

## **The University Library as Educational Change-Agent: An Australian Perspective**

Alan Bundy, University Librarian  
University of South Australia, Australia

### **Abstract**

Funding, technological, and flexibility drivers in massified higher education will accelerate pedagogical change in universities. Increasing disaggregation of teaching will provide greater opportunities for other university agencies to contribute to that change. In the age of information the university library has a critical responsibility to be one of those agents.

Universities in all developed countries are greatly challenged by issues of massification, values, standards, funding and pedagogy it is no time for faint-heartedness in higher education.

Not the least of those issues is the delineation and implementation of a teaching and learning framework to meet individual, national and global needs in the 21st century knowledge economy.

There has already been a discernible, if uneven, shift in developed countries from teaching to a student-centred learning philosophy and practice at all levels of formal education.

Some years ago British librarian and consultant Maurice Line concluded that this shift

- makes the division in universities between teaching, the library, ICT and educational technology increasingly meaningless;
- that the importance of learning how to learn and information literacy should lead the partnership between teachers and librarians;
- that the entire university should be restructured to meet societal and individual needs.

### **The disaggregation of teaching**

This is the disaggregation of teaching issue, which the University of South Australia one of Australia's newest and most innovative universities has been considering in its teaching and learning framework for 2010. That framework reflects on the changing role of academics, observing

As well as working collaboratively with other educational institutions and providers it is clear that changes in the ways that teaching and learning take place through information and communications technologies mean changes in role for academics. Mass higher education has meant that governments are looking at changes to funding models with a view to containing costs and bringing efficiencies and this can be expected in the area of delivery

and teaching models. Funding changes to the research area question the traditional coupling of teaching with research within the role of academics and changes to the funding arrangements for teaching are foreshadowed...the disaggregation of teaching into curriculum decisions, materials and delivery design, student learning services and support, interaction with students, marking assignments, and quality assurance of both courses and the teaching and learning process opens the area to a range of roles that were formerly within the role of the academic staff member. With disaggregation a senior academic might be employed at a curriculum determination level with professional staff and junior teachers engaged in other roles. There may be opportunities for other agencies such as content developers and providers of learning platforms and technologies to enter into partnerships with the university to produce different models of teaching in which the university provides various disaggregated components.

Consequently a key question for the future is

What roles should we anticipate in a disaggregated approach to teaching and how will these staff roles and the teaching models that we are involved in be incorporated within our Teaching and Learning Framework?

University of SA *Draft Teaching and Learning Framework 2010*

The University of South Australia is thus grappling with a profound pedagogical issue which challenges all universities. With strong support from its University Library it has, since 1995, led Australia in identifying seven graduate qualities within its quality assurance and improvement process. These are, that a graduate of the University

1. *Operates effectively with and upon a body of knowledge of sufficient depth to begin professional practice*
2. *Is prepared for lifelong learning in pursuit of personal development and excellence in professional practice*
3. *Is an effective problem solver, capable of applying logical, critical and creative thinking to a range of problems*
4. *Can work both autonomously and collaboratively as a professional*
5. *Is committed to ethical action and social responsibility as a professional and a citizen*
6. *Communicates effectively in professional practice and as a member of the community*
7. *Demonstrates an international perspective as a professional and as a citizen*

The University Library's main direct contribution to the achievement of those qualities has been its leadership, institutionally and nationally, in promoting the importance of developing information-literate students through the curriculum and pedagogy. This issue is considered later in this paper.

### **The characteristics of the modern university**

In addition to the disaggregation of teaching in Australia the following is likely to characterise its public universities until at least 2025

- they will be challenged to remain places seeking truth, and defending those who tell it
- a continuing distinction between them and competency-based vocational tertiary education institutions
- they will be institutions of both research and teaching
- more massification
- higher academic staff/student ratios
- less government funding
- more internationalisation Australia is now the third largest worldwide provider in terms of onshore and transnational (offshore) students
- more entry pathways
- more credit transfer
- more flexibility of enrolment, delivery and academic progress
- more online enrolment, delivery and interaction
- more local, national and global partnerships
- more focus on graduate attributes and qualities

Those are all significant challenges. One which particularly challenges the University of South Australia is the cultural assumptions embedded in its graduate qualities. This is because of its rapid positioning as Australia's and one of the world's largest providers of transnational (offshore) education. The conundrum is well described in the following extract from its draft Teaching and Learning 2010 paper.

In collaborating with partners and in providing transnational programs for students we seek both to acknowledge cultures in other countries and recognise their impact upon teaching and learning. To overlay this cultural acknowledgement upon programs and teaching and learning arrangements that reflect our own value positions is not an easy task especially where what is valued about teaching and learning are significantly at odds. For example, in some cultures being a teacher is to hold an acknowledged authoritative role and a transmission view of teaching and learning is valued, in others critical and independent learners are encouraged by a view of teaching that places more emphasis on facilitation and guidance.

The University Library is engaged in this debate also, in part from its experience over several years in sending its Liaison Librarians to work with students in South East Asia. In 2002 it is employing a researcher, Dr Carolyn McSwiney, to continue the exploration of the pedagogical, information literacy and cultural issues involved in supporting international students. Dr McSwiney's masters and doctoral research has been in internationalisation and libraries.

## The information literacy divide

The issue for universities to consider when identifying their outcomes and investment priorities are what attributes and qualities are required of individuals to contribute to thriving national and global cultures, economies and democracies. Librarians are strongly committed to equity. Many believe that in an information-intensive society the most critical divide is between those who have the understandings *and* capabilities to operate effectively in that society and those who do not and that this constitutes the information literacy divide. An iteration of this viewpoint is to be found in the Australian Library and Information Association's 2001 *Statement on information literacy for all Australians*, a statement which readily translates to a global context.

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The first object of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is 'To promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy and democracy'.

A thriving national and global culture, economy and democracy will be advanced best by people able to recognise their need for information, and identify, locate, access, evaluate and apply the needed information.

Information literacy is a prerequisite for

- participative citizenship
- social inclusion
- the creation of new knowledge
- personal empowerment
- learning for life

Library and information services professionals therefore embrace a responsibility to develop the information literacy of their clients.

They will support governments at all levels, and the corporate, community, professional, educational and trade union sectors, in promoting and facilitating the development of information literacy for all Australians as a high priority.

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Apart from the progressive but uneven infusion of information literacy into teaching and learning in schools and more recently universities, Australia has made several other information literacy contributions of note

- five national information literacy conferences
- the publication of Dr Christine Bruce's US award winning book *The seven faces of information literacy* the world's seminal text on information literacy

- the publication of *Information literacy around the world* edited by Candy and Bruce
- the development, as an initiative of the University of South Australia Library, of national information literacy standards, an improvement on the US standards of 2000. Information literacy standards is being used already in a wide range of Australian educational contexts, has been translated for use in Spanish speaking countries and is being translated into Bahasa Indonesia. Its comprehensive introduction is particularly useful in establishing information technology 'fluency' as a subset of information literacy. The standards are
  1. *The information literate person recognises the need for information and determines the nature and extent of the information needed*
  2. *The information literate person accesses needed information effectively and efficiently*
  3. *The information literate person evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into their knowledge base and value system*
  4. *The information literate person classifies, stores, manipulates and redrafts information collected or generated*
  5. *The information literate person expands, reframes or creates new knowledge by integrating prior knowledge and new understandings individually or as a member of a group*
  6. *The information literate person understands cultural, economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically, legally and respectfully*
  7. *The information literate person recognizes that lifelong learning and participative citizenship requires information literacy*
- the 2002 establishment of the Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy (ANZIIL) to conduct intensive programs for librarians and other educators
- research funded by several university libraries to develop a methodology for self-assessment by students of their information literacy

The development of the Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy, the world's second after the US Institute for Information Literacy, is significant. It recognises that although academic librarians may well have teaching qualifications (sometimes more so than their academic colleagues) they need development in instructional design, curriculum development, teaching and assessment.

Another significant Australian university library development is a national student portal to greatly enhance ease of access to information resources, and which will contribute to changing academic work. The Australian Academic and Research Libraries Information Network (AARLIN) is a virtual research network that will provide unmediated, personalized and seamless access to the resources of libraries, commercial information providers, and to any internet resource selected by academics and librarians.

## From rhetoric to substance

Information literacy is an issue for librarians, but it is not a library issue. However, turning the rhetoric about information literacy and learning how to learn into 21st century substance will continue to require library-leadership. The leadership will *not* usually come from academics, who may have difficulty in grasping the issue, perceive it as a threat to their professional autonomy, or may be reluctant to move beyond teacher-centred exposition of content. Nor will it come from other professions other than librarianship, such as medicine and law, which may have a pecuniary interest in restricting the information literacy of potential clients. Nor, typically, will that leadership come from the multinational corporate sector, politicians, bureaucrats and governments because all of those may have more to lose than gain from truly information literate citizens '...able to spot and expose chicanery, disinformation and lies' (American Library Association 2001). Witness the constraints on Freedom of Information legislation and access, company information, consumer information, journalists, librarians, books and the internet in many countries.

Because universities should be places where truth is sought and defended, there is a need to re-evaluate the substance, durability and relevance of their educational outcomes in the age of information.

There are two fundamental reasons for this. The first is lifelong learning. The second is the rapid obsolescence of much content in professional first degree programs, making knowledge of how to learn, and how to find, evaluate and apply new information that more important. The reality is that much of the content in such degrees has a use-by date of ten years. They focus on answers which continually change, rather than on questions which rarely change.

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The issues were reflected very well in a 1994 Australian government report *Developing lifelong learners through undergraduate education*. In its substantial section on libraries it noted

A number of librarians from universities and other institutions made submissions to our study which provided an insight into the multifaceted role of libraries in higher education. We spoke with, and received submissions from, librarians who were involved with the courses selected for in-depth profiling and, from the data collected, it was clear that librarians saw their role as undergoing major transformation as they themselves became agents of change within the university community....librarians are operating at the cutting edge of technological developments in identifying the need for, locating, accessing, evaluating and managing information.

... In order for this vision to be realised, however, two important changes would be necessary. Firstly, academic staff would need to view their role differently, and to see themselves as facilitators of learning; and secondly, there would need to be enhanced collaboration between academic staff and librarians in the design and delivery of programs.

With respect to the first two issues, a number of librarians acknowledged that not all academic staff share their commitment. They often faced difficulties in working with academic staff who were committed to tried and tested didactic learning methods and who were not prepared to make the shift to resource-based teaching in which students had responsibility for their own learning.

The Council of Australian University Librarians' submission identified the need for academic staff to either 'incorporate [information literacy] programs, or work with library staff on adjusting their curriculum to incorporate information literacy goals'. The submission went on to argue that teaching approaches such as contract-based learning, problem-based learning and resource-based learning are more likely to develop students' information competence than the traditional lecture-tutorial model, but that 'if such approaches to teaching and learning are not in place, or if faculty cannot accept the value of implementing change, the success of 'extra-curricular' programs which may be established is jeopardised as students are unable to perceive relevance in any information programs devised for them'.

In the long run, the success of the librarian in working effectively with academic staff to promote self-directed resource-based learning depends not only upon the academics' attitudes towards teaching and learning, but also on the culture of the departments in which the staff and students work.

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There has not yet been a study of the impact of that 1994 report. However an Australian federal government review of higher education has just released a discussion paper *Striving for quality: teaching, learning and scholarship*. Its executive summary states

Higher education institutions should produce graduates with skills, knowledge and learning outcomes that promote individual development and that the nation requires for continued economic, social and cultural development. The new century is generating a need for 'emerging' skills and knowledge that have not been previously a focus of higher education. These include initiative and enterprise skills; *information literacy* and management skills; the capacity for lifelong learning; the ability to be adaptable and 'learn-to-learn' in jobs and roles yet to be envisaged; and skills to work effectively in multidisciplinary contexts.

There are indicators that, using the 'handle' of information literacy and by promoting their online connectivity and resources and the capacities of their professional staff, Australian university libraries are helping their universities to open the window of educational change. Some disaggregation of teaching is already underway. Disaggregated tasks, such as assessing learning resources for quality, overlap with what librarians do now, and the subject expertise of the academic is being married with the librarian's navigation and sense-making of the information universe.

### **Increasing student-academic staff ratios: a driver of change**

Increasing student-academic staff ratios will likely accelerate different approaches to teaching and learning, and the disaggregation of teaching. Seven years ago the average student-academic ratio in Australian universities was 16.2. Now it is as high as 25 at some universities, more than in many high schools. It may be as high as 50 by 2010. Of necessity, this will mandate a different teaching construct.

Australian government constraints on university funding may drive desirable pedagogical change more effectively than any appeal to academic staff to reconsider their discourse. The next 20 years in Australian universities could thus well see relatively fewer academics but more professional staff, including librarians. This would require it possibly does already a redefinition of teaching load, away from the simplistic student-academic staff ratio to a more sophisticated approach inclusive of all those who contribute to effective teaching and learning. Such a calculation would be an interesting exercise indeed.

## Some issues

The Australian university library experience and inevitable frustrations of promoting information literacy and contributing to educational change is not unique. It is shared by academic libraries in other developed countries.

That experience begs a number of questions. These include

- is it possible to have meaningful pedagogical change without a focus on the information context of the 21st century in which current and future generations will exist?
- are university libraries support agencies in the educational process, or partners in it?
- how proactive should they be in promoting educational change?
- what roles should librarians plan for in a disaggregated approach to teaching?
- what educational backgrounds and personal qualities do they need to be effective in contributing to that disaggregation?
- how can national and institutional policy makers be encouraged to include librarians in addressing educational, information policy, economic and social issues?
- how can librarians become more adept at inviting themselves to the pedagogical and policy table if they are not invited?
- should the OECD have an information literacy position and commitment when information literacy, coupled with information access, is a prerequisite for economic, cultural, and democratic progress in all countries?

## Conclusion

Education and society are effectively being re-engineered because of economic and social forces, both heavily influenced by ICT. As Line observes 'Libraries are inevitably, and centrally, caught up in the turmoil'.

The re-engineering of the teaching and learning framework is now underway or in prospect in progressive universities. This provides a window of opportunity for their libraries to demonstrate their actual and potential contribution to educational-change, and to educational and lifelong outcomes appropriate to the age of information. Just as the early 21st century is no time for faint-heartedness in higher education, it is no time for faint-heartedness by librarians in pushing open that window of opportunity.

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