee are: Peter Macauley (Chair, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology), Jennifer Berryman (State Library of NSW), Stuart Ferguson (University of Canberra), Gaby Haddow (Curtin University), Katherine Howard (Royal Society for the Blind), Mary Anne Kennan (Charles Sturt University), Anne Lloyd (Charles Sturt University), Michael Olsson (University of Technology, Sydney), Helen Partridge (Queensland University of Technology), Kerry Smith (Curtin University), Janine Schmidt, Suzana Sukovic (University of Technology, Sydney Library & University of Sydney), Peta Hanley (Deakin University, Research Committee Project Officer), and Sue Hutley (ALIA Executive Director).

The role of the Research Committee is to encourage the conduct and use of research that will underpin innovation and improvement in library and information practice by:

- Administering and overseeing operation of the Association's Research Fund;
- Recommending recipients of ALIA Research Awards to the Board of Directors;
- Contributing to the development of Association policies or research;
- Mentoring and fostering research by ALIA members; and
- Encouraging publication of funded research activities within and beyond the Association.

The Committee meets by teleconference to plan and report on activities, assess applications for ALIA research awards, and to discuss issues forwarded by the Research and Publishing Standing Committee and ALIA's Board of Directors. If possible, we take the welcome opportunity to meet in person at conferences and other events.

Some of the activities in which the Research Committee is currently involved include:

- A **Research Mentoring Scheme** where people interested in undertaking a LIS research project are partnered with experienced researchers who act as mentors is currently being piloted and evaluated. Research conducted under this scheme may be based in a workplace or may be of a more general nature.
- **Research for LIS practitioners:** a satellite event associated with the **Information Online conference** to encourage and develop collaborative, relevant practitioner research and publication in the LIS community. The workshop will be held at the State Library of New South Wales on Friday 4th February 2011. Registration details will be advertised closer to the event on the Information Online 2011 web site and through *inCite* and the ALIA web site.
- A **Doctoral Consortium** meeting in conjunction with the **RAILS (Research Applications in Library Science)** mini-conference. RAILS is an annual seminar series, organised by educators and providing an opportunity for researchers (including Masters and PhD students), educators, and practitioners to showcase current research being undertaken in our professional discipline areas. More and more LIS

practitioners are taking on the challenge to further their education and undertaking PhDs. However, given the dispersed nature of the country and small size of the field in Australia, often there are only small numbers of doctoral students at each institution. A Doctoral consortium meeting like this provides PhD students with an informal forum to share their research with their peers, and an opportunity to discuss aspects of their research with academics and other experts in the field.

Practice-based research is encouraged by ALIA and the Research Committee through the Research Awards (<http://www.alia.org.au/awards/>). These self-nominated awards are to support research projects across a range of subject areas in the LIS field. So if you have an aspect of your work that you would like to investigate further, why not consider applying for a Research Award? Your results could be instrumental in changing the way we work.

The ALIA Research Committee members fervently believe that research in our field can inform and benefit our practice and we hope to encourage you, our colleagues, to join us in this endeavour.

Mary Anne Kennan

on behalf of The ALIA Research Committee
mkennan@csu.edu.au



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