

# A new (multiplayer) model of academic library support for research

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## Short Abstract (300 words)

The research game is competitive. Research productivity and quality enhancement are major priorities for higher education in the current environment, and faculties are looking to leverage all possible sources of research funding. A key challenge for academic libraries, therefore, is to align the library closely to the research of the faculty. In particular, how can academic libraries add value to the research process?

At Melbourne Law School, the Law Research Service offers support to Melbourne Law School academic staff by undertaking discrete research tasks and facilitating access to information for the purposes of research. Research assistants are drawn from the law student body and supervised by Law Librarians to undertake sophisticated legal and interdisciplinary research. Law Research Service aims to free academic staff time to think and write, thereby directly contributing to faculty research outcomes.

Alissa will demonstrate enhancing proactive academic research support services with student research assistants gives the library capacity to play a more prominent and valued role in the research process. By involving more players in the research game, a faculty research service can help researchers to move to the next level.

## Abstract (2 pages)

The research game is competitive. Research productivity and quality enhancement are major priorities for higher education in the current environment, and faculties are looking to leverage all possible sources of research funding. A key challenge for academic libraries, therefore, is to align the library closely to the research of the faculty. In particular, how can academic libraries add value to the research process?

Traditional library services are increasingly perceived by faculty as irrelevant to the research process. Academic libraries require 'liaison' librarians to translate the vast and murky world of modern library services and infrastructure into sound bites which can be quickly imparted to impatient faculty members. Abstract from the day to day juggling of academic commitments and deadlines, these often fall on deaf ears. What happens when our offers are accepted, and researchers ask for our help with open access repositories, bibliometrics or literature searches? It is generally impossible to meet the pressing needs of faculty members, each with their own unique interests and priorities, with the current levels of staffing for these roles in academic libraries. One-size-fits-all solutions are increasingly offered but fail to suit the advanced information needs of specialist researchers.

Another group of players are also working to support academic researchers. Research assistants are a traditional part of the academic research culture and contribute actively to research productivity. However academic libraries have largely overlooked research assistants as a user group. Few have policies to facilitate better access to library services for these users, and few offer structured training programs which take into consideration the unique needs of the research assistant position. Australian academic libraries have also overlooked research assistants as valuable and highly visible players in the research support process.

In 2009 Melbourne Law School launched the Law Research Service, the first of its kind in Australian law schools. The Law Research Service offers support to Melbourne Law School academic staff by undertaking discrete research tasks and facilitating access to information for the purposes of research. Research assistants are drawn from the law student body and supervised by Law Librarians to undertake sophisticated legal and interdisciplinary research, provide detailed research memos and relevant materials. The Law Research Service aims to free academic staff time to think and write, thereby contributing to the quality, quantity and impact of faculty publications.

Over 70% of the Melbourne Law School faculty engaged the Law Research Service in 2009, and many were repeat users. This level of use suggests that researchers have eagerly accepted assistance and advice in performing research tasks and using the library to its full capacity. When library services are offered in a wholistic research support process they become more relevant to faculty members.

This model of academic support maximises use of the library's collection, and creates efficiencies for the faculty and for library services. The University's investment in expensive databases is maximised by taking the next step, to connect the content to a current research question.

By utilising research assistants and enhancing their traditional research collaboration role, library services are made relevant to the research process in a way that does not require any behavioural change on the part of the academic researcher. Research assistants are given the training and support they need to deliver the highest standards of research. Working in a team enables the library to deliver expected outcomes to faculty members in short time frames.

The model is scalable and flexible for different sized faculties, and is cost effective to implement and maintain. Using students to carry out research tasks enables the librarian to have greater capacity for outreach, for developing relationships and finding new ways to support research by leveraging scholarly information resources. It is a mutually beneficial arrangement for students, who also develop relationships with faculty and gain practical research experience whilst enhancing their studies through active learning.

Alissa will demonstrate that proactive academic research support services align the library with the research ambitions of the broader institution. Enhancing these services with student research assistants gives the library capacity to play a more prominent and valued role in the research process. By involving more players in the research game, a faculty research service can help researchers to move to the next level.

### **Speaker Biography (150 words)**

Alissa Spatore joined the University of Melbourne in 2009 as Law Research Service Manager. Alissa previously held the position of Associate Business and Law Librarian at the University of Western Australia. In addition to her academic law library experience, Alissa has been Library Services Manager at the Perth office of law firm Blake Dawson, and has also worked at The British Library.

In her current position, Alissa is responsible for the Law Research Service, which was awarded Law Librarian of the Year by the Australian Law Librarians' Association in 2009. Alissa has previously presented day-long workshops on *Legal Research for Information Professionals* and has presented at conferences in Australia and overseas.

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