

The human aspects of telecommunication

Kirsty Williamson, Amanda Bow, Solveiga Saule

Recently the Telecommunications Needs Research Group (TNRG) moved from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) to the School of Information Management and Systems (at Monash University). The Group consists of Dr Kirsty Williamson, the director, and two research associates, Amanda Bow and Solveiga Saule. Dr Patricia Gillard, who was director of the group from 1993 until earlier this year remains as senior research fellow.

The TNRG started life as the Telecommunications Policy Research Group (TPRG) in 1991 in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Communications at RMIT. Dr Kirsty Williamson was a member of the group (with Dr Mark Balnaves and Dr Peter Caputi) in this embryonic stage. In 1993 Associate Professor Patricia Gillard became director and changed the name to TNRG. This reflected the emphasis on user research, which became the hallmark of the group.

Between 1992 and 1996 the Group was mainly supported by the Telstra Fund for Social and Policy Research — receiving almost \$500 000 from the Fund. The research undertaken with this funding focused on the human aspects of telecommunications. Research projects included: 'Older adults and their barriers to internet use in public libraries'; 'Young adults and their experiences of the internet in internet cafés in Melbourne'; 'Teenagers and their relationships with information and communication technologies'; and 'The relationships of users to their phones'.

The Group's discipline-base spans the information and communications fields, specifically, and the social sciences, in general. We are particularly interested in how people construct meanings with regard to the role of telecommunications in their everyday lives.



Telecommunication Needs Research Group staff, Solveiga Saule, Kirsty Williamson, and Amanda Bow

Our empirical work has aimed to develop an understanding of 'what is happening now' (and what might happen in the near future), based on what people do and say. Our research is broadly 'ethnographic' but has also included large-scale sample surveys.

The TNRG has recently become involved in research concerning online services for people with disabilities. With Vicnet (State Library of Victoria), it won the contract to develop the website for the @ccessability Program for Online Access for People with Disabilities, which is under the auspices of the National Office of the Information Economy (NOIE). The Group is also a major partner in a consortium which has been funded by @ccessability, to undertake a project entitled: 'Online services for people with disabilities in Australian public libraries'. The consortium received one of the three largest grants, recently announced (\$120 004). Matching funding of \$180 000, principally from another major partner, the State Library of Victoria (through Multimedia Victoria), brings a total funding package of \$300 000. Almost all the money from the NOIE grant is for research, which the Group will undertake over a two-year period. The future looks bright!



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• **4/12 ACT UCRLS.** An elegant breakfast at Chats, following a brief AGM, with a talk by Bob Hefner, literary editor of *The Canberra Times*, on the role of the literary editor. 7.30am for 7.45. Cost \$15. Contact Nancy Clarke, phone 6209 1117, e-mail n.clarke@signadou.acu.edu.au

NSW

• **7/10 NSW Special Libraries section.** An address on *Knowledge Management* by Karl Wiig, Chairman and CEO of Knowledge Research Institute and author of the *Knowledge Management Trilogy*. State Library of NSW, Sumitomo Room, Level 11, Macquarie Street, Sydney. 5.30 for 6.00pm. RSVP: Moya Lum, ph 02 9257 5481, fx 02 9257 7756, moya_lum@amp.com.au. Limited numbers.

• **9/10 NSW Acquisitions and Library Technician sections.** Building partnerships: prepare, evaluate, negotiate and succeed. UTS Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building, Harris Street, ULTIMO. 8:30–4pm. For details contact: Ms Katherine Raper, ph 02 9514 3688, Katherine.Raper@uts.edu.au, Michael Soo, ph 02 9514 3350, Michael.Soo@uts.edu.au or Dimitria Dess, ph 02 97158325, dimitria.dess@tafensw.gov.au

• **13/10–1/12 NSW School Libraries section.** Committee meetings. Venue: Joint council rooms, Leichhardt Primary School, Corner Norton and Marion Streets. Time: 6–8pm. Dates: 13/10, 4/11, 1/12. Contact: Andrew Barber, ph 9519 1544, library@newton-pah.dse.nsw.edu.au

21/10 Australian Copyright Council seminars. Copyright for non-profit libraries given by 2 staff lawyers at State Library. Internet, licences, digitisation issues, charging for copies, showing videos and more; 4 sessions. Contact: ph 02 9318 1788, fx 02 969 3536, info@copyright.org.au

29/10 City of Sydney Library. Internet training. Health resources on the internet. \$225 all day. For information on this, other subject specific internet courses or upcoming free internet seminar series. Contact: Tracey Brooks, ph 02 9265 9451, tbrooks@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

• **30/10 NSW Cataloguers section.** Mollie Thomson Lecture. Guest speaker: Michael Gorman. State Library of NSW, Dixon Room, 6 for 6:30pm, drinks reception, admission free. Contact: Sue Thomas, ph 02 9273 1725, sthomas@slnsw.gov.au. RSVP 27/10 for catering numbers.

• **3/11 NSW Special Libraries section.** Melbourne Cup lunch. David Jones, Park Terrace, Level 7, Elizabeth Street Store. Time: 12:30pm, \$50 (incl. food, beverages and entertainment). Cheque payment to: Marienne Shepherd, Vice-president, ALIA NSW Specials section, 85 Moore Street, Leichhardt 2040, ph 0411 372 929, fax 02 9568 3271, mariennes@hotmail.com. Numbers limited.

• **7/11 NSW School Libraries section.** Conserving the past for the future — archives in school libraries. Contact: Ailsa Holmes-Walker, ph 9781 3541, ailmuirf@ozemail.com.au

• **7/11 NSW TAFE and School sections** Internet content management seminar. Covering filtering/censorship on the Internet. Contact: Ellen Hrebieniuk, ph 02 9335 2681, fx 02 9335 2340, ellen.hrebieniuk@tafensw.edu.au

• **11/11 NSW Library Technician meeting.** CSIRO, Prospect, Division of Animal Production, Blacktown. 6pm. Contact: Katherine Raper, ph 02 9514 3688, Katherine.Raper@uts.edu.au

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