

Reference services at the University of Newcastle—a tiered approach

The University of Newcastle Library has responded to a dynamic information environment with the provision of traditional and virtual reference services across three campuses on a 24x7 basis. In 1997, the Library and Information Technology Services (ITS) units were combined to offer a converged service model including the provision of library and IT support services from a single information desk. The service was further streamlined in 2003 with the opening of the Auchmuty Information Common and introduction of a three tier service model. In 2006, the Library and ITS units were diverged; however, the service principles remain the same.



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The first level of service is generally handled by a student 'Rover' who is on duty whenever the library is open. The student 'Rover' handles basic library and directional enquiries as well as IT related matters associated with printing, laptop connections and use of software applications. Second level support to clients is provided by a School Librarian who assists with general reference enquiries including research for assignments, use of databases, the catalogue, Endnote, as well as basic IT enquiries. Second and third level IT support is provided by the IT Call Centre. The third

level of library support is referral to a Faculty Librarian who provides highly specialised information and research services to support the learning, teaching and research activities of the University's communities.

Although an Information Desk service continues to operate in each of the University's libraries, many of the specialised service points have been rationalised over the last ten years. In 2003, the Law and Biomedical service points were combined to become the BLISS (Biomedical Law Information Support Service) service which is staffed by the same team of librarians to provide specialist support to Biomedical and Law staff and students. When this desk is unattended, students can seek help from the Information Desk in the Auchmuty Information Common.

Another interesting feature of the University of Newcastle Library is the provision of a 24x7 operation at each of the campus locations from February to December. A student 'Rover' is always available to provide assistance around the clock which is greatly appreciated by the clients. The Library has received several testimonials from clients about the outstanding level of service that they have received during the early hours of the morning when a lost assignment has been recovered following a computer problem. A 24-hour SMS service is also available.

A further innovation in the service model is the delivery of an electronic reference service (ASAP) which is available to students located locally as well as across 100 countries throughout the world. This service uses commercially-available software to answer reference questions via email and the web. The service is successfully provided by library staff on three campuses including assistance from the Bibliographic Services Team who also monitor and answer questions.

Approximately 20 professional library staff provide reference and research support to the University Community. There are five Faculty Librarians, 12 School Librarians and three Client Services Librarians. Over 35 student 'Rovers' are rostered to provide the 24x7 support service across three locations.

The Faculty Librarians are supported by a team of professional librarians, including School Librarians at the Callaghan Campus and Client Services Librarians at Ourimbah Campus who also provide services to TAFE staff and students. School and Client Service Librarians are responsible for a particular subject or discipline area and work closely with the Faculty Librarians to prepare and deliver information literacy programs.

The reference service at the University of Newcastle Library will continue to evolve in response to the information needs of its clients, advances in technology and availability of electronic resources. The combination of these elements ensures that their services are available on a 24x7 basis throughout the year.

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Managing online reference enquiries

Charles Sturt University (CSU) is the national university for inland Australia. A multi-campus university and one of the largest Distance Education (DE) providers in Australia, CSU has more than two thirds of its student body studying off-campus. 2007 figures show that of a total of nearly 34 000 students, more than 21 000 (about 63%) were studying by Distance Education mode. This figure includes nearly 5000 international students.

The challenge of designing and delivering an equivalent information service to this diverse range of students—Offshore, DE and Internal—has resulted in a dynamic, client-focused library service.

CSU Library traditionally received reference enquiries from students and staff via a range of means: face-to-face, by telephone, via the Library forum, and by email to generic campus email accounts or to individual staff email accounts.

While the face-to-face, telephone, and forum interaction was not seen to be a problem, CSU Library did have concerns about the disparate nature of the email service, with little consistency in how enquiries were dealt with across the division, no central repository for storing enquiries, no tool in