Client services develop at Monash University Library during the first two decades

Marta Chiba, a former Library director and branch manager, continues her history of the Library

Reader services in the early years consisted of lending, interlibrary loans and reference. Literature searching and the compilation of bibliographies were introduced relatively early. Orientation included taking groups of students and new staff through the library explaining the use of the rudimentary catalogue and drawing attention to specific parts of the collection. Interlibrary loans was an essential service. It provided access to books and periodicals held elsewhere. Interlibrary loans officers were the best known, most appreciated staff members.

New specialist services developed
Clients expected the Library to deliver a wide range of services. Staffing levels were inadequate to satisfy the growing demand for services. The branch-based model of service provision added to the stress. At the beginning only a simple reference service was available to clients. Dedication, determination and innovation enabled branch and main libraries to introduce sophisticated, specialist services earlier than expected. The Biomedical, Law and Hargrave branch librarians visited leading libraries overseas to study provision of specialist services. Professional staff were eager to participate in the development of new services. Reader education from the late 1960s and online information services by the mid 1970s were offered by the Library.

Collaboration with academics
In 1972 the Librarian reported to the Council: "Services to readers expanded in all libraries, with particular emphasis on reader education." By this time reader education was offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In some branches tutorials were followed by assignments which were marked and generally counted towards assessment in the subject. The rapid development of reader education programs was in part due to the relationship enjoyed between subject librarians and academic departments. The Hargrave Library regularly used TIP (Teaching Improvement Project) grants for production of reader education aids. The Audio Visual Services Unit and HEARU (Higher Education Research Unit) assisted frequently with the production and design of films and computer based teaching programs. These programs usually involved collaboration between faculties and library.

Hargrave Library staff 1976. Front row(L-R): Prof Perry Morrison, library consultant; Vicky ?; Peggy Bagnell, serials?; Ann Browne, reference; ? (loans staff). Middle row: Mr Lyons, attendant; Marta Chiba, reference; Sue ?; Elfrida Schnagel; Julia Carling, reference. Back row: George, attendant; Doug May, Hargrave Librarian, Alan Hudson, head attendant, Harry Cole, attendant, Fred Lyons, attendant (Mr Lyons' brother)

Overseas telecommunications link vital
The introduction of online information services commenced as soon as databases and telecommunication services became available. The first Australian services were offered through AUSINET, CAVAL and the National Library of Australia. Following the introduction of MIDAS telecommunication link in 1979, the use of overseas databases offered by Dialog, Orbit, ESA and MEDLINE became cheaper. These new developments created growing demand for library database services. Database searches and online information services became an important component of client services. Library staff received and offered training in searching databases including independent searches by clients.

Library's "maturity and sophistication" praised
A report on the state of development of the Monash University Library was produced in 1976 by Professor Perry Morrison of the University of Oregon, School of Librarianship. Professor Morrison spent nine month as participant observer with the Monash University Library. He accepted specific roles in different parts of the library, for example in the Hargrave Library he undertook the role of interlibrary loans officer for four weeks (see photo above).

At the end of his visit Prof Morrison made many recommendations, some of which were adopted. In his report he stated: "Monash University Library shows a maturity and sophistication which is simply astounding. It exhibits both the advantages accruing to a young institution and to an astounding degree has a maturity equivalent to many older libraries both here and abroad." His praise of the library continued: "…the staff is talented. considerate, friendly and helpful, though sometimes lacking as much formal training as would be desirable."