The Library of The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand

Ms. Sandra Mann
Library Manager
Open Polytechnic of New Zealand
E-mail: ManSan@topnz.ac.nz
http://www.topnz.ac.nz

Background

The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand is one of 25 polytechnics in New Zealand (there are also 7 universities). However, The Open Polytechnic is the only tertiary institution in the country that concentrates entirely on providing distance education courses and programmes. It therefore attracts students from throughout the country, and takes around 30,000 enrolments every year. The level and range of subjects taught is broad and changes according to perceived potential markets. This can create real challenges for the organisation and the library, when, for example a whole new discipline area like psychology is added to the academic portfolio and courses and services have to be established within a period of months.

Due to the distance education mode in which we work, The Open Polytechnic includes in its structure, a Course Design Unit as well as its own Publishing Unit. There is a continuing cycle of course development and course revisions occurring all year round. It is this mode of working which I believe gives this Library a particular opportunity to be seen to actively contribute to the integration of library use and information skills into the course material itself, thereby overtly demonstrating the library integral role in the education process.

The Library of The Open Polytechnic

Background

Prior to November 1991, the Library employed 3 staff, was poorly funded and operated to provide a fairly low level of library service to teaching staff only. All course material was deemed self contained”, and students were not expected to seek resources beyond the supplied material.

Due to government legislative changes, and the Polytechnic"decision to move into degree level teaching, an external review of the Library was undertaken. This saw the staff increase to 5, with the recruitment of a Reference Librarian (the first such), and a Library Manager. I think it is true to say that the Library has been in rapid development mode ever since. The Library has been automated” (we use the GEAC Advance Library Management System), staff numbers have grown to the current level of 25, and we have developed a reputation within the Polytechnic, and externally, for a high level of service performance. The Library consistently rates the highest score in the Polytechnic"annual student satisfaction survey, and we pride ourselves on modeling good customer service and making a positive difference in the Polytechnic generally, as well as in our library-specific work.

Library staff are currently grouped into teams which represent the two direct service arms of the library (staff and students), as well as Technical Services, Systems and User Education.
Traditionally collection management responsibilities have been shared across the library, but it has become clear that to progress, we need a dedicated senior professional leading and coordinating this aspect of our work.

**Services to staff**

There is a team of 6 staff who concentrate in providing information services to the staff of the polytechnic that support teaching, research, course development, management and the development of the organisation and its business. This part of the library operates in special library mode”, and is increasingly having to segment its customer base and target services (with an increasing emphasis on user education). A further developing area for the immediate future is to market potential services to external customers, many of whom have an existing relationship with The Open Polytechnic through having purchased other services or products from us.

**Services to students**

The core objective of the **Student Library Service** is to provide a range of information services to students that positively differentiate the Polytechnic from other post-compulsory education providers.

The main aims of the **Student Library Service** team are to:

- Provide students with timely loan and subject request services;
- Increase student information and research skills to support the development of lifelong learners;
- Undertake proactive and regular tracking of the progress and content of all new courses and revisions going through the course design process to ensure appropriate resources are available to support student requirements;
- Liaise with students and Open Polytechnic staff from the Library, Course Design, Copyright and Faculty to address any course related issues that are significant to the Library.

All our students are studying at a distance, so to encourage Library use and provide equity of access to resources, they can contact the **Student Library Service** by free phone, free fax, email or mail. Within New Zealand, material is delivered and returned by courier at no cost to the student. We set ourselves performance measurement targets that ensure we maintain responsive and timely communication with our students who, are more often than not, working as well as studying with us. The Polytechnic also maintains an internet web site for students at [www.topnz.ac.nz](http://www.topnz.ac.nz), which offers students another way of accessing our services.

**Future development**

In the near future, the challenges for us have a lot to do with the changing balance between holding print collections of material and providing access to electronic resources. This changing balance is the major reason we need to review the library structure and find different ways of managing collections and access to resources.
There is always pressure to achieve more with less” and one of the library strategies to deal with this, is to offer library and information services to external, paying customers. It goes without saying in this environment, that continual improvement” is the norm!

Other trends, which I\’hsure other educational institution?rlibraries have identified, are to do with user education, and gaining recognition, as partners in research, and the educational process generally. Recent initiatives in this area have included one library staff member writing a book on Internet searching strategies, which The Open Polytechnic is about to publish, my editing and compiling a learning Support Handbook”, written specifically for Open Polytechnic students, and my being asked to write research modules for a diploma course currently being developed by the polytechnic. Our contribution to the polytechnic\’g website development and in the records management area, has also contributed to demonstrating a broader range of skills than might be traditionally associated with Librarians working in an educational institution. I believe this is vital to our future.