

Chapter 9

Supporting Scholarship: Reshaping a Vocational Educational Library for Higher Education



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Abstract This research explores library support of the scholarship and research needs of Higher Education (HE) lecturers in a Victorian TAFE (vocational college). Its purpose is to investigate how vocational libraries, now supporting HE delivery, can better provide information resources and services for the scholarly information needs of HE lecturers. The study is an exploratory case study approach for William Angliss Institute library that draws on the related literature on HE and vocational libraries, as well as from qualitative semi-structured interviews with librarians from Victorian TAFE institutes that deliver their own HE qualifications. The term scholarly can be defined in an information context, with the library having a role in supporting the scholarly information behaviour of lecturers. The study shows that TAFE libraries support the scholarship of teaching and learning of HE lecturers but are seen as immature in meeting their research needs. The challenge for the HE TAFE library is to provide access to the range and depth of discipline specific, quality electronic information that encourages and facilitates scholarship and research. The study contributes to firstly, the literature on how libraries can support the transition from a dominant vocational legacy to a hybrid model supporting both VET and HE cohorts; and secondly, the necessary prerequisites to help build research capacity and a HE learning culture within TAFE institute

Keywords Scholarship · Library · TAFE · Information behaviour · Information needs

Introduction

The Australian post-secondary education sector is divided between vocational education and training (VET) and Higher Education (HE). The epistemology of Higher Education (HE) is based on engagement with knowledge and its pedagogy on student

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S. Beeton and A. Morrison (eds.), *The Study of Food, Tourism, Hospitality, and Events*,
Tourism, Hospitality & Event Management,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0638-9_9

merit and grading, not the attainment of competency which is the traditional focus of vocational education. The words “vocational” “education” and “training” reflect the complexity and problematical nature of defining VET. According to Karmel et al. (2008), VET is vocational in intent and instrumental in purpose with skill acquisition its primary goal. Moodie (2008) argues that the VET sector is practically orientated, generally encompassing less than two years study for students and based on articulation pathways to the advanced study of HE. Karmel (2011) distinguished the two sectors of HE and VET not by qualification levels or occupational versus career understandings, but through different funding, regulatory, teaching and learning styles and arrangements.

TAFE is the publicly supported sector of VET. In 2002, the Victorian Minister for Education and Training Lynne Kosky (2002) spoke about reinvigorating TAFE through skill development in line with industry and a flexible approach to delivery. TAFE Institutes were encouraged to apply for accreditation of degree delivery in niche markets on a fee-for-service basis. HE TAFE qualifications are mainly at diploma, associate degree and degree levels. Generally, they either focus on niche areas (for example, culinary arts, land management or forensic science), or combine various disciplines into specific vocational areas, such as aquaculture and environmental studies, or applied business in music. These high level vocationally orientated qualifications centre on broadening and deepening graduate skills and knowledge, creating what Tribe (2002) terms “the philosophic practitioner”.

Unlike VET’s national training packages and competency standards, HE TAFE lecturers are the intellectual custodians of their discipline and define the learning outcomes and graduate attributes of the curriculum. Implicit in the journey for an institute to deliver HE in a VET or TAFE institution is the creation of an academic culture. Academic culture relates to building scholarly capacity in a predominantly VET environment that acknowledges the need for structures that support and facilitate teaching, scholarship and research. One of those structures, the library, is a key provider of and intermediary in the information resources and services that assist scholarly capacity and capability building in TAFE institutions seeking to extend their HE delivery.

Libraries in VET generally and in TAFE specifically established their information services in the context of competency-based training, flexible delivery and work place knowledge. Traditionally the educational role of TAFE libraries lay in supporting trade or applied courses through curriculum resource-based learning. The information resources and services of TAFE libraries were shaped through supporting traditional models of teaching built on the primacy of prescribed course content and teacher industry currency.

Supporting infrastructures, such as the library, play a critical part in achieving the mission of TAFE institutions such as William Angliss Institute in becoming a recognised part of Australian Higher Education delivery. This research explores how William Angliss Institute library is transitioning from VET to HE based support of the scholarly information needs of its HE lecturers. The study will utilize an exploratory case study approach but draw on the researcher’s recent qualitative research data on library support of HE lecturers in Victorian TAFE.

Literature Review

Higher Education (HE) is defined in the literature as inquiry into knowledge and as the development of the mind to critically think, reflect and challenge the nature of the world (Barnett 1990; Truscot 1951). Whereas epistemologically VET can be viewed as living in a world of received knowledge, HE lives in a world of created and contested knowledge. The HE lecturer is constantly questioning themselves not only about best pedagogical practice, but about the right information, knowledge and skills to be teaching.

Economic and government policy changes have undermined the previously clear distinction between the HE and VET sectors. The blurring of the traditional divide between sectors is evident in the increase in the number of institutions providing both types of education- the University providing vocational entry qualifications, VET providers and some TAFE institutions teaching applied or practically oriented HE programs and an increasing number of Registered Training Organizations (RTO), that do both. William Angliss Institute is one of five current Victorian TAFE institutes delivering its own HE and VET qualifications. Unlike Australia's seven dual sector universities, defined by Moodie (2010) as having at least 20% but less than 80% student enrolment in each of its sectors- HE and VET, William Angliss Institute is a mixed sector institute, delivering their own VET and HE qualifications outside their initial establishment and the sector of the majority of their enrolments.

Scholarly Information Need

A principal institutional requirement of HE accreditation for TAFE institutions that allows delivery of HE qualifications is teacher scholarship. Scholarship involves the exchange and dissemination of new ideas and practices, especially in relation to disciplinary knowledge and is central to HE.

Scholarly information refers explicitly to the role information plays in the conduct of research and production of scholarship (Palmer and Cragin 2008). Scholarly information need relates to whatever information is needed to produce, create, organize, manage, preserve, disseminate, access or exchange scholarly output (Adigun et al. 2013). Scholarly information need also highlights the data, information, and training services that target an academics' information need (defined by their subject area or discipline) which is relevant and meaningful to their scholarly development (Greenstein and Porter 1998).

Higher Education Libraries and Information Needs

Cisse (2004) states that the academic library is the access point to the information services and resources that support the Institute's teaching, learning, and research missions. Rethinasami (2009) outlines the library's role as a facilitator between scholars and their information needs in three key areas. These areas are the selection and creation of content, organization of content to enable access, and the preservation of content for ongoing use. Each function supports the information needs of scholarship through facilitating interaction in an inter-disciplinary knowledge space. All three areas inform a debate between library intentions and its specialized functions that strategically serve institutional scholarly priorities, based on collaboration between teachers and the library.

TAFE Libraries and the Vocational Curriculum

The TAFE sector's constant re-structuring since the 1980s fashioned a fragmented and localized identification of the TAFE library's role. McIntyre and Hardy's (1988) seminal study of Victorian TAFE libraries placed TAFE libraries within the national reform framework of industry focused student learning and competency based training (CBT). Booker et al.'s (1995) report *Focus on Learning*, similarly aligned TAFE libraries to a service and flexible delivery model of information services within a VET framework. Historically, this reinforced the TAFE library's identity as a resource-based and learning support focused service catering for work-ready knowledge and skills to a predominantly diverse and part-time student cohort. This was illustrated in non-research orientated library services such as purchasing class sets of books for teaching, one-on-one assistance for literacy and numeracy issues and the supply of teacher centric self-paced learning packages. TAFE library resourcing and collections were built to meet the need of relevant lower certificate level vocational qualifications centred on classroom-based teaching practices.

The perception was that TAFE libraries occupied a service rather than educational role. This stemmed from a number of reasons including a community attitude valuing VET for its training emphasis and the outcome driven environment (Groenewegen 1987). TAFE libraries, established to provide non-university orientated information services for a wide socio-economic cohort, aligned their strategic goals to supporting a varied clientele, often part-time and entering post-secondary education with low levels of literacy, numeracy and computer skills (Volkoff et al. 2008; Milne et al. 2006). Unlike the research support provided by university library services for higher level qualifications, TAFE libraries modelled their resources towards supporting vocational models of teaching. This view emphasized the TAFE library as an information resource gatherer and distributor rather than as a contributing educative partner to teaching departments (Leong 2007).

HE TAFE Libraries

Responding to this global trend towards meeting workforce needs, in 2005, a number of Victorian TAFE institutions positioned themselves as HE providers of applied degrees. This was a proactive response to national strategic education goals and recognized skill shortages. It mirrored the changing needs of individuals and businesses and stronger pathways to knowledge and skills beyond work-based learning.

The resultant mixed sector TAFE library supported both the VET and HE teacher and student. It catered for different learning styles based on the nature of the curriculum. The critical shift from VET as module and competency based, and HE as requiring greater academic rigor, was reiterated in the library's importance to a student's critical thinking and research skills. A shift away from simply meeting required VET assignments towards a mix of HE assessment increasingly placed the library's role in terms of partnered responsibility towards supporting the well-rounded graduate.

The term scholarly has to be defined in an information context. As such, the TAFE library has a role in supporting the scholarly information behaviour associated with HE. Any gap between HE departments and the library related to the meeting the scholarly information needs of HE staff and students. This is demonstrated in the need for expansion of library resources, especially online databases, and direct teacher assistance, especially in referencing, information literacy and research. The introduction of HE into TAFE enabled TAFE libraries to push through cultural change, empowering Library Managers to expand collections, facilities and services. HE in TAFE has altered institutional teaching and learning strategies, with libraries now a more important stakeholder and partner in the transition to a hybrid educational institution.

Methodology

The interpretivist paradigm emphasizes a qualitative research methodology and is congruent with field work and an exploratory research intent (Benbasat et al. 1987). Qualitative research is used when the research question centres on the need to collect, interpret and make judgments about data that cannot be measured, for example what people say and do, and why (Bryman 2008; Creswell 2007; Neuman 2011; Walsham 2006). A qualitative approach was used because the focus for the study was an empathic uncovering of the shared practices and meaning of librarians within the scholarly information domain of library support of HE delivery in TAFE.

A case is defined as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (Miles and Huberman 2010: 25). The phenomenon is the move of HE into TAFE. The bounded context is William Angliss Institute which commenced delivering its own HE qualifications in 2007. A case study method is suitable for research questions that seek to provide rich descriptions or insightful understanding (Merriam 1988). This study seeks to explore the views of HE TAFE librarians in the sector as well

as the researcher's own views of the transition of a library from a VET focus to a hybrid VET/HE model.

This study draws on interviews conducted with twenty librarians from across the HE TAFE sector as a principal source of data. Interviewing is a qualitative technique that stresses the importance of human behaviour through language. It is a basic mode of inquiry that seeks understanding via personal lived experience and the meaning derived from that experience (Robson 2002). Semi-structured interviews with Library Managers, liaison and reference librarians were conducted as part of the researcher's Ph.D. study between February and August 2015. Ethical approval (300/2014/25) was received in August 2014. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to protect their anonymity. The library sample was purposefully selected by the researcher as they represented principal conduits and facilitators for reference, information resourcing and other library services to HE lecturers. Data analysis is the process of making sense out of one's data (Merriam 1988: 127) and is a continual iterative exchange between collection and interpretation. Data analysis commenced as the data was collected. Initial and focused coding protocols were employed to distil down key themes. Key themes informed the discussion section and the researcher's own case study commentary on the William Angliss Institute library.

Findings

Library participants believed that HE lecturers appreciated librarians for the personal element of the library service provided. While resources such as databases, textbooks, subject guides and electronic information were valued and important for HE delivery, it was the library as student space and librarians, as a link between their teaching requirements and student access, that was most appreciated. Librarians believed that lecturers' use of the library related primarily to their teaching needs but that library support of HE research was in terms of resources for teaching currency and the updating of knowledge in their discipline area. While some participants referred to the research needs of the lecturer, most referred to the context of sourcing information used for the courses being delivered.

When asked by the researcher to list what resources and services were offered to lecturers to support their scholarly information needs, the following participant comments were typical.

EBooks, databases, streaming videos and books on the shelf DVDs (John)

The capacity to put together resources such as readings and journals and online resources that are relevant to the curriculum (Rosemary).

Library orientation tours and database classes (Terry)

The findings indicated that librarians believed HE lecturers used a variety of library information services and resources to support their scholarly information needs. These included physical and online resources, library space, and research support for teaching and training and information skills classes for students. Library participants

were cognizant that the library focused on meeting HE student and teaching needs. Interviews with librarians described the wider research and scholarly needs of the HE lecturer in terms of providing physical and electronic collection depth, especially in relation to multiple textbook and level and specialized databases with less restricted licensing.

When it came to what HE lecturers wanted from the library, the following comments from librarians were indicative of the consensus to expand physical and electronic resourcing, as well as providing more one-to-one student and research support.

Information service that is more expansive than it currently is ...coming from in the form of more extensive databases subscriptions (Charles)

Wanting more involvement with the Department (Bob)

What they ask for are multiple copies of any given title that students are going to use to be made available straight away (Shonah).

HE lecturers wanted current information, immediacy and speed of access to that information as well as a greater range and depth of scholarly information available. This higher level of academic resourcing and services referenced a university library context but with the proviso of the TAFE library's vocational legacy. The blend of library resources and services, supportive both VET and HE staff and student cohorts, was indicative of the need for greater library support in regard to resourcing, collections and staffing to adequately cater for the wide range of clients.

According to participant discussion, the challenges for the VET based library transitioning to support HE delivery centred on library identity, institutional recognition, librarian up-skilling and the need for relationship building from the library to both HE lecturers and HE departments. Librarians understood that the library was "a hybrid...in transition" (Joan) or "a VET [library] supporting Higher Education and changing to cope with ... all the issues that it involves" (Cassie). Many librarians emphasized that institutional support extended beyond the library as a requirement for the accreditation of HE degree delivery. Re-shaping the TAFE library from its VET heritage to a more supportive scholarly partner in HE TAFE and its applied teaching and research focus, necessitated an expansion in electronic resources and services.

Liaison with HE lecturers was viewed as more demanding than with VET teachers. Challenges related to realizing the library's importance as an inclusive partner and not just an adjunct to the institute's teaching and learning strategy. HE and its implicit scholarly focus implied firstly, a shift in the library collection from a more operational and generic information emphasis to the scholarly and peer reviewed focus of HE; and secondly, accompanying changes in the knowledge base of librarians.

The findings indicated that librarians wanted to be more involved in assisting with the scholarly information needs of HE. Through positioning the library in the teaching space and maximizing support through "the academic rigor of the collection" (Moira), the library could not only back up teaching and student success but support HE staff in their scholarship and research. The findings from this study confirmed library support of HE lecturers in TAFE related to the library as a student space, to resourcing,

especially database expansion and to library services, in particular the out-reach liaison activities of librarians.

Conclusion

The findings showed that TAFE libraries supported the scholarship of teaching and learning of HE lecturers by the variety of information resources and services they provided. While TAFE libraries were seen by participants as “developing” and “embryonic” in meeting the research needs of HE, they were appreciated and valued for what they afforded the teaching and learning strategies of their institutes. The transition to supporting research struggled against providing the range and depth of information resources, particularly online, that could meet all the scholarly needs of HE lecturers. This was because TAFE libraries now supporting HE were established on a VET physical collection legacy and lacked the range and depth of electronic information resources generally associated with a university library.

Nevertheless, librarians believed they could support the scholarly information needs of HE lecturers by being targeted, proactive and nimble in response, through the information resources and services they provided, to the scholarly information requests they received. The principal challenge for the HE TAFE library, and William Angliss Institute library in particular, was to provide access to the range and depth of discipline specific, quality electronic information that encouraged and facilitated scholarship and research. Librarians viewed HE lecturer scholarship as a shared responsibility. This view was expressed as a commitment to providing the resourcing, collections and staffing intent of a HE library. While aspiration of the resourcing associated with a university library, the HE TAFE library vision reflected a hybrid HE and VET model that emphasized active information services aligned to research, teaching and student requirements. Supporting the scholarly information needs of HE required skilled librarians, distinct HE services and closer liaison and partnerships to departments. Beyond the dependency of the library for HE accreditation purposes, librarians saw their role and function in terms of expanding information resources and services while working collegiately in the space of HE.

Institutional support is required to provide what HE lecturers need for their scholarly information. These needs relate primarily to improvements in library space, information resources, mainly databases, equipment for students and finally, services that support teaching and learning. The introduction of HE delivery in the William Angliss Institute was a catalyst to shift library services from the print based and teaching driven resources associated with a VET curriculum to a more open, online and expanded information service aligned to the needs of HE. VET was associated with a library browse culture as opposed to the more targeted needs of HE. The opportunity of HE delivery in TAFE was reflected in pushing for increased databases, improved research skills training and expanded liaison support with the HE department. Doubling HE library liaison support in 2017 provided an opportunity to establish relationships with HE lecturers. Expanding database suites from a

generalist focus to specialized electronic information was indicative of the transition to the more scholarly and peer reviewed information content required for HE teaching and research. Providing “Google-like” discovery searching through the library catalogue and off site remote access to that information, exemplified a change in the TAFE library from a resource provider to a facilitator in information provision.

Supporting the scholarly information needs of HE required skilled librarians, distinct HE services and closer liaison and partnerships to the faculty. This included a desire from the library to be embedded in the curriculum and to be delivering information literacy and research skills to HE staff and students. The William Angliss Institute library recognized that support of the scholarly information needs of its lecturers requires understanding of their needs. By implication, better marketing and liaison services were necessary to embed the library’s presence into HE conversations and relationships. Articulating a role beyond just an add-on student service requires institutional support to provide what HE lecturers want from the library, namely support for their teaching and students, and where possible, their research needs. The metamorphosis of the TAFE library to a HE VET hybrid library centred on information access and improved and targeted resource provision. For the future development of the William Angliss Institute library, the strategic HE vision was about knowing exactly what HE students and staff wanted and then delivering the information resources and services that met those expectations.

Future Considerations

- Demonstrating scholarly capacity is a required step towards future university accreditation. In the study, the library’s role related to how it supported the Institute’s research and scholarship strategies. This can be achieved through the resources and services that support the scholarly information needs of its students and lecturers.
- The research showed the library’s role in building scholarship and research in VET and HE in two main ways. Firstly, by contributing to the literature on how TAFE libraries can support the transition from a dominant vocational legacy to a hybrid model supporting both VET and HE staff and students; and secondly, understanding how the library is a necessary prerequisite to building research capacity and a HE learning culture within a TAFE institute.
- The vocational/professional nexus is embraced by demonstrating how the scholarly information resources and services that a library provides for its minority HE sector can influence the educational and knowledge space of its majority VET sector. The study showed how both HE and VET staff and students can benefit from a library’s expansion of its services, space and collections.
- HE delivery is changing and is no longer exclusive to universities. The study revealed the library’s contribution to building a scholarly and research culture within a non-university context. The study has relevance for similar transitioning

libraries internationally within the Further Education, Community College and Polytechnic sectors.

- The implication for practice relates to the institutional support required to provide what lecturers need for their scholarship, namely improvements in library space, information resources, equipment, and services.
- The lessons that can be drawn for the HE and VET sectors in Australia and internationally is that information resources underpin scholarship and research. The library's role is to provide a first choice for peer reviewed quality information for lecturer scholarship. This requires Institute investment in information resources and the flow on effect, namely the confidence and belief by lecturers that they can access anywhere and anytime, the range and depth of scholarly content they require.

Acknowledgements The author would like to acknowledge Charles Sturt University for their support of the researcher's current Ph.D. study.

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