

The Australian Chiropractic College Library

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How and when and why was the Australian Chiropractic College started? Who attends the college and what do they study?

Janiece Pope: The ACC is the fruition of the vision of a group of passionate Adelaide chiropractors. They weren't just passionate about their own careers within chiropractic, they were passionate about the field as a whole; and that includes education. Not only were there no chiropractic courses offered locally, but even those located interstate were all offered within the broader context of universities. This group of people had a vision of a local institution that was dedicated solely to chiropractic education.

That included not just solid technique, but also the underpinning history and philosophy, the various schools of thought, and entrepreneurial education for those who want to run their own business one day. They were very well networked with other chiropractors here and internationally, so there was a normal amount of goodwill behind them - some of which translated into generous financial support. The New Zealand College of Chiropractic, which was well-regarded and well-established, gave their curriculum to the ACC as a starting point. This happened in 2016, which was also when they applied for TEQSA accreditation. That came through in 2019, which is also the year they secured a premises and the year I was employed to start up the library.

I had a few months to get started before the first cohort of students was to come through in 2020.

Because this college is very much a passion project, staff/faculty and students were handpicked to make sure that they were aligned with the ethos of the college. So it started off with a very small dedicated group of people, both staff and students - and has since expanded, despite a few COVID hiccups!

Ordinarily the students have to complete a successful prerequisite year of basic health sciences elsewhere (or at the ACC) before they can start the Bachelor of Chiropractic. A lot of them are young (but some of them are a little older); and most of them have previous experience as a chiropractic patient and see chiropractic as a really positive thing in their own lives. So, like the people who founded the College, they are highly motivated to share the benefits of chiropractic with others.

That's in fact why I wanted to work there, because I too believe I have benefited from chiropractic treatment. I couldn't work in such a place if I did not, but nor would they have offered me the job if I had been against chiropractic, or even ambivalent.

What were you doing professionally before coming to the college?

At the time I was employed there I was doing what I am still doing now: working 0.8 in the sexual health sector. So, I picked up the ACC job on my 'spare' weekday.

I came into the sexual health sector as a librarian, but for several years now I have been working in other roles outside of a library (although I still use my library and information skills; for example, I established a sector-wide a current awareness service as part of my sexual health role). At the time the opportunity at ACC came up, I was going through a bit of an identity crisis; and even though I really enjoyed what I did, I was missing working as a librarian. So by taking the 0.2 role at ACC, I could dip my toe in the library waters again without giving up what I was already doing - because I'm really passionate about that too!

My library background was mainly in special libraries - specifically health libraries - which I worked in since the late 90s. The health libraries in which I worked included both hospital libraries and also community settings (the latter being the pathway by which I entered the sexual health sector).

When I worked at the Darling House Community Library (which sadly no longer exists, but that's another story), with the late Ian Purcell, I saw how a library could be so much more than a source of information or entertainment materials. It could also be a safe haven and a home away from home for certain communities. And a librarian could function not only as an information specialist, but also as a welcoming presence and a listening ear for those who had never felt accepted for who they are, or comfortable revealing that truth, in a lot of their everyday spaces. That was very powerful and special, it felt like a privilege - and it informed my love of working in a community setting.

But I was still working out exactly who I was in terms of my career, and after leaving that community setting to return to a hospital one, I eventually realised my heart really lay with community. I absolutely loved how intellectually stimulating work in medical libraries is, and I felt that was very important, the work I was doing there. However I realised that by returning to the community sector I could continue to work as a librarian, but also work with disenfranchised communities, which was perfect for me. No one role or one sector has everything; and sometimes it takes a bit of time for librarians to work out which setting they want to work in, and which is the best fit for their skills and values.

Unfortunately a chain of bizarre events led to the sudden closure of my former workplace, including the Darling House Community Library. I was lucky to get work in another community sexual health library before too long, backfilling a librarian on long service leave. When she returned there was no longer a role in the library for me, as it was a one-person library, but I was then employed elsewhere in the organisation. I'm still working with them now, doing a mix of training and education, current awareness services, and social media, plus community engagement and advocacy. Everything I have done so far in my life has come together to lead me to that mix.

Was the library established in concert with the beginning of the college, or later? What was the process of establishing it like? Were you well supported, involved in decisions, but also autonomous?

The library was a prerequisite for TEQSA accreditation, so I came in fairly soon after they secured a premises. There were a small group of professional and academic staff at that stage, all working out of one room. It didn't have landlines or even computers - the first day I came to work I was working on my mobile! The next week I brought a tablet along to make life a bit easier. We didn't even have Microsoft Office at that stage, so we had to download free software which was similar to our own devices. That's how bare bones it was. It's much more well-equipped now! They were relying on the dedication and the experience of each individual at that stage, to progress things.

One corner of that huge communal room was dedicated to the library at that point (it now has its own room on another floor). There was shelving, already there from the previous tenants: quite enough for library purposes at the beginning. There were also lots of desks.

As well, there were several boxes of books and other materials which people had donated. The substantial goodwill towards the college from established chiropractors resulted in a lot of donated items. As you can imagine, that was both a blessing and a curse.

Of course, I couldn't do anything with those until I had a means of cataloguing them; and I couldn't do that until I had decided what system to use - both in terms of cataloguing/classification and in terms of software.

I was supported as much as I could be by my own boss at that stage, and by those above him, but here's the thing: as I was the only library staff member employed, I was the only one who knew anything about how libraries worked. So as my boss said to me, none of the rest of us know what to do... so we're just trusting you to do it!

Therefore in one way I had absolute carte blanche, which was great. It's wonderful to be able to set something up from scratch in the way that you want it to be.

On the other hand, however, there was no budget at that stage, and I was reliant on free or very cheap solutions for everything. So that kept my wild schemes in check a bit! Fortunately, having worked for a couple of decades in community services, I was used to magicking things up on the smell of an oily rag.

The other thing is that librarians are - and always have been in my experience - extremely collegiate people. Librarians will always help, or co-operate with, other librarians where they can. I have always been impressed by that.

Those two factors really stood me in good stead at the beginning. Plus having networks, even though I hadn't worked in a library for a few years. For example I knew I wanted to work with in terms of software vendors. I knew of the existence of Gratisnet, a wonderful reciprocal scheme, which absolutely saved my life in an environment where the budget would not allow us to directly subscribe to packages. And generally I just knew people who knew people in the library world.

I was also fortunate when I reached out to Stephanie Bacon, a Senior Librarian at the New Zealand College of Chiropractic. She was extremely helpful, and I noted the way they had set things up and the way they were functioning. I also pinched some of their cataloguing records! We discussed the possibility of the Australian College becoming a part of a NZ purchasing consortium, alongside the NZ College and a few others. Unfortunately, that was not to be, due to a few factors outside everyone's control. However, it does show that reciprocal arrangements and helping out other libraries don't have to be restricted to the same state, or even the same country, if you share the same subject matter and a willingness to collaborate.

It wasn't all fun and games in that regards though. Some of the bigger academic libraries with whom we tried to negotiate reciprocal arrangements were simply not interested. I understand that for them they would be giving more than they are getting. Our collection was small, but full of unique holdings and some very rare materials; but that wasn't enough. I understand they have to look out for their own interests and they are not a charity; but I guess I'm just pointing out that it makes it hard to get a foot in the door when the operating budget at the beginning of a library's life is very small.

You have to be creative, and you have to compromise, and you have to be prepared to ask people for favours.

How would you describe the physical space of the library?

The library was initially one corner of a large communal room which functioned as an office for multiple people who worked in different areas. That worked ok in the early days, but as you can imagine was not so ideal for anyone as the college grew bigger.

About a year ago the college expanded onto another floor of the building they are in, and as a result the library got its own dedicated space. It has a workspace and storage for the librarian, as well as enough shelving for the time being. The students wanted it to still be a place where they could work, as well; even though they had other options. That was great, because it meant they saw the library as theirs. You can have the best collection in the world...but if nobody wants to come and use it, and if no one feels that the library space is for them, it's a waste and a missed opportunity. Sometimes, I have observed over the years, librarians almost resent the users, forgetting they are why the collection - and their role - exists in the first place. So there are desks for students to work at, too. Last but not least, there is the obligatory plastic skeleton! Oh and there's also a portrait of one of the founders of chiropractic on the wall, looking very serious and Edwardian - and it looks like his eyes are following you around the room.

The new library is located between one of the lecture rooms, one of the practical rooms, and the student lounge - so it's very visible to the students and gets a lot of passing traffic.

I keep mentioning the students rather than the staff here, because even though the academic staff do very much use the library services, they tend not to work physically in there - their interactions sometimes originate from home, or their chiropractic clinics, or some of the staff spaces at the ACC.

What collection does the library hold? What activities does the library carry out?

The library holds a mixed physical and electronic collection. In terms of electronic materials we tend to rely a lot on free materials, and supplement those through document delivery.

The physical books include new textbooks which are part of the curriculum - apart from chiropractic techniques, there's a lot of anatomy and physiology, quite a bit of basic science, some psychology, and quite a bit of philosophy and history of chiropractic. And there are materials which cater to running a chiropractic business.

The collection also includes a lot of donated materials - some very rare old books, pamphlets, journal issues, and even paraphernalia such as old chiropractic instruments, a real skeleton in a box, and some chiropractic-themed ties!

Every time a donation came in I wasn't quite sure what I would find in the boxes!

Apart from the collection, the library provides a study space, and a current awareness service, and the librarian has input outside the library where appropriate: e.g. as a guest lecturer, and for accreditation purposes, to name a couple. I also had one-on-one sessions some with students regarding things like referencing, and I did some literature searches for staff.

What does the future hold for the Australian Chiropractic College library?

Well at the time of answering these questions, I have just resigned and a new librarian has started. After two and a half years, I was finding that working 5 days across more than one sector and employer was a bit more than I could manage indefinitely. I felt that I had got things up and running, and it was time to hand over to somebody else - somebody who could devote more time to the role as the college grew, which I couldn't do as I was already working in sexual health 0.8. The new librarian also comes from a special libraries background, and is keen to transfer her skills across and for her role to grow with the college. It suits her at the moment to work 0.2, but she will want to work more hours in future, so she is a perfect fit, as the two trajectories will be aligned. It's always been the plan for the library to grow as the college itself grows. So it has a very exciting future.

One thing I really liked about working in the context of the College is that because it's a new and dynamic organisation paving its own way, there were no set expectations of how the library should be, or even how that role should be - apart from obviously complying with professional standards, and accreditation requirements, and covering all bases of what is for now a one-person library. That not only gave me a lot of freedom within the library, but also allowed me to wear some other hats in the College - I was invited to give some guest lectures and tutorials every year.

Sometimes I had my health librarian hat on and talked about evidence-based health practice and evidence-based information practice. As a medical librarian I had a thorough grounding in those principles, and they had always guided my work. So I would present that to first years soon after they started each year.

That was something that I found very interesting and impressive - chiropractic is quite controversial and it gets a lot of bad press. Some people have the idea that it is not at all evidence-based. While there are definitely rogues and crackpots (as in just about any field), they do suck up a lot of the attention and give quite a skewed perspective. The college was very grounded in evidence-based practice, and I felt no conflict at working there as somebody who prioritises that way of thinking in my work. There are a lot of peer reviewed studies being written up, and - at least in

Australia - modern chiropractic education, whether in a university or a specialised institution such as the College, is strongly underpinned by science and evidence-based practice. Because we have robust governance in this country when it comes to higher education, any institution or course simply wouldn't be accredited if it were not based on these as a bedrock. Also, I could never have worked there if that were not the case.

The other lectures I was invited to present at the College were based on some of the training I do in my sexual health role.

So there was never the feeling of being locked into something by expectations, in that role. It felt like a role that was fresh and pioneering and dynamic, like the College itself.

I would encourage all librarians to keep an open mind in terms of the sector or subject matter with which they may end up working. I've ended up working in areas I never would have imagined when I were younger, and really enjoyed it and found it fulfilling. I had always envisioned that I'd be going into council-run public libraries - but as it happened, my whole library career has been spent in special libraries. (Although one of them, as mentioned earlier, was open to the public as well, so it was a hybrid of the two: a community library which was centred around particular topics.) I'm really pleased that things worked out that way. I think being prepared to try things you may not necessarily have envisaged is really important for a librarian. This is particularly the case in an era where librarians are increasingly working outside of libraries, or in roles which encompass non-traditional work. Being flexible and open-minded is definitely an asset for any librarian. And if it doesn't work out, you're not stuck there – and you will always learn things you can take with you into the future.

Allison Cox: I took over from Janiece as Librarian for the Australian Chiropractic College in June 2022.

Working at the Chiropractic College is my first role as a health librarian. Prior to this I worked at the University of Adelaide libraries for thirteen years. I worked in various positions there, my last position being an Arts liaison librarian with a focus on education and music. While a lot of work we did was cross-disciplinary, much of my work still focused on the arts so health is quite new for me!

Coming from a large multi-branch library, I have enjoyed the move to a smaller library. I really enjoy the fact that I do all of the library work myself – from

cataloguing and re-shelving books, to helping the students with their assignment work.

Janiece has done an amazing job setting up the College library and I am enjoying continuing her work. We have recently received some donations with a large amount of historical books and pamphlets relating to Chiropractic which is exciting. One of the most interesting items we have received so far is an LP about chiropractic (my music cataloging background is coming in handy!).

I am really enjoying this position so far, although there have been some challenges. Shortly after I started the role, the College moved to online learning for a term due to Covid-19. This was difficult as I only had one week to meet the students before they went online for 8 weeks!

Next year the College is opening a Chiropractic practice which will mean there will be a lot of relocations within the building. For the time being the library will stay where it is, but in the future it will be moved to another floor. As our collection is quickly growing, I am hoping that it will be a space with lots of shelving! Another new project for next year will be our Book Club. This was initiated by one of the students and I am looking forward to working with her. There are no shortages of books written by chiropractors so we are hoping to get some authors in as well.