

OPEN FOR BUSINESS: REINVENTING MONASH UNIVERSITY LAW LIBRARY FOR A POST-COVID WORLD

Rheny Pulungan

Monash University

rheny.pulungan@monash.edu

 [0000-0003-2672-291X](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2672-291X)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/rhenypulungan/>

Kay Tucker

Monash University

kay.tucker@monash.edu

 [0000-0002-3573-2709](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3573-2709)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/kay-tucker-07699776/>

@KayTLawLibn

Introduction

Our libraries are open for business and while we are not in a post COVID world yet we are starting to reinvent ourselves in response to the pandemic. Change is everywhere, much of it out of our control. Reinvention, or producing something new or different from something that exists, can help us to emerge stronger from a crisis. We will discuss some of the changes and challenges Monash Library staff and users experienced while working through the pandemic, particularly during the lockdown restrictions.¹ We will look at how our library is moving forward to reinvent itself, acknowledging that while some aspects of university life have returned to how they were, others have not.

Our story starts two and a half years ago, at the beginning of Victoria's infamous pandemic lockdown era. Open was not a word we heard very often. We were in a seemingly never ending cycle of open/close, responding to last minute Government announcements and flow on University decisions. Library lights were more often off than on. Borders were closed, forcing a decline in international student numbers and affecting University funding.²

¹ For a detailed discussion of some of the problems created or heightened by the pandemic, and the practices put into place by the Monash University Library see Kay Tucker and Becky Batagol, 'Pandemic Pressures in Universities and their Libraries: A View from Australia' (2022) 21 *Legal Information Management* 129, 137-139.

² Australian Government Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *Forward Impact of COVID-19 on Australian Higher Education* (Report, October 2021) 12-13.

In this paper, we focus on and explore the word “open” in light of our services and resources as well as our ways of working and thinking, discussing four main themes.

1. Open Teams. As have many other university libraries, our Library has been through a major restructure. Our staffing number dropped quite substantially with the Voluntary Separation Packages offered by the University at the end of 2020, stemming mostly from the decrease in funds from international students and concern about future funding. We look at the way our newly “opened” law team is reinventing itself.
2. Open Spaces. The Library’s open physical spaces were critical during lockdowns, especially for socially and economically disadvantaged students. We are now asking ourselves how the pandemic will affect our planning of spaces.
3. Open Teaching. We made significant changes to keep our teaching and learning services open during the lockdowns. What might we keep, modify, or discard as we now move to a more open campus environment, particularly in light of Faculty requirements for Law students and the particular needs of different types of students?
4. Open Scholarship. We experienced heightened demand for open texts and resources during lockdown periods. As well as further opening of subscriber models there is a need for good quality Open Educational Resources to ease the textbook burden for students, and for Open Scholarship, essential for timely communication and accessibility of important research.

Pandemic issues for librarians and students

We used a Padlet³ to ask the ALLA conference attendees to tell us one of the big issues or changes that they or their library experienced over the last few years. Common themes were: difficulty in accessing physical materials, ongoing staffing shortages, organisational changes, lack of IT support, limited availability of ebooks, and the move to online training and classes. The issues shared by delegates from law libraries in the courts, government, and law firm sectors align with issues experienced by those of us in the academic sector.

Prior to presenting, we asked our Monash Law Students’ Society committee members to let us know what was most important to law students during the lockdowns and after. The main issue reported was the difficulty in accessing print only resources. Law students took advantage of the Library’s online resources, particularly online tutorials and Subject Guides⁴ on citing and referencing, legal research and writing skills, and databases. On the question of the advantages and disadvantages of Zoom library workshops and drop-in sessions for consultations, students cited ease of access and revision (if recorded) as advantages. However, students were more

³ ‘Please Tell Us One of the Big Issues or Changes that You or Your Library Experienced over the Last Few Years’, *Padlet* (Web Page) <<https://padlet.com/monashlaw/alla>>.

⁴ ‘Law Subject Guide’, *Monash University Subject Guide* (Web Page) <<https://guides.lib.monash.edu/law/>>.

reluctant to ask questions during Zoom classes, and the availability of online drop-in sessions for follow up questions was not widely known, at least at the beginning of the lockdowns. Going forward, students would like to see the provision of both online and in person research consultations with a librarian.

Many students, especially those stuck overseas and needing to study remotely but also those living locally and forced to join classes remotely from their bedrooms, felt extremely isolated during this time. Feedback received from an international JD student, shows how our online consultation service helped to support them through this isolation and contributed to their higher achievement.

Due to COVID-19, I have to stay in Melbourne alone and haven't seen my family and friends for more than three years. It is really tough for me to study JD as an international student. Your help made me feel much more confident to study and do research...My grades for research assignments keep improving!⁵

Open Teams

A significant part of our reinvention is our new way of working, not only in terms of the more flexible hybrid model of onsite and working from home, but also in terms of our new teams. As part of the restructure in 2021, our Library changed from a branch model, with central services, to a functional model with three divisions. Our liaison librarians and front facing librarians formed a new Academic Services Division, and transitioned from working in one of 10 Faculty teams to one of four teams, each covering either two or three faculties - there are two teams in STEM (Science Technology Engineering Medicine) and two teams in HASS (Humanities Arts Social Sciences). Law is teamed with Business and Economics (hence - we are open for business!).

Our combined team continues to provide expertise in each discipline area but team members have also embraced broader collaboration and support from each other, and the opportunity to learn more about teaching and research in the other disciplines. We have found many areas of cross over. Becoming an expert in law doesn't happen overnight, but the team has started peer learning in the classroom and planning joint workshops for researchers. We think that this model should benefit students while at university, most of whom at Monash are taking double degrees, with business and law being one of the biggest, and when they go to the workplace where they are quite likely to work in broader teams with a multidisciplinary approach.

Research at University has become much more multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and industry focused over the years. There is recognition that law and regulation, and justice and social policy have a place in many research projects - some examples are climate change (which is one of the three Global Challenges⁶ prioritised at Monash), modern day slavery, corporate governance, artificial intelligence, to name just a few. Research from these multidisciplinary

⁵ Email from Jia (pseudonym) to Rheny Pulungan, 10 June 2022.

⁶ 'Our Global Challenges', *Monash University* (Web Page) <<https://www.monash.edu/research/global-challenges>>.

projects flows on to teaching, enabling law students to benefit from and contribute to research done in these areas. A key focus now for our teams is helping researchers find and increase the reach and impact of their research outside academia, including in public policy, legislation and the courts. We are keen to hear if librarians in these sectors come across Monash research that has had some impact.

Open Spaces

During the lockdowns in Victoria, our Library (as well as others across the State) became safe havens for students. Research has found that disadvantaged groups, both socially and economically, felt the effects of the pandemic more severely. Women, particularly those in family violence situations, and young people, many of whom lost their employment at that time, were particularly affected.⁷ At least two of our Library branches were kept open where possible, providing stable wifi, comfortable study space and a monitored, safe environment.

Our Law Library is a branch library housed in the Law Faculty building. It wasn't possible to keep it open at all times, but when closed we had some dedicated core staff working who were vital to the supply of much needed print only materials, helping many students and researchers, including via a Click and Send service for researchers. Although popular, this service proved quite costly to provide. It was a solution put in place to serve a crisis, which we hope won't be needed on such a scale in the future as we increase access to digital versions and promote open access resources.

This year, the Library is working on space analysis planning with an architecture firm. Due for a refresh, the Law Library is one of the two branches being focused on. Workshops were run with Law Faculty academics and the Law Students' Society representatives, and it has been interesting to hear their suggestions and comments about the use of Library spaces, especially as it has changed since the pandemic. There is a strong continued need for the Library to provide study space, with more private, sound proofed spaces for students to take part in Zoom consultations, classes or meetings. Students want and need a variety of spaces, from private, quiet study, to group discussion, and creative spaces for projects that might involve audio or video as assessments have diversified away from sole reliance on traditional exams.

The same applies to our staff spaces. As much of our teaching, consultations and meetings are done in the Zoom room now, we need more sound proofed spaces, as well as spaces to interact with each other and create eLearning resources. With many staff able to work flexibly, mixing

⁷ Jan Kabátek, 'Jobless and Distressed: the Disproportionate Effects of COVID-19 on Young Australians' (Briefing Paper No 26/2020, Melbourne Institute, October 2020) <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/3504613/ri2020n26.pdf>; Lucas Walsh et al, *Life, Disrupted: Young People, Education and Employment Before and After COVID-19* (Report, Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice, Monash University, August 2021) 3 <<https://doi.org/10.26180/15580980>>; Hayley Boxall, Anthony Morgan and Rick Brown, 'The Prevalence of Domestic Violence Among Women During the COVID-19 Pandemic' (Statistical Bulletin No 28, Australian Institute of Criminology, July 2020) <<https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sb/sb28>>.

onsite and work from home each week, our design of staff areas and seating arrangements will change. With most of the collection accessed online, we need high speed, reliable internet and ways to make our vast electronic collection more open and seen, both onsite and remotely.

Although Monash is encouraging students to return to campus and in-person classes, this hasn't fully happened yet. We are still watching to see how the pandemic will affect the reinvention of our physical spaces.

Open teaching

During the six lockdown periods in Victoria many students were stranded overseas and domestic students were unable to come onto campus. We quickly switched to running remote teaching and providing student consultations online. Monash Law Library has consistently embedded its research skills in undergraduate (LL.B (Hons)) and graduate (JD) programs. This includes workshops run in first year undergraduate law units; Foundations of Law, Public Law and Statutory Interpretation, and Torts, as well as in Australian Legal Reasoning and Methods in the JD program. We quickly learned how to use various Zoom features to enable us to deliver interactive workshops. Our workshops were designed to include practical sessions, whereby students were expected to complete activities to find and evaluate various legal sources as groups sitting on the same tables in a classroom. In Zoom these tables had to be created virtually using breakout rooms. Students were able to complete the practical activities assigned to them as a group. In addition, we attempted to record one class from each unit to be shared with those students who couldn't attend and add eLearning resources to the relevant units in Moodle (Monash's learning management system).

Before the pandemic, the Library provided a physical drop-in service in each branch, whereby students could come without booking to hold a short 15 minute consultation with a librarian and/or learning skills adviser. During the lockdowns, we transitioned to Zoom. Initially, the Law Library librarians set up their own Google Calendar meeting appointment times where students and staff could book directly for a Zoom consultation. We then joined the Library's more centralised drop-in service, using a separate break out room for Law queries. As we moved to the new Library structure, law librarians took part in the roster for the Humanities and Social Sciences room (with STEMM forming the other room). This was quite a big learning curve for law as well as other HASS staff. We have created and run training sessions for non-law library staff, but of course there are questions which need to be referred (usually via email) and our teams are very happy to respond to these. Overall, the centralised Zoom drop in service worked well, expanding accessibility to students.

We have recently reinvented our teaching and learning services. We are now mostly back to face-to-face teaching, but have reviewed our strategy to enable broader reach and sustainability. Monash, and the Faculty of Law in particular, is very keen to bring students back on campus and into classrooms. Students may attend online classes for specific reasons which need to be approved. As a result, hybrid teaching sessions are scheduled for particular streams.

Hybrid teaching means that there are students in the room as well as on Zoom. This has its challenges - it is difficult for the teacher to pay attention equally to in class and remote students, as well as for the class to hear from the Zoom students and vice versa. We find that we have to spend more time in the beginning to set up Zoom and make sure that video and audio works in the room. Academics have had a similar experience, so we can only hope for technical improvements that make our lives easier in this regard.

The Library has recently also reviewed its drop-in advice services to identify further opportunities to improve. So that students don't have to wait in a queue when dropping in to meet with a librarian, we implemented a booking system using software called Calendly at the beginning of Semester 2, 2022. Students enter the service via the Library's web page, select their faculty and are directed to available times to book in with a librarian in either HASS or STEMM disciplines. Longer appointments can also be booked by researchers with a librarian in one of the specialist teams.

Open Scholarship

As we saw from the student feedback, one of the biggest challenges our Library users faced during lockdowns was not being able to access print resources. Law textbooks are quite often only available in print or publishers make them inaccessible in electronic format for library wide access. They effectively close access by charging according to the number of students enrolled in a unit, which in some cases could cost over \$20,000 for one semester of use. At the start of the pandemic some publishers were not offering ebooks to libraries, although thankfully that has now changed. The Law Library worked with some publishers early in the pandemic to facilitate gratis ebook copies to economically disadvantaged students. We also worked with lecturers to identify more open texts that they might be able to use to supplement or replace more restricted texts. This pandemic certainly paved the way for publishers to improve library access to their ebooks and for academics to at least think about accessibility when assigning readings.

University libraries have put enormous effort into making ebooks available in a timely manner. Open Educational Resources and open scholarship are a high priority and are integrated into our services. As a result of the Library's restructure at Monash, we now have an Open Scholarship team as part of our Academic Services Division. Our Library is working towards leading the University in this area and our staff are becoming experts in talking to researchers about open access. This year we have been involved in two projects initiated and run via the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL).

Read and Publish agreements⁸ between libraries and journal publishers enable authors to publish papers in their key hybrid journals as open access without paying article processing charges. With open access, the academics benefit from increased engagement and possible

⁸ 'Read & Publish Agreements Negotiated by CAUL', *CAUL - Council of Australian University Librarians (Web Page)* <<https://caul.libguides.com/read-and-publish>>.

impact of their research, while also enabling anyone outside academia, such as in law firms or the courts, to benefit from easier access.

The second project involves the creation of Open Educational Resources using the Press Books platform.⁹ We have not yet had a submission from our Law Faculty, but we are very pleased to see that authors from Bond University have received a grant to work on an OER called *Introduction to Legal Reasoning*.¹⁰

Conclusion

In this paper we have discussed and explored the word “open” in light of Monash University Library’s services and resources, specifically open teams, open spaces, open teaching and open scholarship. We are becoming more open to change, and in doing so, we are reinventing ourselves.

But how do we future proof against more pandemics? Some of our learnings include:

1. moving as much collection as possible to the digital space
2. supplying important print only collection to users who can’t come onsite
3. being responsive to new space requirements aligning with the use of the campus and teaching and learning methods
4. keeping our teaching and consultations hybrid or online with the ability to pivot quickly
5. creating engaging asynchronous learning materials that have broad reach and sustainability in terms of staff time
6. being available and responsive to researchers and students so that they know they have the research support they need in difficult times
7. positioning the library as the leader in open access initiatives and advocacy
8. communicating changes quickly so that our users know how and where to contact us when they need us
9. coming out of the “Law Bubble”! As law librarians, we are very proud to have law specific skills and knowledge. However, we also need to be open to change and new learning opportunities.

One of Monash University’s guiding principles is Openness, which includes the aim to “share our knowledge widely”.¹¹ Our next step is to position the Library as the source of Open Scholarship expertise. Openness has become a priority and we expect it to become the norm in the post-COVID world.

⁹ ‘Open Educational Resources Collective’ CAUL - Council of Australian University Librarians (Web Page) <https://www.caul.edu.au/programs-projects/enabling-modern-curriculum/oer-collective>.

¹⁰ ‘Grant Recipients 2022’, *Open Educational Resources Collective* (Web Page) <https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/grants/grant-recipients-2022/>.

¹¹ ‘Open Access at Monash’, *Monash University Library* (Web Page) <https://www.monash.edu/library/researchers/publishing-and-metrics/open-access>.

