

1992. In addition, organisations which are not members of ACLIS and did respond to the Networks Survey are invited to contact the ACLIS office for a gratis copy of the Library Networks report. Additional copies are available from the ACLIS Secretariat at \$15 for the serials study, and \$15 for the networks study, with both prices including postage. A full report on the collection development policies survey has been sent to all ACLIS State and Territory Committees for their consideration and further action.

On behalf of the ACLIS National Council, I would like to thank you for your interest in these studies. If your organisation is not already a member of ACLIS, and you would like to know more about its activities, please write to me at the address below and I will be happy to send you further information.

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MY ROLE AS A RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Margaret Bolton

A couple of hundred years ago that well known philosopher of life Francis Bacon wrote in one of his Essays:

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention. Some books may also be read by deputy, and extracts made of them by others.

(Francis Bacon: Essays 50 of Studies)

It is nearly 12 months now that I have been employed as a research assistant by the Religion Studies Department in the School of Advanced Studies in Education at the Underdale campus of the University of South Australia.

As I see it, the three skills that I came with that were invaluable to this position were: extensive experience in library research gained through a variety of disciplines (including a passion for family history!), a familiarity with the subject matter of Religion Studies and also with the Library of Underdale, both gained through recently completing a Graduate Diploma course in Religion Education, and last, but certainly not least, computer skills in both word processing and data management.

My position has been basically funded by a grant to build a database of social justice materials suitable firstly for students, but with the potential for much wider use and hopefully for community access in time.

While theoretically this has been the major task for which I was employed, in practice other tasks have taken more of my time, including:

- Copy editing and proof reading a Festschrift put together by Norm Habel in honour of Vic Hayes from Flinders University.
- Undertaking whatever research was asked of me by the various lecturers of the Religion Studies Department.

It is probably this latter aspect of my work that you as theological librarians would be most interested in. However, as I feel it would be good for you to be aware of the other initiatives, I'll touch on them first.

The creation of a **Database** of references pertaining to **Social Justice** issues is, as you can imagine, a task of mammoth proportions, the limits of which are still being worked out.

The sources that I have used include:

- the catalogues of the Underdale Library and other theological collections in Adelaide.
- indexes on CD-ROMs

- published bibliographies on specific issues
- reference material found in the back of books
- the shelves of appropriate bookshops
- and a general garnering of any possible sources (I always have my green jotting book with me and my eyes and ears appropriately tuned).

Materials listed on the database include: books; journal, magazine and newspaper articles; documents from international bodies such as UN and WCC, national and local government departments, and the major Churches; teaching texts and resources; videos and other audio-visuals. The computer software for this database is dBASE IV allowing the setting up of a relational-type database to facilitate searching on subject headings.

A major component that will make or break the functionality of this database is the selection of subject headings. A combination of Library of Congress Subject Headings and those used on the Religion Index are being included so that users familiar with the catalogues of major library collections will feel at home.

The Festschrift: 21 academics from Religion Studies Departments around Australia contributed papers on the theme of Religion and Multiculturalism in Australia. They cover a wide range of issues and make for interesting reading - a must for your libraries when it is published in July.

My task was to transfer each paper from disk to computer, (which sometimes involved conversion from various programs to Word Perfect), to key in those articles that came in hard copy only, to make any necessary amendments (including finding missing parts of reference lists) and then to adjust formatting and style to create a unified whole. Getting the disk and print-outs to the publisher on the very day before a fire destroyed our office along with my computer and disks was theologically providential! It was in completing incomplete references that I learnt my way round the Baker and Taylor Index on ROM (list of all books published in USA) and the ABN on-line.

The first task of Miscellaneous Research was to put together a List of Reference material on Religion Studies available in our UNI SA Library for student use. This included relevant bibliographies, dictionaries and encyclopedias, journals . It was modelled on a similar one from the Barr Smith library for Classics students.

Perhaps the research for which everyone finds my role invaluable is that time-consuming searching through indexes and CD-ROMs looking for material for use when writing books, papers, or articles. The lecturers tell me what their paper is about and I search for suitable material and then locate, photocopy or order it for them through the Inter Library Loan System. Searching on-line catalogues and CD-ROMs for details of appropriate material is the basis of these tasks. With the up and coming advent of direct access from my own computer terminal to our library catalogues through ETHER-NET and eventually to on-line library catalogues throughout Australia through the AARNET system the world will be at my finger tips, so to speak.

Some discussion re the role of research assistant.

An index that I'd like to tell you about, can be found on the ERIC ROM, an index of educational issues from international sources. Because one of the main focuses of our Religion Studies Department is on Religion Education, this index is invaluable too, especially so in that the papers themselves can be read and printed from microfiche copies that are also held by the library.

To the uninitiated today's rapidly advancing computer technology can be intimidating. And even for the experts on-line catalogue and literature searching can be a time-consuming process, the amount of time being proportional to the breadth of the search. For specific focussed topics it can be quite quick, but to browse the broader spectrums takes time, lots of it. I think probably that it is in this browsing that the research assistant has a role over and above that of the librarian. A librarian is expected to provide a service for university staff and students in many different faculties and so time restraints limit the

searches that they are able to undertake to those very focussed ones whereas a research assistant confined to a narrower field of study is more easily able to browse widely for suitable and related material, and especially to select that appropriate to the perspective of the particular study in hand.

And that of course is the huge advantage of on-line searching - it opens great horizons not previously accessible to researchers, horizons that are not only national but international. And it is the great range of articles, papers and ever-developing opinions expressed in the serial literature (along with books) that constitute the primary materials of religion and theological research.

I don't actually read most of the material I produce - in the final analysis the lecturer must read and decide about the primary sources himself. But my knowledge of the subject enables me to narrow considerably the selection, hopefully to the most relevant materials, thus representing an enormous time-saving for already overloaded lecturers.

We now have three research assistants in the School of Advanced Studies in Education, with a fourth added just this week. While the others also undertake library research, they are engaged in more specific projects that include critical analysis of the literature along with interviewing subjects and its consequent collation and analysis of data. All the projects have social justice at their heart. I see my own role as important and integral in the total endeavours of the Religion Studies Department.

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