AARNet and the Academic Library

Jim Cleary shows that librarians have a leading role at the cutting edge of communications technology, but need to train themselves first

THE UNIVERSITY OF Newcastle Libraries recently organised two-day workshops in Newcastle and Sydney on 'AARNet and the Academic Library'. Fifty librarians came from as far away as Darwin and Perth to hear about the program of AARNet marketing and training pioneered at the University of Newcastle. This program builds on an agreement between the Library and the University Computing Service whereby the Library provides value-added services such as marketing and training while the Computing Service concentrates on putting the technical infrastructure in place. In another first for Newcastle the University's Research Management Committee provided research infrastructure funding under Mechanism A to support the provision of part-time casual research and training staff for the Library's AARNet project.

A 1991 survey indicated that fewer than 16% of academic staff at the University of Newcastle had used AARNet. This became the basis for a successful program that encompassed a lunch hour promotional seminar attracting over 100 faculty and a continuing series of introductory and advanced technical tutorials. Faculty

Bill Linklater (left), Librarian of the University of Newcastle and George Miller, Asian Studies Librarian at ANU, at the AARNet workshop reception.

librarians have followed up with the first of a series of seminars on information resources accessible via AARNet. It is the Library's conviction that the academic community has yet to be educated to the implications of AARNet for the scholarly communication system and that the acquisition of technical skills must be linked to a wider consideration of the policy issues involved.

The workshop gave the participants an overview of training strategies, technological support for instruction, directory and access tools, front-end interfaces to the networks and an introduction to the information resources on the network in specific disciplines. The positive response to the workshops and the difficulty many librarians have experienced in getting started with AARNet indicate a need for a program of national marketing and training workshops to 'train the trainers'. It is likely that the University of Newcastle Libraries will take their workshop to other states if resources are forthcoming to support them. If you are interested in following this up, contact the University Librarian, Bill Linklater, on (049) 215 854.

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When information resource budgets are being stretched to the limit by the increasing cost of books, any news of price reductions has to be welcome.

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