

Building our Association – the new grad way

As often happens, I found myself turning to the Oxford Dictionary when trying to start writing this article. That venerable tome defines a profession as, among other things, “a body of people engaged in a particular profession”. A professional association, then, is nothing more or less than a group of those professionals engaged in somehow furthering, advancing, or representing both profession and professionals. I think.

What does all that mean then, for me as a new graduate in the profession and a relatively new member of our professional association? I believe new graduates have an important role to play in the building and maintenance of our profession and our association and this year joined the ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee (NGAC). NGAC members are appointed for a three year term and act in an advisory capacity to the ALIA Board of Directors on issues relating to new generation members of the profession.

As new graduates, we collectively have a vested interest in a solid future for our association. After all, most of us are hoping to build a career out of this profession! Our input as ‘new blood’ coming into the profession is vital as we represent new ideas and reflect the current, on the ground experience of new generation professionals.

There is much written about the range of jobs people are doing in 2010 that did not exist ten years ago. Because of the rapidly changing nature of information and delivery, this is a vitally important point for the dynamic library and information industry. NGAC provides an essential conduit to the ALIA Board on what is happening in jobs and the profession for new generation members of the profession, now. After all, a profession is only as current and vital as the ideas, information, and experiences that go into it.

New graduates and new generation LIS professionals (no matter which actual generation we are part of) have the ability to provide the association with a constant stream of new ideas and fresh approaches to old problems. This enthusiasm can help unlock problems, help the association question ‘the way we do things around here’, and keep jaded cynicism at bay.

At the ALIA Access Conference in Brisbane we heard from Fiona Blackburn at Alice Springs Public Library on the importance of valuing the ‘pre-library’ skills of the older new professional. Older new professionals bring a wealth of experience from outside library land, adding to the existing skills and knowledge base and it is vital for the association to capture and keep these professionals as members. Fiona’s abstract is online at http://conferences.alia.org.au/access2010/pdf/Abstract_Thu_1550_Fiona_Blackburn.pdf.

Karen Bath from the University of Adelaide spoke about using involvement with organisations such as ALIA and associated professional development activities to help further individual careers and help with job seeking. However, this self development also works in reverse for ALIA, as through active involvement in association activities, networking, and knowledge building, individuals are in fact helping to build the profession. (Abstract available at time of writing at http://conferences.alia.org.au/access2010/pdf/Abstract_Thu_1200_Karen_Bath.pdf)

The logical extension of that is the flow-on effect of networking. Building bonds between professionals and exchanging ideas keeps our industry viable and current. New graduates can be an instant part of that through twitter, blogs, facebook, e-lists, or even good old fashioned face-to-face discussion. During the conference, ALIA led the way with this networking by having a strong emphasis on the twitter ‘back channel’, and providing an ‘L’ plate twitter account for those who hadn’t used twitter before (and the enticement of iPads on which to do this was an inspiration). In this way, building networks, building the profession, and building the association are inextricably linked. (Want to know more? Search twitter for the hashtags #aliaaccess and #grads to see what was going

on in the ‘back channel’ and you will see how individual professionals were interacting with each other to further ideas).

On the library tours we looked at some of Brisbane’s (and the Gold Coast’s) biggest and best libraries. The libraries I saw are magnificent examples of planning, great ideas, and cutting edge technologies. They are putting the ideal up there, and thereby creating the space behind which the profession can build and rebuild itself. In the ‘not-keynote’ speech to the Library Camp/Unconference stream on the second day, Stephen Abram from Cengage Learning agreed, saying that the baby boomers have created the technologies and ideas and it is now up to the new generation of LIS workers to further develop this space.

If everyone on those tours or at these conference sessions took just one idea home and wrote about it, discussed it, researched it, or just commented on it in a blog or on twitter, then we are helping to build our profession. Doing all of this as an ALIA member builds our association and makes it possible to continue to do so in the future.

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ALIA ePortfolio Group

The ALIA ePortfolio group is new and dynamic. It developed out of a project undertaken in 2009 the ALIA/AeP2 LIS ePortfolio Pilot Study headed by Gillian Hallam. The project looked at the use of ePortfolios in learning and career development across a range of library and information services. Participants in the project developed an ePortfolio to support their learning and professional development and develop a personal learning system: a place to record achievements, reflect, learn, store information, plan career paths, and network.

ePortfolios are for everyone, offering a dynamic way of storing and presenting information while also allowing the user to go through a process of learn, reflect, and develop. Members of the group have used their ePortfolios for study, professional development, career planning, and performance reviews. The possibilities are endless as you can create blogs, action plans, webfolios, CV’s, profiles, and proformas. Also you can record abilities, achievements, experiences, meetings/minutes, and thoughts.

The group has several aims

1. To support, inform, promote, and develop ePortfolio practice in the LIS profession.
2. To provide support for LIS professionals beginning and using ePortfolios.
3. To align ePortfolios with formal and informal learning, professional development, and long term work goals.
4. To provide an avenue to demonstrate LIS professionals’ capabilities for future and ongoing employment.

We would love to hear what other people are doing with ePortfolios. As a group we encourage the use of ePortfolios. Through our own experiences with the AeP2 pilot study, we would like to support others in the LIS profession to explore the potential of ePortfolios and become a vehicle for further development in the area.

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