

Why consider a PhD?

I have recently taken the opportunity to reflect on the important nexus between research and professional practice. The conduct of research as a professional strategy is well established through the use of evidence based practice, action research, and other investigative techniques. Library and Information Professionals have many opportunities to do research, so why consider a PhD?

Many library and information professionals find that enrolling in a doctoral program is a great way to do research in a supportive environment with others with similar interests and who are highly supportive, while gaining recognised qualifications.

PhD's are now being recognised as a high level professional qualification, a great opportunity for anyone wanting to engage in deep learning about some aspect of professional life, as well as making a significant contribution to theory and practice of interest to the profession.

The QUT experience provides some interesting examples of what might be achieved through doctoral study. At QUT, doctoral candidates work in teams, with their supervisors and other candidates in a highly collaborative way. Candidates and supervisors have a wider range of interests that often bridge different disciplines, such as communication, management, education, computer science, and even psychology or sociology or something else.

Doctoral studies can derive from personal professional interest and a desire to contribute to and learn about a particular field. At QUT for example in the last five years we have seen investigations into learning to search the internet, the relationship between information literacy and learning, international students experience of information use, virtual communities for the physically disabled, the professional experience of ethics, amongst others. Current investigations are looking at evidence based practice in schools, adolescents' use of information in the web environment, collaboration between academics and librarians, curriculum integration of information literacy, library evaluation, use of web 2.0, information behaviour, web search, and other topics.

Doctoral studies may also provide opportunity to collaborate internationally. QUT, for example, has established the QUT-San Jose gateway program through which doctoral candidates from San Jose enrol through QUT, with supervision from both universities. We also enrol students from many other countries. This provides an opportunity for candidates to start to work with researchers from many cultural environments.

So why do people choose to do a PhD? I asked some of our recently completed and current candidates and received different types of responses. For some, the PhD is definitely considered to open closed doors:

- *I am working on my PhD because I find the research process fascinating and would like to open myself to a whole new world of knowledge. Having a PhD will open a lot of doors that would otherwise be closed.*
- *I did my PhD partly because it seemed to offer attractive options for my future employment. It was also a chance to offer a contribution in an area I considered of fundamental importance to people's well being.*

For others it's a confidence booster, or a way of securing recognition:

- *I have learnt so much from my PhD research, which gives me a lot of confidence when I talk to or work with academic staff and colleagues!*

- *From my perspective, it's like having ..permission to be involved and venture more rigorously into research; part of it is to be recognised by fellow researchers and industrial counterparts.*

"I am doing it because all the time I spend learning is freakin' cool"

Some candidates just love to learn-

- *...beyond practical reasons regarding professional opportunities I embarked on the PhD because I like learning, and the program provides time and structure to focus on something new to ... while working on the PhD is invigorating both personally and professionally. That is the professional answer — personally if I am talking to a friend I say "I am doing it because all the time I spend learning is freakin' cool".*
- *I have wanted to do my PhD for the last twenty years. I finally decided to fulfil my dream*

Some have a very specific goal in mind:

- *I want to help develop pedagogy that speaks to the changing needs of 21st century learners. To do this, I need to understand the range of how students engage with tools and information while learning.*

Perhaps one day you, too, might choose to pursue doctoral studies.

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PD goes International

ALIA is offering members a global outlook to PD.

ALIA's FOLIOz courses are offered to members through an international arrangement with the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. These highly regarded online courses offer our members a broad international approach to professional development.

The quality of the FOLIOz courses has also been recognised by our cousins across the Tasman in New Zealand, and in South East Asia, resulting in a number of LIANZA and overseas ALIA members taking the courses as well. The last FOLIOz course for 2009 is: *MAXIM: Maximising the impact of your service* running Monday 30 November 2009–Friday 22 January 2010. We hope to offer more FOLIOz courses in 2010.

Because of our agreement with ARK, other international PD opportunities are available to members. Check out our competition offering a free place at the Singapore Conference: KM Asia 2009: Using knowledge management to advance your organisation during times of change, 24–26 November 2009. ALIA competition applications for this conference close 9 October 2009. For more information and an application form look at our website <http://www.alia.org.au/education/pd/workshops/ARK/>

ALIA is also pursuing other opportunities for members with course providers in the United States. By valuing excellence in professional development we hope to offer the best in the world to members.

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