A parting word

John Shipp, the University Librarian recently left the University of Wollongong to take up the position of University Librarian at the University of Sydney. We gave John the opportunity to write the following parting message:

Remember when you moved to a new school? Before the move, there was a sense of excitement, but also apprehension. The feeling was confirmed on arrival at the new school.

As a newcomer, you were back at the bottom of the heap and had to re-establish your right to a place in the sun. New friendships and alliances had to be formed. Suddenly all the knowledge you had about how things worked was useless because the new school was so different.

My decision to move to the University of Sydney has all the hallmarks of changing school. Sydney provides opportunities for new challenges and experiences. The collection is the best in Australia, there is a large staff and the University is comparatively wealthy. Most of all, there are opportunities...
to implement change on a larger scale than at Wollongong.

There is, however, a downside. The Library has maintained a rather conservative approach to management which is seemingly less customer-oriented than the University of Wollongong. As befits the nation’s oldest university, tradition is regarded highly and the logic of many practices is shrouded in the mists of time.

Within the University there is, however, a realisation that tradition is not enough to guarantee survival. The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Gavin Brown, has a reform agenda designed to revitalise the University. The Library has a vital part to play in that process and it will be exciting to be involved.

When I came to Wollongong in 1977, the University had gained its autonomy from the University of NSW only two years previously. It was not highly regarded and was considered by many to be a last choice as a place to study or work. In the intervening years, the University has won recognition as one of the top ten universities in the country. It is well-regarded internationally and has a constantly improving research profile.

In this process, the Library has been one of the more innovative sections of the University. It was apparent by the late 1980’s that the University could not afford to develop a large print-based library collection. Increasing emphasis was given to satisfying undergraduate needs from a local collection but relying on interlibrary loan and electronic information to support non-core research.

**Access**

This reliance on access, rather than purchasing, gave the Library a competitive edge. It enabled the University to make more information available than would have been possible through traditional collection building. The process was helped by the University’s early adoption of information technology and its investment in networks.

The Library was also a leader in the provision of information literacy training. The University was the first in Australia to require all undergraduate students to complete a library skills test as a pre-condition of graduation. The focus has been on providing staff and students with skills required to access information irrespective of whether it is in print or electronic format.

**Innovation**

Other innovations were associated with the way in which the Library operated and was managed. Emphasis has been given to staff development. This recognised the value of staff as a resource and their contribution to the provision of services. The adoption of quality management techniques also placed the Library in the vanguard. It built on the Library’s use of strategic and visionary planning which preceded the use of such techniques by other parts of the University.

All has not been rosy. There have been times when the Library was criticised despite its best efforts. Much of this stemmed from misunderstanding or was occasioned by the pressures created by the growth of the University. Throughout the past decade, teaching and research activities have grown and it has been difficult for the Library to keep pace. At the same time, the cost of books and serials has risen at rates greater than the growth of the Library budget.

Overall, however, the Library has been able to maintain and improve its services. Constant improvement in the way in which services have been provided has kept costs under control. This has enabled more funds to be available for the purchase of information resources.

**The Future**

The future promises to be both exciting and frustrating as print publications are replaced by online access. Books and serials will continue to be published and will be important for many disciplines and for applications such as coursework texts. It is almost inevitable,
however, that access to most serial publications will be over the network and that a charge will be payable each time an article is viewed. The challenges for the Library will be to manage this access and to provide members of the University with the necessary information literacy skills.

Looking back, particularly on my time as university librarian, I feel a sense of achievement and gratitude. The Library has transformed itself over the period and is among the best in Australia. In part, this has been due to my contribution but more significantly it has been the result of years of hard work by Library staff.

At the forefront was Felicity McGregor who became Deputy University Librarian in 1989. Responsibility for the success of the staff programmes was due largely to Felicity who was also the champion of change in all other areas of the Library. Her constant striving for quality and perfection provided the impetus for much of the innovation undertaken over the last ten years. It has been a pleasure working with such a dedicated staff.

Database Trials

The Library is currently participating in a trial of several full text electronic journals services organised by the CAUL (Council of Australian University Librarians) group. The Library has established links to these sites from the Library Web Page (http://library-uow.edu.au) under the What's New button.

The services are:

**IDEAL (INTERNATIONAL DIGITAL ELECTRONIC ACCESS LIBRARY)**

IDEAL provides access to the electronic version of approximately 173 Academic Press journal titles for the period 1996 and 1997. The journal titles included cover a range of subject areas including biology, economics and business.

Trial access is available to all staff and students until February 1998. It is currently available from a U.S. site: http://www.idealibrary.com/login.html

but it will soon have an Australian site. It is also necessary to have Adobe Acrobat installed on your workstation to view the full text articles.

Contact the Information Desk or your Faculty Librarian for login and password.

**PROJECT MUSE**
(http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/)

Project Muse is similar to the IDEAL service in that it provides access to the full text of journals published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

Project Muse covers approximately forty journal titles in the areas of humanities, social sciences and mathematics including American Journal of Mathematics, Theatre Journal, Eighteenth Century Studies and American Quarterly. Access is available from anywhere on campus.

Note: Please hit reload when you reach the site before you select any further links.
Library Staff win Grants

The following Library staff have lately been the recipients of several research grants and scholarships:

The Reference Services Team received a Educational Strategies Development grant to develop additional Research Edge modules and to further develop existing modules for flexible delivery. New modules to be developed include using EndNote for basic record keeping; advanced EndNote training; the use of e-mail to enhance research and locating and using “grey literature” in the research process.

The Acquisitions Team was successful in obtaining a study grant from the Australian Council for Libraries and Information Services to fund a benchmarking project. The team will be investigating the process of acquiring relevant curriculum texts and recommended readings at both the University of Wollongong and at other universities and is currently identifying suitable benchmarking partners.

Lorraine Denny, the Library Staff Development Officer was awarded the ALIA Dunn & Wilson scholarship. This scholarship is presented to a Library Technician every two years by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and includes a $4000 grant. Lorraine will research the use of job descriptions both in libraries and other organisations.

Web News

The State Library of New South Wales has developed an index that will be of assistance to those searching for up to date information on Australian issues. The index is accessible via the State Library web page at the following address:

INFOQUICK


Infoquick is the State Library of New South Wales index to the Sydney Morning Herald and its associated newspapers (Sun Herald, Eastern Herald, Northern Heral and Good Weekend). The newspapers are usually included in the database within one week of publication.

All articles about Australia or Australians, articles by Australians as well as overseas articles relating to Australia are included. However public notices (births, deaths and marriages) weather reports, classified advertising, music reviews and letters are not indexed.

The database is searchable by both author and subject and covers the period 1988.

Library Humour

Just to add a little library humour, the following collection of “weird reference questions” was taken from the discussion list LIBSUP-L in July 1997 and were actual reference queries reported by American and Canadian library reference desk staff:

“Do you have books here?”

“Do you have a list of all the books written in the English language?”

“Do you have a list of all the books I’ve ever read?”

“Do you have that book by Rushdie: ‘Satanic Nurses’?” (Actual title: “Satanic Verses”)

“Which outlets in the library are appropriate for my hairdryer?”

“Can you tell me why so many famous Civil War battles were fought on National Park Sites?”

“Do you have any books with photographs of dinosaurs?”

“I need to find out Ibid’s first name for my bibliography.”

“Why don’t you have any books by Ibid? He’s written a lot of important stuff.”

“I am looking for a list of laws that I can break that would send me back to jail for a couple of months.”

news@library is published in both Autumn and Spring sessions each year. Comments and suggestions on this newsletter should be forwarded to the Editorial Committee by telephone on 4221 4176 or by email to pam_epe@uow.edu.au.