

Variety and innovation at CSU

The School of Information Studies (SIS) at Charles Sturt University (CSU) is developing a dynamic and varied research agenda which explores a range of issues important to the library and information profession. The emphasis of the program is on the relationships between people, information, and technology, as in the world's iSchools, as well as on the areas of information literacy and information practice. Human information behaviour (HIB), as a broad field of study encompassing information needs, information seeking, information use, and information literacy, is also part of the research program. It should be noted that these three key areas involve some overlap, especially in relation to information technology. Studies being undertaken by the School's PhD students have synergies with research being undertaken by staff, adding depth to the overall research program of the School.

In the area of information literacy and information practice, current staff research focuses on the information practices of immigrant settlers in rural and regional Australia. The project involves collaboration between SIS researchers, Wagga Wagga Public Library, and the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga. Other staff research being conducted in the information practice area focuses on the relationship between information practice and fire-fighting safety. Further dimensions are added through the work of doctoral students, which includes a study exploring information literacy in relation to the empowerment of women in Papua New Guinea, and a workplace study focusing on the information practices of apprentice chefs.

In research focusing on the intersection of people, information, and technology, the role of the World Wide Web plays a part in a range of projects. One study, still in the pilot stage, investigates the changing nature of newspaper publishing – from print to online – and the perceptions of users about these changes. A particular perspective is the role of news media in meeting needs for everyday life information. Another project, in the planning stage, focuses on the role of web technology to assist people with mental illness. This will be a Canadian/Australian study and will involve a Canadian visiting professor who will spend six weeks working in SIS this year. Yet another project examines the validity of the RDA (Resource Description and Access), the new cataloguing standard designed for the digital world, and aims to gauge which of all the RDA elements are the most critical in a university library context.

The research of several SIS PhD students also has a focus on the implications of the web for human society. For example, Australia's increasing digital culture, related to issues surrounding democracy, is being considered in one PhD study. In another, in which collaboration between a teacher and a teacher-librarian is key a component, the use of web 2.0 technologies to support secondary school student learning, is being explored.

Finally, in the broad area of HIB, two innovative student projects stand out. In the first example, a USA-based PhD student is undertaking cutting edge research focusing on the role of information in successful ageing. This student's work builds directly on the PhD studies of his CSU principal supervisor. Study participants are people in the Fourth Age, most of whom are in the category sometimes labelled "the oldest old" (85 years of age and older). As far as can be ascertained, no other research has looked at this group from an information perspective, since the tendency is to believe that information is no longer relevant. Yet the findings of the study show that these assumptions are not well-founded.

The second interesting project is in the teacher-librarianship area, this time being undertaken by a Doctor of Information Management student, and concerns self-efficacy and information seeking by school students. This is the first in-depth

study undertaken on this topic and also has synergies with the work of the principal supervisor. Whereas other researchers have looked at student confidence, in general, this student's work will show other factors that affect students' levels of self-efficacy. These include what students are finding information for (e.g. school work or leisure), their previous success/non-success in finding this type of information, what other students have found, and the difficulty of the topic.

Finally, reflecting a strong commitment to research training for information professionals, the School is now providing students with a pathway to doctoral studies through the introduction of an Honours program. This is one of the very few Australian Honours programs, aiming to encourage practitioners to consider research for the future. It will also enable students to develop research skills that are of value in the workplace, to undertake evidence-based practice, and will allow them to delve deeply into a subject, issue, or problem in which they have an interest or about which they have curiosity.

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