

Your voice

Once were librarians

I recently noted with interest a letter to the Editor of *inCite* from five colleagues from the School of Information Studies at Curtin University of Technology, Perth. The letter comments on the appointment of a new State Librarian and Chief Executive Officer of the State Library of New South Wales. This is a matter, as a citizen of New South Wales, in which I have some interest.

I was once was a librarian and I owe an enormous amount to my education in the field. I gained wide-ranging experience working in school, university and TAFE libraries as well as educating professional and para-professional library practitioners. This provided me with opportunities, skills and insights that led me to a new career beyond librarianship. I am thankful that the new areas of work that I have pursued have been open, providing me with opportunities to grow professionally – to both contribute and to benefit personally. I am pleased that I have not fallen victim to a ‘closed shop’ mentality or to narrow professional sectarianism in the places I have worked. It seems to me that if it is all right for countless others like me to move out of the information professions, then is it not impossible that others might move in. This will be beneficial provided, of course, they bring with them suitable and relevant knowledge and experience.

Such importation seems sound if one recognises that information work in our new and exciting era has expanded to be remarkably different to what it was nearly 40 years ago when I entered the field. I recall when the Library Association of Australia changed its name to Australian Library and Information Association, showing leadership with its forward-looking claim to dimensions much broader than was publicly aspired to by the profession at that time.

I note with interest that ‘information’ in several cases has replaced or is combined with ‘librarianship’ in the titles of what were once generically called ‘library schools’. Academics at the cutting edge in these evolving circumstances seem to be telling us something about the breadth of the information ‘industry’ and where they see the future. Of course, information professionals are found in large numbers in libraries where they contribute magnificently. They are also found in large numbers in many other information fields where they also manage information and other activities probably magnificently as well. I would suggest that it is more than feasible that information professionals from diverse fields can contribute significantly to the work of libraries. Indeed, I suspect that this has been happening since Sputnik and the Cold War precipitated the emergence

of ‘information science’ and the unending consequential exponential growth of information internationally.

So, taking a longer view, and casting about more recently as well, I would like to pose a few rhetorical questions in relation to the leadership and management of libraries and information institutions. Were those who were titled ‘librarians’ who led the great libraries at Alexandria and Pergamon ‘library qualified’? Although we have no evidence that they were or were not, we do know that they were invariably prominent scholars of the day in science, philosophy or literature who had knowledge of the classification of knowledge and the importance of its retention and dissemination. Is it not irrefutable that the ‘great sage’ Lao-tzu, a Confucius scholar was a remarkably successful conservator and manager of the records (probably literary and archival) of the Kingdom of Zhou? More contemporaneously, what of significant figures such as Sir Harold White, our highly respected first national librarian, Paul Leclerc, CEO of the New York Public Library, Chris Chia, former CEO of the National Library Board of Singapore, or the not too few Librarians of Congress who were not library qualified? Were not all of these information practitioners primarily required to be learned and knowledgeable people with proven capacity to lead and manage the great institutions placed in their charge?

Furthermore, in these major roles such leaders have called on, or continue to call on, countless excellent and highly professional librarians and other information professionals who work in so many major library and associated information institutions. Together with these fine professionals, these leaders deliver information for us, the people, in our work, business, research, recreational and myriad other endeavours.

So, I respectfully suggest that we are in need of some balance and perspective here, not encumbered by traditional territoriality. Our aspiration, after all, must be to see our major information institutions led by those with the most meritorious claim to do so, regardless of where they come from, in the ever-broadening information domain.

Dr John Barclay, Member, Library Council of New South Wales

A death knell for librarianship

I am an associate member of ALIA. I am a neutral member with no political affiliation with any political parties in Australia. I am very disappointed with the comments of our President, Ms Dagmar Schmidmaier, Mr John Shipp, Mr Ewan Tolhurst and Ms Jan Richards published in the September issue of *inCite*.



As we are all mortals, it is a matter of time before we will eventually fall ill. When that time arrives, I hope the attending medical doctor who attends to all of us possesses a medical degree and not ‘other qualifications’.

In the meantime, I would strongly discourage new students from taking library courses. The death knell has struck for our profession of librarianship!

Yoon Soo Ching, BA (UTS), AALIA

Rental car deals

I recently used the new Member Advantage service for car rental. The deal saved me \$80–100 over other quotes received and I was also able to get the damage liability fee reduced from \$770 to only \$110 at no extra charge. Combined with some car hire on the Gold Coast in October, I’ve saved \$194.

So I have already saved nearly 25 per cent of my ALIA membership fee. (If I keep using Member Advantage, will that mean you owe me money?!)

Trevor Wakely, Melbourne

Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.

All letters should be addressed to the *inCite* editor and may be e-mailed to incite@alia.org.au, or faxed to 02 5282 2249, or posted to: Your voice, ALIA, PO Box 6335, Kingston 2604. Please include your name and postal address with your letter or e-mail.

Letters will be accepted for publication until the 18th of the month.

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