

Reinvention of the library in the digital age

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak to you tonight. I can't think of a more fitting way to summarise the reinvention and transformation of libraries with our former UWA students, who I am sure have both memorable and perhaps not so memorable experiences of the libraries at UWA. I say fitting, because clients, and especially students, really are at the centre of what we are about in the library.

Tonight I aim to give you some insight into libraries, past present and future, utilising examples from here at the University.

I want to start by asking you to think about the demise of some of the long established institutions - Kodak, Nokia, Compaq, Blockbuster - failed to reinvent their products and services and respond appropriately to the technological disruption around them.

If we think about the main traditional product or service of a library, the physical book (**slide 2**), libraries have over the last 20 years, experienced similar technological disruption. While I cannot imagine a library without any books, technology has resulted in the significant decline of the use of print books at UWA (**graph click**) and by 70% in just 20 years, the number of physical libraries and staff required to support them has significantly declined too. And while the use of print items within libraries has been in decline, the number of students that the library supports at UWA has significantly increased - almost doubling in 20 years.

Technology has transformed the information environment, and thus the library business, where once it was possible to visit a library and take in a large part of the world's top quality knowledge – this is now impossible. Apart from the fact there is too much information in physical form, the world's latest research, to solve today and tomorrow's global challenges is mostly found online in digital form. In an era of fake news and false reporting being able to find accurate and authentic sources of information quickly and easily is an essential skill that we must ensure we foster for all generations and libraries have a central and active role in this.

The rapid rate at which information is published and the sheer amount of it is demonstrated by the history of library acquisition at UWA. It took 100 years – almost exactly - for the university to acquire 1 million books (**slide 3**), from a modest 1000 books at the end of 1913 to over a million one hundred years later. In contrast, it only took 6 years for the library to acquire 1 million electronic books and the amount of electronic information that the Library provides now far outweighs the print. In addition to ebooks, the library provides access to the full-text of over 170,000 online journal titles comprising millions, if not billions of articles. The University's expenditure on information resources – around \$12M AUD per annum is primarily digital – only 3% of this budget was spent on physical books and journals in 2017. We heavily invest in the development of OneSearch, our online information discovery service, which is like google but for subscribed, quality and peer reviewed information. This service had almost 4 million searches in 2017, and our ebooks well over 2.6M downloads, while only 100,000 physical items were loaned from the physical library collections (**slide 4**).

But has this technological disruption and move away from print information resulted in the demise of physical libraries, in our universities, in our communities?

I argue that libraries have, and continue to, reinvent themselves, becoming more visible in their communities and that their importance is increasing, not decreasing, with libraries across the globe transforming their products and activities, while at the same time maintaining their core service and information based values. This reinvention comes through an increased emphasis on the important of library as place, a place for people.

Libraries have always served an important function as place, think back to the Library of Alexandria, but with the emphasis on information first, and people second. I would argue this reversed (**slide 5**). Technological change in libraries is enabling information repositories to become high quality learning and research facilities. To illustrate this reinvention I want to talk about the transformation of the Reid Library ground floor in 2016.

(**slide 6 - 10**) The Reid Library holds a special place on campus as the oldest and the main library with a long and important history. Originally, the northern end of the Administration building was built to house the main library. During the 1930s the number of books owned by the University grew rapidly and it was not long until the space became quite crowded and discussions began about the need for a new larger library. The development of the plans for the Library, and indeed the ability to raise the funds required for it, took many years. By 1960, the library was so crowded that (**slide 11-19**) it was decided that the Undercroft under Winthrop hall previously open, should be enclosed, to accommodate over-flowing collections and students. After much planning and anticipation, construction of the library finally began in 1962, and after two years and a visit from Queen Elizabeth the 2nd, the Reid Library, named after the Chancellor of the time, opened in 1964. The Reid Library has provided access to knowledge for many students since then.

The Reid Library turned 50 years old in 2014 and to coincide with this, the University allocated funding which combined with a number of generous alumni donations, enabled significant refurbishment to commence.

The goal was to provide a space that was innovative and interesting while at the same time comfortable and inviting, a space that said to students we value you and we want you here on campus, and a space that could be used in new and innovative ways. But how does one preserve the history of such an iconic building on campus, and still ensure a future focus?

So those of you who haven't had a chance to visit (and I encourage you to do so), I am going to show some photos now (**slide 20-22**). The ground floor consists of 700 seats for collaboration and learning. A major feature is the new entrance and this is symbolic of the need to make the library welcoming and open to all - feedback from some students, especially minority groups, was that they found the previous main entrance on level 1 intimidating, and it was not good for wheelchairs – the incline of the ramp on the western side of the building is too steep for wheelchairs (**slide 23-29**). Furniture is arranged in different configurations to cater for different types of learning. Students have access to a range of technologies, wifi, power and lockers. The Reid library is open long hours including 24 hours for the busiest part of the semester. In the centre of the space there is a transparent event space – the Circle – held hundreds of student-related events here –this provides an opportunity to showcase innovative learning and research in a vibrant and busy space. We also wanted the library to look great from the outside (**slide 30-31**) – drawing and welcoming students and visitors into the space.

Project was a major success. On a busy day we see around 10,000 visits which is a substantial increase on pre-refurbishment figures. Visits to the Reid Library increased by 85% from 800,000 visits in 2015 to over 1.5M in 2017, we've seen increased student satisfaction through major surveys and the project has been shortlisted and won national and international awards. Many have asked why the project was so successful. Combination of factors, great local architect and a fantastic project team comprising staff from around the university, but the key factor I am most proud of is student engagement (**slide 32**) and here is some feedback from the student guild about the project. Students were consulted at all levels given ample opportunity to provide input and insight. They could see that their feedback was being heard and were constantly kept in the loop. The open communication and thorough student involvement, were driving factors to the successful delivery of this new space.

This is now the approach taken as far as possible to all Library engagement and service development.

We undertook a similar transformation of the UWA medical and dental library in 2017 - renamed after Nobel laureate (professor) Robin Warren. And we are hoping to raise funds to similarly transform our law library and indeed the other levels of the Reid Library.

Library reinvention demonstrates that we value our students, that we value their time on campus. That we recognise the need to provide comfortable and high quality spaces open for hours where they can spending studying alone or in groups, accessing the world's best information and developing the communication, critical thinking, interpersonal skills so sought after in today's job market.

Of course, you may be wondering about the physical books, and we did relocate some books to enable the refurbishment of the Reid Library ground floor. The Library continues to maintain book collections in our libraries that are used, the classics, or those where the online format is not appropriate. Many of our physical collections are stored in secure and appropriate stacks off-campus. These items can be found on OneSearch, requested online and returned to the campus within 24-48 hours. Staff and postgraduate students also have access to libraries around the country, and indeed across the world, with articles delivered electronically to their desktop where possible.

The Library also continues to house special and rare collections (**slides 33-40**) - these include the original collections acquired by the University's first Librarian Miss Wood or the rare and special collections collected by my predecessors Mr Jolley, Mr Ellis and Mr Arfield. Among these include Albert Facey's manuscripts for the seminal Australian work, A Fortunate Life, a set of the beautiful and rare Banks Florilegium (one of 100 copies) as well as rare donated items purchased by the Friends of the UWA Library group and through alumni gifts and donations. I'm pleased to report that these rare and special collections are being used more in education and research than ever before – (**slide 41**) – thanks in part to these new display cabinets donated by the FoL on Reid ground floor and also through use in units - Italian Renaissance Architecture unit (**slide 42**), in Design - Jane Austen and her Legacy – new unit (**slide 43**).

So how does one measure the success of a current or future library? It's clear from the university's archives that the number of the Library's physical volumes was a measure, as these were regularly reported up until quite recently. But just like the physical book should no longer define the library, the number of print items is no longer an appropriate measure. Instead – the use of library space, student satisfaction with space, with library services, the strength of partnerships with education and research staff, the ability of our students to locate authoritative information and the visibility of libraries on committees - within the university - and nationally and internationally – should define the success of a university library. These measures are about people, not information either in digital or physical format.

(**slide 44**) Promote Friends of the Library. Friends of the University of Western Australia Library was established 1965 and remains active today. Finish on services to graduates. Thank Friends – encourage to get involved. Visit the website or feel free to contact me for more information. Mention new graduate library membership option – which will include an expanded Online resources – currently limited – have negotiated with major publishers and hoping to launch by the end of 2018. Also includes access to loan our rich print collections.

It's a great time to be a librarian, I am both proud and privileged to lead the staff who perform excellent work in the UWA libraries.

(**slide 45**) Thank you