# 10,000 books buried at Australian university

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Thank you for the recent article on the British Library's junking of 80,000 books and 60,000 historic newspapers. As Chris Marsden stated, the discarding of the collections, based on considerations of financial expediency is “a telling example of the philistinism that now dominates within ruling circles”.

The article appeared just after a July 8 report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* recalling a similar development at the University of Western Sydney in 1995. The university, located on six campuses in Sydney's working class western suburbs, buried 10,000 books that it lacked the space and funds to catalogue.

The volumes were among 40,000 donated by the University of Sydney's Fisher Library. It seems that the unwanted books were dumped under 2.5 metres of soil on one of the campus grounds and are still there.

The author of the *Herald* article commented: “Perhaps the burying or burning of books is to become the new ‘idea of a university'. Those 10,000 books at UWS were judged surplus to requirements and too costly to house. Burying them (recycling and selling were considered, but discarded) was seen as the economically rational decision.”

I asked one of the UWS librarians to confirm the story. He described the book burial exercise as “very emotive”. Unable to find a company that would cheaply pulp the books, the university simply opted to use them as landfill. There was a “large cry” at the time. Despite the protests, however, the university management proceeded.

The same outlook dominates in the current amalgamation of the UWS's three regional divisions into one institution. Seeking to slash its annual budget by 12.5 percent, or about $10 million, the university has made the library one of its primary targets. The management has decided that $1.5 million must come from library services, eliminating the jobs of 14 library staff.

UWS students already have to cope with hopelessly under-resourced libraries. They commonly have to travel 50 kilometres or so into central Sydney to use the State Library or the libraries of other better-endowed universities.

When a journalist asked a UWS spokesman about the latest library cuts, he said the savings would go to funding “the university's capacity to maintain and improve its core performance on teaching, research and community service”. This reference to a “core performance” is revealing. It appears that decent libraries are no longer regarded as fundamental to the university's aims. Books are simply becoming an expensive, and optional, overhead.

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