

ALIA Top End is liberated!

Julie Adams on behalf of the ALIA Top End Education Forum Organising Committee

ALIA Top End hosted an Education Forum: Liber8on: Library Education Ready for 2008 and Onwards, in Darwin (Northern Territory) on the morning of the 18th of August.

Background

As most library workers are aware, there are significant changes in Australia's library education environment. At a local level, the Charles Darwin University has just announced its closure of the undergraduate degree course and their intention to offer an external post-graduate library course in 2007.

ALIA Top End identified the need to examine our local education and training issues and to plan for the future needs of the profession. The group decided to host an Education Forum. This decision was timely because, as you know, Education and Workforce Planning is one of ALIA's national priorities for 2007. And as ALIA plans to host a national Education Forum in 2007, the Northern Territory forum was organised to be a lead into the national forum.

Format and attendance

The forum was run along similar lines to the one in the ACT. (Information about the ACT forum is available on the ALIA website at <http://www.alia.org.au/groups/active/proactive/250/a.html#aglin2>.) It was open to all interested parties.

Based on the number of people who contacted the organising committee prior to the forum, and the number who attended on the day, it is obvious that education is a very relevant topic for all library and information sectors. The organising committee had a target of 30 participants on the day. 39 people attended, representing a cross-section of libraries and perspectives.

The evaluation forms indicate that the forum was a huge success in bringing people together to discuss education issues for our profession. This is a fantastic outcome, as the goal of the forum was to initiate dialog between stakeholders and plan for the future.

Program

The morning program began with a presentation by Gillian Hallam (ALIA's 2005 President and Associate Professor, Queensland University of Technology) on the national and international library education scene. This was extremely useful in placing our local education environment in context.

Several local speakers and two interstate education providers presented education issues from their stakeholder perspectives. These presentations provided an excellent lead in to the discussion about local issues and ideas.

Discussion and outcomes

Everyone then participated in small group discussions to prepare a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis to use as a basis for an open forum discussion.

A whole range of issues were discussed, from specific suggestions for course content to the concept of Masters being the entry level qualification for the profession. It was obvious that education issues are very important to our local community and there appeared to be a strong



Stuart Ferguson, Director of Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, and Gillian Hallam, Associate Professor, Queensland University of Technology

commitment to positively contribute to improved outcomes.

The presenters, as representatives of the various stakeholder groups, remained after lunch to participate in a planning session to start clarifying and prioritising the core issues. A brief list of outcomes from this session is given below:

- Obtain data to use in lobbying
- Create an environment that continues the education focus and dialog between stakeholders
- Create a local policy advisory group and/or education committee to follow up issues
- Investigate ideas for succession planning for educators
- Develop mentors at all levels
- Feedback issues and ideas to ALIA National Office

What next?

Regrettably time was tight, so discussion was limited. However, ALIA Top End realistically viewed the forum as a first step, a catalyst for an ongoing commitment to education. The evaluation forms supported this concept. Participants appreciated that the issues are being addressed and expressed the desire for continued dialog and focus.

ALIA Top End will follow up the planning session outcomes. A full report, which includes details of the issues discussed, will soon be available on the group's webpage.

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