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## Shaping Oceania's libraries: library training as an agent for change

### Paula H. Jones

Coordinator, *Diploma in Library/Information Studies*,  
School of Humanities and USP Library,  
The University of the South Pacific,  
Republic of Fiji Islands.

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines how library programmes of The University for the South Pacific (USP) are responding to the challenges and opportunities of new Information Communications Technology (ICT) and multimedia in the Pacific. USP, a unique regional academic institution serving 12 island nations in the Pacific, has changed its course delivery from dual-mode to multi-mode, using a variety of delivery techniques such as audio-graphics, video conferencing and WebCT. The paper describes the ways the library programmes use these techniques, and how the content of the Diploma programme is responding to the advent of ICT, digital information and multimedia in library/information work. It concludes by asserting that this is producing a more proactive type of library graduate who better can cope with the changes that affect libraries in the region.*

### **Introduction**

In this paper I would like to examine the impact of audiovisual and multimedia forms of course delivery on conventional library programmes offered by the University of the South Pacific. I will discuss how our library programmes are responding to the challenges and opportunities that the new Information Communications Technology (ICT) in the Pacific presents in order to improve the quality, relevance and effectiveness of our teaching programmes as agents of change. There is nothing new in the way we deliver our courses – what is of interest in this paper is how we are using audiovisual and information technology to overcome some of the problems facing course delivery. I will also look at how we are incorporating more information technology components into our programmes in order for our students to respond to changes in libraries in our South Pacific region.

The University of the South Pacific (USP) offers two library programmes solely through distance education, that is, a *Certificate in Basic Skills in Library/Information Studies* and a *Diploma in*

*Library/Information Studies*. The programmes address the realities of Pacific Island libraries, most of which are poorly developed, and in particular are under-financed, understaffed, with poor physical facilities, inadequate collections, and a lack of access to the Internet and other sources of digital information. Our library courses emphasise conventional library skills and knowledge in, for example, collection building, cataloguing, and information skills relating to print resources.

In the past, the programmes, available solely via distance education, have been delivered using packages of print material, with occasional support from audio and videocassettes. Fortnightly tutorials are delivered face-to-face with students in Suva, Fiji, and we offer audio satellite sessions to students in the region. The courses are presented in the English language to students from many different cultures whose first language is not English.

With the advent of Information Communications Technology (ICT) in the Oceania region, the delivery and content of the courses are changing. All countries in the USP region now have Internet connection, and a small but significant number of libraries are automating their systems and accessing digital information. The library programmes, in particular the *Diploma*, are responding to these changes. Tutorials now incorporate audio-graphics (where PowerPoint tutorials are delivered) and videoconferencing (where students and library coordinators communicate visually and aurally in real time). I will discuss these in more depth later in the paper.

We also aim through USP's library programmes to promote change in the region's libraries by building the skills and knowledge of our graduates in Information Communications Technology relating to libraries and equipping them to handle changes in libraries and information centres in the region.

Because the way we deliver the library courses is integrally linked to the organization of the University, I would like to give you some background about USP before I discuss the way we deliver the library programmes.

### **The University of the South Pacific**

The University of the South Pacific, established in 1968, is a regional institution that provides education at tertiary level to twelve member countries in the Oceania region (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu). The governments of these countries own USP. The region is vast – it covers “33 million square kilometers of ocean, an area more than three times the size of Europe. In contrast, the total land mass is about equal to the area of Denmark. Populations vary in size, from Tokelau with 1600 people to Fiji with 750,000. The total population is about 1.3 million.” (USP 2003)

There are three campuses – the main one is in Fiji. A second one is in Samoa where the School of Agriculture is located. The School of Law is situated in Vanuatu. Each of the twelve USP countries have their own Centres, and some have additional and sub-centres. Altogether there are 14 Centres and 9 sub-centres. These are equipped with computers, lecture and tutorial rooms, satellite and video-conference facilities, offices and a library, except for Suva, where the main USP Library caters for on-campus and students studying by extension, or distance. Computers for student use are available in each Centre. In terms of enrolments, USP has over 15,000 students, 6000 enrolled on-campus and 9000 external students.

Traditionally the University served its clients either by delivery of courses on-campus, or via distance education, through the Centres. One large part of the University is dedicated to the administration of extension services. Up to the mid 1990s courses to the distance students were delivered using conventional print packages supported by audio-satellite tutorials. In the case of courses with large enrolments, local tutors would be employed.

The conventional teaching/learning package for a course offered in distance mode consists of:

- Course book(s) produced by the University that contain all the readings and material for learning;
- Introduction and assignment booklet;
- Additional material such as audio cassettes, videos, depending on the course; and
- Text books, for some courses.

USP students who study via distance rely on the package for all their learning. If they have access to the Centres and their libraries, they may be able to broaden their learning through additional resources. The course work is constructed to encourage students to engage actively with the material. However, because students are very reliant upon the package, many tend to approach their learning in a passive way. Sometimes it is difficult for distance students to be proactive about their learning because:

- the style of teaching in the school systems in the region, which is teacher-focussed rather than student-oriented, reinforces passive learning;
- the mode of delivery in distance courses may reinforce a passive style of learning in some students;
- the students lack the confidence and experience to respond adequately to more proactive styles of learning; and
- it is not easy to find additional learning materials, as there are few well-stocked libraries in the region.

In recent years, the University has changed its focus from dual mode (on-campus/distance) to multi-mode with the emphasis on flexible delivery of programmes. In line with this, the distance administration, formally known as Extension Services, is now known as Distance & Flexible Learning (DFL). New technology has made available alternative means of communication with distance students, so that now courses may be delivered using a variety of techniques including audio-graphics, video-broadcasts, video conferences and WebCT, a well-known course delivery and management tool. This has been made possible by the expansion of the University communications network, known as USPNet, since 1999. The availability of different modes of course delivery creates opportunities for students to become proactive learners.

At this stage I would like to give you a picture of the problems that affect all students who study at USP. Later I will talk about those specific to the library courses.

### **Problems affecting course delivery**

Problems that affect course delivery include the following:

- The large region we cover – larger distance means greater costs;
- Conventional mail and transportation can be erratic and slow;
- There are several time zones and the International Date Line divides the region. This affects the real time delivery of tutorials and lectures. You cannot schedule classes on a Monday in Fiji as this would be a Sunday in Samoa;
- The University must deal with 12 governments and their laws, which impinge on access to Internet and the World Wide Web;
- The students come from a number of different cultures, each with their own languages. The Pacific area contains half the total number of languages worldwide. The first languages of our students include:
  - Samoan, Cook Island, Tongan, Tokelauan, Tuvaluan, Niuean versions of Maori language ---
  - I-Kiribati
  - Nauruan
  - Fijian
  - Hindi
  - Urdu
  - Chinese dialects
  - Vanuatu languages and dialects - 113 - including Pidgin–Vanuatu “Bislama”

- Solomon Islands languages (there are there are 65 local different languages - Solomon Island pidgin is spoken commonly as well as English )
- Marshallese
- French
- English
- The University uses English as the medium of instruction. However, in most cases students speak English as a second, third or even fourth language. In some countries English is taught from elementary school – for example, in Fiji, students are taught in English from Class One and are proficient in English by the time they enter university. In some Pacific Island countries, English is first taught at secondary school level. Therefore the proficiency of students in English language varies enormously;
- Not all students live within reach of a USP Centre. Some live on remote islands where communication via conventional postal services (via air or shipping transportation) may be irregular.
- The level of technical expertise available in support staff in the USP Centres varies. If there is a major problem in satellite equipment and software, staff from the main campus in Fiji may need to travel to that country. This is very expensive. Satellite services at that Centre may be unavailable for days or even weeks;
- Power failure. Many of the USP countries experience intermittent power failure. In some cases the University or Centre is able to provide backup generators. However the responsibility for power supply is the government of that country.

The University attempts to address most of these present problems through the section known as Distance & Flexible Learning (DFL). DFL coordinates the system of administration through the USP Centres in the USP countries who communicate with students, examine them, forward their assignments, in some cases provide tutors and deal with student issues in general.

New developments in Information Communications Technology (ICT) allow the University to provide a wider range of options in communication and course delivery. I will speak of some of these later in relation to the two library programmes.

### **Background To The Library Programmes**

The University of the South Pacific offers two library programmes. The *Certificate in Basic Skills in Library/Information Studies* is a vocational programme aimed at library assistants who do not yet qualify to enter degree-level courses, but who want to gain library skills. The programme was first offered in 1998. The *Diploma in Library/Information Studies* programme, first offered in 1990, is at academic level. It produces para-professional graduates who can work as qualified library assistants. In 2002 there were 302 enrolments in *Certificate* courses and 102 enrolments in *Diploma* courses, a total of 402 enrolments.

There are two coordinators who have a heavy workload – we teach six to seven courses each per year. At the same time we must revise course material, prepare assignment booklets and examinations, and prepare and present tutorials. The two coordinators are based in the University Library and also undertake duties as librarians. Although these represent additional duties, there are a number of benefits in being based in the Library:

- we are practicing librarians and can keep abreast of new developments in the library field;
- we have direct input into USP Centre libraries' development, which can benefit our library students;
- we can easily take advantage of new USP Library initiatives to expand services to the Centre libraries. They will be able to take advantage of access to electronic version of journals and learn how to search for information this way.

The *Diploma* has existed since 1990, arising out of a former vocational level Certificate. The *Diploma* programme consists of ten courses at first and second-year academic level, six of which are library courses. The *Certificate in Basic Skills in Library/Information Studies* was introduced in 1998. It has five courses at vocational level. Many students who enter the *Certificate* programme are not yet employed in libraries when they commence the programme, whereas most *Diploma* students are currently employed in libraries when they start.

Currently the emphasis is on the redevelopment of the *Diploma* courses most of which are due for extensive revision. In this paper I will use the *Diploma* programme as an example of how we are delivering our courses. I will discuss the structure of the *Diploma* programme later in this paper.

### **Libraries in the USP Region**

Our students are employed in a range of libraries throughout the region – national, public, community, school, academic, special and government. In dealing with the course content, our programmes take into account the condition of most libraries in the region.

With a few exceptions, most libraries in the region rely heavily on manual library systems for circulation and cataloguing. Libraries in Oceania have a lot of problems, which include:

- Poor buildings;
- Poor facilities;
- Under-staffing;
- Inexperienced and unqualified staff with no management skills ;
- No budgets for collection development;
- Poor collections, dependant on donations;
- No strategic planning;
- No computers;
- No integrated automated library systems;
- Poor public image
- Poor leadership at a national level – of the twelve USP countries five have institutions called national libraries. Fiji, the most developed of the USP countries, does not have a national library, and the USP Library sometimes acts as a de facto national library.

In a study titled *Information needs in the Pacific Islands*, Esther Batiri Williams (1998) states:

...the Pacific Island region is poorly aware of the role, power and influence libraries, archives, radio, television and information and communication technologies play in development. Very few decision-makers and Pacific Island leaders will link good governance and accountability to the efficient management of public sector records. Many teachers do not understand the impact of libraries and library books on reading and literacy even though they claim that they do. Many government officers do not recognise the need for good information and statistical databases for strategic planning and efficient operations.

Second, many leaders and decision-makers are not aware of the magnitude of the problems that pervade in these fields of development. For instance, in all the Pacific Islands, the value of the archives and museums are not recognised as the repositories that hold and preserve the national and cultural heritage and identity of a country. These institutions are given minimal recurrent funding and are barely surviving. There is a clear lack of political will to support development in these fields. (p. 1)

Amongst the poorest types of libraries are the collections in schools, euphemistically described as *school libraries*. Public libraries fare little better. For example Suva City Library, in the main town of Fiji, has not had a book budget since 1988 and relies entirely on book donations.

A few libraries in the USP region, namely some academic and special libraries have better facilities that are comparable with libraries in developed countries. These libraries include:

- The University of the South Pacific Library in Fiji
- The University of the South Pacific Library in Samoa
- The University of the South Pacific Library in Vanuatu
- The Forum Secretariat Library (Fiji)
- The Library of the Pacific Community (a branch library is found in Fiji, but the main library is in New Caledonia, which is not one of the USP countries)

Unfortunately these libraries are the exception. Our library programmes must cater to the realities of libraries in the region. For this reason there is a heavy emphasis in the library programmes on conventional library knowledge and skills, some of which may seem outdated in programmes in developed countries such as Australia and New Zealand. For example, HU104 Library/Information Services currently emphasises how to find information in printed ready reference sources such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, fact books and so forth.

### **Diploma in Library/Information Studies**

The *Diploma in Library/Information Studies* consists of ten courses at academic level. All are of one semester in length, except for HU103, the cataloguing course, which takes two semesters. Currently there are five core library courses, one elective library course, an English course that is compulsory plus three academic electives.

The structure of the *Diploma* programme is as follows:

Core units:

- LL114 - English for Academic Purposes
- HU101 - Introduction to Library/Information Studies
- HU102 - Building the Library/Information Centre Collection
- HU103 - Organising the Library/Information Centre Resources
- HU104 - Library/Information Centre Services
- HU205 - Managing the Library/Information Centre

Elective units - any one of the following library electives:

- HU206 - The School Library/Information Centre
  - HU207 - The Academic Library/Information Centre
  - HU208 - The Public Library/Information Centre
  - HU209 - The Special Library/Information Centre
- plus any three academic electives

Students who complete the *Diploma* may continue their studies and undertake a degree, towards which the *Diploma* courses may be cross-credited. A student enrolled and successful in two courses a year will take about five years to gain a *Diploma*. The courses are at first and second year academic level and include practical and theoretical skills and knowledge. Students who complete the *Diploma* programme are qualified at a paraprofessional level that is comparable to a library technician in Australia.

While the emphasis in the current *Diploma* courses is on conventional library skills used in libraries with manual systems, the content and delivery of the programme is evolving in order to equip our students to deal with change. All of the USP countries are being influenced by Information Communications Technology (ICT). These countries have Internet access and so USPNet can connect the University and its Centres in the region. In a few cases, libraries are being partially automated with library systems that are used for cataloguing and circulation. The penetration of automated

library packages into libraries in the Pacific is slow. Nevertheless, the access to the World Wide Web, the Internet and other IC technologies has created opportunities for libraries to overcome some of their shortcomings. The USP *Diploma* programme is incorporating knowledge and use of some of this technology that is appropriate to the students and libraries of the Oceania region.

In the rest of this paper I would like to discuss how the course content is developing to meet the new demands of ICT in the region. I will also describe the ways we use multimedia and audio-visuals to present course material and overcome some of the problems I mentioned earlier.

### **How the course content is responding to change**

In general the library course coordinators are making extensive use of PowerPoint tutorials to highlight and demonstrate course content and reinforce students' learning. These tutorials are used for face-to-face tutorials in Suva, and in the audio-graphic sessions to regional students. We place copies of these tutorials in Class Shares, a space on the USP network where lecturers can make such material available to students. We include instructions on how to view a PowerPoint tutorial in each library assignment booklet, as well as a Readme file for each library course in Class Shares. Our Library students are slow to take advantage of Class Shares. This reflects the lack of confidence that our library students have in using computers, common to many USP students in general, but particularly regional students who have had less or no exposure to computers. For example several years ago when I ran a workshop in the Solomon Islands on automation in libraries, there were students who had never used a typewriter or keyboard, let alone a mouse and computer. However we are observing a gradual change in the way our students approach using computers. One tactic is to insist that they do an assignment using this technology (as described below in the cataloguing course). A future 200-level course we will write will include an assignment where students must present the information in PowerPoint format.

### **Videos:**

Where possible, we purchase multiple copies of relevant videos on library issues and place them in our USP Centre libraries. These are listed in our course material and students are encouraged to watch them. We have prepared a half hour video that introduces students to the concepts of libraries and the types of libraries. Because library students in our region have little opportunity to see libraries that can act as role models, we use this video to introduce them to the concepts of good library practice.

Even with such a simple technology as this there may be problems of access to a video player. Recently several regional students contacted me because they did not have access to a video player that worked and the Centre's video player was currently under repair.

The University now has the technology to digitise video recordings and make them available as Video Compact Disks (VCDs), so we are currently having our own library video production transferred onto VCDs which will be placed at each Centre library. Students will therefore have two ways in which they can view this video.

### **Audio satellite transmission of tutorials:**

In this form of tutorial, students at the University Centre satellite rooms in their country listen and communicate with their tutor. The tutor and the students can hear each other, but cannot see each other. This allows tutors and students to discuss important issues. It is possible for the tutors to run these sessions from our offices using the telephone. However there are a number of barriers to successful communication at tutorials. These include:

- Connections that fail;
- Poor connections where you cannot hear each other clearly. In the past few years this situation has greatly improved;
- Students who are intimidated by the technology. The regional University Centre staff train students in how to use the satellite equipment, basically a microphone, which is not at all

complicated to use. Instructions are also included in the students' assignment booklets. However many students take a while to feel comfortable with this;

- Students are sometimes intimidated by the tutor who may come from a different culture and speak with an accent. In my case, students may be intimidated because I am not a Pacific Islander and speak with an Australian accent. I too often have problems understanding students' accents;
- Students have to communicate with the tutor in English. A student who is asked a direct question may "freeze up" and be unable to respond quickly, if at all. When this happens a lot of time may be wasted;
- Students who are late to tutorials. "Pacific time" is proverbial in that region. In Fiji we call it "Fiji time." It refers to a casual attitude towards time keeping and not appreciating that meeting schedules is important. Students may turn up to half an hour late in a one-hour session;
- Students who do not receive permission from their employers to attend tutorials which take place during working hours;
- Students who are in remote areas, for example on outer islands, and who cannot attend satellite tutorials. Audio taped copies of the sessions are made available, but I am not sure how many of these students request copies of the tutorials.

### **Audio-graphics**

The basic audio satellite session has been improved enormously with the addition of audio-graphics. In this case the satellite rooms at each University Centre and the main satellite coordinating area on campus in Fiji are linked via the Internet and computer. The tutor is able to transmit a tutorial using computer software. At the same time students and tutor are linked via the audio satellite link.

We are using audio-graphics more and more in our programmes with Microsoft PowerPoint as the medium of presentation. It allows us to present the information visually. We can sum up, highlight and explain in this way. It helps overcome some of the communication problems I mentioned earlier relating to audio satellite transmissions. We feel it helps the student focus on the issues, and reinforces the learning. In some cases we feel that a visual presentation can make a topic much more interesting, as with the history of books and writing. In other cases, such as cataloguing, the visual interpretation of standard rules seems to make it easier for students to understand difficult concepts. The satellite operators in Fiji archive these tutorials for 14 days on the DFL server, so those students who did not attend can still get access to the tutorial.

This form of transmission encounters many of the same problems that I mentioned above regarding audio satellite transmission. In addition, it may take up to 15 minutes or more for the satellite operators at the Centres to set up the equipment and enter the session. And sometimes equipment is not working, or is being used for other purposes.

### **Video Conferencing**

We use this as an alternative to the audio satellite or audio-graphic tutorials. The studio at the University campus in Suva can link to two regional centres plus two Fiji Centres (Lautoka and Labasa). With this facility, students can see and hear the tutor, who can see and hear them. Students cannot see students at other linked USP Centres, but can hear each other.

This has enormous advantages in the presentation of material. We can present documents during this session using a document projector and make use of computer software such as PowerPoint tutorials. Because this uses a video link that is transmitted via USNet and satellite, students receive these images in virtual real time. However the quality of PowerPoint presentations is not as good as when using audio-graphics.

Another advantage is that the tutor is no longer a faceless voice, but a real person who engages with the students. Students seem to gain more confidence when communicating to their tutor. One disadvantage which applies to courses with large regional enrolment, is that you are limited to two regional countries.



## **Email**

The Library training coordinators use email extensively to communicate with students, especially those in the region. Students can email assignments directly to the coordinators, who in turn can send them comments and attach other relevant information. This is a huge improvement on the way communication used to take place, where it could take six or more weeks to communicate with a student in some parts of the region.

## **WebCT**

WebCT is an on-line course delivery and management software package that is used in over 2200 institutions worldwide. Some USP courses are presented using WebCT. The policy at the moment is that DFL will provide the instructional designers and support team to develop WebCT courses only if the course is to be presented entirely using WebCT. We do not feel that our library courses are ready to be presented solely in this way. However we see the potential for some aspects of courses to be presented via WebCT and hope to negotiate with DFL over these cases. For example, the learning of the history of libraries and books would be greatly enhanced by using WebCT to access some of the many websites on these topics, as would using electronic encyclopedias and other reference resources.

## **Specific Course Initiatives**

I will now describe some of the specific ways we are incorporating ICT, multimedia and other audiovisual elements into our course content. One of our objectives is to create proactive learners who will transfer that proactivity and confidence to their work in libraries.

## **Cataloguing**

The cataloguing course has been revised extensively. Each cataloguing student now receives as part of the course material two CD-ROMs. One contains a series of PowerPoint tutorials on cataloguing that reinforce the learning material. We are finding that these work very successfully in showing students basic principles of applying cataloguing standards. They are also useful for revising the course material.

Also included on this CD-ROM is a demonstration version of the BookMark automated library system. The other CD is a sample version of the Athena library system. Each of these demonstration systems includes a sample database and students can search and catalogue using the system. Students are required to submit, as part of an assignment, printouts of material they have catalogued using these demonstration systems.

The revised cataloguing course now includes a substantial section on MARC (**M**achine readable cataloguing) and students must use the Athena sample system to apply MARC to their cataloguing.

Our students will also be able to take advantage of a very new USP Library initiative. Our library systems manager has created an in-house programme that allows ISBN numbers to be matched en masse (as opposed to individually) with other Web-based libraries' catalogues that use ANSI/NISO Z39.50. Catalogue entries can easily be identified and fetched. Our cataloguing students will be able to use this from our USP Centres to practise downloading and then editing MARC records.

## **Information Services**

We are revising HU104 - Library/Information Centre Services to include the following:

- How to use the World Wide Web to search for information
- How to search on-line library information databases for information. Currently the main USP Library receives access a number of electronic versions of journals. USP students at our Centres can use the Library home page or catalogue to search for information in these journals. This facility is only available through USPNet at our Campuses and Centres to USP staff and students.
- How to use an on-line information service. USP Library subscribes to some electronic information services, such as Proquest. Our library students can access this through USPNet.

- How to search on-line ready reference databases. There are various electronic encyclopedias, and basic ready reference sources that are freely available on the World Wide Web. Our students will learn to use these in order to answer some ready reference questions.
- How to use specific CD-ROM databases. The Library coordinators are currently working with the Centres library staff to identify useful CD-ROMs (as well as print material) that all Centre libraries should have. We will develop activities so that students will understand how to find information using these sources.

There are some problems of speed of Internet connections in the USP countries. When we develop our courses, we need to be aware that accessing and downloading information on the Internet may be very slow in some many of these countries. Therefore many of the activities we are developing will teach basic principles and introduce the students to the resources, rather than use them at a more advanced level.

The work that we are doing in revising this course may benefit all USP students, not just Library students. It is likely that we will adapt the material into self-paced library tutorials and brochures so that all students may become competent users of these electronic resources.

### **Collection development and acquisitions**

When we revise HU102 Building the Library/Information Centre Collection we will introduce students to tools such Australian Compact World (or Bookfind) on CD-ROM, which allows library staff to search for in-print materials. Because we have a limited licence for this, we cannot make it available through USPNet, so we will probably demonstrate its use through PowerPoint tutorial, including pictures of search screens. Other initiatives in the course content will include finding bibliographic information through on-line sources such as *Amazon.com* and publishers' web sites. As most libraries in the USP region do not have access to in-print resources, nor can afford them, this will be a very practical way of meeting this shortcoming.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper I have tried to give you an idea of the unique situation of the University of the South Pacific and how this affects the delivery of our library courses. I have shown how we are incorporating multimedia, ICT and other audiovisual elements into the curricula and course presentation of the library programme in order to make conventional library curricula meet the changing realities for libraries in Oceania.

The title of my paper "library training as an agents of change" is rather ambitious. We are remaking our *Diploma* programme to create graduates who are proactive, confident, and knowledgeable about information technology. They will then be able to perform their duties in libraries in the Pacific, and be in a position to respond positively to the changes and opportunities that new information technologies and multimedia bring. Our students will be in a position to lead and initiate, rather than react, and provide guidance to others as to how their libraries and information centres should develop for the future.

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