

Information Futures Commission – submission

Library users and their perceptions

The Library is described in its vision as “the ‘heart’ of the University of Melbourne, enabling scholarship in all its forms”¹.

The Library vision was underpinned by market research with students, academics, librarians and the University leadership. As is normal the personal experiences of those engaged in the market research sometimes escalated their individual experiences/ opinions to the broader needs. This was particularly evident in the highly charged debate about the physical versus the digital, or ‘what is the future of the Book?’ It is important that this is recognised and make decisions with both our heads and hearts.

Based on this initial research, I would argue that there is no one size fits all for making decisions to enable the future scholarship information lifecycle and further research is required.²

It is critical that the decisions on scholarly information are based on, and seen to be based on:

- Substantive, evidence based research on what enables the best student/ scholarly engagement, both from Melbourne’s direct experience and global leaders in this space;
- An articulated detailed analysis of what is expected at each stage of the scholarly information journey from the University of Melbourne – the ‘attributes for information scholars’.

Although there are other potential factors³ the two most important elements for Melbourne’s scholarly information decision based on the initial research for the Library vision are:

- Discipline (and splits within discipline) – Arts needs are very different to Medicine. And within Arts there are huge differences depending on the subject⁴;
- Stage of the scholarly information journey⁵ – There are different needs for: first and second year undergraduates; third year plus undergraduates; Masters Coursework; Masters Research; and PhD student, as well as teaching academics and research academics. This is an initial segmentation that could be split differently or be more refined, based on research.

From an initial literature review the addition of the stage of the scholarly journey, to the well documented discipline focus, has not been studied in any depth. There would be tremendous interest in this approach as it would have great practical applicability to all Universities.

It is recommended that Melbourne develops a framework/ matrix based along these two axes for the whole scholarly information lifecycle, combining it with knowledge of what creates the best scholarly engagement. A key output would be the documented attributes for information scholars based on their discipline and their stage in the scholarly journey. This will help Melbourne make informed decisions for its future scholarly information that are based on the head and heart, rather than just the heart.

James Beckford Saunders,

Marketing and Change Manager, Information Services, University of Melbourne - 9th May 2008.

¹ University of Melbourne Library – a vision for 2015, November 2007 - which was approved by Academic Board in December 2007 <http://inside.infoservices.unimelb.edu.au/library/futures/vision.html>

² The scholarly information lifecycle that has been used by the Information Futures Commission works through information from its *Creation stage*, to the *Contribution stage* of disseminating, sharing and preserving it, to the *Access stage* of finding it and viewing it, to the *Use stage* where it is analysed, interpreted and synthesised.

³ These include International/Australian, Gender, Age, Social-Economic background and would be worthy of further research.

⁴ Professor Mark Considine, Dean of Arts recently commented on this at the Information Futures Commission Open IdeaS Forum 'Scholarly Information in a Digital Age' – 8 May 2008

⁵ For example, the research revealed that many students don’t access information literacy training past their first year undergraduate. In addition, PhD students/ academics described them often hitting a wall early on when they realised the superficial nature of their information scholarship skills.