Higher Education round-up:
What some of our up-and-comers are thinking about

Who: Leith Robinson
What: PhD, Information Studies
Where: Curtin University of Technology
Supervisors: Dr Paul Genoni, Dr Kerry Smith
Converged memory institutions: A study of the consolidation of community cultural resources

This project investigates the increasing trend worldwide of the convergence of memory institutions (the galleries, libraries, archives, museums, and records centres that cover the various domains of public collecting), into one physical site and/or one virtual interface, as well as the joint projects, sharing of resources, and partnerships that are forming. Various technological, social, cultural, and economic changes have driven convergence, and memory institutions are rethinking their purpose, role, and identity, as are stakeholders, including organisations, associations, governments, staff, and users. Similarly, education, job titles, duties, software and hardware, pay structure, and office and workstation designs are all in flux, and these changes have stirred many emotions.

As well as the above, the thesis examines the history of public collecting institutions and the surrounding issues such as the information commons and the rise of social hubs. The methodology involves a literature review, a survey of Western Australian public library managers' knowledge and perceptions about convergence, and case studies of 3 WA libraries to determine the suitability for – and if so, the degree of – potential unification.

The findings will inform the development of recommendations for the practice and management of converged memory institutions, to optimise future utility and efficiency of our information and heritage. It is contended convergence will 'future-proof' our sector, by raising relevance, value, and the level of satisfaction experienced by all.

Who: Roziya Abu
What: PhD, School of Social Sciences and Psychology
Where: Victoria University (International student)
Supervisors: Associate Professor Marty Grace, Dr Mary Carroll
Adapting Australian rural public library services approaches to Malaysia

Through her work as a senior lecturer at the MARA University of Technology Roziya developed an interest in helping Malaysian rural communities by enhancing the current usage of rural public library services. The focus of her research is the investigation and analysis of the impact on rural communities of the development of Malaysian rural libraries in recent years and to explore the relationships between rural public libraries and their community members in both Malaysia and Australia, with particular attention to empowerment and community development.

Currently in 2009, the total number of rural public libraries in Malaysia is 1089. Despite the increasing number of rural public libraries built all over Malaysia, they are not fully used. Perlis State Public Library Director, Norma Mohd Darus, revealed that only 20% of users of rural public libraries are adults, while 80% of the users are school children and school teenagers.

Roziya's research will examine how community development programs are implemented by local rural public libraries in Malaysia. She will explore the expectations and the needs of the local communities, the influence of local government and how the local community and service providers perceive the community development programs implemented in rural public libraries in Malaysia, along with their views about unmet needs. This research will include an examination of practice in Australian public libraries in disadvantaged and rural communities. This material, along with the investigation of community development programs in Malaysian rural public libraries will inform conclusions and recommendations for further actions, programs, and services to improve the development of the Malaysian rural public libraries.

Who: Chloe Brookes-Kenworthy
What: Master's of Information Services
Where: Edith Cowan University
Supervisors: Dr Mark Brogan
Building trusted digital repositories

Chloe is currently researching the implementation of Digital Repositories (DRs) in the Australian cultural heritage sector. A digital (or institutional) repository is a set of services and technologies that provide the means to collect, manage, provide access to, disseminate, and preserve digital materials. Chloe's project seeks to determine what good practices exist in the planning, design, and implementation of DRs in the cultural heritage space.

Chloe's project is using TRAC – the Trustworthy Repositories Audit and Certification: Criteria and Checklist – developed by the Research Libraries Group (RLG) and the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA) Digital Repository Certification Task Force in 2007. TRAC addresses fundamental questions concerning governance, sustainability, long-term preservation, and trustworthiness in establishing and managing digital repositories.

Data describing the current state of maturity and sustainability of DR initiatives is scarce, but required for planning the sector's future. Chloe hopes her research will assist in identifying areas of greatest risk and in providing a basis for measurement of progress into the future. It is hoped that when the research results are publicised they might encourage agencies with DR to incorporate appropriate elements of the criteria into their repository infrastructure, if necessary, to enhance their capacity to be considered trustworthy.

Who: Helen McSkimming
What: Master's of Library and Information Management
Where: Charles Sturt University
Supervisors: Dr Anne Lloyd
Easing the tyranny of distance for distance education students

Many students face considerable barriers when embarking on distance education studies. Based on studies I reviewed, I developed a program to be delivered to distance education students in my local public library. The TOOLS program (Targeted Orientation of Online Literacy Skills) was

designed to be delivered over three weeks, and included an introduction to resources available through the university library and catalogue, search techniques, use of databases, and application of referencing systems.

When the students arrived for their first session, it was clear that my proposed program would need revision. It became apparent that more than three sessions would be required to provide the students with the information and communication technology skills and the information literacy skills required to confidently manage their studies, and to allow them to focus on the content of their courses rather than agonise over the learning tools. By the end of six sessions (and several informal sessions along the way), we had covered the topics planned for the TOOLS program. The students became more comfortable with the technology and began to focus more intently on the content of their courses.

At the conclusion of the program, the three students participated in individual interviews based around semi-structured open questions. Each of the students described feelings of being overwhelmed, stressed, daunted, or floundering prior to participating in the TOOLS program. They were able to clearly identify the particular technological and information literacy skills they had learned during the program and, as a result, reported feelings of greater confidence, increased self esteem, and relief! Each of the students stated during their interview that they felt that they would have withdrawn from their course if they had not had the support provided by this program.

My literature review revealed little evidence that Australian public libraries are currently supporting distance education students through structured programs. However, case studies from overseas libraries, together with the outcomes of my own research, suggest that public libraries may have a valuable role to play. At the community level, public librarians are well placed to embrace their professional responsibility by assisting distance education students to achieve their life-long learning goals.

Who: Katie Hannan
What: PhD, Education, Arts and Social Sciences
Where: University of South Australia
Supervisors: Dr Mia Stephens, Dr Jane Hiscock
An investigation of the extent to which Australian public libraries are practicing sustainability

Developing an understanding of how Australian library staff perceive the concept of sustainability, and how it has successfully been applied in Australian libraries will assist library managers to develop best practice sustainability initiatives. This information can be reported to the Australian Library and Information Association, allowing them to develop research informed policy on sustainability. Identification of skills that are required by staff to implement sustainability initiatives may highlight gaps in current curricula of accredited courses and lead to course reviews, resulting in library staff graduating with qualifications that are better suited to organisational needs.

I am currently planning a mixed methods approach to my research. Initially I hope to conduct a survey of library staff across Australia using an online questionnaire.

This will allow me to gain a better understanding of how library workers perceive the concept of sustainability and whether staff think that their organisation has achieved, or is trying to achieve a level of sustainability. This data will indicate which organisations to study in further detail. My aim is to study several organisations by conducting field research to understand how each organisation works, and how the employees of each organisation interrelate.

This research topic is inline with the Australian Research Council's National Research Priorities one and four; "an environmentally sustainable Australia: transforming existing industries and responding to climate change and variability" as well as "Safeguarding Australia: understanding our region and the world".

Who: Jennifer Berryman
What: PhD, Information and Knowledge Management
Where: University of Technology, Sydney
Supervisors: Dr. Theresa Anderson, Professor Joyce Kirk
Award-winning thesis reports on how much information is enough

In a world of abundant information, how judgements of enough information are made is a fundamental but perplexing question for information behaviour researchers. Dr Berryman's thesis examined how workers determine they have enough information when engaged in a work task, the ways in which this critical judgement is made, and the subtleties that shape the judgement. With an interpretive orientation, the multiple case study investigated judgements of enough information made by public sector policy and research workers while seeking and using information.

Key findings included the need for a mental template of the work task and the information needed against which iterative judgments of enough information were made. Participants sought feedback from different groups on both the evolving mental templates and the information gathered. As this process continued, the nature of what constituted enough information changed. A number of factors influenced both the process of judging and the nature of enough information including the task itself, the views of stakeholders and colleagues, the nature of organisational decision making processes and organisational attitudes towards uncertainty.

This work has practical application for information and knowledge management professionals. The findings add weight to the argument that these professionals must move out of their resource centres and embed themselves in work teams, enabling them to anticipate information needs rather than react to requests and to use their expertise to support workers at every stage of their information seeking and use.