

## **Selling the Collections: The Future of the University Library**

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Universities throughout the world have invested heavily in the provision of library resources to support their teaching, research and learning activities. This investment has been justified and legitimised throughout the centuries on the basis of libraries being the heart of the university; what Germaine Greer described as ‘... reservoirs of strength ... lakes of mental energy’.<sup>1</sup> The quality of a university was, and still is, measured in part by the size and quality of its libraries.

With the exception perhaps of academic regalia, the library is one of the most direct links between the medieval university and its modern counterpart. Libraries continue to be the storehouse of accumulated knowledge used to inform and guide learning and research, as well as the protectors of the past for the future.

Changes in higher education, including different pedagogy, varying societal expectations, and the emergence of information technology, are beginning to undermine the traditional functions and justifications of libraries. Certainly within developed economies there is a questioning of the future role of university libraries, their place in the institution’s list of priorities, the resources allocated to them, as well as the part they will have in teaching, research and learning.

Many students and some academics have a ‘MacDonalds’ approach to information. They want instantaneous gratification

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of their demands and are satisfied if the result approximates to their expectations and is delivered rapidly. Quality is often less important than ease of access, and the constraints imposed by traditional libraries are often derided as obstructionist. If the information is not available on the Internet, it either doesn't exist or it is out of date. Misconceptions are rife that all information is available on the Internet, is free, is accurate and is easy to locate.

Faced with the combined onslaught of such attitudes as well as the rising cost of acquiring academic publications, the adoption of more flexible learning opportunities, static institutional budgets, and a fascination with technology, university libraries are in danger of losing their places in the sun. Most have skilfully adopted the Internet and are meeting the other challenges so that they remain relevant to their institutions. The university library of the future is likely to be considerably different in most institutions from what it is today. The nature of the library and its services will vary depending on the goals and aspirations of the community it serves.

What then will be the fate of the University of Sydney Library?

The Library collection has always been regarded as one of the jewels of the University of Sydney. Among the first staff members appointed to the new University in 1852 was the Librarian, Frederick Hale Forschall. The fledgling University devoted more than one third of the income received in its first year to the purchase of books. Regrettably, such largess was never to be repeated, and some other good intentions were to meet similar fates.

When the Senate met in January 1854 to approve the preliminary design of the main Quadrangle, the Library was first among the priorities for space and was allocated the site now occupied by the Great Hall. In subsequent revisions, however, the Library was relegated to a well-proportioned, but much smaller, space which is now the Senate Room.<sup>2</sup> The Librarian was provided with an oriel which allowed him to look into the Great Hall and dream of what might have been.

By the end of the century, the collection had grown and occupied several rooms adjoining the Library as well as the anteroom to the Great Hall, space in the Western Tower, and rooms elsewhere in the University. The acquisition of the Stenhouse collection in 1878 greatly exacerbated the space difficulties but became the nucleus of the rare book collection. On these foundations the reputation of the Library as a research collection was founded.

At the 1879 Commemoration Ceremony the Chancellor, Sir William Manning, recognised the need to improve the Library accommodation and hoped that a benefactor would come forward.<sup>3</sup> Help came in 1884 when a local resident, Thomas Fisher, died leaving the bulk of his estate to the University for the establishment and maintenance of a library.<sup>4</sup>

It took until 1909 before MacLaurin Hall was built and the Fisher Library installed in its Gothic splendour. The architectural style while compatible with the rest of the Quadrangle also reflected contemporary perceptions of libraries as temples of knowledge. MacLaurin Hall and the reading rooms of the British Library, the state libraries of Victoria and NSW, and the main reading room at the University of Adelaide Library, are testimonies of the homage felt due to books, knowledge and libraries, if not to librarians.

By 1955, the combined collection of the Fisher, Medical and Law libraries had grown to 368, 218 volumes but facilities in the Fisher Library were crowded and inadequate. Following the Second World War, enrolments grew rapidly as ex-servicemen resumed their education. The 1957 Murray Report on Australian Universities observed that the Fisher Library was quite unsuitable to its purposes and grossly overcrowded.<sup>5</sup>

This was not a new revelation as the University Librarian, E. V. Steel, had been fighting doggedly to improve staffing, facilities and the book vote. His annual reports repeatedly identified the inadequacy of the book vote as well as staffing and space difficulties. The construction of the present Fisher building represented a major step in the development of the Library.

In 1959, E. V. Steel was succeeded by Andrew Osborn, who threw himself into the dual task of building a world class collection and influencing the design of the new building. During his relatively short tenure, the collection doubled, and included the acquisition of a number of specialist collections which mirrored the research interests of the University.

From 1962 until 1980 the University Library was led by Harrison Bryan, who continued the development of the collections. When he left to become Director-General of the National Library, the collections contained almost three million items. In terms of size and quality, the University of Sydney Library rated well with the major North American research libraries. By the late 1970s, Bryan was warning of the difficulties which libraries would face if rises in publisher costs continued and could not be matched by increases in university funding.

During the incumbency of Neil Radford as University Librarian, the reality of the Bryan prophecies began to become apparent. The collections continued to grow but some of that growth was due to amalgamation with colleges of advanced education as well as the copyright deposit status of the Library. From the mid-1980s, the cost of journal subscriptions began to increase at much greater rates than ever before and quickly outstripped growth in the income of most Australian university libraries.

Librarians initially expected that the prices would level out and tended to divert funding from other activities, especially the purchase of monographs, in order to maintain journal subscriptions. The prices continued to rise, however, and at rates averaging greater than ten per cent annually over more than a decade. Unable to maintain subscription budgets, libraries began cancelling and seeking other ways of accessing journal literature. Initially, this was confined largely to cooperative arrangements between libraries, principally interlibrary loans, but later became more technology based.

By the late 1980s, the sector of the publishing industry

involved with indexing and abstracting began to change. The publishers of these services began to make their products available on CD-ROM and by the mid-1990s most were available on the Internet. Once the index and abstracting services could be networked, libraries began to cancel the print copies. Some small specialist publishers were unable to afford the technological investment and were acquired by larger enterprises. New companies began to emerge, often established by young entrepreneurs who had particular technological skills. In other cases, established companies saw the opportunities and invested in the technologies and expertise necessary to change their methods of publishing.

Journal publishers, however, were relatively slow to offer networked versions of their publications. Their reticence was due largely to the significant investment which they had in the print technology and a fear that they would lose revenue by not being able to guarantee control over the copying of articles. Initially, most attempted to impose licence conditions more stringent than those which existed for print publications.

The fears and insecurities of publishers have been heightened by copyright collecting agencies which have attempted to portray a future in which the rights of authors and publishers will be vulnerable and open to uncontrollable abuse. Much of this paranoia is unwarranted, particularly in terms of libraries, which have generally sought to respect the rights of creators while maintaining a strong defence of the fair dealing provisions of the Australian copyright legislation.

Nevertheless, copyright agencies have mounted a strong campaign to have the proposed legislation relating to digital copying altered in ways which would virtually eliminate free copying for personal use. The Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) has advocated charging regimes which would involve a cost being incurred each time an item of information in digital format is viewed even if it were not copied for later use. (CAL is an Australian copyright management company whose role is to collect fees for the copying of published material and to

distribute the proceeds to the copyright owners, usually publishers and authors.) The universal application of such arrangements strikes at the very core of learning and knowledge acquisition processes and would have significant budget implications for all educational institutions, not just universities.

Librarians have been at the forefront of the battle to protect fair dealing for personal use while at the same time supporting mechanisms which would provide protection for the owners of intellectual property. Libraries have supported the establishment of the Australian Digital Alliance, which has lobbied Government in support of maintaining the same copyright features for digital publications as have existed for print publications. They have also approached many of the larger publishers directly and negotiated licences for access to their digital publications which preclude further payments to CAL.

This has been only partly successful. Publishers of the major refereed journals, especially in the scientific, technological and medical disciplines, have continued to increase their annual subscription costs whether in print or digital format. Between 1986 and 1996 the total cost of journals subscribed to by the major North American research libraries rose by 147 per cent.<sup>6</sup> Similar increases were faced by Australian universities but were worsened by fluctuations in exchange rates.

As the University of Sydney approaches its sesquicentenary, the future of universities is subject to constant debate. Decreased government support, greater competition from international universities, the emergence of private education providers, the demand for more flexible learning mechanisms, all contribute to the uncertainty about the future nature and role of universities.

Not all universities are reacting in the same way. Some have already identified a destiny which depends heavily on the use of technology to deliver courses to wherever the learner is situated and at times which suit the individual. Others are seeking to develop specialist markets. This often involves the cessation of activities which are no longer considered viable contributors to the institution's budget. Areas of teaching and research have

and guarantee their existence.

The University of Sydney has elected to continue to support a diverse range of disciplines and to capitalise on the benefits which are associated with the physical campus. The 'on-campus' experience is considered to be educationally desirable and commercially viable. At the same time, considerable effort is being directed toward the adoption and development of different teaching methods which will allow students to opt for learning styles which suit their own requirements. These alternatives include the use of information technology.

The University's course of action provides a significant challenge for the Library. For almost one hundred and fifty years, library services have been focused on developing collections of books and journals at various locations throughout the University. While the number of sites administered by the University Librarian has varied over time, there are currently twenty-one libraries on nine campuses. These range from the Fisher Library to libraries with a single staff member, such as Mathematics and Physics. Most libraries are at Camperdown and Darlington but it is 262 kilometres between the Law Library and the library on the Orange campus.

Location-based services are no longer sufficient to meet the needs of the University and there is some doubt that the traditional university library will continue to be relevant or viable within a decade. How then should the University of Sydney Library respond to the challenge of remaining a dynamic partner in the University's teaching, research and learning activities?

The Library always acquired publications in a variety of formats including print, manuscript, audio-visual, microform and more latterly in digital form. It has been a leader in the digitisation of publications for textual analysis. The Library's Scholarly Electronic Text and Image Service (SETIS) has an international reputation for the work it does digitising Australian literary and other works. SETIS was established with the assistance of the Faculty of Arts and has the capacity to play a greater role in the transformation of the Library and the way in which University

of Sydney scholars access, create and disseminate knowledge.

The Library has also been an early adopter of the use of networked information, especially those sources which are available via the Internet. Access is provided to hundreds of indexing and abstracting services and to thousands of full-text journals and other publications. From the beginning of 2000, a procedure has been implemented whereby the networked version of a journal will be acquired in preference to the print edition. The networked version is acquired if it is identical to the print version or if it provides scholars with features not available with the print edition.

What does this mean for the Library and for the University? Firstly, there is no overall cost saving. Through the combined efforts of Library staff and collaboration with other universities, subscription costs have been negotiated which are generally about 10% less for the networked version than for the print equivalent. Over time it is expected that there will be savings in the cost of providing shelf space, the re-shelving of volumes, binding, and some processing activities.

On the negative side, the Library has had to increase its investment in computer facilities, Internet access charges have grown, and different skills need to be acquired by Library staff as well as by users of the new services. The big benefit, however, is the availability of the information and the more flexible ways in which it can be used. Members of the University can now access much of this information from any computer connected to the Internet and at times when the libraries are closed.

One of the early adopters of the technology has been the Faculty of Medicine, as part of the Graduate Medical Program. Central to the Program is the use of problem based learning. Each tutorial is available online and contains a statement of the topic, the problem to be addressed, and details of the resources which are relevant to the tutorial. Among the resources are citations of journal articles for which the Library is now providing links to the actual text. Student can read the articles on screen, print them out for later reference or save them on their computer.



This facility allows students on clinical placement in hospitals to do tutorial work at times convenient to themselves and without necessarily having to visit a library.

Similar use of the technology is occurring in other faculties and the day may well be close to dawning when coursework students have no need to use printed books and journals. There are pundits, informed or otherwise, who forecast the end of libraries and vast savings to universities, which will no longer have to allocate resources for the acquisition and storage of collections. Others look longingly at the insured value of the collections and seek ways to release the investment for other uses.

What will be the nature of the University of Sydney Library by the end of this decade? The answer is ambiguous. In some areas there is likely to be little change, yet in others the changes will be profound.

The University Library collection now totals around five million items, some of which are held in no other library outside of Western Europe or North America. The Rare Book collection for instance houses a copy of Isaac Newton's *Philosophie Naturalis Principia Mathematica* published in 1687 which contains manuscript addenda thought to be by the author. This book is not just valuable, it is irreplaceable.

The University Library will continue to maintain its print collections as they are as much part of the institution's heritage as the Main Quadrangle. A challenge for the Library will be to find ways of exploiting this resource. An economic rationalist might be tempted to recommend selling the collections in order to fund the acquisition of new information formats. With the exception of the rare book library, however, much of the collection would fetch considerably less than the \$500,000 for which it is insured.

The value of the collection is in its use as a resource for research and learning. There would be few buyers for a significant part of the collection as these items are also held by a number of Australian universities and receive little use. To sell the rare

book collection would deprive the University of an asset which sets it apart from most other Australian university libraries. It is also a feature which, in the world of true scholarship, distinguishes the Library as a place which values the past as a contributor to the future.

That said, the Library will need to find ways of limiting the cost of maintaining at least part of the collections. Although badly needed, there is little immediate hope of a building to bring together the six science collections located on the Camperdown campus. All of the libraries are short of shelving space and it is expected that the acquisition of print volumes will continue well into the next decade. One strategy being considered is the development of a storage facility for rarely used items which would be owned cooperatively by a number of universities. Such a facility would enable the retention of one copy of items currently held by multiple libraries. This would provide space and other savings for individual libraries and the facility would constitute a major national research resource.

While the University's libraries will continue to contain printed books and journals, the number will lessen as more space is required to accommodate computing facilities necessary to access information in digital formats. Although there is growing private ownership of computers, the Library will have to provide facilities for those who are unable to afford their own or who need specialised facilities to access and use particular types of information.

Greater availability of networked information will have other implications for the Library. Staff in the libraries have always provided assistance in the location and use of information. The Library has provided instruction in bibliographic searching and other aspects of information literacy. Other universities have already recognised that information literacy is an essential skill which should be possessed by both students and staff. The future for the Library includes greater involvement in the teaching of these skills. This will occur in a number of ways, including teaching users when they are searching for information, and

collaboration with academic units which include information skills as part of their curricula.

More flexible delivery of courses will increase demands on the Library to provide access to facilities and services. There will be greater provision of full-text, image, statistical and audio information through the University's network, and availability will be twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. Accompanying this provision will be a demand for user assistance and the Library will need to identify ways in which members of the University can gain help, irrespective of where they might be and at what time they are in need.

The Internet has widened expectations of the extent of information resources available. The University Library of the future is likely to provide a range of portals or gateways which will be developed in association with academic units. These portals will have a strong subject or theme nature and will enable members of the University to search for information on topics required for their scholarship. Having located a number of information resources, the individual will be presented with the choice of free access to some and limited or paid access to others.

The type of access may vary. Coursework students, for instance, may have different access privileges from research students, and academic staff may have another set of rights. There may also be differences in the access available to members of each faculty. While such a proposal may appear discriminatory, elitist or even just foolish, it is one possible way of making better use of available resources.

There have always been limits to what the Library has been able to acquire and scholars either had to do without or make other arrangements. In some cases these arrangements were private purchase or a visit to another library; in other instances mechanisms such as interlibrary loan or the help of an associate at another institution were used.

A major change in the way in which the Library operates will be greater scrutiny of how resources are acquired and used. The

networked information environment allows statistics to be maintained relating to the use of individual publications and for comparisons to be made more easily about the relationship between cost and usage. It may well be more cost effective to pay for the delivery of individual pieces of information from some sources than to subscribe for unlimited use.

It is likely that there will be a change in the way in which publishers present their products in the future. Most publishers currently maintain the concept of journals and sell subscriptions to them in the same way they marketed the print version. The future is likely to see the individual journal title become less significant. Instead of paying for access to particular titles, libraries will purchase the right to access a set number of articles for a predetermined fee. The reputation of the database, however, will continue to be important as a mark of the reliability and quality of the information it contains.

Another likely characteristic of the future University of Sydney Library will be its involvement in the publication of scholarly information. The Library has developed a great deal of expertise in the digitisation of publications so that they can be used for textual analysis. This is a far higher order of endeavour than the simple imaging processes undertaken elsewhere under the guise of digitisation.

The expertise possessed by Library staff, in conjunction with that of other members of the University, would enable greater participation in the preparation of University publications for Internet access. Major North American universities, most notably Stanford, Johns Hopkins and Michigan, have become significant digital publishers in competition with commercial publishers.

Stanford University established the Highwire Press in 1995 and now publishes 206 'journals', mostly in the scientific and medical disciplines. The establishment of the press was in response to the increasing control of scholarly publication by commercial enterprises. Although there remain a large number of publishers of scientific journals, most have only one title. The majority of refereed titles are published by international

conglomerates such as Elsevier Science, a part of the Reed-Elsevier group, which also dominates legal publishing, and Thomson, which also publishes in the humanities and social sciences.

While these companies have a concern for scholarly publishing, their primary purpose is to make money for their shareholders. In order to maintain their revenue streams, they have constantly increased prices beyond Consumer Price Index levels without any discernible improvement in their products.

Librarians and academics in North America have sought to temper the influence of these companies by advocating that the academy regain control of scholarly publishing. The Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) and the International Consortium for Alternative Academic Publishing are both examples of attempts to encourage learned societies, universities and individual authors to support non-commercial scholarly publishing.

The Australian environment is too small to warrant the establishment of similar bodies but the Council of Australian University Librarians is a member of SPARC. It is unlikely that any Australian university could afford the investment which Stanford has made in Highwire Press but there are other avenues which could be pursued.

The University of Sydney Press imprint is no longer licensed to Oxford University Press and could be resurrected as an electronic publisher. This would provide a means of publishing the many journals already associated with the University. It would also provide a means of publishing academic monographs, particularly in the arts and humanities, which are of scholarly importance but are not considered to be economically viable.

The press need not be a stand alone venture. The Australian Society of Authors is hoping to provide an electronic publishing avenue for its members. The system will allow authors to place a digital version of their work on the Society's web page. The text can be read online but a fee will be payable if the text is printed or copied to another computer or disc. The University of

printed or copied to another computer or disc. The University of Sydney Press could be a sub-set of such an initiative.

In summary, the future of the University of Sydney Library is as a curator of the print collections amassed since 1852, a repository for new print publications, a facilitator of access to publications and other information resources available in digital format, a partner in the teaching of information skills, and a collaborator with the academic community in the publication of scholarly information. The larger libraries will remain although some of the smaller sites will be made redundant by the increased use of network information. Those libraries that remain will continue to be major locations at which students pursue their learning. This will grow as problem based learning becomes more commonplace.

The Library will provide a wider range of learning support facilities such as discussion rooms containing computing equipment which can be used to format tutorial presentations. Library staff will collaborate more closely with academic staff to assist them locate the information resources needed for their research. Access to networked information resources, user assistance and other services will be extended and a large number of these services will be available twenty-four hours a day. Even if all of this does not come to pass exactly according to my prophecy, the future will be the continuation of the University of Sydney Library as the foremost university library in this country and one which is recognised internationally for its support of teaching, learning and research of the highest order.

#### Notes

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- 2 C. Turney, U. Bygott, P. Chippendale, *Australia's First: a History of the University of Sydney*, vol.1, 1850–39, Sydney, 1991, p.131.
- 3 W. M. Manning, *Chancellor's Address, University of Sydney Commemoration*, 1879, pp.4–5.
- 4 Neil Radford, 'Thomas Fisher and the Fisher Bequest' in *On Establishing and Maintaining a Library : Two Essays on the University*

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- 5 *Report of the Committee on Australian Universities*, September 1957, Canberra, 1958, p.51.
  - 6 J. Branin and M. Case, 'Reforming Scholarly Publishing in the Sciences: a Librarian's Perspective', in *Notices of the AMS* 45.4 (April 1998): 479.