



LET THE FUTURE BEGIN!

Our feature contributors this month seem to be following on from our electronic and digital theme in the June issue, so our feature contributions are very focused on the 'how' of what we do. And we're taking innovative steps to find the answers. At University of Technology Sydney, the library team asked the school students who will be the library users in the future what they wanted. As well as the request for awesome chairs, the collaborative process took an unexpected turn.

Meanwhile public libraries rejoice! A landmark study in Victoria has put hard numbers against the benefits this sector provides to that state and they're more than happy to tell us how. Read on, and let the future begin!

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ACADEMIC LIBRARY DREAMING

Much has been written about "the library of the future" and quite a few libraries have been so dubbed. But "the library of the future" very quickly becomes "the library of the past" unless it continues to evolve, to address – and preferably anticipate – contemporary needs. This is an enormous challenge in a time in which technologies, information sources and expectations are changing daily. How can we make available the knowledge of the past in an accessible and appropriate way? How can we ensure that the knowledge of the present and future is useable today and tomorrow? What services will characterise future libraries and what will underpin them? And who will we be, the library staffers of tomorrow and beyond?

A new university library is a centrepiece of the very ambitious redevelopment of the University of Technology, Sydney CBD campus so these questions are at the top of our minds. Some aspects have been determined: it will continue to be a leading edge digital library, three-quarters of the library's physical collections will be in an underground Library Retrieval System, learning spaces will be diverse and exhilarating, and specialist facilities will support researchers and community and industry access. But what will our service model be? And who will we be?

To begin a discussion around those questions, and as one of a series of planning activities, UTS Library organised the by-invitation *2020 Academic Library Symposium* on 31 January 2011. Attendees were mostly senior staff from Australasian academic libraries who were challenged during the morning by the ideas of researchers and research students, mostly from design backgrounds, to think radically about new libraries. The major finding was the realisation that collections have receded in importance. In a world awash with information, knowing how to find and use information and knowledge is much more important than the size of the on-site collection. Not surprisingly, online and increasingly mobile technologies are central but well-designed, diverse and adaptable spaces are also critical.

During the afternoon these thoughts were infused by input from the Horizon Workshop presented by librarians of the future – those in the early stages of their careers – to stimulate discussion about the future library workforce. Group discussions focussed on skills, aptitudes and attitudes. Staff will need to be excellent communicators, collaborators and negotiators with inquiring minds, confidence, assertiveness and the ability to teach. 'Professionalism' becomes an attitude to one's work, colleagues and clients rather than just possessing an ALIA-accredited qualification. Diversity and creativity are valued together with innovation and leadership. For academic library managers, this implies that we should be recruiting 'good people', those with the necessary attitudes and aptitudes, and then ensuring that they develop and continue to develop their skills appropriately in place of depending on a foundation library program.

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