

**Report from the Melbourne Experience Committee on discussion of the paper  
*Scholarly Information in a Digital Age – Choices for the University of Melbourne***

**1. Reports of Activities Relating to the ‘Melbourne Experience’**

**Scholarly Information in a Digital Age – Choices for the University of Melbourne**

Members agreed that the paper raised significant issues that will impact not just on the University but also the higher education sector and the wider community. Continuing along the current path is not a feasible option for the University and it was noted that Ms Linda O’Brien, Vice – Principal (Information) and her team are keen to present a series of choices to the University incorporating feedback received.

The Committee’s discussion is summarised under the following topics:

**1. Spaces**

- i) A balance needs to be achieved between the Library and other spaces utilised by students in the learning process, with less actively utilised materials stored off campus to free up collaborative activity spaces for students.
- ii) The positive affection for the Library needs to be acknowledged and in conclusions drawn from a study conducted by the Library it was noted that the library is viewed from different perspectives; as a safe/secure space which students identify with and which provides the first level contact with learning materials; the Library as people - a reference to the service provided by staff and the Library as a collection of learning materials.
- iii) The popularity of the Engineering Student and Learning Centre, an invigorating home based space for this student cohort, close to teaching spaces provides a great ‘break out space’ for students where learning continues outside the classroom. Therefore it was suggested that while the Library could be utilised as the focus of scholarly activity, a network of other spaces is required to enhance the social/collaborative nature of the learning process.
- iv) The creation of these spaces can be viewed as the commencement of a progressive enhancement of the physical environment to provide students with the best Melbourne and cohort experience.
- v) It was observed that at some Universities, students feel free to enter any part of the campus however at the University of Melbourne access to spaces is more restricted via keys, Proximity and Swipe Cards.

**2. Collections**

- i) It is possibly not necessary to have original journals on campus, as these are available online, so storage off campus should be explored.
- ii) While it was acknowledged that the University has been bequeathed with important collections from people of significant standing in the community and it is the responsibility of the University to ensure that these are catalogued and maintained for research purposes, it was suggested that these might be better handled in partnership with a Museum or other similar institutions.
- iii) In recognition of the fact that the University has a much larger collection than most of our counterparts (which gives the University a level of prestige, status and a competitive edge) a national strategy, with the University taking a

leadership role, was recommended to deal with these collections for the benefit of students and the wider community.

### **3. Access for Students**

- i) Ease of access to information for undergraduate, postgraduate and research students is critical and storage on or off campus needs to be prioritised based on students' needs.
- ii) A significant tension identified in the paper is the importance of balancing the different forms of access. Members were of the opinion that multiple forms of access rather than concentration on a select few will be necessary. As a learning, teaching and research community, we need to better understand what is important about interaction, including social interaction, in promoting learning and take advantage of and promote access to those materials and spaces that enhance this.
- iii) It was observed that the provision of rich learning experiences and the funding of collections and spaces is linked to marketing and maintenance of the University of Melbourne brand. An important aspect in the recruitment of postgraduate students is access to the exceptional collections of the University.

### **4. Support for Diverse Student groups**

- i) A structured approach is required to address the diverse usage, access and skill levels of students from equity backgrounds as well as international students, to avoid disadvantaging these cohorts.
- ii) It was mentioned that in 2003-2004, Academic Board had supported the embedding of information literacy in course offerings and this may need to be re-examined as some students struggle with navigating their way through the online materials, finding it difficult to evaluate and synthesise the relevant information. It was important to avoid making assumptions about the competence and confidence of students in accessing the University's vast resources. It was suggested that this information literacy skill could be built into breadth subjects.

### **5. Open Access**

- i) It was acknowledged that it is a mark of confidence for a University to have open access to its materials. MIT has had an increase in student numbers since it has embarked on its open access path and Harvard University has ensured that its academics in the Arts and Social Sciences publish in open access Journals.
- ii) If the University undertakes to go down this path, it needs support from staff at the grassroots level, at the learning/teaching/research interface, as it is the intellectual property of staff and students that will be more openly available and they need to feel comfortable for this to occur. It was observed that it would be very beneficial for the University's Indigenous Studies to be available to the broader community given the unique nature of the information.
- iii) Open access is affecting a number of stakeholders including the publishing industry and it was noted that the University needs to make a decision in relation to this fairly rapidly or it will lose the potential for impact.
- iv) Overall there was support for moving to more open access.