

The ALIA Study Grant Award... What it means to me

Vicki Williamson finds it the most important, helpful and rewarding event of her career

Applications for the 1995 Study Grant Award have to reach ALIA National Office by 1 September (see announcement in inCite 2, p11). But what do these awards actually mean to those who receive them? Three of the previous award winners explain that they have no doubt of their lasting benefits.

It's just two years since my appointment as University Librarian at the Curtin University of Technology in Perth, Western Australia. I've discovered in that time that a University Librarian gets asked all sorts of questions and invited to speak at a variety of functions—school groups, students of librarianship, local service clubs to name just a few.

On such occasions there are some common questions, for example.

Question: Why did you decide to become a librarian?

Answer: I didn't really decide, I just needed a job and the first one that came along was in a library.

Question: What's the most important thing that's happened during your career in libraries?

Answer: Winning the Study Grant Award in 1985.

Question: What helped your career progression the most?

Answer: Winning the Study Grant Award in 1985.

Question: What's your most rewarding professional experience?

Answer: Winning the Study Grant Award in 1985.

Question: What's your proudest professional achievement?

Answer: Winning the Study Grant Award in 1985.

And so it goes on.

Yes, I'm a strong supporter of the ALIA Study Grant Award because I believe I wouldn't be where I am today if it hadn't been for the professional experience gained as a result of winning the Award. The Award made a great difference to my professional career. So too, did working for the Armidale College of Advanced Education, having an excellent boss in the formative stages of my career and a supportive husband.

The Study Grant Award allowed me to experience many things that would normally not be part of the work experience of a person in their fifth year of working as a librarian. At the time I won the Award I was working in a rural community (Armidale, NSW, then population about 20 000), in a small academic library (Armidale CAE Library/Learning Resource Centre, staff of about 13 and collection about 120 000 items).

The Study Grant Award gave me an opportunity to:

- travel overseas; In part, the Study Grant Award paid for travel to the United States to visit selected universities offering academic programs in nursing educa-

tion. Up until that time I had not even travelled outside the State of New South Wales, let alone overseas.

- speak at several State, Special Interest and National Conferences, starting with the National Health Sciences Seminar in Adelaide.
- build a wonderful range of national and international contacts, some of whom became good friends;
- invite a US colleague to come to Australia and work with me at the Armidale CAE for 6 months.

Winning the Award did a lot for my confidence. It gave me an opportunity to test my professional ideas with colleagues, many of whom were more experienced than I was. It allowed me to begin to move in a different circle and to get to know some senior members of the profession.

Winning the Study Grant Award improved my job opportunities. Shortly after returning from the United States I received an offer of employment from another NSW CAE which was soon to introduce basic nursing programs. Although I did not accept that offer, I'm sure it helped the Armidale CAE to decide to reclassify my existing position!

Winning the Study Grant Award enabled me to meet Dr Donald Riggs, who was then Director of Libraries at the Arizona State University. At that time Donald and ASU libraries were heavily into strategic planning, something I had never even heard of! Strategic Planning to this day remains one of my professional interests and the key to our efforts at Curtin University of Technology.

Every year when my ALIA Membership Renewal Form comes around I think about the cost of membership versus the value and service I get as an individual member. Then I reach for my cheque book in the safe knowledge that if nothing else, ALIA at least still has the Study Grant Award. I hope the ALIA Board of Education will continue the Award and that many, many other ALIA members will have the opportunity to learn and grow, as I did, by the experience of winning the Award.

Linda Luther found that winning the ALIA study grant changed her life

In 1988 ALIA awarded me a study grant to investigate information services provided in technology parks. It gave me an opportunity to visit a number of places in the United States and England.

As well as the funds provided by ALIA, I negotiated some funding from Technology Park, Adelaide, and the South Australian Institute of Technology (as it then was). These negotiations led me to make contact with



Vicki Williamson



Linda Luther



Carla Mellor

more senior people in both organisations than would have been possible otherwise.

The grant required a schedule of visits to be established and contact made with unknown colleagues. When I later chaired the ABN Users Meeting I found I was using many of the same skills. My success in chairing the ABN meeting led to my election on Network Committee. I regard this as a significant professional opportunity.

As a result of the grant I spoke at a number of seminars in Adelaide and published a paper for ALJ. Public speaking and publication are easier to practise if you have a source of information, such as that gathered from a study tour.

Last month I visited a number of libraries in Sydney and Melbourne. I am involved in planning the Library at the new University of South Australia campus—City West. On my travels one of the librarians said, 'Linda Luther—there's a name to conjure with!' It seems I have established a name for myself in some circles. I attribute that to the professional experience gained following from my activities in 1988.

Carla Mellor gained in confidence and built on her experience

Enhanced confidence is how I would sum up what winning the 1991 ALIA study grant meant to me.

One always thinks of these awards as being won by other people; usually people from large libraries. It is quite empowering to realise that someone from a special library can achieve this. Obviously my success was

only possible because of the dedicated library staff who helped me with the detailed coordination and planning required to visit so many agricultural libraries in three countries in as short a time as possible. Additional financial help and support was provided by the South Australian Department of Primary Industries, where I worked at the time of my application.

Much of the actual knowledge I acquired is somewhat dated now (Should I ask ALIA to fund a refresher trip?). What is still relevant, however, is the experience itself. Professionally and personally it was very rewarding to discuss with so many librarians, library administrators and systems people in three different cultural settings, the services, issues and trends relevant to our common field of endeavour. The degree of success of the study grant application was a tribute to preplanning, stamina and the willingness of international colleagues to share their knowledge with me.

I do have regrets that six months after my return I left the agricultural library field. However, these are more than offset by the scope and diversity of the challenges in my current position as Manager, General Reference Library, State Library of Queensland, my MBA studies and my new Brisbane lifestyle.

The confidence to make such major changes was boosted by my experience. Consequently I would encourage all librarians, (and in particular those in special libraries, who often find unique solutions to library challenges, but do not have time to advertise the fact), to take advantage of the opportunities the ALIA study grant can enable. ■

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