

Cybrary Skills in the Tertiary Environment: Inservice Education for librarians from developing countries

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Abstract

This paper explains the *Cybrary Skills in the Tertiary Environment* programme offered at the University of Queensland Library to librarians from tertiary institutions in developing countries. Under the programme, librarians from several countries have worked and studied at UQ Library, in groups or in individual placements, for varying periods of time. The paper describes the generic programme, and looks at critical success factors.

Introduction: Continuing professional education

Professional people are in general aware of the need to engage in continuing education. Across the disciplines, practitioners, educators and professional associations have encouraged and facilitated a range of professional development activities. Government agencies have also taken an interest, establishing or endorsing competency standards which practitioners must maintain to continue practice in a profession, and which require ongoing education/training activities.

On an international level, IACET (International Association for Continuing Education and Training), founded in 1968, is one recognized organization for standards and certification for continuing education and training, regardless of discipline. IACET states as its mission: "To promote and enhance quality continuing education and training through research, education, standard setting and certification." (IACET, 2001) It has developed the Continuing Education Unit (CEU) as the standard unit of measure quantifying continuing education and training activities, and an Authorized Provider program for organizations which are continuing education providers and commit to adhering to the criteria for the CEU.

Continuing Education in the Library and Information Profession

The Library and Information profession, no less than any other, has recognised the importance of ongoing professional education. National and professional associations work to encourage and regulate continuing education, often including it in Codes of Ethics or Professional Conduct. The Library Association (UK) for example, states in its "Code of Professional Conduct" that

Members must be competent in their professional activities including the requirement

- (i) to keep abreast of developments in librarianship in those branches of professional practice in which qualifications and experience entitle them to engage
- (ii) in respect of those members of the Association responsible for supervising the training and duties of another librarian, to ensure that

those whom they supervise are trained to carry out their duties in a competent manner.
(The Library Association, 2001)

The Australian Library and Information Association has produced a policy statement on Continuing Professional Development, which states that

The dynamic environment of the library and information sector dictates the need for library and information professionals to remain flexible and adaptable to change. To meet this need, they have a responsibility to demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning by ensuring that their knowledge, competencies and skills meet the needs of their employers and the clients of the services which they offer. Similarly, employers have a responsibility to provide opportunities for library and information professionals to keep their skills, knowledge and competencies up-to-date.
(ALIA Board of Education, 2000)

In Australia, CREATE Australia is the national Industry Training Advisory Body (ITAB) for cultural industries. It has developed the National Training Package for libraries and museums, endorsed by the Australian National Training Authority in 1999. At the same time, the Australian Library and Information Association's *Strategy for the recognition of competence in the library industry* is designed to provide a national process and guidelines for recognising the current knowledge and skills of people working in, or proposing to work in the library industry. ALIA's Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme is designed to provide strategies for members to plan and undertake CPD, and to formally recognise members' participation in professional development by a national certification scheme. ALIA also undertakes to facilitate forums where knowledge can be created, shared and disseminated and in this way collaboratively contributes to the professional development of its members.

In the North American context, Duncan Smith, in an article entitled "What is the shelf life of the MLS?" comments that "our profession's continuing education system (is) largely informal and unstructured", (Smith, 2000) despite the efforts of such industry luminaries as Dr Elizabeth Stone. As early as 1974, Stone published research demonstrating that "the profession needs a continuing education program that provides relevant content of high quality that address the actual needs of practicing librarians." (Stone, 1974) Necessary also, is continuity in offerings, rather than an occasional workshop or staff development day. Stone envisaged a Center for Continuing Education housed at the ALA, with a staff responsible for coordinating the profession's efforts in the area. While still no such center exists, the ALA does host a round table devoted to continuing education – the Continuing Library Education Network and Exchange Round Table (CLENE), (<http://www.ala.org/alaorg/rtables/clene>), which publishes a newsletter, conducts conference programs, publishes documents and manuals on the topic, and participates in gatherings like the Congress on Professional Education.

Professional Development and continuing education activities are also sponsored at other levels within the profession. Many libraries have their own programs for their

staff, which are often coordinated by a full time Staff Training and Development officer. Library Consortia also have a focus on ongoing professional development. And, not least of all, Library Schools often offer continuing education programs/courses. A survey of twenty universities and colleges in the US which were identified by U.S. News and World Report as having “the best” library/information science programs, showed that thirteen of the twenty also offer continuing education programs. (Syracuse University School of Information Studies, 2000)

However, while it is apparent that the library and information profession is taking very seriously the need to engage in continuing professional education, there is still an overall problem. And again, Duncan Smith points to it.

This wide array of providers has several implications for our profession’s continuing education continuum. Primarily, we cannot depend on any one institution. No one has a monopoly on the provision of continuing library education, which suggest that no provider has it as a primary job. Continuing education for all of the institutions is at best a secondary mission or objective. As a result, this cornucopia of providers does not meet all of the profession’s continuing education needs. The providers of continuing education and their leadership, and not the librarians, determine which needs to meet, how and when to meet those needs, and which needs not to meet. (Smith, 2000)

Smith’s claim is that the profession, in effect, “lacks a cadre knowledgeable in the components of continuing education and the development and implementation of these programs, and we have little evidence to indicate the wide spread use of transfer of training techniques”. (Smith, 2000) He goes on to cite a case study on training for reference accuracy in Maryland, the results of which indicated that activities which supported effective implementation of continuing education were

- a training program or event that provided sufficient time for participants to learn and practice behaviours/skills,
- peer coaching several times a week subsequently for at least one month after the training, and
- specific strategies for maintaining the new skills/behaviours, such as a local policy requiring their use.

A combination of these three factors has a significant impact on the continuing use of the learned behaviours/skills.

Continuing Professional Education for Librarians in Developing Countries

It is some of the unmet needs of professional librarians in developing countries in the Asia Pacific region for continuing education that we have become aware of at the University of Queensland Library, and are working to meet through the programme that we name generically *Cybrary Skills in the Tertiary Environment*. The need is that which is experienced by library professionals in developing countries who are confronted with the imperative to “implement the electronic library.”

Edward Lim, in an article published in the journal *Asian Libraries*, points out that many developing countries have strategies to improve their information technology

and telecommunications infrastructure, with the aim of accelerating national participation in, and benefit from, the global information economy. (Lim, 1999) It is Lim's contention, however, that "perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on infrastructure development, and not enough on human resource development" in this context. Competent information professionals are key to the effective implementation and uptake of the emerging information technologies, and therefore training of information professionals is critical. There are, however, "many obstacles" to the adequate training of library and information professionals for the information society.

The first obstacle relates to the lack of competency of many library school lecturers, especially in developing countries, in using computers and other IT technologies. A second problem is related to the fact that few library schools have attempted to incorporate the developments of the Internet and other communications technologies in an integrated way in their curricula. Where computing topics have been introduced, they have tended to be treated as separate modules or subjects, usually as electives. The emergence of the Internet and the concept of the virtual library provide the opportunity for library and information schools to restructure their curricula around the model of the virtual library. (Lim, 1999)

Lim goes on to discuss a revised curriculum for library schools in developing countries, "in which the issues associated with the development [of a virtual library] and management in a pervasive networked environment are explored." Topics explored should include:

- Information management and organization – covering building subject or information gateways, extending the library catalogue, storage and retrieval of full-text and multi-media document, intelligent agents and access architectures, metadata etc.
- Information resources and access infrastructure – electronic reserve, electronic journals, networked databases, ..document delivery services, preprint servers.
- Communication with and training of users – including mediated services, computer-mediated instruction and communication technologies (e.g. email, listservers, Internet chat relay, bulletin boards, computer conferencing, MOOs)
- Preservation and archiving – dealing principally with the issues and problems relating to long-term access of digital records, and some of the international initiatives in this area.

Such changes in the curricula of Library Schools will eventually result in the production of information professionals with appropriate skills for the 21st century library environment. Obviously, however, this will take time.

In the mean time, there are many practising librarians in developing countries who are currently faced with implementation responsibilities which require the skills set listed by Lim, but for which their training as librarians, undertaken perhaps decades ago, could in no way have prepared them. Neither have they had the opportunity to participate in relevant continuing education programmes over the years of their

professional practice. The expectations placed on them are high, and their need to acquire the necessary “know how” is immediate.

Courses being taught in many library schools of developed countries as continuing education units for practitioners are usually not appropriate for the needs of this group of professionals. While valuable in themselves, they are often discrete offerings, lacking any coordinating principle, and are really geared to the professional in the sophisticated library settings of the developed nations, who can pick and choose from amongst the available courses the one that meets a particular current need. They are not what is needed by the librarian in the developing country who seeks to tap into a source of skills development which will enable him to plan, implement and improve the services/facilities in his own situation.

One possible solution is for these professionals to spend time in libraries in developed countries, where they can engage in update courses, undertake targeted work experience placements, “shadow” library staff who are practitioners of the skills they need to acquire, participate in management strategy meetings, observe and teach information skills tutorials for users, - in short, observe, learn about, and practice any or all of the skills they need to acquire, in the environment of a fully functioning library/information resource centre. For operational libraries to participate in this way in the overall education of information professionals is to extend to our own professions’ development the type of cooperation that has long been a principle of librarianship. It is to remember and enact the fact that we are all partners in educating ourselves and our colleagues.

Training for International Librarians

A search of the library literature did not reveal a large number of institutions offering this type of training opportunity. One notable provider is the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs at the University of Illinois Library at Urbana-Champaign.(<http://gateway.library.uiuc.edu/mortenson>) Robert Wedgeworth, the Librarian at University of Illinois, argues that the training of librarians from all over the world is imperative for the achievement of a globally connected and Internet-based library system which transcends the boundaries of geography, culture and language. (Wedgeworth, 1998) The Mortenson Center, since its inception in 1988, has trained more than 300 librarians from more than 60 countries. “Under the leadership of Professor Marianna Tax Choldin, its director, the centre provides opportunities for librarians and those engaged in library- related activities to come to the university for a short or extended period of training that emphasizes modern tools and techniques of librarianship with special attention to new technologies. A major focus of the program is to provide training skills so that participants can share their expertise with colleagues and library users when they return home.” (Wedgeworth, 1998)

Another North American library offering training for international librarians is Colombia College in Vancouver, British Columbia. Its internship program is described by Yvonne de Souza in an article in *College and Research Libraries News*. (de Souza, 2000)

In Europe, the Flemish Interuniversity Council and the Belgian Government combine to sponsor STIMULATE – Scientific and Technological Information Management in Universities and Libraries: an Active Training Environment.

(<http://www.vub.ac.be/BIBLIO/itp/stimulate-announcement.htm>)

This three month course is aimed at academic professionals working in universities, and seeks to provide participants with a clearer view on the importance of information in general, to guide them in retrieving information, and to teach them to organise and manage their institutional, regional or national information resources.

In all probability, there are more institutions than these offering this type of training to international librarians. We are doing it at the University of Queensland, and a search of the literature does not reveal this.

Training for International Librarians at University of Queensland Library

At the 2nd Congress on Professional Education conducted by the American Library Association, the trends in continuing education and lifelong learning which were explored included

- competency and high performance,
- new economic models and partnerships,
- changes and expansion in delivery formats, and
- commitment to continuing professional development.

The new economic models and partnerships are described thus:

Traditionally, continuing education and professional development have been financed by the participants who pay fees and receive education and training in exchange. Participants select from an array of offerings. Programming success is often indicated by the number of attendees and the financial payoff to the provider. New economic models may be emerging in which the audience is selected first and the educational offerings are designed to meet that audience need.

Partnerships in which two or more organizations join together in a supplier/consumer relationship are beginning to emerge, as well as collaborations among providers and delivery channels. In still other instances, products and services purchased by organizations may have a training component built into the contract. (American Library Association, 2000)

Our activities at The University of Queensland fit with this new economic model. While we have developed a course structure, the modular *Cybrary Skills in the Tertiary Environment* , and participants can select from the modules or undertake the whole course, we also place emphasis on customising the training of each individual or group, so that a match is achieved between what they need to learn and what they actually undertake during the training period or internship. We also have situations where the professional training is one element of a wider collaboration between two universities.

The collaborative arrangements between the University of Queensland and the University of Danang in Vietnam, for example, included English language training, a

Doctoral development programme, and library activities. These were the selection, acquisition and cataloguing of book and non-book materials in English, the training of eight staff members from the University of Danang at the University of Queensland (four academics and four library staff members), and a visit to Danang Information Resources Centre by two UQ Library staff for further training, as well as the provision of a portfolio of information on possible appropriate print and non-print journal acquisitions for the Information Resources Centre. All of these collaborative activities were funded by a North American philanthropic organization.

In other cases, our clients have been self-selecting. We have received unsolicited contacts from international librarians who have explored the UQ Library website, which we badge as the Cybrary (<http://www.cybrary.uq.edu.au>) and sought to spend time with us. This has led to the customising of courses and activities to meet the specific needs of the client in question. While one library might send one person to work for two weeks learning skills for a particular application, another institution might send a group of four or more to undertake the four modules of our generic training programme. While a level of expertise in English is required, some groups also elect to preface their cybrary skills training with an English language intensive, delivered by the University's Institute for Continuing and TESOL Education.

Training activities can also be conducted as part of a wider consultancy with a client library. Consultation and recommendations are most frequently sought in the area of managing the transition to a hybrid library environment, where access to both print-on-paper resources and words-on-the-web resources is to be managed via a seamless interface on the library's website. Such consultations can be followed by the placement for training of staff of the client library for periods of up to three months during which they learn and practice the necessary skills, and also develop under supervision tangible products to take home – the design for the web page, an outline collection development policy, a virtual reference collection focussed on the discipline of the client library, class outlines for user skills tutorials, to name but a few.

Train the trainer courses are an important element in the UQ programme, so that participants gain confidence in their ability to pass on to their colleagues at home the skills they have acquired during their visit.

One of the most important aspects of the visiting librarians' experience at the University of Queensland Library is the immersion in the culture and climate of the Cybrary, a culture which reflects the educational ideology of the whole University. The Library reflects the University's educational framework, which includes the skills of information literacy and management among the defined Graduate Attributes. It is tuned to the requirements of a student-focussed and resource-based teaching and learning methodology, and is planned, in both its physical places and cyber spaces, to facilitate and enhance the students' learning and research experiences. The students use the library, its services and resources, in a range of ways, individually, in groups, or in classes in fully equipped training rooms. This is a very different model of the functioning tertiary library from the one familiar to some of our visitors – often one which features closed access collections, multiple copies of textbooks, and students seated in rows facing the same direction, studying in silence. Such a library also reflects the teaching method of its parent institution, a method which relies more

directly on the teacher as imparter and the student as recipient of subject content, and the lecture as the vehicle of delivery. What the visiting librarian often comes to realise is that the development and promotion of the type of information resource centre he is seeing at the University of Queensland actually implies a significant shift in educational ideology in his own institution – a not insignificant requirement. Lecturers are often locked into the same type of teaching methods as they studied under themselves, perhaps decades earlier. However, the transition to more flexible teaching and learning styles is essential if institutions are to exploit the possibilities offered by the new technologies, as well as grasp the opportunity to extend the availability of education by implementing distance learning modes.

Cybrary Skills in the Tertiary Environment – the generic programme

The generic Cybrary Skills in the Tertiary Environment programme consists of four self-contained modules. Visiting librarians may take one or more of the modules, as part of a training period designed for them after consultation. The training will include, as well as the taught units of the chosen module, hands on practical experience gained in partnership with an experienced professional librarian. Visits to the various discipline-based libraries which comprise The University of Queensland Library system give the participants the opportunity to observe the uses of information technology and the provision of modern library services in a number of library environments. The range of disciplines covered by the University and its Library means that visitors can be partnered with a librarian who is knowledgeable in the visitor's subject area.

The modules of the generic course, and their component parts, are:

Module 1: Effective collection management

- Collection development policy and practices
- Selecting and acquiring information resources
- Integrated library systems
- Document delivery services

Module 2: From workstation to Cybrary: using technology in libraries

- Workstation applications and operating systems: making them work for you
- Networked resources, service and infrastructure
- Accessing resources via the Cybrary

Module 3: Meeting the needs of library users

- Library users, their information needs and the services available
- Marketing library services
- Information skills for library users

Module 4: Managing the modern library.

- Strategic and operational planning
- Budget development and financial planning
- Staff resources
- Project management

- Library building design
- Managing the information technology

In addition to these modules, the Library can offer participants courses from the IT Training series that all staff of the UQ Library itself must undertake. Work placements in subject libraries (including reference work, subject liaison with teaching faculties, and collection development), and work placements in functional sections (Information Access and Delivery, Library Technology Service, and Library Corporate Services) are scheduled for participants. Observation and participation in services such as the AskIT Computing Help and Training service, and Ask A Cybrarian virtual reference desk are also part of the experience. Participants who are or will be library managers have the opportunity, in “shadowing” situations, to observe strategic planning in specific areas through such committees as the Teaching and Learning Advisory Group, the Web Advisory Group, and the Collection Development Advisory Group, as well as various levels of management meetings.

International training – critical success factors

Experience with international visitors at UQ Library supports the points made by Duncan Smith referred to above. For the training experience to be effective, enough time must be allowed for participants to learn and practice the range of skills and behaviours they seek. Follow up coaching – even via email – subsequent to the training is important. And ideally, the trainees should be going home to a situation where they will have the opportunity to implement what they have learned reasonably quickly.

It is also critical that participants have themselves articulated their goals in the training, and have communicated these goals to the training staff and supervising librarians at UQ. We seek to obtain as full an understanding of the home library circumstances as possible, and to gear activities to the production of experiences and materials which will be useful in the development schema for the home library – the collection policy document, the code for the home page on the website, supervised practice teaching information skills classes.

We also ask participants to send a *resume* which includes a description of their work experience, and details their current role in the home library and the role to which they will be returning after the training. It is important information for us in our preparations to know what base of qualification and experience we are building on. We require some proficiency in English language, and are most happy if participants preface their library training with an English language intensive at the University.

Participants in training at UQ Library have found themselves very busy. Their days are full, and they have plenty of reading to do at night if they wish. Full course notes are issued, and the visitors have access to the full range of instructional and promotional brochures and handouts published by the Library. Each group is given a CD with all the course notes, power point presentations, html files they have developed, and information skills class outlines they have worked on. They are also accommodated in their own space with workstations, and all have taken the opportunity to keep in daily email contact with home.

I think it is true to say that all participants have enjoyed their time at The University of Queensland. They have also enjoyed the programme of cultural activities, and their accommodation in homestay placements means they are immersed in the lifestyle of South East Queensland. The staff of the UQ Library likewise enjoy having these visitors in our midst. As professionals, they welcome the opportunity to share their expertise and experience, and they also enjoy greatly the benefits of getting to know colleagues from our neighbouring South East Asian countries.

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