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The Pleasure and the Pain of Donations

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Abstract:

Deakin University is only 25 years old but already has a library collection of over 1 million volumes thanks, in part, to judicious seeking and acceptance of donations. This paper provides a case study of how the University has been able to quickly establish teaching and research level collections for new disciplines as well as build breadth and depth in areas already covered by the collection. Donations of formed collections, in particular, have enabled the University to build a research reputation in a number of specialist areas and to make important links with its local communities. The benefits of donations are highlighted, as are the problems that come with being offered gifts of information resources.

Introduction

Established in 1974, Deakin University is one of the new generation of Australian universities. It maintains the traditional values of excellence in teaching and research, and also challenges conventional practices by creating new ways of developing and delivering courses.

Deakin University is a multi-campus institution with four main campuses, one in the Victorian state capital, Melbourne; two in Geelong, which is the second largest city in the State and 75 kilometres from Melbourne; and another in the regional city of Warrnambool, a further 200 kilometres away. Currently it has about 77,000 students studying on the various campuses, in the workplace, at home or overseas. More than 31,000 students are enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and over 14,000 students study externally. There are over 3,000 international students studying Deakin courses in Australia and throughout the

world. In both its teaching and research the University has forged particularly strong links with business, industry and the professions and a further 45,000 students from corporate customers are enrolled in customised courses through the University's private arm, DeakinPrime.

A number of Deakin's courses are offered in each city, thus requiring the duplication of core information resources at each campus library, as it is not feasible for students to travel between campuses for their information needs. While the advent of electronic information resources has reduced the need to duplicate physical information resources at each campus, not all information is available in digital form.

As a young university, being only 25 years old, Deakin has had to develop distinctiveness in its teaching and research, and to build breadth and depth in its library collections so as to support the teaching and research programs, and also to attract high calibre academic staff. It doesn't have the benefactors, alumni or collections of the large metropolitan universities that were established in the 1800s or early 1900s. This paper outlines how donations of library resources have enabled Deakin's Library to become an excellent resource for the staff and students of the University, and for the scholars who use its unique collections.

The Role of Donations in Collection Development

The following case studies will outline how the University Library's collection has been enriched by donations of individual and formed collections.

Parliamentary Library of Victoria

Since 1994, Deakin University Library has been the beneficiary of donations from the Parliamentary Library of Victoria, which has become our most significant and largest donor. The Parliamentary Library has chronic space problems and has to make regular withdrawals from its collection. The original donation was a large law collection to help the University start its fledgling legal collection when Law was introduced into the curriculum in that year. Since then the University has received regular donations of material that the Parliamentary Library no longer requires. These donations often include rare and valuable material.

In 2000, the Parliamentary Library of Victoria donated a large collection of early Australian pamphlets. The donation consisted of over 700 titles predominantly from the 19th and early 20th century. The collection contains many rare titles, amongst them Caroline Chisholm's 1842 publication, 'Female immigration considered in a brief account of the Sydney Immigrant's Home'.

To commemorate the significant role of Australia's 2nd, 5th and 7th Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, after whom the University is named, the University is raising funds to create the Alfred Deakin Prime Ministerial Library (ADPML). Alfred Deakin was a great fan and user of the resources of what is now the Victorian Parliamentary Library as he was first a politician in the Victorian Colonial Parliament. After Federation in 1901, the new Australian Parliament sat in the Victorian Parliament House, so Alfred Deakin maintained his connection to this library collection. As part of the Alfred Deakin Prime Ministerial Library, it is proposed to re-create Deakin's personal library. Being aware of this initiative, the Victorian Parliamentary Librarian has been automatically send the University any items that are weeded from the parliamentary collection at the time Deakin was a politician, thus providing a wonderful contribution to this historical collection that is under development. The value of these donations is difficult to make, but, because of the historical nature of the material, these items are unlikely to be found elsewhere. Thus, the benefit of these donations is enormous in both a financial and cultural perspective.

The Deakin Family

In addition to the many hundreds of items donated by the Victorian Parliamentary Library for the period 1860 to 1920, to be used in the historical re-creation of the library of published material that so influenced Alfred Deakin during his life, donations of books that Alfred Deakin owned have been made by members of his family. These extremely generous donations will add great value to the Alfred Deakin Prime Ministerial Library. Through the preservation services of the University Library, these items will be well cared for, for the benefit of the nation. These items in the private domain are not likely to become available on the second hand or antiquarian book market, and further donations are likely when the ADPML opens.

Louis Goldberg History of Accounting Collection

Before his death in October 1997, Professor Louis Goldberg arranged for his substantial collection of works on accounting to be placed in the public domain at Deakin University. As a dedicated collection, the "Louis Goldberg Accounting Collection" is prominent among the special collections located at the University's Geelong Waterfront campus. This collection is one of the best of its genre, containing a substantial number of very rare items not available elsewhere in the Southern Hemisphere. The Library and the School of Accounting and Finance were delighted that Louis Goldberg honoured Deakin with this bequest. Since this collection has been catalogued, and selected items made available on the Internet, the University has hosted a number of significant professional events, such as hosting a visit of delegates from the World Congress of Accounting Historians. In addition, the collection is used as a research resource within the School, attracting international scholars who want to use the resources.

Funding of A\$20,000 was received from the School of Accounting and Finance (A\$10,000) and the Society of Certified Practising Accountants (A\$10,000) to catalogue and process the collection. This financial commitment from the School and the Society has forged closer ties between the University and the profession, based on the mutual interest in this historical accounting collection.

Donations from Corporate Closures

1998 was a big year for donations at Deakin University Library. The Library's annual report records the value of donations received in that year as A\$10,113,422.¹ In the corresponding period, the Library spent only A\$4,238,963 on acquisitions.

Telstra is Australia's national telecommunications carrier. As a result of the centralisation of Telstra's Research Centres in 1998, Deakin University Library received approximately 700 journal titles covering the disciplines of environmental science, chemistry, management, mathematics, physics, computing, and metallurgy. These journals greatly increased the breadth and depth and value of the Library's science and technology collection. This collection was valued at over A\$1.5 million.

Again in 1998, BHP, a huge Australian mining and manufacturing corporation closed down its research library in Melbourne. As a consequence Deakin University received a collection of thousands of issues of metallurgy and material science journal titles, which continue to prove valuable to the School of Engineering research staff.

Geelong Regional Commission

The donations from the Geelong Region Commission commenced in 1978 with deposit copies of their reports. When the Victorian Government closed the Commission, the

University also received significant collections from Geelong Region Commission offices (maps, additional reports, library contents).

In 2000, Deakin University Library also received the first part of a collection of material on the Geelong Regional Commission and Geelong Regional Planning Authority. Agenda papers collected by Colin Atkins during his time as Director of both organisations were added to the collection, with working papers, ministerial briefings, and speeches and so on being added in 2001–2002.

These collections form an important resource in building a collection on the history of one of the University's regional communities. The resources are of benefit to students and researchers of the University, as well as to members of the community.

Cultural Gifts Program (formerly Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme)

Deakin University has benefited significantly from an Australian Government initiative, the Cultural Gifts Program. Significant collections were donated to the University under this program.

Dr Joyce Richardson donated her research collection on brachiopoda to the Library under the Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme. This significant collection comprises books, journals, and scientific papers dating from 1852 to 1996. Some of this material was produced for exchange among researchers, and did not go on to the commercial market, or was produced only in limited numbers. Hence, many of the items are impossible to purchase.

In 1998, Dr Joyce Richardson donated another valuable collection to the Library. The collection contains books and reprints on anthropology, ethnology, and marine biology published between 1847 and 1893. Much of the material is extremely rare including a set of Challenger papers that compliment the Library's Challenger Report holdings.

Major Law Collections

As already mentioned, the Law discipline was added to the University's curricula in 1994. In addition to the donations from the Victorian Parliamentary Library, the University actively solicited donations from retiring lawyers, barristers and judges so as to be able to provide core print resources at its Melbourne, Geelong and Warrnambool campuses. Many eminent jurists donated collections including Victorian Law Reports, Weekly Law Reports, the Australian Law Journal, and English Law Reports.

In addition to core teaching resources, the Library has been developing specialist research collections in Law. The Geelong Lawyers' collection, comprising interviews, biographies, photographs, certificates and other documents relating to the Geelong legal profession from 1840 to the present was donated by retired Geelong lawyer, Vivian Hill. The collection is housed in the Geelong Waterfront Special Collection, and a selection of material has been digitised and is available via the Geelong Lawyers' Collection website. The collection is intended to preserve the history of the legal profession in Geelong and to stimulate research and publication. This collection is important because it provides links with the community and the cultural heritage of the region as well as adding research value to the University

Children's Literature

The Australian Schools Textbook Collection

This collection comprises textbooks used in Australian primary and secondary schools wherever published. Also included is school curricula, [student workbooks](#), exam / test papers,

and related material such as teacher's classroom manuals. A particular strength of the collection is the large number of nineteenth century Australian publications it contains. The collection has been formed over the last 20 years, primarily on the basis of donations. It is the largest of its type in Australia, comprising over 15,000 titles, and is considered to be of national significance.

Children's Literature Research Collection

This collection started in 1985 with a donation of 1,500 children's books from Mrs Hilary Stott. Since then the collection has grown by purchase and donation. The collection consists mainly of 19th and early 20th century children's books including Australian and overseas picture books, fiction, poetry and folktales. The collection is particularly strong in girls' and boys' adventure albums and material with an Empire theme. The Children's Literature Research Collection provides evidence of what children were reading at home. It is complemented by the Australian Schools Textbook Collection, which provides evidence of what children were reading at school.

Children's Book Council of Australia - Victorian Branch Collection

The collection of the Children's Book Council of Australia - Victorian Branch complements the other two collections. It includes Australian children's books in the first edition and all the winners, commended titles and short-listed books since the inception of the Children's Book Council of Australia Awards. The collection contains over 3,000 titles and a further 50 titles or Award winners are added each year. This is a custodial collection and is held in the Special Collection at the Melbourne Campus Library.

Additional donations have been made because of the strength of the special collections in children's literature. For example, an individual donor, Mr. Joseph Elkhorne, has contributed a large children's literature and book character toy collection to complement the Book Council of Australia (Victorian Branch) collection.

All these collections are heavily used by the Faculty of Arts literature students and also by the students in the Faculty of Education, providing unique research opportunities that would not have been possible had it not been for the donations.

Custodial Collections

The prestigious Royal Society of Victoria (RSV) Collection was installed in the Special Collection at Deakin University's Melbourne Campus in 2000. The RSV material is Australia's leading natural history collection, comprising Australian and international books and journals from around the world. This collection spans over 100 years of scholarly publishing and is of inestimable value. The University Library, with financial assistance from the RSV and the University's Faculty of Science & Technology, has just completed cataloguing the collection onto the Australian national database, Kinetica, thus making it accessible to researchers anywhere in the world. (Indeed, all the Library's collections are catalogued this way.) RSV members are welcome to use the collection at the University. A prestigious launch of the RSV Collection is planned for mid 2003, demonstrating the importance of such collections to the reputation of the University.

The Pleasure of Donations

The case studies highlight the significant role that donations can play in the creation of library collections. Although the focus has been on donations of formed collections, donations of individual items can be of enormous value. Friends of Libraries often make donations of rare or expensive items that would otherwise not be purchased from a library's acquisitions budget.

Donations enable the building of depth in existing collections, thus enhancing value as a research resource. Donations can also be used to fill gaps in existing collections or used to provide duplication of core resources if more than one collection must be maintained, as in a multi-site organisation. When Deakin University merged with Victoria College and the Warrnambool College of Advanced Education, donations were used to build research level collections in what were predominately undergraduate teaching collections at these campuses.

Donations can also assist in quickly developing new collections to support new teaching disciplines. Deakin University used donations to build its Law and Nursing collections in a very short period of time, and in multiple locations.

Donations can also be used to build uniqueness in a library's resources, attracting further donations, scholars and researchers. In a university, this can mean significantly adding to the research profile and status.

Significant collections, which have strengthened Deakin University Library, have been located on the Duplicate lists of journals circulated amongst Australian libraries. The University has acquired particularly valuable runs from Sydney, Melbourne, and Geelong hospitals, which have significantly strengthened and deepened our collection of nursing and related disciplines.

Many Australian libraries rejected donations that Deakin accepted. The reason given often given for rejection was lack of processing resources. However, by incorporating donations into the regular receiving workflows at Deakin, it was possible to even out some of the inevitable peaks of activity in acquisitions. It also kept staff productively employed at quiet times.

The Pain of Donations

It would be hard to argue against the value of accepting donations given the case studies that have been mentioned. However, there are problems for libraries associated with accepting donations, and it is important to recognise these before making decisions as to whether to accept or reject donations.

Space is required, not just for housing the collection once the items are catalogued and processed, but space is required to store items before processing and this can be significant if accepting donations of large, formed collections. The cost of space is not insignificant.

The cost of staff to process donated items must be factored into the decision making process. Individual donations do not add significantly to the workload of staff, however, processing a formed collection of many thousands of titles is a burden that must be factored into workload planning. Also, if the donations are of historical material, the cost of original cataloguing must be factored in as copy cataloguing records are unlikely to be available.

Some of my staff complain about the statistical skewing of the mean age of the library collection with lots of aged items added. If "new book" displays contain many donated items, some library users may be wondering what is happening to the library's acquisitions policy, as they like to see new books on the shelves, not old ones.

A particularly important factor to consider when offered donations is whether there are conditions attached. For instance, donations accepted under the Government's Cultural Gifts Program, whereby the donor receives a tax benefit, require the accepting institution to keep the collection in perpetuity. This may not always be appropriate, especially if the collection is large (occupying lots of space) and the discipline covered by the donation is no longer

relevant to the host library. Always try to accept donations without strings attached. Try to reserve the right to refuse, dispose of, process and locate the donations as it suits the library.

Deakin University has experienced problems of insect infestation and mould because of the poor physical state of some donated items affecting other parts of the collection. Check out the items before accepting them and, if necessary, arrange for treatment before relocating the donations to the library.

It is better to accept a formed collection, without conditions attached, and remove it from the donor and then weed the collection afterwards. In the case of individual donors, they are often offering the donation at a stage of transition in their lives, and the accepting library should be aware of this and make the process as stress free as possible.

Custodial collections require contracts and legal agreements to safeguard both parties. These can be difficult to negotiate and complex to manage. However, the benefits should outweigh the disadvantages.

The Financial Value

There is debate in the literature as to whether cultural collections, as found in libraries, galleries and museums, should be valued.² Whether it is a good idea or not, the accounting rules in Victoria require the University to value its library collections.

In 1997, the total value of donations was A\$3,766,900, not far short of the amount spent on purchasing new items for the collection during that year. The donations included formed collections worth A\$371,600 added to the Special Collection, A\$595,800 to the book collection, A\$24,600 to Special Collection periodicals, and A\$2,774,900 to periodicals.

In 1998, the value of donations received was \$10,113,422, including the major Telstra and BHP collections.

In 1999, the value was A\$4,150,000; in 2000 - A\$4,230,000; in 2001 - A\$3,700,000; in 2002, the value was A\$2,600,000.

Clearly, Deakin University has benefited from donations. These have enhanced the research value of the library collections and have also contributed to creating substantial undergraduate teaching collections, as evidenced in the creation of the law and nursing collections. The University's collections are definitely richer for having an acquisitions policy on Donations.

There is more pleasure than pain!

References

¹ Deakin University Library. 1998 Annual Report, p. 6-7

² G.D. Carnegie and P.W. Wolnizer, Valuation of cultural and heritage collections for financial reporting purposes – report prepared for the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, Victoria, Deakin University, 1994.