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**The National Year of Reading:
celebrating the role of literature in an academic culture**

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Abstract:

2012, the National Year of Reading, was celebrated in libraries, schools and community centers throughout Australia. At the University of Adelaide, we celebrated our academic culture of literary teaching and research with a range of programmes and initiatives based in the humanities faculty. The Barr Smith Library played an integral part in supporting the university's literary culture with our collections, services and expertise.

This paper describes my role as an embedded librarian in the humanities, and the different areas of professional practice that I employed for NYR in 2012: collection development and promotion; teaching; collaboration with academic colleagues; the use of new educational technologies and social media. It provides an insight into some of the current trends and future opportunities that are shaping the role of the subject librarian in academic libraries.

Introduction

2012 , the National Year of Reading, was a year for celebrating literature and reading at the University of Adelaide. Our Department of English Language and Literature, founded in one of our first faculties in 1876, became the Discipline of English and Creative Writing. We launched the J. M. Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice, combining the study of literature and music with other art forms. The university began teaching its first Bachelor of Languages, allowing students to gain qualifications in the language and literature of a range of European and Asian cultures. As always, the library proactively supported teaching and research with our rich collections and customized services. We also hosted the National Year of Reading programme for university staff, highlighting books and electronic resources in our collections.

As the Research Librarian for the humanities (English and Creative Writing, Classics, French Studies and German Studies), I was delighted to have the opportunity to co-ordinate the library's contribution and to initiate projects that were particularly suited to the National Year of Reading. I also consolidated my role as an 'embedded librarian', working as a colleague with the academic staff of the English and Creative Writing discipline. In this paper, I will discuss my professional practice: how I drew on my knowledge of our collections, new library technologies and services, our teaching and research expertise and, invaluable, on the community of scholars, students and staff throughout the university.

The Collections

The Barr Smith Library's literary collections have grown around the teaching and research profile of the University of Adelaide since the late nineteenth century. English Language and Literature was introduced as a subject in the first Degree of Bachelor of Arts that we awarded in 1879, with the original library (a single room in the Mitchell Building) providing the works of canonical English authors such as Shakespeare, Chaucer, John Dryden and Oliver Goldsmith. In the twentieth century, the discipline began to teach the work of the great British modernists – James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf – and through the 1940s and 50s American and Australian writers were added to the syllabus. In 1966, Australian Literature was introduced as a separate subject, including novels by Patrick White, short stories by Henry Lawson and poetry by Judith Wright.

The Barr Smith Library's collections, housed by this time in the 1930s Reading Room, kept pace with these changes - not always an easy task, given the fact that work by modernist writers like Lawrence and Joyce was initially banned, seized by Customs officers on arrival in Australia. We have a first edition of Joyce's *Ulysses*, published by Shakespeare and Co. in Paris, and a signed first edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in our Rare Books room. The research interests of the English Department are extensively represented in this and other parts of our Special Collections - 'more so than most other areas {of the university}' (Hoskin 1990, 27) - due to active collaboration with the discipline and generous bequests and endowments specifically earmarked for literature.

The depth of these older collections is matched by contemporary material that reflects the way in which the teaching of English literature has changed over the

years. The introduction of Australian literary studies was one turning point that I have mentioned; more recently, the emphasis on the cultural production of literature has moved the syllabus far beyond the traditional literary canon. Film studies, gothic literature, Decadent fiction and autobiography are studied as well as Shakespeare and the Romantic poets. In recent years, Creative Writing has added another stream, as students produce novels, short stories and poetry, accompanied by an exegesis, as well as literary criticism in essays and theses.

Additions to the collection naturally include the published works of our own scholars. Relevant publications by university staff have traditionally been in the field of literary criticism ; we also collect their creative writing. The English discipline's first creative writer was well-known crime writer Michael Innes (Professor J.I.M. Stewart, Jury Professor of English in the late 1930s); we hold his detective series, published by Gollancz, as well as his critical work on Joyce, Conrad and Hardy. Since the foundation of the Creative Writing programme and the centre for Creative Practice, our affiliated literary writers have included J. M. Coetzee, Brian Castro, Nicholas Jose, Tom Shapcott, Eva Hornung and Peter Goldsworthy.

The Embedded Subject Librarian

This collection development is one of my responsibilities, as I work in conjunction with the discipline's academics to ensure that their teaching and research needs continue to be met. This is made easier by the academic qualifications that I gained

before becoming a librarian: B.A. (Hons) majoring in English and French language and literature. One of the primary requirements of 'embedding' a librarian in a user group is 'advanced knowledge of the client or customer's domain, regardless of the setting. {This is} a fundamental component of this service ethic.' (Kesselman and Watstein 2009, 395). Kelly Heider, writing about embedded librarians in university libraries notes that

In order to have the knowledge base required to develop a subject-specific collection and teach program-specific information literacy skills, it is imperative that an embedded librarian hold an advanced degree in the area he /she will serve. Not only will the knowledge improve his / her quality of work, but it will also garner respect from college faculty colleagues who have, historically, regarded librarians as skilled professionals but not as peers. (2010, 114)

I would argue that a high level of subject-specific knowledge is an ideal rather than an 'imperative' scenario: realistically, we cannot expect a perfect match of library and academic qualifications in all of our librarians. What is significant, though, in an academic library is a genuine passion for and strong working knowledge of the discipline, and the commitment to the clients' needs that comes with this: as 'literature and case studies demonstrate ... the successful development, management and delivery of embedded library services is fueled as much by the human side of the equation – by attributes, knowledge, skills, abilities and values – as it is by anything else.' (Kesselman and Watstein 2009, 395)

The Teaching Librarian

A strong working knowledge of the subject is essential when it comes to the requirement that subject librarians teach research skills to the undergraduate and postgraduate students in their disciplines. At the University of Adelaide, we have developed a Research Skills Development framework that encapsulates the level of skills that we are trying to teach. Our students learn to

- embark on inquiry and so determine a need for knowledge/understanding.
- find/generate needed information/data using appropriate methodology.
- critically evaluate information/data and the process to find/generate this information/data.
- organise information collected/generated and manage the research process
- synthesise and analyse and apply new knowledge.
- communicate knowledge and the processes used to generate it, with an awareness of ethical, social and cultural issues (Willison and O'Regan 2006).

Like my academic colleagues in the English discipline, I use this framework to determine the students' level of progress in their research skills development. I was introduced to this technique when I completed Teaching @ University, the first course in the Graduate Certificate in Education (Higher Education); I currently use it as a professional tool to improve the content of the discipline-specific library instruction programmes that I teach.

For example, our first-year English students study 'Introduction to English: Ideas of the Real', a course that is designed to introduce them to a range of literary texts that fall in the domain of Realism. As well as reading nineteenth and twentieth-century literature, 'students are introduced to a range of interpretive practices; the course is designed to increase their skills in critical reading, analysis, writing and

research.’ (University of Adelaide. Discipline of English and Creative Writing 2012)

My contribution to these outcomes is the teaching of Research Skills tutorials that focus on the first three stages of development (enquire, find, evaluate) ; my subject knowledge and teaching experience then enable me to work with students at the higher level of skill development as well.

This is usually done in one-on-one or small group consultations after the initial workshops; I have office hours in the English department on a weekly basis. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students make appointments to see me at ‘point of need’. (I tend to see members of the first group whenever a research essay is due, and the latter consistently throughout the academic year.) We often discuss the synthesis, analysis and application of ideas in the research material that they have uncovered: for example, where the theories set out in a particular journal article fit into the argument that they are making in an essay, or which secondary sources are likely to support their analysis of a text. In one working day, I could easily find myself discussing aspects of the bildungsroman in Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (‘Ideas of the Real’), classical allusions in Malouf’s *Ransom* (‘Old Texts Made New’) or feminist interpretations of Australian Gothic literature (a current line of enquiry for one of the Creative Writing post-graduate students.)

The iPad Librarian

Office hours *outside* the physical library but *inside* the user group’s space is a common practice of embedded librarians. (Woodward 2009). This year, the University of Adelaide provided each of the discipline Research Librarians with an iPad2, a tool that has greatly enhanced the way we work with our client groups. With

a 21st-century tablet device – lightweight, portable, with multi-purpose functionality – I can leave the library building and work with English academics and students in their own working spaces. I go to discipline meeting rooms and function areas, lecture theatres, seminar rooms, offices and study rooms. The iPad's functionality and flexibility mean that my clients and I can work together on databases, Google Scholar, iBooks (out-of-copyright literary texts are freely available) and online reference tools. We find definitions in the OED, check literary terminology in Oxford Reference Online, highlight relevant passages and keywords in primary sources and search for and retrieve secondary sources.

This is all standard liaison librarian work; I am also experimenting with the unique features of tablet devices. There really is 'an app for that' : on my iPad, I have a Shakespeare concordance app, the British Library 19th Century Collection app and the ground-breaking Touch Press production of T S Eliot's *The Wasteland*. I use the note-taking function to keep track of research consultations, email search results through to the client's address and activate the audio-functions for recording reference interviews as needed. If I choose to, I can watch and discuss an academic library's YouTube video on Boolean searching with a small group of students around a table. The teaching potential of iPads seems to be endless, only limited by our imagination and willingness to experiment. (Borbasi et al. 2011)

Research consultations with academic staff are also much easier and more effective with an iPad. These can be informal 'corridor conversations' or more formally planned appointments, where we pool our areas of expertise and discuss a range of issues, including research sources, reference management and journal publishing. The library offers Research Data Management guidance and Adelaide Research & Scholarship is our open access digital repository for university staff.

The Blackboard Librarian

The University of Adelaide is currently using Blackboard Learn software for its learning management system ('MyUni'); this is another instantly available source of information on the iPad. Like my academic colleagues, I have instructor access to the English discipline courses, which means that I can keep up-to-date with students' assignments, tutorial topics, lecture notes and readings. When I speak at lectures, the Powerpoints and recordings are made available on MyUni (this is standard practice for all discipline lectures), and I can add material on research skills to any of the courses, as needed. Each MyUni subject has a link back to my subject resource guides (LibGuides) on the library web pages; I can envisage a time when all of the material that I write will be seamlessly integrated in the student's digital learning space.

Another reason for maintaining instructor access is the range of tools available on MyUni. Several of my Research Librarian colleagues have used the software that enables us to create online quizzes and assessment; we also have the option of using tools such as Adobe Presenter (to publish web-friendly powerpoints), Wimba Create (for interactive online tutorials) and a variety of voice tools. The university is now supporting LAMS, open source software for designing sequences of collaborative learning activities for individual students, small groups or classes. Our future as embedded librarians, teaching research skills, lies in our use of this kind of student-workspace technology and the collaboration with our academic colleagues that this entails.

The Reading Librarian

Reading literature – fiction, poetry, drama – is the lifeblood of many of our humanities courses, from Homer's *Odyssey* in Classics to contemporary novels in English, French and German. The University assumes that students will spend twelve hours a week on course work: in the case of English, this is expected to be three contact hours (lecture and tutorial time), three hours preparation (research and writing) and six hours reading. The academic staff member who gives the introductory lecture for 'Ideas of the Real' includes one Powerpoint slide with the single word **READ** on it: the five hundred or so first-year students in the room are given the 'reading is essential' message from their first day at university.

As a librarian, critic, book reviewer and avid reader, I am very enthusiastic about the idea of fostering a reading culture across the *whole* university. The University's Graduate Attributes commit us to promoting 'continuous learning and the capacity to maintain intellectual curiosity throughout life' (University of Adelaide, DVCA 2012), something that wide reading undoubtedly encourages, and the value of reading literary texts is supported in many studies (Dewan 2010, 51). The National Year of Reading has given librarians a golden opportunity to focus on a love of reading and

all the great things that are already happening around books, reading and literacy ...giving them an extra boost, with inspirational programs and events taking place across the country. Libraries will be partnering with ... a host of organisations that share our passion for reading.

(National Year of Reading 2012)

2012, the National Year of Reading, was celebrated at the University of Adelaide with the *Reading Women* programme. This was a project that I co-ordinated through the Steering Group of the Women's Professional Development Network (WPDN), a group designed to support the professional and personal development of women staff members at the university. We run an accredited university-wide mentoring programme (now in its sixteenth year), career workshops, health and well-being sessions, the Financial Empowerment Series for Women, networking events and a very active Book Club.

The WPDN Book Club was inaugurated in 2008 and is open to all members of the University of Adelaide community. It provides an opportunity to 'meet and network with staff who have a shared interest in reading and writing from a broad cross-section of the University. Feedback from previous years' attendees indicates these sessions provide a much needed '*brain boost*' - providing a break from work that energises, inspires and re-charges'. (University of Adelaide. Women's Professional Development Network. 2012.)

With a foundation like this, the WPDN Book Club was the obvious place to initiate a National Year of Reading campaign. Our first event was a launch in March (effectively the beginning of the academic year) with a large, enthusiastic audience in the Barr Smith Library listening to three university speakers discussing the impact that reading had on their careers. We followed this with 'Bring your favourite book', a well-attended networking session that brought readers and writers from all over campus together. Our parents (a considerable number of university staff and students) were given the opportunity to attend 'Books and Reading for Children', an

energetic question-and-answer session run by a qualified Children's Librarian from a local public library. The last two major events were traditional 'Read the book, meet the author' sessions, with two University of Adelaide writers, Kerryn Goldsworthy and Amy Matthews, sharing insights about their recently-published, award-winning books.

All of these events were held in the library, in keeping with current trends to use our physical space both as a 'third place' for the university community to socialize and as a site for cultural events. Throughout the programme, we promoted the fact that almost all of the books that we discussed were available in the Barr Smith Library (with the exception of Dr Seuss and Maurice Sendak from the 'books for children' session!) To encourage further conversation around books and reading, we had pre- and post-event discussions on the *Reading Women* blog, and held informal meetings in the university Staff Club ('Coffee Reading' and 'Champagne Reading.')

The concept of promoting 'recreational reading' in academic libraries has gained ground in recent years. (Rathe and Blankenship 2006; Smith and Young 2008; Dewan 2010):

Up until now, college and university libraries have lagged behind other institutions in promoting literacy and lifelong learning. While they have operated under a different mandate than schools and public libraries, this mandate need not be a barrier to literacy goals. The next wave of recreational reading strategies will emerge from academic libraries. Trott (2008, 134) predicts that colleges and universities will follow

the lead of public libraries: “Readers’ advisory services offer academic libraries the opportunity to expand their contact with readers in their university community and to attract new users into the library.” (Dewan 2010, 53-54)

Some studies advocate setting up a separate ‘popular reading’ collection (Rathe and Blankenship 2006; Dewan 2010); my aim in the National Year of Reading was to promote a valuable collection that is already part of the library. Through bi-weekly posts on the NYR blog that I initiated (*Reading Women*), I highlighted the authors and titles that we had acquired in more than a century of collecting for a thriving English language and literature discipline. Just to give an example: 2012 was the year of the Charles Dickens bicentenary, the Patrick White centenary and the thirtieth session of the Adelaide Writers’ Week festival. In our collection we hold multiple copies of all of Dickens’ novels, as well as the work of many other nineteenth-century authors; we have the full complement of Patrick White’s novels (many of which are out-of-print), including the recently-published *Hanging Garden*. During Writers’ Week, we promoted the work of the participating authors, as well as our unique collection of recordings of Writers Week sessions, dating back to 1998. Our print collection holds hundreds of English, American, European, Asian, African and Australian novels – from early classics like the *Tale of Genji* to the latest Australian/Vogel Literary Award winner.

We also hold many useful literary resources in our electronic collections, such as the quality journals, magazines and newspapers that specialise in offering professionally-written book reviews (*Australian Book Review*, *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The London Review of Books*, *TLS* and so on.) Our *ebooks@Adelaide*, free web books online, has been commended for its contents and readability, ‘a useful e-book collection to augment print editions for

all academic levels' (Lord 2011, 269). Our extensive crime fiction collection has been indexed online as 'Murder in the Library', giving enhanced access to this very popular genre of fiction. We highlight new literary titles through the subject-classified section of our weekly New Books List (Literature: 800-899) and our NYR literary blog contains many links that return the user to our print and electronic collections.

Other Australian university libraries supported National Year of Reading activities, although we were very much in the minority in a project that was largely driven by public libraries. RMIT, Curtin, Murdoch and CQU became official partners; like the University of Adelaide, they actively promoted NYR with book groups and through social media. Two researchers from RMIT will run an evaluation of the national programme, which will be published next year (Welch 2012).

Conclusion

In *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*, Professor Alan Jacobs praises reading as 'one of the great human delights' (2011, 10) ; in 2012, the National Year of Reading, librarians throughout Australia engaged with the public to celebrate reading for its many benefits and joys. As Research Librarian for the humanities at the University of Adelaide, I worked with academic and professional staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students, to promote the pleasures and value of reading literature held in the Barr Smith Library. Some of my clients were English students presenting at seminars and writing essays; others were doing specialized literary research in our extensive collections. Many of them were simply looking for a good book to read: a novel, a volume of poetry, short stories. All of us were celebrating the 'great human delight' of reading.

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