

## Traversing the information landscape with Fulbright scholarship

Fulbright scholarships offer Australian researchers, educators and professionals amazing opportunities for educational and cultural exchange and professional learning in the United States. Scholarships of various types are available, including postgraduate, postdoctoral, senior and professional scholarships. The Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence (SIR) Program assists US educational institutions that are traditionally underrepresented in international academic exchange.

I have had amazing experiences as Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence, based in Denver Colorado from August to December 2010. My program was sponsored by Dr Mary Somerville, Director of Auraria Library, University of Colorado Denver. It has focused on advancing the academic success of students on the culturally diverse Auraria Campus, which incorporates the University of Colorado Denver, Metropolitan College Denver and Community College Denver. To this

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end I have worked with librarians, academics, learning advisers, and students to develop informed learning approaches to learning, teaching and library administration. This has involved participation in library planning meetings, presenting workshops and leading informal discussions with librarians and educators and conducting focus groups with international

students and teachers of international students.

A highlight of my Denver residency has been co-teaching a first year experience entitled *Learning in the 21st Century* with Dr Carole Basile. This has proved an innovative opportunity to weave CS Bruce's 'informed learning' concepts into the course curriculum. Each week the students have been learning about learning as a discipline, whilst developing strategic, critical, ethical and creative approaches to using information to learn. In addition to basic learning theory, students have developed awareness of essential information sources and support services around the campus, to assist their transition to life and study at university.

Carole and I also collaborated with Liaison Librarian, Karen Sobel, and student peer mentor An Nyguen for students to explore informed learning in differing contexts such as museums, a science and technology expo and a nursing education simulation lab. As informed learning involves reflective information use, the students have created informed learning maps to document and reflect on their informed learning journeys, as well as informed learning treasure chests' to gather their information resources.

The scholarship has also enabled me to visit other colleagues and campuses around the United States. I've had the pleasure of discussing the theory and practice of informed learning and the information using experiences and needs of international students with MLIS students at the University of Urbana Champaign, and faculty and librarians at Purdue University, Colgate University and University of Washington.

At Purdue University, I also attended the *Project Information Literacy* symposium, at which Dr Alison Head presented findings of an important investigation about college students' information-seeking strategies and research difficulties. The report entitled *Truth To Be Told: How College Students Evaluate*

*And Use Information In The Digital Age* was launched online on 1 November (Head and Eisenberg, 2010). This study, which involved 8353 college students on 25 US campuses addressed the vital question of what it is like to be a student in the digital age and explored students' experiences of researching a topic from start to finish. The findings show that college (university) students "traverse the information landscape with a small compass". In other words, they tend to use a small range of familiar resources which they have previously used. They use classic standards for evaluating information resources, such as authority and currency. They find using information resources relatively easy, compared with initiating research and evaluating resources and their own work. Research is a social experience for students, who tend to discuss their information use with their peers and seek assistance, notably more from professors than from librarians. These findings provide a needed and sound evidence base for ongoing information literacy development in higher education.

Back in Colorado, I attended CALCON10, the Colorado Association of Libraries conference, where I was pleased to make contact with academic and teacher-librarians from around Colorado. The conference title, *Illumination & Transformation*, made an electrifyingly apt theme for a librarians' conference with a focus on advocacy and literacy.

ALA President Roberta Stevens presented an insightful keynote address about the impacts of social and technological change on the roles of libraries and information professionals, stating libraries are the "heart and mind of the community" and "lifelines" and "first responders" in times of natural and economic distress, such as Hurricane Katrina, where libraries are able to deliver essential information and e-government services. She emphasized that librarians have unique opportunity to be 21st century leaders in the global economy as long as we respond to changing expectations and needs of information users. In line with this, she spoke about "blended librarians" – meaning the need for librarians with knowledge and expertise in both traditional formats and online tools who support users as online communicators and creators, who can envision library services for the future, and have skills to develop and implement new service models according to changing contexts.

This Fulbright residency has proved an intense and valuable learning experience for me, professionally and personally. I have made some wonderful friends among US librarians, faculty and other Fulbright scholars and alumni, with whom I look forward to further developing education and research connections and I thank sincerely all those in the US who so warmly welcomed and assisted me, along with the Australian-American Fulbright Commission and QUT for their support of my scholarship.

I would strongly encourage other information professionals and educators to take advantage of Fulbright opportunities. Visit <http://www.fulbright.com.au/index.html> for more information.

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