

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

Submission from the Friends of the Baillieu Library

Introduction

The Friends of the Baillieu Library welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation paper *Scholarly Information in a Digital Age – Choices for the University of Melbourne*. In doing so, the Friends commends the University and the paper's authors for providing a masterful overview of the challenges facing the University at a crucial time in its development.

The Friends of the Baillieu Library

The Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne was opened in 1959. Seven years later, in 1966, the Friends of the Baillieu Library was founded with the expressed aim to “provide a fund for the purchase of books, manuscripts or prints required by the Library. This aim still remains at the core of the Friends’ activities, but these have broadened over time (1). The Friends were very early entrants in the field of supporting University collections.

The Friends have long held a “watching brief” on the Library’s overall position within the University and have welcomed the increasing importance placed on the Library and its services in the last couple of years.

The Report

At this stage, the Friends of the Baillieu Library do not propose to submit a detailed response to the Report.

The Report does provide a broad overview of the challenges facing a University at a time when technology is changing at an ever-increasing pace. It rightly highlights the demands of both students and researchers and brings out their differing requirements.

In our view, the key challenge is articulated on p. 27 of the Report:

What is the right balance between browsable collections, collaborative spaces and individual spaces in the Melbourne library of the future? What will scholars and students be prepared to access by connecting to electronic sources rather than viewing physical collections? To access by recalling the physical object from a non-browsable source?

Students need both a place to work and a place to make them passionate about the printed word.

The publication of printed materials is increasing, not decreasing. The “digital revolution” is adding another dimension to research and learning. The two approaches exist side by side and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Students come to the university skilled in manipulating technology but these skills do not always translate into the ability to navigate their way through the world of refereed knowledge. The role of the Library and its staff is crucial in this area.

The University libraries are desperately short of space – space for students to work and space for its collections to grow. In 2009, the Baillieu Library will celebrate its Golden Jubilee. There could be no better an occasion to announce the refurbishment of the existing building and the provision of major new facilities centrally located on campus. The new facilities should allow for the extensive browsing of printed resources as well as space for students to work either alone or collaboratively. The University’s concrete responses to these challenges are keenly awaited.

It is assumed that the next stage of the process will include the University’s proposals as to how these challenges will be met. The Friends feel that it is best to wait until this is underway before developing a more detailed submission.

Graham Dudley
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Endnote

- (1) The current Constitution of the Friends (adopted in 2006) identifies seven aims:
- a. *to support The University of Melbourne Library,including the Baillieu Library and all Branch Libraries, by ways and means the members determine from time to time. The aims shall include the following:*
 - b. *to identify any books, manuscripts, prints, paintings and other materials of value for The Library and acquire them by purchase, gift or other means;*
 - c. *to assist and support The Library in the care, maintenance and preservation of its collections;*
 - d. *to obtain gifts of money or other property whether real or personal, for The University, to be used for the purposes of The Library;*
 - e. *to organise meetings for members at which they may be addressed by authors and other literati, view exhibitions and libraries, and engage in discussions that promote knowledge about books for their instruction and enjoyment;*
 - f. *to co-operate or associate with other bodies sharing the Friends' aims;*
 - g. *to publish or assist the publication of any work consistent with the objects of the Friends.*