

## Impact of COVID-19 on our Monash University libraries

*Ayako Rankins*

Subject librarian for Japanese Studies  
Monash University Library

### My experience

Working from home suddenly started while I was preparing for teaching Japanese newspaper databases for the Japanese media class, but I had to quickly change my plan to pre-record the session and to deliver it asynchronously online instead. I was also involved in helping Japanese language units to create online modules for the students who cannot attend classes due to the closure of international borders. I had a chance to talk with one of the academics, and we were talking about how difficult it would be to teach language online! I instantly agreed that language teaching must be face-to-face and learn through cultural behaviours, expressions and body language. I asked one of the language teaching lecturers how their teaching is going and about the reactions from their students. At least from the teaching side, they are surprised to find out that online language teaching is not impossible but involves some challenges such as how best to utilize available technologies to provide students with quality. So far, all courses have been delivered online throughout this year, and I am still working from home at the time of writing.

### The libraries and services

Two out of six Monash University Library branches, Sir Louis Matheson Library and Peninsula Library have been kept open on a limited basis to support students without access to adequate study facilities at home during this pandemic. It was not until mid-October that all other library branches started to reopen after they were closed earlier in the year due to the pandemic. This had particularly helped the students during the exam periods. The Library's popular services such as the Information Point, which is the frontline public facing contact point, and the Research & Learning Point, where students can gain advice from Librarians and Learning Skills Advisers through drop-in consultations, have quickly shifted and adjusted from face-to-face inquiries to all-online services. The Research & Learning Points, which used to be branch-based, have now been merged into one centralised online service operating throughout the semesters.

For some years the Librarians and the Learning Skills Advisers have been closely working together as the Research and Learning team to deliver research skills directly into curricula across all faculties at Monash. Librarians deliver information discovery, search strategies, and evaluating & managing resources, while Learning Skills Advisers deliver study skills such as strategic readings, critical thinking, and academic writing. The Library sessions complete the full cycle of researching and we have been targeting students in their first year so that they can benefit from these skills in their future research. For example, in one of the units that I have been involved in, we were usually invited into the scheduled lecture or tutorial work time to deliver a face-to-face session. This year, however, we had to create and deliver an online module to suit the fully online delivery of courses and to enable students in revisiting and rechecking the module

anytime they need. We have also allocated time for dedicated online drop-in sessions, where students can ask any questions regarding their problems in working on their assessments. In addition to all the above, the Library has also been maintaining Research and Learning Online, which contains resources produced and developed by a team of Librarians and the Learning Skills Advisers. This set of resources serves as a 24/7 online learning support to students in many aspects of their coursework and research. The resources have been continued to show the excellent level of education support available at Monash, particularly throughout this pandemic.

### **The Japanese collection**

Purchasing e-books for the Japanese collection has been very challenging. The current library's e-preferred collection development is not a viable option for Japanese resources. Therefore, I had to negotiate with the Library to start getting permission to be able to order Japanese prints as an exception. Fortunately, the exception was approved, and therefore the ordering and requests for Japanese print resources have been continued. A "Click and Send" service has also been operating to facilitate academics and researchers in accessing resources from the library's own collections. Meanwhile, access to resources which are not held by the Library is enabled through document delivery services.

In addition to the above-mentioned complexities, the National Library of Australia's recent decision of ceasing its Japanese collection development has impacted researchers of the Japanese studies unit of Monash University and across the country, especially in terms of using Japanese databases remotely. There was an opportunity for me to introduce the National Diet Library's Digital Transmission Service to Monash University Library, and I followed up potential for the Library to become a partner for this service. Unfortunately, the Library decided not to apply for this service due to multiple issues, such as licensing conditions that are unmanageable and unsustainable. Further to this, the Library expects significant changes in terms of on-site access to collections into the future, while unfortunately the currently available arrangement with the National Diet Library's Digital Transmission Service is a strictly managed on-site access.

### **The future**

It is very hard to predict what will happen to the Higher Education sector, universities, and their libraries. Current uncertainties and change, including in terms of staffing, make it hard for me to plan for the future. However, I would like to believe that whatever happens to Monash University Library, librarians and their expertise in subject knowledge will still be required as a vital service for the University, one that will last as long as there are researchers who are curious and pursuing their academic passions.