



The light-filled beauty of the award-winning Sunshine Coast University Library

Designing a contemporary classic

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Designing today's university library has been compared with the equivalent of crystal-ball gazing. Everyone involved in the design project — but especially librarians — must act as fortune-tellers, acknowledging the past and looking to the future. Long gone are the days (if, indeed, they ever existed) when librarians only needed to know how to measure linear feet in order to establish the number of book stacks required for the existing collection.

Librarians involved in the design and renovation of library buildings must become knowledgeable about a whole range of issues, including lighting, security and protection, heating, cooling, humidity, air-conditioning, noise and other atmospheric controls, shelving layouts and reader service areas. And, the recent emergence of new technologies has changed the nature of librarianship, giving many of these issues a new twist. Furniture, fittings, and floors must be designed to accommodate data connections and computer cabling.

Not only must the interior be pleasing and conducive to study and research but all occupational health and safety guidelines must be registered so that services and collections are accessible to all patrons, irrespective of any

physical disabilities. Furthermore, beware the librarian who does not realise the importance of ergonomics for staff and patrons.

Sunshine Coast University College, Australia's newest university, opened in February 1996. The campus site occupies some 100 hectares and the master plan outlined that buildings should not be in excess of three storeys in height. The library building has been designed to house the campus library and the university's information technology services as one contiguous and integrated whole. Information technology is accessible at virtually any public point in the facility, providing for a range of uses including the library's catalogue, CD-ROM networks, access to the university's networks and the Internet, including e-mail.

The internal design of the library reflects the current trends in library services and maximises the current state of technology. Self-service borrowing and reserves have been designed around the loans desk. The loans desk also doubles as the computer help-desk and assistance is provided by information technology services staff. Print, non-print and electronic resources are all acquired for the library's collection, most of which is housed in open stacks, on the top floor of the

three-storey building. The bulk of cataloguing and processing services are outsourced, purchased directly from library vendors, and as such the delivery and staff areas in collection or technical services reflects this activity.

Library and IT staff are housed on the ground and first floors of the building. To encourage communication and synergy among staff there are no separate areas for library and IT staff. Network and instructional technology IT staff are located next to reference librarians, computer help-desk staff are located next to loans desk staff, collection services staff are close to audio-visual staff, and the main reception area houses both the university librarian/director of information services and the manager of IT services. Most staff work in an open-office environment and the mix of staff with complementary responsibilities and expertise is proving to be successful. The result is a co-operative and productive learning environment.

The interior has been designed to be attractive and to accommodate large traffic flows. There is a high degree of flexibility and adaptability, with a minimum of load-bearing walls and columns. Given the anticipated increase in the use of computer-based and telecommunications technology, the build- ▶

ing has been designed for future expansion. Computer cabling has been accommodated using floor boxes in a grid system so as not to create impediments for the movement of people or to tie workstations to permanent locations.

Patrons have access to the library's catalogue, CD-ROM networks, and the Internet from eighteen workstations connected to networked printers. Another three workstations provide dedicated access to the Internet. Access is also made available to a computer laboratory that is used by university staff as a classroom and for tutorials. In addition, library and IT services staff use the laboratory for instruction, providing general and subject-specific instruction for staff, students and, on a fee-paying basis, for the general community.

Reader seating, enough to accommodate 500 people, has been designed to acknowledge the different teaching and learning styles at the university. Individual and group study spaces, along with casual reading areas, are available and the furniture custom-designed and built to accommodate power and data to encourage users to bring in and use their own laptop computers or those that are provided by the university. Seven group study rooms are available, along with carrels and tables that can seat from two to six people.

The library, it is hoped, will foster close relations with the local business and general community. It may engage in various entrepreneurial activities based on the library's facilities, services and collections. With this in mind, staff have access to a twenty-five-seat seminar room located next to a kitchen and three group-study rooms that can also serve as breakout rooms for further discussion.

The building also houses gallery space and the library has hosted several art exhibitions and has used the space for special functions including book launches and author talks. The library is expanding on the success of its first literary evening to hold more of these types of activities.

While there is probably no such thing as a perfect building, the new library is proving to be functional, accessible, and an inviting place for discovery and discourse. Students and staff of the university certainly agree, as do the critics judging from the awards that the building has received. In 1997, the building won Australia's top annual architectural award, the Sir Zelman Cowen Award for Public Buildings. The library community is encouraged to visit Australia's 1997 Building of the Year to see if they agree with the jury's assessment that it is a 'contemporary classic.' ■

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Freedom of expression and access to information

Alex Byrne, pro vice-chancellor for information resources and chief librarian at the Northern Territory University has been appointed to chair a new committee on freedom of expression and freedom of access to information. He will lead an international committee with members from more than twenty countries.

The committee has been established by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) to advise on matters of international significance to libraries and librarianship in this area. It will deal with such issues as censorship of library and information materials, including those published via the Internet. Its establishment builds on the work of an interim committee over the last two years.

Mr Byrne noted that there is a wide range of ideological, economic, political and religious pressures which can limit access to information in libraries, or restrictions on librarians and other information specialists. The committee will work with other international bodies to ensure open access to information to support business, education, government and community activities.

He said, 'This is a vital issue throughout the world. Limitations on access to information and freedom of expression can arise in any nation. They can range from the political censorship of local public libraries now occurring in the south of France to the wholesale destruction of a nation's recorded history, as occurred in Laos and Cambodia.'

It is also a very sensitive area in which the special concerns and needs of communities must be carefully considered. The committee's responsibility is to assist libraries and information centres worldwide to realise the human right to know. ■

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