

ALRA Newsletter No 76 (December 2021)

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Editor's note:

Dear ALRA colleagues and readers,

Welcome to our Newsletter No. 76 of December 2021. This newsletter is published very late in the year – the disruptions continued, and 2021 was basically a sequel of 2020. We cannot use the term “unprecedented” any more, as it seems to become a new form of normalcy to get in and out of lockdowns or having restrictions of one kind or another imposed on our functions.

In our last newsletter a few of us could already give you some insight about some of the consequences of what working under these circumstances meant. Meanwhile the financial damage to universities has been evaluated¹ showing that an estimated 35 000 jobs got lost in the sector, mostly affecting casual, fixed and short-term personnel. Libraries had their share in reducing costs, as Rheny and I show for the ANU and Monash University libraries. The re-structuring of the latter proves the continuing reduction of specialist positions mostly based on economic reasoning is ongoing – a trend that can be observed not only in Australia. With managements favouring administrative function over subject knowledge the subject specialist is a dying breed.

When students can't come to Australia Australian universities support them locally: Anita reports on the new services established on the Indonesia Campus of Monash University. These services enable students to use most of Monash University's services - both those who are enrolled as Monash Indonesia students and the Australian enrolled ones while they are in Indonesia.

Last but not least: for the first time we include a cartoon to illustrate a modern times “liaison librarian”.

We hoped in vain to not having to report on pandemic related experiences – we were overly confident, it seems. It continued to disrupt a few things heavily, and many of us had their workplace endangered, or completely changed, adding to the already existing anxiety. But we also found positive challenges in doing things differently, and learning new tricks, and discovered the value of seeing colleagues, friends and our clients face to face.

We may stay in a state of flux for quite some time, but we will contribute to provide the best services possible. 2022 may be different or not – I wish you all to have a safe year!

Friederike Schimmelpfennig

December 2021

¹ Ian Marshman and Frank Larkins: “ How bad has COVID been for university finances and staff?” University World News, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20211215052334254> , 15 Dec 2021

Monash Library Transformation 2021 and Its Impact on Asian Collections

Rheny Pulungan, Monash University Library

Monash, like many universities, had to change some aspects of the way it operates, due to a shortfall in revenue caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of borders in 2020 has prevented the enrolment in Australia of many international students who would normally be on campuses. In September 2020, the University started the Voluntary Separation Packages (VSPs). A significant number of staff, mostly professional staff took the packages and left the University in late 2020.

The loss of staff and the plan to respond to challenges like those experienced during COVID-19 lockdowns in a more efficient way prompted Monash Library senior leaders to send out a proposal of changes document in April 2021 to their Library staff. One of the significant changes proposed in the document was to establish the Academic Services Division which would group library branches into two teams: HASS and STEMM library teams. Consequently, the then Arts Library team which consisted of different discipline areas including the Asian Studies was merged with Education and MADA (Monash Art, Design and Architecture). The proposal also specified that there were no Asian Studies librarian roles in the new Library structure and all subject librarians were to be called liaison librarians.

The consultation period was scheduled for two weeks, giving opportunities to all Library staff to give their feedback. During this consultation period, Asian studies librarians sought clarification for the disbandment of their roles and the rationale behind the decision. The Library management responded by maintaining their position that the new structure would enable the Library to be more efficient in supporting the University's academic endeavour in a budget-constrained environment. In July 2021, all subject librarians received individual transfer letters which outlined their new roles.

The following are the changes that have been made in relation to the Asian Collections librarians:

- Jung-Sim Kim (Korean Studies Subject Librarian) is now a liaison librarian in the Engineering-IT-Science (EITS) team.
- Rheny Pulungan (Indonesian Studies Subject Librarian) is now a liaison librarian in the Law-BusEco team.
- Ayako Rankins (Japanese Studies Subject Librarian) is now a liaison librarian in the Engineering-IT-Science (EITS) team.

The only other librarian who stays in her current role is Xiaojun Liu (Chinese Studies) but this is because of a special arrangement between Monash and Melbourne University. However, this arrangement will be reviewed in early 2022 to reflect the changes at Monash Library in relation to the Asian Collection librarians.

All queries or questions regarding the Asian Collections at Monash should now be directed to Anita Dewi who remains as the Liaison Coordinator in the Arts, Education and MADA Library team (anita.dewi@monash.edu).

COVID has forced many libraries to change, not just operationally but also structurally. This has been a big loss of expertise for the Asian collections at Monash University and Australia wide. The library seniors confirmed that that they would keep the collections and continue to purchase Asian studies books and serials. Continuing the acquisition without the help of any subject and language experts would be a challenge and it seems that it would be done by the centralised collections team in the Library through blanket order, approval plan or any other types of special arrangements. Time will tell whether the Asian collections under the new structure will continue to grow, and whether the teaching and research needs coming from Asian Studies at Monash will still be supported by the Library.

Covid19 -lockdowns and their impact on ANU library services in 2021

Friederike Schimmelpfennig, Australian National University Library

ANU had, as almost every other university, difficult years in 2020 and 2021 due to a reported loss of revenue of 17.4%¹. The combination of massive cuts and lockdowns had us thinking about services and staffing quite differently. I would like to give an overview from a personal perspective of what we had to do, what we did, and what repercussions I think this all will have for the future.

Disclaimer:

Descriptions and opinions are mine only and do not represent the opinions of any other library or university executives or staff.

Implications of financial constraints

The financial constraints meant that university staff deferred salary increase in 2020, and about 460 positions had to go university wide. A large part of those were taken from the professional portfolios, in contrast to earlier redundancy rounds in 2013 and 2016/17 where mostly academics and teaching staff were affected. The ANU Library is a part of the university's "Service Portfolio" which contributed highly to cost savings through staff separations in 2020. Of the Scholarly Information System's ca. 120 employees 30 took the voluntary separation package, 20 of those came from the library. In addition to that the University did not renew most of its casual staff contracts. For the library that meant a loss of approximately 620 work hours per week, and a loss of almost all higher-level positions and many years of corporate knowledge. Major reviews of services were undertaken, and the need of redistribution recognised. When restructuring was introduced in other portfolios and schools the Library management decided not to pursue the same direction but simply "reorganise the reporting lines". In consequence all staff members that are in cataloguing, acquisitions and licensing were streamlined into the "Tech Services Stream" whereas everyone else became a member of the newly established "Client Services Stream". With voluntary redundancies and a purchase freeze for the end of 2020, the Scholarly Information Services division reached the prescribed goal of savings in 2020 and possibly for 2021 without having to implement involuntary redundancies. In 2021 we did not experience a budget reduction for library materials.

Examples of new services

Throughout the lockdown periods the libraries were closed. In the recent 9 weeks of lockdown almost all staff worked from home and we managed to stay in contact with our users online.

No one could borrow or return books, so we increased lending periods and waived all occurring fines. For requests that were not available as e-books, we offered a click and collect service where users could order books to be collected from the shelves and placed for collection on a specific trolley in the entrance area of one specific library building. Only a small number of staff had access to the library buildings to pick up the items and process them. On request we even delivered the books to the requestors' doors – a staff member drove through town to deliver. As student accommodations were locked down this service was

¹ Marshman, I. and Larkins, F.: "How bad has COVID been for university finances and staff?" *University World News*, 15 December 2021. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20211215052334254>

highly welcome. We also invested a lot of time and effort into short introductory videos for digital literacy training, and recently implemented a live chat function, which was received particularly well. This chat, using Springshare's LibAnswer/LibChat module, is to be serviced by all library staff, with shifts rostered with multiple staff available at the same time so that questions can be answered with as little delay as possible. For all staff this is a positively challenging and exciting experience.

We have now also moved to using LibCal, a booking system for appointments with specific librarians responsible for focus areas. In a way it works similar to the medical HotDoc appointment software. At the time of writing it's still in its starting phase.

The first week after reopening 2 November the libraries had more than 8000 visitors – we saw many happy faces, yes – real and full faces, since not everyone followed mandatory mask wearing in the first weeks. We were supposed to monitor this and remind users to wear them, policing through the aisles. Not all staff felt confident doing this. Recently restrictions were eased and masks are not mandatory right now.

The position of subject specialists

For subject librarians, who at ANU already run by the generic term “information access coordinator”, the main change was a move towards more desk shifts, everyday active online chat supports, loans and fines managements, user registrations, and many more generic user and client services. Information access coordinators can now be rostered up to more than half of their weekly work hours for these general client services. These services are part of the general position description and are necessarily extended, yet they constitute a major disruption in work arrangements: the liaison with academics, the follow-up of specific reference requests, and collection management tasks. The loss of staff means that these user services will be permanent additional work load for subject librarians.

The study of Asia and the Pacific is formulated as one of the “main areas of research focus” in ANU's Strategic Plan 2021-2025, and thus the existence of Asian Studies collections at ANU may not be endangered. Even though the ANU library as one of the last academic libraries in Australia that has not yet abolished subject specialists as such and has kept the Asian and Pacific Studies library, as a consequence of this re-shift towards generic client services the research support by subject specialists will be diminished simply due to a lack of allocated time. We may, however, be lucky that we are housed in a dedicated library, where the Asian Studies team already provides most of the client services, partly functions as building custodian, deals with minor IT issues, contributes to teaching information literacy, and also functions as the caretakers of the rare book collection, all in addition to the responsibilities as subject specialists/collection managers.

With the progressing perception of libraries' main functions being social space, study space, safe space, learning and teaching space, and with staff also functioning as well-being mentors particularly in competitive corporate-structured universities, the subject qualification of staff tends to step into the background. This has been elevated in Covid- and lockdown periods as reorganisation required “all hands on deck” due to staff shortages, which, in spite of having filled a few positions back, will remain.

In the long run this development, amplified by circumstance, fits into a widely seen phenomenon that downgrades academic subject librarians to be administrative generalists only, with a loss of their distinctive portfolios. The new function as a “liaison librarian” does not necessarily require that specific

expertise any more. The alarming developments at National Library, Monash and other university libraries in the last few years regarding Asian Studies staff and collections don't bode well for the future of subject specialists. In the long run they seem to be a dying species, perceived as "no longer required" by library executives and boards.

Implications for collections:

A long-time ongoing policy change towards "e-book acquisitions only" with carefully curated large scale EBA (Evidence Based Acquisition) and DDA (Demand-Driven Acquisition) models providing a "one-stop-shop" and a "just in need"² model where users have major influence on purchase and collections, has made collection curation by subject specialists for English language titles within Asian Studies largely superfluous. Large vendors' packages whose EBA structure we use contain many of those items already, ready for the user to call. Even though we place a major part of our collection development into the hands of big for-profit vendors and aggregators, in times of lockdown and library closures it proved extremely useful: clients have instant access to new material very quickly, and since a VPN system was installed that allowed users access to the ANU network these materials are available remotely irrespective of location. This and the perceived savings of time, effort, and staff will make these models attractive to become the new normal in acquisitions.

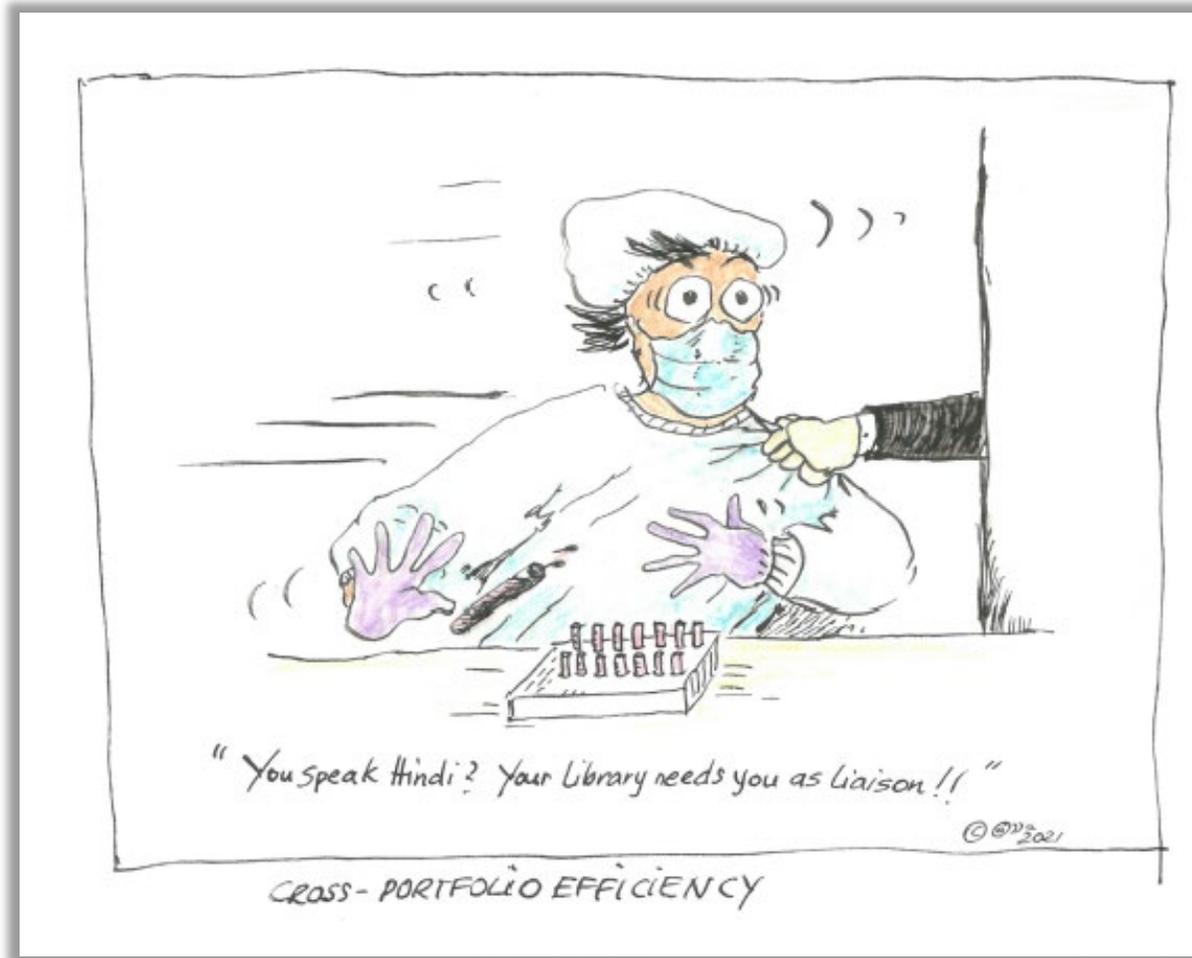
For materials in other European languages it still looks a bit different, here the input of collection experts may still be required. It is, however, a diminishing part of work since research publications in other languages than English are rarely required nor supported to be purchased. For Asian and other non-Latin script languages this, to a degree, still needs the input of some experts³.

Even though the allocated percentage of the overall library budget for all Asian Studies has been only 3% for many years, the fact that ANU put Asian Studies into a focus of research will guarantee for the further existence of the Asian Studies collection. How extensively collection building can be done we will be seen in the coming years, when budgets, acquisition models, workplace descriptions and key performance indicators for subject specialists have been abolished, reassigned or redefined. The trend, how I see it, is increasing mechanisation of an environment where mainly usage statistics and economic rationalism decide on collections, with Asian Studies in danger of becoming more and more a mere sub-group of business and politics studies – but I'd be happy to be proven wrong.

² R. Missingham: "Flipping the catalogue: taking resource discovery to the next level" in: McLeish, Simon, editor. *Resource Discovery for the Twenty-First Century Library: Case Studies and Perspectives on the Role of IT in User Engagement and Empowerment*. London: Facet Publishing, 2020. Used here is the preprint article.

³ See: "Cartoon" in this publication

The future of the Liaison Librarian



A new library is developed for Monash University Indonesia Campus

Monash University has established a campus in Indonesia, the teaching, learning and research activities of which predominantly focus on several strategically aimed master's and PhD programs. The first intake started on 4 October 2021. In April 2020, the Library was invited to contribute to the development of space and services for the Indonesia campus. The Library was well positioned to support this initiative given our overall capability, and in particular, its strong existing engagement with Indonesian Studies in the [School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics \(LLCL\)](#) and the [Monash Herb Feith Indonesian Engagement Centre](#), both within the Faculty of Arts.

Monash University Indonesia Campus Library operates as a global "branch" of the Monash University Library. The scope of services and support include:

- Services and facilities - Services are coordinated and supported from Australia, delivered via the updated web presence. Facilities are managed by the Indonesia Campus operations team.
- Content and collections - Access to electronic licensed resources only, including via the library's readings service. Supplemented by the resource sharing service (including electronic delivery of scanned materials). There is no onsite physical library collection.
- Skill development and enhancement - The Indonesian students access the same professional services and support for research and education that are available for Australian-based students. This includes access to the library's information service, library liaison service, and library research skills service.
- Communication and engagement strategy, including public programs and exhibitions - The Library will contribute to campus activation and provide existing digital exhibitions for the campus launch.

The Monash Indonesia Campus Library is core to the campus experience, an attractive, collaborative space for conversations, for the exchange of ideas, and using technology such as digital walls, a place for the visual demonstration of Monash's breadth of work. As a welcoming meeting place, it enables the creation of the academic community on campus, both within and beyond Monash University. This is in line with what is stated in the planning document, that the campus would be "a place for connecting a global community of change makers". The library has been recognised for its valuable contribution to the success of an important University initiative, by stakeholders - users, academics and senior University leadership.

As indicated by the Senior PVC/President of Monash Indonesia, one of the key expectations was provision of sustainable and seamless access to digital resources for staff and students at Monash University Indonesia campus. The library has been able to provide the services as expected within the financial parameters. The Senior PVC also views the benefit for students and staff, where they find the Indonesia campus (physically and virtually) as an intellectual hub/home meeting and extend their education and research needs. It is the aim that this can be achieved by November 2022. In this space, the library is a significant part of a compelling showpiece, along with other sections of the campus, and a functional hub where people learn and gather.

Anita Dewi

Project Manager, Monash University Indonesia Campus Library Development

10/12/2021

In short:***The Xu Dishan Collection at ANU has now its own website***

In early 2018 I wrote about the digitisation efforts for the materials contained in the collection of Xu Dishan 许地山 (1893-1941) which forms the basis of the Chinese collection at ANU. This digitisation process is now finished and an introduction into the history of the collection, its main subjects, the presentation of exemplary items, and a biography of Xu Dishan are available here:

<https://library-admin.anu.edu.au/collections/xu-dishan-collection/index.html>