Research capacity building for library and information studies

Research is an integral dimension of any profession or discipline and library and information studies is no exception. We have a proud history of research in our field in Australia; however, evidence suggests that relative to other professions, our research capacity has reduced over the past decade or more. Examples of this decline include a reduction of higher education LIS academics from 130 in 1996 to 64 in 2005 (Hallam, 2007); the demise of the Australian journals, *Cataloguing Australia*; *Education for Library and Information Services: Australia*; and *Orana: journal of school and children's librarianship*; and the lack of growth in LIS PhD completions relative to total growth of PhDs in Australia (Macauley et al, 2009). Exacerbating this predicament is the widely known issue of our ageing workforce and, in particular, our ageing LIS academics. However, it is not just academics that undertake research. In fact, should we expect sixty-odd academics from a total of approximately 4500 ALIA personal members to undertake the majority of research in what is, realistically, a practitioner based profession? We certainly have a dilemma.

A typical response from practitioners regarding such dilemmas is, 'so what is ALIA going to do about it?'. So who or what is ALIA? We all know the answers. ALIA is composed of us – members – and it is up to us, or at least some of us, to undertake research. As a practitioner based discipline, it makes sense that we produce practitioner research. So what is ALIA doing about it?

Well, for a start, there is the ALIA Research Committee. You are represented on the committee by ALIA Executive Director, Sue Hutley; experienced researchers, Dr Peter Macauley (Chair), Dr Gaby Haddow, Dr Mary Anne Kennan, Dr Anne Lloyd, Dr Michael Olsson, Associate Professor Helen Partridge, Associate Professor Kerry Smith, and Dr Suzana Sukovic, all active researchers in LIS. The committee look forward to working with our new members and narrowing any real or perceived gap between research and practice.

In particular, the role of the research committee is to foster research which underpins innovation and improvement in library and information practice by:

- Administering and overseeing operation of the Association's Research Fund;
- Recommending recipients of ALIA Research Awards to the Board of Directors;
- Contributing to the development of Association policies or research; and
- Encouraging publication of funded research activities within and beyond the Association.

The ALIA awards and scholarships acknowledge and encourage practitioner research. These include the Ray Choate Scholarship, Library Technician Research Award, YBP/Lindsay & Croft Research Award for Collection Services, The Twila Ann Janssen Herr Award, and Study Grant Awards. More information about these significant awards and scholarships is available from: **http://www.alia.org.au/awards/**. Any of the Research Committee members can provide advice to those interested in applying for the awards.

ALIA also encourages research capacity building through the Research Mentoring Scheme. The Scheme is the result of a proposal by ALIA Director Helen Partridge who said, "The aim of the project is to provide a mechanism for encouraging and supporting the development of research skill, knowledge, and practice in the Australian library profession generally and in the ALIA membership in particular. The research mentoring program will provide the opportunity to develop a culture of research within the Australian library profession. It will provide encouragement, assistance and expertise in the research process for protégés. The research mentoring program will help to ease the transition from a practice oriented library and information professional to the research oriented library and information profession."

These are some of the things ALIA, and ALIA members, are doing to encourage and support research and research training in LIS. ALIA values feedback, so feel free to contact Executive Director, Sue Hutley (email: sue.hutley@alia.org.au) or Peter Macauley (email: peter.macauley@rmit.edu.au) if you have any suggestions regarding research support for ALIA members.

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Hallam, G. (2007). Education for library and information science. In S. Ferguson (Ed.), *Libraries in the twenty-first century: charting new directions in library services* (pp. 311-336). Wagga Wagga, New South Wales: Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University.

Macauley, P., Evans, T., & Pearson, M. (2009). *Classifying Australian PhD Theses by Research Fields, Courses and Disciplines: report on a study for the Research Excellence Branch*, Australian Research Council: RMIT University, Deakin University and the Australian National University. Retrieved April 9, 2010, from **http://prodmams.rmit.edu.au/qjcu4phay2ia.pdf.**