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## Current Status and Implications of Services for Disabled Readers in Australian University Libraries: Postprint

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study examines the current state of services for disabled readers in eight renowned Australian university libraries to derive implications for similar services in Chinese university libraries. [Method/Process] Employing a web-based survey methodology, the research analyzes the registration systems for disabled readers, the development of dedicated website service sections, the configuration of auxiliary facilities, and the service content provided for disabled readers across the eight Australian university libraries. [Results/Conclusion] Chinese university libraries should enhance service awareness for disabled readers, collect basic information on disabled readers, strengthen the development of website service sections, improve the configuration of auxiliary service facilities and allocation of collection resources, and provide service content tailored to disabled readers.

### Full Text

#### Preamble

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#### Current Status and Enlightenment of Library Services for Disabled Readers in Australian Universities

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study examines the current status of services for disabled readers in eight renowned Australian university libraries to derive

implications for Chinese university libraries. **[Method/Process]** Through web-based investigation, this paper analyzes the registration systems, website service column construction, facility configuration, and service content for disabled readers at these eight Australian university libraries. **[Result/Conclusion]** Chinese university libraries should enhance service awareness for disabled readers, collect basic information about disabled readers, strengthen the construction of website service columns, improve auxiliary service facilities and collection resource allocation, and develop service content suitable for disabled readers.

**Keywords:** Australia University Library Disabled Reader Reader Services

**Classification Number:** G252

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In China, as the state attaches greater importance to education for people with disabilities, the number of individuals with disabilities receiving higher education has increased annually. According to statistics from the China Disabled Persons' Federation, more than 7,000 students with disabilities were admitted to regular institutions of higher education each year from 2011 to 2015, with 9,592 disabled students admitted nationwide in 2016 [1]. After enrollment, disabled students constitute a special category of library users whose disabilities create numerous inconveniences when accessing library services, requiring additional assistance from university libraries. However, current services for disabled readers in domestic university libraries remain significantly inadequate, with few libraries actually providing relevant services in practice. Theoretical research also lacks comprehensive introduction and analysis of cases from Chinese university libraries. In contrast, university libraries in developed countries and regions have long emphasized services for disabled readers, with the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Hong Kong all implementing targeted services that have been studied by domestic scholars [2-7]. Similarly, Australian university libraries have generally prioritized services for disabled readers with distinctive features, though no specialized literature has introduced these practices. Therefore, this paper investigates Australian university libraries through their websites, examining the current status of their services for disabled readers and offering recommendations to provide reference for Chinese university libraries.

## 2. Basic Survey Information

To ensure representativeness of survey subjects, the author selected institutions based on the influential U.S. News Global University Rankings 2018 edition in April 2018. These rankings evaluate universities worldwide through 12 major indicators, effectively reflecting their comprehensive strength and status internationally and nationally. In the 2018 edition, 33 Australian universities were included [8]. As members of the Group of Eight (Go8) universities, seven institutions ranked within the global top 100: University of Melbourne [10], University of Sydney [11], University of Queensland [12], Monash University

[13], Australian National University [14], University of New South Wales [15], and University of Western Australia [16], while University of Adelaide [9] ranked 122nd. This paper therefore selected these eight renowned Australian university libraries as survey subjects. According to statistics from the Australian Department of Education and Training, the number of new university students with disabilities in Australia increased annually from 2011 to 2016: 10,008, 11,677, 12,738, 14,495, 15,329, and 16,336 respectively [17], demonstrating a consistent upward trend. This has prompted greater attention from the Australian government and universities toward disabled students, with “AUD 1.5 billion provided in 2017 to support teaching resources for students with disabilities” [18]. The author’s investigation revealed that these eight prominent Australian university libraries, as important institutional components, generally emphasize services for disabled readers, offering relatively comprehensive services supported by well-developed infrastructure and software/hardware conditions.

### **3. Services for Disabled Readers in Eight Australian University Libraries**

#### **3.1 Registration System for Disabled Readers**

Given that disabled readers have special requirements for facilities, equipment, and resources when using library services, all eight Australian university libraries require disabled readers to register and undergo assessment before accessing services. This practice facilitates understanding of the specific numbers, disability types, and special needs of disabled readers, enabling advance procurement of assistive software/hardware and appropriate planning for new construction and renovation projects. Additionally, these libraries emphasize that services are available only to enrolled students, highlighting their status as current students. The registration and assessment process is led by university offices for student equity and disability support or student accessibility services. Applicants register online and undergo face-to-face assessments, after which approved disabled students can access library support services. The assessment process considers the needs of disabled students, with interviews typically lasting no more than two hours. For students with hearing impairments or non-English native speakers, appropriate assistance is provided during interviews. All information and conversation content is strictly confidential and will not be disclosed or shared without student consent. This registration and assessment system forms the foundation for effective services for disabled readers in Australian university libraries, ensuring that complete records of basic information enable smoother service delivery when disabled students use library facilities.

#### **3.2 Construction of Disability Service Columns on Library Websites**

The presence and placement of disability service columns on library websites reflect the level of importance attached to disabled readers. All eight Australian university libraries feature such columns on their websites, demonstrating con-

ceptual prioritization of disabled readers. The Australian National University Library, University of Melbourne Library, University of Queensland Library, University of Adelaide Library, and University of Western Australia Library place these columns on their primary navigation pages, while the remaining three libraries position them on secondary pages—all within no more than three levels of navigation to facilitate quick access for disabled readers. The University of Melbourne Library also includes a direct link to disability services in the quick menu on its homepage, providing an alternative access method. This detail reflects Australian university libraries' emphasis on disabled readers and their commitment to thoughtful service design. shows the names and locations of disability service columns on the websites of the eight libraries.

### 3.3 Facilities for Disabled Readers

Comprehensive, professional, and user-friendly facilities are essential for effective library services for disabled readers, affecting both their efficiency in utilizing resources and their evaluation of service quality. Well-equipped facilities attract readers to use library resources and services. The investigation revealed that all eight Australian university libraries have relatively complete facility provisions, which can be categorized into basic barrier-free facilities and auxiliary facilities with related software.

**3.3.1 Basic Service Facilities** All eight libraries emphasize barrier-free infrastructure, with accessible elevators, restrooms, and pathways as “standard equipment,” thoughtfully designed. For example, the Australian National University Library’s accessible elevator features braille buttons on control panels positioned at wheelchair-accessible heights [14]. The University of Melbourne Library’s barrier-free pathways enable wheelchair users to enter the library and access any internal location [11]. To facilitate convenient access for disabled drivers, the Australian National University, Monash University, New South Wales, Western Australia, and Adelaide libraries provide designated parking spaces arranged with considerable consideration. The Australian National University Library positions these spaces adjacent to or directly in front of library entrances [14], while Monash University Library allows disabled readers to temporarily park in red, yellow, or blue permit zones when designated spaces are full [19]. Additionally, Monash University, Australian National University, and Western Australia libraries provide rest areas specifically for disabled readers to alleviate fatigue from reading or studying, demonstrating strong humanistic care. details the basic service facility construction across the eight libraries.

**3.3.2 Auxiliary Facilities and Related Software** All eight libraries emphasize learning space services, variously termed adaptive technology rooms, assistive technology rooms, resource rooms, or learning centers. These spaces include both conventional facilities for general users and specialized assistive equipment and software for disabled readers, providing crucial support for those with reading disabilities, visual impairments, or mobility limitations. Hardware includes

computers, printers, scanners, and ergonomic furniture, while software primarily comprises screen magnification, screen reading, voice recognition, and text-to-speech programs. Reservations are typically made online. For instance, Monash University Library's booking system displays a daily schedule with green indicating availability and red indicating booked slots [20]. Usage time is maximized while considering disabled readers' physical conditions—Queensland University Library allows three bookings per week of up to three hours each, requiring seven-day advance reservation [12]. The University of Sydney Library also permits disabled readers to arrange examinations in assistive technology rooms, utilizing equipment and software to ensure smooth test-taking [11]. New South Wales, Queensland, and Western Australia libraries provide lockers for disabled readers to store books and personal items. lists auxiliary facilities and software across the eight libraries.

### 3.4 Service Content for Disabled Readers

**3.4.1 Consultation Services** Australian university libraries appoint dedicated disability services librarians to handle problems disabled readers encounter when using library resources or to address special needs. Seven of the eight libraries (excluding New South Wales) list contact information including phone numbers, email addresses, and office locations for these librarians on their websites. Consultation covers library resource introductions, facility location guidance, floor layouts, service and facility reservations, photocopying and scanning assistance, document delivery requests, and service feedback surveys. Although New South Wales Library does not have dedicated disability services librarians, disabled readers can still obtain needed information and assistance at the library front desk. Establishing dedicated disability services librarians enables rapid problem resolution, maintains good communication with disabled readers, demonstrates clear responsibility allocation, and facilitates coordination with other institutional departments.

**3.4.2 Printing, Photocopying, and Scanning Services** These services represent alternative means for disabled readers to access library resources. All eight libraries provide such services, particularly following Australia's Copyright Amendment (Disability Access and Other Measures) Act 2017, which relaxed restrictions on disabled readers' access to copyrighted materials and expanded available resource types [21]. For example, the University of Adelaide Library provides A3 and A4, black-and-white and color photocopying of journals and books, along with free scanning services, with assistance available from disability services staff [9]. The University of Queensland Library scans and converts print books and journals into accessible formats, enlarging them as requested [12].

**3.4.3 Research and Learning Services** These services aim to save research and learning time while improving efficiency for disabled readers. The eight Australian university libraries offer comprehensive research and learning support, focusing on software applications and research skills at both basic (library usage

help) and advanced (research training) levels, effectively meeting disabled readers' academic needs. Monash University Library's online research and learning services include university study skills, assignment completion and examination arrangements, and thesis writing training. The "assignment completion" section provides detailed guidance on understanding assignment requirements, structuring work, searching for and integrating literature, subject-specific examples, exam preparation, reading techniques, and time management [22]. The thesis writing training covers topic selection, data collection, and writing structure. The University of Melbourne Library offers training on Endnote, Mendeley, and Zotero for efficient literature management, and copyright education to help disabled readers avoid infringement and protect their legitimate rights [10]. New South Wales and Monash libraries emphasize walk-in or immediate learning services during business hours, while Adelaide Library provides downloadable PowerPoint slides for continued learning. details research and learning service content across the eight libraries.

**3.4.4 Other Services** Beyond the three universal services mentioned above, the eight libraries provide additional services based on their specific circumstances: (1) Library tours—Western Australia and New South Wales libraries offer personal tours for new disabled students or those with needs, arranged by contacting disability services staff; (2) Book retrieval and document delivery—Australian National University, Monash, New South Wales, Queensland, and Adelaide libraries provide assistance with retrieving and returning books from shelves. Western Australia Library mails materials to disabled readers who cannot visit in person and allows telephone renewals [16]. Adelaide Library provides document delivery within 24 hours [9].

## 4. Current Status of Services for Disabled Readers in Chinese University Libraries

Available literature indicates that only Hong Kong university libraries currently provide comprehensive services for disabled readers, from conceptual awareness and website design to facility construction and service content [6-7]. Mainland Chinese university libraries lag considerably in this regard. Most have designed their structures, facilities, and collections based on the needs of non-disabled readers, with minimal consideration for disabled readers, creating numerous inconveniences. Among the 42 "Double First-Class" universities representing the highest tier of Chinese higher education, only Dalian University of Technology Library briefly mentions "fully open, barrier-free reading services in all reading rooms" [23], while others provide no dedicated content for disabled readers. Among other regular institutions, only a few demonstrate people-oriented service spirit: Changchun University Library has established a 500-square-meter Braille reading room and assistive equipment room [24]; Guangzhou University incorporates disability-friendly design with barrier-free access [25]; Jinan University Library provides barrier-free service instructions on its website, offering

elevator access from the ground floor to eliminate the inconvenience of multiple steps [26]. Chinese university library services for disabled readers lag significantly behind in service scope, content depth, facility provision, and collection development, failing to meet disabled readers' needs.

## 5. Enlightenments from Australian University Library Services for Disabled Readers

### 5.1 Enhance Service Awareness for Disabled Readers

Awareness of services for disabled readers is gradually strengthening in Chinese libraries, particularly in public libraries, which have made active progress with 850 Braille and audio reading rooms established at provincial, prefectural, and county levels by the end of 2016 [1]. However, Chinese university libraries need further improvement, especially as the number of disabled students admitted to higher education increases annually. As essential components of disabled students' campus life, university libraries bear unshirkable responsibility for supporting their learning and providing services. To improve service quality, Chinese university libraries must first prioritize services for disabled readers and enhance service awareness. Specific measures include: (1) Establishing disability services offices or liaison systems based on actual conditions, with overall responsibility for coordination and consultation; (2) Collecting basic information about disabled readers to prepare for targeted services—if staffing is limited, offices can be affiliated with existing departments using part-time personnel; (3) Providing facilities and resources that meet special needs, developing programs suited to disabled readers' characteristics, and promoting services through website columns; (4) Conducting feedback surveys through online, telephone, or on-site methods, with follow-up visits when possible to ensure continuous quality improvement.

### 5.2 Collect Basic Information About Disabled Readers

A major reason for the limited services for disabled readers in Chinese university libraries is insufficient understanding of their basic information and special needs. The Australian survey shows that disabled students must register and be assessed before accessing special services and facilities, enabling institutions to estimate required human, material, and financial resources and make targeted plans for staffing and equipment procurement while avoiding resource waste from information asymmetry. To develop services for disabled readers, Chinese university libraries must first master basic information about enrolled disabled students, including disability types and numbers. Following China's classification of people with disabilities into visual, hearing, speech, physical, intellectual, mental, and multiple disabilities [27], libraries may encounter various types of disabled readers (except mental and multiple disabilities) as enrollment increases. To provide targeted, high-quality services, libraries must obtain necessary basic information by: (1) Contacting student affairs departments for data

on numbers, types, severity, names, and grades of disabled students for statistical analysis; (2) Enabling voluntary registration and feedback on websites while ensuring privacy protection, allowing libraries to obtain firsthand information about needed services and facilities.

### 5.3 Strengthen Construction of Website Disability Service Columns

The Australian survey demonstrates that all eight university libraries recognize the important role of websites in serving disabled readers, featuring dedicated columns with clear introductions to services, facility locations, and procedures, along with direct links to university disability student services. This integrated approach helps disabled readers understand policies and eligibility. In contrast, Chinese university libraries severely lack such website construction—only Jinan University Library among “Project 211” institutions has a disability service navigation [7]. Chinese university libraries should prioritize website column development by: (1) Adding a primary-level “Disability Services” sub-column under the “Services” menu, including policies, service content, facility descriptions and locations, emergency contacts, feedback channels, accessibility maps, and links to relevant university departments; (2) For libraries unable to add new navigation, improving existing sites by adding “friendly reminders” in service or resource columns to ensure disabled readers have comparable experiences. Enhanced website construction serves as effective promotion for both the university and library.

### 5.4 Improve Auxiliary Service Facilities and Collection Resources

As shown in , Australian libraries emphasize comprehensive auxiliary facility configuration, from infrastructure to specialized learning space equipment and software. Chinese university libraries should learn from these practices: (1) In infrastructure, design and install accessible elevators, pathways, and restrooms with low-mounted handrails, and position designated parking near main entrances; (2) In learning spaces, equip rooms with specialized software including screen readers, voice recognition, and office applications, along with computers and printers; (3) For existing buildings, incorporate barrier-free concepts in renovations by adding accessible elevators, reserving priority seating, installing wheelchair ramps at main entrances, and adding signage; (4) In collection development, procure appropriate materials based on disabled reader numbers and types, such as Braille books, large-print materials, audiobooks, and psychology/health books to foster positive, resilient attitudes.

### 5.5 Develop Suitable Service Content for Disabled Readers

Services should prioritize convenience and address disabled readers’ unique characteristics and needs:

**5.5.1 Lecture and Training Services:** (1) Offer academic research lectures and book recommendation exchanges to help disabled readers adapt to uni-

versity life and master learning methods; (2) Provide employment training in collaboration with career centers, promoting national employment policies and encouraging early career planning; (3) Invite psychological experts to conduct counseling sessions addressing mental health challenges arising from campus life and interpersonal difficulties; (4) Train disabled readers on specialized equipment to ensure safe, effective use and prevent resource waste.

**5.5.2 Special Privileges:** (1) Extend loan periods by 10-15 days beyond standard limits; (2) Allow proxy borrowing via email or telephone requests when disabled readers cannot visit in person; (3) Provide priority service at circulation desks to reduce waiting times.

**5.5.3 Value-added Information Services:** Based on collected information, push relevant notifications including new book lists, training schedules, and learning/rehabilitation information via email.

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## Status of Disabled Reader Services of University Libraries in Australian and Its Enlightenments

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**Abstract:** [Purpose/significance] By analyzing and researching the services for disabled readers of eight famous Australian university libraries, this paper sums up its enlightenment to the services for disabled readers in university libraries in China. [Method/process] Through online survey on library services for the

disabled readers of eight famous Australian university libraries, the paper analyzes aspects of registration system, Web column design, facilities construction, and service contents for disabled readers. [Result/conclusion] In view of this, mainland university libraries in China should improve the attention to the disabled reader service, collect reader information, enhance Web column design, perfect facilities construction, and launch suitable services for disabled readers.

**Keywords:** Australia University Library Disabled Reader Reader Service

*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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