



THE UNIVERSITY OF

MELBOURNE

SUBMISSION ON BEHALF OF THE COMMITTEE OF
CONVOCATION, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

TO

THE INFORMATION FUTURES COMMISSION
APRIL 2008

This Submission was accepted overwhelmingly at a meeting of the
Committee of Convocation, University of Melbourne on April 16th
2008

L. J. Boston
President
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**SUBMISSION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE INFORMATION FUTURES
COMMISSION BY THE COMMITTEE OF CONVOCATION**

The University is to be congratulated on restoring the position of University Librarian with a supporting structure, which has already raised the Library's profile, and on setting up the Information Futures Commission to bring the Library's problems, some long-standing, before the University community. As the Vice-Chancellor writes in his foreword to the Consultation Paper of February 2008ⁱ, while "The fates of research libraries and universities are inter-twined", our Library is facing difficulties both with respect to its great collections of scholarly publications, cultural materials and archives, and resources made available on the internet.

This submission, made by the Committee of Convocation, is concerned with issues relating to the Library, in line with the motion carried by the Committee of Convocation and forwarded to the University Council late in 2007. That motion stated:

That the Committee believes that an opportunity now exists through the adoption of the ten year plan to improve book storage facilities in the University and strongly encourages the University Council to proceed with the process of consultation and planning to provide appropriate accommodation, with a strong preference for accommodation on campus, for its substantial and important print resources, including research collections. The Committee believes that planning should allow for further substantial growth into the future, given the present storage difficulties.

This submission assumes that the production of digitally-produced material will grow and that more space will be needed to accommodate the hardware, access facilities and the students using them. Since it is the nature of the virtual world that access is possible from anywhere, it is not strictly necessary that a university provide this space (the Consultation Paperⁱⁱ cites examples of those who do not). Melbourne, rightly in our view, has chosen to do so, in the course of creating a student "Experience", student life and the provision of resources for learning, on campus. Unfortunately, while the internet provides students with cheaper and readier access to some study materials than would be the case if these were in print only, private suppliers of electronic resources may charge heavily, especially for access to journals.

RECOMMENDATION 1: that the University do all it can, acting with other universities and professional bodies, to ensure that digital information is available at a fair and reasonable cost, so that it continue to be widely accessible.

This submission also assumes a need for easy access to books and other printed materials which, despite the burgeoning use of electronic resources, will not diminish in the foreseeable future, though it may be that these will be most heavily used by the scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Professor Andrew Abbott of Chicago, while conceding this point, also says: “a study of 5700 scholars at (this) University showed a strong correlation between heavy users of print and heavy users of electronic sources, scholarship advancing on electronic and physical fronts at once, so that a serious research library must be both physical and technological.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In Melbourne too the provision and use of digital material has not reduced the demand for physical library collections. The production of books is growing, not diminishing in quantity,^{iv} and there is a substantial demand for literature produced prior to the electronic age. In 2006, the materials vote was shared equally between physical and electronic resources. Melbourne’s physical collections are expanding by more than 60,000 volumes per annum and creating further pressure on space inadequate already, but Dr. Kenn Fisher, among his comparisons between Melbourne and others of the Group of 8 Universities and Universitas 21 partners, reports with respect to the number of volumes per EFTSU in the collection, that Melbourne, with 90+ per EFTSU, is well below the average of 125.^v

The survey by the Society of College, National and University Libraries (U.K.) in August 2007 reported a long-term increase in the number of book loans, up by 11% in the past 10 years, with Melbourne’s loan rate of 42 loans per EFTSU leading that of Griffith and Monash. Unless a technological break-through makes digital the preferred format for books consulted for their sustained argument or narrative, the demand for physical books, we believe, will long continue. Books are pleasant and comfortable to read anywhere; and their content is stable, resisting

deliberate tampering and accidental erasure.^{vi} The technology does not yet exist to make extensive reading of digital information as easy on the eye as the reading of print items.

Storage of printed materials require the strong floors which the purpose-built Baillieu Library provides, but competition for this space from claimants (in themselves worthy) leaves only the Baillieu's second and third floors out of the five for books (the first and basement hold small quantities). Not only are there many more students and staff than when the Baillieu Library was built, but it must accommodate computers, of which in term time there are never enough, and the new "learning spaces" where students "are encouraged to work collaboratively"^{vii} as well as individually. The Library staff has grown, and although those of Technical Services were moved to another building, the space thus vacated was occupied by the Book Room.

Melbourne is following the "general trend" where campus libraries are seen as centres for research and student self-learning, collaboratively or otherwise^{viii} (when were they not?), trading-off space for people against browsing space for books. It is the lesser-used books and non-current issues of serials which lose in this competition and are exiled off-site. Indeed, it is said that the purchase of a book necessitates the moving off-site of one presently held on the browsing shelves. The University of Chicago is cited as an exception among American universities following this trend, placing a new automated storage and retrieval system adjacent to its existing research library^{ix}. In Australia, Macquarie University appears to be exceptional in planning to keep its collection together in one building, though 80% of space is also to be of the "automated storage and retrieval" type (i.e. cannot be "browsed"). In Melbourne, following the general trend means that there are about 2 million books available for browsing on campus and 1.5 million elsewhere. Items requested from off-site storage at CARM are delivered in about four days; those stored at Brunswick within 24 hours. This method, however, is satisfactory only when the book needed is known, and we should bear in mind Fisher's observation that, "evidence world-wide shows that the value of material stored off-campus is never realized".

RECOMMENDATION 2: that storage space be found or created on campus, preferably close to the Baillieu Library, for a greatly increased number of volumes. Storage for five million volumes would be seen as the minimum provision. It should be possible to browse the overwhelming majority of these volumes. A fast and efficient retrieval system should be provided and funds made available to complete and maintain a high quality digital catalogue of all printed items held by the University. There should also be increased provision of suitable space made for the valuable Rare Books, Special Collections and Archives, which form part of the Library.

Placing students and computers in the Library has the advantage of facilitating use of printed materials and computers at the same time. Visits to the Percy Baxter Collaborative Learning Centre in the first and second week of the semester showed approximately six students, among those using approximately forty computers, also had books on the desk. Apart from two groups on the first occasion, all students were working singly. At the computerless tables at the front students read books or used laptops, only two working together. During a second visit further into the semester there were nineteen groups of two or more, spread among some forty computers and several tables. Perhaps the need is for more small work-stations rather than those accommodating groups. More collaborating was seen in the large “quiet discussion area”, along with (it seemed) much social chat.

Fisher^x alludes to the Library’s expressions of awareness over a long period of time of the chronic shortage of spaces for collections, computers, study, informal collaborative learning and socializing. The Library’s obligation to provide the last is not obvious. The custom of students leaving to talk to friends is long-established. A problem in recent years has been the need for comfortable cafés, enclosed and staying open in the evenings. The University is trying to recreate this type of facility in the student “hubs” or branch libraries. Is it not possible to negotiate with present refreshment suppliers on campus to remain open later?

RECOMMENDATION 3: that the University investigate the possibility of re-establishing a closed-in café, open in the evening, very close to the Baillieu to reduce the need for socializing within the Library itself. The University should also continue to expand the number of private study spaces for students on campus, given the periodic shortage of such spaces.

Library staff and others have given much thought to the best method of distributing library facilities, including books, over the campus. Funding will dictate the number and type of branch libraries, and the facilities they can offer. Indeed, some academic staff regret the loss of small departmental libraries, which functioned as learning hubs, rating their convenience of location above the advantages offered by a large, combined unit elsewhere. It does seem that a central library, holding the main book-stock, offering extensive opening hours and all library services, and serving as a headquarters of a distributed Library service is the most suitable model. A central Library (the Baillieu) already exists, though in a state of crisis for want of funds and attention over many years. It was purpose-built to take the weight of thousands of books on every floor, there being no other like it on campus. Its use, therefore, for purposes other than the storage and display of books is a waste of a unique resource. No other building on campus can store so many books. Almost any other building, however, could be adapted for any one of the secondary uses that have now been housed in the Baillieu.

RECOMMENDATION 4: that, as far as possible, a strong central library be the main repository for print items, with a number of smaller libraries maintaining a high level of service with adequate opening hours for University community use.

As a separate issue, the Baillieu Library is in great need of refurbishment. Its approaching Jubilee year provides an opportunity for the University to seek funding and undertake the necessary works as well as the long-term planning to construct or create such library facilities as befit a great University of the future. The Committee believes that a review of the use of space in

the Library should yield additional space for storage and student use of both books and e-resources.

RECOMMENDATION 5: that the University seek to carry out a review of the use of existing space in the Baillieu and proceed to a major refurbishment of that Library as soon as possible. The space occupied by the Book Room should be returned for Library use.

Whatever the result of such a review, it is clear that the Baillieu, without extension, together with other existing libraries, cannot accommodate all physical holdings. If warehouse storage is necessary, it should be nearby, with browsing facilities offered where appropriate. However, possible means of extending the Baillieu Library should be explored.

Recommendation 6: that the University consider ways of increasing space available for the use of the Baillieu Library.

In conclusion, the Committee of Convocation stands by its motion of late 2007 in urging the University Council and now the Information Futures Commission, to plan for substantial increases in on-campus facilities to accommodate print resources and research collections. We believe facilities for, at least, 5 million volumes should be provided for on campus and that as many items as possible should be accessible for easy browsing. We thank the Commission for this opportunity to present our point of view.

Summary of Recommendations:

- 1. That the University do all it can, acting with other universities and professional bodies, to ensure that digital information is available at a fair and reasonable cost, so that it continue to be made widely accessible.**
- 2. That storage space be found or created on campus, preferably close to the Baillieu Library, for a greatly increased number of volumes. Storage for 5 million volumes would be seen as the minimum provision. It should be possible to browse the overwhelming majority of these volumes. A fast and efficient retrieval system should be provided and funds made available to complete and maintain a high quality digital catalogue of all printed items held by the University. There should also be increased provision of suitable space made for the valuable Rare Books, Special Collections and Archives, which form part of the Library.**
- 3. That the University investigate the possibility of re-establishing a closed-in café, open in the evening, very close to the Baillieu to reduce the need for socializing within the Library itself. The University should also continue to expand private study spaces for students on campus, given the periodic shortage of such spaces.**

4. That, as far as possible, a strong central library be the main repository for print items, with a number of smaller libraries maintaining a high level of service with adequate opening hours for University community use.

5. That the University seek to carry out a review of the use of existing space in the Baillieu and proceed to a major refurbishment of that Library as soon as possible. The space occupied by the Book Room should be returned for Library use.

6. That the University consider ways of increasing space available for the use of the Baillieu Library.

ⁱ Information Futures Commission: "Scholarly Information in a Digital Age", Consultation Paper, Feb. 2008.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. p.10.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. p.8.

^{iv} Ibid. p.5.

^v Dr. Kenn Fisher, "University of Melbourne Libraries Executive Summary Report, 10 year strategic plan", Feb. 2005. p.4.

^{vi} Consultation Paper p.10.

^{vii} *ibid.* p.10-11.

^{viii} *ibid.* p.20

^{ix} *ibid.* .20

^x Fisher, *op cit.* p.3.