Semester I, 2009. This 'Smart Study' program offered intensive information literacy training combined with a broad range of tips of how to get to know the university culture and what is required to study successfully. Numbers of students participating in this program were strong and a modified version was on offer for the beginning of Semester II. The library customised and integrated existing components of the library orientation program and learning support units to improve students' chances of academic success.

Our increasing numbers of students taking online courses and units will continue to prove challenging for library staff, as they ensure that these students find out about the resources available and how to gain access to them. In 2010 the university will move from a traditional two-semester program to include a winter term, a seven-week intensive study period that will allow students to fast-track the completion of their degrees. This will be an exciting time for the university and the library, as the library continues to focus on meeting the needs of students on campus, offshore, online, and mixing online with some on-campus delivery.

Bringing together library resources and students, educating students on the best and most effective use of the resources, and using the skills of experienced staff to fulfil these goals will continue to evolve as the university itself moves into a new and challenging era of education delivery. The library's priority is to ensure that the important link between the library and students – academic staff – are as keen as we are to promote access to valuable information resources and learning support services offered by the library. Our Academic Planning Librarians play an important role in this area, liaising between the library and academic staff and providing a strong flow of information to both areas.

As with service delivery in all libraries, we face many changes in our organisation that demand of us a high level of awareness of our clients' needs, and the ability to adapt to the evolving strategic and operational context of the university sector.

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Preparing for a career change

Changing career focus?

Gaining employment as a Liaison Librarian at Southern Cross University has meant an exciting and challenging learning curve for me. My previous work as a teacher librarian and as a special librarian gave me many skills that I have been able to apply in new ways. The ideas below are offered for librarians who are thinking about moving to a reference or liaison role in the university sector, based on my first year in my new role.

Use what you already know

Research skills from business can be transferred to the academic world, it's just that now you are sharing and demonstrating the knowledge on how to do the search. As a librarian in a university, you may conduct many classes on information literacy skills, reference manager software, and introductory library sessions to first year students. Teaching or training experience can be of great value: though the students are taller (I was used to primary school children)!

Experience with different computer applications such as Microsoft Office, email, and browser software will be appreciated by students who come to the desk seeking advice.

Use databases

If it has been a while since you have accessed databases, brush up on searching skills by using your National Library of Australia or your State Library membership card. This can give you access from home to database platforms such as EBSCO.

Be ready to learn new skills

Read the guides that many universities supply on searching particular databases. Practise searching for resources on their catalogue. Find out what reference manager software (such as EndNote or RefWorks) is supported by the university where you would like to be employed. Download a trial version to work on. Become familiar with different reference styles used by different faculty areas by checking the university's website for guides. Keep up to date with information trends such as web 2.0 by reading journals and subscribing to RSS feeds or listservs.

Give yourself time

If you have succeeded in obtaining your new role at a university, give yourself time to learn the culture and procedures. For those, like me, making their first venture into higher education libraries, there is a whole new world of acronyms, job titles, roles, and policies to learn.

You are not the only one now!

It can be hard to let go of your past role ("we used do to it this way..."). You may not be the only 'expert' anymore; there will be other people you can call on. This can take some adjusting to if you're used to doing the whole range of library functions. Sometimes I have needed to remind myself to step back and not jump in to client-librarian conversations, simply because I know the answer. Guess what, so does my colleague!

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Be aware of the appropriate procedures and lines of authority, particularly if you have been accustomed to making your own decisions.

Being bold

For me, working in the university sector has turned out to be the most rewarding career move I've made. It is immensely satisfying to help students and academic staff find the information they need. In my first few weeks I couldn't believe how often and genuinely I was thanked for my help. The opportunity to increase my own skills base by learning from colleagues and attending conferences and workshops has also been a major professional benefit. I highly recommend working in the university sector to any librarian looking for a career change.

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University libraries – a great place to be!

It sounds like a cliché, but it is a very exciting time to be working in a university library. Technological developments such as web 2.0 and tools that allow online collaboration, wireless access, handheld devices, and more powerful computing storage and infrastructure are some of the forces transforming the learning, teaching, and research activities of universities. In response, university libraries are reviewing, refreshing, and reinventing themselves so they can continue to add value in this new environment.

Opportunities exist for university libraries that can identify where there is a need, and provide the skills, services, and resources required to meet that need. University culture, university structure, staffing arrangements, and budget are some of the local factors that impact on a library's capacity to develop new services, and to provide leadership within their organisation. At QUT, the local factors have come together to create an environment where the university library has been able to embark on new initiatives that support the strategic direction of the university.

Research support

University libraries have always been in the business of supporting researchers by acquiring resources, and assisting with information searching.

The research support portfolio has greatly expanded in recent years and the university library now has a much greater role to play. Libraries are, more than ever, collaborating with research computing services and other areas of information technology to provide a range of new services supporting and leading the e-research revolution taking place in universities.

Librarians are providing researchers with services including assisting with writing grant applications, publication management (selection of journals and conferences in which to publish), citation analysis, open access publishing including the use of institutional and subject repositories, research data management, the use of content management systems, design of research centre web sites, and the use of online collaboration tools to facilitate communication with other researchers.

Librarians are going to need to develop a whole new range of skills if they are to be placed at the forefront of the e-research wave. Researchers also need to develop these new e-research skills, and librarians at QUT, through their recently formed Research Support Service, will be there to help and lead the way forward.

Learning support – an integrated approach

In 2008 QUT Library expanded its learning support services to include academic skills support. The types of services badged as academic skills include assistance with note-taking, exam technique, writing and reading skills, and time management. QUT Library is progressively integrating the library's information literacy services with academic skills services to offer a 'client- focused' learning support service. After all, undergraduate students do not differentiate between a librarian and an academic skills advisor when seeking assistance. Student queries typically span both professional areas with the student wanting help with finding information resources as well as assistance with interpreting the assignment question or getting started with planning the essay. Academic skills support and information literacy support are usually offered by different organisational units within a university and from different service points. QUT Library is aiming to improve the student experience by providing an integrated service.

The integration of the two service areas is taking place across all domains of learning support; at the Library Help Desk, in the e-learning/e-services environment, library orientation and training sessions, and in the work associated with embedding literacies into the curriculum.

Librarians and academic skills advisors are located in the one work unit at each branch library with a rolling staff development program in place to ensure all staff have the necessary skills.

Inquiry management

Improving the student experience is a priority for Australian universities operating in the highly competitive higher education sector. Service innovation in the form of well designed, interactive online student services, available 24/7, is one way to address this priority.

AskQUT (using RightNow Technologies) is QUT's online enquiry management system. Students can access the FAQ database anytime. If the answer to their question is not available, they can submit a question which is directed to the appropriate area for action. All questions are tracked and the student is guaranteed of an answer within a few working days.

AskQUT is managed for the university by the library's eServices Group. It is maintained as one of the library's suite of e-services. The library's AskQUT Service Manager works across the university, negotiating the input of FAQ content from all faculties and organisational areas, training university staff in using the system, and reporting on system use and the types of questions being asked, to inform service development.

The library was well placed to manage this service for the university because of its well-established links with all faculties and divisions, expertise in managing information, and reputation for having a strong client focus.

Access to information

Exciting developments for libraries are not restricted to new services. The provision of information resources is core business for all libraries, not just university libraries. Information can now be made available via the web without delay and in a number of ways. The traditional publishing model is no longer necessary for disseminating scholarly information, and the old business model of traditional publishing as the only source of scholarly information is being challenged. Many libraries are offering institutional repositories that enable researchers to make their scholarly papers available to the world. Indeed, the future of the scientific journal article as we know it is being questioned by some. No group is better placed than university libraries to provide the leadership necessary to explore and develop new ways of making research outputs available to the world for the greater good. No other group is going to lead these new developments. What a fantastic opportunity!

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