



TRANSFORMING RMIT'S SWANSTON LIBRARY

RMIT University Library in Melbourne has undergone a radical makeover to give students the library they want. This first-class facility will provide more study space, a new library service model, improved access to collections and it's designed to support on-site and online learning and teaching. CRAIG ANDERSON, University Librarian at RMIT, reports.

Many readers would be well acquainted with RMIT's libraries, especially the Swanston Library, formerly known as the Central Library. The library is now being swept up in the university's – and arguably Australia's – largest academic building project.

The series of 'grey ghosts', as the RMIT buildings along Swanston Street are known, are being transformed by an innovative design from Lyons, one of Australia's leading architecture firms for educational buildings. The original buildings were constructed in the late 1960s and '70s to face away from Swanston Street, to avoid the noise and bustle of what was then Melbourne's busiest thoroughfare.

The closure of Swanston Street to vehicular traffic some years ago, along with the opening of the Swanston Academic Building in 2012, meant that the university had up to 10,000 students a day accessing core university services, such as the library and student support services, through a series of entrances that were unattractive and difficult to navigate.

The new design positions the Swanston Library as a core occupant in a stunning space that is integrated with other university services, as well as retail outlets.

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The core of the project is a shared student hall to be used by the Academic Registrar's Group, which manages student administrative functions from admission to graduation. Others include the Students Group, a free service that supports both RMIT staff and students. Among the group's services are the Study and Learning Centre, the Disability Liaison Unit, and student counselling and wellbeing. This collocation will result in a more integrated service for students.

In addition, there are a number of 'mega-flex' rooms that can be divided into two smaller rooms or kept as one large room, seating over 60 people. These rooms



An architects computer graphic of RMIT University Library

are designed to be used for a wide variety of functions, including enrolment, careers fairs and teaching. And when not in use for a designated function, they can be configured for individual student study.

On the levels above the student hall there is a library collection area that can be closed at quieter times of the evening so that 24/7 study facilities can be provided without the need to manage collection access.

The reduction in the use of print material means there will be no circulation desk; loans will be managed by roving staff and self-loan kiosks. The reference function will be carried out at side-by-side desks, which provide a more informal and supportive environment. The new layout integrates the study areas into the collection zone, but some will be located in a separate area. One of the zones includes a series of innovative study pods, which provide a quiet environment without giving the impression of a series of glass boxes.

The development, which opens in stages starting in late 2015, will allow for better student services and maximise interaction between support groups. 🌱

DR CRAIG ANDERSON, FALIA (CP)
University Librarian
RMIT University
craig.anderson@rmit.edu.au

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