Stepping out — library technicians in the new information environment

Bonnie Rae Bruce, vice-president, West Australian Library Technicians Section

The increased use of technology coupled with advances in online learning, electronic information resources and internet services have brought about profound changes in the provision of information services, resulting in an expansion of the roles that qualified library technicians now perform.

One of the key themes of the 6th ALIA Biennial Conference was skills optimisation — that is, marketing one's skills as widely as possible, and continually upgrading one's skills to increase career options.

As a response to these issues, Brenda Ellen and Bonnie Bruce arranged for the West Australian Library Technicians section (WALTS) to host a seminar to showcase seven library technicians and their careers.

The seminar was held at the WA State Reference Library, and was opened by Judy Clayden, from the School of Computer and Information Science at Edith Cowan University (ECU), Perth. Judy traced the development of library technician courses and work practices over the last twenty years, and remarked that the prediction by Denis Richardson at the 1979 *Alternative Futures* LAA Conference that library technicians would become members of a graduate occupation has been realised with the new Bachelor of Science (Library Technology) offered at ECU.

Seminar presenters represented major sectors of the information industry including academic and corporate libraries. Three of the presenters — Jean Broomhall, Alison Russo and Sandra Wilson — run campus libraries within a larger tertiary institution (SEMC TAFE and Curtin University) and all had experienced opportunities to challenge themselves and obtain new skills. Jean directed a major refurbishment of the Bentley Campus library, Alison maintains and develops SEMC's Library website, and Sandra has expanded her management skills.

Lisa Kelly graduated from Central TAFE (Perth) in 1996 and, after gaining some experience locally, travelled to the United Kingdom. There she marketed her qualification, Information Technology and database searching skills to gain librarian level positions, as well as becoming the Education Information Officer for the British Council.

Brenda Westcott has worked at Chevron Oil and Gas Co for approximately six years, during which time the library shed staff and gained material. Brenda now runs the Perth Chevron Library with help from part-time staff. She has provided advice and professional guidance to the Papua New Guinea branch of Chevron Oil, and is busy promoting the library to business units within the company both locally and in London and Aberdeen.

After a prizewinning graduation from the Bachelor of Science course at ECU, Carol Muir has never worked as a library technician. She has however used her qualification to work as a research assistant within ECU, as well as managing whole-of-university projects such as generic literacy skills in tertiary education. She is a part-time tutor within the Bachelor of Science course and can provide information on 'cleavage luminescence' (should you ever wish to know!)

Lothar Retzlaff closed the seminar by briefly describing his career, culminating in his present position as library technician and sometime graphic designer for Hollywood Private Hospital. Through the years Lothar has grasped the chance to expand his skills base and has worked as a hospital photographer, projectionist and operations manager for the WA Pops Orchestra, a private and separate entity to the WA Symphony Orchestra. He has been very active within the WA ALIA scene, and was involved in group mentoring for library technicians.

The seminar illustrated the myriad opportunities for qualified library technicians and highlighted the value of increasing one's skills base through further study and on-the-job training. All the presenters were eager to tackle new challenges and opportunities as they arose, and in doing so greatly expanded their experience and career prospects. ∎

Rivers of Knowledge

9th Special, Health & Law Libraries Conference, Melbourne, 26–29 August 2001

Rivers of Knowledge
9th Special, Health & Law Libraries Conference

A booklet containing the provisional program and registration information is now available. Details are also available on the conference home page at: http://www.alia.org.au/conferences/shllc/2001/.

If you would like a copy of the brochure sent to you, please contact The Meeting Planners, telephone 03 9417 0888 or e-mail Anne Docherty at adocherty@meetingplanners.com.au. ∎