

# Fostering engagement with academic communities of practice: a new role for librarians

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# Research study

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Case study for Masters thesis in Information Management (RMIT) conducted in October 2014

## **Key Questions:**

- How do mathematics academics engage with information available about teaching?
- What are their information needs?

# Approach

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Interviews with 13 academics in Australian universities

- Background
- Experience and training in teaching
- Information sources used
- Information needs

# Findings

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- Workplace culture
- Teaching is 'sink or swim'
- Big challenges in teaching
- Pressure to adapt teaching
- Traditional teacher centric approaches


# Findings

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## Sources of information

- Colleagues and peers
- Presentations - listening
- Accidental discovery & referral

## Information needs

- A starting point
  - Access to practical and reliable information
  - Accessible/not time consuming
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# Emergent communities of practice?

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## **Academics valued...**

- Learning from people
- Participation
- Experience
- Shared practices
- Practical solutions to problems

## **A Community of Practice is...**

- Learning is social
- Participation
- Shared expertise
- Shared practices
- Problem solving

# Communities of Practice in universities

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- Some success but not widespread
- Effective for professional development and multi-disciplinary collaboration
- Need a facilitator to establish and support

# How does this fit with academic libraries?

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Supporting research

Academics

Metrics,  
publishing &  
resources

Supporting teaching

Student learning

Information  
literacy, teaching  
materials &  
resources





# Skills

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## LIBRARIANS

- Information provider
- Curator
- Liaison
- Researcher
- Trainer
- Organiser

## COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FACILITATOR

- Information provider
- Enabler
- Champion
- Researcher
- Facilitator
- Organiser

# Examples

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- ✓ Communities of practice can be effective in universities
- ✓ Librarians are active within their own communities of practice
- ✓ Librarians are actively supporting teaching practice in universities
- ✓ Liaison and embedded librarians already support information needs of groups of academics

# Conclusions

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Unmet need exists for information and support in teaching



Information seeking behaviors mimicked communities of practice



Communities of practice need a facilitator



Librarians have skills, knowledge and relationships to facilitate communities

# Mechanisms

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- Extend current liaison librarian services
- Partner with L&T units
- Participate in Faculty L&T committees
- Identify receptive departments and working groups
- Learning and teaching grant recipients

# Thanks

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