

# REACHING OUT TO DISTANT STUDENTS

**R**ebbecca Fabry is an Information Librarian with Charles Sturt University Library, based at the Orange campus. Tabitha Merrell is an Information Librarian with the Faculty Liaison team also based at the Orange campus. Together they have some good advice for tackling the practical challenges thrown at them in supporting students near and far.

As 76.5% of our students are studying via distance the vast majority will never set foot on campus. And at CSU we have a lot of campuses – Wagga Wagga, Bathurst, Albury-Wodonga, Orange, Dubbo, Port Macquarie, Canberra, Goulburn, Parramatta, Ontario (Canada), a study location in Wangaratta, a specialist centre in Manly and Study Centres in Sydney and Melbourne as well as other offshore partner sites. We have developed a range of library services and online resources designed to combat the 'disconnectedness' distance students may feel, as Dan Gall describes it in his 2012 article *Librarian Like a Rock Star: Using Your Personal Brand to Promote Your Services and Reach Distance Users*.

We reach out via social media sites and have created virtual tours of our physical spaces. This creates a connection and familiarity with our students and demonstrates that we are approachable, ready and willing to assist them whenever needed.

We address distance and different time zones through online support. Our popular virtual reference services are available to both internal and distance students. Our chat service has proved so popular that usage has increased by 45% in the last year. These services are offered seven days a week except during the Christmas closedown period.

Our embeddable tailored online information literacy tutorials provide point of need assistance for both internal and distance students. The tutorials, created in consultation with lecturers, are placed within subject sites. This ensures there is no differentiation in the provision of information to students regardless of location or mode of study.

In addition to our physical spaces, CSU Library has created a culturally appropriate online space for indigenous students where help and resources are accessible in an inclusive and respectful environment.

All of these measures are backed up by the postal service. Our distance students can still have physical items like books and DVDs posted to their home address free of any charges.

Charles Sturt University Library is constantly exploring new ways of supporting students and staff, regardless of their location or mode of study, to ensure distance is no longer a barrier to continuing the lifelong learning journey.

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