

Lifelong Learning for Law Librarians: Opportunities at Charles Sturt University

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Charles Sturt University has offered education for librarianship for over twenty-five years. The first courses offered in the mid-1970s were a Bachelor of Arts (Library and Information Science) and graduate diplomas in library and information science and school librarianship. Since then the range of course offerings in librarianship has expanded. The School of Information Studies (<http://www.csu.edu.au/faculty/sciagr/sis/>) now offers a full range of courses, from bachelor degrees to doctorates, by distance education to over 1400 students located in Australia, Hong Kong, Mauritius and other parts of the world. The School educates professionals to work in the rapidly expanding information industry, ranging from the traditional area of public sector libraries to the emerging field of private sector information management. After more than two decades as a leading Australian educational institution in this field, Charles Sturt University's School of Information Studies is now one of the largest in the world. Many of its graduates hold senior positions in information agencies of all types. Fifteen staff members are fully engaged in delivering librarianship and teacher librarianship courses, and call on the same number of information technology academics in the School. The Centre for Information Studies, arguably the most important library and information studies publisher in Australia, is based in the School of Information Studies (<http://ww.csu.edu.au/cis/>).

STUDYING IN THE DISTANCE EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

What does it mean to study in the distance education environment? Studying distance education no longer means receiving a mail package, with interaction between instructor and student limited to a residential school held on campus,

phone conversations, mail and assignment feedback. Today's student at Charles Sturt University must have online access in order to be admitted into the course and will use a range of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to successfully complete the course requirements. All librarianship subjects provide at least an online subject outline and supporting online tools, and some are completely online. Online tools include a web-based forum (and where appropriate sub-forums), a listserv, and access to all CSU facilities including the full range of library services. Some subjects include online chat or MOO.¹

In the online environment a subject is no longer a discrete entity as it was in the days of the mail package. A subject today is an integrated whole consisting of a number of parts that may include, for example:

- a textbook and a set of readings provided in print or electronic form;
- a set of notes written around the textbook and readings;
- interaction with the instructor and peers on a forum and in a chat room;
- continuous assessment of learning (either individual or by peers) with comment on progress and advice;
- a set of URLs with the requirement to evaluate pertinent and current material; and/or
- optional face to face sessions.

CSU COURSES WITH LAW CONTENT

Charles Sturt University offers two professional qualifications which have scope for the student who wishes to specialise in law librarianship. Both are recognised by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). The courses are the Bachelor of Arts (Library and Information Science) and the Master of Applied Science (Library and Information Management). The BA(LIS) structure requires students to study a sequence of eight subjects in a discipline area other than librarianship. A wide range is available, including Justice Studies and Law

¹ MOO is a MUD, Object Oriented. A MUD (Multiple User Dimension, or Multiple User Dialogue) is a computer program which users can log into and explore. Each user takes control of a computerised persona/avatar/incarnation/character. You can walk around, chat with other characters, solve puzzles, and even create your very own rooms, descriptions and items.

Nine subjects are available in the Justice Studies stream:

- Foundations of Criminology
- Criminal Law and Process
- Evidence and Procedure
- Punishment and the State
- Crime, Delinquency and Social Welfare
- Criminology
- Criminological Perspectives in Social Problems
- Policing and Society
- Deviance and Social control

Students selecting the Law stream can select from thirteen subjects:

- The Australian Legal System
- Australian Government and Politics
- Social Welfare Law 1 and 2
- Commercial Law
- Local Government Law 1 and 2
- Industrial Law
- Administrative Law
- Corporation Law
- Taxation Law and Practice
- Finance Law
- Advanced Commercial Law

In addition to studying these streams there is also scope for the student to select a law library for his or her practicum placement

The MAppSci(LIM) is of shorter duration than the BA(LIS), three semesters of full-time study compared with six for the BA(LIS)² Consequently it has less scope for offering a specialisation in law. Opportunities do exist, however, within individual subjects. For example, several subjects allow the student to select and

² Note that nearly all CSU students study part-time

develop a topic of their choice, and this allows the interested student to pursue an area relevant to law librarianship.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

Continuing professional development is an essential part of being an information professional, and law librarians are no exception. Charles Sturt University has a firm commitment to CPD. Its mission statement notes that it aims to produce 'graduates with a professional edge who are competitive in meeting the present and changing needs of society, commerce and industry' and it emphasises 'the development of skills for and positive attitudes towards life-long learning'.

To meet the University's commitment to CPD, the School of Information Studies offers:

- specific courses to meet new professional and/or vocational needs (e.g. a graduate certificate in audiovisual archiving was first offered in 2001);
- single subjects as CPD activities (the School of Information Studies offers a wide range of these);
- short courses offered through the Continuing and Professional Development Centre (<http://www.csu.edu.au/division/cpec/>);
- masters degrees and graduate certificates which are sometimes taken by students for CPD reasons; and
- occasional workshops on request for staff training, (e.g. a workshop on reference services for Hong Kong librarians was run in 2001).

FUTURE OPTIONS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION OF LAW LIBRARIANS IN AUSTRALIA

Charles Sturt University's library and information management courses recognise the need for a thorough understanding of the traditional bases of librarianship while also emphasising a study of the new electronic means of collecting, organising and disseminating information. They are designed as generalist courses to prepare librarians and information specialists for work in all types of libraries and in information agencies such as community information services and information brokerage. They provide a solid basis for the education of librarians

and information workers. Currently, however, CSU does not provide specialist qualifications such as law librarianship, and nor do other Australian schools of information studies.

How can specialist qualifications be offered? One possibility is for Australian information studies schools to develop a consortium to develop, maintain and deliver specialist sequences of subjects. Few Australian schools are large enough to support a concentration of more than two or three staff members in a particular area. With agreement on a consortium model, it would be possible to envisage the development of a specialist course in law librarianship (a graduate certificate, perhaps, of four subjects). Of course, many issues would need to be addressed if this suggestion is to be developed. Chief among them is likely to be how to reach agreement on suitable administrative arrangements for sharing payment and for recompensing staff employed by different universities.

The convergence of technologies is resulting in significant change in the profession. The new information professional is custodian, systems developer and manager, and educator. At CSU we believe that the significant distinguishing characteristics are our profession's skills in organising information, and in information provision and delivery. These skills, combined with a solid knowledge of another discipline (such as law for law librarians), equip graduates of the School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University for the future.