

OUA at Curtin

Last year, Curtin University's Department of Information Studies became the first library and information studies department in Australia to provide information studies education through Open Universities Australia (OUA). How's it going?

Curtin University is offering individual units for undergraduate students, and full courses (Graduate Diploma and Masters) for postgraduate courses through OUA. For secondary streams of study, undergraduate students can take units from different universities in order to tailor a degree to their requirements, but if they intend to complete an accredited LIS qualification then they will elect to graduate from Curtin University. This means that OUA students can obtain Curtin University

"FOUNDATION UNITS SUCH AS RECORD KEEPING CONCEPTS AND PRACTICE HAVE A CONSIDERABLE APPEAL TO STUDENTS IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR PRIMARY DISCIPLINE – AN INDICATION THAT THEY APPRECIATE THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD INFORMATION AND RECORDS HANDLING SKILLS IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR MAJOR."

qualifications in librarianship, corporate information management and archives.

Students entering Curtin's postgraduate units and courses need to meet the same entry requirements (a completed degree in another discipline) as those students entering through more traditional pathways. The content of units and courses, and the assessment requirements are identical to those experienced by students enrolled directly

in Curtin courses. OUA students also have the same requirements with regard to workplace experience.

All OUA students study externally to the Curtin campus via distance education. There are four study periods (equivalent in length to an academic semester) per year. The uptake has been impressive, given that the

current study period is only the third in which Curtin DIS has been offering through OUA. It would seem that the considerable interest in studying through OUA is created by their significant advertising and promotional reach, and their emphasis on flexibility.

There are currently 169 undergraduate students and 62 postgraduate students enrolled through OUA. It is clear that not all of these students intend to complete an LIS qualifying course. Some of them are enrolled in other courses of study but are choosing to take a 'minor stream' of library and information units. This is particularly noticeable in the corporate information management stream, with some 80 students currently completing the foundation unit of Recordkeeping Concepts and Practice. It is apparent that the foundation units such as this have a considerable appeal to students irrespective of their primary discipline – an indication that they appreciate the importance of good information and records handling skills irrespective of their major.

Teaching staff are still coming to terms with some of the quirks of dealing with this new student cohort. It seems that OUA appeals (particularly at the undergraduate level) to some students who might come from non-traditional backgrounds in terms of university entry and this presents its own set of challenges, but it also has great potential in terms of broadening the potential base of LIS graduates. It is likely that the first Curtin OUA students will be graduating in 2013.

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