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University Libraries recognise their civic mission: opening doors and developing capacity

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“A thriving culture, economy, and democracy requires the free flow of information and ideas.”

ALIA Core Values Statement

Introduction

Australia’s libraries are fundamental to the free flow of ideas. “They are a legacy to each generation, conveying the knowledge of the past and the promise of the future.” The University of Queensland recognizes its civic mission and within this, the University of Queensland Library values the long-standing practice and community expectation in Australia that publicly funded libraries or record keeping institutions provide public access. As a consequence, the University of Queensland Library or Cybrary is concerned about the restrictions on access to information now being put in place by publishers and legislators or agencies, which are finding new ways to control communication, and it is prepared to challenge these restrictions when public access is threatened.

Traditionally, university libraries have supported an institution’s learning community – its researchers, teachers and students – and the wider community of scholars. The early university libraries were not dissimilar to the monastery collections of the 1300s – 1400s, where books were chained to desks and it was necessary to be a Latin scholar to appreciate their contents. “[T]he concept of popular libraries, of mass

2 Ibid.
3 The Library has badged its services as the University of Queensland Cybrary indicating the unique combination of real and virtual information resources, physical facilities and service delivery, in person and via the Internet.
culture, has been realized only in the twentieth century, if at all”\textsuperscript{4} Some may argue that universities in Australia have, until quite recently, adopted an ‘institution apart’ culture, and question whether this remains the predominant culture today.\textsuperscript{5} There are signs of change, evident in the strategic plans of universities that refer to engagement with local communities.

This paper recognises the complex global information environment within which we study, work and undertake leisure pursuits. The ‘digital divide’ is touched upon, while identifying that physical access, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills to locate and analyse information and communicate effectively in this new age, are as important as access to the technology. The buildings and facilities of the University of Queensland Cybrary, its web developments, training programs and cultural heritage initiatives have been used to illustrate how university libraries are fulfilling their civic mission, enabling the free flow of information.

**Information – Who is missing out?**

The information landscape of today is extremely complex. The information industry is characterized by changing business models, mergers and acquisitions, global publishing controlled by a handful of publishers, protracted negotiations between buyers (universities) and suppliers (publishers, producers and vendors), and groups of buyers or consortia adding another layer to the negotiations. The affordability of information is influenced by the global economy; exchange rates, particularly in countries like Australia; the high rate of inflation for some forms of information, including journals; and the ever-increasing rate of publishing as a reflection of research output.

Then there is the issue of what is often referred to as the ‘digital divide’. The Australian Council for Education Research (ACER), in a report commissioned by the Australian Library and Information Association, the National Library of Australia and the National Office for the Information Economy, brings together some interesting trends as outlined below. The purpose of the feasibility study was to develop a “strategic framework for a broad-based national coalition ‘to promote and advance the integration of information literacy into the community, business, public library, school and tertiary education programs and to ensure an awareness of information literacy for lifelong learning.’”\textsuperscript{6} 

- The world produces approximately 250 megabytes of information for every man, woman and child in the world or the ‘equivalent to the textual content of


250 books’ (School of Information Management and Systems at the University of California at Berkeley, 2000).  

- Australia is ranked ‘tenth of the top fifteen countries in terms of Internet usage with 7.6 million Internet users. (Computer Industry Almanac, 14 May 2001).

- Around 53% of households in Australia had access to a home computer in 2000 according to the ABS Household Use of Information Technology survey, and 33% of Australians had Internet access. Of the 47 per cent of Australian adults who accessed the Internet in the twelve months to November 2000, the largest proportion were found to be young (74 per cent were 18-24 years old), employed (63 per cent), and on incomes of more than $40,000 (75 per cent).

- “[P]rinted material constitutes less than 0.0003 per cent of the total storage of information …(School of Information Management and Systems at the University of California at Berkeley, 2000).

- “[V]ast amounts of the total information produced are generated and stored by individuals … digital information production is both the largest in total content and the most rapidly growing.”

The report recognises that there are many in the community who do not have a voice and stakeholders - those currently undertaking projects in information literacy - should be speaking out on behalf of disadvantaged groups. Bringing these stakeholders together and reaching an agreement on how best to build the capacity in the community to be able to ‘read write and speak’ in this new age will perhaps be the greatest challenge.

“…information literacy is broader than technology skills…information literacy embraces all kinds of information: electronic, non-electronic and verbal. It should not be reduced simply to ICT skills but also encompass those skills traditionally associated with literacy. Information literacy may be thought of as a ‘new literacy’ for a new age but should also encompass the basic skills that enable a person to read write and speak about this new age.”

Information is becoming increasingly expensive. Australia faces the risk of being an information poor society. University libraries do have a voice when negotiating for more affordable access to information and can insist upon ‘walk-in’ access to electronic resources for members of the community. University libraries are in the position to offer training programs to community groups, enabling local communities to develop the necessary information literacy skills for this ‘new age’.


10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid, p.50.
University libraries assist in bridging the gap

At the local level …

Access – the real and the virtual

Physical access to collections
Physical access to collections held in the Cybrary’s thirteen branch libraries is available to the community. The Cybrary offers an inquiry service to all who enter, assisting them in finding the information they seek. There are no structures impeding entry, which tends to be the experience in the United Kingdom, the United States and parts of South-East Asia. Telephone assistance is also available for the hours the branches are open; that is, up to 84 hours a week. For those in the community who prefer to use the web, the Ask a Cybrarian service, an online information desk, is available. The Ask a Cybrarian service provides answers to questions within two working days and this year chat sessions have been introduced.

Branches have open access collections where anyone is able to browse the books and print journals. The only exception to this is the Fryer Library, the special collections section of the University of Queensland Cybrary. Manuscripts, rare books and special collections in various forms - for example, architectural drawings, photographs and book plates - are retrieved for visitors to view. No ‘reader’s tickets’ or letters of introduction are necessary. Members of the local community and the international scholarly community are all welcome.

The Ipswich Library and the Gatton Library, located at the University’s regional campuses, have found their place in the local community, complementing the services, facilities and resources provided by the public libraries.

The Website
The Cybrary website (www.cybrary.uq.edu.au) provides a single point of access to resources in print and links to resources on the web. The Cybrary website provides access to over two million real volumes; 16,000 print journal titles; over 16,500 e-journals; 145,000 e-books; 22,000 videos; around 400 networked databases; the Virtual Reference Collection; course materials – lecture notes, reading lists; past exam papers; guides to resources in specific subject areas and access to Internet gateways. Many resources are freely available over the web and can be accessed by local communities and the global community with access to the Internet. Commercial electronic products, databases, e-journals and e-books are only available remotely to students and staff of the university.

Visitors to a branch library are able to look up many of the electronic resources, books and journals, to which the Cybrary subscribes. The University of Queensland Cybrary is a tough negotiator and requires what is referred to as ‘walk-in access’ to be included in licence agreements for the electronic products. We are at times

13 The Fryer Library collects published and unpublished material, with particular strengths in Australian literature, Australian history as it pertains to Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, architecture and art.
disappointed by publishers or producers who will not agree to this ‘right’, but continue to negotiate for ‘walk-in’ public access. There has been a change in ‘ownership’ and a change in pricing models as more and more information becomes available electronically. While any visitor may walk up to the shelves and consult a book or journal in print, most publishers’ standard licence agreements restrict access to their electronic products to staff and students of the university only. Over time, the amount of information freely available to the community will decline. It is essential for the free flow of ideas that university libraries keep their doors open and advocate for free access to information for those who enter.

It is not only the publishers who are challenging the free flow of information. Governments, when drafting legislation to protect copyright and setting broadcasting guidelines for the new digital age, can make compliance with the legislation lead to greater restrictions on access to information than had previously existed. Some institutions now simply require all who access a computer while on campus to authenticate that they are a staff member or student of the University. This may become the only guaranteed path to ensure compliance with some pieces of legislation.

The building design

“…the library itself is a social creation”

J.H. Shera

“Libraries are civil, respectable and respectful places, a force for public good. They offer a place of sanctuary, a secure risk-free social place that is welcoming to all.”

The branch libraries of the University of Queensland Cybrary have been designed around client use and provide a welcoming, attractive and friendly environment. They have all been refurbished the same way, to have the same look and feel. Each branch has the following facilities:

- Inquiry desk
- High Use Area (textbooks)
- Computers – eZones
- AskIT (at each campus)
- Study spaces
  - Individual, group, quiet
- Loans (including autoloans)
- Photocopying/Printing
- Training rooms
- Display area
- Security

The University of Queensland Cybrary is celebrating the opening of its new purpose-built library at the Ipswich campus. This is the signature building for UQ Ipswich. It brings together the Library, the Student Centre and all student support services to provide a one-stop-shop for students and visitors to the campus. The building represents the meeting of the University of Queensland and the Ipswich region through the materials used in the building, the focus on IT and its openness to the community. It links the real and the virtual and the campus and the community.

The Centre has been designed to represent a village market square. Colours fit the heritage environment of the campus and the materials used in the building bring together Ipswich in the use of tin and brick and the university in the use of sandstone and glass. The internal garden provides a relaxed space for group study, a green space away from the extremes of the Ipswich weather, a buffer between the noisy eZones with computers and the quiet of the book stacks, and contributes to the air quality in the Centre. The water feature running through the garden enhances this space.

One of the primary aims of the design is to be welcoming to the university and local communities. A variety of options for seeking assistance are provided, including face-to-face, telephone, web assistance, self-bookings and autoloan. As visitors enter the building, they are be able to survey the services, collections and facilities on offer – books, journals and multimedia; inquiry desk and loans; computers with access to the Internet; the Student Centre and Student Support Services; eZones; training rooms; casual seating areas and group study rooms; individual study areas and the café. Lighting, signage, colour and carpet have been used to highlight different services and facilities. Three glassed group study rooms overhanging the garden area, draw the visitor’s eye to the upper level, which provides the opportunity for quiet study and research.

Visitors to the campus are able to see what the campus has to offer by checking the display at the entrance to the building. They can then sit down and have a cup of coffee before attending an organised training session on how to search the Internet or browse the collections or relax and read a book whilst appreciating the tropical indoor garden. Library buildings certainly have changed from the foreboding edifices of the past.

**IT assistance and access**

“As ‘e-everything’ embraces education, effective student learning depends on excellent IT skills. AskIT provides free and friendly information technology training and help as an indispensable, integral support to teaching and learning at the University of Queensland. Training and help are available to ensure that students gain the IT skills and knowledge critical to success at University and life as citizens in a developed information society.”

Submission. Australian awards for University teaching: Institutional Award.

AskIT is a desk, phone email and web service available to students of the University. The AskIT website offers answers to Frequently Asked Questions, which are available to anyone who consults the Cybrary website. An AskIT desk service is available at each campus, including St. Lucia, Ipswich and Gatton.

As well as the assistance provided by AskIT, many branches provide easy access to the campus network and the Internet through plug-in ports available to students who bring their laptops to campus. A number of branch libraries are in the process of introducing wireless technology. At the Ipswich Library, where wireless technology

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16 “AskIT: No Degree Without It!”, Submission to the Australian Awards for University Teaching: Institutional Award, 2000.
has been in place for some time, students are able to borrow laptops already equipped with wireless modems while on campus. When students enrol at the University of Queensland they are encouraged to attend one of the many AskIT training programs. Students may not have the necessary IT competencies to successfully complete their courses of study. AskIT training programs not only develop IT skills to equip students for their life at university, but also skills that they will be able to take with them into the community when they graduate.

**Training – working with the Community**

**UQL Pathways**

UQL Pathways is an Internet training service; quality training courses are provided to the public on a fee for service basis. Training agencies, including the Red Cross, may pay this fee and programs can be specially tailored to meet specific learning objectives. In 2002, the Ipswich Library conducted a series of workshops with Red Cross Job Training, in which a group of twelve at-risk youth attended campus for five weeks to learn information literacy skills in an environment that also encouraged social skills and confidence building.

The Cybrary welcomes the opportunity to work with agencies based in local communities; agencies with the necessary links in the community and agencies that increase the capacity of local communities to integrate IT and information literacy skills into daily lives. By bringing young people and adults who have had no affiliation with the University onto campus, by establishing some familiarity with the campus and its facilities, training programs build valuable links with the community.

Training programs include *Navigating the Internet, World Wide Web, Resource Discovery Tours* and *Internet Seminars*. A number of subject-based courses have been developed on agriculture; business and government; dentistry, health, law, local government and schools. The courses and seminars are presented in state-of–the-art facilities located at St. Lucia, Ipswich and Gatton campuses.

**LATCH-ON**

The University of Queensland Cybrary has developed a series of workshops on using the Internet and email for groups of young adults with Down syndrome. The Cybrary has worked in collaboration with the Fred and Eleanor Schonell Special Education Research Centre, which conducts a program at the University called Literacy and Technology Hands-On (LATCH-ON). The LATCH-ON program is founded on research which suggests that young people with Down syndrome can continue to develop their literacy in the years after the completion of formal schooling, and that improved literacy can be empowering and can help these students participate more fully in the community.17 This innovative program emphasises the social contexts of

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literacy and makes use of current technology, and other resources available at a university campus, to enrich it.\textsuperscript{18}

**Cyberschool**

Most Queensland high school libraries have limited resources. Teachers and students need affordable access to quality information resources. For geographically isolated students and schools, the issues are compounded. In addition, the Internet provides a vast range of information resources, but finding appropriate and reliable information for effective teaching and learning can be challenging.

The University of Queensland Cybrary’s award winning *UQL Cyberschool* program (www.cybrary.uq.edu.au/schools) and its experienced teacher-librarians provide:

- negotiated discounted purchase prices for school access to quality information resources, e-journals and online databases;
- a website which provides links to valuable Internet sites in specific subject areas, a Virtual Reference Collection, authoritative e-resources for each of the key learning areas of the curriculum, and the University Cybrary’s online catalogue;
- advice, support and solutions to technical problems;
- training and regular updates for teachers, teacher-librarians and students;
- tours and guidance in the use of relevant information resources and introduction to the University and its school programs.

**At the National Level …**

**Collaborative activities**

**Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL)**

Australia is considered a small market by those who lead the large publishing houses. Only a handful of publishers now control the global publishing industry and one does not have to be an economist to identify the oligopolistic practices being adopted by the market leaders. Libraries in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and Australia have all recognised that the best way to send a powerful message from the buyers (the libraries) to the sellers (the publishers) is to collaborate. This is easier to achieve across state borders than national ones.

By collaborating, university libraries are able to negotiate more effectively on cost, access and the increasing number of compliance clauses written into publisher licence agreements. The information infrastructure for the nation is maintained, or at least further erosion is abated, while the global publishers create even more innovative ways to increase their income streams. Negotiating reasonable deals will continue to be a constant battle that must be fought by those stakeholders who are able to exert the greatest influence.

Subject Gateways

Central to the philosophy of subject gateways is the commitment to provide access to quality information resources and the focus of most is on Internet resources. The Australian subject gateways are hosted by trusted organisations, predominantly university libraries, but also have links to business and industry. Most gateways have been initiated through an injection of funds from the Australian Research Council and have been developed to enhance research and learning. The gateways are generally freely available to the community and/or available through local public libraries.

The University of Queensland Cybrary works in partnership with other Australian university libraries on a number of subject gateways, including the following.

- The AVEL Sustainability Knowledge Network ([avel.edu.au](http://avel.edu.au)) is a portal and brokerage service for engineers, other professionals and researchers concerned with sustainable systems. It is also a resource for students in senior secondary and tertiary education.

- WebLaw ([weblaw.edu.au](http://weblaw.edu.au)) is a legal researcher's first choice for accessing online Australian legal information. It provides lawyers, students, researchers and lay professionals with annotated links to up-to-date, quality assessed Internet resources.

- Austlit: Australian Literature Gateway ([austlit.edu.au](http://austlit.edu.au)) provides authoritative information on hundreds of thousands of creative and critical Australian literature works relating to more than 67,000 Australian authors and literary organisations. Its coverage spans 1780 to the present day.

- Agrigate ([agrigate.edu.au](http://agrigate.edu.au)) is a subject information gateway for resources, both online and offline, identified as valuable to those participating in Agriculture Research.

Preserving our cultural heritage

The University of Queensland Cybrary has an ongoing commitment to digitise parts of its collection to support the University’s teaching, learning and research imperatives. Some of the Cybrary’s pictorial collections are available as online exhibitions on the website. The Cybrary is digitising oral history collections, for example, *From Lunchroom to Boardroom*. This audio collection can be searched in the catalogue ([www.cybrary.uq.edu.au](http://www.cybrary.uq.edu.au)) and by simply clicking a link the transcripts can be read online while listening to the taped interviews. Films depicting the University’s earlier days are being digitised for the purpose of preservation, therefore guaranteeing access for future generations.

The Cybrary is also a member of PictureAustralia ([www.pictureaustralia.org](http://www.pictureaustralia.org)), a collaborative Internet-based service hosted by the National Library of Australia that allows users to search the online pictorial collections of multiple agencies from the one website. The cultural agencies that make their image collections available through PictureAustralia include libraries, galleries, museums, archives, universities, local history societies and other cultural organisations.

The University of Queensland Cybrary has been a member of PictureAustralia since its foundation in September 2000. Historical images of Queensland from the Alcock and Hume collections in the Fryer Library are available through the PictureAustralia...
During 2002, nearly 1,000 images of Queensland towns and cities were added to the PictureAustralia service. The images are primarily of Queensland historic buildings. These images include a wide range of domestic, public, mining and agricultural buildings that have been photographed over the last 27 years. PictureAustralia is free to anyone with access to the Internet. New technologies applied to collections hidden away in closed stacks can potentially reveal many unseen treasures to the world.

At the global level ...

e-learning networks
E-learning communities have the potential to span national borders. Online learning initiatives are being pursued by traditional universities, private universities and international publishing companies. The University of Queensland offers some of its programs in a fully online mode. The Cybrary is integral to the achievement of the learning objectives for online programs.

Available via the Cybrary website – regardless of time or place – are databases and ejournals; e-books; digitised course materials and exam papers; digital theses and UQ e-prints; the Virtual Reference Collection and subject guides. Information skills training programs are in the process of being developed for the web. Information assistance is available though the AskACybrarian service, which now includes chat sessions, and IT help is offered through the AskIT web page.

Conclusion

University libraries in Australia have a long tradition of providing open, free access to collections. Many of our buildings have been refurbished and are now more inviting to visitors than the more imposing structures of the past. In this new digital age, the challenges that face the community in effectively accessing information extend beyond the physical. University libraries are playing a vital role in protecting the free flow of information. All library sectors - public, school and tertiary - are concerned about information literacy for lifelong learning and are developing programs that will enable the community to integrate IT and information literacy skills into daily lives.

There remains the constant battle with publishers and producers to deliver affordable information. Consortia around the world continue to maintain pressure on the handful of publishers that control the global information industry.

“We assert that access [to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works] across time and across cultures is fundamental to a thriving culture, economy and democracy.”19