

# LIBRARY TECHNICIANS



set up SALT in the first place, various past Presidents/Convenors, Secretaries, Treasurers, members of committees, and Conference Committees. It was wonderful to see our honorary member, Matthew Griffiths (from NSW), who has regularly attended SALT workshops and dinners.



*Attendees at the SALT dinner*

In lieu of an after-dinner speaker, all guests were encouraged to share their experiences (especially the funny ones), people who had influenced them, and their own 'pearl of wisdom'. Recurring themes were the Murder Mystery dinners held at some of the weekend workshops, singing and dancing at various conference dinners, and some 'accidents' in lectures and workshops at TAFE. Robyn Matthews and her fellow lecturers and tutors were mentioned many times.

We also recognised 15 years of devoted service by our Treasurer, Amanda Colbert, with a speech and a gift. There were lucky chair prizes and a door prize. It all added up to a very memorable evening.

SALT is now going into 'suspended animation', to be archived until a time when it is needed and can be retrieved and reactivated. Thank you to everyone who has been a part of SALT over the past 30 years.

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## Victoria University celebrates its library technicians

To celebrate, promote, and advertise our National Day, Library and Cultural Studies enlisted the help of Gail Schmidt, Genevieve Pergl, and Helena Lozanovski, from the State Library of Victoria, Margie Anderson, the ALIA Local Liaison Officer – Victoria, and Jenny Barron and Lynette Lewis from One Umbrella, an LIS employment agency.

Margie spoke about ALIA's role in the profession, its core group of staff, the conferences it organises, its advocacy role for workers, online e-lists, and training sessions for keeping members up-to-date in their professional development. Margie encouraged everyone to join ALIA and maintain professional networks in a dynamic industry in times of change and progress.

Margie awarded the ALIA Top Student at VU to Kylie James who is working two part-time jobs – a school library and a public library. Kylie said she felt honoured and thanked ALIA for donating the award, and the staff at VU for selecting her. Kylie said that doing the technician course had been a challenge, and that she was now doing what she had dreamed about and was very happy.

Hellana Lozanovski spoke about her work as a Collection Development Officer and current position, Map Cataloguing, at the State Library. Hellana described for the students how she prepared for a job interview, what background work she had done, and the mock interview questions she developed and answered. Hellana also offered details and props from her current project.

Genevieve Pergl completed the course at VU and has been working at the State Library in different roles since 1994. Genevieve noted that her job started as a six-month contract. She is working on the digitisation project at the State Library and brought in a Video Disk from an early project to give a demonstration of how people could search for and order thousands of images from the State Library now over the internet.

Gail Schmidt gave a bit of a history, speaking about how, when she started the course, there had been no internet, electronic journals had not been invented, and all research was done manually. The VU course has changed many times to keep pace with technology and industry trends and Gail feels it will hold students in good stead for the future. She noted that ALIA, as the professional body, is a good source of information for career advice, ways of addressing professional development needs, lifestyle benefits and services, and the industrial relations arena. Gail encouraged all students to attend the Victorian ALIA Library Technicians Group activities, several of which are held each year.



*Library technicians celebrate at Victoria University*

One Umbrella's Jenny Barron and Lynette Lewis, then spoke to the students. Jenny handed out materials on how to prepare resumes. Annette went on to talk about how things change, including necessary web 2.0 skills. Jenny noted that it had been a very tight market and spoke about salaries and what students could expect in different roles. They recommended that students should go to ALIA and VALA, and engage in social networks and professional groups.

A great celebration was had by all. Thanks to the Library Studies Team: Mary Carroll, Tim Dolby, Ian Rogers, Margie Anderson, Janet Murray, Paula Jones, and Leonie McCormack.

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## Working nationally as a library technician

Have you ever wondered what it was like to work with colleagues and not see them? At the Australian Catholic University this happens every day. The university has campuses in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, and ACT. Library technicians are employed on every campus on different levels and in different positions. This is a great opportunity for staff as they can apply to transfer from campus to campus if the opportunity arises.

There are approximately 30 library technicians spread out over the six campuses. They can be employed as senior library technicians

(lending services coordinators, acquisitions officers, and interlibrary loans/document delivery officers), library technicians (acquisitions, serials, course reading, e-reserve, inter-campus loans, and online readings), and library assistants (shelvers, some basic interlibrary loans/document delivery processes, and the loans desk). A number of these staff are actively involved in ALIA activities, both national and state-based.

We hold regular committee meetings for the different divisions, but as we are so spread across the country we cannot meet face-to-face very often. In order to compensate, we hold regular meetings via teleconference, email, or videoconference. The manager who chairs the relevant committee sends out regular correspondence via email to inform the staff of important changes that affects all campuses. Following this, a video or teleconference is held to discuss the issues 'in person'.

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## The changing role of the library technician

Traditionally library technicians have been employed as experts with training in a specific technical process. These days, the library has changed and so too has the role of the library technician. But changes in the library haven't brought restrictions – just opportunities for the library technician.

With the introduction of outsourcing at Yarra Plenty Regional Library, library technicians have the opportunity to reapply their expertise in a less technical, more strategic environment. With a greater understanding and conceptual view of libraries, technicians have been provided with a platform to contribute their knowledge in a variety of areas including branch management and strategic planning. As a result, hierarchical barriers are beginning to soften, giving technicians the opportunity to pursue managerial roles and/or contribute to the strategic direction of the library service.

I have been fortunate enough to be involved in a state-wide resource sharing initiative called LibraryLink Victoria, which was introduced into Victorian public libraries in 2007.

Having completed a Diploma in LIS, my technical skills have been invaluable in the application of LibraryLink Victoria to our resource-sharing service. My position as Interlibrary Loans Coordinator has enabled me to build on my technical skills and perform a more strategic role in the planning and implementation of resource sharing both locally and statewide.

This has led to some positive personal experiences, including membership of various leadership groups and the opportunity to submit papers to relevant journals and conference programs, enhancing my interest in managerial and leadership roles. I've since become a member of the The Management Development Program recently implemented by Yarra Plenty Regional Library.

The Management Development Program has been designed to develop participants, preparing them for management roles. This is an excellent opportunity for technicians to demonstrate their leadership and technical skills in a combined role. Participants are not required to possess managerial experience and are selected on merit by their managers.

As libraries continue to evolve so too do the roles of library technicians. Expertise and knowledge nurtured through the ever changing world of libraries (or community spaces) provides the opportunity to reach the ultimate goal of providing excellent services to the most important people of all: our customers.

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## LTs – worth their weight in gold

What do currently trained library technicians have to offer? Their national training package has a 'whole of industry' focus, preparing students and trainees for work across all sectors of our industry. The required qualification, Diploma of Library/Information Services or Advanced Diploma of Library/Information Services, typically involves the equivalent of two years full-time coursework, during which students develop extensive work-ready skills in customer service, team work, web 2.0 technologies, library promotion, multimedia and web development, group training and presentation, information literacy and research, young adult and children's literature, circulation services, cataloguing and classification, acquisitions and end processing, ILL and document delivery.

The employability skills embedded in the training package ensure a strong customer service focus across all areas of training.

Current library technician graduates have skills in new technologies and information formats and can deliver responsive customer-focused service to meet heightened expectations within our user communities. The training package for Library/Information Services is constantly reviewed by industry; it reflects and supports the widespread implementation of new trends and embraces the service opportunities now possible.

Most employers are aware of the benefits of employing qualified library technicians who, as a result of their comprehensive practical coursework training, can readily apply these valuable skills. It is however worrying to hear that some library employers, when filling customer service positions (CSOs), choose applicants who have generic customer skills from other industries with few, if any, library-specific skills. These unqualified CSOs are offered the same rate of pay as newly qualified, skilled library technicians, even though they do not have the spectrum of industry specific skills needed to deliver quality customer service.

Library technicians, with their extensive range of customer-focused skills and enthusiasm, weigh in extremely well in the information industry employability stakes.

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## What do you do in a school library all day?

Note: Tasmania uses the college system for years 11 and 12 with most high schools being for years 7–10.

I am currently employed as a library technician in a senior secondary college in Tasmania. We cater for students studying pre-tertiary subjects for university entrance, as well as offering many VET subjects for students who are not on the path to university. The college is split over two campuses, with two libraries. We