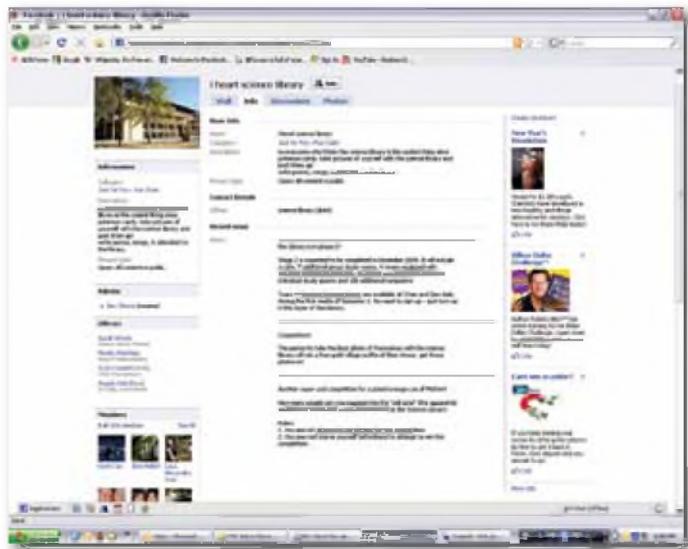


Energise>>Enthuse>>Inspire

i heart science library

At the beginning of 2008, I was an Arts (Communication Studies) graduate picking up casual summer work at my family's business and wondering how I'd survive in the competitive Perth media scene. Fast-forward one and a half years and I'm now an LIS graduate working in an academic library. A last-minute enrolment in the 2008 graduate information studies course, many of my friends commented on the 'new direction' I'd taken with my studies and career. Through my experiences in a brand new academic science library, it's becoming apparent to me that my Communication Studies background and skills in e-learning and web-based technologies are increasingly useful and relevant in libraries...

The new Science Library at the University of Western Australia (UWA) opened its doors to students on 20th July 2009. With an innovative outlook and design that emphasises access, collaboration, and connections, it's a great environment for a new librarian to work and learn in. And the library's users tend to agree. In the opening week, 'awesome' seemed to be the standard response from students. By the 3rd of August, the students took their praise online with the creation of a Facebook fan group, "i heart science library", aimed at "everyone who thinks the science library is the coolest thing since pokemon cards". By the 19th of September the group already had 281 members and numbers are steadily growing.



Three weeks later, one enthusiastic library user composed and wrote "the library song" a four-minute ode to the "Scibrary" (as it is affectionately known by students). The song and its accompanying video describe the new library facilities in great detail, with the catchy chorus:

*"It's the new science library...
it's the place to be!
it's the new science library...
it sets your inner nerd free!
it's the new science library...
it's what libraries are meant to be..."*

The song made its debut on Facebook and was added to YouTube on 6 September 2009. Less than two weeks later it had already been viewed 1942 times.

I think it's safe to say that the student response to the new library surprised nearly everyone. But what was most surprising was their use of web 2.0 technologies to express their feelings towards the new facilities. It's one thing to study web 2.0 concepts and skills in library and information studies courses – but it's another to

see them taking form in front of your eyes. Our experiences with the new Science Library have reinforced that these are the technologies our students are using and reassured us that there is a place for libraries within them.



Katie Mills

The challenge for us is that the place for libraries in social networking sites is still relatively undefined. We're in the unique position that this has been entirely user-initiated and at no point did we decide to bring the new library onto Facebook. The students have welcomed and accepted the Science Library into their virtual space and have effectively begun marketing the library to their friends and colleagues. In fact, one viewer commented on the YouTube video, "who needs tours when you can have this song?" From the UWA Library point of view, I can see how it would be very tempting to want to adapt the Facebook group and YouTube channel to allow for further promotion and delivery of resources and services. I guess our challenge from now on is to find a way to build on this positive student-initiated foundation without intruding in their space. If anything, it's a useful tool for determining user needs and feedback.

The new Science Library serves three of the university's faculties: Engineering, Computing, and Mathematics; Life and Physical Sciences; and Natural and Agricultural Sciences, and brings the previously separately housed collections and services together into one place. This move has also created a dedicated central space for all UWA science students. I think the online community of library users created by the Facebook group is a reflection of the new sense of unity that exists. But it really goes much further in that it provides a virtual space for collaboration, despite whether the students choose to use it for this purpose or not.

As a new librarian, it's been an exciting experience to watch the library begin to take on its own identity and culture through the students' use of social networking sites. With the second stage of the Science Library (complete with café, access grid, and multimedia facilities) scheduled for completion in December 2009, I'm sure first semester 2010 will present further opportunities for exploration of how the library can use new and emerging technologies to support student learning and research. We're ready, the students are ready, and the foundations have been set for the new Science Library to employ new and emerging technologies to become a collaborative teaching and learning community.

And that's really "what libraries are meant to be"...

Katie Mills
Librarian, University of Western Australia
kmills@library.uwa.edu.au

To see the Science Library "theme song" go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBkGc3v7K9Q>

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...gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinator Naomi Doessel, naomidoessel@gmail.com