

Your voice

The name game

This business of changing names for librarians and library technicians is worrisome (Your voice, *inCite*, September 1999). I don't claim to have an ultimate solution, just a comment or three to add to the debate.

For me, the term 'professional' is as much about a mindset as it is about qualifications, so the distinction of professional/para-professional has always been a bit of a worry. When I started out in the sector, I had the privilege to work with some of the first graduates of the library technician's course in the Northern Territory. They taught me — a newly-graduated *librarian* — as much about *professionalism* as anyone I have met or worked with since. Since then the nomenclature of the workplace has become very fluid, to say the least. The existing distinction is now misleading and can be construed as degrading — so yes, it is high time for review.

There are those who claim giving up the term 'librarian' for 'information manager/scientist/guru' or whatever years ago has resulted only in the world being horribly confused about what any of us do — never mind worrying about which bits belong to librarians and which bits to library technicians. This is a very real danger — we need the support of our patrons always, and if we confuse them, we can lose them. Lose them and who needs us?

Changing names to keep up with the times is undeniably seductive, but also undeniably dangerous. Superficial, merely cosmetic name changes will not stand the test of

time. We need a change that will make sense in ten years — a name that makes sense to us and to the communities we serve, without subtitles. After all, they are the ones we are *all* here for.

Lee Welch, Adelaide

More library technicians

Thank you for devoting a whole issue to library technicians!

I am a graduate of the Associate Diploma of Arts in Library Studies at the CIT in Canberra and have been fortunate to be employed in the library sphere since — well before, really — graduation. It has been my experience that, although we may be considered the 'nuts and bolts' specialists in the field, we are also treated as second-class citizens. Although I have completed 'hands-on' cataloguing subjects, I am still not given the opportunity to practise my skills — even in a most rudimentary fashion — as this is considered a librarian's domain!

When it is considered that, prior to this age of over-qualification, librarians and most other library workers were unqualified and merely taken in as required, the hierarchical which exists between librarians and library technicians is quite absurd. Because I do not possess a degree I will never be able to practice my very valuable skills and will in all likelihood lose them. How sad!

We need to re-educate people about the value of library technicians. Once again, thank you — it is a start.

Rhonda McMaster

Values and vision

Following the Specials, Health and Law Librarians Conference in Hobart I heard a number of reports that Kathy Saurine had delivered a thought-provoking presentation — having just read the transcripts I am prompted to respond. I am impressed by Kathy's thoughtful tribute to Leslie Symes as 'energetic, imaginative, hardworking and tireless, proactive and professional', 'a person light-years ahead of her time'.

In tackling the issue of 'vision' Kathy threw out a timely challenge. I believe the profession has come through a time of introspection when we have been preoccupied with our image, name and internal processes. Perceptions of librarianship have changed, and a broader vision of ourselves and our role is needed. We are already operating in a much expanded environment — beyond the walls of the library, beyond the limitations of our job descriptions, and beyond the stereotypes of our traditional roles.

It has been said in the management literature that only a small percentage of people actually have a vision. As a profession which traditionally has focused on preserving records of past knowledge, we may find it difficult to look into the future and create a vision for ourselves and then articulate this vision so that others can understand it and be drawn into supporting it.

I believe that our intelligence, knowledge and professional values will lift us above the ordinary information workers. We are

a values-based profession with a long history which demonstrates our commitment to the preservation of recorded knowledge and the facilitation of equity of access to this knowledge.

The profession has also shown a commitment to education and research. I believe that one of the challenges for us is to continue our own professional development, contribute to the research base of our profession and create new knowledge in the disciplines and subject areas within which we work. There are examples of law libraries demonstrating advanced knowledge-management practices from which we can all draw. The new 'evidence-based librarianship' list is an example of the trend towards practising what we preach in health librarianship.

ALIA is in the process of recreating itself with its charter of renewal. It is timely to consider a new values-based vision for our profession — a vision which will differentiate us from other information professions and broaden our horizons.

Ann Ritchie, Canberra

Your voice

Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.

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Letters will be accepted for publication until the 18th of the month.

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