

Hookers for books

Ashley Carr, education officer, Newcastle University Student Association

On Thursday 5 May this year students from the University of Newcastle took to the streets in protest against the lack of funding being invested in their library campus. The protest, however, was not your usual rally or march.

Local commuters were confronted by three students prostituting themselves in order to raise much needed money for the university's library. Dressed for the occasion, the two 'prostitutes' and one 'pimp' aimed to draw attention to the desperate situation at hand. Most people realise that university libraries all over the country are under funded and that cost-cutting is lowering the quality of the libraries, but not much is being done to remedy this. So the students took to the streets to earn some much-needed money for their library. It was a light-hearted attempt to let people know about the issues involved with recent funding cuts and what students have to do to improve their education. There was also another message inferred through the students' actions: that universities have been forced to prostitute themselves as a means to increase funding and raise capital.

Despite some claims to the contrary, the students did not actually take part in any illegal activities, and no money changed hands. Claims to the contrary were made up to heighten public awareness and encourage media involvement. And it worked. There was media coverage in the press and on the television, and a lot of people witnessed the scene as they drove by. 'It was about using signs and symbols that

everyone could identify with and applying them to the condition of libraries and universities in order to get a message across,' said one of the participants.

Library funding was the focus of the stunt because it is felt that a well-stocked library is a pillar for any university serious about learning, education and the exchange of knowledge. It is now common, with the slashing of resources and services that are not seen as capital producing or cost effective, for people to view library expenditure as a burden rather than an investment. One participant in the stunt stated that, 'if universities are serious about maintaining high levels of scholarship then libraries should be central to such a vision, and going by previous cuts to education, libraries desperately need a re-injection of funds.'

The stunt also reflected the broader issue of national funding and the fact that universities are struggling to main-

tain acceptable standards of academic excellence without the resources and funding to do so. The library is one example of what is happening to public education. The students involved proved that they would do anything — almost — to improve the condition of libraries and higher education. ■



Student protestors 'hooking' for their library...

Prize for teacher librarianship



This year's winner of the Australian Library and Information Association student award at Edith Cowan University is Kerry Deboer. Kerry received the award for achieving the highest academic results in the Graduate Diploma of Science (Teacher-Librarianship) at Edith Cowan University.

Left: Vicki Wilson presenting the award to Kerry Deboer