Sabbatical Leave Project Proposal Narrative
Technology, Collaboration, and Learning:
Professional Learning Experiences of Australian Public Library Staff
September 6, 2016

I. Project description and work plan

I am requesting a one-semester, full-pay sabbatical to pursue scholarship related to the professional learning experiences of public librarians in Australia. In 2017, I will be applying for a Fulbright Specialist Program grant for the sabbatical period (Spring 2018), however the proposed sabbatical activities can be feasibly conducted regardless of the outcome of my Fulbright application. I am currently working in partnership with the Academic Services Division of the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia on preliminary research related to this project. We are partnering with the Australian Library and Information Association’s Australian Public Library Alliance.

My research interests center on three main areas: emerging technological trends and their impact on library services, learning and professional development for library staff, and library futures. This project’s overarching goal supports my research agenda by bringing all three of my areas of interest together: to understand what library personnel need to learn in an evolving library setting, how they engage in exploring emerging technologies, and the various ways they gain needed knowledge to better serve their communities.

Historically, public librarians and library personnel have pursued opportunities for professional learning experiences (PLE) such as reading professional literature, attending in-service days and conferences. By the late 1990s, webinars and other technologically focused opportunities for learning offered more channels for development. Through all of these changes, institutional support and personal drive for learning were proven to be important facets of PLE. For example, a supportive manager and an environment that fosters learning are necessary for positive results in any PLE endeavor (Chan & Auster, 2003). In the Australian context, Sayers (2007) reviewed North American, Australian and New Zealand data and concluded that “Generation X and Y learning styles are typically motivated by a desire to enhance professional skills” (474). Varlejs (1999) noted that librarians possess an eagerness to learn, which is “an attribute central to one’s professional life” (p. 194). Other studies explored positive outcomes for management support of PLE activities, the creation of encouraging environments for
learning, and supported ongoing evaluation of formal learning offerings (Chan & Auster, 2003; Havener & Stolt, 1994).

Emerging technologies shift the emphasis for PLEs and the delivery mechanisms. These now include online conferences, Learning 2.0 programs (Stephens, 2013) and MOOCs (Stephens and Jones, 2015). Bitter-Rijpkema, Verjans, and Bruijnzeels (2012) surveyed the impact of emerging, disruptive technologies on library learning and note the job description of the public librarian is moving “from information to knowledge worker with a focus on innovative co-creation of meaning” (p. 39). Public libraries of all kinds are adding digital creation labs and makerspaces as models of library service evolve. Understanding how public library staff are learning about these emerging technologies and trends will provide insights into how to best deliver PD training for the public library of the future. This is important to the growth and relevance of libraries in Australia and everywhere.

Based on a research study I am finalizing in the US, we are adapting my large scale online questionnaire related to the PLEs of public librarians in Australia for dissemination in late 2016 via a research partnership with the Academic Services Division of the University of Southern Queensland and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). This preliminary study sets the stage for more in depth research via this sabbatical project. A scan of recent research indicates there is not a lot of empirical work in the LIS field on this topic. No study of this kind has been completed in Australia on a national level. The project has two components:

Project A) Data collection and analysis for a research study that further explores the PLEs of Australian public librarians. During sabbatical leave in spring 2018, I will begin to address the apparent gap in the literature noted above through the collection of at least 20 open-ended, semi-structured interviews with public librarians across Australia and a mix of regional, rural and metropolitan areas. This will occur in partnership Helen Partridge, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Scholarly Information and Learning Services) at the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia. The proposed project builds upon the two year study Partridge leads aimed at establishing a framework for the education of the information professions in Australia. To be clear, I will use the sabbatical leave to (1) conduct and transcribe these interviews, (2) analyze the interview data, (3) produce and submit one article draft by May
15, 2018 (more publications should follow from the same data set). The primary data collection techniques would be in-depth interviews using the method of Narrative Inquiry. This method affords the opportunity to tell the story of the learning experiences of library staff via the collection and analysis of field texts (Creswell & Creswell, 2007).

Project B) *Workshops and presentations at various Australian locations based on the results of the online questionnaire that will be disseminated in late 2016.* These presentations would coincide with the schedule of data collection above. Locations could include the state libraries in each Australian state and universities. Sessions would also be presented at Australian state public library association conferences scheduled during the project timeline. ALIA would help to promote these events to ensure good attendance.

**II. Project’s benefit to the University**

The benefits to the university include enhanced visibility on the global stage, contributions of scholarship related to professional learning, and an impact on the curriculum of the School of Information for the training of new librarians and information professionals. These Australian-based activities support and enhance the School of Information and SJSU’s globalization initiatives and awareness. The activities increase our visibility as an important contributor of international scholarship related to public librarianship and PLEs. Sharing findings via articles and presentations not only benefits those working in the field to encourage continuous professional learning but those who teach future librarians in graduate programs. Incorporating the scholarship into our curriculum, such as the core course INFO 200 Information Communities in the “Global Librarianship” module and in the INFO 287 “The Hyperlinked Library” module based on concepts of learning and reflective practice will benefit our graduates as they enter the field. The benefits will continue as the project does beyond Spring 2018. Two to three more publications should follow from the cumulative data set of this project. This provides an ongoing research focus for me as a scholar in addition to the benefits outlined above.

**III. Applicant’s ability to complete the project**

The indicators of my ability to complete the project are a) a successful record of 10 publications related to PLEs in libraries in peer-reviewed journals since my hire at SJSU; b) my experience presenting programs and conducting research with partners in Australia in 2008 and 2009 as well as my experiences
presenting internationally on related topics; c) the readiness of the University of Southern Queensland, the Australian Library and Information Association and other institutions to collaborate; and d) my interests in PLEs in the field of libraries as well as strengthening graduate education for librarianship at SJSU.

IV. Timeline for completion

Lead-up to Sabbatical Leave

Summer 2017:
- Complete Fulbright application
- Finalize methodology for data collection for Project A
- Submit IRB Protocol for interviews by 08/15/17

Fall 2017:
- Complete methods/methodology section for Project A article
- Schedule presentations and workshops for Spring 2018

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Spring 2018:
- Schedule in depth interviews for Project A (Late January)
- Develop presentation slide decks and workshop plans (February)
- Data Collection and presentations/workshops in Australia (March)
- Review, code and analyze data (April)
- Complete article for Project B (May)
- Submit article for Project B by May 15, 2018

References


