

A RESPONSE TO “SCHOLARLY INFORMATION IN A DIGITAL AGE”

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A broad strategic assessment of needs is long overdue. I will limit myself to 5 brief points but would be pleased to elaborate if requested:

1. **Scale.** *Melbourne’s biggest challenge is to increase the proportion of university resources directed to library resources.*

The present level of collections and allocation of space and facilities is comparable with other G8 universities but falls well below the standards of leading international universities. To be harsh, Melbourne has a good undergraduate library system but is a very patchy research library. If Melbourne aspires to be a leading international university, it will have to stop making excuses, set appropriate targets and find the resources.

2. **Funding.** *No review has any substance unless it addresses both the level of funding and the funding mechanisms.*

Ideally funds should be earmarked in the long-term for library resources, including a proportion of fees from postgraduate enrolments. More attention should be given to endowments and corporate sponsorship for large projects.

3. **Access.** *Offsite and unbrowsable collections deny access to researchers who cannot identify specific authors and titles.*

Offsite access works well for readily identifiable titles and authors. It does not work in cases where researchers need to browse through related materials. This leads to absurdities where researchers go to other libraries, sometimes overseas, to obtain materials that potentially are available in their own universities.

4. **Cataloguing.** *Melbourne must overcome the large backlog in cataloguing.*

Uncatalogued materials effectively do not exist. The same applies to badly catalogued items. Librarians understand this. Those who allocate library resources usually do not.

5. **Foreign language collections.** *Melbourne cannot aspire to be an international university without substantial non-English-language collections and a strategy for building them.*

‘Globalisation’ and ‘digitalisation’ will not eliminate the use of foreign languages. Cutting-edge research will continue to need foreign-language sources. For historical reasons the Library has some good materials in French, German, Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian. Their long-term place in the library system is insecure, as demonstrated by the recent debacle of shifting a large proportion of Indonesian-language materials into offsite storage.

Foreign-language collections have special needs and require specialist librarians.

Asian Studies collections are undervalued and especially at risk. The reality is that an international university cannot neglect its own immediate region, which in Australia's case is Asia.