

GOING THE DISTANCE IN THE NT

*A taste of the top end:
Fire at Palmerston
Campus 2010 as seen
from the Library.*

Working in the Northern Territory can present some unexpected excitement – from snakes in computer cords to cane toads, dry season burn-off and cyclone induced power outages in the wet season. This excitement brings with it many challenges, especially when it comes to professional development opportunities in remote areas. With the Northern Territory covering an area of more than 1.35 million square kilometres there are some limitations. Charles Darwin University (CDU) Library uses numerous methods to support staff in their professional development activities.

Our challenge is to be creative in the way staff address professional development needs. Activities include attending conferences, webinars and workshops, as well as reaching out to the professional library community online.

As a result of the 'tyranny of distance' the travel, expense and time needed to attend training interstate means opportunity is limited. Membership to networks such as ALIA, Queensland University Libraries Office of Cooperation (QLOC), the Australian Law Librarians' Association (ALLA) and others enable staff to virtually attend events and workshops. Use of teleconferencing and online tools facilitates interactions between libraries across Australia when in the live environment, or at a later date via an archived recording, as time differences also pose another challenge. Email lists and 'communities of practice' are also invaluable to staying up to date with technology and library activities.

Locally, we are fortunate to have a solid network of counterparts that allow for sharing of knowledge, visits and opportunities. CDU has a strong relationship with the Northern Territory Library and the NT Department of Health Library, among others. Through collaboration and resource sharing this affords a greater chance of enticing visiting presenters, particularly if we can gather sufficient numbers of attendees from other libraries in the region.

Actually visiting other academic libraries is always a bonus. Online contact is great but visiting, chatting and looking at resources and services in person are more productive. At every opportunity (even if during our own recreational leave) we arrange to meet librarians or visit libraries when possible. Some of the relationships formed and the ongoing discussions are much more productive when you can picture the library spaces or the voice on the other end of the telephone.

OUR CHALLENGE IS TO BE CREATIVE.

The well established CDU Library Staff Development Working Group holds presentation sessions throughout the year enabling staff to share their personal development experiences by delivering a presentation or report to other CDU library staff. Using PowerPoint, Prezi, YouTube, Collaborate or other online tools allows sharing of the individual's experience regardless of the campus location. Moreover, it helps staff to develop their presentation skills. This approach is essential in our remote environment to ensure knowledge and information is shared with colleagues, and it justifies the expense for conference attendance.

With CDU Library Executive support, it is a great experience to attend conferences held in Australia and internationally for up-skilling purposes. Attending such valuable conferences and training helps build ongoing professional networks, creating opportunities to share with colleagues and the library team back home. This encourages reflection on what we have learnt from those visits and how we can adapt the relevant skills to better our services toward library clients.

LIAISON AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT TEAM

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