A TALE OF TWO LIBRARIES: THE MELBOURNE/GRIFFITH EXCHANGE PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an exchange program between the libraries of The University of Melbourne and Griffith University. The paper covers the reasons behind the decision to arrange an exchange, the preparations, the actual exchange experience and the follow up. The advantages for professional and personal development and the value of bringing staff from two university libraries together in a co-operative program are also explained. The initial exchange involved a team of Senior Library Service Officers from The University of Melbourne, who participated in a five-day visit to Griffith University. Two team members were based at the Griffith University Gold Coast campus and the other member was at the South Bank (Brisbane) campus. This took place in August and September 2010 and was followed by a reciprocal visit to The University of Melbourne by a team from Griffith University. The main aims were for the team members to observe the functioning of another academic library, and to facilitate discussion and the interchange of ideas.

Although Griffith University Library has a similar academic role to the author's home library, it was found that a number of influences helped to create distinctive characteristics at the two libraries. Influences include the location of the Griffith Gold Coast campus within a tourism region and The University of Melbourne Campus in an inner-city area. Climate also plays a part, as does the age of the two universities. Melbourne's traditional heritage and the more recently established Griffith campuses have contributed to the contrast in their layout and physical environment. A further distinction was Melbourne’s research-based collection and Griffith's subject-based collection, which appear to be products of each university's individual philosophy.

This exchange program with Griffith University was an excellent opportunity for both professional and personal development. The skills and knowledge gained enabled the author to expand her vision for the future of the academic library and provided a variety of aspects that could be discussed with colleagues at her home library. To be able to speak face-to-face with the staff at Griffith and to observe the way in which another library functions were invaluable. It is an experience that can only be
given the highest recommendation and it is suggested that further exchange programs between university libraries would be a worthwhile professional and personal development exercise.

1. INTRODUCTION

In August 2010, a small team of library staff from The University of Melbourne participated in a five-day visit to Griffith University, which was followed by a reciprocal visit in September 2010 to The University of Melbourne by Griffith University library staff. The purpose of this exchange program was to enable staff to observe and participate in the day-to-day functioning of another academic library. As part of the three-person team from The University of Melbourne, the author and another member were based at the Griffith University Gold Coast campus, while the other team member was at the South Bank (Brisbane) campus.

2. BACKGROUND

Linda O’Brien, Pro Vice Chancellor (Information Services) at Griffith University promoted the exchange program between the two libraries, as she was a former Vice-Principal (Information) at The University of Melbourne. O’Brien and Philip Kent, the present University of Melbourne Librarian, believed it provided an opportunity for staff to learn from each other and to build networks (O’Brien pers.com. 2011). Following discussions between O’Brien and Kent, contact was made between Staff Development personnel at each university to finalise the details (Kent pers.com.2011).

In addition to the close ties, both Griffith and Melbourne were undergoing changes to service deliveries, and Griffith had implemented the same Innovative Millennium which had been in use at Melbourne for some years.

The choice of the Melbourne participants was made following a call for expressions of interest in which applications were restricted to HEW 3-5 Lending Services staff. This was followed by interviews with the short listed applicants and a briefing session for successful participants.

On arrival at the Griffith Gold Coast campus, exchange participants took part in an induction program, which included a tour of the campus and the library, where they were introduced to Lending Services staff. The exchange participants were then able to observe the library functions before being integrated into the team.

3. THE UNIVERSITIES

The university campuses are quite different. Griffith University has five campuses and seven library locations spread between Brisbane and the Gold Coast in South-East Queensland. While the Brisbane campuses are in urban settings, the physical appearance and feeling of the Gold Coast, Logan, Mt Gravatt and Nathan campuses have a greater expression of their natural surroundings. These campuses have adapted their buildings to be incorporated into the bushland hills, which has encouraged native flora and fauna to become a part of the campus environment. The Gold Coast campus is near tourist attractions, such as Sea World and other recreational facilities, which gives it a more relaxed feeling. The University of Melbourne has seven campuses and fifteen branch libraries across Victoria. The main campus is in Parkville, which is an inner-city suburb of Melbourne and is
close to the city centre, residential housing and shopping areas, such as Lygon Street. In recent years, the University has extended its Parkville campus by purchasing nearby properties. The student populations of both universities are reasonably similar, comprising both domestic and international students. Griffith has over 40,000 students who come from 124 countries (Griffith University website), while Melbourne has over 47,000 students, which includes about 11,800 international students from 120 countries (University of Melbourne website). From these figures it is apparent that similarities in make-up of student numbers provided an appropriate basis for any comparison.

4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

As well as offering opportunities for swapping ideas and facilitating discussion, the exchange visits encouraged personal and professional development for the participants. The benefits for personal development came primarily from being placed into a new environment and away from the usual daily routine. This included being based in a different city, with new surroundings, and a new library with different facilities and routines. According to Tosey and Gregory (2002) the outcome of any personal development experience should be the development of interpersonal skills and an increase in self-esteem, and the exchange visit provided excellent opportunities to achieve these aims, as well as increasing the ability to overcome new and unfamiliar situations.

The exchange also contributed to professional development by providing many activities that increased knowledge and skills for use in the workplace (Tosey and Gregory 2002). These activities included job shadowing, which gave an insight into the responsibilities of each library staff member. Talking with the Griffith University library staff increased our knowledge of different library practices and our personal observations added to this knowledge. We also participated in a video interview and gave our views on the exchange. This was valuable experience in explaining our opinions.

5. THE LIBRARIES

In the March 2005 issue of inCite, Lorraine Bradshaw suggested that ‘Every organisation is unique, and has a slightly different way of doing things’ (Bradshaw 2005). This was an important finding from the exchange. Although both the Griffith University and the Melbourne University libraries have a similar academic role within their respective universities, differences were evident that resulted from a range of factors.

It is apparent that the history of each university has helped to create a distinctive character for its libraries and has contributed to the contrast in their layout and physical environment. The University of Melbourne is the second oldest university in Australia and its library system began with a general library that was established in 1855 but was replaced in 1959 by the present Baillieu Library and a number of smaller libraries located throughout the campus. As a consequence, the Melbourne libraries have a traditional quality that is reflected in the Baillieu’s post-World War Two era architecture (Baillieu 2009), although there have been several refurbishments over the years. In contrast, Griffith University was established in 1975 and has a more contemporary feeling.
The Gold Coast campus library is an example of an open-plan configuration, which has been introduced to improve the look of the library and to encourage students to feel comfortable in the library surroundings. In preparation for the 2008 refurbishment of the library, supermarkets, shopping centres and airports were used as inspiration for the designs. The result is a spacious library utilising natural light. Encouragement is given for students to use the library facilities as a meeting place – ‘the library is the lounge of the campus’ (Graves pers.com. 2010). This is also evident in the attitude of allowing food and drink in the library as long as users inform staff of any spills so they can be cleaned up immediately. In contrast, the Baillieu Library has a strict policy of prohibiting food and drink, although bottled water is allowed in the library.

6. THE COLLECTIONS

A further distinction was evident in Melbourne University's research-based collection and Griffith's subject-based collection, which appear to be products of the individual philosophy of each university. The Gold Coast campus library's collections are: General, Business, Health, Education, Law, Arts, Science and Technology. Melbourne has specific libraries for different subject areas. These include the Baillieu Library, which is Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences focussed. Other libraries include: Architecture, Mathematics, Law, Education, Chemistry, Physics, Economics and Commerce, Bio-Medical, Sciences (Earth Science and Engineering) and two Music and Vet Science Libraries. This has the advantage of enabling librarians to become specialists in specific subject areas.

Classification systems and collection management at the two libraries differ considerably. At the Baillieu Library, the collection is classified by the Dewey Decimal system and different types of material are shelved in separate areas. The Gold Coast library shelves books, videos, DVDs and CDs together under the Library of Congress system. When new items are purchased, the Griffith library staff removes the same number of items. This, along with more digitised resources, prevents shelves from being overcrowded. Generally, signage has been reduced to improve the aesthetics.

As well as contributing to the relaxed feel of the Griffith University libraries, climate also plays a part in collection management. The humid Queensland climate encourages mould, which is a constant concern. Items that are badly damaged are removed from the collection and destroyed to prevent the further spread of mould. If the damage is limited, the items are wiped over with a solution of vinegar and water. Mould is not a problem at Melbourne, whereas vermin and insects are usual causes of book damage.

7. CIRCULATION SERVICES

It was interesting to note the role of the service pods at the Gold Coast library. There are five co-located pods: three Loans Service, and two Library and IT Help Service pods. A practical feature of the pods is the ability to raise or lower the height to allow library staff to either be seated or to stand. The Loans Desk deals with Lending Services functions, topping up photocopy/printing cards, selling binding kits for assignments and assignment handling. Students hand in their assignments to the library staff, who stamp it with a date and time, then issue a receipt. At the time of writing, the Baillieu desk combines loans and information, but the Baillieu is undergoing refurbishment and by September
2011, the redesigned service desk will incorporate Loans, Information, Inter-Library Loans and Student IT.

There is a growing trend for academic libraries to increase self-service options for library patrons (Woodward 2009). This is evident in the handling of hold items at both the Gold Coast and Baillieu libraries, where students are encouraged to pick up and borrow their hold items. The only difference is that the Gold Coast students can place holds on any item that is available in the library whereas the Baillieu restricts placing of holds to items that are on loan. Although the use of this service allows patrons to have control of their library transactions, it can have the potential of reducing personal interaction with library staff (Woodward 2009). However, even though this self-service procedure is offered, students with problems or experiencing difficulties can go to the Loans Desk for more personal assistance.

8. FACILITIES

During the exchange, particular features at the Gold Coast library made an impression because of their usability for patrons. These included the study facilities. The library provides five group study areas with table, chairs and whiteboard that can be used by students. There are also other areas for quiet individual study with similar facilities. Furniture is light and may be moved to suit group requirements. At the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne, they have only two rooms that students can book for two hours to be used for group discussions.

There is an Easy Access return chute outside the Gold Coast campus library where items can be returned. This means items can be returned at any time without going into the library so that the return of borrowed items is convenient for students. A smaller Easy Access return chute is planned and this will be situated undercover near the bus stop. The library staff clears the outside chute three times a day – morning, afternoon and evening. At Melbourne, they have return chutes in the library where patrons return their items during libraries opening hours and an after hour chute when the libraries are closed so patrons can return their items.

9. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES: SYSTEMS AND STAFF

At Melbourne a Performance Measurement system was discontinued. In contrast at Griffith, the library staff are involved in measuring the library’s level of achievement by using the following six surveys of Performance Measurement:

1. Courier Box Check-In Survey – measures the time taken from courier box arrival to the time that all courier boxes have been checked and the materials are processed. This is carried out twice a year. The Service standard is for material from courier boxes to be checked in within two hours of arrival.
2. ICL Turn Around Times Survey – surveys identify the turnaround times for randomly selected Inter-Campus loan materials and this is carried out bi-monthly. Service standard for ICL turn around times is to be completed within three days of leaving the home campus, and two items per campus are randomly selected from the list.
3. Loan Check-In Survey – surveys measure the time taken for items placed in the return bins to be checked in and available on the shelves in the library. This is carried out on the first Wednesday of each month except for December, January and February. Team Leaders randomly select six items from the return bins over the day and the Service standard for Loan Check-In Survey is that all returned material is checked in within one hour of return and all reserve material is checked in within fifteen minutes of return.

4. Random Double Check-In Survey – identifies the number of errors that occur when items are incorrectly checked in. This is carried out monthly. Random Double Check-In Survey Service standard has an excepted error rate of 0.5 per cent or lower, and the Team Leader randomly selects six trolleys of checked-in material over the period of a week.

5. Shelving Accuracy Check Survey – identifies that books are being shelved correctly and is carried out twice a semester. Ten items are randomly selected from the one trolley, so a total of fifty items is done over the week. The Service standard is to have a shelving error rate maintained of less than six per cent.

6. Shelving Turnaround Times – measures the time taken for items to be checked-in and shelved. This is carried out twice a semester on a Wednesday. A Team Leader places a survey form on trolleys with the date and time recorded. The Service standard for the Shelving Turnaround Times Survey is to have all material shelved within twenty-four hours.

All the statistics are recorded and can be accessed by all library staff and Team Leaders so they know where they need to improve and which ones they will concentrate on first (Zielinska pers.com. 2010).

At Griffith, staff involvement is also encouraged in a Rewards and Recognition Scheme. Nominations can be given for colleagues who have achieved beyond expectations in four of the Value awards – People, Leadership, Learning and Innovation. Staff can also nominate for a Team Work Award. A Director’s Choice Award is usually given to the quiet achiever. All awards are presented at an annual event with each winner receiving a certificate and voucher to the value of $500. This encourages staff to become more involved in the workplace by providing goals for improvement and encouraging recognition of their own and their colleagues’ achievements (Cooper pers.com. 2010). In contrast, The University of Melbourne had no Rewards and Recognition Scheme for library staff until 2010. At this time, the library decided to set up Library of Excellence Awards so that staff, students and academic staff could vote for library personnel they felt had done an excellent job. These awards were handed out at an end of year function with all nominees receiving a certificate and the winners receiving a prize and certificate.

10. REPORTING BACK

The requirement of keeping a reflective diary was a useful way to record our thoughts and observations. This was valuable for providing details that could be used in our PowerPoint presentations that were given to colleagues after the exchange. This meant that the knowledge gained during the exchange was shared with the wider library community and may encourage other library staff to participate in any future exchange programs.

11. CONCLUSION
Academic libraries are in a state of transition, responding to changing social attitudes that require new services and more agreeable surroundings (Dewe 2009). The Baillieu Library is currently undergoing refurbishment and it is probable that the Gold Coast Library will also make changes in the future. It will be exciting to see these changes and to determine the contribution that this exchange may have made.

Participation in this exchange has been a most rewarding experience, both personally and professionally. It has provided an opportunity to gain knowledge of the way in which another academic library functions and to observe the way libraries cope with their particular requirements. Meeting with other library staff in this way has the potential to make inter-library consultation and the exchange of ideas easier. If more exchange programs could be established between libraries, this would give other library staff the opportunity to gain similarly valuable experience.

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