

Stepping into the future

Changes in LIS education at University of South Australia

By the time this item is published in *inCite*, a notice will have been released in South Australia announcing the phasing out of the BA (Information Studies) program offered at the University of South Australia. This decision was made by the Library and Information Studies team with no little regret but with a conviction that our contribution to the emerging needs of the profession in the 21st century can best be made by focusing our resources and talents on postgraduate professional education. This decision is aligned with the declared planning priorities of the University of South Australia, the student body of which is shifting increasingly into postgraduate study, and which, over the next decade, will further develop its areas of excellence.

It may seem ironic that the decision was taken subsequent to the both the Graduate Diploma in Information Studies and the BA (Information Studies) gaining ALIA recognition in May of this year. However, the value of the effort required of an institution applying for recognition and of the professional body considering it is that it necessitates both parties scrutinising all aspects of the program and weighing up what must be done to achieve an offering of quality.

The preparation of the application brought into perspective for us the seismic changes which have occurred in the general environment in which we work, and in the specific one of our university, in the seven years since our last application for recognition. Receiving the notice of recognition

from ALIA for our programs for another seven years entailed the responsibility to ensure that we could continue to deliver those programs as recognised for that length of time. At this point, the School of Communication, Information and New Media, in which the LIS team is based, began the process of the five-year review of the BA and it soon became evident that the review would be the occasion for a major re-conceptualisation of the degree. In this situation, the LIS team, one group among several in a school of some thirty-eight academics, cannot assume to dictate limits to the review in order to preserve the structures endorsed by ALIA.

It is our goal to provide in the new BA, whatever the form it takes, a stimulating sub-major as a taster of information studies for undergraduates which will draw them into the postgraduate diploma. We are also exploring the possibility of granting credit towards the options in the graduate diploma to students who complete the sub-major. If this can be done, then a pathway from TAFE to the graduate diploma can still be maintained, though it will be a much longer and narrower one than that previously available.

While the BA review crystallised the local situation for us, it must be seen as only one among many influential factors. Some of the others which prior to May had been leading the team towards the decision to concentrate on postgraduate education were: the increasing pressure within academe towards generic courses while that from employers and students is towards the particular (even ephemeral!); the constantly growing diversity of positions LIS graduates are applying for and winning; new staffing and resource patterns (in all universities not just our own); and the rapidly diversifying 'markets' to which universities now address themselves. No Australian university in a major urban area can now regard itself as primarily a 'local' institution.

While the University of South Australia takes its responsibilities to the South Australian community very seriously, it is now an international university with a substantive proportion of its student body composed of students of foreign nationalities both on campus or in their home countries. Members of the School of Communication, Information and New Media teach both within the 'normal' academic year and in special sessions, on a circuit of regional centres in Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. In South Australia where the demographic decline in the numbers of young people is an inescapable reality, expansion into postgraduate education is a necessity. It aligns well, however, with the trend across Australia to conform to the international standard of gaining a general education at the bachelor degree level before entering professional programs. The Master of Library Science has been the pre-service qualification in librarianship in the United States for decades.

Focusing our attention on the Graduate Diploma in Information Studies allows us to mount a solid program, the core of which provides an essential and generic professional education and the options the means by which students can specialise. As a one-year program, it is under the control of the LIS team and is more readily adapted as required than a three-year degree may be.

Maureen Nimon, Associate Professor, School of Communication, Information and New Media, University of South Australia

Informit Online


Full Text Databases

Australian Public Affairs Full Text
AGIS Plus Text
Meditext

Searching for Australasian content?

These full text databases offer an unique collection of Australasian content perfect for researchers in the

- Academic
- Corporate
- Government
- Legal &
- Medical sectors



subject coverage includes:
legal, health &
social sciences

For further information visit
www.informit.com.au