The world is our oyster

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Distance is a factor which distinguishes Charles Sturt University whether it measures the distance between campuses or describes the locations of many students. In 1996 there were 15 946 students studying at a distance compared to 6872 campus-based students. The library provides library materials and services to this disparate and far-flung group, aiming for equity in access.

Distance education library services depend on all the resources and staff of the library. A dedicated group of staff are responsible for postal loans to remote students, provision of photocopied articles, reference queries, database searching, and interlibrary loans (on request). In times of peak demand the work load is heavy. In addition distance education library staff are often a student's first point of contact for queries which may not relate directly to library services. Contact can be made by toll-free telephone, fax, post, and e-mail. Students may contact any Charles Sturt University library although it is usual for them to first contact the campus from which their course is provided.

The Internet has made great impacts on the provision of library and information services to distance education students. Since 1995 on-line connection to a growing range of Charles Sturt University library services has been available. Initially the library catalogue and then a modest selection of bibliographic databases were offered. Now there are library-subscribed databases, full-text journals, and links to selected World Wide Web (WWW) sites. Some databases are accessed through telnet while others have a WWW interface. The library is moving to WWW interfaces for as many services as possible to make searching more user-friendly and uniform. Access to these services is via the library home page: http://www.csu.edu.au/division/library/libhp.htm. At the same time the library continues direct support to students who do not have electronic connections.

Benefits from remote access developments have flowed to on-campus users. Until recently most resources were based at a particular campus — Charles Sturt University has four libraries and six affiliated libraries throughout New South Wales and in Canberra. New services are available on-line to all and are augmented with a free daily intercampus loan service.

In 1997 the Charles Sturt University library will be further increasing its resources and services to remote users. Students already have the facility to consult their borrower records and to renew items on loan. This year they will be able to place requests while searching the catalogue and have the items sent to them. The number of students with Internet access is still relatively small. Over 1000 remote students requested passwords and/or assistance in the use of remote access services in nine months of 1996. The University will provide subjects on-line from 1997. These will have links to library resources and the incentive to gain access will increase.

The challenge for library staff is to rise to the demands of new and changing technologies, to understand their effect on students and to retain a helpful, human contact. Judging by feedback, we are well advanced in meeting these challenges. ∎

State librarian steps down

On 6 February 1997 the Victorian Government's *Arts Institutions (Amendment) Act* came into force. The Act's proclamation abolishes the Museums Advisory Board and the Libraries Board of Victoria. As part of the current restructuring and focus on future development, the government, and on its behalf, the new Library Board, is committed to putting in place a high-quality leadership team, to ensure that the maximum benefit is obtained from these opportunities by seeing through the organisational reforms and the balance of the redevelopment.

Helen Tait, state librarian, has decided for personal reasons not to renew her contract when it expires at 30 June 1997. The Library Board requires a chief executive who will oversee the completion of the redevelopment and see the leadership agenda on track into the 21st century. Helen feels unable to make a commitment to the time-frame required, despite her commitment to the objectives of the Board. Helen will stay to oversee the current round of restructuring and planning. ∎