

Benefits of membership

I recently applied for a new position in TAFE and, whilst working on the unenviable task of revising my CV and addressing the selection criteria, I was reminded of the value of my ALIA membership for the past 12 years. I know that I have made a contribution towards the advancement of the Association in that time, but I believe I have received far more than I have ever given!

My membership has given me access to a huge amount of resources, the most important ones I believe are the people and I have made many enduring friendships and established important networks that have helped me in my current job. Being an ALIA member gave me the opportunity to win the Dunn & Wilson Scholarship, which then gave me so many wonderful opportunities. The events, conferences, forums and meetings I have attended and the skills and knowledge I have acquired from those events, all combined to enable me to confidently address the selection criteria for the new job. I felt a real sense of satisfaction in completing my CV, even if my application is not successful this time. So for anyone considering membership of a professional society in their field, my advice is to give it a try and see where it takes you!

Kerrie Blyth ALIATec CP
Devonport, Tasmania

Like to recommend ALIA membership to a colleague? Request a membership pack for them: call 1 800 020071 or e-mail membership@alia.org.au.

Status of the profession

I have witnessed, and in some ways have contributed, to the diminishing status of the profession of librarianship. The reason why I see myself as complicit is that for many years I was not a member of ALIA.

I recently decided to rejoin when my institution, one of the leading Group of Eight universities, dropped any requirement for 'Eligible for professional membership of ALIA' in any of its library positions and was not able to stop the banning of a book under draconian new laws.

I see this as a problem for my profession and want to work in ALIA to address it.

In essence the profession has always dealt with ways of giving access to information. Is it the case that some of the core principles of librarianship are in critical conflict with some of the core principles of the business model?

In many ways, the direction of universities, conflicts with the librarians' professional responsibility to give access to information. Uni-

versities as publicly funded institutions, used to accept their libraries as a gateway for information to the public and used to help the public as well as its own students and staff.

The competitive environment, particularly after the introduction of GATS, means that universities are fighting for fee paying students. Students and staff are then 'customers' and the institutions do not like sharing their services with others. A recent OECD report showed that public education spending in Australia fell by 7% between 1995 and 2003, while rising by an average of 48% in other countries.

I am not sure what all the answers are in increasing the profile of librarianship but I believe our profession will survive if we as librarians and library technicians engage in what we are doing and why we are important to society. We have weathered many forms of industrial and political revolution, but we have to be engaged in the questions on a level beyond just how we can best serve industry.

Melanie Lazarow
University of Melbourne

Library services threatened

As a former local government employee (for over 20 years) in the public library sphere I supported and encouraged lifelong learning and literacy. Thus it was with great disappointment I read that many local councils may be forced to close branches or reduce their opening hours as a result of dismal funding from the NSW Government ('Library services threatened', Harvey Grennan, SMH, 30 Jan 2007, p.30).

Libraries have become more social, casual, accessible meet and greet places in recent times. In very broad terms, modern public librarians see their role as facilitating access to both the library building and library resources, for a diverse range of people, in a democratic manner. Further, local government libraries are also a 'shop window' for our funding authorities – our councils. Libraries, although public places, are probably one of the last bastions of security in a pleasant social space.

One of my major roles as a public librarian was to support library users in the use of information and communications technology; for instance the use of the databases, thus providing clients free access to high-quality information. It is imperative that the NSW government start to adequately fund these essential services that public libraries provide, now and in the future.

Nora Martin AALIA
Allambie Heights NSW

ALIA group enabled a great regional workshop

In December last year, Joan Frye Williams, internationally acclaimed library futurist, visited Hobart. Joan was the overseas keynote speaker for ALIA's third New Librarians Symposium in Sydney. Through the generous support of the ALIA Information Online Group, Joan was able to come to Hobart.

For more than 25 years, Ms Frye Williams has been a successful librarian, consultant, vendor, planner, trainer and evaluator of library services. Since 1996, she has practiced as an independent consultant specialising in innovation, technology, and the service needs and preferences of library customers. Joan ran a half-day workshop 'The Indispensable Librarian: New Service Responses for a New Library Environment'. The 63 workshop participants had an outstanding development opportunity.

From the State Library's perspective, Joan's messages were very consistent with current organisational initiatives and provided some timely reinforcement and ideas. Feedback from the 40 State Library of Tasmania participants was overwhelmingly positive and these comments were typical:

- One of the best I've been to – really inspirational
- I was not sure I would be able to concentrate for 4 hours but Joan was so interesting I could have listened to her for another 4 hours
- Inspirational indeed...to have us all come away really enthused is wonderful, and it's been the chat of the building since I walked in this morning!
- What I found most interesting was the 'can do' attitude and the fact that Joan's ideas were based firmly in client research and usability studies. It was so refreshing to see libraries from the perspective of how the client sees us and wants us to be, not what we think is 'good' for the client

On behalf of those who attended Joan's workshop, I would like to thank the ALIA Information Online Group for making Joan's visit happen. It was outstanding.

Pat Bomford
Senior Librarian (Staff and Organisational Development), State Library of Tasmania

