

A PROFESSION FOR EVERYONE

Over the last few months, I have had a number of Members come and talk to me about a current hot topic: gender equality. This issue is an important one, as the library and information profession here in Australia should be held up as a great example for other professions throughout Australia, and indeed the world, on gender equality and the successful careers that women have made for themselves in the information profession.

ALIA is an advocate, and has been a long time supporter of gender equality. In ALIA's most recent set of publications looking at the future of the profession, we stated that 'Library and information services and professionals thrive best in an environment where – people actively seek to reduce inequality.'

Taking a look at leadership positions across the university library sector, almost 75% of our university librarians (the senior managers) are women. It is a different story when it comes to the gender of the person they report to in the university but this too is changing, albeit slowly.

Our profession is full of successful women in leadership roles who demonstrate great stamina, sacrifice and flexibility, and a huge will to succeed, while facing strenuous demands on their work/life balance. We are a profession that supports women, promotes women and one of the few professions that has equitable pay.

National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) is made up of 10 member libraries, and 60% of the CEOs of these member libraries are women. Seven out of the last 10 ALIA presidents have been women.

Some of the challenges facing women in our profession and in the workplace were highlighted in an excellent keynote delivered by Dr Marianne Broadbent at the ALIA National 2014 Conference, recently held in Melbourne. Dr Broadbent talked about the struggles women face when they are career-focused and driven. I have seen both genders promoted in libraries and I know women who have risen very quickly through the ranks. For women, this rise to senior management positions does come at a cost and sacrifices are often made. More often than not, their personal lives suffer, and yet this cost and sacrifice is generally never discussed when a man makes the jump to senior management.

Let's take a look at our future and the people coming in to our profession. Our student population in the library and information courses across Australia are heavily skewed towards women (anecdotally around 80%) and this is skewed even further when we delve into the gender of teacher librarians.

Our challenge here is to promote a positive and non-stereotyped image of women and men in the library and information industry. We must make this profession attractive for both genders to join.

As a man, I am often asked what it's like working in an industry dominated by women. My response is that my first permanent job was working in libraries and that gender inequality was not something I faced personally. As far as I knew, library staff were promoted on ability, education, skills and knowledge, and certainly not on gender, and I believe this to still be the case. Moving from academic libraries into the academic side of a university has been an eye opening change for me, where I've found gender equality is a struggle for many universities.

My 16 year old daughter is described by her teachers as being strong willed and very driven. She is smart, dedicated to her studies and ambitious, traits fostered by her parents (both librarians). My hope for her is to never have to face any gender inequality along whatever path she chooses.

In the library and information profession, we should be very proud of the work our experienced and senior members of the profession have built for us over many decades. These people have built a profession that is streets ahead of most other professions in terms of gender equality and we should continue to encourage and support this accomplishment.



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