

THE REWARDS OF The Research Advisory Committee

It was hard work at times, but the three years that DIANA HODGE and SUZANA SUKOVIC spent as co-chairs on ALIA's Research Advisory Committee opened their eyes to the huge range of work in which librarians are involved.

We have just finished our three-year term as co-chairs for the ALIA Research Advisory Committee (RAC). Overall, it has been an extremely rewarding experience. It involved a lot of work, but it was worth it. However, many times over the three years, we thought, 'Thank goodness we nominated together'.

The roles of the advisory committee are to advise the ALIA Board of Directors on all aspects of library and information research theory, policy and practice; matters of interest and concern to ALIA Members relating to research; and the awarding of research grants. Every year the committee assesses applications for the Research Grant Award which is worth \$5000.

Awarding the grants is interesting, time-consuming and very satisfying. Knowing the amount of effort that goes into the applications and into the completion of the projects means that the committee takes this task very seriously and we have a very strong commitment to a fair and transparent process.

The committee also plays an active role in the creation of the ALIA Research Agenda; the further development of research activities for the Association, including conference workshops; producing the research-related information, resources and support that should be available to ALIA Members, and raising awareness of, and contributions to, the ALIA Research Fund.

In the three years we have been chairs, the committee has undertaken all sorts of activities in these areas that may not be apparent to most ALIA Members. We oversaw the development of the *ALIA LIS Research Environmental Scan* report by Mike Middleton, created the ALIA Research Agenda, continued the practice of delivering research workshops at ALIA conferences and wrote the research



Diana Hodge and Suzana Sukovic

column for *INCITE*. We have been asked on numerous occasions to read research proposals and government reports of various kinds and contribute comments to an ALIA response. All of these projects required many hours of work from us and our dedicated committee members. Your ALIA Board members work very hard to put our professional point of view forward to those in power.

We'd also like to give you a bit of a personal perspective on our experience.

Diana: I'd be lying if I said I wasn't relieved to be passing the chairing role on to others, but the benefits that I have received as a committee member and as chair have been enormous and have made the hard work well worth it.

I have met some incredible people through the committee, both ALIA employees and committee members. It was daunting when I joined that first phone hook-up and spoke to people I had never met. Helping deliver my first practitioner research workshop at ALIA Conference 2012 was a pivotal moment. My fellow committee members were not at all scary in real life; they were warm, welcoming and happy to have me on board.

Before joining the RAC, I had been a member of ALIA, went to ALIA conferences and occasionally browsed my way through an ALIA journal – which means I had very little idea of what ALIA actually did. Being part of the

committee has allowed me to see behind the scenes and get an idea of the amount and range of work ALIA does for its Members. I knew that ALIA did advocacy work on behalf of the profession, but getting a glimpse of the scale of this has been an eye-opener.

I have spent most of my working life as an academic librarian with only a peripheral awareness of what was happening in other sectors of librarianship. The RAC aims to have representatives from all sectors of the profession – academic librarians and teaching staff, school librarians, public and corporate librarians, health librarians and others. It is easy for us to let our perspective narrow to our own little niche; working closely with committee members from all walks of librarianship has broadened my horizons and given me a much better understanding of the challenges faced by my peers in the profession.

Suzana: I am leaving RAC after nine years – six as a member and three as co-chair. I started on the committee just after finishing my PhD to give it a go. Little did I know that it was going to become a long-term commitment. Back in the day, the RAC members were predominantly academics. It now consists of professionals and academics with wide-ranging backgrounds. I am particularly proud that during our co-chairing the RAC continued to grow into a strong and outward-looking group with members with a wide variety of professional and ethnic backgrounds.

In my time on the committee, I met many interesting people and dealt with a range of issues, which I wouldn't have an opportunity to encounter in my professional life. Volunteering for ALIA gave a new dimension to my experience. Co-chairing a formal advisory committee and working with ALIA LARK (Library Applied Research Kollektive), a grassroots group, I felt truly connected with the issues of research in the profession. Meeting monthly with people dispersed across Australia and being regularly on the phone with Di in Adelaide gave a whole new dimension to a sense of connection. I am glad to pass on the baton, but I'm also happy that I ran with it for a while. 🌟

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