

The Challenges of Two Libraries

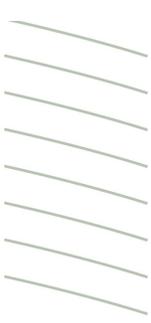
by Deborah Decru

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My role as Librarian at St Athanasius College involves working between two libraries at our campuses in Donvale and Eporo Tower, La Trobe St, Melbourne CBD. I work a twenty-hour week, mostly at the Donvale Campus as it has the space and unobtrusiveness to be a “work” place, so the covering and labelling of print books is confined to that library as is everything involving paperwork. The Eporo Campus Library is small, highly visible and unsuited to my level of messiness, and the Library desk is often used by others for study because it has the best spot on the College floor, so it’s problematic to leave anything lying around. We have a small collection of around 5,500 monographs and journals spread across the two campuses.

When I was first given the opportunity to look at plans for our College’s second campus and library, I was excited at the prospect of designing a new library space. Little did I realise at the time that the space was very small and quite restricted in its possibilities. Nevertheless, I was able to mock-up what I believed to be a useful combination of private and group study and sitting areas, and I passed these ideas on to the designer for the whole floor. Unfortunately, many of my suggestions were overlooked but the end result is still quite pleasing.

The Bishop had already included a compactus (mobile shelving) in the new library specifications, and wanted the type that was used in St Vladimir’s Seminary in the U.S., the full electronic version. I was able to find the company



that imports the same working parts from the U.S. and then builds their own framework. My contact at Dexion was fantastic and walked me through the whole process. Unfortunately, he left before the compactus was installed and we never finalised the idea of installing a locking mechanism on the bays to secure the more valuable books. The compactus works well for the level of demand at the Library. I don't think it would suit most library environments as it's really a one-person-at-a-time solution for a small space.

In preparing for the additional campus, I introduced RFID tagging to the library to enable a self-borrowing kiosk to be installed at the new site, knowing there would not always be a librarian available. I researched the products on offer and interviewed four librarians about their experiences with the two major players in the field. I decided to move forward with FE Technologies because the hardware seemed to differ very little across the two companies, but I found FE Technologies' customer service far superior and that was important to me as a non-technical person. Their product has been reliable to date and the kiosk is very easy to use. Tagging was onerous but not overwhelming, particularly as we have a small collection and I had some help to break up the routine. I did envisage installing security gates at the new library, but this proved unviable as the door is set against a wall on one side so there is no room for gates. With the site often unattended, no one is around to notice an alarm in any case.

Plans for use of the two campuses were not articulated in advance and questions such as, "Will I get a car space?" were never answered. As it turns out, I don't have a car space and usually pay to park across the road in a city carpark when I need to bring in or take out books. I bought a Clax cart to transport large numbers of books. This is a foldable trolley with folding crates, very easy to collapse and lift into the car boot.

Each semester the evenings when there are classes at Eporo change, so I have to be flexible regarding my availability. I have the help of a volunteer so to date I have needed to be at Eporo only one night a week. I prepare for the upcoming semester by checking holdings at each library for the units being taught and ensuring all relevant books are in the correct place. I change the shelving location for each item on the LMS and put an Eporo Campus sticker on books as required. This has been helpful when books are returned to the other library. There are sometimes issues when assignments are due as I can't always move everything that might be useful. This is an ongoing problem, but fortunately the wealth of online resources we have access to now through the University of Divinity can usually offset any deficiencies in print offerings.

We have very few students taking face-to-face classes at Donvale so the library there is rarely used by students, although academic staff make good use of our print resources. The predominance of students studying online has made my role easier as I focus more on providing online materials where available. Print book purchasing is generally restricted to specialised research areas pertaining to early Christianity and monasticism in Egypt, and Orthodox studies, except where insufficient online resources are available for teaching units.

Five years ago, overseeing the two libraries as a half-time librarian would have been extremely difficult, possibly unviable due to the need to move books around, but with the increase in online study and resource availability, the demands on me have reduced significantly, to the point where, effectively, the College has one active library and a storage/workspace facility.



Fig 1: Eporo Campus Library



Fig 2: Donvale Campus Library