

most 'remote' off-campus students, whose lack of access to appropriate and necessary library resources is often compounded by inefficient and unreliable local mail systems.

In this section of our paper we will discuss not only the type of library delivery service Deakin provides, but we will also present a profile of our overseas users, outlining what we see as their primary reasons for using the service. Our beliefs are based not only on our experience but also upon letters and comments which we have received from our students, which constantly serve to highlight the value of a library service.

The practical problems associated with sending library material overseas will also be addressed, as will concerns regarding costs to the institution.

In this paper we use the term 'overseas' or 'overseas-based' students to refer to those off-campus students who are either temporarily or permanently domiciled overseas.

Who uses the library delivery service?

In second semester of 1993 there were 227 enrolled overseas-based off-campus students.

Between February and October of 1993, 138 of these students, or 61%, both temporary and permanent overseas residents, used the library delivery service at the Geelong campus of Deakin University (The service does operate from Warrambool, and in part from the Melbourne metropolitan campuses, but exact figures of overseas student use from these campuses is unavailable at this time).

Many of these students have used the library service on more than one occasion. Some rely completely upon us to meet their information needs.

Our experience indicates that the majority of overseas-based students enrolled in and commenced off-campus mode of study whilst still resident in Australia. Few are permanent overseas residents.

These students live in a range of geographical areas. Some are residents of nearby countries, such as New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Vanuatu and the Fijian Islands, while others live in more distant areas namely, Switzerland, Turkey, Egypt, Alaska and Iceland. Two of our students, from Alaska and Iceland, have since returned to Australia and commenced postgraduate studies with Deakin, after completing their undergraduate degrees whilst overseas.

A few of our students are situated in countries troubled by political and social unrest, such as Cambodia, Syria and Iran. Mail deliveries to these areas, however, is no less uncertain or unreliable than many other more

'stable' countries, and their local postal systems have caused us less concern than those in countries like Italy and Mexico.

Not only do these off-campus students live in a variety of countries, but they also come from different walks of life.

For example, there is one group of government employees who have been posted to Australian Embassies in cities such as Damascus and Manila. Their mail is sent, via Canberra, as part of the Diplomatic Bag.

Some students are employed in companies with overseas operations; some travel with a partner who has been transferred overseas; others teach in schools and colleges; a few work with airlines or are employed by government agencies such as the Armed Forces. One of our students was recently on peacekeeping duty with the UN in Cambodia. Two current Australian tennis players were both enrolled in off-campus study with Deakin, whilst travelling the overseas tennis circuit.

Reasons why these students use the library delivery service

Over 93% of overseas-based off-campus students are enrolled in coursework study units.

They often purchase required textbooks before travelling overseas. Others, such as embassy and teaching staff, have access to workplace libraries and other alternative sources of information and material.

Students who are only living overseas for limited or temporary periods rarely have the opportunity to locate or develop a network of information sources. The material they require is specific to their course of study, and often, an essay can only be written with reference to particular readings. This material is not always provided as part of their course material.

Also, those students who are residents of non-English speaking countries, who are not fluent in the language of that country, face additional problems in trying to locate required material.

Students who face the greatest difficulties, appear to be those who are enrolled in research units of study and areas of specialised interest such as Australian studies or nursing theory. Relevant material and information is not always readily available, as our student in Iceland found, when attempting to locate books about Australia in the University of Reykjavik's library.

Whilst overseas university and public libraries appear on the whole to adopt a helpful and, in many cases, friendly attitude to Deakin off-campus students who have attempted to utilise their resources, English language books on topics such as Australian urban planning, colonial art and architecture and, in particular, more current detailed statistical information are not easily obtained.

This belief is supported by comments in a recent letter from one of our students who lives in Maryland, USA. 'There is precious little information on Australian art and architecture in the United States and the library materials I received were critical to my successful completion of the course.'

To the end of October 1993, nearly 1100 books and 1000 photocopies were despatched overseas. Some of our borrowers used us extensively, as Table 4 shows, and the average number of items borrowed per user was 14.5.

Table 4.
Borrowing by top
ten overseas users

Rank	Student level	Country	Books borrowed	Photocopies
1	Honours	PNG	60	55
2	Masters by coursework	Japan	8	87
3	Undergraduate	Singapore	63	19
4	Masters by coursework	Japan	-	69
5	Undergraduate	Singapore	53	13
6	Masters by coursework	PNG	16	49
7	PhD	Singapore	17	47
8	Masters by coursework	Indonesia	27	36
9	Masters by coursework	Singapore	17	41
10	PhD	PNG	23	21

What sort of service do we provide?

Overseas-based off-campus students pay an annual charge of \$55 for library delivery service, which helps to offset the following:

1. the library's airmail postage costs in sending out parcels to students; and
2. financially reimbursing students, whom we require to pay the costs of returning library material by airmail (postal receipts must be submitted by those students claiming reimbursement at the end of each semester).

All off-campus students, regardless of geographical locality, have the opportunity to utilise the full resources of Deakin's five campus libraries, with material being posted directly to students from all campuses.

Student requests for books, audio-visual items (where Customs restrictions allow), photocopies of journal articles, and subject information searches incorporating CD-Rom and On-line database searching are readily accepted at the Geelong and Warrnambool campus libraries.

We try to be flexible and supportive in providing service to overseas students. For example, in some countries where local mail systems are idiosyncratic and unreliable, problems can arise in the delivery of requested library material. In these cases we can adjust set loan periods or fax journal articles.

Our only restrictions on what can be sent to overseas students are based on reasons of practicality and common sense. Therefore we will not send items in high demand, nor our only copy of a particular title or a copy of a book that has excessive weight. We will always find an alternative (unless otherwise requested).

Problems faced in providing service to overseas students

(a) Costs

The annual charge applied to overseas enrolled off-campus students is expected to cover the library's airmail postage costs, and reimbursement of students' return postal expenditure.

The library meets the remaining staff costs of receiving requests, retrieving items, posting out and clearing returned items etc.

One of the main problems the library faces in meeting the information needs of overseas-based off-campus students is the cost of staff time involved in the lengthier and more detailed procedures required in dealing with these students' requests.

For example, extra staff time is required when packing overseas parcels. It is a time-consuming process. For every book parcel a Customs declaration form, including value estimate, must be completed and attached to the outside cover. Often extra labelling is required and some students have special mail requirements. (One student supplied us with a statement in Indonesian which we attached to his parcels and which expedited their passage through customs.)

Parcels must be packed and ready to meet daily mail schedules. This means that they are organised before Australian mail deliveries, and during our busy times this can hold up the packing procedure for the bulk of remaining items. Also, accurate and detailed postal records must be maintained to ensure problems concerning the late arrival or non-delivery of requested items are kept to a minimum.

Even allowing for these records, some extra time is spent in sorting out and following up on inevitable postal concerns.

(b) Mail problems

Due to the unreliability of overseas mail systems, students can suffer delays in receiving requested material. In turn, they also have difficulty in being able to return material by the required due date (a common problem with all students!).

Postal delays occur primarily at the country of destination, once a parcel has been received and placed in the 'tender care' of the local postal authority. At this point the variations and peculiarities in each local system become apparent. For example, some countries, especially in South-East Asia, have strict regulations about videos and nearly all parcels containing videos are opened and inspected by customs. A student in Brunei commented, 'How long a parcel takes depends on whether the censor takes an interest in it'. Then to compound the problem, such packages sometimes attract customs duty, which the student must pay before the parcel is released. Is it any wonder that books returned from overseas students are frequently late!

Attempting to return material can also provide our students with some surprises. For example, China and Italy have not yet recognised as legal the 'padded' or postpak satchel. Therefore students cannot recycle our sending bags, but must use either wrapping paper or in the case of China, purchase cloth or hessian mail bags. Also in some countries the use of coloured pens to address parcels is not acceptable.

A final problem occurs occasionally when material is returned to the library by sea rather than air mail.

(c) Communication Difficulties

We often need to get in contact with overseas students, and the only efficient way to do so is by fax. Many of our students have access to fax machines but correspondence between the library and those that don't can be slow. Usually the need to contact a student is in response to a specific problem that is best sorted out speedily; and time delays tend to compound the problem.

From the student's point of view, communication difficulties with the library present another set of problems. Many of our students prefer to communicate their information needs to the library by telephone. This is not always an option for overseas students. The problem of slowness with overseas mail deliveries can result in anxiety for students. For example, if requested material is not available and a change of essay topic is required it can take several days for notification to reach students. Their study schedule can be easily disrupted, putting them further behind in reaching work requirements.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper we have focussed first upon off-campus postgraduate students, and, secondly, upon our overseas-based off-campus students.

The problems they represent for libraries in trying to provide a 'quality' library service have been discussed.

For libraries the ongoing costs associated with developing and maintaining a research collection, coupled with extensive ordering of material on inter-library loan and often comprehensive literature searches of on-line and CD-Rom databases which are required by postgraduates prove to be the largest challenges in meeting the information needs of these students.

Our figures, however, suggest that this demand is generated by limited numbers of students. We have suggested that the necessity for library support is linked to subject discipline and the distinction between thesis or coursework study.

This assumption was also supported by data relating to overseas-based library users with over 50% of this group enrolled in the Arts Faculty, with traditionally 'high library use' subject areas, but only 1% from science and technology and 5% MBA students.

It is also likely that postgraduate students are using alternative sources to locate information or material, other than the library at their home institution. Many of our postgraduate students, particularly education students, are faculty members at other tertiary institutions and the use of specialised workplace libraries is frequent.

When considering overseas-based off-campus students, we have presented a profile of the overseas student, who is usually temporarily living overseas for work-related reasons. These reasons are as varied as the countries in which they reside. The one thing the majority of these students have in common is their reliance upon the library delivery service for necessary material which will help them complete their unit work requirements.

The library's greatest difficulty in helping students meet that need lies with overseas mail systems. Their slowness and unreliability result in continuing problems for both the students anxiously waiting for parcels and the library.

It was not our aim to focus attention, in a negative way, upon the problems associated with library service to these two groups of students. If we are aware of what difficulties exist in the provision of library service, then we are in a much better position to overcome those difficulties to produce an excellent library service.

Appendix 1. Examples of subject/reference requests made by postgraduate students

- (a) Victorian country Ph.D student
1. Newspaper ownership - Australia - concentration of ownership—capital cities and non-capital city area—19th and 20th centuries (pre-1950).
 2. Newspapers—non-capital cities, Australia—locations/numbers/circulations (volume and geography)/types—19th and 20th centuries (pre-1950).
 3. Newspapers—State and territories capital cities—as in 2.
 4. Newspaper operations on a day-to-day basis—non-capital city areas of Australia—19th and 20th centuries (pre-1950). (These may well take the form of auto/biog.)
- (b) Overseas masters by research student
1. Complete the name of CRA Ltd, Australian-based mining company that operates in Papua New Guinea.
 2. Bilateral or multilateral agreements on fishing rights between the governments of Australia and the South Pacific Island Countries.
 3. From the Economic and Social Survey 1992, published by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) probably in Manila, figures on savings and investments in the South Pacific Island countries
 4. Any publications by Stuart, Harris held in DU library?
 5. Recent figures on volume and value of nickel production in New Caledonia and phosphate in Nauru.
 6. Would it be possible to obtain timetables of Qantas airlines, Air Pacific, and Australian Airlines on their flights to the SPICs. I basically would like to have an idea on the routes and frequency, or their flights to the region. Does Australian Airlines have flights in that area?

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