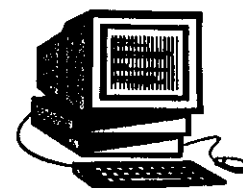


# ***Serials: paper and electronic: St Mark's Library experience***



*Anne Morris-Bannerman*

In April 2000, we decided to have a Seminar devoted to the issues surrounding Serials, electronic and paper.

## **Our situation at St Mark's Library**

St Mark's Library is a typical theological library with a healthy mixture of new technology and databases alongside Rare Books and paper copy Serials.

- We have three hundred serial titles acquired through Blackwells, through other institutions via system of exchange with other institutions and direct subscription.
- We have access to 70 journal databases through our affiliation with Charles Sturt University. The important databases are Periodical Abstracts and Current Contents.
- We had a variety of CD ROMs, some which are networked and some single license arrangements. One of these is ATLA Religion Index.
- A Library Home Page was developed in 1999 by a group of University of Canberra students and has recently been loaded onto the CSU Library Homepage.

## **Pressure points on St Mark's Library**

During 1999, it became obvious that St Mark's Library could no longer ignore the pressure from the information world to change more towards the electronic mode of providing library information. We needed at least to pose the questions surrounding the serial debate. There were a number of pressure points:

Financial considerations. In 1999, we had estimated that our serial costs would be \$10,000. The costs crept up to \$12,000 and Blackwells predicted an average increase in the costs of journals for 2000 of 10%. The A\$ had suffered during 1999 and was not expected to recover in 2000.

We have, with other theological libraries, negotiated affordable access to ProQuest Religion. ProQuest Religion covers 50 journals cover to cover, 22 of these were held in our Library. Two titles were exchange journals with other institutions and two had been discontinued. The 18 remaining titles were purchased through Blackwell costing around \$1900 in 1999. Therefore a question of whether to cancel subscriptions to at least some of the 18 journals.

We serve over 300 Distance Education students. These students access our collections CSU library Homepage and only rarely use our paper collections direct when they come into St Mark's for residentials.

During 1999 we had a series of talks with Unilinc and DA Information around ATLA Religion Index online. An administrative delay gave me time to rethink and I decided to cancel the order. It was to have cost around US\$3000. I reordered the CD-ROM for 2000, however the 2000 version has proved to be cumbersome and difficult to use. I will revisit the online version for 2001. This

process became symbolic of the struggle of choices between CD ROMs and databases.

During 1999 a group of Information Management students developed a St Mark's Library Homepage. This has been loaded onto the CSU Library Homepage. There has been a question of the part this plays in relation to journals.

#### **Who we invited to the seminar**

- The St Mark's Library staff - one staff member is responsible for Distance Education and works also at the ANU; the cataloguer has been at St Mark's for 18 years and is able to give a historical perspective for us in these sorts of library discussions.
- A representative each from the undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- Our academic administrator who is involved with the gathering of articles for the reading bricks for Distance Education subjects.
- The Business Manager, the 'reality bites' person in our institution.
- Library committee members including staff from Signadou campus of ACU and the National Library.
- And I spoke on behalf of Margaret Macpherson, the Charles Sturt University Librarian.

In order to set an academic tone to the seminar, I decided to take the opportunity to invite a speaker from the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, which is located on the St Mark's premises. I invited Dr Anna Corbo-Crehan to talk from an ethics point of view.

Dr Corbo-Crehan's talk did set the tone for a very interesting discussion and sharing of experiences around online databases, including the benefits, the fears, the shortcomings, and the inevitabilities.

In general, the seminar was a very frank encounter where we all learnt a lot about the electronic journal environment (particularly from SCU), about the needs of students, and about the issues driving the debate.

#### **Ethical points from Anna's paper**

"Anything that interferes with, or runs counter to the aims we think a library ought to have will be wrong; anything which is conducive to those aims will be right."

This is the basis of what our library considerations need to be when thinking about any changes, including the electronic changes. Libraries have an obligation to make the materials held as accessible as possible. This of course depends on the type of material; for example rare Books and manuscripts need more control than access to journals.

#### *Points Anna raised*

- Will and do electronic journals give access to all we can now access in the hardcopy journal. eg conference details, book reviews.
- Electronic journals would obviously make access easier for students who live at a distance from the library; students who are ill, have family commitments or who have transport difficulties; part-time students.
- Access to electronic journals does require computer hardware and software. Therefore there is a question of fair distribution for students who do not have access to a computer
- There is an issue of computer literacy and the extra work for library staff in training students either via electronic information or with face to face sessions in the library.

- What is fair usage of the Internet in libraries? How much should an institution carry a student's use of the Internet and when should student pay? This includes the demand for copying of articles. What is fair for a student to pay and what are the responsibilities of the institution?

#### **Views of undergraduate students, postgraduate students and the academic administrator.**

- The students expressed a frustration for many of their colleagues around computer literacy. This included the use of the catalogue for some and the databases for many students. Therefore real issues for the library staff to provide literacy training. I am aware that ACU and CSU have both concentrated on database and catalogue literacy via the Homepages and face to face with students. Our computer training of students has increased during 2000. Training needs to extend to staff training in the use of new database packages and CD ROMs.
- Some distance students do not have a computer and others do not have access to the Internet. Where students have access to the Internet, speed of access is slow, leading to a high communications costs. The general problem also for many is the frustration and delays when the system is down.
- Problem of access to older issues of a journal, together with the concern about gaps in the holdings. There is a real concern about the stability of a title within a database. A preference for a balance between paper and electronic titles.
- The electronic journals did provide a good source of articles for the development of distance education packages for the academic staff.

#### **Business Manager**

- Concerns about the ongoing hardware and software costs, including printing costs.
- Short term implications of the GST at all levels
- Problem of royalties from the use of electronic journals.

#### **Charles Sturt University and the Australian Catholic University have some points of similarity around e-journals.**

- Each university has a number of campuses scattered throughout the Australian eastern states.
- Both have made electronic information available to students and staff. Each has many databases and thousands of journals accessible on their systems.
- Both have placed an emphasis on computer literacy.
- St Mark's is different in focus from Signadou, the Canberra ACU campus, in that the majority of the St Mark's students are Distance Education students.
- Both CSU and ACU have referred to their Collection Development policies when making decisions about journal retention. In general availability of online alternatives and the subject focus of campuses drive these decisions.

The tough economic environment facing both library systems influences rationalisation of titles.

#### **Some of the issues facing St Marks**

All of the concerns above face St Mark's Library. We are particularly concerned about continuous access to a title and archiving of electronic journals. Theological students are conservative and prefer paper copy journals, however we have a responsibility to enable access to information for the distance student. There is a tension, therefore, between serving the on-campus students and researchers, and providing resources for the distance students.

St Mark's is likely to take an approach that provides a hybrid collection of paper and electronic journal titles. Exchange journals will continue for a while at least, as will subscriptions to some of the academic journals. Hopefully there will be a move towards subscribing to databases with a theological and biblical focus.

The era of the library as a safe haven, to which we can retreat to quietly read, research and study, is definitely being challenged by the development of online information and electronic access to books and journals. It is important for us to also hold that vision of a lovely library space for those who do have direct access to the paper collection. Our Library holds that vision. However we are, at the same time taking the opportunity to access the online collections.

### **Conclusion**

The tight financial resources for libraries together with the technological age, which pursues us like an obsessed and spreading empire, are driving us towards uncomfortable choices. These choices offend our responsibilities, as librarians, to preserve and protect information stored in books and journals. We have come to accept tapes and videos, microfilm and microfiche.

However this current environment where our precious information is placed under the control of elusive companies run by non librarians, sends tremors through our confidence, questioning our purpose, our very *raison d'être*. Like doctors, whose values of preservation of life are being threatened by the power of the patient and too many people, so too are we, as librarians, with values of preservation, being threatened by the power of the literate electronic user and perhaps too much information.

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