

vol. 53, no. 1, 2011  
Published by NTEU ISSN 0818-8068

# AUR

Australian Universities' Review



## AUR Editor

Dr Ian R Dobson

## AUR Editorial Board

Dr Jeannie Rea, *NTEU National President*

Dr Timo Aarveaara, *University of Helsinki*

Professor Walter Bloom, *Murdoch University*

Dr Anita Devos, *Monash University*

Dr Jamie Doughney, *Victoria University*

Dr Leo Goedegebuure, *University of Melbourne*

Professor Ralph Hall, *University of New South Wales*

Professor Dr Simon Marginson, *University of Melbourne*

Mr Grahame McCulloch, *NTEU General Secretary*

Dr Alex Millmow, *University of Ballarat*

Dr Neil Mudford, *UNSW@ADFA*

Professor Paul Rodan, *CQUniversity*

Dr Leesa Wheelahan, *Griffith University*

## Production

Design & layout: Paul Clifton

Editorial support: Anastasia Kotaidis

Cover photograph: 'Enter the cave...', entrance to University of Melbourne car park, Victoria. Photo by Adam M. Dimech, [www.photologium.com](http://www.photologium.com), ©2010. Used with permission.

## Contact Details

Australian Universities' Review,  
c/- NTEU National Office,  
PO Box 1323, South Melbourne VIC Australia 3205

Phone: +613 9254 1910

Fax: +613 9254 1915

Email: [editor@aur.org.au](mailto:editor@aur.org.au)

## Website

[www.aur.org.au](http://www.aur.org.au)

## Editorial Policy

The *Australian Universities' Review* (*AUR*, formerly *Vestis*) is published by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) to encourage debate and discussion about issues in higher education and its contribution to Australian public life, with an emphasis on those matters of concern to NTEU members.

Editorial decisions are made by the Editor, assisted by the AUR Editorial Board. The views expressed in articles in this publication, unless otherwise stated, are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor, the Editorial Board or the publisher.

Although some contributions are solicited by the Editor or the Editorial Board, *AUR* is anxious to receive contributions independently from staff and students in the higher education sector and other readers.

*AUR* publishes both articles and other contributions, including short commentary and satire. Articles will be assessed by independent referees before publication. Priority is given to contributions which are substantial, lively, original and have a broad appeal. Responses to previously published contributions are encouraged.

*AUR* is listed on the DEEWR (formerly DEST) register of refereed journals.

## Contributions

Please adhere to the style notes outlined on this page.

Contributors should send digital manuscripts in Word format, preferably by email to [editor@aur.org.au](mailto:editor@aur.org.au). Contributions on CD or PC disk will also be accepted.

Contributions should normally be between 1,000 and 5,000 words, although longer articles will be considered. All articles should be accompanied by an abstract that would not usually be longer than 150 words.

The author's full contact details should be provided, including email address, telephone and fax.

Contributions are sent to a minimum of two referees, in accordance with DEEWR requirements for blind peer review.

## Book Reviews

Books for review should be sent to the Editor. Our policy is to review books dealing either with tertiary education or with matters pertinent to issues in tertiary education. Book reviews should be between 200 and 1200 words; review essays may be longer.

## Satire

Do you have something satirical to say about the Australian higher education sector? Send it in!

## Replies and letters

*AUR* welcomes letters of response to articles published in the journal. Longer responses to articles are also encouraged.

Responses should be a maximum of 1,000 words, and should be received within a month after the publication of the journal so that they can be properly considered by the Editor and the Editorial Board for the following issue.

## Subscriptions

*AUR* is free to NTEU members on an opt-in basis. Full details at [www.aur.org.au/subscription.html](http://www.aur.org.au/subscription.html).

Annual subscription rates (inclusive of GST where applicable):  
Australia and NZ \$60 AUD  
Overseas airmail \$80 AUD

Overseas payments should be made by credit card or bank draft in Australian currency.

## Advertising

*AUR* is published twice a year, in February and September. The current hard copy circulation is approximately 8,000 per issue.

Rates are available on application to Paul Clifton, National Publications Coordinator (email [pclifton@nteu.org.au](mailto:pclifton@nteu.org.au)).

## Archive

This issue and previous issues of *AUR* (currently back to the 1970s) can be viewed online at [www.aur.org.au](http://www.aur.org.au).

## Style

Style should follow the APA Referencing Guide, 6th edition. Style sheet available at [www.aur.org.au/submissions](http://www.aur.org.au/submissions)

References in the text should be given in the author-date style:

King (2004) argues...

or as various authors argue (King 2004; Markwell 2007).

Page references should be thus: (King 2004, p. 314).

Page references should be used for direct quotations.

The reference list should be placed in alphabetical order at the end of the paper, utilising the author-date system.

For a reference to a book:

Gall, M., Gall, J. & Borg, W. (2003). *Education Research: An introduction* (7th ed.), Allyn and Bacon, New York

For a journal reference:

King, D.A. (2004). What different countries get for their research spending. *Nature* 430, 311-316.

For a reference to a chapter in a collection:

McCollow, J. & Knight, J. (2005). Higher Education in Australia: An Historical Overview, in Bella, M., McCollow, J. & Knight, J. (eds), *Higher Education in Transition*, University of Queensland, Brisbane.

For a web reference:

Markwell, D. (2007). The challenge of student engagement. Retrieved 2 June 2010 from [http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/\\_data/page/95565/Student\\_engagement\\_-\\_Don\\_Markwell\\_-\\_30\\_Jan\\_2007.pdf](http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/_data/page/95565/Student_engagement_-_Don_Markwell_-_30_Jan_2007.pdf)

Sub-headings should be typed in lower case, ranged left, with relative importance indicated by A, B etc.

Single quotation marks only should be used, except for quotes within quotes. All quotes of more than 50 words should be indented and placed in a separate paragraph.

Dates thus: 30 June 2010.

'ise' should be used rather than 'ize', e.g. *organise* not *organize*.

'per cent' should be used rather than '%' in the text.

Abbreviations should be avoided, but if their use is necessary, they should be explained at their first use.

Neither male nor female pronouns should be used to refer to groups containing persons of both sexes.

Figures, photographs and illustrations should be provided in high resolution (300dpi) EPS, PDF, JPEG or TIFF format, numbered consecutively in the order in which they appear (or are cited). Figures should be drawn precisely and boldly.

In accordance with NTEU policy to reduce our impact on the natural environment, this journal is printed on a 30% recycled stock, manufactured by a PEFC Certified mill, which is ECF Certified Chlorine Free.

*AUR* is also available online as an e-book and PDF. Visit [www.aur.org.au](http://www.aur.org.au) for details.

NTEU members may opt for 'soft delivery' (email notification rather than printed copy) for all NTEU magazines. To access your membership details, login to the members' area at [www.nteu.org.au](http://www.nteu.org.au).

# Australian Universities' Review

- 3 Letter from the editor  
**Ian R Dobson**

## ARTICLES

- 5 Going to university: Pacific Island migrant perspectives  
**Michael Cuthill and Sue Scull**  
An examination of university access through the specific eyes of migrants from the Pacific Islands
- 14 Pinnacle: Evaluation of the Graduate Teacher Training Programme at the ANU  
**Adifi Barthwal, Diane Chenoweth, Cathy Day, Meredith Hughes, Elizabeth Kirk, Simon Kitson, Taweetham Limpanuparb, Penelope Marshall & John Shellard**  
Teacher training for PhD students: what a good idea!
- 21 Lessons from a student engagement study: benefits for students and academics  
**Robert Errey & Glen Wood**  
A study from the University of Ballarat demonstrates the benefit of having students who are 'engaged'.
- 35 A ten year citation analysis of Australian research institutions  
**Robin J Batterham**  
Australian biomedical researchers punch above their weight!
- 42 Supporting and evaluating transitional learning for international university students  
**Alison Owens**  
How to help international students to help themselves.
- 50 On being a happy academic  
**Brian Martin**  
Happy staff are better staff! Everyone should invest in happiness.
- 57 The new ERA of journal ranking: the consequences of Australia's fraught encounter with 'quality'.  
**Simon Cooper & Ann Poleffi**  
Another report about 'quality' with a Capital 'K'. Why can't our governments and agencies get it right?
- 66 Quality teaching: means for its enhancement?  
**John Buchanan**  
Quality assessed by quantity? A mismatch of theory and method.

- 73 Who benefits from foreign universities in the Arab Gulf States?  
**Stephen Wilkins**  
A leg up or neocolonialism? Transnational higher education is playing a major role in the economic, cultural and social development of the Arab Gulf States

## OPINION

- 84 Preparation and aspiration: access to higher education for working class students  
**Heather Brook**  
It's a long way to the top...
- 89 An interrupted pathway  
**Dee Michell**  
...when you want to rock 'n' roll!
- 94 Looking back into the future  
**Arthur O'Neill & Bob Speechley**  
What's been did and what's been hid! (And more).
- 100 We'll support you ever more!  
**Joseph Gora**  
I wish to register a complaint....this time about university rankings
- 102 The English language growth project – an introduction  
**Judith Rochecouste, Rhonda Oliver, Denise Mulligan and Martin Davies**

## REVIEWS

- 105 Vote 1 – the clever country  
*Why knowledge matters in curriculum – a socialist realist argument* by Leesa Wheelahan.  
**Review by Neil Mudford**
- 107 The Real Education Revolution  
*Private Schooling in Less Economically Developed Countries: Asian and African Perspectives*  
*Oxford Studies in Comparative Education*, by Prachi Srivastava & Geoffrey Walford (eds).  
**Review by Jonathan Sibley**
- 109 The bottom line...  
*Balanced Growth. A History of the Department of Economics, University of Melbourne*, by Ross Williams (ed.).  
**Review by Alex Millmow**

REVIEWS *continued*

- 111** Tribes and Territories  
*Improving What is Learned at University: An exploration of the social and organisational diversity of university education* by John Brennan, Robert Edmunds, Muir Houston, David Jary, Yann Lebeau, Michael Osborne and John T. E. Richardson.  
**Review by Patricia Kerslake**
- 113** Cat scan for dogmatic times?  
*Herding Cats: Being advice to aspiring academic and research leaders* by Geoff Garrett and Graeme Davies.  
**Review by Geoff Sharrock**
- 115** Chalk and talk?  
*The Poor Relation: A history of social sciences in Australia* by Stuart Macintyre.  
**Review by Jen Kwok**
- 116** (Not Just) 'Horror movies on my TV...'  
*International Student Security* by Simon Marginson, Christopher Nyland, Erlenawati Sawir and Helen Forbes-Mewett.  
**Review by Grant McBurnie**
- 119** Mapping the sociology of education: social context, power and knowledge  
*The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education Practice* by Michael W. Apple, Stephen J. Ball and Luis Armando Gandin (eds).  
**Review by Jo Luck**
- 120** Errata

# Letter from the editor

Ian R Dobson

Welcome to 2011! We, the editorial and production team at *Australian Universities' Review* hope you will be cerebrally stimulated by and enjoy this year's issue of *AUR*. We aspire to provide a wide range of material, and once you get your teeth into this issue, I'm sure you'll agree that we have succeeded. *AUR*'s aim is 'to encourage debate and discussion about issues in higher education and to contribute to Australian public life...' (*AUR*, Editorial Policy – see inside front cover). In order to follow this policy, *AUR* seeks, and receives a wide range of scholarly, blind-peer-reviewed papers, as well as opinion and experience pieces. This issue is replete with all of these!

Given that we are a journal concerned with higher education, papers will typically be about students, staff and bureaucratic processes. Of the student-focused papers, Michael Cuthill and Sue Scull provide insights into the perennial problem of access to higher education, with a particular focus on students with a Pacific Island background. The paper by Robert Errey and Glen Wood is concerned with getting students to engage, because engaged students are happier and perform better.

Among the opinion pieces are two personal narratives from Heather Brook and Dee Michell, both of whom describe their path to university and academia from non-traditional and low socio-economic status beginnings.

From another part of the student spectrum, Cathy Day and her colleagues from the Australian National University describe Pinnacle, a teacher training programme for full-time PhD students.

Many of the rest of the papers in this issue have a 'staff' focus, with the paper by Brian Martin providing an examination of how one might become a 'happy'

academic. Many papers are written these days about the pressures academics feel about their 21st century workload and the way the profession is changing. Several such papers have been published in *AUR* over the past couple of years. Martin's paper suggests that academics' long-term happiness levels are likely to be increased by exercising well-developed skills, building strong relationships, helping others and cultivating mindfulness.

Other papers are about academic staff in the context of the over-developed and process-bound bureaucracy foisted on universities by (often) poor government policy. In the next breath it must be added that universities seem to acquiesce rather too quickly to such developments. Years of under-funding, and a raft of ill-considered programmes (such as the statistically unsound 'research training scheme' of a few years ago, and more recently the subjective, opaque and manipulatable journal ranking scheme) leave the sector with problems that shouldn't have been placed before it in the first place.

John Buchanan's paper notes that the pursuit of teaching quality means that '...universities are resorting to stark, reductionist representations of educational quality, such as mean figures generated by student surveys, to measure and report on this'. On another aspect of quality, Simon Cooper and Ann Poletti discuss the aforementioned journal ranking scheme, highlighting as they go, many of its flaws.

The predominance of material on the academic side of the university workforce shouldn't lead anyone to conclude that *AUR* isn't equally interested in the majority of university staff, that is, those who are not academics! Editors often find themselves with more papers on some topics/perspectives than others.

I can climb down from the soap box to briefly mention the remaining papers. First, we have former Chief Scientist Robin Batterham's take on citation analysis. On the basis of his ten-year analysis of ten of Australia's major publishing research institutions he indicates that Australia performs reasonably well on the world stage, but he wonders if performance might be improved even more by a tighter focus on the best performers.

Arthur O'Neill and Bob Speechley put on their 'grumpy old men' hats in providing a review of the past and their insight about the future. I'm sure this paper will amuse you, but will also cause you to marvel at the authors' insight. In similar (but different) vein, we have another offering from the inimitable Joseph Gora, who this time gets his claws into university ranking systems.

There is a report on the English Language Growth project that addresses the needs of international students. This short report represents an extension to Katie Dunworth's paper on English language proficiency published in *AUR* 52(2). I'm all for anything that improves written English by all students and staff, including staff from university marketing offices.

The final paper fits in with *AUR*'s desire to look outward as well as inward. Even though our title describes

our overall outlook, not even Australian universities can operate without thinking about the global village. In this issue we present a paper about the expansion of higher education opportunity in parts of the Middle-East. Stephen Wilkins describes and considers the situation. Does the influx of foreign providers mean an increase in opportunity for locals, or is it a 21st century form of colonialism? Several Australian universities now have a presence in the Middle-East.

One of this editor's briefs when appointed to the editor's chair was to increase the number of book reviews. As you will see, this is one thing that has definitely occurred. This issue features nine book reviews. Many thanks to those busy staff that were able to find time to produce these fine reviews.

While I'm thanking people, we must not forget *AUR*'s hard-working editorial board, many of whom provide book reviews and/or blind peer reviews of the papers included, in line with the government's rules for peer review. We must also thank the production team behind getting *AUR* on to your bookshelves or your hard disk. There is much more to publishing a journal than you might imagine!

Until next time!

# Going to university: Pacific Island migrant perspectives

Underlying factors constraining access to higher education for young people from low socio-economic backgrounds in Australia: Pacific Island migrant perspectives

**Michael Cuthill & Sue Scull**

University of Queensland

Despite extensive and on-going efforts, people from a low socio-economic background continue to be significantly under-represented in Australian higher education. In response to this situation, a two year action research project explored the broad issue of higher education access for young people from low socio-economic backgrounds in South East Queensland, Australia. This paper focuses on one specific aspect of that project, and reports on the underlying factors which constrain access to higher education access for one cultural community in Australia. Analysis is based on interview data from young people and parents from this community, and presents a rich description of their lived experiences. Enhanced understanding of the perspectives of young people and their families relating to higher education access provides a solid foundation for developing informed and culturally appropriate higher education access initiatives.

## Introduction

In recent years large numbers of Pacific Island migrants have moved to the South East Queensland region in Australia. However, the precise number of migrants in the region is unclear. Given that many of Pacific Island migrants arrive in Australia via New Zealand, they may be reflected in the data as New Zealanders, with no further indication of ethnicity. As a result of this, it is widely believed that official statistics for the region vastly under-represent the true number of migrants from a Pacific Island background. However, it is believed that the population could total about 70,000 people.

In common with other migrant groups, this somewhat disparate Pacific Islands 'community' faces many settlement challenges. Of specific interest to this paper, are concerns as regards the educational outcomes of young people from this cultural community (Scull & Cuthill 2010, 2008, 2008a; Moreton Pacific Island Reference Group 2007; Mafi 2005). These concerns have direct relevance to the Australian national agenda relating to higher education access for students from low socio-economic (SES) backgrounds (Department of Employment Education & Training 1990; Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales 2008).

Despite considerable equity, outreach and access efforts during the past twenty years there has been ongoing under-representation of students from low SES backgrounds in higher education in Australia (James, Baldwin, Coates, Krause & McInnis 2004; Coates & Krause 2005; Ferrier 2006; Postle, Batorowicz, Bull, Clarke, McCann & Skula 1997). Based on analysis of students from a diverse range of schools, Dobson and Skuja (2005) argue that this under-representation of people from a low SES background is clearly not a reflection of their ability, but rather a function of a set of interrelated factors which constrain access to higher education (Slack 2003; Young 2004).

Factors which have been discussed include the economic cost of higher education (Andrews 1999), lack of appropriate support networks (Harvey-Beavis & Robinson 2000), limited family experience with or understanding of higher education (Young 2004), and low 'aspiration' - where many people from low SES backgrounds do not include higher education as part of their cultural world view (Marks, McMillan & Hillman 2001). The issue of equitable access to higher education is not specific to Australia, and is reflected in many overseas settings (e.g. Walpole 2003; Andrews 1999; Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi 2004; Tikly 2005; Blanden & Machin 2004; Abbas 2002; Cooke, Barkham, Audlin, Bradley & Davey 2004; Haque 2000; Hannah 1999).

## Research context

This paper draws from data collected during a two year study focusing on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) communities living in an area of socio-economic disadvantage, the Inala-Ipswich 'corridor' in South East Queensland. The broad study looked to explore:

- The attitudes, understanding, expectations and aspirations of potential students and their families from CaLD communities to higher education; and
- Innovative approaches for immersing outreach activities into CaLD communities, to establish appropriate processes whereby these groups, with university assistance, will be able to identify, nurture and support potential students to continue to higher education.

The research adopted a community-based participatory action research approach using primarily qualitative data collection methods, including informal stakeholder meetings, semi-structured interviews,

workshops, working groups, field notes and observational data (Cuthill 2010; Minkler & Wallerstein 2003). The research design involved three main stages, 1) a preliminary scan, 2) primary data collection, analysis and triangulation of diverse data sources, and 3) development of collaborative responses to identified issues (for description of the broader project see Scull & Cuthill 2010).

The preliminary scan, working with a range of CaLD communities in the 'corridor', identified Pacific Island migrants as experiencing difficulties in accessing higher education, and subsequent research was implemented in collaboration with this cultural community. People from a Pacific Island background may come from many countries across the Pacific regions of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia, each of which has its own unique culture. Within this paper the term 'Pacific Island' is used broadly to refer to people of Polynesian descent. The action research worked primarily with the Tongan and Samoan communities in South East Queensland.

One Tongan and one Samoan community researcher were employed for 18 months to support implementation of culturally appropriate fieldwork within the Pacific Island communities. Both community researchers received introductory training in research methods with a specific focus on interview methods. Their work was directly supported by the project's research manager. One component of the extensive data collection undertaken for the meta-project involved interviews with young people and parents from the Pacific Island community (Israel, Eng, Schulz & Parker 2005).

Data were collected through twenty-five in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in English by the Pacific Island community researchers. Separate interview schedules were developed for young people and for parents. Eleven interviews were conducted with young people aged 13-18, six of whom were female and five male. Eight of the young people identified their cultural background as Samoan, one as Samoan/Tongan, three as Tongan and one as Tongan/Australian. Seven mothers and seven fathers (not related to the young people who participated) were also interviewed; seven identified as Samoan, six as Tongan and one as Tongan/Australian. Participants were nominated by the Pacific Island Reference Committee which provided support and direction to the research. Interview questions explored five key areas: participant aspirations, attitudes, understanding, expectations and perceived barriers to education. Data



were thematically sorted under these five key areas, and a secondary analysis on responses relating to constraints was undertaken.

The specific focus here, working from interview data, is to provide rich description drawn from the lived experiences of these young people and their parents, of what they see as the underlying factors constraining their access to higher education. Identification of these factors provides an informed and empathetic basis for better understanding of this issue within one migrant community setting. However, it is likely that some of the factors discussed here will be common to other migrant or refugee populations (e.g. Bouloukos 2002; Nguyen 2003; Hugo 2004; Abu-Duhou 2006) and therefore might help inform the broader agenda relating to higher education access, equity and outreach, both in Australia

and overseas.

This following section of this paper provides an overview of the current school context and post school options for young people from this community. This is followed by presentation of a set of underlying factors, identified through data analysis, that are seen to constrain access to higher education.

### ***Current school context and post school options***

Pacific Island parents who participated in interviews acknowledge the important role they play in the education of their children, and indicate that they have high expectations for their children's performance at school. However, parents educated in the Pacific Islands may be limited in levels of support they can provide, as there is a general lack of understanding as to how the Queensland education system works, and more specifically what their young people are learning at school. As one Samoan-educated parent explained,

See, what they are learning right now in school is different from what I learnt in school. When I tell her what I learnt in school they laugh. They think I am dumb or whatever, because they never heard of it. It is so different to what I learnt in Samoa.

Clearly, cultural differences within a school setting can be problematic. Interviewees note that in Samoa and Tonga, responsibility for children's education rests with the school, particularly with teachers, and as a result parents are not closely involved with their chil-

dren's education, as this is not traditionally their place or role. There is also an expectation that teachers will use strong discipline with their students, and parents usually visit the school only if their child is in trouble. As a result, school visits in Australia can have negative connotations for Pacific Island parents.

Other factors might also hinder parental engagement with schools, such as long work hours, lack of confidence or language issues. One parent commented,

I'm scared to go because my English is half-half. If my English is good then I go and see the people. Sometimes they give me forms I can't fill it out, my spelling is half-half.

This parent's identification of low levels of English language and literacy is relevant regarding educational achievement at school, with possible flow-on impact

to English comprehension and literacy skills for young people. Despite apparent high levels of need in the Pacific Islander community, their access to English as a Second Language (ESL) support is limited.

If Pacific Island parents do not engage with the school, this might be interpreted by teachers as a lack of parental interest in their children's education, when this is not necessarily the case. Such cultural mismatch can create challenges for communication between schools and parents. Due to the differences in their upbringing, parents may be unaware of the importance of engaging with their children's school, or the need to prioritise education over other areas of family and community life. One parent described a practical example of this,

Sometimes there's choir practice, and our son wants to stay home and finish off his project or homework or whatever. But because of the commitment we have to the church, we will all go to the choir and he doesn't finish the homework.

Interview participants also refer to possible bias within the Queensland education system where Pacific Island students may be disadvantaged in their learning as a result of different learning styles, relevance and interest in the curriculum, western pedagogies and teachers' [lack of] understanding of Pacific Island students' needs. For example, one interviewee noted that a lack of relevance of the curriculum can create boredom and dissatisfaction among Pacific Island students,

---

**The specific focus here ... is to provide rich description drawn from the lived experiences of these young people and their parents, of what they see as the underlying factors constraining their access to higher education.**

---

leading to disengagement from learning, evidenced by absenteeism or disruption in class. Peer pressure can also impact on educational outcomes, as one young person explained,

As for my Samoan friends ... well we all get distracted very easily. I don't know, the teacher would be talking and our minds would wander off somewhere else and we just all like concentrate on something else instead of the teacher. ... Like I wanted to go in classes where I knew most of the Samoans wouldn't be in. .... I know if I'm in a class with all the Samoans I would fail that class, ... like I would seriously fail it because we would just be talking and laughing and not listening to the teacher.

Despite these challenges, some Pacific Island students do achieve good academic outcomes at school, while more generally they excel in areas such as sport, art, music and dance. Positive outcomes in these extra-curricular pursuits do help build students' self-esteem and confidence, but unfortunately they may be regarded as more important than an academic focus by both students and parents. As a result, the starting point for some school teachers is an assumption that Pacific Island students are talented in terms of the arts and sports, but are unlikely to succeed academically. Such negative stereotypes are seen to be self-reinforcing both within the community and among external groups.

It appears that relatively few young people from a Pacific Island background in the Inala to Ipswich corridor are continuing to university when they finish school. If further study or training is undertaken then Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses tend to be a preferred option, based on perceptions that these are more accessible, appropriate and/or cheaper. One young person described their views on this,

I don't know, just the word university, it even scares me. It's like you know it's different, it's a higher education compared to TAFE. You might be able to graduate at TAFE and I don't know, TAFE to me just seems, it feels better. It feels like my cup of tea. University, it's like, that's just for lawyers and doctors and for white people. I'm not trying to be mean, but do you know what I mean? I'm like, oh, I just don't feel comfortable.

If a university education is considered at all, it may be regarded as too hard or simply not something that is part of their vision. In particular, interview participants suggest that the cost of university is perceived as being beyond the means of many families, especially those

on low incomes. This perception is underpinned by lack of understanding regarding the range of financial help and assistance that might be available. Prior family involvement in higher education also has an impact, especially when there are few people in the community with university experience.

While interview participants argue that families are trying to support their children in accessing higher education, the current post-school pathway for young Pacific Islanders is to look for work after finishing school, usually to help support their families, and often ending up in unskilled occupations. As one youth worker commented,

I always ask them [young people] are you going to uni or TAFE? And out of a majority of them, they'll say, 'oh we're going to work in McDonalds' or something like that. I think it's a waste.

Another parent reinforced this comment,

The whole lot of them, being Samoan boys, think when you leave school you get a job anywhere ... make the parents happy, that's it.

Interviewees suggest that higher education is well regarded within their community, and plays an important role in obtaining a good job and having a successful life. Several participants highlight the prestige attached to university education, and the status or honour it gives to those who complete it. One commented,

I feel like university gives you an opportunity, it's like a ticket, like if you get to university that's your ticket into wherever you want to go or whatever you want to do.

However, this positive perception isn't necessarily translated into action, as the same interviewee went on to explain,

Some of the kids these days are just, they just don't have the determination or, like they're not really willing to go that far. They just stop at a certain time and think that they can't do it.

It appears that, while educational opportunities are often cited as the reason for migration to Australia, stated aspirations for higher education and the actuality are at times contradictory. While there is strong argument that both parents and young people aspire to higher education, the ability to realise these aspirations seems to be lacking. Many families have no-one with any experience of higher education to provide good information, support and direction to young people. One parent explained,

... if the parents don't have the knowledge about university, or if they don't understand what's around, they don't know how to encourage their children.

Others argue that while the community generally expresses high aspirations, it is unclear whether higher education is genuinely valued, supported and prioritised accordingly by parents, with immediate family needs an overriding concern. One parent explains the appeal of having some immediate extra income when discussing her son's plans after he finishes school,

Yes, maybe I want my son to go to work in the factory, same as the Island people go to work in the factory ... I don't think about the university, only the factory ... because of the money, it comes faster, the money, from work.

While starting work after finishing school appears to be a pragmatic reality for the young people who were interviewed, they did identify specific activities they would like to pursue including music, arts, teaching and sports. In particular, the young men spoke of the lure of a professional sports career, a goal encouraged and supported by parents. One father suggested that,

Every single Polynesian parent that has a son ... the first thing they think of is that their son can get out of the poverty cycle through sport.

There are Pacific Island 'role models' in Australia who are professional sports players. Yet their success is somewhat misleading. While many of the young Pacific Island students are excellent sports men and women, history suggests relatively few will go on to succeed at a professional level, and meanwhile the educational opportunities have been lost. One parent explained her experience,

There are too many examples, particularly in our community, of what happens to kids that don't get a good education. There's a few boys ... they went to a private school on scholarships for sport, and they had the academic opportunities given to them but they didn't make use of it, and now they're all working in factories.

While a small number of sports professionals provide inspiration to these young people, interview participants identify a general lack of role models from Pacific Island backgrounds in Australia. In particular, there are relatively few school teachers or tertiary educated professionals from Pacific Island backgrounds in the study area. By contrast, in New Zealand (where Pacific migration has been occurring for more than 50

years) and where there are high achievers from Pacific Island backgrounds in many different areas of professional life. Some parent interviewees reported having family members who had completed, or were currently undertaking university degrees in New Zealand. However their location meant that they were unlikely to have an impact on young people in the Australian community. As one interviewee explained,

If I was in New Zealand and my children could see that, yes, but ... that wouldn't be positive for my kids unless they were actually involved around their aunts and uncles back in New Zealand.

Immediate income from unskilled employment opportunities were a key focus during interviews, while longer term benefits from higher education were not recognised. Overall, it appears that while higher education is a stated priority within this community the reality is that other requirements, such as supporting family, takes precedence. As such, the current school context and post school options do not suggest that we will see increased numbers of young people from Pacific Island communities in the Inala-Ipswich corridor accessing higher education.

These interrelated contexts provide a cultural and community backdrop which underpins any consideration of higher education access. In addition, an in-depth understanding of the underlying factors which constrain these young people from accessing higher education opportunities is required before culturally appropriate and holistic responses can be developed.

## Underlying factors constraining access to higher education

While some Pacific Islanders have been in Australia for 20 years or more, much migration has taken place in the last 5 years. As a result many families are still working to establish themselves. As one interviewee explained,

But when you are newly migrated you have a lot of problems you know. You need to set yourself up, you need to get the children, getting things which are new to you like finance, you know, it's a lot of issues, because we are not used to that kind of thing.

A range of factors relating to their settlement are seen to directly or indirectly impact on higher education access.

For example, many Pacific Island migrants occupy a unique position in Australia, due to their migration status. Migration agreements between Australia and

New Zealand allow people from a Pacific Island background to migrate to Australia via New Zealand, and to settle here as New Zealand citizens. As a result they appear in Census data as New Zealand, rather than their Pacific country of origin, and therefore they are largely invisible in official statistics. This lack of visibility is problematic as such data are used as the basis for funding a range of services, including those provided to new migrants on arrival. Given that Pacific Island communities are in bureaucratic terms largely 'invisible', their needs can easily be overlooked.

Unemployment or lack of job stability, housing affordability, and potential eligibility issues regarding access to settlement services and government benefits, oftentimes lead to financial pressures. If employment is found, it is usually in unskilled and low paid jobs which do little to improve the situation. Further confounding this situation is the difficulty in accessing relevant information, particularly with regards to government-funded services. This can be particularly challenging for migrants with a first language other than English. Lack of access to appropriate information and services means that issues such as intergenerational poverty, community and domestic violence, addiction and health issues, and a disproportionate number of young Pacific Islanders involved with the criminal justice system, are not being responded to in an appropriate and effective manner. The cumulative impact of these related issues, and the resultant financial pressures, means that the key focus for many families is on day to day priorities and survival, rather than longer-term planning.

Young Pacific Island people growing up in an economically disadvantaged environment such as this are fully aware of the financial pressures and may choose to leave school and find work, even if they are doing well at school. Some students work part-time while still at school, and while this is not uncommon in Australian households, it is reported that this work can involve a significant number of hours per week. As a result, there is a lack of time to do homework, and tiredness at school leading to a drop-off in school results. One parent described how,

...most of the parents that I know are struggling, and so the easiest way for them to get money is to send their kids to work. Most of the kids that I know too, they have part time jobs, and those part time jobs end up like five or six days a week. So you know, when those part time jobs are there, they don't have time to study.

In addition, homes can at times be quite crowded, with relatives and/or overseas visitors, making it difficult for young people to find appropriate space to do homework. A lack of resources to assist with study including access to computers, the Internet and reference books is also identified. The potential for financial stress is clear, as one participant highlighted,

Like if you say they're going to go and be a doctor you know, that costs thousands, sometimes more than what a house is worth so, if you can afford that. It's hard really, because I'm not in a position where I can afford to you know, if my child wanted to go to uni, then I wouldn't be able to pay ... we'd have to probably double the mortgage on the house, or sell it and everything if she had to go (to university) here.

Interviewees also identify a significant challenge when adjusting to a new cultural context, including a range of unfamiliar governance procedures and service systems. They argue that across Pacific Island nations the culture is strong and proud, and for many it remains as important an aspect of their lives in Australia as it was in their home country. It was explained during interviews that a focus on the collective is fundamental to Pacific Island culture. Of key importance to this collective community are the family and the church. The extended family, including friends and community members, are all tremendously supportive of each other. The sense of duty and support is very evident and includes care for younger siblings, accommodating visitors or newly arrived migrants, or offering financial assistance to the extended family or church.

This is a different world view compared with the stronger focus in Western culture on the individual. However, such responsibility is not regarded as an imposition, but simply a fundamental aspect of Pacific Island culture. One interviewee described this responsibility,

If I have only one dollar in my hand, then one of my family in Tonga rings today and asks me for one dollar, I send him that one dollar, I don't care if I have money or don't have any money. ... because you've got to help the family. You have to help your church. You have to help the people in Tonga.

This generous and supportive view of family and community can create competing priorities for families, due to an extensive range of financial commitments a recently migrated family may have such as rent, loan repayments and petrol. These competing

priorities do impact on educational outcomes, as one parent explained,

Like there may be a relative who's come over from the Islands to here, and is going back next month, so we all put ... some money for them to take back. And leave the kid to miss out on the school uniform or the shoes.

These bonds to an extended family and community are closely aligned with their [predominately] Christian faith and the church.

The church provides a strong foundation for maintaining both culture and community life, and acts as a meeting place within the community. Interview participants suggest that for many people it plays a central part in their lives. As such, churches and the church leaders have an influential role in the lives of their parishioners and the community. However, some participants express concern at the level of influence the church has in the lives of some Pacific Island migrants, noting that commitment to church can draw heavily on family time and finances, which can in turn impact on educational opportunities for young people.

The challenge of adjusting to a new cultural context is also evidenced through conflict of identity. For example, young people may find it difficult to be accepted as Australians due to their appearance, yet they may also have little understanding or affinity for their identity as a Pacific Islander. Issues relating to identity can be exacerbated for young people born in New Zealand, whose parents were born in the Pacific Islands, and then the family has migrated to Australia. The pressure to understand, respect and come to terms with fundamentally different cultures is challenging for both parents and young people. However, interview participants argue strongly that it is important to achieve some balance between Pacific Island and Australian culture, and between old and new values.

Interview participants identify intergenerational conflict as one outcome resulting from the pressures of cultural adjustment. Exposure to 'new' western values and societal norms encourage young people to challenge the traditional Pacific Island parenting role. Poor communication can also contribute to this intergenerational conflict, especially when English is a second language for the parents and a first language for

the young people. Conflict arising from different cultural frameworks and poor communication, together with a wide range of other pressures, may mean young people simply choose to leave home. A breakdown in authority challenges Pacific Island parents who have been brought up in a much stricter disciplinary environment. One father outlined the problems he has experienced,

I would like my daughter to go to school, it is the reason why I came to Australia ... but now they are free to choose what they want to do. If I force her to go to school, maybe I punish her and the government would lock me up, take me to the prison. But I don't want to force her to do anything, because I'm scared of the government.

## Conclusions

This paper presents Pacific Island perspectives on migrant settlement issues, with a specific focus on how settlement issues impact on access to higher education for young people from

this cultural community in the Inala-Ipswich corridor in South East Queensland. These young people undoubtedly face a complex set of interrelated factors which impact on their education and life choices.

These factors broadly relate

to school engagement and achievement, migration status, financial pressures, lack of understanding of the Australian higher education system, cultural differences, and lack of role models. It is suggested that any moves to address higher education access issues will need to recognise and better understand these underlying factors. In summary, five key points are noted.

First, it is clear from participant's responses that access to appropriate and relevant information is an important requirement for navigating a new cultural landscape, and enhanced information systems are required to support migrant settlement processes. In particular, information needs are seen to underpin each of the underlying factors discussed in this paper which are argued to constrain access to higher education.

For example, there are currently various misconceptions regards costs of Australian higher education, clear difficulties in obtaining relevant information, and current methods of dissemination are often inappropriate

---

**If I have only one dollar in my hand, then one of my family in Tonga rings today and asks me for one dollar, I send him that one dollar, I don't care if I have money or don't have any money. ... because you've got to help the family.**

---

for Pacific Island community members. There is a lack of awareness about the full range of post-school education options, and information is not reaching those who require it. In addition, low levels of awareness about university study, among Pacific Island parents and young people, means that it is often not even considered as a realistic option.

Second, parents are seen as key stakeholders, but were somewhat constrained in their ability to support higher education access opportunities for young people. Capacity-building initiatives, which help parents to better support their children's education opportunities, would be a positive response. Such initiatives might include exploring how parents can better engage with schools, increasing parental understanding of educational pathways and raising awareness of education support systems - all of these have the potential to improve higher education access.

Third, in developing more holistic and inclusive responses to address identified higher education access issues, consideration might be given to how the diverse set of stakeholders, including schools, community groups, government agencies, churches and universities might work better together to achieve better education outcomes for Pacific Island children. If this collaboration is to be effective, there is a need to develop a shared understanding of all stakeholder perspectives and needs. Cultural respect and knowledge exchange must be approached as a two-way process between all those groups who have a concern with this topic. For example, while Pacific Island parents learn about the differences between their country of origin and the Queensland education system, schools can increase their understanding of the cultural background of the students they teach, and their specific needs. Such outcomes can be achieved through facilitated dialogue, if both groups are genuine in their intent.

Fourth, while it has been suggested in the literature that financial issues have limited impact on the decision to participate in higher education due to the availability of income-contingent loans, this view overlooks that proportion of the population who are domestic students but not Australian citizens, and who are therefore required to pay fees before commencing study. For people from a low SES community this presents a major obstacle. Low levels of awareness surrounding the availability of such loans and the need for Australian citizenship to be eligible to apply are therefore key issues to address.

Fifth, clearly there is potential for the cultural differences between Australian and Pacific Island societies to result in confusion among young people, particularly with regards to their sense of belonging, identity, self-belief and esteem. There is some indication that young people feel trapped between two cultures. The competing priorities they experience between school, family, peers, church, community and sporting commitments, is also seen to further confound their self perception. There is an urgent necessity, within the broader national discussion on education outcomes, not to lose the focus on these young people. Their needs, the pressures they are facing and their opportunity to contribute to Australian society must always be seen as a priority within this discussion.

**Michael Cuthill and Sue Scull are from the Boilerhouse Community Engagement Centre, University of Queensland, Ipswich, Queensland, Australia**

## References

- Abbas, T. ((2002)). The home and the school in the educational achievements of South Asians. *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 5, no. 3: 291-316.
- Abu-Duhou, I. ((2006)). *Engagement of the African community in the Northern Territory: Their settlement, education, workforce and community participation*. Darwin: School for Social and Policy Research, Charles Darwin University.
- Andrews, L. (1999). *Does HECS deter? Factors affecting university participation by low SES groups*. Canberra: Higher Education Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Behnke, A.O., Piercy, K.W. & Diversi M. (2004). Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Latino Youth and Their Parents. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 26, no. 1: 16-35.
- Blanden, J. & Machin, S. (2004). Educational inequality and the expansion of UK higher education. *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 51, no. 2: 230-249.
- Bouloukos, L. (2002). *Listening to emerging voices: Addressing collective needs*. Brisbane: Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland.
- Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H. & Scales, B. (2008). *Review of Australian Higher Education Final Report*. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
- Coates, H. & Krause, K.L. (2005). Investigating ten years of equity policy in Australian higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 27, no. 1: 35-47.
- Cooke, R., Barkham, M., Audin, K., Bradley, M. & Davy, J. (2004). How social class differences affect students' experience of university. *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 28, no. 4: 407-421.
- Cuthill, M. (2010). Working together: A methodological case study of engaged scholarship. *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* (in press).
- Department of Employment Education and Training (1990). *A fair chance for all*. National and institutional planning for equity in higher education: a discussion paper. Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service.

- Dobson, I.R. & Skuja, E. (2005). Secondary school, tertiary entry ranks and university performance. *People and Place* 13, no. 1: 53-61.
- Ferrier, F. (2006). *A review of higher education equity research in Australia 2000–2005*. Melbourne, Victoria: Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, Monash University.
- Hannah, J. (1999). Refugee Students at College and University: Improving Access and Support. *International Review of Education* 45, no. 2: 151-164.
- Haque, Z. (2000). The Ethnic Minority 'Underachieving' group? Investigating the claims amongst Bangladeshi pupils in British secondary schools. *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 3, no. 2: 145-168.
- Harvey-Beavis, A. & Robinson, L. (2000). *Views and Influences - Tertiary Education, Secondary Students and their Advisers*. Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Hugo, G. (2004). *Australia's most recent immigrants 2001*. Australian Census Analytic Program. Adelaide, University of Adelaide: Australian Bureau of Statistics. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2053.02001?OpenDocument>
- Israel, B., Eng, E., Schulz, A. & Parker, E. (2005). *Methods in Community-Based Participatory Research for Health*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- James, R., Baldwin, G., Coates, H., Krause, K.L. & McInnis, C. (2004). *Analysis of equity groups in higher education 1991–2002*. Melbourne, Victoria: Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne.
- Mafi, S. (2005). *Creating, understanding and using new paths: Achieving better educational outcomes for Pacific Islander young people*. Ipswich, Queensland: Education Queensland.
- Marks, G.N., McMillan, J. & Hillman, K. (2001). *Tertiary entrance performance: the role of student background and school factors*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Camberwell, Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Minkler, M. & Wallerstein, N. (2003). *Community-Based Participatory Research for Health*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Moreton Pacific Island Reference Group (2007). *Pacific Island Framework for Action in Education*. Ipswich: Education Queensland.
- Nguyen, H. (2003). *A needs analysis of Vietnamese families in Inala and surrounding areas, and the difficulties they face integrating into Australian mainstream society*. Brisbane: Inala Community House.
- Postle, G.D., Batorowicz, K., Bull, D.D., Clarke, J.R., McCann, H.A. & Skula, E. (1997). *Towards excellence in diversity: educational equity in the Australian higher education sector in 1995: status, trends and future directions*. Toowoomba, Queensland: University of Southern Queensland Press.
- Scull, S. & Cuthill, M. (2010). Engaged outreach: Using community engagement to facilitate access to higher education for people from low socio-economic backgrounds. *Higher Education Research and Development* 29, no. 1: 59-74.
- Scull, S. & Cuthill, M. (2008). *Realising opportunity: Developing informed engagement strategies for potential students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the Inala to Ipswich corridor*. Ipswich, Queensland: UQ Boilerhouse Publication, University of Queensland, Ipswich Campus.
- Scull, S. & Cuthill, M. (2008a). PolyVision: Pacific Youth of Tomorrow. A collaborative partnership between the University of Queensland and Pacific Island immigrant communities in Australia. *Journal of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* 10, no. 3: 35-38.
- Slack, K. (2003). Whose aspirations are they anyway? *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 7, no. 4: 325-335.
- Tikly, L. (2005). The ethnic minority achievement grant: a critical analysis. *Journal of Education Policy* 20, no. 3: 283-312.
- Walpole, M.B. (2003). Socioeconomic status and college: How SES affects college experiences and outcomes. *The Review of Higher Education* 27, no. 1: 45-73.
- Young, J. (2004). 'Becoming different': Accessing university from a low socio-economic community - barriers and motivators. *Systemic Practice and Action Research* 17, no. 5: 425-469.

# Pinnacle: evaluation of the graduate teacher training program at the ANU

**Aditi Barthwal, Diane Chenoweth, Cathy Day, Meredith Hughes, Elizabeth Kirk, Simon Kitson, Taweetham Limpanuparb, Penelope Marshall & John Shellard**

**Australian National University**

Pinnacle is the ANU's teacher training programme for full time PhD students. The Pinnacle Teacher Training Program provides a mentoring system that aims to equip postgraduate students with the skills and theoretical background that they will need to become high quality lecturers. This article describes Pinnacle, and discusses the assessment of its effectiveness by past Pinnacle participants, using quantitative and qualitative feedback. There were differences in the perceived effectiveness of Pinnacle related to participants' sex and their academic discipline. Overall, the participants found that the opportunity to deliver lectures, to work closely with their mentor, and to reflect on their own teaching philosophy and practice gave them a sense of being confident and competent teachers by the end of the programme. Pinnacle provides an opportunity to reflect on the practice of teaching before habit and academic pressures permanently shape teaching practices.

## Introduction

Most Australian universities offer teacher-training programs for junior academics and for graduate students who intend to pursue a career in tertiary teaching. All of them provide theoretical background and the opportunity for practice teaching. Many also provide mentors to ease the transition into teaching, such as the University of Canberra, the University of Wollongong and the University of New South Wales (Viskovic 2006; Harland 2006).

Pinnacle is the ANU's teacher training programme for full-time PhD students. This article describes the programme, and assesses perceptions of its effectiveness, using quantitative and qualitative feedback from past participants.

## Description

Pinnacle is a semester-long course that has been delivered four times through the Research Students Development Centre at the ANU. It commenced in Semester Two, 2008. Pinnacle participants are potential future academics, so it is necessary to promote within them effective education practices from the outset.

A key feature of Pinnacle is the adoption of a mentor by each participant. This mentor is generally an experienced lecturer with a proven teaching reputation who is running a course in the participant's field of study. Participants meet regularly with this lecturer to discuss the design and progress of their course; they also give some lectures and undertake marking. This is a key component of most teacher-



training courses (Gaia et al 2003; Hickson and Fishburne 2006; Ligadu 2008).

Another important feature is the opportunity for discussion and reflection on teaching. Korthagen and Kessels state that 'student teachers who themselves experienced learning in an active way are more inclined to plan lessons that facilitate students' active knowledge construction' (1999, p.5). Discussion between the Pinnacle participants aims to enrich and solidify their learning. It also provides a perspective about the many different teaching styles and considerations in their respective courses. The concepts and skills taught in Pinnacle are overtly applied to Pinnacle's own delivery. Participants are encouraged to be aware of their own learning process throughout the course, and this informs their own thinking about the material which they are studying. Pinnacle promotes an explicitly reflexive pedagogy in its approach to teaching.

Figure 1 demonstrates the interrelationship of Pinnacle components. These include:

**Pedagogy**

- Theory Online: This forms a substantial part of Pinnacle. The learning is split into three modules: Student Learning, Course Design and Assessment. The first module centres on theories of learning. The course

design and assessment modules look at the lecturer's role in designing the course and assessment. This component of Pinnacle involves extensive reading.

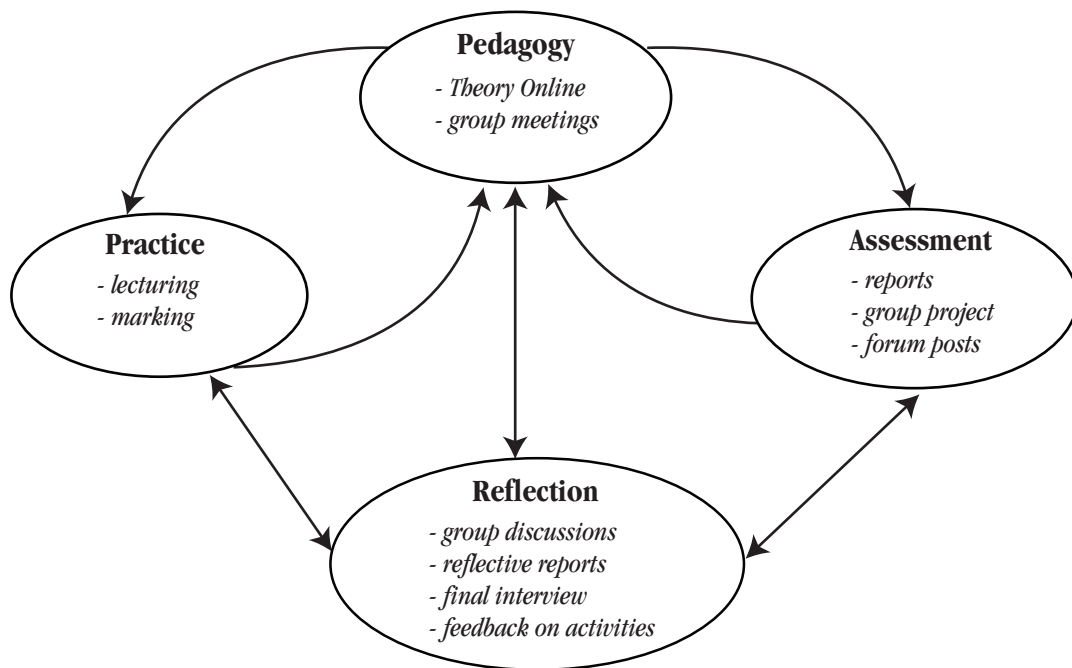
- Group meetings: These provide a chance for participants to discuss their thoughts about and experiences of pedagogical theory and the practicalities of teaching. Discussions typically revolve around the difficulties that students have faced as learners and teachers, as well as the pedagogical theory from the Theory Online modules.

**Practice**

- Lecturing: During the Pinnacle semester participants are required to present several lectures in their guide's course. These lectures are filmed and the videos are provided to the participants at the end of the course.
- Marking: Participants mark some or all of the assignments, essays or exams of their guide's course. This may be a part of their tutoring responsibilities, or it may be undertaken purely for Pinnacle.

**Assessment**

- Reports: Participants submit three reports on the modules of Student Learning, Course Design and Assessment.



**Figure 1: Pinnacle course design**

- **Group project:** Towards the end of the Pinnacle semester, participants embark on a group project. This aims to integrate what has been learned throughout the course and to empower participants, allowing them to make an explicit contribution to, and take responsibility for, the quality of teaching in their university or elsewhere. In the past this project has been the facilitation of a campus wide teaching forum. The present article is part of the authors' 2010 group project.
- **Forum posts:** Whilst working through the Theory Online modules, participants post their thoughts about the content into designated online forums, demonstrating their understanding of the course content.

### Reflection

- **Group discussions:** Discussing participants' experiences in lecturing and marking, and their responses to the Theory Online modules encourages reflection on all aspects of Pinnacle.
- **Reflective reports:** In addition to the assessed reports, three reflective reports are completed. The first relates to the course with which the participants are associated, the second is a reflective essay on the lectures which the participants have delivered, and the third is a longer essay reflecting on the participant's journey through the course as a whole. The latter reflective essays form a key component of the evaluation of Pinnacle for this article.
- **Final interview:** Interviews are conducted by the Pinnacle course convener with each participant. These centre on how participants' views on teaching have changed and developed through the course.
- **Feedback on activities:** Participants receive feedback on their own lecturing and marking from their mentor.

While no marks are given for activities, all are compulsory to complete the course. At the end of Pinnacle, participants receive a certificate that indicates their completion of the course and a DVD containing the video of their lecture and their interview. The DVD is intended to give the participants a reference point to reflect on later. A small scholarship is also awarded, to compensate for loss of time on PhD research.

### Evaluation

To evaluate Pinnacle as a teacher training programme for graduates, feedback from previous Pinnacle partici-

pants was used. This feedback was from the first three Pinnacle sessions, with data from the current Pinnacle session, that of the present authors, being excluded. It consists of the surveys completed at the end of each Theory Online module, and the final reflective essays.

The online surveys had essentially the same format each year. They commenced with questions asking participants to rate the effectiveness of various Pinnacle activities on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1–2 indicating that the activity was *ineffective*, 3–5 *moderately effective* and 6–7 *highly effective*. The overall effectiveness of Pinnacle was then queried. The responses to all the rating questions were collated and averaged. These numerical questions were followed by free-format questions in which any answer could be provided. For this article, the most prevalent responses were noted.

Next, each of the reflective essays was 'interpretationally analysed', whereby comments were extracted, patterns identified and themes determined (Gall *et al.*, 2003 p.453). The themes identified were:

- Motivation for undertaking Pinnacle
- Skills gained from the course and particular course components: course design, lecture delivery and assessment.
- Changes in teaching philosophy.
- Aspects of the course which were liked and disliked.
- Suggestions for improvement.

In addition, the participants' journeys were analysed according to some identified themes:

- Change in teaching philosophy.
- Sense of competency and confidence relating to Pinnacle material.
- Perceived change in personal story.

The procedure described above provided both quantitative and qualitative data on which assessments of Pinnacle could be made.

### Survey data

#### *Motivation to undertake Pinnacle*

The most common reasons selected by respondents for undertaking Pinnacle related to learning how to be a better teacher. *Opportunity to learn how to teach* was nominated by 37 per cent of respondents while 32 per cent suggested that they became involved in Pinnacle in order to *learn theoretical/practical pedagogy*. *Exposure to good teaching practices* was selected as a motivation by 26 per cent of respondents. One participant nominated the scholarship awarded on completion of the programme as their primary reason

for undertaking Pinnacle. When this participant's responses were tracked through the survey data, it emerged that despite their primarily financial motivation, they still rated Pinnacle highly, found it effective and would recommend it to a colleague. It is clear from the results that the majority of participants undertook the programme because they wanted to learn about teaching and improve their teaching skills.

**Overall Effectiveness**

Participants were asked about the overall effectiveness of Pinnacle on a scale of 1 to 7. A total of 84 per cent of participants rated Pinnacle as *highly effective* by giving a score of 6 or 7, and the remaining 16 per cent thought the programme was *moderately effective*, all of whom gave a score of 5. The average score was 6.1, which equates to *highly effective*.

There was no significant difference in perceptions of the overall effectiveness of Pinnacle by sex. Men rated the overall effectiveness of Pinnacle as 6.0 and women as 6.1.

Participants came from a wide range of disciplines. For the purposes of evaluation, these were divided into the broad divisions of Humanities and Sciences. When asked to rate the overall effectiveness of Pinnacle, those from the Humanities returned an average score of 5.5 whilst those in the Sciences returned a score of 6.0. This contrasts with their respective responses to individual course aspects, which will be discussed below.

**Individual course aspects**

Participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of each aspect of the course. The mean for all participants' responses is shown at Table 1, in order of most effective to least effective.

Table 1 shows that the most effective parts of Pinnacle were those in which the learner-teacher actively participated and was entirely responsible for the outcome. That is, giving their own lectures (average score of 6.6), their own tutorials (6.0) and the three written reflective reports (average scores of 6.0, 6.0 and 5.9).

<i>Average Score</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Effectiveness</i>
6.6	Your lectures	↑ Highly Effective
6.0	Lectures report	
6.0	Final report	
6.0	Your tutorials	
6.0	Design report	
5.9	Observing lectures	↑ Moderately Effective
5.9	Working with guide	
5.8	Observing tutorials	
5.2	Interview video	
5.2	Marking	
4.8	Pinnacle group meetings	
4.8	Organising group event	
4.6	Use of Alliance	↓

**Table 1: Effectiveness scores for Pinnacle activities**

This aligns with other studies that show that practice teaching is the most useful component of teacher-training programmes. 'Student teaching is considered by many educators to be the single most important experience in teachers' pre-service education, with the potential to be a powerful learning experience' (Head, 1992, p.95).

By contrast, in Pinnacle the least useful part was the mainly passive activity of using Alliance, which is an online collaborative tool through which the Theory Online component was delivered.

Although each sex rated Pinnacle's overall effectiveness almost identically, there were marked differences in the perceived value of individual aspects of the course. The largest difference between the sexes in rating the effectiveness of different aspects of Pinnacle was on the interview video. On average men rated it at 6.3 (highly effective) whilst for women the average rating was only 4.7 (moderately effective). Similarly, men gave group discussions an average rating of 5.8 whilst women gave them an average rating of 4.3. On the other hand, women rated the effective-

ness of their own tutorials (6.3) more highly than men (5.0). The gender differences in assessing the effectiveness of individual aspects of Pinnacle may be related to gender differences in preferred learning styles. There is a large body of research on gender differences in learning. For example, one study of undergraduate learning preferences showed that women preferred kinesthetic learning methods (for Pinnacle this would include their own tutorials) whilst men preferred a range of learning methods including visual, aural and reading-writing (for Pinnacle this would include the interview video and group discussion) (Wehrwein et al 2007).

Participants from the humanities on average rated each aspect of Pinnacle with an effectiveness of 5.7, whilst those from the sciences gave an average rating of 4.8 for each aspect. This is an interesting result because it will be recalled that although rating each aspect more poorly than those in the humanities did, those in the sciences found that the overall effect was more beneficial. Those in the sciences rated all but two of the 13 course aspects at a lower average level than those in the humanities, yet their average overall evaluation of Pinnacle was higher. Although there is a body of literature on the different approaches to learning and perceptions of effectiveness between different disciplines, the apparently contradictory results of the present study cannot be explained simply in these terms.

Tellingly, 100 per cent of participants would recommend Pinnacle to their colleagues. Although positive about Pinnacle, there were some suggestions for improvement made by the participants. With respect to Teaching Interest Groups, 32 per cent of respondents felt that they were too hard to organise and these were abandoned in later semesters of Pinnacle in response to this evaluation. In addition, 26 per cent felt that the Theory Online (TOL) modules should be a prerequisite completed prior to beginning the programme, rather than be treated as optional before commencement. The same proportion (26 per cent) felt that Pinnacle meetings needed to be better structured and more closely linked with the TOL modules. In addition, 16 per cent of participants suggested that they would like to see TOL extended.

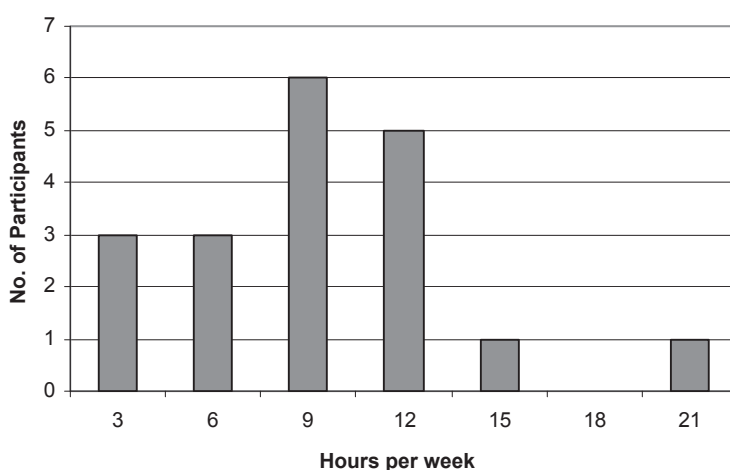


Figure 2: Participants' reports on hours spent on Pinnacle per week

Workload was an area that the survey was particularly interested in measuring. Most participants did between 9 and 12 hours of work for Pinnacle each week. Whilst most felt that the workload was 'about right', a sizeable minority – 27 per cent of participants – felt that the workload was too heavy. Figure 2 shows the spread of reported workload for former participants.

Figure 2 shows that there was wide variation in the number of reported hours spent on Pinnacle, with the highest reporting participants claiming to have spent between five and seven times as many hours on Pinnacle as the lowest reporting participants. This result may in part be due to differences in definitions. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the highest reporting participants counted all their lecturing and tutoring time as 'time spent on Pinnacle', whereas the lowest reporting participants included only time spent on Theory Online, which was the context of the survey. The median number of hours spent per week on Pinnacle was 8.0, or roughly one day per week. It is on this estimated time that the scholarship award is based.

From the evaluation of the quantitative data, it can be seen that Pinnacle was regarded in a positive light by participants who completed the programme, although different sexes and disciplines had different views on the most useful individual aspects.

### Reflective feedback

The qualitative data gathered from the participants' final reflective assignment tells a similar story to the data gathered from the survey. The participants' responses described the changes that they had undergone through

the Pinnacle programme, and could be separated into three narrative 'threads' that were consistent themes in the reflective responses. These three areas of change were teaching philosophy, competency and confidence, and a change in the personal story of the respondent.

Interestingly, just over half of the participants felt that there was no real change in their teaching philosophy. Rather, they felt their participation in Pinnacle validated their approach to teaching. Most of the participants articulated that they had gained confidence, and felt more competent, in their teaching as a result of participating in Pinnacle. One participant commented:

It (Pinnacle) was a wonderful experience that will certainly help me to become a better teacher.

Most also felt that they had undergone a change to themselves - to their personal story - through participating in Pinnacle. Another participant related:

Not meaning to sound pretentious, the course's meta-thinking has allowed me to approach other aspects of my life like piano teaching and relationships with other people from a fresh, more self aware perspective.

In a similar way to the quantitative data, the qualitative material collected from the participant's final reflective report clearly showed that Pinnacle was experienced as a positive event. It effects a change in the way that participants conceptualise themselves as teachers, and provides them with a greater sense of competence and confidence when approaching the classroom and lecture theatre.

The overall results of the data analysis of the survey, and of the reflective final reports, give a comprehensive picture of a programme that is regarded as a highly effective tool for building confidence and skills in early career teaching academics. Participants found that the opportunity to deliver lectures, to work closely with their guide lecturer, and to reflect on their own teaching philosophy and practice gave them a sense of being confident and competent teachers.

## Conclusions

The surveys discussed here must be understood as providing feedback in the context of the course. There

may have been different assessments of the learning process if the feedback had been gathered independently of participation in the course. Also, the numbers are small due to the limited number of people who have completed Pinnacle and were thus able to participate in the survey and reflective exercise. As further groups complete the programme, it would be of interest to compare their experiences with the experiences of the limited group whose responses were considered for this article. This being said, however, Pinnacle

---

**...Pinnacle was experienced as a positive event. It effects a change in the way that participants conceptualise themselves as teachers, and provides them with a greater sense of competence and confidence when approaching the classroom and lecture theatre.**

---

has been rated as a positive experience which participants believe will contribute to the effectiveness of their teaching at a tertiary level.

Currently many lecturers, when teamed with an inexperienced tutor, will seek to provide support and some degree of training (Gaia

et al 2003; Hickson & Fishburne 2006; Ligadu 2008). This situates Pinnacle-type courses at the centre of a much larger debate regarding communities of practice; social learning; and, the professionalisation and formal accreditation of teachers in the higher education sector. In some cases the mentoring alone might have similar outcomes for the student teacher as a programme such as Pinnacle. The strength of Pinnacle is that the mentoring model does not seek to supplant such an arrangement, but to formalise and support it. It also ensures support for postgraduate student teachers that might otherwise have to fend for themselves, and provides a comprehensive mix of theory and practice.

The interactive and reflexive model of Pinnacle helps to shape the teaching of those trained. As well as being introduced to educational theory and putting it into practice in the courses that they are teaching, participants also experience it in the way that the course is delivered. This encourages empathy with the experience of undergraduates and reflective consideration of teaching practices.

The mentoring element of Pinnacle is key to its role within the university. An area for future investigation is the impact that such mentoring has on the teaching practices of the mentor as they are challenged to explain why they do things the way they do. It is reasonable to suggest that such a mentoring model has a positive effect on teaching that extends far beyond the gains in confidence and skill of the participants. The

mentoring model could have a two-fold effect, both in helping postgraduate student teachers to come to grips with all the elements of running a course and in raising the profile of careful, reflective thought about teaching in the minds of all academic staff.

For many, Pinnacle provided an opportunity to reflect on the practice of teaching and change their thinking on the subject, perhaps before habit and academic pressures have permanently shaped their teaching practices. For others it was an opportunity to gain confidence and experience in a supportive environment that fostered improvement and reflection. Though such a course is arguably not a substitute for formal and extensive teacher training it does fulfill a clear need and provides the first step for developing skilled, thoughtful, tertiary educators.

**The authors of this paper undertook training and assessment at the Research Student Development Centre, Australian National University, ACT, Australia.**

## Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Trevor Vickers for his generous support throughout the research and writing of this paper, and for his many useful insights into the Pinnacle programme. They would also like to thank Malcolm Pettigrove for his valuable suggestions whilst reviewing a draft of this paper.

## References

- Harland, T. (2001). Pre-Service Teacher Education for University Lecturers: the Academic Apprentice. *British Journal of Teacher Education*, 27(3), pp.269-276.
- Head, F. (1992). Student Teaching as Initiation into the Teaching Profession, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 23(2), pp.89-107.
- Hickson, C. & Fishburne, G. (2006). *Can we help? Mentoring graduate teaching assistants*, Conference Paper, Association for Active Educational Researchers 2006 conference. Retrieved on 18 May 2010 from <http://www.aare.edu.au/06pap/hic06205.pdf>.
- Gaia, A.C., Corts, D.P., Tatum H.E. & Allen, J. (2003). The GTA mentoring program: An interdisciplinary approach to developing future faculty as teacher-scholars. *College Teaching*, 51(2), pp.61-65.
- Gall, M., Gall, J. & Borg, W. (2003). *Education Research: An introduction* (7th edition), Allyn and Bacon, New York.
- Korthagen, F. & Kessels, J.A.P. (1999). Linking Theory and Practice: Changing the Pedagogy of Teacher Education, *Educational Researcher*, 28(4), pp.4-17.
- Ligadu, C.P. (2008). *Developing an alternative program for teacher trainee mentoring: a case study at a Malaysian university*. PhD thesis, University of Wollongong.
- Viskovic, A. (2006). Becoming a tertiary teacher: learning in communities of practice, *Higher Education Research and Development*, 25(4), pp.323-339.
- Wehrwein, E.A., Lujan, H.L. & DiCarlo, S.E. (2007). Gender differences in learning style preferences among undergraduate physiology students, *Advances in Physiology Education*, 31, pp.153-157.

# Lessons from a student engagement pilot study

Benefits for students and academics

**Robert Errey & Glen Wood**

University of Ballarat

Better learning outcomes flow from higher levels of student engagement. When the perception is that student engagement is in decline, there is genuine concern amongst committed academic teaching staff. This paper reports on a pilot study designed to foster an understanding of the factors that influence engagement in undergraduate students in the business school at a regional Australian university. Two focus groups were conducted with the assistance of 22 students enrolled in the major study areas of the school, and the information obtained informed the development of an on-line questionnaire aimed at exploring the drivers of engagement and disengagement. Eighty-five students completed the questionnaire, and 67 usable responses were available for analysis—a response rate of 17 per cent, which could be seen as illustrative of student disengagement. However, the findings of the pilot study suggest that the majority of students believed themselves to be engaged with their studies. Students reported that the instructors' approach, class and assignment structure, learning support and other personal factors affected their level of engagement. A *preliminary model of student engagement* was developed from the findings. Key factors have been drawn from this to inform learning and teaching policy and practices within the School.

## Prologue: scene from a business school lecture

During the lecture, the academic turns and faces the assembled students—makes a mental note that approximately 25 per cent of the students are missing, some are fidgeting with lecture notes, others are sneaking a look at their mobile phones, a few are conducting private conversations with their neighbours and some just look 'bored out of their brains'—not the elements that portray an engaged student cohort.

Why is it so? The majority of students claim to be in full-time employment (84 per cent, in fact), but nonetheless they are also enrolled in what amounts to a full-time study load. Could this situation lead to anything other than a disengaged, pass-seeking student body? Perhaps one solution could be for business schools

to develop and deliver programmes and courses in a manner that accepts that today's student cohorts appear to be balancing learning commitments with other more demanding responsibilities such as earning enough money to survive and meeting family/social commitments. In addition, there are practical steps that can be taken to improve student engagement in the classroom.

## Introduction: student engagement

This paper reports on a pilot project that looked into student engagement within a school of business in a regional university. The principal purposes of the project were to identify the drivers of student engagement and to develop a preliminary model of student engagement, and in addition to identify any improvements in

research design and administration processes when subsequent, more thorough studies are undertaken in the near future.

Higher levels of student engagement have been linked with better student learning outcomes, such as the quality of their output. Given the general perception that there has been a decline in students' engagement, it is important to identify the factors that influence their disengagement.

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) findings, two factors appear highly salient to teaching today (Kuh, 2001). These are first, active and collaborative learning, and second, enriching educational experiences. Businesses want to employ people who have the ability to manage rather than merely having knowledge about management concepts (Cunningham, 1995). Consequently, business schools should 'design a curriculum to assist students' to achieve identifiable outcomes (Wee, Kek & Kelley, 2003, p. 150). Wee *et al.* believe that problem-based learning (PBL) goes some of the way to achieving the outcomes. They also acknowledge that 'The PBL approach is only one way to transform the curriculum ... To produce graduates with the skills required by the business world, marketing educators must first be able to produce self-directed learners' (Wee *et al.*, 2003, p. 160).

In their study of what constitutes a master teacher, Smart, Kelley and Conant (2003, p. 77) concurred with earlier studies that teaching success requires, 'strong communication skills, a real-world perspective, caring / empathy, an involvement orientation, and organisation / preparation'. Further, participants in the study indicated a number of other attributes they believed were crucial to effective teaching and student learning, e.g. interactive lecturing, considerable questioning to lift student involvement, and assessment pieces 'that require critical, integrative thinking' (Smart *et al.*, 2003, p. 77).

Interestingly, class participation may not be the central issue. Peterson believes that *course participation*, i.e. 'readily speaking, thinking, reading, role taking, risk taking, and engaging oneself and others, and it may occur inside or outside the classroom confines' (2001, p. 187) is more pertinent. These elements are indicative of *active learning*. Active Learning has the capacity to make students 'the centre of their learning' (Warren 1997, as cited in Peterson, 2001, p.188); the skills gained in this type of learning are those sought by employers. Active learning should involve open-ended questions rather than just seeking the 'right answer'. That is, questions such as 'was there anything

in the readings that surprised you?' and 'was there anything with which you disagreed?' are appropriate.

In addition to fostering active learning, providing students with more enriching experiences is another route for business educators. Students obtain a deeper understanding when an active learning route is adopted, where they apply concepts in 'real-world' tasks (Hamer, 2002). Hamer suggests 'that experiential learning techniques can be used to increase the definitional knowledge acquired by students of low and moderate overall performances' (2002, p. 32). This student profile may be a fair description of the cohort that is the research subject of this paper. Such students 'need to be encouraged to elaborate on course materials outside of the class' (Hamer 2002, p. 33). These are the essential elements of learning and teaching necessary to foster student engagement according to the literature.

This research took the form of a pilot study designed to tap the students' perspective of the factors that influence engagement amongst undergraduate students in a business school. The aim of the research was to consider these factors and through an enhanced understanding of student engagement, inform the School's learning and teaching policies and practices.

## Research design

The project was built around focus groups conducted at the start of the research, followed by an on-line survey. Two focus groups were held to garner students' views on their perspective on how engaged they believed they were; the factors that drove students' engagement levels; and what they believed the business school could do to improve their engagement. The 22 participating students were randomly selected from the School's database and the groups were generally representative of the major study areas and other categorical factors such as gender, stage in the degree, and part-time/full-time enrolment. In line with the ethical requirements for university research, all students were asked to sign an *Informed Consent Form* and were given a *Plain Language Information Statement* to advise them of the key aims and objectives of the research. These were to:

1. Explore and understand if and why the engagement levels vary across the school's three discipline areas (marketing, tourism and e-business; management, and commerce).
2. Explore any issues relating to gender.



### 3. Develop a set of recommendations to address learning and teaching concerns.

The findings from the focus groups were used as the basis for designing the on-line survey, along with information gleaned from the literature review. The research design aimed to explore the level of student engagement and to identify its drivers. Students from all disciplines represented in the business school, that is accounting, applied economics and finance, entrepreneurship, human resource management, marketing and tourism were invited to participate in the research project by completing the on-line questionnaire.

In the focus groups, students stated that they wanted to be engaged. In fact, in general, students felt that they *were* engaged and they identified the factors that engendered an environment that improved engagement

in the classroom setting. Interestingly, students did not believe that they were responsible for driving their own level of engagement—they considered that this was the academic's responsibility.

Where the responsibility demarcation sits was raised by Bryson and Hand (2007, cited in Crosling, Heagney and Thomas, 2009). They believe that engagement is also the responsibility of teachers who should create a participative environment. Students preferred smaller teaching groups (fewer than 100 students in lectures and fewer than 15 students in tutorials), believing that lower student numbers would result in the lecturer (and tutors) making the effort to learn their names, which would in turn aid interaction. Students valued an informal lecture environment (i.e., the lecturer's approach should be relaxed) that was non-judgmental (i.e. students should not be made to feel embarrassed if they provided a wrong answer).

This would also provide students with the opportunity and confidence to ask questions or respond to the lecturer's requests. They wanted lecturers to *add value* to the lecture notes distributed by the School, rather than merely reading from those notes. Added value could be demonstrated by the lecturer relating the theory from the text to a current event reported in the media. Finally, students wanted time to be allocated during lectures for undertaking case studies or other exercises that would then be discussed by the entire class.

---

**Interestingly, students did not believe that they were responsible for driving their own level of engagement—they considered that this was the academic's responsibility.**

---

Students also listed a number of factors outside their control that impinged upon their level of engagement. Many students believed inappropriate timetabling hampered their motivation. For example, if lectures and tutorials in a given subject were scheduled on the same day, students would be more likely to attend both, whereas if they were scheduled on different days they may opt to stay home, go to their paid employment or work on any assignments that were due. This balancing of priorities, in particular, the decision to go to their paid employment rather than attend classes was also identified by Devlin, James and Grigg who stated 'One quarter of the undergraduates who were working reported regularly missing classes or equivalent activities because of employment activities' (p. 5, 2007). Disturbingly, they identified that the proportion

doing so was increasing. Further, Devlin *et al.* state 'Student involvement in paid work affects the quality of their study: 43 per cent of employed undergraduates ... reported that their work adversely affected their study' (p. 6, 2007).

A further factor mentioned by students was that their engagement levels could be shaped by the nature of assignments and the nature of the feedback on assignment performance. For example, final year students expected assignments to be more practical than theoretical, thereby providing an opportunity to apply their knowledge and to develop the skills required in the workforce. They noted the varying practices of different lecturers with respect to assignment feedback. Students' preference was also for specific feedback on the aspects that earn or cost them marks. However, this 'outcomes' orientation is contrary to Cunningham's proposition (1995) about the qualities businesses require in staff. That is, businesses require staff with an understanding of processes such as research and analysis.

Finally, students felt that group work had a bearing on engagement levels. A well-managed group generally attains higher grades and therefore, students seek to form groups with students they trust to contribute in terms of both quantity and quality. Groups that suffer from negative aspects such as poor meeting attendance and language barriers result in one or two members feeling aggrieved at 'carrying' the group. Consequently, those students that felt they contributed more than their fair share for an assignment appeared to carry

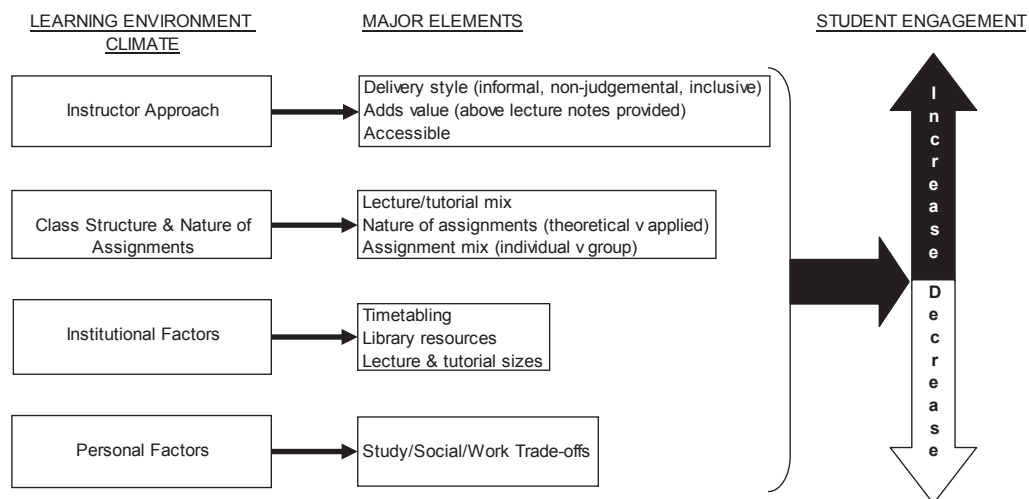


Figure 1: Preliminary Model of Student Engagement

some resentment towards future group assignments. Not surprisingly, their level of engagement appeared to be lower in units that have group work as a major part of the overall grading.

### A student engagement model

Findings from the literature review and the focus group output were combined to develop a list of issues that were then sorted into the major *Learning Environment* categories that formed the basis of the *preliminary model of student engagement* shown in Figure 1. With minor wording changes, they evolved into the major sections in the questionnaire used in the pilot on-line survey. The aim of the survey was to investigate the suggested relationships indicated in the *preliminary model of student engagement*.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was distributed as an online survey. This was chosen as the best means of encouraging student participation. In addition to the learning environment categories shown in Figure 1, the questionnaire also sought background information on students, as well as asking students to rate their level of engagement during the current teaching period. In addition, at the end of each section students had the opportunity to make further comments. Figure 2 shows the major sections in the questionnaire, and the rating scales used.

Students were contacted via the University-provided email address, requesting that they visit a designated website to complete the survey. Colleagues were asked to promote the survey during classes and posters were attached to internal and external walls. Incentives were offered for students' participation, i.e., they

Survey Sections	Rating Scales
1. Engagement (1 item)	Not engaged (1) to Totally engaged (5)
2. Lecturer's Approach (9 items)	Not at all important (1), Only slightly important (2), Generally important (3), Definitely important (4) and Extremely important (5)
3. Class Structure & Assignments (18 items)	Strongly agree (1), Moderately agree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3) Moderately disagree (4) and Strongly disagree (5)
4. Learning Support (12 items)	Strongly agree (1), Moderately agree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3) Moderately disagree (4) and Strongly disagree (5)
5. Personal Application (2 items)	Very poor (1), Poor (2), Average (3), Good (4) and Very good (5)
6. Personal feelings (7 items)	Very poor (1), Poor (2), Average (3), Good (4) and Very good (5)
7. Background Information (14 items)	Coded responses

Figure 2: Item Rating Scales

were entered into a number of prize draws depending upon how rapidly they responded. The survey was available for six weeks.

**Survey results: a summary of questionnaire responses**

Eight-five students responded to the survey – a response rate of about 21 per cent of the approximately 400 students recorded in the school database. However, 18 survey responses had to be discarded due to the extent of missing responses, reducing the response rate of usable questionnaires to 17 per cent. Whilst this response rate is low, it is not unusual. Devlin et al (2007, p.3) reported that ‘response rates by institutions were mostly between 17 and 23 per cent’ from their study on student finances and student engagement. A higher response rate would have been preferred, and the authors spoke to students from their classes to assist with understanding better the reasons for the low response rate. It transpired that many students have personal email addresses with external Internet providers and therefore they do not bother to access the official university email system. In addition, end-of-term assignments and examination preparation resulted in students foregoing what they considered ‘non-essential’ activities. Of course, it is possible that the response rate was simply a reflection of the engagement levels of many students in university activities.

As with all quantitative research, a critical question is whether the respondents are representative of the total population. In this instance, the only statistic that appeared to be askew from what the researchers would consider to be ‘as expected’ was the gender distribution of respondents. Whereas questionnaire respondents suggested a preponderance of female students (about 70 per cent), the overall female undergraduate population in business programmes is approximately 47 per cent (DEEWR 2007). Despite the skew with gender, the researchers believe the participants were reasonably representative of the total student body and that the resultant statistical analysis could be taken as ‘indicative’ (with some confidence).

The ‘average respondent’ can be described based on the response frequencies from the ‘background information’ section of the questionnaire (as shown in Table 1). The ‘average’ respondent can therefore be defined as: younger than 22 years of age and more likely to be female, in the early stages of their study programme, undertaking a full-time or near full-time study load in

the business or management programmes and specialising in human resources management or marketing, in addition to working full-time. This student is also likely to have been born in Australia, and to be living with their parents or renting with friends.

Two interesting but conflicting statistics from a student engagement viewpoint, i.e. 84 per cent claim to be employed full-time but at the same time 57 per cent stated that they were enrolled in 3 or 4 units, indicating that they were also enrolled as full-time students (see Table 2). This may be an important indicator to understand student engagement better. On the point of extra-curricular activities, a study of economics students at a university in Hong Kong indicated that students heavily involved in such activities produced lower rates of absenteeism than other students (Chong, Cheung & Hui, 2009). However, it is not clear from that study whether paid outside work was included as an ‘extra-curricular activity’.

Table 2 provides a summary of the major results of the survey (see Appendix 1). The authors reviewed the

Item	Variable	No.	%
Total valid responses		67	100
Age	<= 22 years	37	64
Gender	Female	47	70
	Male	20	30
Number of units completed so far ( <i>Undergraduate programmes comprise 24 units</i> )	<= 4	26	39
	5<=12	12	18
	13<=20	16	24
	21+	13	19
Current enrolment	3 or 4 units	45	57
Birthplace	Australia	55	82
	Asia	8	12
	Europe	4	6
Programme	B.Business	20	30
	B.Commerce	16	24
	B.Management	22	33
	Other programmes	7	13
Specialisation	Accounting	12	18
	Human resources mgt.	14	21
	Marketing	19	28
	Other	22	33
Employment	Full-time	56	84
	Part-time	11	16
Living arrangements	Parents/guardian	23	34
	Renting	20	30
	Own accommodation	13	19
	Other	11	17

**Table 1: Student Background**

Major Survey Sections	Individual Items (abbreviated descriptions)	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (at .05)
Engagement	Rate your engagement	3.37	.935	-1.111	Yes
Lecturer's Approach	Delivers lectures without just reading the slides	4.60	.629	14.274	Yes
	Adds value with practical applications	4.33	.683	9.929	Yes
	Creates a non-judgmental environment	4.31	.656	10.147	Yes
Class Structure & Assignments	Advantage when lecture & tutor are the same person	1.60	.986	-7.499	Yes
	Group assignments no more than 40% of the unit's total marks	1.76	1.088	-5.556	Yes
	Tutorials limited to maximum of 15 students	1.90	.890	-5.560	Yes
Learning Support	Group assignments not necessary for all units	2.01	1.273	-3.119	Yes
	More copies of required texts in library	1.45	.784	-10.986	Yes
	Library should have latest texts	1.49	.766	-10.763	Yes
	School needs dedicated person for course advice	1.58	.907	-8.284	Yes

**Table 2: Major Statistical Findings**

focus group findings to establish the expected mean of student responses to questions on *engagement*, the *lecturer's approach* and *class structure and assignments*, which had a scale of 1 to 5—this mean was then used in univariate t-tests. The responses provide useful information about possible drivers of student engagement, and will assist in subsequent research in the area.

## Engagement

In this study, engagement was defined for the students at the commencement of the Student Engagement Survey as follows:

For our purposes in this research, 'Student Engagement' is considered to be revealed in the attitudes students bring to their study, the work students produce during their lectures and tutorials, and the extension of that learning beyond the formal lecture/tutorial times.

This definition encompasses aspects put forward by previous researchers but is perhaps not as broad as others: for example, 'student engagement is the extent to which students are actively engaged in—actively committed to and actively involved in—their own learning' (Markwell, 2007, p. 2) or it is 'a broad phenomenon which encompasses academic as well as certain non-academic and social aspects of the student experience' (Coates, 2006, p. 4).

Students rated their level of engagement on a scale from (1) *not engaged* to (5) *totally engaged*. As far as the overall level of engagement was concerned, the mean rating was 3.37 with a standard deviation (SD) of

0.935. The mean score was not statistically significant (at the 05 level) Only 8 students indicated that they were not engaged.

### Lecturer's approach

The rating scale for this question went from (1) *not at all important* to (5) *extremely important*. In analysing the important elements relating to students' perception of the Lecturer's Approach, the lecturer's ability to deliver the material 'without just reading from the slides' (mean = 4.60) was considered important, as was the lecturer's capacity for 'adding value' with practical applications (4.33). Students also valued the creation of a non-judgmental environment (4.31), and wanted lecturers that cared about student progress (4.22). T-tests revealed these results to be statistically significant (at the 05 level). The second and third aspects had been specifically mentioned in the focus groups. The item 'Tries to include as many students as possible in class discussion' generated the lowest mean (3.64). Whilst on face value this may be seen to be at odds with their stated level of engagement, perhaps it reinforces that 'engagement' is multi-dimensional, i.e. there is more to engagement than contributing in class.

### Class structure and assignments

The rating scale for this question went from (1) *strongly agree* to (5) *strongly disagree*. Students agreed that there is an advantage when the lecturer is also the tutor (1.60) and that tutorials should be limited to a maximum of 15 students (1.90). There were also some strong views on group assignments, with students believing that they should be a maximum of

40 per cent of a subject's total marks (1.76) and that group assignments were not necessary in every unit (2.01). T-tests revealed these to be statistically significant (at the 05 level). Again, the benefits of small tutorial classes and the angst caused by group assignments had both been raised in the focus groups.

### Learning support

The rating scale for this question went from (1) *strongly agree* to (5) *strongly disagree*. Students agreed that the library should carry more copies of the required texts (1.45) and that the library should have the latest texts (1.49). Students also believed that the School needed to have a person specifically responsible for providing advice about programmes and units (1.58). T-tests revealed these to be statistically significant (at

the 05 level). Many focus group participants raised the issue of their frustration with obtaining conflicting and/or wrong advice about their courses from administrators within the School and also academics. This was highlighted by Light (2001, p. 81, cited by Markwell, 2007, p. 8) who states 'Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience'. Twenty students (30 per cent) indicated that they believed that 'timetable clashes have adversely affected my choice of subjects' whilst 19 (28 per cent) stated that the Internet allocation was inadequate for their study needs.

increasing trend of paid employment for Australian university students was one factor that had a negative impact on student engagement was put forward by Krause, Hartley, James and McInnis (2005). Twenty-five students (37 per cent) said they spent 1-5 hours per week on all learning tasks (excluding class attendance), whilst another 23 (34 per cent)

---

**If the maxim of three ex-class hours to each in-class hour is applied, a full-time student should be spending at least double what the respondents reported. Such commitment conflicts can be expected to have a negative impact on the end of semester assignment preparation and results, which would be likely to exacerbate student feelings of disengagement.**

---

### Personal application and feelings

The rating scale for this section went from (1) *not at all important* to (5) *extremely important*. Students were asked how they felt about seven aspects of their learning environment. They reported that they felt positively about lecture content (4.09), the support obtained from lecturers (3.97) and how lectures were delivered (3.79). Again, t-tests revealed these to be statistically significant (at the 05 level). However, these findings were at odds with comments made during the focus groups where students tended to raise the negative aspects of their learning experiences. Perhaps it is reasonable to speculate that the students who

responded to the questionnaire were those that were more engaged and therefore, have had more positive learning experiences.

Further, students tended to report average/negative responses to three other items relating to 'support'. These responses were received in reference to the support provided by administrative staff (52 per cent of responses), by student services (47 per cent) and by library staff (42 per cent) (Scale: (1) *Very poor*; (5) *Very good*.)

Examination of student study habits revealed interesting, conflicting and worrying results. Seventy per cent reported being on campus 3-4 days per week during the teaching period. However, many of these were full-time students who also effectively had full-time work commitments. The suggestion that the

spent between 6-15 hours per week. Students spent 10.8 hours per week (weighted average) on learning tasks outside class times. If the maxim of three ex-class hours to each in-class hour is applied, a full-time student should be spending at least double what the respondents reported. Such commitment conflicts can be expected to have a negative impact on the end of semester assignment preparation and results, which would be likely to exacerbate student feelings of disengagement.

### Are highly engaged students different?

To determine if 'highly engaged' students were different from others, the level of engagement was reduced to two levels - 'low or moderate' and 'high' and cross-tabulations conducted on all other categorical items. Five statistically significant relationships ( $p < 0.05$ ) plus two near-significant relationships were found. A summary of these is shown in Table 3.

Item	p-value	'High engagement' students were more likely to report...
Q2. Lecturer demonstrates that he/she cares about your progress	0.041	Greater importance
Q6. Content of lectures	0.001	Very good
Q6. Delivery of lectures	<0.001	Very good
Q6. Support from lecturer	0.050	Very good
Q6. Support from library staff	0.010	Very good
Number of units completed	0.051	0-4 units i.e. First year students
Programme	0.028	Double degree

**Table 3: What do Highly Engaged Students Report?**

As shown in the table, the highly engaged student was likely to prefer nurturing lecturers, and to appreciate the content and delivery of lectures, as well as the support received from lecturers and library staff. An obvious inference and concern is that students appeared to be less engaged towards the end of their programme; 'highly engaged' students were more likely to be in first year. This is an interesting outcome given the emphasis on, and concern about, the first year experience in Australian universities (Krause *et al.*, 2005).

### What has been learned from the pilot study?

Several useful pieces of information have been drawn from the current study. Statistical information from the focus groups and questionnaire has been used to inform school policy, and some practical matters that have been brought to light have been proposed to inform the conduct of subsequent studies. For example, on the former, the findings reveal that the *Lecturer's Approach, Class Structure and Assignments, Learning Support* and *Personal Factors* appear to affect student engagement. Critical aspects appear to include how the lecturer delivers the lecture, how the lecturer adds value in lectures, +the place and importance attached to group assignments and course advice provided to students. Hence, there is some support for the *preliminary model of student engagement*.

A particularly positive outcome of this study is that the School has had the opportunity to consider the research findings develop and enhance its learning and teaching initiatives. Further, the findings can be taken into account when considering the structure, content and delivery of the School's programmes in future offerings. Coming at this from another angle

though, perhaps the School finds itself with a much bigger problem than it first imagined because of the changing nature of university education. As Devlin *et al* state 'The traditional idea of a linear school, university, work progression, which still forms much policy and practice in higher education, no longer holds true' (2007, p. 7). With so many students undertaking part-time and full-time work the seeds

of disengagement can be traced back to the demands that come with having employment commitments (Devlin *et al*, 2007). However, on the basis of the study reported here, the authors conclude that the School is some way from addressing the elements of teaching practice that could potentially lift the level of student engagement.

Relating to practical matters, prior to undertaking this pilot study, numerous assumptions had been made by the researchers. For instance, it was expected that it would be possible to divide the students into their respective discipline areas to discover the varying levels of, and drivers of engagement across academic specialisations. However, the relatively low response rate undermined the ability to conduct this more in-depth and rigorous analysis and limits the ability to generalise the findings to the total student cohort.

In addition, it was assumed that all students would be familiar with electronic communication, and hence the survey was distributed on-line. Attempts were made to inform students about the research project, and invitations for them to participate were forwarded based on the 'official' email address allocated to them by the university. However, it transpired that many students rarely used this avenue of e-communication, preferring instead to use personal email addresses. This knowledge alone will ensure that a broader section of the student population will be accessible in future studies.

Despite the lower than expected response rate in this pilot study, further research is being planned. One-on-one in-depth interviews with students are being considered, to follow up on issues such as the discrepancy between the favourable rating of lectures reported via the questionnaire and the negative opinions expressed in the focus groups. In addition, students from the University's other

schools will be invited to participate in a larger scale research project.

### How learning and teaching policies and practices have changed

This pilot study has been a partial but significant spur in boosting the profile and activity level of the Learning and Teaching Portfolio over the past two years. Academic representation on the Learning and Teaching Committee (L&TC) has increased by three—ensuring all discipline groups are fully represented. To improve student learning and lift the level of student engagement (and in turn to increase student retention rates) the L&TC has, for example:

1. Broadened its range and frequency of student workshops that are designed to build confidence in their academic skills—examples of topics covered are time management, academic writing and referencing, and essay preparation.
2. Produced policy statements and resources or run workshops and information seminars for academics on topics such as identifying 'students at risk', plagiarism, assessment feedback and student mentoring guidelines.
3. Made a concerted effort to standardise the format and content of Course Descriptions, and greater consideration given to assessment objectives and tasks so as to add more structure to course delivery.
4. Started the roll-out of extensive study guides for all courses delivered.

These, and other actions, reflect the views expressed by Whetten (p. 339, 2007) when he states 'I've come to understand that the most important professioning I do as a teacher involves my thoughtful choice of reading material, assignments, activities, and, most of all, learning objectives.' These pieces of the student learning puzzle should be driven by what students need to learn and how the academic can best facilitate the learning process (Whetten, 2007).

Further, Crosling *et al.* (2009) in their study on student retention in higher education surveyed a number of teaching and learning approaches—induction and continuing support processes, student diversity, curriculum design, student-centred active learning, integration of study skills and formative feedback. The current activities of the L&TC are addressing student engagement issues that broadly fit under the teaching and learning approaches reported by Crosling *et al.*

### Major conclusions and recommendations

It is in the best interests of both students and academic staff to have highly motivated, engaged students that complete their studies. For the lecturers, such students give incentive to them in their teaching practices, and encourage more innovative and creative ways of achieving optimal outcomes in both learning and teaching. For the students, remaining engaged throughout their studies will ensure optimal performance, and is likely to generate grades that will enhance their future career advancement.

It is important to understand and appreciate the reasons why students are not engaged. This study provides insights into what shapes student engagement, and as such, it has implications for student retention. Less than optimal levels of student retention mean that relatively scarce resources are wasted. Student failure means high financial costs for students, both direct and indirect. The automatic loans provided to students to cover tuition fees must be repaid whether students have passed or failed and students must meet the opportunity cost of absences from the labour market that might be necessary for students to repeat units. Non-completing students might also find their passage into meaningful employment blocked.

Of course, this study had a number of limitations, particularly the response rate to the on-line questionnaire. The researchers considered that this lack of engagement in a project, which had well publicised rewards for participation, was indicative of the general malaise described by lecturers as 'lack of engagement' in university community activities generally, and in their studies, in particular. Clearly, the study would need to be replicated in a wider sample before any generalisations could be made about the findings of this pilot study.

It seems reasonable to presume that the survey should be repeated periodically to monitor student engagement regularly. Such surveying should therefore be built into the regular duties of a member of staff. Having established some of the major reasons for the low rate of response (that is, sending invitations to email addresses that students chose not to access and timing the pilot survey with a relatively busy time for students) it will be possible to appreciate a wider range of students' opinions and to act on them as appropriate.

Students' attitude to group work and to group projects means that the school needs to become

more pro-active with this issue; it clearly causes grief to students and to academic staff alike. Issues such as whether group work should be assessable or the proportion of a subject's marks that should be made up of group work need to be closely examined. Group size and submission and presentation of group work also need consideration. Findings could be used to formulate policies covering the adoption of standardised group work models.

Perhaps there is also an issue relating to staff training. If some lecturers are failing to excite their student audiences, specific staff development could address this need. In fact, this initiative has been introduced into the school over the past 12 months through peer review and curriculum development workshops and modelling effective teaching practices in First Year. Part of the problem for some staff could be that high teaching loads prevent them from undertaking research, which would add value to their teaching, as desired by students.

Obtaining a higher student response rate would provide richer information about the wider student body and the extent of its engagement. Specialisation-related information and more detailed correlations between students' engagement and hours spent in the paid work force, time spent travelling to campus, or the impact of non-academic activities would add to the school's capacity to maintain an engaged student body.

However, the pilot study has provided a rich source of information that has formed the basis of a series of recommendations fed into the school's learning and teaching committee. These issues have been addressed and policy changes implemented in the previous 12 months. On-going evaluation of these initiatives and their potential impact on student engagement will go some way toward satisfactorily engaging students in self-directed active learning.

**Robert Errey and Glen Wood are academics at the School of Business, University of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia.**

## References

- Chong, T.T., Cheung K. & Hui, P. (2009). Skipping economics classes: A case study from Hong Kong. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 31, 37-42.
- Coates, H. (2006). *Student engagement in campus-based and online education*. London, Routledge.
- Crosling, G., Heagney, M. & Thomas, L. (2009). Improving student retention in higher education: Improving teaching and learning. *Australian Universities' Review*, 51, 9-18.
- Devlin, M., James, R. & Grigg, G. (2007). *Studying and working: A national study of student finances and student engagement*. Retrieved 2 June 2010 from [http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/downloads/Pap\\_DevlinJamesGrigg26-29Aug07.pdf](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/downloads/Pap_DevlinJamesGrigg26-29Aug07.pdf)
- Cunningham, A.C. (1995). Developing marketing professionals: What can business schools learn? *Journal of Marketing Education*, 17, 3-9.
- Hamer, L.O. (2002). The additive effects of semi structured classroom activities on student learning: An application of classroom-based experiential learning techniques. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 22, 25-34.
- Krause, K., Hartley, R., James, R. & McInnis, C. (2005). *The first year experience in Australian universities: Findings from a decade of national studies*. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.
- Kuh, G.D. (2001). *The national survey of student engagement: Conceptual framework and overview of psychometric properties*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.
- Markwell, D. (2007). The challenge of student engagement. Retrieved 2 June 2010 from [http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/\\_\\_\\_data/page/95565/Student\\_engagement\\_-\\_Don\\_Markwell\\_-\\_30\\_Jan\\_2007.pdf](http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/___data/page/95565/Student_engagement_-_Don_Markwell_-_30_Jan_2007.pdf)
- Peterson, R. M. (2001). Course participation: An active learning approach employing student documentation. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 23, 187-194.
- Smart, D.T., Kelley, C.A. & Conant, J. S. (2003). Mastering the art of teaching: Pursuing excellence in a new millennium. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 25, 71-78.
- Talbot, G.L. (1997). A grounded research perspective for motivating college students' self-regulated learning behaviors: Preparing and gaining the cooperation, commitment of teachers, ERIC Clearing House for Community Colleges. (The ERIC Documentation Reproduction Service No. ED 414 788).
- Wee, L.K., Kek, M.A.Y. & Kelley, C.A. (2003). Transforming the marketing curriculum using problem-based learning: A case study. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 25, 150-162.
- Whetten, D.A. (2007). Principles of Effective Course Design: What I Wished I had Known About Learning-Centered Teaching 30 Years Ago. *Journal of Management Education*, 31, 339-357.



## Appendix 1: Student Engagement Questionnaire

### Student Engagement Survey

*This survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. We are interested in your perceptions, and your co-operation is very much appreciated. Your individual responses are confidential.*

**For our purposes in this research, 'Student Engagement' is considered to be revealed in the attitudes students bring to their study, the work students produce during their lectures and tutorials, and the extension of that learning beyond the formal lecture/tutorial times.**

#### 1. YOUR ENGAGEMENT

How would you rate your engagement during the current teaching period (TP3, 2007)? Please circle the number that best represents your level of engagement.

<b>Not engaged</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Totally engaged</b>
--------------------	---	---	---	---	---	------------------------

#### 2. LECTURER'S APPROACH

Using the scale below, please tick the relevant box that best expresses how important each aspect of the lecturer's approach is to your enjoyment of your learning.

	Not at all important (1)	Only slightly important (2)	Generally important (3)	Definitely important (4)	Extremely important (5)
Creates a casual environment					
Creates a non-judgmental environment					
Tries to include as many students as possible in class discussions					
Adds value to lecture material with practical applications					
Is accessible for meetings					
Responds to phone calls/emails within 24 hours					
Demonstrates that he/she cares about your progress					
Provides lecture notes prior to the lecture					
Delivers the lecture without just reading from the slides					

If you wish, please elaborate on any of the areas in Q2 above: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. CLASS STRUCTURE & ASSIGNMENTS

Using the scale below, please tick the relevant box that best represents your level of agreement for each item.

	Strongly agree (1)	Moderately agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Moderately disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
The two-hour lecture & one-hour tutorial mix suits my learning style					
The one-hour lecture & two-hour tutorial mix suits my learning style					
Lectures and tutorials for a unit should be held on the same day					
The 90 minute lecture and 90 minute tutorial mix suits my learning style					
Lectures should include class group exercises/small case studies					

Group assignments are not necessary in every unit					
Group assignments should be limited to a maximum of 40% of the unit's total mark					
Assignments in first year units should mainly be theoretical					
Assignments in second year units should mainly be a balance of theory & application					
Assignments in third year units should mainly be practical application of theory					
Tutorials should be limited to a maximum of 15 students					
Tutorials should only cover the application of lecture material through set questions					
Some tutorial time should be allocated to group assignments					
Tutorials should only cover the application of lecture material through interactive experiences					
Monitoring in tutorials by the lecturer of group assignment progress helps my learning					
It is an advantage to have the lecturer as the tutor					
Lecturers & tutors do not communicate with each other					
Lecturers & tutors seem to disagree on various topics					

If you wish, please elaborate on any of the areas in Q3 above: \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

**4. LEARNING SUPPORT ISSUES**

a) Using the scale below, please tick the relevant box that best represents your level of agreement for each item.

	Strongly agree (1)	Moderately agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Moderately disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
Timetable clashes have adversely limited my choice of units					
The 'Allocate' system has helped me with scheduling classes					
Assignments in all units always seem to be due the same week					
The library needs to have the latest texts					
The library needs to have more copies of required texts					
The library needs to provide more work stations					
The library needs to provide more quiet areas					
The library needs to increase the no. of document deliveries per student					
The School needs a specific person for offering course and unit advice					
Units need to offer employer placement opportunities					
There number of computers in labs. is insufficient					
Internet allocation is adequate for my study needs					

If you wish, please elaborate on any of the areas in Q4 above: \_\_\_\_\_

---

b) Students are given a monthly internet allocation. Do you believe the system of Internet allocation needs to be changed? Yes [ ] No [ ]

If yes, please give your views: \_\_\_\_\_

c) Using the scale below, please tick the relevant box that best represents how often you have experienced the following situations.

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)
Timetable clashes have forced me to choose between which unit to undertake				
Timetable clashes have forced me to choose between which class to attend				
Timetable clashes have forced me to choose between classes & work commitments				
Timetable clashes have forced me to choose between classes & assignment completion				

**5. PERSONAL APPLICATION**

5a. During semester, how many days per week (including evenings and half-days) do you typically spend on campus? Please circle the appropriate number.

1 to 2 days	1	3 to 4 days	2	5 days or more	3
-------------	---	-------------	---	----------------	---

5b. On average, how many hours per week (including weekends) do you spend on class preparation? This includes the following activities – pre-lecture reading, note-taking, literature research, tutorial preparation, writing, studying and other learning activities. Please circle the appropriate number.

None	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31+
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

5c. What aspects of your course do you enjoy the most?

Please rank your top THREE. Place a “1” in the box next to the aspect that you enjoy the most, a “2” for the second most enjoyable aspect and a “3” for the third most enjoyable.

<input type="checkbox"/> Achieving high grades	<input type="checkbox"/> Responding to lecturer’s questions in class
<input type="checkbox"/> Developing skills which will benefit my career	<input type="checkbox"/> Social activity with other students
<input type="checkbox"/> Gaining knowledge in a subject	<input type="checkbox"/> Voluntarily contributing to class discussions
<input type="checkbox"/> Group work with other students, when successful	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify)....

5d. What are the aspects of your course that you least enjoy?

Please rank your top THREE. Place a “1” in the box next to the aspect that you enjoy the least, a “2” for the second least enjoyable aspect and a “3” for the third least enjoyable.

<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties in working in some groups	<input type="checkbox"/> Irrelevant assessment tasks
<input type="checkbox"/> High workload	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor explanation of the awarded grade
<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate written feedback on assignments	<input type="checkbox"/> Responding to lecturer’s questions in class
<input type="checkbox"/> Introductory units are too basic	<input type="checkbox"/> The unit does not meet my expectations
<input type="checkbox"/> Too few practical opportunities to apply concepts / theories learnt	<input type="checkbox"/> Too much theory
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) .....	<input type="checkbox"/> Voluntarily contributing to class discussions

**6. PERSONAL FEELINGS**

Overall, please indicate the way you feel about the following aspects of your study. Please tick the appropriate box. If you have not, for example, used Student Services, please tick the *Not Applicable* box.

	Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very good	Not Applicable
The content of lectures						
The delivery of lectures						
The support from the lecturer						
Group work						
Support given to you by:						
.....the School’s admin. staff						
.....Student Services						
.....Library staff						

If you wish, please elaborate on any of the areas in Q6 above: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

<b>7a.</b> Your year of birth:		<b>7b.</b> Sex: Male      Female	
<b>7c.</b> How many units have you successfully completed? No. <input type="checkbox"/>			
<b>7d.</b> How many units are you currently enrolled in? No. <input type="checkbox"/>			
<b>7e.</b> Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>			
<b>7f.</b> Where were you born?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Australia		<input type="checkbox"/> Europe	
<input type="checkbox"/> Africa		<input type="checkbox"/> Middle East	
<input type="checkbox"/> Asia		<input type="checkbox"/> New Zealand/Pacific Islands	
<input type="checkbox"/> Central/South America		<input type="checkbox"/> North America	
<b>7g.</b> Where were your parents born?			
<b>Father</b>		<b>Mother</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>7h.</b> What is the primary language that is spoken in your home? (Select only ONE)			
<input type="checkbox"/> English		<input type="checkbox"/> Hindi	
<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal language		<input type="checkbox"/> Italian	
<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese		<input type="checkbox"/> Turkish	
<input type="checkbox"/> Greek		<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
<b>7i.</b> In your last year of secondary schooling, what type of school did you attend?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Catholic		<input type="checkbox"/> Independent/Private	
<input type="checkbox"/> Government		<input type="checkbox"/> Overseas school	
<b>7j.</b> In what type of programme are you enrolled?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelors of Business		<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor of Management	
<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor of Commerce		<input type="checkbox"/> Double Degree	
<input type="checkbox"/> Others...Please specify:			
<b>What is your main area of study? (Specialisation). Select one only.</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Accounting		<input type="checkbox"/> Entrepreneurship	
<input type="checkbox"/> Applied Economics and Finance		<input type="checkbox"/> Marketing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Brewing		<input type="checkbox"/> Organisational Management and Leadership	
<input type="checkbox"/> Business Law		<input type="checkbox"/> Tourism	
<input type="checkbox"/> Human Resource Management			
<b>7l.</b> What is your enrolment type?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Full-time		<input type="checkbox"/> Part-time	
<b>7m.</b> What are your living arrangements? Your main type of accommodation for this semester is?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Family/Guardians		<input type="checkbox"/> Renting with friends or co-tenants	
<input type="checkbox"/> Halls of Residence		<input type="checkbox"/> Own house/unit/flat	
<input type="checkbox"/> Private board		<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
<b>7n.</b> What are your major sources of financial support for expenses while at University? (Please choose up to 3; rank 1 as the major income source).			
<input type="checkbox"/> Any form of unemployment benefit		<input type="checkbox"/> Personal savings	
<input type="checkbox"/> Full time work		<input type="checkbox"/> Scholarship	
<input type="checkbox"/> Parental support		<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse/Partner	
<input type="checkbox"/> Part-time casual work		<input type="checkbox"/> Youth allowance/AusStudy	
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal loans from financial institutions		<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

**Thank you very much for your cooperation. If there are aspects of this survey that you would like to discuss, please contact any member of the research team.**

# A ten year citation analysis of major Australian research institutions

**Robin J Batterham**

University of Melbourne

The introduction of the Excellence in Research for Australia scheme has heightened debate amongst research institutions over the use of metrics such as citations, especially given the ready availability of citation data. An analysis is presented of the citation performance of nine Australian universities and the Commonwealth Scientific, Industrial and Research Organisation (CSIRO) that indicates that Australian Institutions perform significantly better than the global average. That said, the question is raised as to whether we are setting the bar too low. Finally, a tentative link between citation performance and application to innovation is noted.

## The importance of measuring research and development (R&D) performance

Public funding of research and development in most countries is seen as being of great value to the economy by both direct and indirect contributions. Many studies have estimated the benefits and while there is no clear cut figure, it is generally seen that the public benefit well outweighs the cost of publically funded R&D (Industry Commission, 1995). The links between public spending on R&D and innovation are documented and were analysed in depth in two major national studies for the Australian Government (Batterham, 2000; Cutler, 2008).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2008 found that the total funding on innovation was estimated at \$29b. Even acknowledging the benefits, given that funds are always limited, obvious questions arise. Are we investing enough or too much? How much should be in mis-

sion-oriented R&D versus unconstrained R&D? Should excellence be the prime determinant for government funding? Should research be prioritised? None of these questions is simple, and one of the most significant challenges is the measures that can be used to gauge the effectiveness of R&D.

## Performance measures for R&D

Leaving defence and matters of national security aside, most government funded research is published ultimately in the open literature. It is hardly surprising then that measurements based on publications feature so strongly in funding schemes or that there are clear calls for funding to be related to performance (Industry Commission, 1995).

Many countries take direct measurements in the form of research assessment schemes. Others use the indirect

route, e.g. the National Science Foundation in the USA, and the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council in Australia rely on peer review assessment for selection of projects. Peer review itself is heavily influenced by publications. Any other system would be open to the criticism of *insider knowledge* being the main determinant of funding.

It is interesting to note that at the country level, there are several analyses that show the relativity between countries and use this to justify arguments around the level of funding. The work of King (2004) on the scientific wealth of nations set a benchmark that was followed by Mashelkar (2009) in India who used a novel approach of rating publications per head against GDP per head, thereby showing the monetary advantage of doing research in certain countries, India in particular.

A similar international approach at a sectoral level was published recently to show that in the field of nanoscience, Europe and the USA publish a similar number of papers but the citation rate for the USA is over twice that for Europe. The suggestion was made that this may be due to the higher proportion of mission oriented work in the USA through the Department of Energy funded Government Laboratories (Roco, 2010) than in Europe.

It is hardly surprising that excellence features in any appraisal as much as the number of publications. Excellence is seen as a key driver in and of itself in that research judged to be excellent is seen as more likely to have a greater impact and to be more likely to attract collaborators. Given the availability of citation analysis for most publications, it appears inevitable that citations and the resulting *impact factors* will feature more and more in the allocation of funds, despite comments highlighting the limitations of assessment schemes (Nature Publishing, 2010a, b, c; Van Noorden, 2010).

Ultimately, the most significant measure of the effectiveness of R&D is its impact. It has long been recognised that this is the most difficult measure of all. The challenges include the length of time between discovery and application; the relative contribution of translational work, Intellectual property protection; development and scale up; marketing and speed to market.

Whether the final user is in the public domain, e.g. in health education or the private domain, the chain between R&D and innovation involves multiple steps and multiple players making impact measurement a real challenge. While impact is currently not in the *Excellence in Research for Australia* (ERA) scheme, it is now under trial in several universities in the UK for

their *Research Assessment Scheme* (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2010).

## A relation between citations and innovation

Given the difficulty of measuring impact, it is informative to note the work of Breitzman (2001) who investigated the published science that underpins the prior art disclosed in patents. He showed that where the prior art involved higher citation rankings, the companies' stock price outperformed other companies by a large margin over a ten year period. This is one of the few examples of a demonstrated connection between the quality of R&D as measured by citation impact and innovation as measured by patent activity and ultimately the stock price of companies. Schwartz (2004) also noted the same trend using a similar procedure in 2004. An analysis along these lines for Australia could be interesting.

## Recent citation analyses of Australia's R&D performance.

Of several analyses of Australian performance at the institutional level, that from the Forum of European Australian Science, Engineering and Technology Discussion Paper (Matthews *et al.* 2009) shows that overall, Australia performs above the world average but that when international collaboration is involved, the citation impact is markedly increased (see Figure 1 from Matthews *et al.*, 2009). From a simple minded view of economic efficiency, one might argue that if citation impact were the primary goal, then some of the funding spent within Australia should be redirected to offshore collaboration.

The other recent analysis that looks at the totality of Australia's performance is the Australian Innovation System Report by the Australian Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (2010). This report acknowledges the difficulty of measuring innovation performance and focuses on R&D capacity as an essential element of the national innovation system. Given that the Government has a target of increasing the number of research groups performing at world class levels, the proxy of performance is taken as the number of research fields with higher than world average citation rates over the period 2004-2008. The report suggests Australia achieved this level in 19 of the 22 fields.

Given that excellence can be linked to greater levels of international collaboration as well as a higher

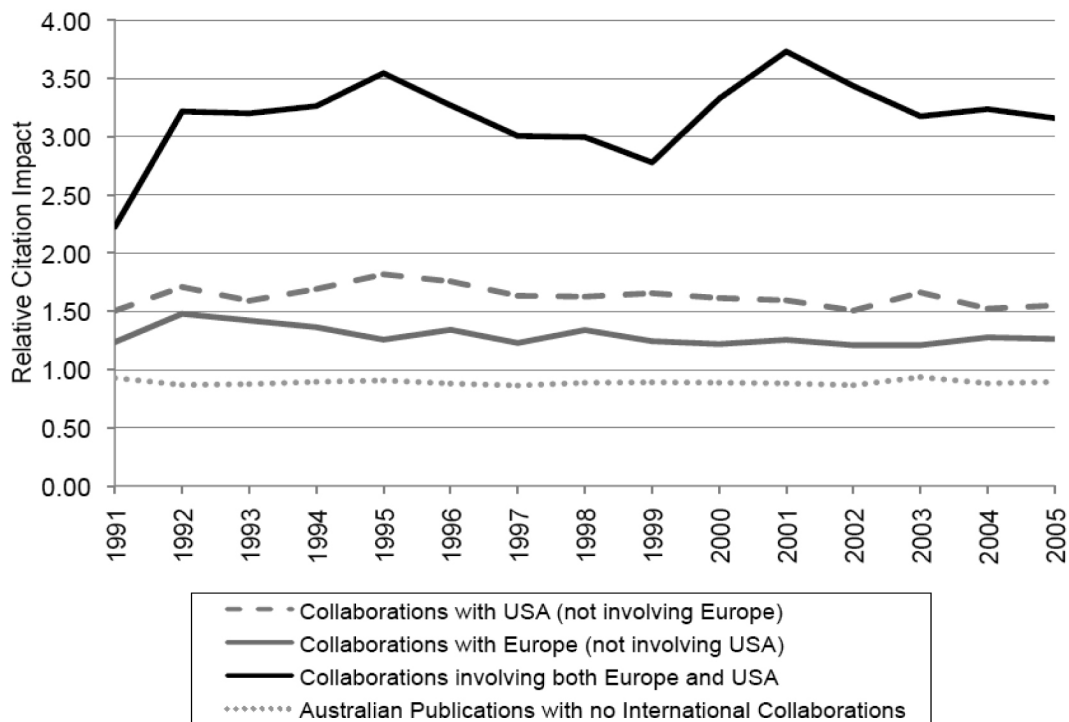


Figure 1 Relative citation impact of science citation index publications 1991-2005

impact in innovation through the support of patents, we may well question why being “above average” is adequate. For a nation that publishes of order two or three per cent of the world’s publications, one might argue that the target should be much higher.

**An analysis of ten institutions in Australia for the period January 1999 to November 2009**

In this paper we consider ten institutions in Australia, chosen in terms of the highest numerical score for either publications or citations totalled across all 22 of the fields in the Thompson ISI Essential Science Indicators (ESI). At the outset one notes that to be classified in any field, an institution must have had at least one paper published in the ten year period that is in the top one per cent of cited papers in that field.

The independent medical research institutions warrant comment. First, ESI analyses institutions as they appear on the author lists. Thus, despite close connection with universities, the independent institutions may not appear in the associated university numbers. Equally, as these medical research institutions tend to publish in a limited number of fields, they won’t appear in this analysis as the selection of the ten insti-

tutions for analysis in this paper is based on the total publications and citations for all twenty-two ESI fields for that institution. As an example, data for the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in Melbourne, Australia is noted at the end of the paper.

The ten institutions ranked by citation are shown in Table 1. As expected, this ranking is somewhat different to the oft repeated league tables e.g. the Times Higher Education World University Rankings and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University’s Academic Ranking of World Universities, and is because the analysis is based only on citations and covers a ten year period.

Using a scale measure such as the total number of publications or citations is not an absolute measure of quality. An institution might put out a large number of mediocre publications that would nevertheless attract a significant number of citations. Against this, a small institution might have a stellar performance in terms of citations per paper but be too small to feature in this analysis. Interestingly, while there is a gradation in citations/paper across the ten institutions, it is hardly marked.

Next let us consider where these citations sit as against the rest of the material indexed in the Thomson Essential Science Indicators (see Table 2). The rankings for each field are based on the number of Institutions

Institution	Citations		Papers		Number of Fields		Citations per Paper
	Number	Rank	Number	Rank	Top 10%	Top 10	
University of Melbourne	365,427	97	28,582	65	2	-	12.8
University of Sydney	354,109	99	29,847	55	4	-	11.9
University of Queensland	308,191	121	25,777	83	4	-	12.0
UNSW	242,937	173	21,249	125	1	-	11.4
ANU	240,425	177	18,394	153	2	-	13.1
Monash University	235,937	178	20,137	131	2	-	11.7
CSIRO	216,123	205	15,603	207	4	3	13.9
UWA	190,737	233	16,214	194	1	-	11.8
University of Adelaide	142,250	312	13,156	248	-	-	10.8
University of Newcastle	60,138	603	6,540	505	-	-	9.2

**Table 1: Top 10 institutions in Australia ranked on the basis of total publications and citations listed in the Thomson Essential Science Indicators**

that are in absolute terms in the top 10 institutions in the world as well as a column showing where the ranking fits as a percentage (the top 10 per cent of all institutions in the field, 25 per cent, 50 per cent and >50 per cent).

Of the 22 fields, Australia at an institution level is above average in nineteen of the fields as stated in the Australian Innovation System Report 2010 but more interestingly, if we define world class as in the top 10 per cent, Australia is world class in six of the fields with clinical medicine and plant and animal science being quite extraordinary results.

Equally meritorious is that CSIRO at the institution level is the only institution in Australia that is ranked as being in the top 10 institutions in the world (absolute) and does so in three of the fields, none of which involve a particularly small number of institutions worldwide which would then inflate the likelihood of being in the top 10.

The relatively large number of institutions publishing in particular fields and ranking well below world average performance raises interesting questions. Uncomfortable and all as the question is, should our limited research funds be used

this way or are we better targeting bringing those near the top (say the top 25 per cent) up to the top 10 per cent?

Course	Number of Institutions					Total for world
	Top 10	Top 10%	Top 25%	Top 50%	Top 100%	
Clinical medicine	0	6	9	10	10	3047
Plant & animal science	1	6	7	9	10	877
Environment/ecology	1	2	5	9	9	541
Geosciences	0	2	3	6	10	443
Engineering	0	1	9	10	10	1084
Social science	0	1	6	9	10	681
Agricultural sciences	1	1	5	6	8	438
Chemistry	0	0	5	8	10	941
Biology and biochemistry	0	0	4	9	9	714
Computer Science	0	0	4	8	8	335
Materials science	0	0	4	5	7	631
Psychiatry/psychology	0	0	3	7	9	385
Pharmacology & toxicology	0	0	3	4	5	388
Neuroscience & behaviour	0	0	2	5	8	458
Microbiology	0	0	2	4	7	329
Immunology	0	0	1	6	7	305
Physics	0	0	1	5	7	681
Molecular biology & genetics	0	0	0	2	9	423
Mathematics	0	0	0	2	5	194
Space science	0	0	0	1	4	134

**Table 2: Ranking of Australian Institutions by field against the rest of the world**



## Data on individual fields and universities

Sitting behind the analysis in Table 2 of overall Institution rankings for each of the 22 fields is the data that corresponds to the performance of each Institution in each of the 22 fields. Appendix 1 shows the ranking by citation for each field for each of the top ten institutions. Within each field, one finds different numbers of Institutions on a worldwide basis, e.g. there are 3047 Institutions in Clinical Medicine but only 877 for Plant and Animal Science. To simplify the presentation and facilitate comparisons, the absolute rankings are converted to a percentage ranking. As an example, the University of Sydney citations for the field of Clinical Medicine rank 73 from 3047 institutions worldwide reported in the Web of Science. This is shown on the diagram for Clinical Medicine as Sydney, 2.4 per cent as the rank has been converted to a percentage.

The data in Appendix 1 graphically confirm the pre-eminence of some Australian institutions. To this analyst, it suggests the question that if higher citations imply more impact and innovation, as argued above, should Australia concentrate more of its research funding on those that are performing at the higher levels, e.g. the top 25 per cent of their peers in the world?

## Data for the independent medical research institutions

The analysis in this paper used citations and publications across all twenty-two fields of the ESI and then took the top ten institutions. This absolute scale misses the smaller but prestigious institutions such as the medical research institutes. Consider as an example the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute (WEHI). For a ten year period from January 2000, the Institute had 55189 citations covering seven of the twenty-two fields, thereby just missing out on the analysis in this paper. On a specific field-basis, say immunology, their citations of 12580 put them just behind the University of Melbourne (15226) and Monash University (13139) but ahead of all other institutions in Australia.

Most meritorious is that WEHI has 37.2 citations per paper for immunology against a world average of 20.4.

## Conclusion

An argument is outlined that high rankings on citations are an indicator of more effective innovation. The analysis of a ten year performance window for ten of

the top publishing institutions in Australia certainly supports the claim that Australia's performance is well above average.

An unanswered question logically follows of how much better could we do and whether this entails focusing effort on our top performers and those that are close to the top. This is a topic that demands a deeper analysis than this paper, with its aggregation at an institutional level.

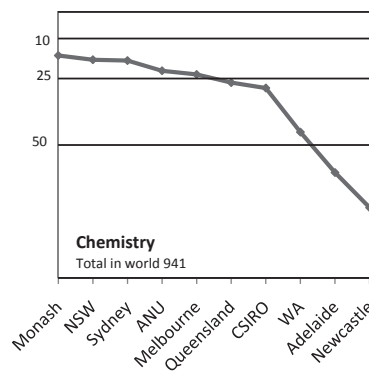
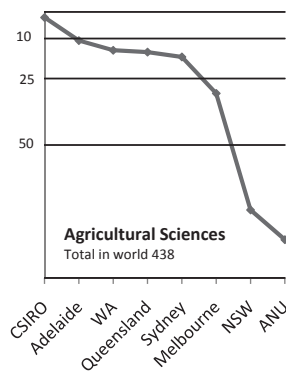
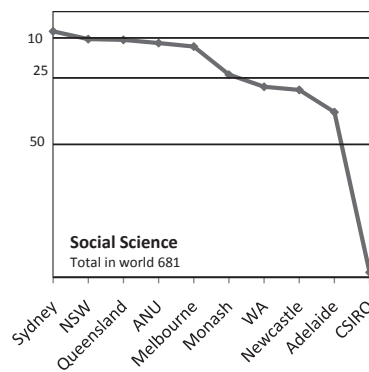
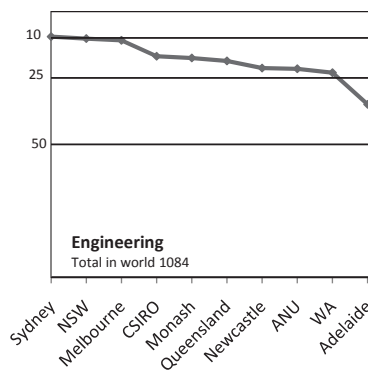
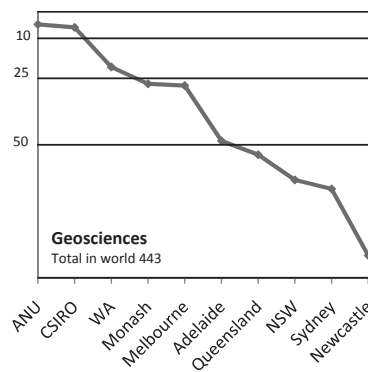
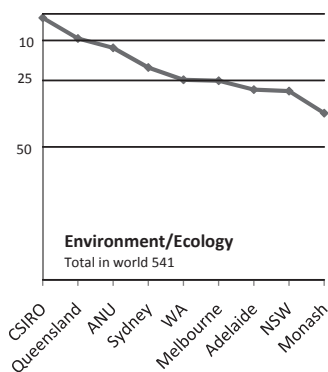
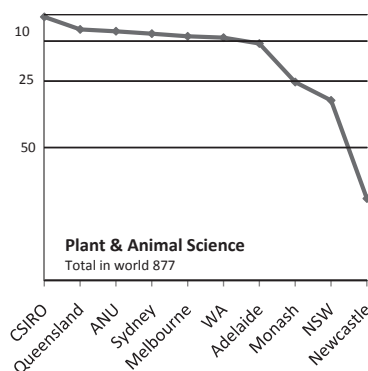
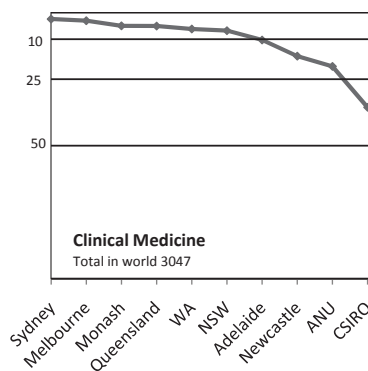
**Robin J Batterham is Kernot Professor of Engineering at the University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia and a former Chief Scientist of Australia.**

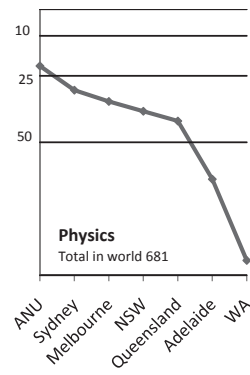
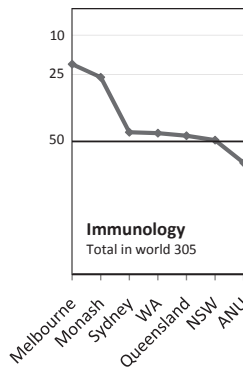
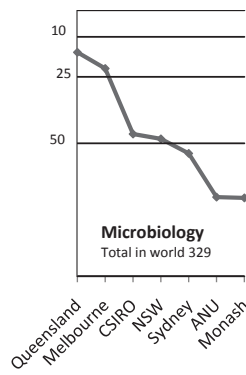
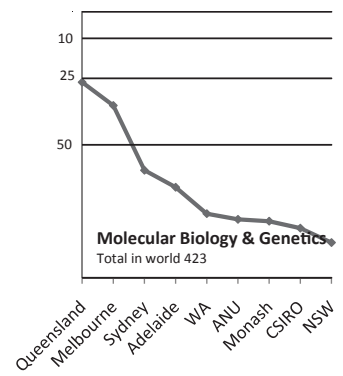
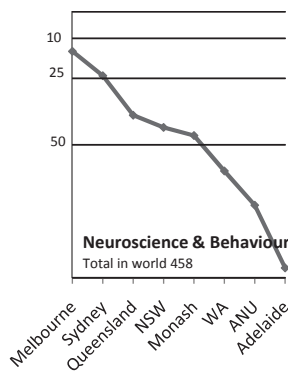
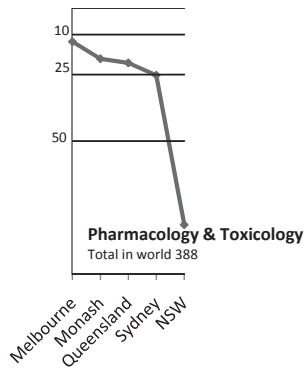
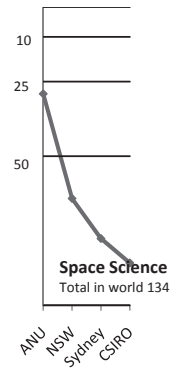
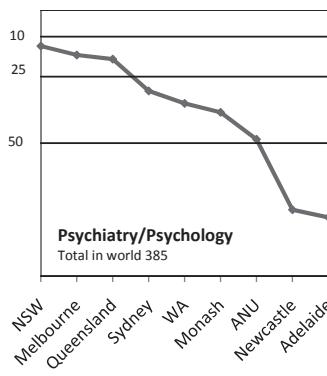
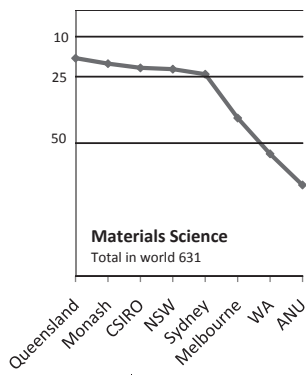
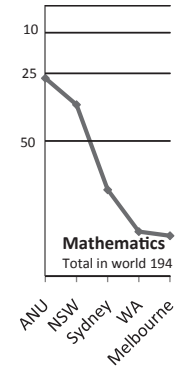
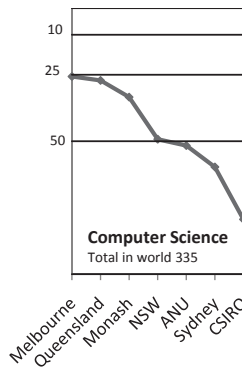
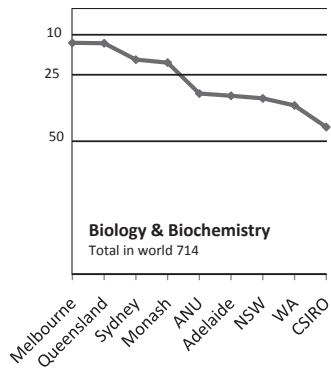
## References

- Batterham, R.J. (2000). *The chance to change: a discussion paper*. Department of Industry, Science and Resources, Canberra.
- Breitzman, A. (2001). *Identifying undervalued companies via patent analysis as a means of highlighting merger/acquisition targets*. National Meeting of the American Chemical Society, San Diego.
- Cutler, T. (2008). *Public and private sector alliances for innovation and export development: The Australian experience*. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).
- Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Australian Government. (2010). *Australian Innovation System Report*.
- Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2010). *Research excellence framework impact pilot exercise*. HEFCE, <http://hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/impact/>.
- Industry Commission (1995). *Australian Government Research and Development. Report No. 44, 1995*. Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2008). *Research and experimental development, all sector summary, Australia, 2006-07*. 8112.0. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/productsbytopic/07E66F957A46864BCA25695400028C64?OpenDocu ment>
- King, D.A. (2004). What different countries get for their research spending. *Nature* 430, 311-316.
- Mashelkar, R.A. (2009). *Changing geography of science, technology and innovation*. Asian Particle Technology Symposium, New Delhi, 14 September 2009.
- Mathews, M., Biglia, B., Henadeera, K., Desvignes-Hicks, J., Faletic, R., Wenholz, O. (2009). *A bibliometric analysis of Australia's international research collaboration in science and technology: analytical methods and initial findings*. Forum of European-Australian Science, Engineering and Technology (FEASTS) corporation, Discussion paper.
- Nature Publishing. (2010a). Assessing assessment. *Nature*, 465, 845.
- Nature Publishing. (2010b). Do metrics matter? *Nature*, 465, 860-862.
- Nature Publishing. (2010c). How to improve the use of metrics. Opinion. *Nature*, 465, 870-872.
- Roco, M. (2010) *A long term view of nanotechnology development*. The International GENNESYS Congress on Nanotechnology and Research Infrastructures, Barcelona.
- Schwartz, E.I. (2004). *The Sound War*. Technology Review, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Van Noorden. R. (2010). A profusion of measures. *Nature* 465, 864-866.

**Appendix 1**

Ranking by citation as a percentage. The number in the box refers to the total number of institutions in a particular field.





# Supporting and evaluating transitional learning for international university students

**Alison Owens**

Central Queensland University

In 2007, as part of its response to the continuing diversification of students, Central Queensland University introduced a for-credit undergraduate course, *The Principles of University Learning*, focusing on 'learning to learn' in the Australian university context. The aim was to support the transition of learners with diverse prior learning experiences into the Australian model of education requiring independent and active learning strategies deployed in critical engagement with diverse materials in changing contexts. This paper presents research conducted to evaluate the outcomes of the course reflected in quantitative and qualitative data collected for a total of 144 course graduates. Grade Point Average (GPA) results collected over three terms of study were reviewed for course graduates. In addition, research also reviewed qualitative data related to the course to establish its effect on student perceptions about learning. This report includes background information and rationale as well as research results identified over 2008-09.

## Introduction

Central Queensland University's (CQU) decision to introduce a for-credit course focused on learning to learn in 2007 was exceptional in the university sector where the convention is to provide learning support as a preliminary or peripheral option not counting towards the student's formal program of study. All courses benefit from evaluation of outcomes and as the intended outcomes of this course were to improve learning experiences and achievements for diverse learners across all courses, a CQU Learning and Teaching Grant was awarded to support research of quantitative and qualitative data for 144 course graduates of 2007-08. This paper presents a summary of issues

backgrounding transitional challenges for diverse students and conventional university learning support provisions then describes course development, objectives and outcomes.

## Background: student diversity & curriculum

The demographic diversification of students participating in higher education has continued for the last two decades as a consequence of rapid and continuing technologisation engendering a globalised 'knowledge economy' in which participants who are able to learn, unlearn and re-learn (Malloch Brown, 2006) remain current and effective in a discipline or professional field. Age, gender, cultural background, first lan-

guage, geographic location and even prior education no longer prohibit individuals from entering university programs as universities create flexible pathways to accommodate the backgrounds and needs of their diverse students.

The following trends indicate the complexity of this diversification in Australian universities. The total number of persons studying for a qualification who attained a bachelor degree increased from 14 per cent in May 1997 to 21 per cent in May 2007 which represents the most notable increase of all educational sectors (ABS, 2007a). Not only are there more Australians entering university per capita, but they derive from increasingly disparate social contexts reflected, for example, in the changing trends in student age - under half of the 2.5 million Australians studying for

a qualification in 2007 (43 per cent) were in the 15 to 19 age group (ABS, 2007b) - and study mode - university students studying from home increased 4 per cent per year between 1982-

1993 (ABS, 1995). A further contributing factor to increased student diversity in Australian universities has been steadily growing numbers of international students moving from under 19 per cent of all enrolments in 2001 to over 25 per cent in 2008 (Ross 2008, p.6). At CQU, the proportion of international students is significantly higher at over 40 per cent. Clearly, any notion of a 'typical' student as an Australian high school graduate studying fulltime on Campus is increasingly redundant.

CQU has experienced particularly dramatic diversification of its student population for two main reasons: first, as a regional institution, it provides programs across vast distances allowing students in diverse locations and communities to study internally or by distance; second, CQU's interstate metropolitan campuses attract large numbers of international students from over a hundred different countries. An important question confronting the institution and its teaching staff is: how can curriculum be revised to accommodate the needs of such diverse learners?

### **How the sector incorporates learning how to learn**

Like most Australian universities, CQU offers internal study support options and services for all students at

no extra cost through dedicated 'skills centres' including the CQU Communications Learning Centre and Learning Skills Units. These centres are proactive and effective offering academic skills workshops, short courses and individual advice in person and over the internet as required. Many students elect to take advantage of these services; many don't. A key reason students may not participate in such 'add on' study support sessions is the natural tendency to prioritise workloads associated with for-credit course work.

A quick survey of universities in Australia confirms that study skills support is widely available in diverse modes including one to one and group based sessions, face to face and remote mode, as well as text based support online or in print. Group-based, delivery modes are referred to by a host of terms including but

not limited to: 'courses', 'workshops', 'units', 'tutorials', 'lectures' and 'programs'. Schedules for these sessions are almost invariably accompanied by careful qualification and reminder that such learning sessions

are 'not for credit' towards a degree. The reluctance of Faculties to credit the study of 'learning' itself is by no means confined to Australian universities. US and UK based universities also tend to offer study support as a 'not for credit' service although the availability of such support seems more limited than within Australian institutions and is more commonly available as a foundation or preparatory, fee-based study program rather than a value added service for enrolled degree students (UCLA and Coventry University are examples).

At a recent symposium on the standard of English communication skills achieved by Australian university graduates (AEI, 2007), many industry representatives bemoaned the reluctance of university Faculties to include continuing English communication development as part of for-credit courses. Plentiful study texts are published by institutions explaining to students how to succeed at Australian universities and English expression, written and oral, technical and stylistic, features centrally in such study skills texts. However, if universities do indeed seek to promote active and collaborative learning as recommended by Chickering and Gramson (1994), they must move beyond a text based strategy. Those institutions who accept that learning to learn, unlearn and re-learn is not only beneficial but crucial for learners to progress both in their

---

### **An important question confronting the institution and its teaching staff is: how can curriculum be revised to accommodate the needs of ... diverse learners?**

---

university program and as lifelong learners in a professional career may include a 'learning to learn' course as a legitimate and for-credit unit in a program of study recommended to students across disciplines. This is what has happened at CQU.

### Course rationale, objectives and design

In 2006, a multidisciplinary group of academic staff worked in a consultative team to develop a first year university course, the *Principles of University Learning (PoUL) EDED11449*, designed to facilitate the transition of students into the critical model of university learning and teaching common to most 'western' universities. The provision of such a course at CQU was driven by large enrolments of international students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds who had experienced prior learning and teaching approaches that were different from and even incommensurable with current Australian approaches which emphasise independent learning, active student engagement and critical discourse. Instead, many international students have learning and teaching expectations framed in teacher-centred practice and examination-only assessment. Rather than simply teach students to write an essay or report or reference the work of other authors, this course sought to make encultured approaches to learning explicit, invited students to reflect on their own learning and teaching preferences and expectations in relation to the Australian model, and provided guided development of independent and collaborative learning skills and strategies across the range of common assessment modes.

Initially, the course was offered to international students only. In 2008, the Course was revised and extended to include domestic students, both internal and flex on the assumption that all students can benefit from explicit guidance in developing metacognitive self-awareness and competence, information literacy skills and appropriate English communications for academic purposes. Collaborative learning achieved by students in international-domestic teams is a key ambition for the course now that both cohorts are enrolled and future research may test whether this was achieved and to what effect. As international student and domestic student collaboration and integration is notoriously elusive and sparsely researched (Sawir, 2008) this promises to be a valuable exploration. The research undertaken and reported in this paper was restricted to research of the academic progress and

qualitative commentary of the 144 international students who successfully completed the course in 2007-08 and continued studying at the university for one further term.

The course was premised on fundamental principles articulated in constructivist accounts of learning which emphasise the active engagement of learners in authentic tasks and the 'adaptive' cognitive process of 'coming to know' (Thanasoulas, n.d.; Jaworski, 1993). Constructivism acknowledges a personal involvement in learning where learners '...interpret what they hear, read and see on the basis of their previous learning habits. Students who do not have appropriate backgrounds will not be able to accurately 'hear' or 'see' what is before them' (Thanasoulas, n.d., p.4).

Where students originate from widely diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, an emphasis on comparing what is new with what has been previously learned enhances the capacity for all learners to revise or adapt their concept of 'knowledge' and how it is properly constructed. These constructivist values are reflected in three of the seven *Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* which are widely accepted and applied in the Australian university sector:

- Developing reciprocity and cooperation among students.
- Using active learning techniques.
- Respecting diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1994).

The learning outcomes of the course are articulated as follows:

On successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

1. Compare and contrast different conceptions of learning and how these influence student and instructor approaches to learning and teaching.
2. Explain the purposes, defining characteristics and changing nature of universities.
3. Apply principles of effective learning to your own study as the basis for successful lifelong learning.
4. Utilise a range of written, communication, presentation and teamwork skills relevant to University learning and global practice, (EDED11449 Course Profile, 2007).

As the course sought to develop independent learning as well as collaborative learning assessment tasks were designed to allow for development and demonstration of both. Assignment one required regular submission of individual reflections on learning as well as self-paced online Information Literacy Quizzes (ILQs).

Assignment one promoted extensive engagement with the Blackboard Course Management System common to CQU courses ensuring that students became skilled in navigating the technologies supporting their learning at CQU. As self-reflection is seen as a vital component of student engagement (Krause, 2006) and assists in coping with change (Clarke, 2005) reflective tasks were considered particularly suitable for new international students. The ILQs and the online submission of reflections also allowed students to receive vital instruction as well as feedback on their citation techniques via Safe Assignment reports. As international students are frequently disciplined for plagiarism (Anyawanu, 2004; Ballard & Clanchy, 1991) this was considered a useful safeguard for first year international learners.

Assignment two required students to form a group and work collaboratively to develop and deliver an oral presentation in answer to a critical question posed by the group. This task was designed in alignment with constructivist principles to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning by framing their own questions. In addition, purposive team work and speaking in public are authentic tasks common in professional practice.

As the development of this course was motivated by student diversity and represented an act of collaborative curriculum renewal, it was useful to evaluate the extent to which course objectives had been realised and to disseminate findings among the university community. As student diversity and curriculum renewal are topics of concern across the sector and are current Australian Learning and Teaching Council priorities, research findings may be of interest to the university sector generally, particularly in relation to how such a course, and specifically, such assessment strategies can affect academic standards across all courses.

## Research method

The key questions driving this research were:

1. To what extent have the learning outcomes of EDED14449 been achieved a) by student account, and b) by student performance?
2. How has the course impacted on participants' approaches to learning?

At the time in which this research was initiated there were four terms of quantitative data (student course results and Grade Point Average (GPA)) as well as qualitative data (student reflections and focus group discus-

sion) making it possible to test the value of the course both from the subjective perspective of students and the objective perspective of GPA movements in a triangulated research design.

Quantitative or numerical data in the form of student grades can provide an account of how large numbers of students are performing in their course work as measured by assessment criteria and teachers. This is important information by which students are deemed to progress or not in their programs of study and allows for a comparison between the PoUL sample and a randomly selected sample of the rest of the undergraduate (non-PoUL) student population. The Grade Point Average is calculated by adding together the grades for every course completed per term by each student and dividing this result by the total number of courses completed.

Quantitative data cannot, however, provide the rich, experiential data required to explore changes in approaches to learning. Written reflections were therefore reviewed for 136 students from the total of 144 PoUL graduates. These students were located at a range of campuses in Sydney, Melbourne and Gold Coast and were instructed by different teachers. Student reflections were coded for common themes and repeated comments and metaphors to build a picture of the most common experiences of changes in learning for the group of learners. In addition, these reflections were scanned for evidence of changes in academic writing techniques and strategies including use of quotation, paraphrase and reference as well as use of evidence and examples in written exposition.

Hence, this research involved analysis of pre-existing quantitative and qualitative data seeking evidence of improved learning outcomes and changes in approaches to learning. Such a design allowed a check for correlations between student perceptions of how their learning may have progressed and their teachers' perceptions of their learning competence reflected in formal grades.

## Results

### *Grade Point Average (GPA)*

As a central objective of this course was to improve student learning strategies and outcomes across discipline, Grade Point Averages were reviewed for all 144 students who passed PoUL across consecutive terms of study for all the courses that they undertook, regardless of discipline. This represented a total of

four courses per term for a typical fulltime student. As a result of attrition, only 144 students out of a total of 181 who passed PoUL over the period of the study were enrolled in courses across two or three consecutive terms included in the study and able to contribute data relevant to testing movements in GPA.

Only students who passed PoUL were included in the data counts. It was decided that students who did not pass PoUL (a very low percentile who failed to attend 50 per cent or more of the course) should be excluded from the study as they had not actually successfully completed the course and could not therefore be expected to demonstrate the knowledge and skills delivered by the course. All the grade results for all 144 students, including fail grades, were included in data counts for GPA.

Whilst PoUL was designed primarily for new students to assist them with transition to undergraduate university study, large numbers of continuing students who were underperforming in their programs were also enrolled. Hence, for continuing students, GPA was collected for the term completed prior to PoUL (four courses). For continuing and new students GPA was collected for the term in which students studied PoUL (four courses), and the term completed immediately after PoUL (four courses). Any student can achieve a maximum GPA of seven and a minimum of zero. The minimum GPA to Pass or Pass Conceded/Supplementary is between 3 and 3.5. Table 1 shows the GPA and standard deviations for PoUL students across three terms of study in 2007-08.

An obvious outcome from this data is the inflated GPA for students for the term in which they studied PoUL. This was dramatic for continuing students who moved from 2.836 GPA to 4.214 GPA. This marked improvement was not surprising, as the course was intended to guide the development of strategies and skills supporting learning across disciplines and assessment modes. For example, PoUL course work explicitly attempts to assist students with their other consecutive course work by including information literacy workshops and repeated opportunity for research of electronic databases as well as requiring each student construct a study plan and schedule for all their courses over the twelve weeks of term. It was expected that students might perform better across all their courses in the term that they study PoUL for such reasons.

As evident in the data table, the post-PoUL term results are lower than the grades achieved in the term of PoUL but these grades are an improvement on grades achieved prior to undertaking PoUL. This indicates that PoUL graduate students have developed more successful study skills and strategies for ongoing learning. In order to check that PoUL was indeed the source of improved learning outcomes evident in the data, a control group of undergraduate students who did not enrol in PoUL was randomly selected and also studied for GPA movements across the same three terms. The results of this study are in Table 2.

For students who do not undertake a course in developing learning, the GPA does not show a significant improvement and, in fact, can show a decline in

grade as reflected in Term 3 results. However, these students are clearly in a better position to start with as they are achieving a GPA which is at pass level or better without assistance.

Whilst PoUL was designed for all new students, the tendency has been to enrol only new students who have problematic study records at point of entry to their undergraduate program as well as continuing students who are not achieving satisfactory academic

<i>Cohort: All students with prior and/or post PoUL results included</i>	<i>Prior term</i>		<i>PoUL</i>		<i>Post PoUL</i>	
	<i>average</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>average</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>average</i>	<i>SD</i>
PoUL student GPAs collated from 4 terms (total 144 students)	2.836	1.521	3.858	1.419	3.334	1.795
PoUL new students GPAs – 2 terms of study PoUL and Post PoUL (64 students)			3.413	1.495	3.116	1.84
PoUL continuing student GPAs – 3 terms of study prior PoUL, PoUL and post-PoUL (80 sts)	2.836	1.521	4.214	1.246	3.508	1.738

**Table 1**

<i>Cohort: non-PoUL students with 3 terms of results</i>	<i>1st term</i>		<i>2nd</i>		<i>3rd</i>	
	<i>average</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>average</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>average</i>	<i>SD</i>
Non-PoUL students (total 90)	3.829	1.397	3.844	1.567	3.793	1.585

**Table 2**



progress. The data indicates that PoUL can assist continuing students who are at 'academic risk' achieve significantly improved learning outcomes and can assist new students with a poor history of study prior to enrolling at university to achieve an overall pass in their first term of study. As international students commonly fail one or more courses in their first term of study (Levy, Osborn & Plunkett, 20003; Burch, 2008), this was considered a positive outcome.

A further encouraging data check performed for PoUL graduates was an audit against the University Misconduct Database where there were no records of misconduct (usually indicative of plagiarism) for the 144 PoUL graduates. The course appears to enhance student capacity to find and use information appropriately in the university assignments. This is a finding strongly supported by qualitative accounts from student reflections and focus group discussion.

### **Qualitative feedback**

Whilst the impact of PoUL on GPA is a critical measure of the capacity for the course to successfully transition students into the Australian model of teaching and learning a more in depth understanding of how this happens and what this means is understood by reviewing the study experiences of PoUL students in their own words. This was achieved by reading student reflections and by a review of student comments in a focus group discussion. A summary of results for these data sources is provided below.

The course was organised around twelve weekly topics and student reflections were required to focus on any of these topics which related to learning and teaching at university. Students were required to submit six reflections of up to 500 words each. These reflections were meant to relate to the topics of the course and also include personal commentary on what they were learning and how this required a shift in approach compared to prior learning contexts. The following is a summary of key themes from reflections submitted by 144 students over three terms of study and a focus group discussion with nine PoUL graduate students.

#### **Reflection 1: week 2-3**

The first reflection was focused on the differences between university learning and whatever study the student did last, often overseas in countries including Bangladesh, China, India, Nepal, Sri-Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam and so on. PoUL students undertook the Myers-Briggs learning style test along with other individual

learning preferences tests in the first weeks of term so that they reflected both on encultured or group norms/tendencies and discovered/reflected on their individual learning styles, strengths and preferences. Students enthusiastically related how they were having to adjust from teacher-centred, examination-driven learning contexts to the Australian context where they must study independently and in groups to demonstrate learning in changing assessment contexts:

In Australia the main objective of studying is to understand and to learn how to apply it in real life, but in Vietnam they are just being taught and forced to remember everything from text books to pass the exam (Vietnam, male).

In China, my teacher always tells me what should I do and how to do it. Western people consider such as education style will reduce students' creativity and independently. They laughed that Chinese teacher feeds knowledge to the student (China, female).

In Nepal, we had to face two major exams every half year to get through the course, but here we have to face exams, presentations, online test and group activities almost every day (Nepal, female).

There is a cathartic tone to these early reflections as students clearly relish the opportunity to explain their challenges and attempts at adjustment to their teacher. Few university assignments make room for writing about personal experience and it is evident in the volume of writing and the enthusiasm of these texts, that personal experience of adjustment needs to be expressed.

#### **Reflection 2: week 4-5**

In this set of reflections, student attempts at in-text as well as end-text referencing appear. This reflection is submitted after the Information Literacy class and the influence is evident. Many students have learned the meaning of common terms that they are assumed to understand. For example, they explain the purpose of a lecture as opposed to tutorial and can explain the concept of GPA as well as 'satisfactory progress'. Students also begin to point out limitations to memorisation and examination-only assessment regimes. Students are now able to identify a range of information sources including electronic journal databases, books, internet sites and lecture notes/course readings.

#### **Reflection 3: week 5-6**

Plagiarism is now well defined and penalties are understood and justified. Although, a few students submit

work that is inadequately referenced, it is, nevertheless, referenced. Paraphrase style when it is actually direct quote is the most common type of error. All students attempted to express ideas in their own words as well as 'blend' other sources into their writing. Plagiarism, it is explained, is to 'thieve someone's harvest' or 'treasure'. Some students are able to explain the difference between direct and indirect referencing.

There is a strong Learning Skills Unit (LSU) awareness and appreciation in these reflections which are written after the session on writing for university which includes LSU staff. Reflections now articulate the concept that students must read a range of texts (not just the set textbook) to develop their own position for strong, persuasive and credible argument. There are multiple uses of the term 'for example' as students practice clarifying meaning through the use of example and/or evidence as taught in the mid-term sessions.

#### **Reflection 4: week 7-8**

Students explain the rules of referencing and plagiarism as a priority and frequently give examples of their own error through prior ignorance based on culturally different teaching/learning environments.

This course should be compulsory for all new students, if only to understand plagiarism. I heard about it many times, 'don't plagiarise; be careful, don't do it'. I thought, 'what is plagiarism?' Then I did plagiarise and I found out what plagiarism is. Maybe this course should be free? (India, male).

Understandings of plagiarism are more sophisticated covering, impersonation, copying, resubmission and so on.

There are many recommendations that this course should be completed in first term by all students. Student disappointment at group member class-absences begins to be expressed in reflections as they work towards their group oral presentation.

Many students also acknowledge that they had not read rules and policies of the University – not even the terms and conditions of the student contract that they had all signed at start-up which lists their rights as well as their responsibilities.

#### **Reflection 5: week 9-10**

Student reflections reveal a clear sense of the importance of the pre-class, in class and post class study pattern required to get the most out of lectures and tutorials. The time management class in PoUL has a profoundly positive effect for many students who are

better able to manage their study load across courses.

This course makes student life more enjoyable because of better time management, we can relax more, we are less stressed because we are doing a bit all the time (Nepal, male).

This course provides the ability to handle four courses in one semester (new students especially),(China, female).

Appreciation for the support services of LSU becomes even stronger: 'LSU is a wonderful gift from our university to international students' (India, male).

Blackboard course management system and online resources are frequently praised: 'I will not lose my way of learning,' (Thailand, female). Students appreciate the time taken in the course to guide them through the study materials conventionally included in all course sites:

Learning how to use Blackboard and to download and use discussion board with lecturer feedback is very helpful (China male).

In this course we learned how to read the Course Profile and the course website. I started here one year ago and had my sister here who showed me how to use course material and website. If I didn't have her I don't know how I would have found the information I need. In this class they teach you how to find and use all course material and I wonder why I didn't do it before (China, female).

Most students are now able to articulate their learning strategies and are eloquent in explaining the importance of critical thinking and questioning:

We learn to challenge an idea or ask questions about a topic. In work we have to find ways to give our management good ideas. We must be able to interact with confidence with them. This helps with social life also. We have to be prepared to challenge and this course helps us get confidence in giving opinion or disagreeing. It comes from knowing there is evidence and what is the process to identify evidence (India, male).

#### **Reflection 6: week 11-12**

Students display confidence to go forward in their continuing studies.

Just like a cowboy to have all different guns in the belt (India, male).

Team work was generally popular and meaningful to students but also allowed for the development of friendships and social interaction so important to students far from home. Students are now able to list the

multiple forms of assessment and distinguish/justify formative and summative, formal, informal and non formal. They are able to distinguish purpose/context and features of different assessment tasks (e.g. report, essay, presentation) in their own words.

Universities not only aim at providing specialist education to their students but also in their overall development. The courses are designed in such a manner that they not only provide academic and theoretic knowledge to the students but also help them develop practically. Let's try to explain this with an example. Take the example of our renowned university and our presentation. Like the presentation we are giving today, it will help us in better conceptual clarity. I have to work with other students so it will help me in working in a team thus developing team attributes. The presentation I am giving will help my communication skills, bring in confidence and overcome my fear of speaking in public. The research I have to do for making this presentation brings to my knowledge various other aspects like the pace with which globalisation is going on ... (India, male).

## Conclusion

The learning outcomes of students who have successfully completed PoUL have improved significantly as a result of undertaking a course focused on transitioning learners from various prior learning contexts. The course has assisted learners adapt to the critical model of university learning in Australian institutions where learners must work independently and collaboratively across a range of assessment genres and contexts. The subjective commentary of students in their reflections demonstrates the key phases and adjustments made in the guided journey and also provides an outlet for the personal and often emotional experience of adjustment to a new learning context and frequently a new social context. Information literacy instruction and quizzing assists students overcome the high risk involved in learning to properly cite and reference material in support of learning. Collaborative group work assists them adjust to the new social context as well as engage in the team based discussion, debate and learning that characterises so much of the activity undertaken in the Australian university and workforce. Including a 'learning how to learn' course within the formal curriculum rather than as an optional add-on has been welcomed by students and teachers involved in this study and can establish improved study skills and learning outcomes for new students from diverse backgrounds.

**Alison Owen is Associate Professor and Deputy Director of the Central Queensland University's International Education Research Centre, Sydney, Australia**

## References

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics). (1995). Participation in education: Home-based higher education. *Australian Social Trends, 1995*, Retrieved 23 March 2008, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs>
- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics). (2007a). *Education and work*, Australia, May 2007, Retrieved 23 March 2008, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/>
- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics). (2007b). *Survey of education and work*, Australia, May 2007, Retrieved 23 March 2008, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/>
- AEI (Australian Education International). (2007). *Pathways, preparation and selection*. National Symposium: English Language Competence of International Students, August 2007, Sydney, Australia, Retrieved 28 March 2008, from: <http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/Shop/Products/Publications/Publication623>
- Anyanwu, R. (2004). Lessons on plagiarism: issues for teachers and learners. *International Education Journal, 4* (4), 178-187, Retrieved 24 May 2005 from <http://iej.cjb.net>
- Ballard, B. & Clanchy, J. (1991). Assessment by misconception: Cultural influences and intellectual tradition. In L. Hamp-Lyons (ed.), *Assessing Second Language Writing in Academic Contexts* (pp. 19-35). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Burch, T. (2008). Teaching and learning accounting with overseas students, *People and Place, 16* (1) 2008; 12-20. Retrieved 12 July 2009 at: <http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=157274631413497;res=IELHSS ISSN:1039-4788>.
- Clarke, M.K.A. (2005). *Mentoring reflection and learning portfolios: an investigation into practices that contribute to professional learning*. Doctoral thesis, University Western Sydney, available [online] Australian Digital Theses Program.
- Chickering, A.W. & Gamson, Z.R. (1994). Seven principles for good practices in undergraduate education. In K.E. Feldman & M.B. Paulsen (eds.), *Teaching and learning in the college classroom*, pp. 255-262, ASHE Reader Series, Needham Heights.
- Jaworski, B. (1993), *Constructivism and Teaching – the socio-cultural context*, Retrieved 9 January 2008 from: <http://www.grout.demon.co.uk/Barbara/chreods.htm>
- Krause, K. (2006). *On Being Strategic about First Year*. Paper presented at Queensland University of Technology First Year Forum Conference, October, 2006.
- Levy, S., Osborn, M. & Plunkett, M. (2003). *An investigation of international students' academic and social transition requirements*. Paper presented at ACM International Conference, Newcastle, New South Wales, Retrieved 7 July 2009 from Informit database
- Malloch Brown, M. (2006). Success Characterized by Ability to Learn, Unlearn, Relearn when Necessary, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Commencement Address, New York University, May 8, 2006, Retrieved 27 March 2008 from: <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2006/dsgsm285.html>
- Ross, J. (2008), Transnational Threat to Higher Education's Gravy Train. *Campus Review 18* (10), 6-7.
- Sawir, E. (2008). International Students and the English Language: how can we move forward? *Campus Review, 18* (4), 9-14.
- Thanasoulas, D (n.d.) *'Constructivist Learning' Teaching Learning*, Retrieved 4 January 2008 from <http://www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/constructivist.html>

# On being a happy academic

**Brian Martin**

University of Wollongong

Happiness research provides guidance on what academics can do to increase their satisfaction at work. Changes in external circumstances, such as salary rises, seldom have a lasting effect. More likely to improve long-term happiness levels are exercising well-developed skills, building strong relationships, helping others and cultivating mindfulness. These methods for improving well-being have some specific implications for academic life, suggesting strategies for individuals and policy-making.

## The issue of happiness

Happiness research has boomed in the past couple of decades and has attracted a public following. The findings from this research, when turned into recommendations for individuals, are usually presented as relevant to just about anyone — they are not highly specific to occupations. For example, the finding that expressing gratitude makes people happier is relevant in most circumstances: a person can express gratitude about completing a task, meeting with a friend, taking a stroll or eating an ice cream (Emmons 2007).

Nevertheless, it is possible to develop recommendations, deriving from happiness research findings, specific to occupational groups. Here, I look at implications for academics, a somewhat neglected topic given that most happiness researchers are themselves academics.

I first briefly outline factors that don't have much impact on average happiness levels, with implications for academics, and then turn to beliefs and behaviours that have been shown to improve satisfaction in sustained ways. Implications can be for individuals, academic groups and policy-making.

Like any research field, in studies of happiness there is a huge body of literature and a number of debates and differences. I mostly use findings from happiness

research that seem fairly well established. As well as technical studies in the field (e.g., Keyes & Haidt 2003) and surveys of research (e.g., Diener & Seligman 2004), there are a number of accessible treatments, including ones by leading researchers (Gilbert 2006; Haidt 2006; Lyubomirsky 2008; Ricard 2007; Seligman 2002).

The word happiness can be misleading, suggesting a superficial mood. Closer to the meaning used by most researchers is contentment, well-being or satisfaction with life. A person can be deeply happy in this sense without jumping for joy.

## Genetics and circumstances

As a rough rule of thumb, researchers say half a person's happiness level is determined genetically, 10 per cent affected by external circumstances, and 40 per cent by beliefs and behaviours that can be changed (Lyubomirsky 2008). Those unfortunate enough to inherit a low 'set point' for happiness can look at the glass half empty and rue their fate or look at the glass half full and make changes to increase happiness. Whatever the role of genetics, there is nothing much to do about it. (In principle, staff could be recruited according to their set points, an unlikely and ethically problematical prospect.)

External circumstances include salary, climate, good looks and material possessions such as cars and houses, among other things. The research finding is that these factors make little ongoing difference to personal happiness levels. A classic study examined lottery winners who initially were ecstatic but within a few months had reverted to close to their previous happiness levels. Indeed, following their lottery wins, ordinary activities like having breakfast were less satisfying than before, because they did not compare in intensity to the thrill of the win (Brickman *et al.* 1978).

The basic process that limits ongoing satisfaction from changes in external conditions is called adaptation: people get used to their circumstances and before long revert to their set points. This is also called the hedonic treadmill: people keep striving for material things to make them happy but end up in the same place. This process applies to things like new cars, new bodies (cosmetic surgery), jobs and promotions.

Although adaptation limits the benefits of improvements in the standard of living, it also protects against serious losses.

People who became paraplegics or quadriplegics initially were very unhappy but after a number of months were found to be nearly as happy as before (Brickman *et al.* 1978). Changes in income, house size, objective measures of health, education and so forth have effects on wellbeing, but they are quite a bit smaller than other things that people can do.

Most people systematically misperceive what will make them happier. Although increased income brings meagre happiness benefits, people keep striving for higher-paying jobs and do not readily learn this is not making much difference to their satisfaction with life.

Academics are widely said to be not all that materialistic because they could, supposedly, obtain higher salaries by entering another occupation, a claim that applies to some disciplines more than others and even then only to some individuals. However, most individuals compare themselves mainly to those closest to them, for example comparing their houses and cars to those of nearby neighbours — the proverbial Joneses — rather than those across town. So academics are more likely to compare their own salaries to those of colleagues rather than those of hairdressers or media magnates.

For many academics, rank is more important than pay: the status of being a full professor is more important than having an expensive car and plush house. Within a discipline such as physics or philosophy, internationally oriented academics are usually concerned more about their reputations than their salaries or ranks.

In terms of life satisfaction, preoccupations with salary, rank or scholarly reputation make little difference. Yet the quest for money and status dominates the lives of many: some make incredible sacrifices to achieve tenure and promotion, find a better job and obtain recognition from peers. At the collective level, academic unions and professional associations commonly seek higher salaries and more funding for universities. Figures show that a doubling of income per capita in a developed country makes little difference to average happiness levels — the society becomes richer but people are no happier than before (Eastbrook 2003; Frey & Stutzer 2002; Lane 2000). The same most likely applies to academics.

Academic unions and professional associations usually pursue percentage increases in salaries. A different option is to seek equal dollar increases, thereby reducing ratios between salaries. When salaries — and ranks and fame — are more equal, envy is reduced. Other parts of academic life would be more salient, in particular those with a possibility of greater satisfaction.

## Beliefs and behaviours

Research shows that the most reliable way to increase happiness in a sustained way is to change one's beliefs and behaviours. Important methods include expressing gratitude, being forgiving, creating and deepening relationships, being optimistic, entering a state of flow, being mindful and helping others. These and other methods can be applied to the special circumstances of academics. Here, for reasons of space, I focus on just a few: flow, relationships, helping others and mindfulness.

### Flow

Mihayi Csikszentmihalyi (1990) named and analysed *flow*. When a person has highly developed skills and

---

**Most people systematically misperceive what will make them happier. Although increased income brings meagre happiness benefits, people keep striving for higher-paying jobs and do not readily learn this is not making much difference to their satisfaction with life.**

---

exercises them at the limit of their ability — but not beyond — they may become totally absorbed in what they are doing, sometimes to such an extent that time passes without noticing it. This intense state of concentration can be deeply satisfying. Athletes absorbed in this fashion call it being 'in the zone.' Csikszentmihalyi found that flow experiences occur in all sorts of occupations and activities, from playing chess to piloting planes.

Doing research is an ideal activity for entering flow. Advanced skills are required and intense concentration is needed at a number of points, such as making sense of data, understanding theory and planning a research project. Even a seemingly ordinary aspect of research, such as reading a research paper and relating it to one's own ideas, may require considerable mental effort.

Flow can be so satisfying that people make great efforts to repeat the experience. Some scholars fit this pattern, devoting every spare moment to their quest. However, some have difficulty setting aside time for research. Urgent administrative or teaching tasks take precedence. Telecommunications technology, including email, the web and mobile phones, has increased the number of potential interruptions and distractions in academics' lives, with the result that entering and maintaining flow is more difficult.

A solution, at the individual level, is to schedule personal research time every working day and, at the scheduled time, turn off phones, email and other distractions, so that it becomes easier to maintain concentration — and, incidentally, to be more creative (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 120). At the level of an academic unit, an innovative policy would be to schedule daily times for everyone to do research. Another option is to respect individual research times as equivalent to teaching: interrupting someone's class is not normally done lightly, so neither should interrupting their research.

Flow is best achieved while doing tasks that are challenging but not too challenging. If tasks are too easy, there is a risk of boredom; when the challenge is too great, anxiety may result. Research can be calibrated to one's skill level: having investigated a topic in depth, it is always possible to go even deeper or to move to a different topic or a grander synthesis. There are not many jobs in which the skill required for extended work can be perpetually tuned to one's abilities. This is one of the attractions of a scholarly career.

There is a problem, though, for research students and junior academics: research expectations can be daunt-

ing, producing anxiety. A PhD thesis is a huge demand at the beginning of a career, as is publishing in top journals as a junior scholar. Early career expectations can cause anxiety and make entry into flow more difficult, a perverse effect given that flow helps to achieve top performance. Individuals can try to cope by trusting that ongoing effort will produce satisfactory results. At a structural level, one solution is to replace the PhD thesis with a requirement to produce a series of papers, an option at some universities.

Many academics — especially in non-laboratory fields — like to schedule research time in big blocks, sometimes a 'research day' once a week, feeling that they need several hours to get into their current project. The risk with this strategy is that the blocks of time are endlessly postponed. An alternative is to develop the capacity to enter the flow state fairly quickly, on a daily basis. People can certainly do this, for example with crossword or Sudoku puzzles, engaging them with full concentration so long as the puzzle is challenging but not overwhelming.

Scholars, after they retire, are much more likely to continue research voluntarily than undergraduate teaching. One reason may be that teaching has less status than research at most universities; another reason may be that entering flow is more difficult while teaching. A common problem is boredom: teaching the same material year after year can become tedious. To increase prospects for continued flow, teachers can set themselves challenges, for example up-dating the curriculum, using innovative teaching methods, or finding new ways to present material and communicate to students. The idea is to turn teaching into a thrilling on-going challenge instead of a dutiful necessity.

Entering flow while doing administrative tasks is an even greater challenge. Again, developing skills and setting challenges is the way to proceed. One reason why flow may be easier with research than teaching or administration is that most scholars spend years developing advanced research skills — through study as an undergraduate and as a research student — but relatively little time to developing skills as teachers and administrators. The greater the skill level in any endeavour, the greater the potential satisfaction from exercising that skill at an advanced level.

### ***Relationships***

Happiness research testifies to the crucial importance of relationships. These can be in the family or with neighbours, friends, work colleagues and in a variety

of other contexts. For many people, having relationships, especially deep and rich ones, is the single most important factor for life satisfaction.

For academics, relationships at work supplement those in other parts of life. In work roles, there are several types of relationships: with immediate colleagues, typically in nearby offices, with students, with peers in the field and with others on campus and in the wider community, including administrators, staff and cleaners. Any and all of these relationships are worth pursuing: initiating, maintaining and deepening. It can be quite satisfying to meet friends while walking across campus or to receive emails from like-minded individuals.

Several sorts of relationships are worth special mention. Research collaborations can be intense intellectual engagements. Co-teaching can be similarly worthwhile. The implication is that you can gain greater satisfaction from research and teaching by seeking and fostering meaningful collaborations — even if they involve more work than doing things by yourself.

Another valuable relationship is between mentors and protégés, the latter sometimes called mentees. Effective mentoring relationships require sharing

and gaining greater understanding of personal knowledge about capacities, goals, hopes and fears — all a solid basis for relationship-building. Mentoring relationships are often thought to be between an older, more experienced mentor and a junior mentee who needs guidance, but these relationships are seldom one-directional. It is also possible to have relationships with an opposite information flow, with a junior partner providing insight into social networking or the latest theoretical techniques, for example. Ageing academics can renew their enthusiasm by seeking mutual mentoring with junior colleagues.

Relationships with students, especially research students, are another potent source of satisfaction. They often have elements of the mentor-mentee relationship.

Relationships do not have to be comprehensive to be worthwhile. It is sometimes mistakenly thought that a friend needs to fill every role, from confidant to supporter, but it is quite possible to have friends who fill just one of many different potential roles, and to benefit from those friendships (Rath 2006). Academic

relationships often fit this pattern. Interacting with a collaborator or student can be fulfilling without the relationship satisfying every need.

To gain the most from relationships, it makes sense to take the initiative to meet people and build connections that are meaningful in the academic context. It is a mistake to assume that relationships just happen. Like happiness itself, relationships require attention and effort.

### ***Helping others***

Research shows that helping others is a reliable way to feel better yourself. Immediate pleasures like eating chocolate are transient compared to simple forms of assistance like helping someone cross the street. A career with regular opportunities to help others is worth a large sacrifice in salary. One study showed that graduates from Cornell Law School were willing to take public interest law jobs at a modest wage in

preference to high-paying corporate jobs, because the public interest jobs involved helping people who really needed help (Frank 1996).

Teaching involves helping students to learn and, beyond this, broadening their horizons and prepar-

ing them for life. To the extent that teaching actually does this, it is more satisfying. The implication is that you should design and run your classes to accentuate the helping dimension.

However, there is a qualification to helping. The psychological rewards from helping can decline if the process becomes routine. Too much helping — for example, caring for a family member with Alzheimer's — can cause burnout and depression. So it might be optimal to help students to help themselves or each other.

Helping others can also occur through research. The implication is to pick research topics that have a connection to social welfare rather than only career advancement. This need not be finding a cure for cancer; it might also be building safer bridges or providing insight to readers of Jane Austen's novels.

Another arena for helping is professional service, for example serving as an editor, referee or an official in a professional society. Then there is so-called community service, for example giving talks at Rotary clubs or

---

**Research shows that helping others is  
a reliable way to feel better yourself.  
Immediate pleasures like eating chocolate  
are transient compared to simple forms of  
assistance like helping someone cross the  
street.**

---

joining the board of a welfare organisation. Some roles outside academia are quite separate from academic activities, but often there is a connection, via skills developed in teaching or research. Community service has the spin-off benefit of building wider support for universities (Hall 2007).

In summary, academic work potentially provides numerous opportunities to help others, most obviously students, but also wider constituencies through research and service. Being oriented to helping is a counter to the usual self-interested preoccupation with workloads, status and personal advancement, and is likely to contribute to a greater sense of satisfaction.

### **Mindfulness**

Many scholars in the humanities and social sciences talk about reflexivity, or sometimes self-reflexivity, which usually means being aware of one's own situation or role as a researcher. Someone analysing discourse is being reflexive when drawing attention to their own discourse. More generally, researchers are self-aware when discussing their choice of research methods and when reflecting on their own position in shaping ideas within a research area. However, for greater satisfaction in life, a quite different form of awareness is worth cultivating: mindfulness.

The process called mindfulness basically means being aware of your own place in the world (Hanh 1975). While experiencing the world, you are simultaneously aware of experiencing it. This applies both to external sensations and to emotions: you can be mindful of how you feel. Being mindful can heighten pleasures and moderate negative states. For example, being aware of a looming sense of resentment or anger can defuse the negative emotion.

Mindfulness is beneficial in all sorts of situations, from family life to sport; it can be used to improve learning (Langer 1997). To realise the full benefits of mindfulness, continued practice is needed; Buddhist monks can spend decades in the quest.

Mindfulness involves being aware without passing judgement (Kabat-Zinn 1991: 33–34). This form of awareness may be especially difficult for academics to cultivate, because they are so used to exercising their critical faculties; being mindful means stepping back from constant judging. Robert Boice is one of the few advocates of mindfulness in a scholarly context. In his handbook on being a productive new academic (Boice 2000), he advises briefly pausing before beginning tasks, or in the middle of them, to reflect on their

purpose, in what he calls active waiting.

Mindfulness is a way to attain greater satisfaction in life, including academic life. Rather than getting caught up in angst over too much work, interruptions, bureaucratic impositions or interpersonal resentments, being mindful can help scholars step back from the rush of emotions and calmly see to the core of their activities.

### **Redesigning activities**

Two ways to increase day-to-day satisfaction are to choose to do different activities — or to do familiar ones in different ways — and to change the way we think while doing them. Sometimes it is worth seeking creative solutions.

Many academics, if asked to nominate the most tedious aspect of their job, would say marking of assignments. Nothing is more depressing than a large pile of exam papers or essays. Is there some way to turn the task into something more joyful? The tedium of marking might be alleviated by being mindful. Another approach is to reshape the task.

My goal over many years has been to design assignments that are both stimulating for students and enjoyable for me to mark. Gradually I developed tasks that allowed students considerable choice within a framework, so that I look forward to reading their work. Note, however, that developing such assignments requires a degree of control over assessment tasks. It is not a solution for those given piles of exam papers set by someone else.

Another activity often decried by academics is attending meetings, which are often experienced as boring and a waste of time. For those running meetings, the obvious solution is to design them to be stimulating, or at least effective (Maier 1963). For those who must attend meetings run by others, it might be worth suggesting some alternative formats; if this is not feasible, then individual coping is a fallback option. Rather than passive attendance, each meeting can be turned into an intellectual challenge. While simultaneously following what is being said, you can set yourself mental tasks such as counting backwards from 1000 by 17s, planning your next research project, composing a paragraph of text, memorising the position of every object in the room — a technique for strengthening memory (Restak 2003) — or reflecting on positive attributes of others in the room. The challenge is to do this while being respectful of others present.

In fashioning a satisfying academic life, the first



option is to choose activities — research topics, teaching techniques, service roles — with the greatest opportunities for flow, relationships and other contributors to happiness. The second option is to redesign activities to make them more satisfying. The third option, especially relevant for less desirable activities, is to adapt and cope by using techniques such as mindfulness and self-generated mental challenge.

## Conclusion

The job of an academic is one of the best possible in terms of opportunities for job satisfaction. Unlike most jobs, there is tremendous scope for entering the satisfying flow state — especially through research — when exercising advanced skills. Academic work provides opportunities for developing diverse relationships and for helping others through teaching, research and service. More generally, academics have considerable control over what they do, when they do it and how they do it, providing opportunities to shape daily experiences in satisfying ways.

Despite these advantages, many academics seem to spend more time complaining than being thankful about their circumstances. I know of no research about contentment levels of academics compared to workers in other occupations, but informal observation suggests academics are not distinctly different. The reason is that academics, like most others, systematically misunderstand what makes them happy and as a result pursue career advancement and peer recognition at the expense of more satisfying options. Furthermore, few academics systematically attempt to develop mental states, such as gratitude, forgiveness, optimism and mindfulness that have been shown to lead to greater satisfaction.

To cultivate happiness-promoting thoughts and behaviours, individuals can use exercises presented in some of the more practically oriented treatments of happiness (e.g., Lyubomirsky 2008). Working with others on such exercises has the advantages of providing motivation and building relationships. Changing policies and practices is a bigger project; it makes sense to work on these using methods that are satisfying, so the means reflect the desired ends.

Happiness research is still in its infancy but already has solid findings with practical applications. But scholars are not especially noted for studying research findings in fields other than their own, nor for acting on them. Like most people, academics think they know

what makes them happy and are reluctant to change their behaviour based on studies that say otherwise.

Academics, in certain fields at least, are oriented to critique, and some enjoy finding holes in the new 'happiness orthodoxy.' For example, it is easy enough to point out that positive psychology — the label for scholarly happiness research — is individualistic, as indeed is most psychological research. Does this then imply that pursuing the implications of happiness research involves a self-centred search for inner peace while social problems are neglected (Ehrenreich 2009)? This sounds plausible but is inadequate. After all, one of the key findings of the research is that great satisfaction can be gained from helping others, and this includes supporting union campaigns, joining peace organisations and acting against any social problem you'd like to name. Personal happiness is quite compatible with promoting social change.

Critics of happiness research sometimes position themselves as challengers to a new orthodoxy. However, the deeper challenge stems from happiness research itself. The social orthodoxy is the pursuit of money, possessions and status, all part of capitalist consumerism and competitiveness. Happiness research suggests there is more to life than the quest for money, power and status. In today's world, that is subversive indeed.

## Acknowledgements

For useful comments on drafts, I thank Scott Armstrong, Chris Barker, Rae Campbell, Lyn Carson, Annalise Friend, Ian Miles, Jenn Phillips and Kirsti Rawstron.

## References

- Boice, R. (2000). *Advice for New Faculty Members*: Nihil Nimus, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA.
- Brickman, P., Coates, D. & Janoff-Bulman, R. (1978). Lottery winners and accident victims: is happiness relative? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36, 917–927.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper & Row, New York.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, HarperCollins, New York.
- Diener, E. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). Beyond money: toward an economy of well-being. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 5, 1–31.
- Easterbrook, G. (2003). *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*, Random House, New York.
- Ehrenreich, B. (2009). *Bright-sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*, Metropolitan Books, New York.

- Emmons, R.A. (2007). *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA.
- Frank, R.H. (1996). Can socially responsible firms survive in a competitive environment? in Messick, D.H. & Tenbrunsel, A.E. (eds) *Codes of Conduct: Behavioral Research into Business Ethics*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 86–103.
- Frey, B.S. & Stutzer, A. (2002). *Happiness and Economics: How the Economy and Institutions Affect Well-being*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Gilbert, D. (2006). *Stumbling on Happiness*, Knopf, New York.
- Haidt, J. (2006). *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Basic Books, New York.
- Hall, D.E. (2007). *The Academic Community: A Manual for Change*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, OH.
- Hanh, T.N. (1975). *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1991). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*, Bantam Dell, New York.
- Keyes, C.L.M. & Haidt, J. (eds) (2003). *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-lived*, American Psychological Society, Washington, DC.
- Lane, R.E. (2000). *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Langer, E. (1997). *The Power of Mindful Learning*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want*, Penguin, New York.
- Maier, N.R.F. (1963). *Problem-solving Discussions and Conferences: Leadership Methods and Skills*, McGraw-Hill, New York.
- Rath, T. (2006). *Vital Friends: The People You Can't Afford to Live Without*, Gallup Press, New York.
- Restak, R. (2003). *The New Brain: How the Modern Age is Rewiring Your Brain*, Rodale Press, Emmaus, PA.
- Ricard, M. (2007). *Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill*, Atlantic Books, London.
- Seligman, M.E.P. (2002). *Authentic Happiness*, Free Press, New York.

# The new ERA of journal ranking

The consequences of Australia's fraught encounter with 'quality'

**Simon Cooper & Anna Poletti**

Monash University

Ranking scholarly journals forms a major feature of the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative. We argue this process is not only a flawed system of measurement, but more significantly erodes the very contexts that produce 'quality' research. We argue that collegiality, networks of international research, the socio-cultural role of the academic journal, as well as the way academics research in the digital era, are either ignored or negatively impacted upon by ranking exercises such as those posed by the ERA.

It has recently been announced that the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative will remain largely unchanged in the coming year, and will remain as an instrument used by the Australian Government to determine the level of research funding available to Australian universities (Rowbotham 2010). While there has been some unease about the ERA amongst academics, many seem resigned to the process. Perhaps some have simply accepted the onset of the audit regime and have bunkered down. Others perhaps welcome the chance to operate within the competitive environment the ERA brings, having discarded (or perhaps never subscribed to) the older cultures of collegiality that, as we shall see, are hollowed out by cultures of audit. Others may simply believe that the ERA provides a relatively neutral way to measure and determine quality, thus accepting the benign, if somewhat unspecific assurances from Senator Kim Carr and Australian Research Council Chief Professor Margaret Sheil that academics who stick to what they are good at will be supported by the ERA.

The ERA represents a full-scale transformation of Australian universities into a culture of audit. While

aspects of auditing have been part of the Australian context for some time, Australian universities have not faced anything like say, the UK situation where intensive and complex research assessment exercises have been occurring for over two decades. Until now that is, and a glance at the state of higher education in the UK ought to give pause. Responding to the ERA requires more than tinkering with various criteria for measuring quality. Instead we suggest the need to return to 'basics' and discuss how *any* comprehensive auditing regime threatens to alter and in all likelihood undermine the capacity for universities to produce innovative research and critical thought. To say this is not to argue that these things will no longer exist, but that they will decline as careers, research decisions, cultures of academic debate and reading are distorted by the ERA. The essential 'dysfunctionality' of the ERA for institutions and individual researchers is the focus of this article.

In discussing the pernicious impacts of auditing schemes we focus in particular on the journal ranking process that forms a significant part of the ERA. While the ERA will eventually rank other research activities

such as conferences, publishers and so on, the specifics of this process remain uncertain, while journals *have* been ranked and remain the focal point of discussions concerning the ERA. In what follows we explore the arbitrary nature of any attempt to 'rank' journals, and examine the critiques levelled at both metrics and peer review criteria. We also question the assumption that audit systems are here to stay and the best option remains being attentive to the 'gaps' in techniques that measure academic research, redressing them where possible. Instead we explore how activities such as ranking journals are not only flawed but more significantly erode the very contexts that produce 'quality' research. We argue that collegiality, networks of international research, the socio-cultural role of the academic journal, as well as the way academics research in the digital era, are either ignored or negatively impacted upon by ranking exercises such as the ERA. As an alternative we suggest relocating the question of research quality outside of the auditing framework to a context once more governed by discourses of 'professionalism' and 'scholarly autonomy'.

In 2008 the Australian Labor Party introduced the ERA, replacing the previous government's RQF (Research Quality Framework), a scheme that relied upon a fairly labour intensive process of peer review, the establishment of disciplinary clusters, panels of experts, extensive submission processes and the like. In an article entitled 'A new ERA for Australian research quality assessment' (Carr 2008), Senator Kim Carr argued that the old scheme was 'cumbersome and resource greedy', that it 'lacked transparency, and failed to 'win the confidence of the university sector'. Carr claimed that the ERA would be a more streamlined process that would 'reflect world's best practice'. Arguing that Australia's university researchers are 'highly valued ... and highly respected' Carr claimed that the ERA would enable researchers to be more recognised and have their achievements made more visible.

If we took Senator Carr's statements about the ERA at face value we would expect the following. The ERA would value Australian researchers by making their achievements 'more visible'. The ERA would reflect 'world's best practice' and reveal 'how Australian university researchers stack up against the best in the world'. Finally the ERA would gain the confidence of researchers by being a transparent process. All this would confer an appropriate degree of respect for what academics do.

## 'Respecting Researchers': the larger context that drives visibility

According to Carr the ERA provides a measure of respect for academic researchers because it allows their work to be visible and thus measurable on the global stage. Given that academics already work via international collaboration and publishers and processes of peer-review already embed value, the questions remains: for whom is this process of visibility intended? Arguably it is not intended for members of the academic community. Nor the university, at least in a more traditional guise, where academic merit was regulated via processes of hiring, tenure and promotion. In other words the idea of 'respect' and 'value' already has a long history via institutional processes of symbolic recognition.

Tying respect to the ERA subscribes to an altogether different understanding of value. Demanding that research be made more visible subscribes to a more general culture of auditing that has come to frame the activities of not merely universities but also schools, hospitals and other public institutions (Apple 2005; Strathern 1997). Leys defines auditing as 'the use of business derived concepts of independent supervision to measure and evaluate performance by public agencies and public employees' (2003, p.70); Shore and Wright (1999) have observed how auditing and benchmarking measures have been central to the constitution of neoliberal reform within the university. Neoliberalism continually expects evidence of efficient activity, and only activity that can be measured counts as activity (Olssen & other forms of intellectual activity) that lies at the core of the ERA is not simply a process of identification or the reflection of an already-existing landscape, but rather part of a disciplinary technology specific to neoliberalism.

The ERA moves away from embedded and implicit notions of value insisting that value is now overtly measurable. 'Outputs' can then be placed within a competitive environment more akin to the commercial sector than a public institution. Michael Apple argues that behind the rhetoric of transparency and accuracy lies a dismissal of older understandings of value within public institutions. The result is a

de-valuing of public goods and services... anything that is public is 'bad' and anything that is private is 'good'. And anyone who works in these public institutions must be seen as inefficient and in need of the sobering facts of competition so that they work longer and harder (2005, p.15).

Two things can be said here. First, rather than simply 'reflect' already existing activities, it is widely recognised that auditing regimes change the activities they seek to measure (Apple 2005; Redden 2008; Strathern 1997). Second, rather than foster 'respect' for those working within public institutions, auditing regimes devalue the kinds of labour that have been historically recognised as important and valuable within public institutions.

Outside of critiques that link auditing to a wider culture of neo-liberalism more specific concerns have been raised concerning the accuracy of auditing measures. The degree to which any combination of statistical metrics, peer or expert review, or a combination of both can accurately reflect what constitutes 'quality' across a wide spectrum has been subject to critique (Butler 2007). With the ERA, concerns have already been raised as to the lack of transparency of the ranking process by both academics (Genoni & Haddow 2009) and administrators (Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities 2008).

Though there is no universally recognised system in place for ranking academic journals, the process is generally carried out according to a process of peer-review, metrics or some combination of these methods. The ERA follows this latter approach combining both metrics and a process of review by 'experts in each discipline' (Australian Research Council 2010; Carr 2008). Both metrics and peer review have been subject to widespread criticism. Peer review is often unreliable. There is evidence of low correlation between the reviewer's evaluations of quality with later citations (Starbuck 2006, 83-4). Amongst researchers there is recognition of the randomness of some editorial selections (Starbuck 2006) with the result that reviewers are flooded with articles as part of a strategy of repeated submission. Consequently, many reviewers are overburdened and have little time to check the quality, methodology or data presented within each submitted article (Hamermesh 2007). In an early study of these processes, Mahoney (1977) found that reviewers were more critical of the methods used in papers contradicting mainstream opinion.

The technical and methodological problems associated with bibliometrics have also been criticised in the light of evidence of loss of citation data pertaining to

specific articles (Moed 2002), as well as geographical and cultural bias in the 'counting process' (Kotiaho *et al.* 1999). Beyond this there are recognised methodological shortcomings with journal ranking systems. The focus on journals, as opposed to other sources of publication ignores the multiple ways scholarly information is disseminated in the contemporary era. The long time frame that surrounds journal publication, where up to three years delay between submission and publication is deemed acceptable, is ill-suited to a context where 'as the rate of societal change quickens, cycle times in academic publishing ... become crucial' (Adler & Harzing 2009 p.75). Citation counts, central to metrical systems of rank, do not guarantee the importance

or influence of any one article. Simkin and Rowchowdhury's (2005) analysis of misprints in citations suggest that 70 to 90 per cent of papers cited are not actually being read. Moreover, there is no strong correlation

between the impact factor of a journal and the quality of any article published in it (Adler & Harzing 2009; Oswald 2007; Starbuck 2006).

Neither peer review, nor metrics can accurately capture how academic research is carried out and disseminated. Nor do they provide guarantees of quality. However, as Adler and Harzing observe, the privileging of any combination of these measures leads to different material outcomes:

Each choice leads to different outcomes, and thus the appearance – if not the reality of arbitrariness ...whereas each system adds value within its own circumscribed domain, none constitutes an adequate basis for the important decisions universities make concerning hiring, promotion, tenure and grant making, or for the ranking of individuals and institutions (2009 pp.74-5).

Senator Carr's hope that the ERA would 'gain the trust' of researchers is rendered problematic within a culture of audit. As Virno has observed 'cynicism is connected with the chronic instability of forms of life and linguistic games' (2004 p.13). The move within Australia from the RQF to the ERA, the lack of transparency as to the ranking process of journals within the ERA, the fact that there is no universal system of measurement, and that ranking bodies shuffle between the inadequate poles of metrics and peer-review, confirms the chronic instability of attempts to define and meas-

---

**With the ERA, concerns have already been raised as to the lack of transparency of the ranking process by both academics and administrators...**

---

ure quality. The result can only be, at the very least, a distortion of research behaviour as academics recognise and cynically (or desperately) respond to quality measurement regimes. As we move from the RQF to the ERA with a change of government, the scope for 'chronic instability' is vast.

It is widely recognised that those subject to audit regimes change according to the perceived requirements of the regime, rather than the long-held understanding as to what intrinsic quality governs their work. Strathern (1997) and Power (1994) have persuasively argued that auditing regimes are not merely reflective but are transformative. Such regimes contribute to the production of different subjectivities, with different understandings and priorities. Commenting on the reconstitutive capacity of auditing measures Cris Shore argues that 'audit has a life of its own - a runaway character that cannot be controlled. Once introduced into a new setting or context, it actively constructs (or colonises) that environment in order to render it audit-able' (2008 p.292).

Recognising the transformative nature of auditing allows us to focus on the unintended consequences of the journal ranking process. Privileging journal ranking as an indication of quality fails to comprehend how academics work within a contemporary context, how they work as individuals and as colleagues, how they co-operate across national and disciplinary borders, and how they research within a digital culture that is well on the way to displacing paper-based academic publishing. Indeed even if all the issues pertaining to accurate measurement, inclusion and transparency were somehow to be resolved, the ERA and the journal ranking exercise would remain at odds with the aim of generating sustainable quality research. Nowhere is this clearer than with the object at the heart of the process - the journal itself.

## Journal ranking and the transformation of journal publishing

Why privilege the journal as the site for academic value? Beyond the problems in trying to measure journal quality, the journal is undergoing a transformation. Journals are subject to a number of contradictory processes. On the one hand the journal as a place for disseminating research is partially undermined by alternative ways of circulating information. Adler and Harzing (2009) argue that academic research is no longer published just within the refereed journal but that books, book

chapters, blog entries, conference papers and the like need to be taken as a whole as representative of contemporary research culture. Moreover to place such a heavy evaluative burden on the journal, as the ERA does, fails to reflect the changed status and meaning of the journal within academic culture. Journal articles have become increasingly uncoupled from the journal as a whole. The increasing centrality of electronic publishing means allows people to read *individual articles* rather than whole issues. In an observational study at three universities in Sweden, Haglund and Olsson (2008) found that researchers increasingly (and in many cases exclusively) rely on Google and other search engines for research information, bypassing libraries and traditional sources.

Many researchers use a 'trial and error' method (2008 p.55) for information searching, using a selection of keywords and evaluating the result. A flattening out of informational hierarchies results, where the content of individual articles becomes more significant than the journal that houses the articles. Electronic hyperlinks extend this shift where academic reading takes place beyond the pages of a (vertically ranked) individual journal to a horizontally network database of scholarly articles. This extends the trend identified by researchers such as Starbuck (2006), whereby little correlation exists between articles and citation impact measured by journal quality. Ranking journals frames a mode of quality assessment around an increasingly irrelevant institutional form.

Conversely the significance of a small number of journals has been enshrined through the auditing process. While academics know that there may be little correlation between the journal and the quality of individual articles, they also know that careers may now depend upon publishing in a journal whose value has been 'confirmed' by a process such as the ERA. In this sense, despite the decentring of journals via the information mode, the journal is destined to survive; some will flourish. However, this is hardly cause for celebration given the general conservative approach to research taken by esteemed journals (Mahoney 1977), the knowledge that academics will tailor their work in order to fit in with the expectations of the journal in question (Reddon (2008) and finally, that many highly ranked journals are now products of transnational publishers, having long disappeared from the university departments that originally housed them and the community of scholars that sustained them (Cooper (2002, Hartley 2009).

This is not to dismiss the importance of the journal, but to argue that journals are socio-cultural artefacts whose most important work occurs outside of the auditing process. Ranking schemes like the ERA threaten to undermine the journal's social and cultural importance. While journals are under threat by changes in publishing and digital modes of access and circulation, many continue to exist by reference to a (imagined and actual) community of readers and writers. The decision by a researcher to publish in a journal is often made in terms of the current topic being explored within the journal, the desire to discuss and debate a body of knowledge already in that journal, invitations or requests by the editors, or calls for papers based upon a theme of interest to the academic. In other words journal *content* or *collegial networks* frame decisions about where to publish as much as the perceived status of the journal (Cooper 2002; Hartley 2009).

The problem with rankings is that these relations are in danger of being overlaid by an arbitrarily competitive system so that scholars will no longer want, or be allowed to (by institutional imperative) publish in anything below a top ranked journal, as Guy Redden (2008) has observed with respect to the UK situation. We suggest that the transformative capacity of auditing measures such as the journal ranking scheme that constitutes the heart of the ERA threatens to produce a number of perverse or dysfunctional reactions within the academic community that threaten to undermine research quality in the long-term.

### **The ERA and its perverse effect upon scholars and institutions**

Drawing on the above we want to focus specifically on some of the potential impacts of the journal ranking exercise. In particular, the potential for the mechanisms designed to measure 'quality' to create dysfunctional reactions and strategies within Australia's research culture. Osterloh and Frey outline institutional and individual responses to research ranking systems, indicating that at the level of the individual, responses tend to follow the process of 'goal displacement', whereby 'people maximise indicators that are easy to measure and disregard features that are hard to measure' (2009 p.12). As others have observed, the primacy of journal rankings in measuring quality for the Humanities runs a very high risk of producing such responses (Genoni & Haddow 2009; Nkomo 2009; Redden 2008). In his

article published prior to the development of the ERA, Redden drew on his experiences of the UK's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) system, to observe that narrowly defined criteria for research excellence can result in 'academics eschew[ing] worthwhile kinds of work they are good at in order to conform' (2008 p.12). There is a significant risk that a large proportion of academics will choose to 'play the game', given the increasing managerial culture in Australian universities and the introduction of performance management practices which emphasise short-term outputs (Redden 2008).

In what follows, we attempt to flesh out the impact that the dysfunctionality introduced by the ERA will have on the research culture in the Humanities in Australia. These points are based on our observations, discussions with colleagues both nationally and internationally, and review of the literature around research management systems. It is our argument that these impacts strike at the heart of collegiality, trust, the relations between academics at different levels of experience, how we find value in other colleagues, and how individuals manage their careers; all components fundamental to research practice and culture. The ERA displaces informal relations of trust and replaces them with externally situated forms of accountability that may well lead to greater mistrust and scepticism on the part of those subject to its auditing methods. This at least has been the experience of those subject to similar regimes in the UK (Power 1994; Strathern 1997). It should be noted that the potential for dysfunctional reactions has been acknowledged by both Professor Margaret Sheil, CEO of the Australian Research Council, and Professor Graeme Turner, who headed the development of the ERA for the Humanities and Creative Arts clusters (McGilvray 2010, Rowbotham 2010). In both cases, universities have been chastised for 'misapplying' the audit tool which, in Sheil's words, "codified a behaviour that was there anyway" (Rowbotham 2010).

### **Impact on international collaboration and innovation**

One impact of the ERA journal ranking system is the further complication it produces for international research collaboration. For many research practice is a globalised undertaking. The (limited) funds available for conference attendance, and the rise of discipline and sub-discipline based email lists and websites mean that many are networked within an internationalised

research culture in their area of specialisation. In the best case scenarios, researchers are developing connections and relationships with scholars from a range of countries. Before the ERA, these connections would form a useful synergy with a researcher's Australian-based work, resulting in collaborations such as joint publications, collaborative research projects, and knowledge exchange. Such projects can now be the cause of significant tension and concern; an invitation from an international colleague to contribute an article to a low ranked (or heaven forbid, unranked) journal, to become engaged in a collaborative research project which results in a co-edited publication (currently not counted as research activity in the ERA), or to present at a prestigious conference must be judiciously evaluated by the Australian academic for its ability to 'count' in the ERA. This can be determined by consulting the ERA Discipline Matrices spreadsheet. Projects such as those listed above will need to be defended at the level of the individual's performance management as the ERA is bedded down in performance management (a process which has already begun, with the discourse of the ERA being adapted internally by Australian universities). These unnecessary barriers restrict open and free collaboration, as Australian researchers are cordoned off within a system which evaluates their research outputs by criteria which affects only Australians. This seems even more perverse when we return to Senator Carr's framing of the ERA process in global terms; seeing how Australian researchers 'stack up against the rest of the world' - that the ERA would represent 'world's best practice'. Instead the structural provinciality built into a purely Australian set of rankings cuts across global research networks.

In all likelihood, scholars will feel compelled to produce work that can be published in highly-ranked journals. The result of this is a new form of dysfunctionality; the distortion of research and its transfer. Redden argues that:

Because of the valorising of certain kinds of output (single-authored work in prestigious form likely to impress an expert reviewer working in a specific disciplinary framework upon being speed read), researchers modify their behaviour to adapt to perceived demands. This means they may eschew worthwhile kinds of work they are good at in order to conform. Public intellectualism, collaboration, and interdisciplinary, highly specialised and teaching-related research are devalued (2008 p.12).

If the ranking of journals narrows the possibility for innovative research to be published and recognised

this situation may well be exacerbated by the uncertainty around *new* journals and emerging places of publication. The ERA seems unable to account for how new journals will be ranked, and arguably new journals are a place where new and innovative research might be published. Yet, it takes a number of years for new journals to even be captured by the various metrical schemes in place. For instance the ISI Social Science Citation Index has a three year waiting period for all new journals, followed by a further three year study period before any data on the journal's impact is released (Adler & Harzing, 2009 p.80). Even for journals ranked by alternate measures (such as Scopus) a reasonable period is required to gain sufficient data for the ranking of new journals. Such protracted timelines mean it is unlikely that researchers will gamble and place material in new journals. Equally the incentives to start new journals are undercut by the same process. The unintended consequence of the ERA ranking scheme is to foreclose the possibility of new and creative research, and the outlets that could publish it.

### Impact on career planning

Many early career researchers are currently seeking advice from senior colleagues on how to balance the tensions between the values of the ERA and their need to develop a standing in their field, especially in those discipline and sub-disciplines which have not had their journals advantageously ranked. The kind of advice being offered ranges from 'don't do anything that doesn't count in the ERA' to convoluted advice on how to spread one's research output across a range of outcomes which cover both ERA requirements and the traditional indicators of quality associated with one's area of specialisation. Professor Sheil has herself offered advice to younger academics, stating in a recent interview that: 'You should get work published where you can and then aspire to better things' (Robowtham 2010). Within a year of the ERA process commencing we already see evidence of academics being deliberately encouraged to distort their research activity. McGilvray (2010) reports that scholars are being asked 'to switch the field of research they publish under if it will help achieve a higher future ERA rating'. Journalism academics at the University of Queensland and the University of Sydney have already switched their research classification from journalism to other categories that contain more highly ranked journals. Similar examples are being cited in areas from cultural studies



to psychology. Such practices distort both the work of the researcher and threaten to further marginalise any journals contained within the abandoned field. Given the degree of institutional pressure it would be a brave researcher who would follow the ARC's chief executive Margaret Sheil's advice to 'focus on what you're really good at regardless of where it is and that will win out' (McGilvray 2010).

While some senior academics (including Professor Sheil) are encouraging early career researchers to go on as though the ERA isn't happening, and maintain faith that audit techniques will adequately codify the 'quality' of their work, or at least retain confidence in the established practices of reputation and the power of the reference to secure career advancement, this remains a risky strategy. Others encourage a broader approach to publication, especially where a sub-discipline's journals have been inaccurately ranked, and advocate re-framing research for publication in highly ranked journals in areas such as Education. A generation of early career researchers, then, are left to make ad hoc decisions about whether to value governmental indicators or the established practices of their field with little understanding of how this will impact on their future prospects of employment or promotion.

In her study of younger academics constructions of professional identity within UK universities, Archer noted a growing distance between older and newer generations of academics. Stark differences emerged in terms of expectations of productivity, what counted as quality research, whether managerial regimes ought to be resisted and so on. Evidence of intergenerational misunderstanding was found (2008 p.271) and while talk of academic tradition or a 'golden age' prior to neo-liberalism was sometimes used to produce a boundary or place to resist managerialism, in many cases the discourse of older academics was resented or was regarded as challenging the authenticity of younger researchers. Instead of the idea of research and scholarship as a culture to be reproduced, schemes such as the ERA threaten to drive a wedge between two very different academic subjectivities.

Performance management by ranking leaves the individual academic in a situation where they must assiduously manage the narrowly-defined value of their publication practice and history (Nkomo 2009; Redden 2008). When the 2010 ERA journal rankings were released, many academics woke up to discover that their status as researchers had been radically re-valued (see Eltham 2010 for a blogged response to

this experience). Rather than contributing members of scholarly communities, individual researchers are now placed in direct competition with each other and must be prepared to give an account of their chosen publication venue in the context of performance management and University-level collation of data for the ERA. So too the journals, and editors of journals, who will strive to increase the ranking of their publications at the necessary cost of others in their field. As Redden points out, such a situation runs the risk of importing the limits and failures of the market into the public sector (2008 p.16) as any re-ranking of journals will have direct effects on people's employment.

### **Lack of certainty about stability of rankings**

While researchers are left to make ad hoc decisions about their immediate and future plans for research dissemination, and ponder their 'value', they do so in an environment where there is no certainty about the stability of the current journal rankings. Given the long turnaround times of academic publishing it is increasingly difficult for people to feel confident that the decisions they make today about where to send an article will prove to be the right ones by the time they reach publication. Given the increase in submissions one expects A\* and A ranked journals will receive, turnaround times are likely to increase rather than decrease with the introduction of the ERA. The erratic re-rankings that occurred between the last draft version of the journal rankings and the 2010 finalised list (where journals went from A\* to C, with some disappearing altogether) have left many researchers uncertain as to whether current rankings will apply in 2012 when their article comes out. No one (not Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, nor senior researchers or other discipline bodies) seems able to provide certainty about the stability of the rankings, although many suspect that the current list will be "tweaked" in coming years. Again this has implications for career planning as well as internal accountability measures such as performance management, more importantly it unnecessarily destabilises the research culture by introducing the flux of market forces to evaluate what was traditionally approached as an open ended (or at least, 'life' (career) long) endeavour (see Nussbaum 2010; Redden 2008).

### **What is quality anyway?**

Perhaps the most significant impact of attempts to quantify quality via a system of audit such as the ERA is that it works counter to the historical and cultural practices for determining quality that exist in academia. While these practices are in no way perfectly formed or without error, they do inform, sustain and perpetuate the production and distribution of knowledge within the sector internationally. As Butler has observed, any attempt to quantify quality via an audit system runs inexorably into the problem of how to define quality. Linda Butler, a leading scholar of research policy and bibliometrics, points out that research quality is, in the end, determined by the usefulness of a scholar's work to other scholars, and that 'quality' is a term given value socially (2007, p.568). She quotes Anthony van Raan who argues:

Quality is a measure of the extent to which a group or an individual scientist contributes to the progress of our knowledge. In other words, the capacity to solve problems, to provide new insights into 'reality', or to make new technology possible. Ultimately, it is always the scientific community ('the peers', but now as a much broader group of colleague-scientists than only the peers in a review committee) who will have to decide in an inter-subjective way about quality (van Raan (1996) in Butler, 2007 p.568).

The Australian Research Council, in defending the ERA journal ranking for the Humanities and Creative Arts Cluster, relied heavily on this understanding of quality, citing the review panels, expert groups and discipline representative bodies that were consulted in the determination of the rankings (ARC). Indeed, peer review and the sector's involvement in determining what counts as 'quality' were central to Carr's description of the ERA (Carr 2008). However, and somewhat ironically given the audit culture's obsession with accountability, the lack of available information regarding the debates about quality and its constitution which occurred in the formation of the list disconnect the concept of 'quality' from its social, negotiated and debated context. As we have already noted, this lack of accountability does little to encourage academics to feel valued by the ERA process, nor does it support Australian academics in their existing practices of internationally networked research where the prevailing idea of quality, and how it is identified and assessed, is communal, collegial and plural. There is now, and will continue to be, a significant and unnecessary rift developing between international understandings of quality in research and the Australian definition.

## Conclusion

In the concluding chapter of *The Audit Explosion*, Michael Power diagnoses a key problem resulting from the rise of audit culture: 'we seem to have lost an ability to be publicly sceptical about the fashion for audit and quality assurance; they appear as 'natural' solutions to the problems we face' (1994 p.32). Many academics remain privately sceptical about research auditing schemes but are unwilling to openly challenge them. As Power observed sixteen years ago, we lack the language to voice concerns about the audit culture's focus on quality and performance (1994 p.33), despite the fact that in the Higher Education sector we have very strong professional and disciplinary understandings of how these terms relate to the work we do which are *already* 'benchmarked' internationally.

In light of this and the serious unintended outcomes which will stem from dysfunctional reactions to the ERA, we suggest that rather than try and lobby for small changes or tinker with the auditing mechanism (Academics Australia 2008; Australasian Association of Philosophy 2008; Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities 2008; Genoni & Haddow's data 2009), that academics in the Humanities need to take ownership of their own positions and traditions around the idea of professionalism and autonomy which inform existing understandings of research quality. Reclaiming these terms means not merely adopting a discourse of opposition or concern about the impact of procedures like the ERA (often placed alongside attempts to cooperate with the process) but adopting a stance that might more effectively contribute to the very outcomes of quality and innovation that ministers and governments (as well as academics) desire. Power's suggestion is that 'concepts of trust and autonomy will need to be partially rehabilitated into managerial languages in some way' (1994 p.33) and we may well begin with a task such as this. As Osterloh and Frey (2009) demonstrate, if academics are permitted to work informed by their professional motivations - intrinsic curiosity, symbolic recognition via collegial networks, employment and promotion - governments will be more likely to find innovation and research that, in Kim Carr's words, you could be 'proud of'.

**Simon Cooper teaches in the School of Humanities, Communications & Social Sciences and Anna Poletti teaches in the School of English, Communications & Performance Studies at Monash University, Victoria, Australia.**

## References

- Academics Australia. (2010). The ERA Journal Rankings: Letter to the Honourable Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Science and Research, 11 August 2008. Retrieved on 2 March 2010 from <http://www.academics-australia.org/AA/ERA/era.html>
- Adler, N. & Harzing, A. (2009). When Knowledge Wins: Transcending the sense and nonsense of academic rankings. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 8(1), pp. 72-85.
- Apple, M. (2005). Education, markets and an audit culture. *Critical Quarterly* 47(1-2), pp. 11-29.
- Archer, L. (2008). Younger academics' constructions of 'authenticity', 'success' and professional identity. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(4), pp. 385-403.
- Australasian Association of Philosophy (2008). Cover letter response to Submission to the Australian Research Council, Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Initiative. Retrieved on 3 March 2010 from <http://aap.org.au/publications/submissions.html>
- Australian Research Council. (2010). *The Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Initiative*. Retrieved on 4 July 2010 from <http://www.arc.gov.au/era/default.htm>
- Butler, L. (2007). 'Assessing university research: a plea for a balanced approach.' *Science and Public Policy*, 34(8) pp. 565-574.
- Carr, K. (2008). *A new ERA for Australian research quality assessment*. Retrieved on 3 July 2010 from <http://minister.innovation.gov.au/carr/Pages/ANEWERAFORAUSTRALIANRESEARCHQUALITYASSESSMENT.aspx>
- Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (2008). Submission to Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA). Retrieved on 14 June 2010 from <http://www.dash.edu.au/publications>
- Cooper, S. (2002). Post Intellectuality?: Universities and the Knowledge Industry, in Cooper, S., Hinkson, J. & Sharp, G. *Scholars and Entrepreneurs: the University in Crisis*. Fitzroy: Arena Publications, pp. 207-232.
- Eltham, B. (2010). When your publication record disappears, A Cultural Policy Blog, Retrieved on 13 March 2010 from <http://culturalpolicyreform.wordpress.com/2010/03/04/when-your-publication-record-disappears/>
- Genoni, P. & Haddow, G. (2009). ERA and the Ranking of Australian Humanities Journals, *Australian Humanities Review*, 46, pp 7-26.
- Hamermesh, D. (2007). *Replication in economics*. IZA Discussion Paper No. 2760 Retrieved on 30 June 2010 from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=984427>
- Haglund, L. & Olsson, P. (2008). The impact on university libraries of changes in information behavior among academic researchers: a multiple case study. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*. 34(1) pp. 52-9.
- Hartley, J. (2009). Lament for a Lost Running Order? Obsolescence and Academic Journals. *M/C Journal*, 12(3). Retrieved on 3 March 2010 from <http://journal.mediaculture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/162>
- Kotiaho, J., Tomkins, J. & Simmons L. (1999). Unfamiliar citations breed mistakes. Correspondence. *Nature*, 400, p. 307.
- Leys, C. (2003). *Market-Driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest*. Verso: New York.
- Mahoney, M. (1977). Publication prejudices: An experimental study of confirmatory bias in the peer review system. *Cognitive Therapy Research*, 1(2), pp. 161-175.
- McGilvray, A. (2010). Nervousness over research ratings, *Campus Review*, 27 September.
- Moed, H. F. (2002). The impact factors debate; the ISI's uses and limits. Correspondence. *Nature*, 415, pp. 731-732
- Nkomo, S. (2009). The Seductive Power of Academic Journal Rankings: Challenges of Searching for the Otherwise. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 8(1), pp. 106-112.
- Nussbaum, M. (2010). The Passion for Truth: There are two few Sir Kenneth Dovers. *The New Republic* 1 April. Retrieved on 3 June 2010 from [http://www.tnr.com/article/books-and-arts/passion-truth?utm\\_source=TNR+Books+&+Arts&utm\\_campaign=aff15dbfb8-TNR\\_BA\\_040110&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.tnr.com/article/books-and-arts/passion-truth?utm_source=TNR+Books+&+Arts&utm_campaign=aff15dbfb8-TNR_BA_040110&utm_medium=email)
- Olssen, M. & Peters, M. (2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(3), pp. 313-345.
- Osterloh, M. & Frey, B. (2009). *Research Governance in Academia: Are there Alternatives to Academic Rankings?* Institute for Empirical Research in Economics, University of Zurich Working Paper Series, Working Paper no. 423. Retrieved on 30 June 2010 from <http://www.iew.unizh.ch/wp/iewwp423.pdf>
- Oswald, A.J. (2007). An examination of the reliability of prestigious scholar journals: Evidence and implications for decision-makers. *Economica*. 74. pp. 21-31.
- Power, M. (1994). *The Audit Explosion*. Demos: London.
- Redden, G. (2008). From RAE to ERA: research evaluation at work in the corporate university. *Australian Humanities Review* 45 pp. 7-26.
- Rowbotham, J. (2010). Research assessment to remain unchanged for second round. *The Australian Higher Education Supplement*. 3 November. Retrieved on 3 November 2010 from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/research-assessment-to-remain-unchanged-for-second-round/story-e6fgrcjx-1225946924155>
- Shore, C. (2008). Audit Culture and Illiberal Governance. *Anthropological Theory*, 8 (3) pp. 278-298.
- Shore, C. & Wright, S (1999). Audit Culture and Anthropology: Neo-Liberalism in British Higher Education. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5(4) pp. 557-575.
- Simkin, M. V. & Roychowdhury, V. P. (2005). Copied citations create renowned papers? *Annals of Improbable Research*, 11(1) pp. 24-27.
- Starbuck, W.H. (2006). *The Production of Knowledge: The Challenge of Social Science Research*. Oxford University Press: New York.
- Strathern, M. (1997). Improving ratings: audit in the British University system. *European Review*, 5 (3) pp. 305-321.
- van Raan, A.F.J. (1996). Advanced Bibliometric Methods as Quantitative Core of Peer Review Based Evaluation and Foresight Exercises. *Scientometrics* 36, 397-420.
- Virno, P. (2004). *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. Semiotext(e): New York.

# Quality teaching: means for its enhancement?

**John Buchanan**

University of Technology, Sydney

The pursuit of enhancing quality in tertiary education and educators is noble. Increasingly, however, universities are resorting to stark, reductionist representations of educational quality, such as decontextualised mean figures generated by student surveys, to measure and report on this. This paper questions the validity and reliability of such mean scores. Universities are using these results for high-stakes ends, and disclose them to ever-broader audiences. This paper focuses on the broader publication of these mean scores pertaining to individual staff members. The paper investigates forces that drive such an approach and the attractions thereof, and enumerates its outcomes and effects, while investigating potential theory-method mismatches. The paper evaluates this evaluation method against four criteria: (measurement of) quality teaching; ethical practice; managerial relations; and research methodology and methods. The paper also proposes some alternative approaches to interrogate and enhance teacher quality.

## Introduction

The North Wind and the Sun were in dispute as to who was the more powerful. They decided to have a contest to see who could remove the coat from a man they saw walking beneath them. The wind blew harder and stronger, but all this did was to make the man clutch his coat all the more tightly around him. The sun then shone with all its strength and warmth. The man removed his coat.

*Adaptation of a tale attributed to Aesop* (Morpurgo & Clark, 1988, pp. 40, 41).

Enhancing the quality of education and of educators in tertiary contexts is a noble pursuit. Increasingly, however, universities are turning to stark, reductionist (mis?)representations of educational quality, such as those generated by student surveys, to measure and report on this. In particular, there is an increasing preoccupation with the use of decontextualised mean Likert-scale scores to adjudge the quality and performance of teaching and teachers. As the title of this paper suggests, the validity and reliability of such mean scores is under question here. In particular, uni-

versities are tending to use these results for high-stakes ends, and to disclose them to ever-broader audiences. It is the broader publication of these mean scores that is a particular concern of this paper.

The paper sets out to interrogate the forces that drive such an approach and the attractions thereof, and to enumerate its outcomes and effects, while investigating some theory-method matches and mismatches. The paper measures this evaluation method against four criteria:

- (Measurement of) quality teaching
- Ethical practice
- Managerial relations
- Research methodology and methods.

The above four criteria interrelate and overlap considerably; a number of observations are at home in more than one of them.

Universities' growing preoccupation with student feedback as a, if not the, means of determining (in both senses of the word) quality in higher education, fails many of Trowler's (2009, p. 2) characteristics of theory: it fails to identify relationships, to develop and interrogate 'systematically and logically related propo-

sitions', and to illuminate or even acknowledge causes or contexts. Moreover, it presumes a consistency in students' capacity and willingness to assign quality to their learning experiences. In short, such processes appear to reduce research into educational quality to Trowler's (2009, p. 3) "market research' approach'.

At a surface level, a practice of evaluating education then making public the results, propounds a very plausible logic:

- Students, the 'consumers' of education, are the best, if not the only arbiters of the quality of their experiences and the performance of their teachers;
- Raising the stakes will 'keep educators honest', holding them accountable;
- The above process is therefore not only efficient, but also just; anyone resisting this process can be presumed to be hiding something.

Such an approach constitutes a 'poor thin way of doing things' (Carroll, 1982, p. 228) in terms of coming to understand (the quality of) education and of research, these being two of the core businesses of universities. Moreover, industrial and managerial issues conflate with pedagogical ones, resulting in an ill-fitting amalgam. As Ball (1995, cited in Trowler, 2009, p. 3) points out, 'the absence of [explicit] theory leaves the researcher prey to the unexamined, unreflexive preoccupations and dangerously naïve ontological and epistemological a praxis'.

As with teaching or any form of communication, audience and purpose are crucial considerations in evaluation. Ramsden and Dodds (1989) offer several warnings about such data: the evaluation of teaching does not equate to 'performance in the lecture hall or tutorial room' (p. 33); the information 'must not be used as a covert means of staff appraisal' (p. 28); 'no teacher should feel threatened by the process or feel that the information could be used punitively' (p. 27) and 'a member of staff should be given the option of having no one but him/herself see these results, or of approving the release of these results to others (including heads of departments)' (p. 28).

Investing such confidence in student feedback scores presumes that students know more about educational quality than do their teachers. In the field of education in particular, however, this logic appears to falter. Presumably, education staff members are more learned than their students in the domains of learning and teaching. By extension, the practice contributes to pressure on staff to conform to real or perceived student ideals of teaching, learning and content. These

may be at odds with less popular but more beneficial decisions made by staff, who presumably have more expertise in the matter. The Principle of Minimum Differentiation (Hotelling, 1929) illustrates another possible consequence of this practice. In an effort to please and appease students, staff members' teaching methods may tend to become indistinguishable from one another, as they each strive to achieve the same outcome – student satisfaction with their teaching.

More broadly, public dissemination of such data appears to feed and be fed by two other unsettling trends in education:

- The 'student as client' mentality. Apart from problems of conformity mentioned above, this mentality impedes the growth of student autonomy and responsibility.
- The 'client-must-know' mentality. Privacy is increasingly being eroded and disregarded.

The above dynamics are further exacerbated by the commercialisation of education. As Fitch and Loving (2007, p. 85) point out, however, 'the consumer process does not necessarily identify the best idea. It simply indicates the most popular'. This process is part of a worldwide trend that has been gathering momentum for some time. Of the 1990s and its preoccupation with basic skills testing of school students, Slee and Weiner (2001, p. 87) observed that, 'reductionist analogies and 'quick-fixes' appeared to be preferred by a polity that had grown impatient with careful research analyses of complex educational and social issues'.

The effects of such approaches to the collection and dissemination of data on individual teachers are multiple. Moreover, these approaches to measuring the quality of teaching are found wanting in the domains of quality education, ethics, decency in management of staff, and well-conceptualised research, as the following sections illustrate.

## Quality in education

The practice of making public individual staff members' mean performance data constitutes an impoverished model of teaching and learning, and undermines the qualities it purports to promote. It reinforces popular and populist, lay notions of teaching equating to performance. As such, it frustrates much of the work teacher educators in particular attempt to do with their pre-service teachers, in pointing out that the burden for learning is one shared between teacher and learner, and that a quest for popularity

can be a seductive diversion from this responsibility for the teacher and for the institution. The model has more in common with popular, naïve conceptions of education and its evaluation, or for that matter with popularity contests, than with rigorous research or educational endeavours.

The practice provides students with a most reductionist component, that is, the mean score, from a very limited and decontextualised data set. It suggests that the absolute and comparative expertise of a member of teaching staff can be reduced to a number to two decimal places. Apart from its demoralising nature and research design problems (see below) this also thwarts our attempts to assist preservice teachers in appreciating the subtleties, and the fractal intricacies and complexities of teaching and learning (Schuck, Gordon & Buchanan, 2008). In addition, a central facet of teaching is the promotion of skills and dispositions related to critical literacy. Calls for student exercise of critical literacy will be shouted down by a practice such as the release of such a simplistic set of figures devoid of context.

Brookfield (1995) discusses the angst for perfectionists when attaining imperfect scores, and concludes that what he calls the 'perfect ten' system does not work in the interests of either students or teachers. To this I respond with a confession. Regrettably, I can recall the highest mean score I have ever attained from a student feedback question, almost as if that equated to the best one. I won't dignify the number by quoting it here. All I can confidently claim is that I was more satisfying that semester than ever before or since. Even though, for reasons I don't fully understand, I am less satisfying now, I do not believe I am an inferior teacher to the one who attained that higher score. Nor do I believe that any given semester's results correspond arithmetically to the quality of my teaching, or to that of my peers. And yet, it is virtually inevitable that such comparisons will be made. The process establishes a 'quest for an unholy grail'; I am a fervent and evangelical non-believer in the 'perfect ten' teacher or lesson, yet I find myself striving for such a score, and disappointed upon failing to attain it yet again.

Many teachers are well aware of a number of tactics that they could employ to raise their satisfaction ratings, that are apedagogical or even counter-pedagogical in nature. According to Campbell's Law (Harvard Education Letter, 2010, para. 4) the high-stakes nature of testing such as this may be the means for its own corruption. According to Campbell,

the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.

Teachers and others may be tempted to subvert the process and thereby denude it of the very transparency such a process boasts. Naturally, this is as much an ethical, as it is an educational issue.

Publicising student satisfaction data has the potential to 'poison the teacher-student relationship before it begins' (Russell, 2010a). The opportunity for a reputed poor-scoring teacher to engage her or his new students may be stillborn. Those teaching staff who score highly in such arenas may create unfulfillable expectations in the imaginings of prospective students. In short, this practice serves to 'stream' teachers, with all the expectations and assumptions on performance that emerge therefrom. Further, the process may compromise or corrupt students' motives for choosing or avoiding particular subjects or teachers.

More fundamentally, is this the future of teaching preferred by teachers-to-be? Will our graduate teachers be comfortable with their own students generating Likert-scale satisfaction scores, reading them and then making comparisons between all the (say) year 6 teachers or all the maths teachers, or for that matter between a maths and a geography teacher? This is but one unintended consequence that may be hastened by student acceptance of or indifference to the publication of such data at university. What effects might such a situation have on the way teachers approach their teaching, and on the morale of the profession? Gunzehnauser (2007) brings attention to 'our role as professional educators to prepare teachers, administrators, and other school personnel for resistance to normalisation ... social resistance and ethical resistance' (p. 24).

Such a regime will make us fearful of the experimentation and innovation necessary for the pursuit of educational enhancement and renewal. In her study of responses to imposed accountability, Findlow (2008) noted 'the environment - both institution and scheme - demanded subscription to a view of accountability that impeded real innovation; that is the sort of accountability that is modelled on classic audit' (p. 5 electronic version). Teachers may be driven to perform stunts, to entertain, rather than devolving to their students due responsibility for the heavy lifting of learning. The work of the teacher is not primarily to entertain, not even to inform, if by 'inform' we mean to convey factual knowl-

edge. One of the primary functions of a teacher is to disrupt; to meddle with their students' (and their own) presuppositions and securities. As a general rule, students (like teachers!) dislike disruptions.

## Ethical practice

The misappropriation and misuse of standardised testing regimes compounds the misunderstanding thereof (Gunzenhauser, 2008). Arguably, the process of collecting (and disseminating) student satisfaction data on teachers stands outside the realm of research, and constitutes part of the process of improvement in practice. Accepting that this holds true, the process must nonetheless conform to acceptable ethical standards, as must any interaction between staff and management. In any other research context, data pertaining to an individual would only be made public in any easily identifiable way with the informed consent of the 'subject'. One argument in support of making such data available to students is the convention of respecting the time taken by participants to furnish information. Nevertheless, research also sets out to respect the subjects of the research, in this case, teaching staff. In any case, the release of aggregated data satisfies this requirement; having completed a national census form, I expect to see aggregated data, but not to learn how next door is doing.

As mentioned previously, the publication of satisfaction data leaves unquestioned their contexts - their ecologies and antecedents; these data will tend to be interpreted by prospective students as the absolute mark of a particular teacher's expertise in teaching, and teacher comparisons by students will be made accordingly. The process amounts to the dissemination of misleading information about individual employees and their performance.

This practice fails multiple ethical obligations. It is more likely to undermine than enhance quality education for the following reasons:

- It is a humiliating, demoralising and dismissive way for a university to treat staff and their expertise.
- It diminishes the team, driving staff from the collaborative to the competitive end of the continuum; staff may become less predisposed to helping, supporting

and working with one another. It may breed resentment towards those staff seen to be 'students' pets'.

- It may have a similar debilitating effect on staff members' goodwill towards their students and management.
- As mentioned above, it privileges the showy over the substantial, the student over the teacher. School league tabling systems have been criticised for their tendency to drive schools and teachers to 'teach to the test' (e.g. Irvine, 2010). Similarly, this process will push staff towards teaching to the test. Here, though, the test is not even relevant in curricular terms.

It has been argued that student 'corridor conversations' about the quality of their learning experiences will take place in any case, and that social and other online sites permit such communication among students. Some content of 'What I hate about [insert name here] University' sites hardly appears consistent with ethical practice; for a university to use this as a basis for establishing its own platform for dissemination to students of information appears dubious at best. In

---

**...the publication of satisfaction data leaves unquestioned their contexts ... these data will tend to be interpreted by prospective students as the absolute mark of a particular teacher's expertise in teaching, and teacher comparisons by students will be made accordingly.**

---

any case, the publication of such data is more likely to conflagrate rather than contain such communication. I am not soliciting my employer's protection from such material. Nor can they offer it.

In short, the information made public is so stark as to be misleading. This hardly seems ethical, and would not appear to serve any purpose for students, staff or education.

## Decency in management

'Good' management is probably as elusive a concept as good teaching, and so the term 'decency' - admittedly also a subjective term - is used here. Much of what constitutes a good teacher-student relationship applies equally to managerial relationships. Fitch and Loving (2007, p. 83) speak of

Dewey's 'amicable cooperation' in the classroom. Widely recognised as indispensable for cultivating multicultural democratic citizenship, no other approach has proven as effective in promoting positive inter-group relations, increasing academic achievement, and building bridges across borders of difference.

These principles apply in the boardroom as in the classroom.

Publishing student feedback scores transgresses the bounds of decency in management; it degrades and demeans the profession and its members. As argued above, it has the potential to be highly demoralising to staff, sets them up in competition with one another, and demonstrates a lack of professional trust. Echoing Foucault's (1995) metaphorical panopticon, Pignatelli (2002) refers to a 'blanket of surveillance, shrouded in a haze of frightfully crude and narrowly defined performance indicators' (p. 171), which serves to smother schools' collective needs and aspirations. Marshall (2001, p. 77) calls for 'thoughtful disobedience' as part of a constant vigilance against subjugation. This may include vigilance against our passive, regressive selves Gunzenhauser (2008), a vigilance that matches that of management.

The counterproductive and demoralising effects of this 'culture of compliance' (Buchanan, Gordon & Schuck, 2008, online version) and its attendant 'instruments of discipline' (Gunzenhauser, 2008, p. 4, online version) have already been mentioned. There is a certain logic here. This process feeds and feeds on the angst that it generates. The metaphor of a game of poison ball comes to mind. S/he who jumps lowest or last is 'out'. Does management believe that but for such scrutiny, staff would lack the will and wherewithal to interrogate and improve their teaching? Gunzenhauser (2008) also notes the increasing centralisation of control and surveillance attendant to this process of 'snoopervision' (National Symposium, 2010). Drawing on the work of Marlow, Ramsden (1998) outlines a 'downward spiral of distrust' (p. 200) emanating from perceived suspicion on the part of management.

One argument for making such data public is that it empowers students, who might otherwise be, or feel, impotent in the teaching/learning equation. A question in response is 'empowers them to do what? To further humiliate those staff, who, by definition, are already attaining results their university and students regard as poor?' Slee and Weiner (2001, p. 90) refer to the 'discourses of derision' inherent in such power ecologies. The process generates considerable amounts of angst and resentment amongst at least some in the profession. That real or imagined rump of staff who care not about their teaching - perhaps even defensively so, if they feel they can do little about it - will presumably continue not to care, at least outwardly so, and will tread further the path of disillusionment and dysfunction.

Unless such a practice proceeds to its logical conclusion, that of students demanding and securing the dismissal of teaching staff who displease them, it would seem that student anger in this matter will not be assuaged.

Brookfield (1995, p. 18) claims that a preoccupation with 'scoring' teaching and teachers, 'serves individuals with a reductionist cast of mind who believe that the dynamics and contradictions of teaching can be reduced to a linear, quantifiable, rating system'. His fury unspent, he proceeds to say that, 'such epistemologically challenged people sometimes find their way into positions of administrative and legislative power'. In fairness, Brookfield almost certainly oversimplifies the demands of administration and legislation, but one wonders what score he would accord such individuals.

## Methodological issues

A heavy reliance on student feedback data is beset with multiple methodological weaknesses, including undertheorised, inappropriate methods. It appears to ascribe validity and reliability to results furnished by one cohort of, say, 35 students who complete a survey, and another group of 35 (or some other number, with similar or significantly different demographics, of) students, at a different time of day and week, in different classrooms, subjects etc, in terms of comparing results. Differences in class sizes constitute a double whammy here; apart from undermining confidence in result comparisons, class size variations are one variable likely to affect satisfaction levels. Data-gathering instruments are being used as devices to achieve two tasks that are, potentially at least, mutually corrosive; a tool for providing diagnostic feedback for teaching staff and perhaps their supervisors (who are bound by privacy provisions), has now been pressed into the service of a publicity and controlling mechanism.

The mean scores of typical student feedback surveys constitute opinions, but will be interpreted by many as bearing some relationship to objectivity or reality. Moreover, these mean figures attempt to capture levels of satisfaction. How well they do so is unknown. They do not purport to capture teaching and learning quality. Nevertheless, they appear to be widely interpreted as measures thereof. Anecdotally, there appears to be widespread mistrust in the accuracy of such figures, even among publication proponents. That being the case, why would one then proceed to publicise such



figures? Those who use these figures believing them to be 'true' are arguably being defrauded, and surely those who use them knowing or presuming them to be false, are being fraudulent.

A move from pen-and-paper completion of student satisfaction data to online versions at a number of universities further complicates the issue. While an online method carries time and resource efficiencies, it also removes the possibility of correlating individual numeric ratings, including outliers, with a student's comments. Anecdotally, in-class paper responses also appear to generate higher response rates. Moreover, a system whereby each response was eventually returned to the lecturer, afforded a higher degree of teacher-confidence of errors or tampering detection.

Methodological anomalies may be tolerable in the context of feedback to a restricted audience, that is, to staff and perhaps management. Even here, however, they are not without danger. No methodology appears capable of addressing the problems associated with publicising such results. The instances of inappropriate use of such data, according to Wilson, Lizzio and Ramsden (1996, p. 4) include, 'individual teacher/subject evaluation' and 'single criterion for student decision making about course enrolment'.

Gunzenhauser (2008) refers to a 'technology of normalisation in which the norm takes on outsized proportions' (p. 1 online version). The resultant sets of figures, to two decimal places, may convince and seduce us as to their bona fides, perhaps beyond our point of resistance. As Trowler (2009, p. 2) notes, 'despite the etymology of the term, data are not 'given' but are 'contrived'. He adds that it is difficult to escape our domain assumptions 'because normalisation lends them invisibility'. Ramsden and Dodds (1989, p. 18) describe the validity ascribed to such figures based on their apparent objectivity as 'entirely spurious'.

None of this is to decry student feedback surveys per se. They have their place, and offer useful windows into our students' thinking and assumptions, insights and blindspots, as well as our own, while providing us at times with helpful, practical ideas for innovation and alternative practices. Increasingly, however, they are being accorded the status as the absolute arbiters if not straightjackets of educational quality, and publicly so. As Atkinson (2000) observes, 'a narrow focus on 'what works' belies the complexity of the art and science of teaching' (p. 322, emphasis in original). A challenge now is perhaps for managers and administrators,

particularly those who aspire to be publicly judged in this way on a six-monthly basis, to defend this practice.

### Of sunshine, heat and mansuetude: possible alternatives?

The coda or moral often attached to the Aesop fable at the beginning of this paper is that of gentleness. What the wind couldn't achieve by force, the sun did. It seems that coercive forms of productivity or performance improvement overlook an important factor: human motivation.

If we profess that 'good' education centres on (knowledge of) the learner's needs, and engenders deep, long-lasting thinking and change, why do we not apply this wisdom to the teacher-as-learner? Curry, Jaxon, Russell, Callahan and Bicais (2008, p. 3 [online version]) observe that, 'teachers learn through *situated and social interactions* with colleagues who *possess distributed expertise* and with whom they have opportunities for sustained conversations related to mutual interests' (emphases added).

Having simple measures to determine quality in education is highly compelling and seductive. Our quest for meaning and causality can lead us into oversimplification and error. As Slee and Weiner (2001) point out, the abandonment of a belief in a single cause or set of causes of quality education 'unsettles our explanatory frames' (p. 94).

As intimated earlier, the reductionist preoccupation with numbers is reminiscent of scoring a talent quest or perhaps a dance-off. Hole (2001) muses that teaching is akin to doing a rain dance; you never know if you're successful until or unless you get rained on. He goes on to say (p. 84),

I'm beginning to understand how futile it is to mimic the chants and movements of the rain dancer. Even if I could get the steps right, could I bring forth the rain? ... being a rain dancer is so much more than just knowing the dance.

I would add that even if rain ensues, one should be diffident in ascribing cause and effect. Moreover, superficial aping of behaviours is a particularly dangerous model for teacher education. As Russell (2010b) observes, 'learning to think pedagogically is at the core of learning to teach, just as learning to think mathematically is at the core of learning mathematics' (p. 1).

I am gradually learning in my teaching that there are times when I need to 'relinquish control to gain

influence' (Senese, 2002, p. 51). This is perhaps one such time for university managers. This is not to say that there is no place for guiding (perchance chiding?), supporting and otherwise assisting teaching staff in value-adding to their pedagogy.

What metaphor might we ascribe to teachers? Neither performing seals, impressing the crowd with their antics, nor walking encyclopaedias, full of knowledge to impart. A more apt metaphor might be that of the catalyst, precipitating a response (except that teachers are consumed by the process). This is not necessarily pretty. It is not unfailingly agreeable or comfortable. I contend that good teaching, especially in my field, social and environmental education, should 'get under your skin' at least to some extent. Any process that encourages us to cower from this is, I believe, toxic to good teaching, and will lead us to a safe, soporific sameness, an uninspiring and uninspired future that dignifies neither teaching nor teachers. Effective, quality management supports and exhorts its teachers in marshalling and mobilising the vision, energy, creativity, confidence and courage necessary for educational renewal. Surely this lofty aspiration outperforms a regression to the mean.

**Dr John Buchanan is a Senior Lecturer in the Education Group and a Core Member of the Centre for Research in Learning and Change at the University of Technology, Sydney, NSW, Australia**

## References

- Atkinson, E. (2000). In defence of ideas, or why 'what works' is not enough. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21(3), 317-330.
- Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Buchanan, J., Gordon, S. & Schuck, S. (2008). From mentoring to monitoring: The impact of changing work environments on academics in Australian universities. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 32(3), 241-250.
- Carroll, L. (1982). *Alice's adventures in Wonderland and Through the looking glass*. Oxford: OUP.
- Curry, M., Jaxon, K., Russell, J., Callahan, M. & Bicais, J. (2008). Examining the practice of beginning teachers' micropolitical literacy within professional inquiry communities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(3), 660-673.
- Findlow, S. (2008). Accountability an innovation in higher education: a disabling tension? *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(3), 313-329.
- Fitch, F. & Loving, G. (2007). Competition and cooperation: Evil twins or fated lovers? *Philosophical Studies in Education*, 38, 83-93.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Gunzenhauser, M. (2008). Care of the self in a context of accountability. *Teachers College Record*, 110(10), 2224-2244. Retrieved 7 July 2010 from <http://www.tcrecord.org>
- Harvard Education Letter (2010). Retrieved 21 September 2010 from <http://www.hepg.org/hel/article/237>
- Hole, S. (2001). Teacher as rain dancer. In Mintz, E. & Yun, J. (eds). *The complex world of teaching: Perspectives from theory and practice*. Cambridge MA: Harvard Educational Review. Pp. 79-86.
- Hotelling, H. (1929). Stability in competition. *Economic Journal*, 39(153), 41-57.
- Irvine, J. (2010). A little rote learning is a dangerous thing when ideas are in short supply. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 February 2010, p. 7.
- Marshall, J. D. (2001). A critical theory of the self: Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Foucault. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 20, 75-91.
- Morpurgo, M. & Clark, E. (1988). *The orchard book of Aesop's fables*. London: Orchard Books.
- National Symposium – Advice for Ministers and ACARA on NAPLAN, the use of student data, My School and league tables. Sydney, 23 July 2010. Unknown audience questioner.
- Pignatelli, F. (2002). Mapping the terrain of a Foucauldian ethics: A response to the surveillance of schooling. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 21, 157-180.
- Ramsden, P. (1998). *Learning to lead in higher education*. London: Routledge.
- Ramsden, P. & Dodds, A. (1989). *Improving teaching and courses: A guide to evaluation*. Parkville, Vic: Centre for the Study of Higher Education.
- Russell, T. (2010a, pers. comm.). Conversation with Tom Russell, April 2010.
- Russell, T. (2010b). *Innovation and self-study: Lessons learned*. Retrieved 27 July 2010 from <http://sites.google.com/site/innovationandselfstudy/home/lessons-learned>
- Schuck, S., Gordon, S. & Buchanan, J. (2008). What are we missing here? Problematising wisdoms on teaching quality and professionalism in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(5), 537-547.
- Senese, J. (2002). Opposites attract: What I learned about being a classroom teacher by being a teacher educator, in: Loughran J. & Russell, T. (eds). *Improving teacher education practices through self-study* (London, Routledge Falmer) 43-55.
- Slee, R. & Weiner, G. (2001). Education reform and reconstruction as a challenge to research genres: reconsidering school effectiveness research and inclusive schooling. *School effectiveness and improvement*, 21(1), 83-98.
- Trowler, P. (2009). *Wicked issues in situating theory in close up research*. Retrieved 6 December 2009 from <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/events/hecu5/thinkpieces.htm>
- Wilson, K., Lizzio, A. & Ramsden, P. (1996). *The use and validation of the Course Experience Questionnaire*. Brisbane: Griffith University.

# Who benefits from foreign universities in the Arab Gulf States?

**Stephen Wilkins**

University of Bath, UK

The Arab Gulf States are the largest hosts of international branch campuses globally. By increasing higher education capacity in the Arab Gulf States by over 30,000 places, foreign institutions have, through various forms of transnational provision, increased significantly the accessibility of higher education to young people living in these countries. However, critics of transnational higher education have suggested that it can be seen as the new neo-colonialism which benefits the providers much more than the receivers. This study aims to identify the stakeholders that might benefit from transnational higher education in the Arab Gulf States, and to examine the extent to which those stakeholders are actually benefiting from it. It was found that transnational higher education is playing a large role in the economic, cultural and social development of the Arab Gulf States.

## Introduction

During the last decade, transnational higher education provision increased dramatically right around the globe. In fact, by 2010, more international students were taking UK higher education programmes outside of the UK than in it (Universities UK 2010). The term 'transnational education' refers to educational programmes in which learners are located in a country other than the one in which the awarding institution is based (McBurnie & Ziguras 2007, p. 21). Transnational programmes are delivered in one of three ways: distance education, partner-supported delivery or a branch campus. This article, however, is concerned only with branch campuses located in the Arab Gulf States, hereafter referred to as the Gulf States.

An international branch campus may be defined as an educational facility that has its own premises (which normally include teaching rooms, a library and a refectory, and sometimes also recreational facilities

and student accommodation) where students receive face-to-face instruction in a country different to that of its parent institution. The branch operates under the name of the parent institution and offers qualifications bearing the name of the parent institution. It usually offers courses in more than one field of study, has permanent administrative staff and usually permanent academic staff too (ACE 2009).

International branch campuses can be owned solely by a foreign university or jointly between a foreign university and a local partner. Ownership structures of international branch campuses vary considerably, and they can be quite complex. For example, whilst the intellectual property of degree courses taught at Murdoch University International Study Centre Dubai remain with Murdoch University in Perth (Australia), ownership of the physical assets in Dubai reside with its academic infrastructure provider, Global Institute Middle East Limited, which also employs the academic staff. Middlesex University Dubai was also established

as a joint venture, between Middlesex University UK and an entity called Middlesex Associates in Dubai.

The situation where teaching is provided by a local partner (usually operating under their own name) and not the institution that is awarding the qualifications is usually regarded as partner-supported delivery rather than a branch campus operation (McBurnie & Zigu-ras 2007, p. 27). Foreign-backed universities that have been established as, or developed into, independent institutions, such as the British University in Dubai, are also not usually regarded as international branch cam-puses (Verbik & Merkle 2006, p. 4).

The Gulf States have been the largest recipients of transnational higher education globally, whilst Aus-tralia, the UK and USA have been the largest provid-ers. However, amongst the Gulf States, different forms of transnational provision dominate in different countries. For example, the Sultanate of Oman has no international branch campuses, but does have private higher education institutions (higher education insti-tutions) that have foreign partners, whilst Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have many branch campuses. In fact, the UAE hosts over 40 international branch campuses, which represents almost a quar-ter of all international branch campuses worldwide (Becker 2009, p. 7).

The possible benefits that international branch cam-puses might deliver to students, to host countries, and to the institutions owning them, have been suggested in the literature (Hatakenaka 2004; Knight 2006; Verbik & Merkle 2006; Olds 2007; Fox 2008; Becker 2009; Maringe 2009; Naidoo 2010), but as yet there has been little published empirical evidence to support the sug-gested benefits. This study aims to identify the stake-holders that might benefit from transnational higher education in the Gulf States, particularly in the UAE and Qatar, and to examine the extent to which those stakeholders are actually benefiting from it.

## Transnational higher education in the Arab Gulf States

### *Saudi Arabia*

Amongst the Gulf States, only Oman and Saudi Arabia have no international branch campuses (Becker 2009), but it is only in Saudi Arabia that face-to-face transna-tional higher education is not available. However, there is evidence that Saudi Arabia's leading universities are moving towards a policy of increased international collaboration (Onsman 2010). This is most evident at

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), established in 2009. It has entered into col-laborative ventures with 27 universities globally and created five international academic excellence alli-ances (Corbyn 2009).

The benefits for foreign universities can be huge. For example, in return for advising on equipment require-ments and staff selection, providing master's syllabuses in materials science and chemical engineering, and participating in collaborative research, Imperial Col-lege London will receive US\$25 million over five years (Corbyn 2009). It seems, therefore, that international collaboration might result in a win-win-win situation for KAUST, its foreign partners and for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. KAUST will benefit from international expertise and will become a partner in cutting-edge research, the foreign partners will also benefit from the research undertaken as well as from the funding received, and, as a nation, Saudi Arabia will move closer to achieving its objective of becoming a knowledge-based economy.

### *Bahrain and Kuwait*

There are only a handful of transnational higher edu-cation providers in Bahrain and Kuwait. New York Institute of Technology established a campus in Bah-rain in 2003, and in 2009/10 it had over 1,200 stu-dents on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. In 2006, the Economic Development Board in Bahrain announced that it would develop, with a Kuwaiti investment company as its partner, a 'higher education city' in Bahrain, where interna-tional branch campuses would be established. It is not yet known when this planned hub for transna-tional providers will open.

Box Hill Institute, based in Melbourne, Australia, has had a campus in Kuwait since 2007, where a range of foundation and diploma programmes are offered only to women. It is still common in the Gulf States for men and women to be educated separately, although most of the international branch campuses deliver teach-ing to mixed sex classes. The Kuwait Maastricht Busi-ness School was established in 2003, supported by the Maastricht School of Management (The Netherlands). Since then, it has had over 1,000 students, and it plans to move to a newly constructed campus in 2012. In 2007, the University of Bangor (Wales, UK) signed a partnership agreement with the newly established British University of Kuwait, but the new institution has yet to admit its first students.

## Oman

In the Sultanate of Oman, a Royal Decree was issued in 1996 to promote the development of private higher education institutions. The government offers plots of land for the construction of new campuses, loans with subsidised interest rates, grants for acquiring learning resources, and it pays the tuition fees of national students from families receiving social welfare. The government's incentives have enabled private higher education institutions to increase access to higher education as well as improving the quality of their provision (Al Lamki 2002, p. 79). By 2009, 24 private higher education institutions had been established, with enrolments totalling over 33,500, which represented 27 per cent of the total number of students in higher education in the country (Al Shmeli 2009, p. 4). Of these institutions, five are universities.

Most of the private higher education institutions in Oman are joint enterprises owned by Omani citizens, or the Omani government, and foreign higher education institutions, mostly from Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the US (Donn & Al Manthri 2010, p. 111). They focus on providing programmes that are required by the labour market, such as business, computer sciences, engineering and health sciences, which therefore contribute to the country's economic development as well as reducing youth unemployment. Programmes are generally delivered in English, and almost 80 per cent of students require additional English language tuition in their foundation year of study (Donn & Al Manthri, p. 113). It might be argued that it is not really necessary or appropriate for most programmes to be taught in English, rather than Arabic, the native language. For example, Wilkins (2002, p. 150) observed that in vocational training, the greatest barrier to learning and understanding for most Omanis was their weak ability to comprehend and communicate in English.

## Qatar

In Qatar, the Qatar Foundation was established in 1995 as a not-for-profit organisation with the threefold mission of promoting education, scientific research and community development. Qatar Foundation's flagship project is Education City, a 1,000-hectare campus just outside the country's capital, Doha, which is home

to a number of education and research institutions. In order to satisfy Qatar's urgent need for graduates in subjects such as medicine and engineering, it was decided by the Qatar Foundation that it would be more efficient to bring a world-class higher education institution directly to Qatar rather than establishing institutes from scratch.

Qatar Foundation's original aim was to recruit one foreign higher education institution that was regarded as 'top 10' in a number of priority disciplines. It had considered the University of Virginia, but then concluded that there was no suitable higher education institution that was best at everything (Witte 2010a, p. 18). The result was that the Qatar Foundation decided instead to recruit a number of universities, each to specialise in

---

**Most of the private higher education institutions in Oman are joint enterprises owned by Omani citizens, or the Omani government, and foreign higher education institutions, mostly from Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the US**

---

a different discipline. At the start of 2010, six US-based universities had a branch campus at Education City, which included Weill-Cornell Medical School, Texas A&M University, to provide a range of engineering programmes, and Carnegie Mellon University, to provide programmes in business and computer science.

In July 2010, the Qatar Foundation recruited the French business school HEC Paris to Education City, where it will offer MBA programmes, executive and short certificate programmes, corporate-specific training, as well as engaging in business-related research. Then, in October 2010, University College London announced that it will also establish a campus at Education City, to conduct research and deliver programmes in archaeology, conservation and museum studies (Gill 2010).

## United Arab Emirates

The first foreign university to be accredited by the UAE Ministry of Higher Education was the University of Wollongong (Australia), which has been operating in Dubai since 1993. At the start of 2010, the University of Wollongong in Dubai had over 3,500 students enrolled on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Private higher education institutions in the UAE are required to be licensed by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA), and then to have each of their programmes individually accredited. In October 2010, the CAA had 66 licensed private institutions, offering 479 (active) programmes (CAA 2010).

However, there are several free zones across the UAE, where CAA accreditation is not mandatory.

The largest free zone is Dubai International Academic City (DIAC), which is home to over thirty institutions including the University of Wollongong, Murdoch University (Australia), and Heriot-Watt University and Middlesex University (UK). At DIAC, foreign higher education institutions enjoy 100 per cent foreign ownership, no taxes and 100 per cent repatriation of profits. Although higher education institutions in the free zones might escape the requirements of the CAA, each individual emirate has its own licensing and accreditation requirements and its own quality assurance procedures. In the emirate of Dubai, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and its University Quality Assurance International Board (UQAIB) regulate foreign higher education institutions.

Private higher education institutions in the UAE are owned by local individuals, organisations or governments (of individual emirates), or by foreign higher education institutions. For example, the ruler of Sharjah established the American University of Sharjah in 1997 as a private not-for-profit institution, and the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry owns the University of Dubai, which was also established in 1997 as Dubai Polytechnic. More recently, the Abu Dhabi government has funded the establishment of two international branch campuses: Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi, which started operations in 2006, and New York University Abu Dhabi, which admitted its first students in September 2010. Whilst international branch campuses in Dubai recruit the vast majority of their students from the local expatriate communities (with the Indian, Pakistani and Iranian communities being among the largest), New York University Abu Dhabi recruited its students globally, in order to obtain the highest-calibre students who satisfied its stringent entry requirements (Foderaro 2010).

## The beneficiaries of foreign universities in the Arab Gulf States

### *Economic and human development*

The discovery and production of oil and gas since the 1960s enabled the Gulf States to achieve rapid economic development and to provide generous levels of social welfare for their citizens. They are currently among the world's wealthiest countries. All six Arab Gulf countries rely on imports and foreign labour to meet domestic demand (Donn & Al Manthri 2010,

p. 34). With oil and gas resources due to become depleted over the next two decades, the development of knowledge economies, less reliant on the oil and gas industries, has become a key economic objective of governments across the Gulf region.

At the turn of the century, Saudi Arabia and the UAE had the most diversified economies, but they still over-relied on expatriate labour (Wilkins 2001, p. 155). For example, in the UAE, expatriates accounted for nearly 90 per cent of the labour force, and participation of UAE nationals in the labour force was only 54 per cent, and across the entire Gulf region youth unemployment was a problem (Wilkins 2001). As a result, the Gulf States have embarked upon programmes of labour market nationalisation, known as 'Emiratisation' in the UAE, and 'Omanisation' in Oman.

Increased participation in higher education has been regarded as one of the major catalysts to achieve labour market nationalisation and increased diversity in economies. Between 1994 and 2008, there was a threefold expansion of the number of students in higher education in the Gulf countries (Donn & Al Manthri 2010, p. 99), and private sector institutions provided much of this increase. All of the Gulf States have encouraged the establishment of private sector higher education institutions as this policy has relieved them of some of the costs of expanding capacity. With the exception of Saudi Arabia, it is also foreign higher education institutions that have enabled the Gulf States to increase capacity and participation in higher education, whether through the provision of branch campuses, joint ventures, collaboration, the provision of accredited programmes, or the provision of support for independent higher education institutions, such as the British University in Dubai.

The provision of programmes by foreign universities that match the demands of private sector business and industry has enabled countries such as Bahrain, Oman and the UAE to achieve labour force nationalisation targets in some sectors, such as commercial banking, and to make substantial progress in others, such as insurance, human resource management, tourism and hospitality (Mashood *et al.* 2009). Although all of the nationalisation programmes involve targets or quotas, some focus on industries and others on positions/levels in organisations.

As the Gulf States have always had insufficient higher education capacity, several thousand students have each year enrolled at universities overseas. Most have gone to the US, UK, Australia or to other Arab

countries outside the Gulf region. However, since international branch campuses have been established in the Gulf States, more nationals have decided to study at home. For example, approximately one-third of UAE national undergraduate students studying in the UAE are enrolled at a private institution rather than at one of the three federal institutions, and in the emirate of Dubai, the number at private institutions actually exceeds the number at federal institutions (Ahmed 2010a). In December 2009, 13.4 per cent of the students at the University of Wollongong in Dubai were UAE nationals. As more students have decided to study at international branch campuses rather than going overseas, the massive currency outflows associated with overseas study have been reduced.

When Gulf nationals choose to study at international branch campuses in their home countries, national governments benefit in that they do not have to bear the cost of those students' education, as they do not usually pay the tuition fees or any of the associated costs of study. The governments do, however, assist students from poor families. For example, at Education City in Qatar, the Qatar Foundation offers need-based loans and merit-based scholarships. Students who decide to undertake higher education in their home countries are less likely to consider emigration, and therefore the 'brain drain' of Gulf nationals is reduced, and local economies can benefit from the knowledge and skills acquired by these students.

Whereas Education City is focusing on meeting the needs of its local population (Witte 2010b), some of the other higher education hubs, such as DIAC, the Academic City in Dubai, have much bigger ambitions. DIAC was established as a regional hub, with the intention that it would cater for 40,000 students recruited from a large area that includes the Middle East, South Asia and Africa (Bardsley 2008). To date, the majority of students at DIAC have come from local expatriate families. For example, Murdoch University Dubai recruits only five per cent of its students from outside the UAE, but as branch campuses grow and their reputations improve, it is expected that more students will be recruited from overseas.

When foreign students come to the UAE to undertake higher education they also demand other goods and services, which provides a boost to the national economy. Foreign universities that set up in free zones such as DIAC provide revenue to the governments and organisations that own them in the form of rents. Rents at DIAC, on a square-foot basis, are twice as high

as rents in other popular city locations, such as on the Sheikh Zayed Road.

Given that only two universities in the Gulf States - King Saud University and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, both based in Saudi Arabia - appear in the Shanghai JiaoTong ranking of the world's top 500 universities (McGinley 2010), attracting world-class higher education institutions to establish branch campuses can be seen as a strategy to raise the profile and prestige of host countries. The Qatar Foundation has been adamant that institutions at Education City must be 'top 10' in the disciplines they offer. The benefits for host countries of attracting world-class universities to establish branch campuses can extend beyond higher education provision. For example, Abu Dhabi will establish branches of the Guggenheim and Louvre museums to complement the campuses of New York University and Paris-Sorbonne, so that it can develop into a cultural hub in the Middle East as well as a knowledge hub, where cutting edge research will be achieved.

### ***Increased access to higher education and employment***

Foreign universities have, through various forms of transnational provision, increased higher education capacity in the Gulf States by over 30,000 places. This has made higher education available to many Gulf nationals who would otherwise not have had access to it, especially among those who would not have been able to study overseas due to lack of financial resources or because of family or work commitments.

A high proportion of foreign institutions in the Gulf States offer part-time study, which allows local students to continue working full-time while they study, whereas the number of hours a student is allowed to work overseas is usually limited. International branch campuses have introduced innovative and flexible modes of delivery. For example, Murdoch University Dubai's MBA programme uses a trimester system, which allows students to spread their work over three study periods a year. Rates of participation in higher education have increased to 32.1 per cent in Bahrain, 30.2 per cent in Saudi Arabia, 25.2 per cent in Oman and 22.9 per cent in the UAE; however, the rates in Kuwait and Qatar are still only 17.6 per cent and 15.9 per cent respectively (World Economic Forum 2009).

The World Bank's gender parity index (GPI) for tertiary enrolment is an indicator of gender equity. By 1970, the number of women in tertiary education

exceeded men in Bahrain and Kuwait, and by 2000, Oman and Saudi Arabia had also reached gender parity in tertiary education (Luomi 2008, p. 50). Not only did the Gulf States achieve gender parity far before the other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, they also have rates of women participation in tertiary education significantly above the global average of 1.08 females for each man.

In 2008, Qatar had the highest GPI in the world, with 6.05 women for each man enrolled, while the UAE was in seventh place with 2.05 women for each man (World Bank 2010). However, these statistics are distorted to some extent by the fact that men in the Gulf States are more likely to go overseas for their higher education. Nevertheless, with more Gulf nationals deciding to undertake higher education in their home countries (Bristol-Rhys 2008, p. 100), the increase in higher education capacity provided by foreign universities has ensured that women continue to have access to higher education.

Many of the largest employers in the Gulf States recognise the value of higher education provided at foreign higher education institutions, and they provide support and assistance to institutions in many different ways, such as offering advice on curriculum design, help with the development of learning resources, and by providing internships for students. When the British University in Dubai was established in 2003, a range of leading organisations including the Emirates Group, Dubai National Gas Company (DUGAS), Dubai Cable Company (DUCAB) and the Emirates Foundation provided funding for the appointment of staff, funding or opportunities for research, and scholarships for students (Lock 2008, p. 130).

Foreign universities in the Gulf States have improved the knowledge and skills of young people entering the labour market. Graduates benefit by quickly achieving secure and well-rewarded positions that offer career advancement. Employers benefit by not having to invest as much time and finance in training and development, and by recruiting graduates who can make a quicker and better contribution in the workplace.

All of the Gulf States have large expatriate populations, and in the UAE, for example, expatriates account for over 80 per cent of the country's population. Expatriates are not usually able to attend federal universities (although Zayed University recently started admitting foreign students), and before private higher education institutions were established, expatriate families living in the Gulf States had to send their children overseas

to obtain a higher education. International branch campuses enable Gulf expatriates to acquire a high quality, internationally recognised degree at lower cost, since the tuition fees at branch campuses are usually lower than at parent campuses, and without the student having to leave their home or family.

About 90 per cent of the students at Murdoch University Dubai consider their domicile to be outside the UAE, and so it is important for them to gain a 'portable' qualification that they can rely on when they eventually leave the Gulf region. Some 28 different nationalities are represented on Murdoch's MBA programme in Dubai, which has approximately 180 students. The multicultural communities found at branch campuses in the Gulf States offer opportunities for working, sharing and networking among expatriates and also expatriates with Gulf nationals. Outside education, it is unusual for Gulf nationals to mix socially or professionally with expatriate communities.

### ***Students prefer international branch campuses***

UAE nationals who study at a UAE federal institution do not pay tuition fees, but if they enrol at private higher education institutions then they pay the full tuition fees just like any other student. A director at the UAE Ministry of Higher Education recently reported that many Emirati students preferred to study at private higher education institutions rather than federal institutions (Ahmed 2010a). Motives for wanting to enrol at a private higher education institution include the opportunity to study subjects not offered at federal institutions; the possibility of gaining a more highly respected foreign degree, boosting future employment prospects; and the opportunity to study in a multicultural environment, interacting with students from other cultures.

International branch campuses often facilitate an increase in mutual understanding between people from different cultures, and this may enable students to become global citizens. For some Gulf nationals, study at a private institution might have provided their only opportunity to obtain a higher education if they did not gain entry to a federal institution. Most of the foreign higher education institutions that offer undergraduate programmes also offer foundation or bridging programmes, which benefits students who need language or general academic development before embarking on undergraduate study. At Education City, Qatar, an Academic Bridge Programme is offered, which provides students with up to two years of pre-



paratory work to enable them to satisfy the admission requirements of the US-based branch campuses (Witte 2010b). In addition, foreign higher education institutions offer a diverse range of sub-degree level, vocational and professional programmes.

The costs per student on many programmes at Education City are exorbitant, but as the Qatar Foundation is paying all operating expenses, this is not a major problem for the US universities established there (Witte 2010a). Despite being fully funded by the Qatar Foundation, the US universities at Education City are given autonomy in operational decision-making and full control over the curriculum, academic matters and quality. A result of the institutions applying the same entry criteria that they do at home is that most class sizes are very small, which many students find beneficial to their learning. Class sizes at New York University and Paris-Sorbonne in Abu Dhabi are also considerably smaller than those at the home campuses.

### ***Achieving international standards***

It may be argued that foreign universities have helped bring the higher education systems of the Gulf States up to international standards, by providing competition for federal institutions and by encouraging Gulf governments to improve their accreditation and quality assurance procedures. All foreign higher education institutions are expected to adhere to the standards of their parent organisations and the policies and regulations applicable in their home countries. In addition, the increasingly large number of HE providers in some of the Gulf States has a positive effect on quality, by forcing institutions to compete by improving their programmes and the employability of their graduates.

All of the Gulf States have bodies responsible for accreditation and quality assurance at private higher education institutions. The standards for institution accreditation cover all of the main activities and functions of an educational institution, and are generally based on foreign models. For example, the standards implemented by the Commission for Academic Accreditation in the UAE are based on a US model. Even in the UAE's free zones, where regulation is often assumed to be lighter, local bodies still strictly enforce quality

requirements. In April 2010, a review of the University Quality Assurance International Board in Dubai led to the withdrawal from the emirate of two institutions – Mahatma Gandhi University and the International Institute for Technology and Management – as their operations did not satisfy the requirements of the regulator (Ahmed 2010b). The regulation provided by quality assurance bodies in the Gulf States offers a degree of protection to students, who increasingly expect high international standards at branch campuses.

### ***Benefits for foreign universities***

The importance of embracing the opportunities presented by internationalisation has been recognised by most Western universities, and nearly all institutions refer to their international dimension in mission state-

---

**Critics of Western universities that have established international branch campuses often accuse them of 'selling out' to the highest bidder. The director-general of Paris-Sorbonne admitted after the institution opened its campus in Abu Dhabi that it would probably go to any city where all of its expenses were paid**

---

ments (Kehm and Teichler 2007, p. 262). Altbach and Knight (2007, p. 292) claim that earning money is a key motive for all international projects in the for-profit sector and for some traditional non-profit universities, especially when faced with declining state funding. For example, McBurnie and Pollock (2000, p. 333)

observed that since 1999 it has been a strategic aim of Monash University (Australia) to become more self-reliant and less dependent on state funding. Murdoch University expects to earn a return from its Dubai campus in the form of a royalty. Critics of Western universities that have established international branch campuses often accuse them of 'selling out' to the highest bidder (Krieger 2008; Lewin 2008). The director-general of Paris-Sorbonne admitted after the institution opened its campus in Abu Dhabi that it would probably go to any city where all of its expenses were paid (Krieger 2008).

A survey by Knight (2006) found that the main motivations for internationalisation of traditional non-profit universities are usually to enhance research and knowledge capacity and to increase cultural understanding. These would appear to be among the primary motives of Western universities that have entered into collaborative ventures with KAUST and other universities in Saudi Arabia. New York University considers its campus in Abu Dhabi as being part of its strategy to establish itself as a global higher education brand.

In the US, there is now a greater desire amongst students, parents and employers, for both students and academics to gain increased international experience through study or teaching abroad. The UAE campus of New York University is expected to contribute to increasing the proportion of its US-based students who participate in study-abroad from 42 per cent to over 50 per cent (Krieger 2008). Murdoch University has a 'Discovery Exchange Programme', which allows students at its home campuses in Australia to study for a semester or trimester in Dubai, and Dubai-based students can also spend time in Australia.

By diversifying modes of delivery and establishing international branch campuses, Western higher education institutions might be spreading their risks, so that they are less dependent on particular categories of student, and less at risk of sudden shocks or shifting economic and socio-cultural trends that result in reduced enrolments of international students at home campuses. It is increasingly important for some universities to establish or develop a global brand in order to achieve their growth objectives and to attract international students and research income. In addition to its campuses in Australia and Dubai, Murdoch University currently has a presence in Japan, Malaysia and Singapore.

Professor John Grainger, Pro-Vice Chancellor of Murdoch University Dubai, explains the institution's success in the UAE:

'We have developed a high tolerance of ambiguity necessary for living and doing business in the UAE. We treat our students with respect... We insist on the highest possible standards of teaching and learning – all our materials are developed by faculty in Perth, and updated with the latest research findings from across the world. Our faculty and administration pay attention to detail, actively participating in quality assurance initiatives.' (Statement given to author).

By offering high quality programmes in subjects demanded by local students at an affordable price, Murdoch University Dubai increased student enrolments by 100 per cent in 2010-11. The institution is now committed to expanding its facilities in Dubai and introducing new courses. Murdoch University Dubai recently launched undergraduate programmes in Information Technology & Business Information Systems and Environmental Management & Sustainable Development, the latter course being highly relevant locally given that the UAE has the highest carbon footprint in the world and consumes more water per

person than any other nation. In January 2011, it introduced a Master programme in Education.

### **Employee benefits**

Academics at international branch campuses often work in modern, purpose-built premises resourced with the best equipment. They can gain new research opportunities and valuable teaching experience, often leading to the development of new curricula and teaching materials for both home and branch campuses, and increased international research collaboration. Although some academics fear that working at branch campuses in the Gulf States may hinder their research and career progression, in some cases foreign universities are prepared to offer earlier promotions, e.g. to professor, as an incentive to encourage high calibre staff to work at their branch campuses.

Working in the Gulf can offer academics excitement and glamour in their lifestyles. The financial packages offered to expatriate academics in the Gulf States can be very attractive, especially as accommodation is usually provided, salaries are tax-free, free medical insurance is provided, and the school fees of dependent children are paid. International branch campuses also provide employment opportunities for Gulf nationals, especially in managerial, administrative and support roles. As more Gulf nationals achieve PhDs, it is likely that the number taking academic positions at branch campuses in the Gulf States will also increase, thus contributing to the achievement of further labour market nationalisation across the region.

### **Criticisms of foreign universities in the Arab Gulf States**

The literature reveals many critics of the international branch campus concept, and authors have examined particular problems and issues associated with the internationalisation of higher education (Altbach 2001; Naidoo 2003; Altbach 2004; Naidoo 2007; Becker 2009; Romani 2009; Altbach 2010; Donn & Al Manthri 2010; Wilkins 2010). Altbach (2001; 2004) and Naidoo (2003; 2007) observe that higher education has become a commodity to be sold for commercial gain. Naidoo (2003, p. 256) argues that the effects of commodification indicate that in the present context, the historic trends of inequity and declining quality in large segments of higher education systems are likely to be exacerbated.

Donn and Al Manthri (2010, p. 96) suggest that while the products of Western universities may be of the

highest quality in their home countries, they do not necessarily 'travel well' or serve the interests of higher education in the Gulf States. Some institutions may be tempted to deliver at international branch campuses 'off-the-shelf' standardised products with generic content that were developed at their home campuses, and as a result they may be irrelevant or inappropriate in the Gulf region (Naidoo 2007, p. 8). Since commodified systems tend to be lean systems that emphasise cost minimisation, investment in libraries, learning resources and social facilities might fall below international norms (Naidoo 2007).

Altbach (2004, p. 9) suggests Western universities can be seen as the new neocolonists, seeking to dominate not for ideological or political reasons but rather for commercial gain. He argues that the trend of globalisation of higher education is likely to lead to further inequalities, whereby the leading universities in English-speaking countries and in some of the larger European Union countries grow stronger and more dominant, while universities in smaller and developing countries become increasingly marginalised (Altbach 2001). Adopting Altbach's concept of centres and peripheries, Donn and Al Manthri (2010, p. 155) suggest that the Gulf States are on the periphery, becoming increasingly marginalised, as the 'centres' grow stronger. They further argue that the Gulf States could easily fall into the trap of becoming only consumers of knowledge rather than producers of it (p. 124).

In the UAE, the higher education marketplace has become very competitive and among private sector providers there is currently over capacity. Wilkins (2010) found that several institutions were failing to achieve their student recruitment targets or to break-even. As a result, some institutions have been unable to undertake planned investment and expansion, unable to increase their tuition fees in line with increases in costs and unable to run all planned/advertised programmes/modules.

The quality of regulation of foreign universities varies across the Gulf States, and even within individual countries. For example, after the review of the University Quality Assurance International Board led Mahatma Gandhi University and the International Institute for Technology and Management to withdraw from Dubai, both institutions simply relocated to a free zone in Ras al Khaimah, just 87 kilometres away. It should be noted, however, that foreign universities from Australia, the UK and US, are generally regarded as being of high quality by local quality assurance agencies.

In Qatar, some have questioned the connection of Education City with the rest of Qatari society, suggesting that it is elitist and operates in isolation, and that it is encouraging neglect of the federal Qatar University, where over 90 per cent of nationals receive their tertiary education (Witte 2010b). Despite being wholly funded by the Abu Dhabi government, it is expected that only a small proportion of the students at New York University Abu Dhabi will be UAE nationals (Witte 2010b). If, over time, this does not change, resentment and social unrest amongst nationals might eventually occur, especially if young people do not achieve places at other higher education institutions that they consider to be of high quality.

## Conclusion

Donn and Al Manthri (2010, p. 15) argue that higher education in the Gulf States may come to be seen as a baroque arsenal, a valuable economic and political cargo for the sellers/exporters but of little educational value to purchasers/importers. Foreign universities in the Gulf States have, however, added much needed capacity to local higher education systems, and have thus helped significantly increase the participation of young people in higher education.

This study has revealed that higher education in the Gulf States is helping to transform Gulf societies, by increasing labour market nationalisation, reducing youth unemployment, reducing the emigration of highly skilled labour, reducing currency outflows caused by nationals studying overseas, and by contributing to the creation of more highly diversified, knowledge-based economies. Young people are acquiring at international branch campuses the knowledge and skills needed for employment in innovative, knowledge-based organisations.

Donn and Al Manthri (2010, p. 124) also suggest that the Gulf States could fall into the trap of becoming only consumers of knowledge rather than producers of it. However, during the last two to three years, many of the Western-based international branch campuses in the Gulf States have strengthened their research bases by appointing heads of research, by establishing research centres and by introducing doctoral programmes.

It is clear that funding organisations such as the Qatar Foundation and the Abu Dhabi Education Council expect foreign higher education institutions to take the lead in driving their strategies to achieve their

goals of transforming their nations into innovation-based, knowledge producing societies. Foreign higher education institutions that are not directly funded by Gulf governments or organisations are also likely to undertake research, so that they can each develop their reputation and local standing with students, employers and regulatory bodies. It is clear that at the present time mutual benefits are derived from the operation of foreign universities in the Gulf States, with the institutions themselves benefiting as well as a range of local stakeholders.

Dr Warren Fox, Executive Director, Higher Education, at the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), Dubai describes how he sees higher education developing in the emirate:

'We will continue to grow, but I think we will be levelling off; instead of lots of new institutions, we need to expand the number of programmes in institutions that are already here (currently there are 409 programmes in Dubai). We want to broaden the programmes available over the next five years; this will make the (branch) campuses more sustainable... We will also see more postgraduate and doctoral programmes, too. In 20 years, the landscape will probably look a little different; our campuses will be here, and we expect that they will have expanded.' (Statement given to author).

**Stephen Wilkins was formerly Director of Professional Management Programmes at Dubai University College, Dubai, UAE. He is currently a PhD candidate at the International Centre for Higher Education Management, University of Bath, UK.**

## Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Professor John Grainger, Pro-Vice Chancellor of Murdoch University International Study Centre Dubai and Dr Warren Fox, Executive Director, Higher Education, at the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), Dubai for providing information used in this article and for participating in interviews conducted by email.

## References

- ACE. (2009). *U.S. branch campuses abroad. Issue brief*, September. (2009, American Council on Education, Center for International Initiatives. Retrieved on 15 May. (2010 from [http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/cii/pubs/ace/crossborder\\_survey\\_results.pdf](http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/cii/pubs/ace/crossborder_survey_results.pdf))
- Ahmed, A. (2010a). Emiratis seen to prefer private universities, *Khaleej Times*, April 14. Retrieved on 16 October. (2010 from [http://www.khaleejtimes.com/darticlen.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2010/April/theuae\\_April374.xml&section=theuae](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/darticlen.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2010/April/theuae_April374.xml&section=theuae))
- Ahmed, A. (2010b). Branch campuses forced to move out of Dubai, *Khaleej Times*, September 21. Retrieved on 14 October 2010 from [http://www.khaleejtimes.com/darticlen.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2010/September/theuae\\_September481.xml&section=theuae](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/darticlen.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2010/September/theuae_September481.xml&section=theuae)
- Al Lamki, S.M. (2002). Higher education in the Sultanate of Oman: The challenge of access, equity and privatization, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 24(1), pp. 75-86.
- Al Shmeli, S.H. (2009). *Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman: Planning in the context of globalisation*, International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO. Retrieved on 7 July 2010 from: [http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Pol\\_Forum\\_09/Alshmeli\\_Oman.pdf](http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Pol_Forum_09/Alshmeli_Oman.pdf)
- Altbach, P.G. (2001). Higher Education and the WTO: Globalisation run amok, *International Higher Education*, Spring. (2001. Retrieved on 8 May 2010 from: [https://htmlbprod.bc.edu/pls/htmlb/f?p=2290:4:1872596951464925:NO:RP,4:PO\\_CONTENT\\_ID:99872](https://htmlbprod.bc.edu/pls/htmlb/f?p=2290:4:1872596951464925:NO:RP,4:PO_CONTENT_ID:99872))
- Altbach, P.G. (2004). Globalisation and the university: Myths and realities in an unequal world, *Tertiary Education and Management*, 10(1), pp. 3-25.
- Altbach, P.G. (2010). Why branch campuses may be unsustainable, *International Higher Education*, 58, Winter 2010. Retrieved on 13 February 2010 from: [https://htmlbprod.bc.edu/pls/htmlb/f?p=2290:4:3461244414942490::NO:RP,4:PO\\_CONTENT\\_ID:110101](https://htmlbprod.bc.edu/pls/htmlb/f?p=2290:4:3461244414942490::NO:RP,4:PO_CONTENT_ID:110101)
- Altbach, P.G. & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalisation of higher education: Motivations and realities, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3/4), pp. 290-305.
- Bardsley, D. (2008). Dubai plans education hub of 40 universities, *The National*, August 14.
- Becker, R.F.J. (2009). *International branch campuses: Markets and strategies*, The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, London.
- Bristol-Rhys, J. (2008). The dilemma of gender-separated higher education in the United Arab Emirates, in Davidson, C. & Mackenzie Smith, P. (eds), *Higher education in the Gulf States: Shaping economies, politics and culture*, Saqi, London.
- CAA. (2010). *Active programs*. Commission for Academic Accreditation. Retrieved on 15 October 2010 from: <https://www.caa.ae/caaweb/DesktopModules/InstPrograms.aspx>
- Corbyn, Z. (2009). Saudi Arabia begins putting minds to challenges of future, *Times Higher Education*, September 24. Retrieved on 10 October 2010 from: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=408293&sectioncode=26>
- Donn, G. & Al Manthri, Y. (2010). *Globalisation and higher education in the Arab Gulf States*, Symposium Books, Didcot, UK.
- Foderaro, L.W. (2010). N.Y.U. Abu Dhabi scours globe for top students, *The New York Times*, June 20. Retrieved on 21 June 2010 from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/21/nyu.html?src=mv>
- Fox, W.H. (2008). The United Arab Emirates and policy priorities for higher education, in Davidson, C. & Mackenzie Smith, P. (eds), *Higher education in the Gulf States: Shaping economies, politics and culture*, Saqi, London.
- Hatakenaka, S. (2004). *Internationalism in higher education: A review*, Higher Education Policy Institute, Oxford.

- Kehm, B.M. & Teichler, U. (2007). Research on internationalisation in higher education, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3/4), pp. 260-273.
- Knight, J. (2006). *Internationalization of higher education: New directions, new challenges*. The 2005 IAU global survey report, International Association of Universities, Paris.
- Krieger, Z. (2008). The Emir of NYU', *New York Magazine*, April 13. Retrieved on 1 January 2009 from: <http://nymag.com/news/features/46000/>
- Lewin, T. (2008). U.S. universities rush to set up outposts abroad, *New York Times*, February 10. Retrieved on 14 March 2010 from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/10/education/10global.html>
- Lock, D.J. (2008). International higher education: Ownership and opportunities – A case study of the British University in Dubai, in Davidson, C. & Mackenzie Smith, P. (eds), *Higher Education in the Gulf States: Shaping economies, politics and culture*, Saqi, London.
- Luomi, M. (2008). Reforming higher education: The GCC highway in the shadow of the World Bank road, in Davidson, C. & Mackenzie Smith, P. (eds), *Higher education in the Gulf States: Shaping economies, politics and culture*, Saqi, London.
- Maringe, F. (2009). Strategies and challenges of internationalisation in HE: An exploratory study of UK universities, *International Journal of Educational Management*, 23(7), pp. 553-563.
- Mashood, N., Verhoeven, H. & Chansarkar, B. (2009). *Emiratisation, Omanisation and Saudisation – Common causes: Common solutions?* Retrieved on 15 October 2010 from: <http://www.wbiconpro.com/17.%20Helen-UAE.pdf>
- McBurnie, G. & Pollock, A. (2000). Opportunity and risk in transnational education – Issues in planning for international campus development: An Australian perspective, *Higher Education in Europe*, 25(3), pp. 333-343.
- McBurnie, G. & Ziguras, C. (2007). *Transnational Education: Issues and trends in offshore higher education*, Routledge, Abingdon, UK.
- McGinley, S. (2010). Four Mideast universities in world's best 500', *Arabian Business*, August 20. Retrieved on 20 September 2010 from <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/four-mideast-universities-in-world-s-best-500-343573.html?parentID=353278>
- Naidoo, R. (2003). Repositioning higher education as a global commodity: Opportunities and challenges for future sociology of education work, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24(2), pp. 249-259.
- Naidoo, R. (2007). *Higher education as a global commodity: The perils and promises for developing countries*, The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, London.
- Naidoo, V. (2010). Transnational higher education: Why it happens and who benefits?, *International Higher Education*, 58, Winter 2010. Retrieved on 15 May 2010 from [http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/Number58/p6\\_Naidoo.htm](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/Number58/p6_Naidoo.htm)
- Olds, K. (2007). Global assemblage: Singapore, foreign universities, and the construction of a global education hub, *World Development*, 35(6), pp. 959-975.
- Onsman, A. (2010). Dismantling the perceived barriers to the implementation of national higher education accreditation guidelines in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32(5), pp. 511-519.
- Romani, V. (2009). *The politics of higher education in the Middle East: Problems and prospects*. Middle East Brief, 36, May 2009, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.
- Universities UK. (2010). Student mobility versus TNE: Not a zero-sum game, *International Focus*: 28/07/10. Retrieved on 10 August 2010 from <http://www.international.ac.uk/resources/International%20Focus%2060.28.07.10.pdf>
- Verbik, L. & Merkle, C. (2006). *The international branch campus – Models and trends*, The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, London.
- Wilkins, S. (2001). International briefing 9: Training and development in the United Arab Emirates, *International Journal of Training and Development*, 5(2), pp. 153-165.
- Wilkins, S. (2002). The implementation of NVQs in the Sultanate of Oman, *Education+ Training*, 44(3), pp. 144-152.
- Wilkins, S. (2010). Higher education in the United Arab Emirates: An analysis of the outcomes of significant increases in supply and competition, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32(4), pp. 389-400.
- Witte, S. (2010a). *Inside Education City: The persistent demographic & gender imbalance in Qatar*, The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, London.
- Witte, S. (2010b). Gulf State branch campuses: Global student recruitment, *International Higher Education*, 58. Retrieved on 13 February 2010 from [http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/Number58/p5\\_Witte.htm](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/Number58/p5_Witte.htm)
- World Bank. (2010). Indicator 3.3: Gender parity index (GPI), gross enrolment ration (GER) for tertiary, *EdStats*, August 2010. Retrieved on 20 October 2010 from [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTEDSTATS/Resources/3232763-1197312825215/GPI\\_ter.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTEDSTATS/Resources/3232763-1197312825215/GPI_ter.pdf)
- World Economic Forum. (2009). *Global Competitiveness Report 2008-2009*, WEF, Washington DC.

## OPINION

# Preparation and aspiration

## Access to higher education for working-class students

**Heather Brook**

Flinders University

One of the outcomes of the *Bradley Report* (Bradley *et al.* 2008) is that Australian universities have a new incentive to enrol students from low socio-economic status. Consequently, a flurry of (mostly administrative and pedagogical) interest is growing around knowledge concerning the targeting, recruitment and retention of low socio-economic status (SES) students (CSHE 2008; Priest 2009). Some academics from working-class backgrounds recognise, in the current debate, an opportunity to break a long silence—or rather to challenge the ways that we have been persistently and sometimes insidiously silenced. For me, at least, this is both political and personal: ‘political’ because access to education is a fundamental social good that is at present distributed in very uneven ways (Furlong and Cartmel 2009) and personal, because I am a university teacher who was once an low SES student.

I know that my experience as an erstwhile low SES student affects my teaching and interactions with students, but it also influences the way I interpret ideas about the implementation of policies regarding university access and equity. At a recent conference, for example, I heard a lot of discussion about raising the aspirations of low SES students. It seemed that every speaker thought this needed to happen at an earlier age, until eventually the debate settled on how to embed a sense of entitlement to and enthusiasm for higher education in primary school children. The following reflections consider my own experience in relation to two strategies advocated as means to

increasing the enrolment share of low SES students: first, raising aspirations (as early as possible), and second, familiarisation programs. Sad to say, I doubt the kinds of familiarisation or aspiration-raising activities being currently advocated would have helped smooth my own academic path. Having said that, I would not care to imply that such programs are never useful, or that they should not be implemented. I’m sure that my story isn’t typical. (But then, whose is?)

I never thought of our family as ‘poor.’ We *weren’t* poor. There were lots of things we didn’t have, but food and shoes and a warm bed were guaranteed, and I took them for granted. Never being destitute—and never being denied something that really mattered—was one factor among many that slowed any sense I had of class consciousness. My intelligent, capable parents offered measured encouragement for whatever interested us, having had little opportunity or support themselves. My mother finished a year 10 commercial stream, and in her family was considered over-educated. When my siblings and I started school, mum worked part-time—first in a mechanic’s office, and then as a teacher’s aide at a local primary school—again, as a part-time, casual employee. In school holidays, she earned nothing at all. My father started a year of ‘technical school’ after primary school, but hated it and left to work as a messenger boy at the port. He served in the Navy during the latter part of World War II, and when the war ended, worked as a shoe salesman. Later, after he’d met my mother, he joined the Commonwealth Public Ser-

vice under a scheme to support returned servicemen, and worked there (very unhappily, suffering chronic mental health problems) for most of the rest of his life. He remained at 'entry-level' in the public service for many years because he had not completed high school. In order to move up to the next salary band, he completed adult matriculation, but never moved far up the wages ladder. In the long run, stealing money was more appealing to my dad than earning it, and he initiated a number of wildly clever, lucrative 'schemes'. He never did manual labour for a living, so maybe we weren't unequivocally 'working class' after all. But I know that my parents thought of themselves as working class, and money was always tight.

My mum and dad started with nothing, and did the best they could. They were, however, streets ahead of their own parents, who had worked in flour mills, on railway gangs, and cleaning other people's homes. My parents modelled self-improvement through adult education—my mother attended myriad Workers' Education Association evening courses, and my father taught himself astronomy and navigation. Dad took my older brother, sister and me to the council library every Thursday evening. We didn't have bookshelves at home, but the library was a place I knew and loved well. I know my parents had educational aspirations for my siblings and me, even though they knew next to nothing about what tertiary education involved. I knew, nonetheless, that I had the intellectual capacity to attend university, and I understood that I could go.

But, ten years after I left school, none of us had graduated. My sister had started a teaching course, and dropped out after a couple of years. She got married, had three kids, and worked as a cleaner in a shopping centre. (She's a health professional, now, but that's another story.) By the time he left school, my brother had a more substantial criminal than academic record, and a sizeable drug habit. His heartbreaking life ended soon after his 25th birthday. And me? I was the most thoroughly 'prepared' of all of us. At my (state) primary school, I'd done well enough in a music aptitude test to be one of six in my year to be offered free violin lessons. I was lent an instrument and allowed half an hour of group tuition, with a visiting music teacher, every week. No-one in my family had ever had music lessons before. Having those violin lessons confirmed my parents' idea that we were surely rising through the class ranks.

Thinking about my father's response to my violin-playing touches me deeply. Every six months or so,

he'd bring home a classical record. The first was a K-Tel record of Strauss waltzes. He played it, loudly, at our highly dysfunctional dinner table. I think I suspected, even then, that it wasn't 'right': I sensed that my father's effort to bring home some cultural capital in fact exposed our lack of taste. That K-Tel record, with its bright purple cover, would be recognised by most people as a piece of classic 70s kitsch, but to us it was high-class dinner music—it was what we thought rich people did. (Even now, I have no faith in my ability to differentiate 'real' art and kitsch, especially where those in the know adopt an ironically embracing attitude to the latter. I can never tell whether they're being sarcastic or not.) I didn't take to Strauss. Those lurching waltzes still set my teeth on edge. But later records—including a boxed set of Mozart wind concertos, and David & Igor Oistrach's rendition of the Bach double violin concerto—were childhood treasures. Having a knowledge of classical music is great class camouflage. Much later, at various times when I thought it prudent to try and 'pass' as middle class, knowing Beethoven from Brahms was a shibboleth.

I loved classical music, but as a teenager I followed my older brother and sister in all matters of taste. There were only three-and-a-half years between us, and my brother's knowledge about everything that mattered, in high school, meant that I never became a music nerd. Every day after school we'd have Iggy Pop, Led Zeppelin, Lou Reed and Bob Dylan blasting at full volume in the lounge room. At school I did the minimum required—which, for me, was very little. My grades were so poor that I was threatened with having to repeat year 11. When the Principal relented and promoted me to year 12, I made a point of scoring straight A's in the first term, after which my normal, negligible effort resumed. (No wonder my teachers were so infuriated by me.) My parents had so much on their plates—what with my brother's offending, my father's mental health, and their own divorce—that I was more or less excused from accounting for my falling grades. Nobody at school counselled me about what I was doing, and no-one suggested that I consider anything other than a career in music. I probably wouldn't have listened, in any case.

I stayed at school only because I wanted to continue with music—not so much the violin, but a new love, the bassoon. I had been awarded a scholarship each year since I was 14 to take bassoon lessons at the conservatorium. My teacher, Mr Wightman, would smoke cigarettes throughout the hour; sometimes, when I

went into his office late in the afternoon, he would be napping in an armchair. We got on famously. When I sat next to Mr Wightman in the Conservatorium orchestra most Saturday mornings, together we were the oldest and youngest players. The Conservatorium was part of the University of Adelaide. My visits, twice a week during the school year, constituted an extensive familiarisation program: in theory, at least, it is hard to imagine a better preparation for tertiary music study. But one-on-one lessons and orchestral practice did not really prepare me at all for what was to come.

I left home the same week I left school, and not a moment too soon. I was 17 and moved into a share house, taking a room my brother vacated when he left the state, as he frequently did. The rent was \$55 a week, and there were five of us there. Rent of \$11 per week sounds like a bargain, and (even back in 1981) it was, but my weekly income was only \$17, so I supplemented it as well as I could.

Even two months in, I was finding it difficult to make classes at the conservatorium. Mr Wightman retired, suffering lung cancer, and I disliked his replacement. As a single-study scholarship student, I'd only attended personal lessons and orchestra rehearsals, but as an undergraduate there were many more classes required, and the cultural differences between me and my fellow students became more and more pronounced. The vast majority of music students were from the wealthy, inner eastern suburbs. Their parents thought nothing of investing in a better clarinet for young Hugh or Simone, even at \$5000. My parents could no more have bought a professional-level instrument for me than fly me to the moon. Mr Wightman lent me a decent bassoon, and I played that. I ate leftovers off other people's plates in the refectory while my classmates talked about what kind of car or house their parents were buying for them. I was very out of place, but I no longer experienced not fitting in as a failure on my part; I no longer wanted to fit in. So, with 'F's buzzing like flies around my academic record, I left.

Over the next ten years, I worked in cafes, restaurants, fast food retailers, and (occasionally) as a musician. Sick of my chaotic life, and still freshly bereaved, I finally accepted a 'proper' office job. Armed with a more robust sense of who I was and where I stood, I enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts degree at Adelaide University. Going back to the same university wasn't easy. Throughout the whole of my part-time study there, I was scared that someone would discover my previous record of failure and disqualify me from my course.

What's more, I had thoroughly internalised the oppressive equation that rich people are somehow 'naturally' smarter than others, and my confidence was very low. But I had a decent job that allowed unpaid time off to attend certain classes (a fact which relieved me of the burden of actually choosing topics), a loving partner and a safe home.

Even more crucially, at 25 I had endured loss, betrayal and bereavement. I had a strong sense that there was nothing any university boffin could do to me that would hurt worse than the troubles I'd already suffered. I neither wanted nor needed friends at uni. My social life—my friends, family, and partner—remained markedly working class. I was strangely, newly respectable to them, in the same way I knew I was exotically disrespected at uni, (not that I showed it, if I could help it). I was weirdly intellectual in one part of my life, and a closet bogan in the other. Juggling these identities was sometimes uncomfortable, but the pleasure and pride I experienced in learning, and in learning to excel, made up for that. Not quite fitting in within either realm eventually settled into an uneasy kind of balance.

My father was in prison the year I completed honours, and continued his sentence while I went on to postgraduate study. My partner's best mate was in the same prison at the same time. I associated with them, and other credentialed criminals, as much as I did law scholars and politics professors. It is difficult to describe the experience and effects of my inhabiting these clashing cultures, except to say that I remain acutely aware of the distance between them. At one point in my PhD candidature, I doubted (as most of us do) my ability to finish my thesis. My already tenuous self-confidence had been shaken when a fellow student jokingly announced, in front of my supervisor and other esteemed academics, that she was, apparently, officially 'White Trash'. She explained that she'd just come across a new definition of the term. To be classed White Trash, she said, you had to have a relative in jail. And, she went on, because her sister's husband's cousin's son was doing time for theft, or possession, (or something), she fit the bill. The murmurs of amusement that followed were whimsically ironic - to the people around me, this was a quaint, slightly silly conversation about categorisation. For me, it was an occasion of corporeal betrayal: my face and ears flushed red, and my heart pounded so hard that I could hardly speak. Not that I said anything—there was nothing to say that wouldn't frame me as hard done by, ashamed, or spiteful, and I was none of these.



I recounted all of this to one of my partner's football team-mates. We were in the local leagues club after a cold Saturday match, drinking red wine. He rallied me. You don't want to worry about that! You will finish your schoolwork, you'll get your PhD. You wanna know why? Because you can, that's why.' He was right: I could, and did.

I know, however, that going to a university campus as part of a year 9 school excursion, or being encouraged to 'aim high' from a younger age would not have seen me graduate any earlier or easier. As an undergraduate student, what I needed, above all else, was a financially secure environment, along with a modicum of material and 'moral' support for my efforts. As a low SES school-leaver with criminal connections, and an attitude problem, that was (almost by definition) what I did not have. Indeed, I cannot see how it would have been possible for me to succeed in tertiary study while the most basic circumstances of my life were so difficult. For me, being 25 was a lifetime older than 17. That eight-year age difference meant that I could listen to university lecturers and tutors without suspecting them; it meant that I had a greater investment in, but less fear of knowledge.

For what it is worth, my experience suggests several ways that low SES school-leavers might be encouraged to access university. The first, perhaps paradoxically, is that the desirability of moving directly from school to university should be open to question: not just for rich kids on family-funded 'gap' year travels, but for everyone (Furlong and Cartmel 2009, p. 72). Asking low SES students to move directly from school to university, without all the invisible supports that help wealthier students, is a hard ask. I do not mean to suggest that low SES students who want to move directly from school to university should not have every opportunity to do so—and perhaps one way to facilitate this for some would be to offer low SES students access to 'halls of residence' accommodation at discounted rates. But if students do not have the resources to eat well, sleep well and live safely, they cannot be expected to study effectively. The same goes for those low SES (and other) students who begin university, but find themselves out of their depth—whether socially, academi-

cally, or otherwise. (Mistakes arising out of immaturity seem to have fewer consequences for the rich.) The option to suspend study should not be interpreted as failure (Furlong and Cartmel 2009, p. 73), and re-entry to the same or a different course should not be penalised. Most importantly, those people who were low SES school-leavers but who did not go directly to university should be encouraged over the following ten or twenty (or lifetime) years to keep considering further study. That is, the current incentives to enrol higher numbers of low SES students should extend far beyond school-leavers.

For me, the single most important policy the government could enact to effect its 'education revolution' would be to abolish tuition fees; HECs, the 'Higher Education Contribution Scheme'. Working people who

---

**My father was in prison the year I completed honours, and continued his sentence while I went on to postgraduate study. My partner's best mate was in the same prison at the same time. I associated with them, and other credentialed criminals, as much as I did law scholars and politics professors.**

---

were low SES school-leavers find it difficult to see how a university education will advance their financial interests, particularly if they are already in full-time work (as parents, employees, or combinations of both). The HECS system implies that there are monetary rewards attached to university qualifications.

While there is certainly a correlation between wealth and higher education, it is by no means clear that education—or even intelligence (Gladwell 2008)—confers the privileges of a middle class lifestyle and not the other way around. Thus, offering a better education to working-class people does not necessarily mean that they will be 'promoted' into the middle-class, or magically qualify for middle-class incomes (Benson 2009; Kastberg 2007, p. 64). If opportunities for the acquisition of wealth continue to depend on the value of cultural capital apart from or beyond formal education, it is misleading to hitch earning potential to university study. That is not to say that higher education does not broaden opportunities and enhance life: the ability to use knowledge critically, ethically and confidently is surely desirable in and of itself. Education does not have to be vocationally oriented to be enriching. The cost of study is currently articulated to assumed future earnings in ways which deter low SES school-leavers and more mature students, but which matter much less to students from well-off families.

Finally, the fact that there were lecturers at my university who recognised my scholarly talents without judging my life circumstances mattered enormously to me. If, the second time around, certain lecturers and supervisors had not looked beyond my class cluelessness, I would never have persisted with undergraduate, let alone postgraduate study—in fact, I would never have been offered a place. I know, now, that key lecturers and supervisors saw elements of their own experience in mine. And now, as my own teaching and learning practices continue to mature, I recognise aspects of my own experience in my students' lives. Most importantly of all, I take courage and strength from those working-class students I teach, and from those students and colleagues whose stories are similar (and yet always uniquely different) to my own (Tokarczyk & Fay 1993; Dews & Law 1995; Ryan & Sackrey 1984; Strom 2001). It is telling that, as my academic career has unfolded, I have felt progressively less need to 'pass' as—that is, to pretend to be—respectably middle-class. That my willingness to consider my own working-class background has intensified at the same time as my position as a respectable middle-class academic has become more assured is no accident. The irony is deep, complex, and abiding.

Working class people in general, and low SES students in particular, are no more or less intelligent than anyone else. In our under-representation at universities, however, we are sometimes wrongly positioned as intellectually deficient (Kadi 1996). The problem in extending the opportunities higher education affords to under-represented groups lies not in low SES students themselves, but in the social relations that produce them as such. Looking for the first and most influential point of intervention is like looking for the beginning of a loop. Instead, we should attend to the wisdom and experience of those whose situation has some resonance with our own, and build along the paths their steps have already worn. Most of all, universities should be places where class differences, along with other diverse personal and cultural identifications, can be critically productive rather than shaming and exclusive. And this has to start, both inside and beyond the classroom, now.

**Heather Brook is Senior Lecturer in the Women's Studies Department at Flinders University, South Australia.**

## References

- Benson, M. (2009). At what cost? A successful academic faces lifelong debt, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 29 November 2009. Retrieved on 21 January 2010 from: <http://chronicle.com/article/At-What-Cost-/49253>
- Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H., & Scales, B. (2008). *Review of Australian higher education: final report (The Bradley Report)*, Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, Canberra, ACT.
- CSHE (Centre for the Study of Higher Education). (2008). *Participation and equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people*, University of Melbourne, Retrieved on 9 April 2010 from <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/content.asp?page=/publications/policy/equity/index.htm>
- Dews, C. & Carolyn L. (1995). *This fine place so far from home: voices of academics from the working class*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
- Furlong, A. & Cartmel, F. (2009). *Higher Education and Social Justice*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, UK.
- Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Little, Brown & Company, London.
- Kadi, J. (1996). *Thinking class: sketches from a cultural worker*, South End Press, Boston.
- Kastberg, S. (2007). *Servants in the house of the masters*. iUniverse Inc, New York.
- Priest, A. (2009). 'I have understanding as well as you': supporting the language and learning needs of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds, *Journal of Academic Language & Learning* 3(2), pp. A70-A81.
- Ryan, J. & Sackrey, S. (1984). *Strangers in paradise: academics from the working class*, South End Press, Boston.
- Strom, L. (2001). Reclaiming our working-class identities, in Zandy, J. (ed.), *What we hold in common: an introduction to working-class studies*, The Feminist Press, New York.
- Tokarczyk, M. & Fay, E. (1993). *Working-class women in the academy*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.

# An interrupted pathway

Dee Michell

It took me 22 years to get my first undergraduate degree. Not that I studied for all that time, of course, but I first enrolled in 1976 and I didn't graduate with my BA until April 1998. Why did it take so long? Was there something wrong with me? Was there anything anyone else could have done to help me get through university earlier?

These questions are very much on my mind at the moment as programmes have been and are being put into place to encourage more school leavers from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds to go on to university. The South Australian Government's First Generation Programme, Flinders University's Inspire Peer Mentor Programme and the University of South Australia's First Generation University Orientation Programme are examples of such programmes designed because, even though participation in Australian universities has widened considerably since the 1970s, Indigenous students, rural students and those from lower SES backgrounds have been consistently under-represented (Bradley *et al.* 2008, p. xii; Moodie 2008, p. 162; Wyn 2009, p. 17). My interest in the Federal Government's push to increase the representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds from less than 15 to 20 per cent by 2020 (Bradley *et al.* 2008) is both personal and academic. It's personal because I was a student from a low socio-economic background, and it's academic because I now teach in a university (albeit on a casual or contract basis).

Not that I identified as a student from a low socio-economic background when I first applied to go to university. Back then I was still a foster kid and that made me different, but I didn't see myself as coming from a poor or working class background, probably because everyone around me was in a similar situation. Our neighbours across the road had parents

both of whom worked in a factory and left for work in clothes I wouldn't have been allowed to leave the house in, but generally the mothers were at home and the fathers worked elsewhere. My foster father had worked for the same company for 40 years, gradually working his way up from factory shift work to becoming a supervisor. There was some awareness of status I suppose but that was primarily in relationship to the medical profession. Marrying a doctor was promoted as the ideal, and I remember my foster mother becoming indignant when a neighbour who said he worked at the Royal Adelaide Hospital was discovered to be the gardener there; she forever after treated him with considerably less deference!

The kids at school tended to be from Australia-born Anglo backgrounds, but I recall a few Indigenous Australian children, as well as migrants from English and European backgrounds. Forty years later Blair Athol still has a majority Australia-born population, although 29 per cent of the State's refugees from Africa and the Middle East live in that suburb and the adjacent one of Kilburn (My School 2010). These days 66 per cent of children attending Gepps Cross Primary School, where I went for 7 years from 1962, come from backgrounds in the lowest quarter of the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) with 99 per cent in the bottom half of that Index (My School 2010). It may have been similar when I was a kid and perhaps the below national average numeracy and literacy skills were similar too.

I thought I was pretty smart until I went to High School, where the practice of streaming determined I was only average. Maybe that's the reason I chose to go into the commercial stream the following year; I'd accepted my fate of a vocational education, the sort that had been provided for with the mass expansion

of secondary education from the 1950s which was intended to skill up workers for the boom industries of the time - agriculture, manufacturing and business (Branson and Miller 1972, pp. 59-60; Wyn 2009, p. 3). I don't recall why I then suddenly decided in fourth year that I wanted to go to university. This was a decidedly odd, even deviant (Branson & Miller 1979) thing for a kid like me. Research shows that State kids are far less likely 'to continue their education beyond the minimum school leaving age' (Bromfield and Osborn 2007, p. 8) and no-one in my respectable working class foster family had been to university, nor even finished secondary school for that matter. (I was to find out much, much later that nobody in my 'white trash' (Wilson 2002) birth family had either). But it was the 1970s and there was considerable talk of free university education so perhaps I'd imbibed something of that from those exciting Whitlam days.

Doing Year 12 was my first experience of coming unstuck educationally. That commercial stream education had prepared me well for becoming a secretary but not adequately for fifth year, and some of my grades plummeted. I also felt a bit lost and lonely for part of the year as I was only one of four girls to go from the commercial stream into fifth year and the only one to make it through to final exams. I no longer had regular contact with the two teachers who had cajoled and encouraged me for three years either. When I didn't receive the place at the University of Adelaide I wanted, I deferred the offer from the still new Flinders University. Reflecting back now, I think that final year at high school undermined my self-confidence considerably, but I was also experiencing significant conflict at home. I moved out the following year, not long after I'd received my letter from the Welfare Department telling me I was no longer a Ward of the State. Instead of feeling free of family constrictions when I left home, however, I felt so lost, alone and unsupported that I began the first search for my birth family.

Two years later I did start doing a BA at the University of Adelaide. By then I had accrued a little cultural and social capital, something kids from middle and upper class backgrounds have in abundance (Power *et al.* 2001; Kendall 2002; Devine 2004) and a friend was able to ring a friend at Adelaide and organise a place for me there. Without those social connections I would not have gone to Adelaide, but it was presented to me as the 'better' university because it had been established for longer than Flinders. I had no concept of it

being an elite university; after all for most of its life it had been the only university in South Australia. When I arrived on campus it wasn't long before my little bit of confidence ebbed away and I struggled with the work, struggled feeling overwhelmed and out of place, struggled to make friends, even to speak up in a tutorial. I was so intimidated by the Barr Smith Library I bought books instead of borrowing them!

If only I had known back then what I know now. According to a number of studies, students from poor and working class backgrounds come from distinctly different cultural backgrounds than middle and upper class students, even though Australian born non-Indigenous Australians are usually regarded as mono-cultural and therefore seen as having equal access to educational opportunities (Jackson & Marsden 1962; Willis 1977; Branson & Miller 1979; Dwyer *et al.* 1984; Tokarczyk & Fay 1993; Miner 1993; Zandy 1995; Lucey & Walkerdine 2000; Livingstone 2006; Furlong & Cartmel 2009). Because of the dominant middle to upper class culture at university, however, poor and working class students are likely to begin to feel ashamed of their backgrounds, to feel like 'cultural outsiders' in what Sennett and Cobb (1973 cited by Granfield 1991, p. 336) have called a 'hidden injury of class.' They can also begin to doubt their academic abilities, feel as if they shouldn't be at university, that they don't belong, or even wonder what the point of a university education is (Jackson & Marsden 1962; Granfield 1991). Making friends is also difficult for these students, unless they are able to link up with students from similarly marginalised backgrounds (Tokarczyk 2004; Stuart 2006; Walker 2007). Poor and working class students may even put energy into learning how to 'pass' as middle class, mimicking the behaviour, speech and clothing of their middle and upper class classmates in order to fit in, which not only makes for a double load of learning but which can also isolate the students from their family and non-university going friends (Granfield 1991; Jensen 1997).

My memory of that first year at Adelaide was that I was a failure. I didn't fit in, I couldn't speak in class, nor did I have any idea of what I was supposed to do, of what a university education was all about, of what I'd do at the end of it. My results, however, show that I was a competent to good university student, but the feelings of being a failure, of being inadequate, of not belonging, prevailed and I dropped out during my second year. The excuse I gave myself and others was a good working class one - I needed to earn money.

After a sojourn working fulltime using some of those 'commercial stream' skills I'd learned in High School and with ten years in the corporate sector where I worked my way up into management, I finally went back to the University of Adelaide in 1991. By then I knew I'd come from a low socio-economic status background although I didn't have the cognitive understanding I do now of the ways in which social class infuse our behaviour, expectations, feelings and thought processes (hooks 2000, p. 103). In the elite corporate environment I'd instinctively learned to manage what I said about my background (Granfield 1991) in order to avoid being looked on with pity and/or contempt. I'd also learned to mimic my middle class associates and 'passed' skilfully and effortlessly as middle class preferring that to being seen as 'too rough, too loud, too dirty, too direct, too uneducated' (Zandy 1995, p. 2), i.e., as from a working class or 'white trash' family. The psychic cost of 'passing' was enormous though (Jensen 1997).

I suffered regular and debilitating bouts of depression which would have had to do with unresolved childhood trauma as well as with ongoing performances to hide the lower class status of my birth and childhood. I'd accumulated more cultural capital, however, and knew that a university degree would transform that lowly status, not that this was my motivation to study; personal fulfilment has always been the driving force behind my academic career.

Still, I learned quickly that even being a student was better than saying I did 'home duties' or was caring for children fulltime, and there was no stigma attached to being on the Austudy student welfare Programme as there was if I had been on the dole (McDowell, 2003, 39). I also had a few more inner resources in my 30s, a spiritual tradition which taught me that I had inherent worth far beyond the humble status of my birth, and emotional support from a husband who thought I was brilliant. According to Werner's (2005) longitudinal study these are factors which often promote recovery in adulthood for those who've suffered as children, but I also felt at home in Women's Studies where I began to connect my personal experiences to oppressive social structures and cultural practices. Studying part-time while juggling parenting responsibilities, having two

more children and doing paid work part time, however, meant finishing that degree took a damn long time.

By the end of my BA I knew I wanted to study theology, and I also knew I wanted to do a field of study from the beginning and without interruption so I signed up for another undergraduate degree, a BTh at Flinders. This time round I was a much more confident student; even with all the juggling I still had to do I managed consistently high grades, first class Honours and a scholarship to do my PhD.

I've always thought that my meandering, interrupted, at times tortured pathway through higher education reflected badly on me: I didn't know what I wanted, I couldn't figure out how university worked, I clearly wasn't as smart as other people. At some level I must have assimilated the myth that Aus-

---

**At some level I must have assimilated the myth that Australia is a classless society, as well as its corollary that an individual's lack or surplus of talent determines their place in society and therefore if they struggle academically it's their fault**

---

tralia is a classless society, as well as its corollary that an individual's lack or surplus of talent determines their place in society and therefore if they struggle academically it's their fault (Dwyer et al 1984, p. 32; Kadi 1993, p. 94; Tokarczyk and Fay 1993,

p. 4; Miner 1993, p. 74; Fieldes 1996, p. 27; McHugh & Cosgrove 1998, p. 37; Ball and Vincent 2001). The latter of course perpetrates the longstanding myth that those who are poor are also stupid (Brothe 2005, p. 19). Small wonder I often felt stupid, learned to 'pass' as middle class in order to survive, and dropped out of university in my early twenties. According to American and British research, students from low SES backgrounds are four times more likely to have interrupted pathways compared to students from families with more resources including parents who went to university themselves. Even if they fail subjects, the latter students are more able to find out about and negotiate complex procedures which allow them to sit supplementary exams or apply for extended extensions (Power *et al.* 2003, pp. 86-87; Goldrick-Rab 2006, p. 69; Furlong & Cartmel 2009).

Much has changed for university students these days. There are student learning centres to visit and learn the formula for doing essays, library tours, opportunities to get counselling and even Programmes which encourage high school students to familiarise themselves with the campus before they enrol. The experience of first year students is now recognised as

crucial to their ongoing success and perseverance and a number of universities, such as Charles Darwin University, have asked first year students what they need in order to learn more effectively. However, the First Year Experience Programmes appear to treat students as a homogenous group all needing clear directions on assessment criteria, and all needing to belong for example. That it might be more difficult for a student from a marginalised social class to belong appears not to have been considered.

All of those initiatives may have helped me as a student to persevere had I been able to overcome my self-consciousness, anxiety and shyness in order to access them. Probably what I most needed, however, was to not feel ashamed and stigmatised by my background but to know that my personal struggles were connected to the wider social structures and different cultural background I came from. It would have helped, too, to not feel so alone, a feeling that might have been alleviated by being connected with both students and staff from similar backgrounds who could offer understanding, friendship, encouragement and know-how (a point also made by Greenwald & Grant 1999, p. 29). What a difference it might have made if the First Generation Stories Project (First Generation 2007) at California State University, Fresno, which makes provision for first generation university staff to write their stories, had been available then. Or if first generation university students from poor and working class backgrounds had been encouraged to form an organisation to support each other as well as write their stories, as students at the University of Michigan (The Michigan Story Project 2010) now do.

A university education for many middle and upper class students is all a bit ho-hum, a quite usual transition into an independent adult working life. For those of us from poor and working class backgrounds, however, it's far from usual. By my reckoning, fewer than three per cent of Australians from low SES backgrounds would have a university degree; even fewer will have postgraduate qualifications. Surely this means that rather than having joined the ranks of the elite, we are a unique group of people with resilience, courage, perseverance and determination who have overcome any number of barriers – not of our making – in order to be successful educationally in an environment which reproduces middle and upper class privilege. Our knowledge and experience should therefore be called upon in order to inspire, promote, mentor,

befriend and encourage current and prospective students from similar backgrounds, but this appears not to be happening in Australia, even though, as I've said above, it is beginning to occur in the United States.

Would I recommend university education for other people who come from similar backgrounds to mine? I do, all the time! Once I did get settled in, took subjects that appealed to me and balanced strategic and deep learning, I felt enriched, nourished at the very core of being. I still cringe when I think about how far better off financially we would be if I'd not taken this path though. Between the enormous debt I have from tuition fees (HECS) and other financial supplements, and the money I haven't earned over the years because of studying, the financial cost has been a constant strain, and I've yet to see any returns on the 'investment'. I still think it's been worthwhile, however, not only because I love my life now, but also because I've demonstrated that you don't have to be an academically gifted high school student from a low SES background to get a PhD – being average will get you there too.

**Dee Michell is an independent scholar who has worked on a casual and contract basis in all three South Australian universities since she was awarded her PhD in 2008.**

## Acknowledgements

Heather Brook, Senior Lecturer in the Women's Studies Department at Flinders University acted as an invaluable sounding board for exploring many of the ideas about how social class plays out and affects students' experiences on campus. Funding for the research in this paper was provided by a Flinders Teaching Quality Network (FTQN) grant from Flinders University.

## References

- Ball, S. & Vincent, C. (2001). *New Class Relations in Education: the Strategies of the 'Fearful' Middle Classes*, in Demaine, J. (ed.), *Sociology of Education Today*, Palgrave, Basingstoke.
- Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H. & Scales, B. (2008). *Review of Australian higher education: final report ('The Bradley Report')*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, ACT.
- Branson, J. & Miller, D. (1979). *Class, Sex and Education in Capitalist Society: Culture, Ideology and the Reproduction of Inequality in Australia*, Sorrett Publishing, Malvern, Victoria.
- Bromfield, L. & Osborn, A. (2007). 'Getting the big picture': A synopsis and critique of Australian out-of-home care research, *Child Abuse Prevention*, 26, pp. 1-39.
- Brothe C. (2005) in Welsch, K. (ed.), *Those Winter Sundays. Female Academics and Their Working-Class Parents*, University Press of America, Lanham, MD.

- Devine, F. (2004). *Class Practices. How Parents Help Their Children Get Good Jobs*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Dwyer, P., Wilson, B. & Roger W. (1984). *Confronting School and Work Youth and class cultures in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- Fieldes, D. (1996). Still here, still fighting: the working class in the nineties, in Kuhn, R. & O'Lincoln, T. (eds), *Class & Class Conflict in Australia*, Longman, Melbourne.
- First Generation Stories* (2007). California State University, Fresno. Retrieved on 17 February 2010 from <http://firstgeneration.csufresno.edu/default.htm>
- Furlong, A. & Cartmel, F. (2009). *Higher Education and Social Justice*, Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, Maidenhead, Berkshire.
- Goldrick-Rab, S. (2006). Following Their Every Move: An Investigation of Social-Class Differences in College Pathways, *Sociology of Education*, 79, pp. 61-79.
- Granfield, R. (1991). Making it by Faking it. Working-Class Students in an Elite Academic Environment. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 20(3), pp. 331-351.
- Greenwald, R. & Grant, E. (1999). Border Crossings: Working-Class Encounters in Higher Education, in Linkin, S. (ed.), *Teaching Working Class*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.
- Hooks, B. (2000). *Where we stand: class matters*, Routledge, New York.
- Jackson, B. & Marsden, D. (1962). *Education and the Working Class*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Jensen, B. (1997). Across the Great Divide. Crossing Classes and Clashing Cultures, in Zweig, M. (ed.), *What's Class Got To Do With It? American Society in the Twenty-First Century*, ILR Press, Ithaca & London.
- Kadi, J. (1993). A Question of Belonging, in Tokarczyk, M. & Fay, E. (eds), *Working-Class Women in the Academy*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.
- Kendall, D. (2002). *The Power of Good Deeds. Privileged Women and the Social Reproduction of the Upper Class*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, Lanham, MD.
- Livingstone, D. (2006). Contradictory Class Relations in Work and Learning. Some Resources for Hope, in Sawchuk, P., Duarte, N. & Elhammoumi, M. (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Activity: Explorations across Education, Work and Everyday Life*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Lucey, H. & Walkerdine, V. (2000). Boys' Underachievement: Social Class and Changing Masculinities, in Cox, T. (ed.), *Combating Educational Disadvantage. Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable Children*, Falmer Press, London.
- McDowell, L. (2003). *Redundant Masculinities? Employment Change and White Working Class Youth*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
- McHugh, M. & Cosgrove, L. (1998). Research for Women: Feminist Methods, in Ashcraft, D. (ed.), *Women's Work. A Survey of Scholarship By and About Women*, The Haworth Press, New York.
- Moodie, G. (2008). Australia: Twenty Years of Higher Education Expansion, *Journal of Access Policy & Practice*, 5(2), pp. 153-179.
- Miner, V. (1993). Writing and Teaching with Class. in Tokarczyk, M. & Fay, E. (eds), *Working-Class Women in the Academy*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.
- Power, S., Edwards, T., Whitty, G., & Wigfall, V. (2003). *Education and the Middle Class*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Stuart, M. (2006). 'My friends made all the difference': Getting into and succeeding at university for first-generation entrants, *Journal of Access Policy & Practice* 3(2), pp. 162-184.
- The Michigan Story Project* (2010). First Generation College Students@ Michigan, University of Michigan, Retrieved on 17 February 2010 from [http://stemaker.umich.edu/firstgens/the\\_michigan\\_story\\_project](http://stemaker.umich.edu/firstgens/the_michigan_story_project)
- Tokarczyk, M. & Fay, E. (1993). *Working-Class Women in the Academy*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.
- Tokarczyk, M. (2004). Promises to Keep. Working Class Students and Higher Education, in Zweig, M. (ed.), *What's Class Got To Do With It? American Society in the Twenty-First Century*, ILR Press, Ithaca & London.
- Walker, L. (2007). Wider Access Premium Students at the University of Glasgow: Why do they need support?, *Journal of Access Policy & Practice*, 5(1) pp. 22-40.
- Werner, E. (2005). Resilience & Recovery: Findings from the Kauai Longitudinal Study, *Focal Point*, 19(1), pp. 11-14.
- Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to Labor. How working class kids get working class jobs*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Wilson, J. (2002). Invisible Racism. The Language and Ontology of 'White Trash,' *Critique of Anthropology*, 22(4), pp. 387-401.
- Wyn, J. (2009). Touching the Future: Building skills for life and work. *Australian Education Review*, 55, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Melbourne, Vic.
- Zandy, J. (1995). *Liberating Memory. Our Work and Our Working-Class Consciousness*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick.

# Looking back into the future

**Arthur O'Neill & Bob Speechley**

Having worked for many decades at the hopeless task of administering higher education institutions, these two old codgers regurgitate their experience for the benefit of new chums and speculate about the next half century. This paper is based on one presented at the TEM Conference, 3-6 October 2010, Melbourne.

## Introduction

We've racked our brains, as much as is left of them, to figure out what happened in Australian post-secondary education over the last fifty or so years; and to predict what sort of arrangement our great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren, will encounter fifty years hence. To put this modest project another way: what in 2060 might a historian (assuming there are, then, historians) write about our topic over the previous one hundred years?

Then, as now, she/he would know that society and study are a two-way stretch: education is embedded in and gives layers of expression to prevailing socio-political conditions. As these alter, or stay relatively unaltered, so does the shape, size, content and direction of education; and so also does the language used to hatch and cross-hatch bits of it. Raymond Williams (1976) sagely reminds us of the historically shaped senses in which certain keywords are used. We have in mind the variable ways in which 'advanced', 'higher', 'sector', 'system', 'technical', 'technological', 'tertiary', 'training' and 'vocational' have been associated with use of the word 'education'. We say more about that later.

To help provide a testamentary source for a future historian, we've picked out three intertwined social and educational phases over the last fifty and-a-bit years, starting around 1957 and ending now. Then we make some guesses about the social order in 2060, and

therefore about how Australian post-secondary education might be in that year. We best say now that it won't be a pretty picture but, as one of Murphy's Laws says, 'Smile ... Tomorrow Will Be Worse'.

## The past

In January 1957 a conservative Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies, set up a committee chaired by a Pom to inquire into the future of Australian Universities. Its report instituted a shift to federal direction and funding by way of successive States Grants (Universities) Acts, to endorsement of and support for new universities and increases in the sizes of old ones, and to the establishment of an advisory grants committee to provide continuing advice to governments about universities (Murray, 1957).

Menzies catered for a demand. Susan Davies, a first-rate historian of these and later events, says:

The years from the late fifties to the middle sixties marked the second phase of post-war expansion of tertiary education in Australia. From a low point in the mid fifties, student numbers grew in colleges and universities. The systems of technical education – in particular in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia – underwent rapid expansion. Existing institutions increased in size and new technical colleges were established in rural and metropolitan locations. The number of teachers in training doubled and trebled in some instances. In



every Australian State at least one new teachers' college opened its doors in this period (Davies, 1989, p. 15).

Not only was the expansion brought on by population growth but also it indicated altered expectations about continuing formal education beyond secondary schooling. Menzies catered to the ambitions of a rapidly increasing Australian middle class; and the changes he instituted had a knock-on effect, leading to further demand. In short order, revised estimates of enrolments led the advisory grants committee – called the Australian Universities Commission and chaired by Sir Leslie Martin – to recommend what amounted to a review of the structure of post-secondary education and the disposition of component institutions. A binary system of colleges of advanced education and universities emerged from the review (Martin, 1964-65). 'System' was employed to convey the idea that colleges and universities were articulated to form a whole; and that 'tertiary' or 'higher' education' (the adjectival forms were used interchangeably) referred to the sum of these two

parts rather than solely to universities. In turn, this sum was called a 'sector', meaning a component of a larger whole, namely the organized educational activities that were on offer after secondary schooling. Susan Davies' comment about the origin of the binary system is pertinent. She says:

... Menzies acted to contain future costs by the creation of places of higher or tertiary education in non-university institutions. It was an act of political expediency ... Almost certainly Menzies did not believe the sophistry at the heart of the binary policy, namely the separation of pure from applied study and research. He had no illusions about what would happen to the colleges given adequate government support: they (some of them at any rate) would develop into universities (Davies, 1989, p. 170).

In an indirect way, the binary arrangement did afford some recognition of trade and technical education as another segment of the post-secondary orange, though 'training' was often used to distinguish what went on in technical and trade schools from 'education'. Terms, you see, are plasticine in the hands of those who shape them to preferred social ends.

We who lived through these changes were less compelled by advocacy for the proper existence of equal but different sorts of institutions than by concurrent happenings: the alignment of students and socialists in revolt, first in Paris, spreading to other French cities and thence to the western world; and opposition to engagement in the war in Vietnam. If you were young in the late 1960s and 1970s then it was not *all* about sex and drugs and rock 'n roll. There was resistance – to the State and authoritarian institutional structures, to rampant capitalism dressed up in pietistic gab, to patriarchy, to orthodoxy in all its guises – and there were emergent movements: conservationism, feminism, alternative medicine, alternative lifestyles; and there were changes to the organisation and conduct of education, especially in new institutions such as, in Australia,

---

**If you were young in the late 1960s and 1970s then it was not *all* about sex and drugs and rock 'n roll. There was resistance – to the State and authoritarian institutional structures, to rampant capitalism dressed up in pietistic gab, to patriarchy, to orthodoxy in all its guises**

---

Deakin and Griffith Universities. It was a good time to be alive, unless you were drafted to fight in Vietnam or were punched up by the cops at an anti-war protest or on a university campus under siege.

While Murray and Martin had no brief to cover technical education in their

inquiries, 'technological education' was another and rather clouded matter. A University of Technology had been established in Sydney in mid-1949 but existing Central Institutes of Technology in the Australian States were incorporated in the new tertiary sector as advanced education colleges. It pushed the boundaries of sense to maintain that, for example, their engineering students and teachers were different sorts of animals from those in universities. Their courses had to satisfy professional bodies in this and many other overlapping areas. Still, 'technology' had an inconvenient ring about it and in this and later cases when university status came (think of Victoria University) the 'of Technology' bit appeared in smaller and smaller case until it was put out of legislative existence, or was reduced to a capital, as in UTS and RMIT University.

Our second phase begins in 1987, some twenty years after implementation of the binary scheme. By then another sector, Technical and Further Education, had been defined and had prospered. But its moment was still to come. The emphasis now was on efficiency and effectiveness, the idea being that the tertiary education machine could be improved and its pace quick-

ened by adjusting the levers of input, throughput and financing. John Dawkins said when announcing his December 1987 Green Paper that a new approach

was essential if our higher education system is to cope effectively with future growth while maintaining quality and increasing equity ... We need significant growth in higher education to support opportunities for economic growth and create places for the increasing number of young people leaving school. We are currently well behind the best in the world. To be more competitive internationally the number of graduates from our higher education system would need to rise significantly (Dawkins, 1987).

A consequence of his shift of gears was promotion of diversity and competition; and a 'market rules' preoccupation took hold in the executive management suites of universities. But some thought Dawkins was a commo rather than a free marketeer. David Penington, who was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne at the time, says in his autobiography that Dawkins' model of a Unified National System of higher education 'had less the flavour of Adam Smith than that of the later economists, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, let alone of the political economist Vladimir Lenin' (Penington, 2010, p. 245). Professor Penington - we call him 'Surfer Dave' on account of the photo of him on the dust jacket of his book, titled *Making Waves* - did not want to ride his board alongside bolshie staff and students. He says that:

The top-down administrative-law approach [to university management] was, in my view, seriously flawed with respect to both our education and research functions, but 'democratising' with the University Assembly [an elected student and staff consultative body started at Melbourne in 1974] and extensive committee-based decision-making on all issues in academic departments was also seriously flawed (2010, p. 216).

We should mention that Surfer Dave had a less than enthusiastic view of goings-on in earlier years. He mentions 'student unrest' and continues: "Tom Lehrer's song "The old dope peddler" reflected the rising use of cannabis, a symbol of dissent' (2010, p. 213). So do elders misapprehend the pleasures attendant on rebellion.' As Paul Rodan notes in his review of Surfer Dave's opus:

This brings us of course to his clashes with reforming Education Minister John Dawkins, covered in a chapter headed 'The Dawkins Problem' (which sits nicely with 'The Problem of Illicit Drugs' chapter and elevates the Minister to the level of the drug menace) (Rodan, 2010, p. 79).

In the wash-up, realisation of Dawkins' unified national system turned out to mean that a much smaller number of much larger institutions had to do much more with much less. Removal of statutory boards and commissions meant that governments no longer were constrained by their advice. Opening the market led to the appearance of a large number of much smaller private colleges, many of which now offer accredited Bachelor, Diploma and Certificate courses. Some have been contracted to run outsourced service programs, like courses in English for overseas students. The enrolment of overseas fee-paying students became a financial relief valve: on 2007 figures, Australian universities had a little over 7 per cent of the world market for international students and ranked fifth in the top six countries in this field (*The Economist*, 2010).

On the ground, the unified system remained segmented along old lines. A friend of one of us employed in an administrative position in a re-named university of technology did not have her appointment confirmed after probation. Her supervisor reported that she had difficulty in understanding the prevailing organisational culture. She was told that she might be better suited to an organisation that was less pragmatic and less risk-averse, one that placed more emphasis on theoretical constructs in problem solving. Many of those working in the newly-minted universities lived out such claims to distinctiveness: they proclaimed (and believed) that theirs were places for the real world; they brought knowledge to life; experience was the difference; they offered a new way to think, a new school of thought. In contrast, the dismissed staff member exemplified what were held to be characteristics of 'old' universities - their caution, conservatism, abstract emphasis, impracticality. She was being invited to get in touch with her inner self and go back to work for one of *them*. There were horses for courses.

## Now

Our final phase starts in 2008. By then, students had turned away from activism, having been scared out of their wits by the spectre of unemployment. Securing economic benefit from education was now in the forefront of student minds; and of the collective mind of a review panel chaired by Denise Bradley. It proposed increasing rates of participation in higher education, extra federal money to accomplish that and to remedy, at least in part, earlier funding shortfalls (Bradley *et al.*, 2008). Who could argue against such worthy

objectives? The trouble is, government cannot at once support most of the recommendations in the Bradley Report and not provide adequate funding to give effect to them. At least, its credibility suffers when, as Vin Massaro cogently argues in a recent paper, '[t]here is a major shortfall in the means of achieving the higher education revolution ...' (Massaro, 2010a). Not that he (or we) reckons that government policy will bring on revolution in any accredited sense of that word.

One feature we want to pull out of the Bradley Report is the response given to a term of reference about 'establishing the place of higher education in the broader tertiary education system, especially in building an integrated relationship with vocational education and training (VET)' (Bradley *et al.*, 2008, p. 179). The review panel starts by converting this broader tertiary education system into what it calls a 'tertiary education and training system'. So are changes rung: a tertiary or higher education system had been made out of universities and advanced education colleges in the mid 1960s. In the late 1980s and early 1990s a unified national system of higher education had been realised by collapsing colleges of education into universities. Twenty years later, another system comes about by assigning higher education and VET as its two sectoral components (Bradley *et al.*, 2008, p. 200). Meanings shift as authoritative bodies, or Humpty Dumpty, make words mean what they choose them to mean.

What is higher education? The Bradley Report tells us:

Higher education is defined in this report as Australian Qualifications Framework qualifications at associate degree and above and diplomas and advanced diplomas accredited in the higher education system (Review of Australian Higher Education, 2008, p. 2, n. 2).

This is like grading eggs by weight, without reference to what the chooks are fed and how they are accommodated. We need a wider and deeper understanding of what is meant by education, not one that resurrects an equal but different slogan in contrasts of 'higher' and 'vocational' on the one hand and 'education' and 'training' on the other.

As an eminent (if unreconstructed male) historian who also fancied himself as an economist once said: 'The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living'. It is the past that has us in thrall and we repeat it - 'the first time as tragedy' he says, and 'the second as farce' (Marx, 1954, p. 10). We may be repeating binarism by designating universities and vocational education and training as sectors of

a tertiary education and training system. The trusty Vin Massaro thinks that this could be an unintended consequence of the Bradley Report (Massaro, 2010b). Other important recommendations in the Report flag arrival of the moment for TAFE institutions by moving towards parity of treatment across the sectors.

## The future

We are not taken by the idea that improvement is the general tendency in human affairs; and that social formations evolve or unfold in accord with their inherently progressive characters. Experience has undermined our native optimism. A cause for our worry is the absence of debate about qualities to be fostered by education, about the manner of preparing cultivated human beings, and about philosophies informing the educational project. Instead, betterment turns on providing more of the same. The Vice Chancellor of Monash (Byrne, 2010, p. 21) ends a recent article by saying that 'To develop a smart Australia, we need great people, and that is what great universities deliver'. He continues: 'University leaders crying in the wilderness will not get us there. It is time for both sides of politics, the business community and for all who have benefited or hope that their children or grandchildren will benefit from university education to speak up, because the future of Australia's universities is the business of all of us'.

That's a nice bit of tub thumping. It conjures the poster image of a vanguard of orthodontists, divorce lawyers and assorted other graduates striding forward, their arms linked with politicians and businessmen of all stripes. They know what's best for the great unwashed trailing behind: giving more dough to universities. Does the Vice-Chancellor have any other ideas? Yes. He tells us: 'Beyond the economic benefit that individuals enjoy as a result of higher education is the ability to follow their dreams and make a difference. Of the last 10 Australians of the Year, for example, six have completed PhDs' (Byrne, 2010, p. 21).

What education nightmares will weigh on the brains of Australians fifty years hence? We can be pretty sure our successors will be tossing in institutional hulks and twisting to free themselves from chains that our generation and the one before have forged for their captivity. We are saddled with the belief that the 'investment return' of education is all that matters; and with the commodification of education. So far has this gone that advertising hype is the staple of public utter-

ance. Courses of study are products made in factories and sold by the gross. Phoney surveys – ranked in the top one hundred universities in the world, voted the best Business School in the Southern Hemisphere – are used to show that the goods are worthy of purchase.

Simon Marginson and Mark Considine say in the concluding chapter of their book, *The Enterprise University*, that:

It is, to say the least, ironic that an era in which the 'client' and 'customer' have been foregrounded, and universities are more open to the external world than before, their larger purposes have been obscured. There is a corrosive tendency to treat these larger purposes merely as feints or marketing ploys. In the long term this might fatally undermine public support and public investment in the university (2000, p.243).

If 'ironic' is the least that can be said about it then what would be to say the most? It's downright tragic that puff substitutes for making plain that the high intellectual demands of courses are their attraction. Instead, staff are induced, on pain of retrenchment, to offer stuff that will garner high enrolments. As a letter writer to *The Times Literary Supplement* rhetorically put it: 'Are we going to allow market forces to determine the nature of British Universities in the twenty-first century?' (Josipovici, 2010, p.6). I fear the answer, there and here, is 'yes'; and, increasingly, labourers in the vineyard of higher education are treated (in the ironic coinage of a former boss of one of us many years ago) as 'academic peons'.

We've come to think that the growth of managerial imperatives and the decline of academic collectives can be laid at the door of Dawkins. His policy led to the appearance of very large, multi-purpose, multi-campus universities that of necessity are organised and managed in ways that emphasise executive control and decision-making; that require the designation of performance measures and targets; and that conceive mission statements in the manner espoused by public relations advisers. Also, it is paradoxical to have a federal government promoting the goal of diversity in higher education when its own emphasis is on devising and applying uniform policies and practices. Another paradox undermines the advocacy of Marginson and Considine for what they call 'changed forms of governance, including a national policy that [amongst other things] discourages conformism ...' (2000, p. 19). This is to look to the very instrument of conformism, central power, for remedy.

As mentioned earlier, the Bradley Report maintains the equal value of higher education and vocational education and training while holding fast to sectoral differences, just as Martin did so long ago with his university and college of advanced education sectors. On one version of the future, these sectors will converge and perhaps combine to form a unitary system. It is a possibility explored by Leesa Wheelahan in a significant recent paper (2010). If there is a repeat performance of a binary system then there could well be a repeat performance of a Unified National System, leading to the full consolidation of TAFE institutions in fully multi-purpose universities. Where is the next John Dawkins?

We could be looking twenty-five years ahead for this to happen; and the result would be an even smaller number of even larger universities. Even if it came to pass, we think there are signs of a countervailing tendency whose slow motion over fifty years could lead to a quite different arrangement. We reckon big institutions will collapse under their own weight. In their place will be a large number of free-standing colleges and schools, each with a subject focus. Research will be further concentrated in show-piece centres and arms-length institutes. There will come to be as many academies, public and private, as there now are secondary schools.

What about the capital invested in large institutions? Their buildings are ripe for unit redevelopment – think of all the high-rise flats to be put into the Menzies building at Monash University. Selected bits of the real estate will be fenced off and put to continued educational use but most academies will be located hither and yon, for we will come to see the virtue of disaggregating and dispersing portions of the education behemoths. Many of the new small places will enter joint servicing agreements and other forms of partnership, securing for them what Arnold Bennett called the 'mutual independence as regards wardrobes' enjoyed by the two young heroines in his novel, *The Old Wives' Tale*, who had one each in their shared room above the family's drapery shop in Bursley (1938, p. 27).

We don't know what will happen about the education of educators. The intellectual worth of current programs is at best derivative and more often bankrupt, reminding us of a comment about the transfer of teacher training (yes, it was called 'training') from colleges to universities in England in the 1960s: 'Unseemly haste to be the first with the B. Ed. Degree drew, in one place, the melancholy reproof, "We have made our B. Ed. and now we must lie about it"' (Dundonald,

1968, p. 124, f. n. 1). Those who would be teachers deserve better preparation than they now obtain and better students have to be attracted to teaching. We are inclined to think these ends are best served by doing away with Faculties of Education and by assigning the education of teachers to subject schools in the Arts, Humanities and Sciences.

Needless to say, what might happen in education is derived from our views about the future conduct, or misconduct, of capitalism and about the fate of nation states. We are attracted by the ideas of Zygmunt Bauman in his *Does Ethics have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* (2008). He says that shifts towards the disaggregation and dispersion of central authority are in train, and that fluidity and collectivity are becoming characteristic of social exchange. It is the beginning of the era of the 'liquid modern'.

That is an optimistic prediction but maybe tomorrow will see us further along a downhill slope. Twenty-five years after his *Brave New World* appeared, Aldous Huxley wrote: 'The most distressing thing that can happen to a prophet is to be proved wrong; the next most distressing thing is to be proved right' (1959, p.230). Huxley's distress was double-edged because he reckoned some things were turning out to be worse than, and others were just as bad as he projected. His dystopia did not go far enough.

We are about to leave you, dear brethren, with words taken from that eminent economist mentioned earlier. 'It is the same with human history as with palaeontology', he writes to 'Dear Fred', his main collaborator. 'Even the best of minds fail to see – on principle, owing to a certain judicial blindness – things that lie in front of their noses. Later, when the moment has arrived, one is surprised to find traces everywhere of what one has failed to see ... Then they are surprised to find what is newest is what is oldest ...' (Marx, 1975, p. 189).

What is in front of our noses? A not so imperceptible shift of sands below our social and economic order; intimations of the emergence of different world views, of other ways of imagining ourselves in the world; and education will have its part in unmaking the old and making the new.

**Arthur O'Neill is a pensioner and Bob Speechley is Honorary Fellow at the Australia Centre, University of Melbourne.**

## References

- Bauman, Z. (2008). *Does Ethics have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.
- Bennett, A. (1935). [1908], *The Old Wives' Tale*. London: Dent.
- Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H. & Scales, W. (2008). *Review of Australian Higher Education (The Bradley Report) Final Report*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Byrne, E. (2010). Uni policy lacks a few bright sparks. *The Age*, Comment & Debate, 13 August.
- Davies, S. (1989). *The Martin Committee and the Binary Policy of Higher Education in Australia*. Melbourne: Ashwood House.
- Dawkins, J. (1987). Media Release, 9 December, no 209/87.
- Dundonald, J. (1968). Advice to an Alderman, in Lawlor, J. (ed.) *The New University*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- The Economist*. (2010). Foreign university students: will they still come? 7-13 August, pp 40-41.
- Huxley, A. (1959). [1956], Brave New World Revisited. In Gingrich, A. & Rust Hills, L., *The Armchair Esquire*. London: Heinemann.
- Jospovic, G. (2010). Letter to the editor, *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 February. Retrieved on 17 January 2011 from [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/the\\_tls/tls\\_letters/article7021756.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/the_tls/tls_letters/article7021756.ece)
- Marginson, S. & Considine, M. (2000). *The Enterprise University: Power, Governance and Reinvention in Australia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Martin, L. (1964-65). *Report* (3 vols), Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia. Canberra: Government Printer.
- Massaro, V. (2010a). How goes the Revolution? – Targets, Funding, Compacts and Regulation. Paper for Australian Financial Review Higher Education Conference: 'From revolution to higher achievement – driving reform through innovative policy and finance'. Sydney, 9 June 2010.
- Massaro, V. (2010b). Bradley and the new Binary System, downloaded from [www.lhmartinstitute.edu.au/research\\_publications\\_consultancy/publications/Bradley\\_Binary\\_System.pdf](http://www.lhmartinstitute.edu.au/research_publications_consultancy/publications/Bradley_Binary_System.pdf)
- Marx, K. (1954). [1869], *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K. (1975). Letter to F. Engels, 25 March 1868. In Ryazanskaya, S.W., *Marx Engels Selected Correspondence*, 3rd rev. ed. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Murray, K. (1957). *Report*, Committee on Australian Universities. Canberra: Government Printer.
- Penington, D. (2010). *Making Waves: Medicine, Public Health, Universities and Beyond*. Carlton: Miegunyah Press
- Rodan, P. (2010). Power and Influence: the view from the tower, *Australian Universities' Review* 52 (2): 79-80.
- Wheelahan, L. (2010). The expansion & reshaping of higher education in Australia. Headline notes for a paper delivered at the HERDSA conference on 'Reshaping Higher Education', 6-9 July 2010. Retrieved on 17 January 2011 from: <http://conference.hersda.org.au/2010/files/leesa-wheelahan.pdf>
- Williams, R. (1976). *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Glasgow: Fontana/Croom Helm.

# We'll support you ever more!

**Joseph Gora**

University of Ardnax

Feisty raconteur and journalistic scourge of politicians left and right, Mungo McCallum, recently described Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard as a frame waiting for a picture. A similar observation was once made of the former British Prime Minister, the dour John Major, who was so bereft of personality that a Polaroid photograph of him failed to produce an image. This sort of representational vacuity reminds me of the reaction generated by the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings.

To be sure, there was some level-headed commentary from the likes of commentators such as Steven Swartz, Simon Marginson and the Australian newspaper's Julie Hare, but on the whole, the tenor of debate has been dismal, bordering on the banal. And why wouldn't it, given that most public comment has come from university mandarins and academic apologists who believe that the ranking system has some empirical validity. I was heartened though to learn that many (perhaps most?) Australian academics consider ranking mania as, at best, a bad joke, and that some institutions in Canada have refused to participate in this farcical exercise. Hope springs eternal!

It's not simply that the methodologies adopted by the main rankers (rhyming slang, surely!) – Times Higher Education (THE), QS and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University – are diverse and open to the usual interpretation, but there appears to be a significant leaning towards the Anglo-American scene with no fewer than 18 American and British universities figuring in the

top twenty of the THE ranking, with the exceptions being the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (Roger Federer must surely have something to do with this) and the unassuming but almost Anglo-American University of Toronto. The first Asian university, Hong Kong University, squeaks in at 21 followed by six other Asian institutions in the top 50 (and remember, Asia is a very big place!). The only other universities in Europe outside of the UK are the Ecole Polytechnique, (39) and Ecole Normale Superieure in France (42), the University of Göttingen, Germany (=43), and the Karolinska Institute (Sweden) (=43). Over half of the universities in the top fifty are American with the same country holding 72 spots in the world's top 200. In short, no African, Middle Eastern, or Latin American universities are among the top 100 THE universities.

Now, if I were a Vice Chancellor at one of the leading universities in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Kenya, Morocco, India, Peru, Mexico, Costa Rica, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam or New Zealand I would want to know what is going on here. I would certainly be looking very closely at (and well beyond) the measures used to rank universities (namely; teaching, research, citations, industry income and international mix). I would also want to check out how Harvard got a near perfect score for its teaching (no one gets near perfect student feedback!) and who cites the published work of Harvard academics – the US has got hundreds of higher education institutions and a lorry load of journals which means, does it not, that self referential US aca-

demics have more scope to get their work published and cited than, say, scholars in Bangladesh or Finland. And then there's the small matter of Harvard's world's largest \$27.4 billion financial endowment, which is always handy when it comes to buying up high achieving scholars.

But hey, cashed up institutions, cultural preferences, linguistic imperialism (the English language) and the North-South divide aside, if you're going to have a ranking system then make sure it works for you. The fact is that in the competitive marketplace that is international higher education, these things matter. When you're trying to flog your wares to prospective students, reputation and image is everything. This is why universities go to extraordinary lengths to clamber up the greasy pole. It's also why there is such panic when an institution falls short of expectations. The pathetic performance of Australian universities in the latest THE ranking headed by the University of Melbourne (36), Australian National University (43) (17 last year) and the University of Sydney (71) (36 last year), has for now at least, put the skids under the tertiary 'education revolution'.

Perhaps a clue as to how our despondent universities can improve their standing on the global stage is to be found in the goings on at the predatory University of Technology, Sydney. Not satisfied with languishing in exile, the school of finance and economics has embarked on a mission to crank up its previously modest reputation. Ranked as the top economics outfit by a US ranking system, the school has successfully recruited a number of leading academics from; guess where, the US of A. How so? Well, first, so it is reputed, by beefing up the salaries as compared with other Aussie universities and then granting them almost total autonomy in an island-institute. It's not the first time of course that a university has gone on the prowl in search of reputable scholars. But the way things are going this sort of tribal head-hunting is likely to increase, especially among those universities aspiring to be king-pins.

But in order to have a more open and competitive system that truly reflects the new culture of public transparency that is the 'My University' website, I suggest that Australia develops a more innovative approach

to its own internal system of rankings by adopting the league table system of the English Football Association. I suggest a Foster's Universities Premier League comprised of eight universities, and the rest placed in Austar Champion's League, Coles-Myer Division One, and BHP Division Two. Each year two universities will be promoted and two relegated and the university topping the Foster's Premier League will be declared champions and the respective vice-chancellors ensconced in Sudan chairs and paraded before an assembled House of Representatives. Points will be allocated on the basis of citations in respected journals, student evaluations and research grants. The system also allows for transfers of academics from one university to another, although a strict salary cap will have to be imposed to avoid the grossly inflated salaries offered by overly ambitious universities. Just think of the income generating possibilities! For instance, Universities Australia could establish an online gaming facility whereby bets could be placed on university performance and the proceeds used to pay for all those senior managers.

Yes, this is the way to go. I can already hear the chants on the terraces: 'there's only one JCU', 'oh Ballarat, we love you, 'Ade, Ade Adelaide', 'we are the champions', 'old MacQuarie had a farm'... etc.

---

**But hey, cashed up institutions, cultural preferences, linguistic imperialism (the English language) and the North-South divide aside, if you're going to have a ranking system then make sure it works for you.**

---

# The English Language Growth Project

**Judith Rochecouste, Rhonda Oliver, Denise Mulligan & Martin Davies**

International students from non-English speaking backgrounds dominate our tertiary sector. What do we really know about them and their English language learning needs?

The English Language Growth (ELG) Project, was conducted in five Australian universities in 2008-09 to address the on-going English language development of international students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Using an online survey inviting both qualitative and quantitative responses, 798 international students provided a rich source of data. Students provided information on their attitudes, motivation and beliefs about language learning, their strategies for improving their language skills, and their strategies for academic learning. These data were correlated with the participating students' grade point averages or similar academic measures. Many participants took considerable time and effort in responding to the survey's open-ended questions, and a small number volunteered to be interviewed.

## Demographic profile

A summary profile of the participants who completed the questionnaire is described below:

- There was a relatively even distribution of students from the five participating universities: Monash (n=189), Edith Cowan (n=161), Macquarie (n=156), Melbourne (n=154) and Deakin (n=138).
- The sample was relatively young (around 80 per cent aged between 21-30 years).
- There was some bias toward female respondents in the sample (61 per cent).
- Many of the participants had a Chinese ethnic back-

ground (52 per cent had a Chinese dialect as their first language).

- The top five countries of birth were China 37.6 per cent, Malaysia 9.0 per cent, Indonesia 7.5 per cent, Hong Kong 6.1 per cent and India 4.8 per cent.
- There was a relatively even balance between undergraduate (47 per cent) and postgraduate (53 per cent) participants.
- The sample was dominated by students enrolled in Commerce/Business Studies (57 per cent). The next largest disciplinary groupings were in Society & Culture (includes media, linguistics and languages) (10 per cent), Health (9.3 per cent) and Education (includes TESOL) (5 per cent), with the remaining 19 per cent spread across 6 other discipline areas.
- 67.7 per cent had been required to produce an IELTS score for visa entry to Australia, however only 50.6 per cent used IELTS for course entry and just 44 per cent of the latter students (n=178) provided us with details of their IELTS scores.
- The bulk of students (62 per cent) were in their second or third year of study in Australia; 22.3 per cent were in their fourth or fifth year; 7.8 per cent were in their first year; and 7.9 per cent had been studying here for 6 years or more.

## Findings

Our study shows that students employ a considerable range of academic and language learning strategies to



improve their English. Of the academic learning strategies we have noted evidence of social strategies, such as creating or joining study groups and participating in tutorial discussions. However this positive feedback was tempered by many references to the debilitating effects of shyness, fear of ridicule, and a sense of intolerance, which suggests that our universities are not always offering comfortable and secure learning environments.

Numerous cognitive learning strategies were offered by our participants, ranging from simply making lists and learning by rote, to reading as widely as possible and preparing for classes. Memorisation was both supported and rejected in the feedback from our students suggesting that the range of learning strategies among international students is as varied as those among local students.

The metacognitive strategies of organisation, planning, and self-evaluation were less frequent in our qualitative data which suggests a need to promote these strategies within university support services and within faculties.

Advice both from the many international students who completed our survey, and from the decades of research on language learning emphasises the importance of affective variables. Confidence, for example, is important. Learners need to overcome any fear of making mistakes, that is, to keep trying and taking risks, and to expect that they will need a period of adjustment to become comfortable with a new language and a new learning environment. On-going motivation and positive thinking are also fundamental, as learning another language is a life-changing experience.

As the old adage goes: Practice makes Perfect, so English should be used often and widely. For international students this will mean moving out of their comfort zones—even their first language living arrangements—in order to think, speak and live in English. Social immersion in an English-speaking environment is important, whether created at home, at university, at work or in the community. Many students noted that their English language development has involved understanding the cultural conventions and linguistic subtleties of the host country, many of which can only be learnt by communicating with native speakers.

The findings from our study strongly suggest the following:

- Learning environments should be supportive of students. For this to happen we recommend that both teaching and support staff work to cater for

the needs and interests of all students through being cognisant of the students' backgrounds, opportunities, skills and understandings and by providing appropriate teaching and learning resources. Teaching and support staff should develop and provide learning opportunities and provide adequate and appropriate resources (in a timely manner) so that this can be achieved.

- The value of the daily use of English by international students cannot be overestimated. However, students need opportunities for this to occur. Our study shows that many students are so overwhelmed with their academic workload that they are unable to take on this additional, yet effective, learning opportunity. Moreover, many courses do not allow time for students to integrate.
- Tutorial classes should be used to enhance communication between students, over and above the traditional format of discussing subject content. Numerous ice-breaking games and interaction tasks can be remodelled to enhance content learning and communication and which can help interlocutors to relax and develop friendships. Some examples might be activities where students match terminology and definitions, activities where student groups recreate topic sentences or a new title from a reading in their own words, or where students work together on concept maps thereby developing their language as they negotiate and contribute to the creation of a map.
- The value of social support groups and functions for international students is critical. At the university level, it is important that funding continues for these activities. It is important that students are encouraged to join such groups where they can overcome anxiety with regard to speaking. Lecturers and tutors should be informed of social activities on their campuses and encourage their international students to attend. Social activities involving small unit enrolments are also an option. A list of clubs and societies and recommendations for membership can be part of the unit guide. Social activities can be advertised on the unit or course website and students can be advised on the value of social learning strategies.
- Unit coordinators should make a serious attempt at embedding academic support into their units. This can be done by working closely with academic skills development staff and with teaching and learning development staff at the curriculum development stage.

- Students need to understand about learning, what strategies suit them, what strategies are available, and what strategies other students are using. This is a further role for learning advisors, but also one that can be taken on board by academic staff.
- Meta-learning knowledge (or metacognitive strategies) should be developed. This can be done with information on and/or links to learning strategy advice on unit or course websites and in unit guides. It can also be the subject of discussion in an early tutorial.
- Preparation is critical. Unsurprisingly, preparation before classes/lectures and attendance at classes/lectures was linked to academic success in our study. There is a need for staff to carefully construct their material so that students can adequately prepare before class, and that they construct their classes in such a way that students are motivated and understand the need to attend.
- Cultural knowledge is critical to English improvement. International students in our study recognised the importance of learning about Australian culture in order to understand and operate in Australian English and society. At the same time, many would like to have their own cultural experience and expertise acknowledged. We suggest that internationalisation of the curriculum involves a two-way process whereby academics explicitly demonstrate and compare the cultural components of their discipline areas on a local and on a global scale. Academic staff should provide explicit ways for international students to connect the new knowledge of their units with their prior cultural experiences.
- Affective variables are critical in student learning. From the data, several beliefs showed some small relationship with academic success, the importance of cultural understanding for improved English, and the belief that one's speaking should not be hindered by making mistakes.
- Lecturers should be attentive to students' listening skills. Students expressed concern about their listening abilities, particularly in the face of the range of accents they meet in an Australian higher education context. It is the obligation of the lecturer to make him/herself understood. This responsibility can be enhanced through the use of resources such as lecture notes, recorded/videoed lectures, podcasts and online powerpoints, and visuals. Lecturers should take steps to ensure that students understand the content of the lectures. This can be done by speak-

ing clearly and at a pace whereby notes can be taken, avoiding colloquial speech, explaining analogies and metaphoric expressions, providing objectives and alerting students to each objective as it is addressed, and using directive discourse markers. It is also beneficial to provide rest points at approximately 20 minute intervals.

- Students' English should be graded. The data shows a significant relationship (although weak) between academic achievement and receiving marks for good English in assignments. Obviously good English expression will enhance any grading of a written assignment, but this result suggests that if students' awareness of the value of their English is judged, then better results will occur. We are aware that many academic staff are reluctant to judge the quality of English in their students' assignment, feeling untrained to do so. However, the combination of clear organisation, affective cohesion and coherent argumentation will render a better mark regardless of the assessor's skills and it seems that knowing this has a relationship with students' efforts.
- The relationship between reading and subsequent writing is important. Without adequate reading skill development we create in students an instant dependence on the very words of a written text i.e., we set them up to plagiarise. Our research highlights the advantages of developing students' reading to the point where they have the ability and confidence to infer meaning from the context. Many students are arriving at university with an ongoing reliance on dictionary use which makes reading and writing time-consuming and often inexact. It is recommended that students are introduced to terminology in context rather than simple word lists/glossaries, although lists of content terminology should be readily available as part of the course materials.

International students contribute significantly to the Australian higher education sector in a number of ways, not least of all financially. The development of English language skills is critical to their success while they are studying and for subsequent employment. Without a clear understanding of the English language learning needs of international students we abrogate our responsibilities as educators.

**The English Language Growth Project was funded by an Australian Learning and Teaching Council Grant.**

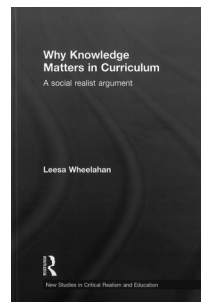
## REVIEWS

# Vote 1 – the clever country

## ***Why knowledge matters in curriculum – a socialist realist argument* by Leesa Wheelahan**

ISBN: 9780415483186 Routledge

Review by Neil Mudford



This book deserves a wide readership. I believe it has some important messages and explanations for us all that go well beyond curriculum development considerations.

Let me state at the outset that I am a physicist by education and an academic aerospace and mechanical engineer by occupation. Dr Wheelahan is a social researcher in educational theory. Part of the fascination in reading the work for this review is discovering the contrasts in argument, evidence and vocabulary between our two fields.

I took on this review expecting to hear about debate concerning the amount of knowledge that should be present in curricula and perhaps some advice on how to choose large chunks of the stuff for inclusion in the same. These topics are the subject of perennial debate amongst engineering educators. It came as quite a shock to find that (a) the debate amongst social researchers concerns whether or not knowledge has a place in curricula and (b) the news that the affirmative team's arguments are a rearguard action or, if we're feeling optimistic, a spirited counter attack.

A comforting patch of commonality is our close agreement on the definition of the term "theoretical knowledge" which we agree is knowledge backed by careful experiment interpreted by critical analysis. Wheelahan goes further in defining theoretical knowledge to be knowledge of phenomena beyond the immediate experience or needs of the student. I will not quibble with this except to say that phenomena that make up the stuff of every day experience can often be the subject of theoretical knowledge that can escape the attention of the casual observer or student. Forces accelerated objects in full view of every human

being who lived before Isaac Newton. His great contribution to theory was to extract from the experience the famous relationship between the two expressed in the equation  $F = ma$ . Only applicable for speeds much less than that of light, I hasten to add, though you have to give it to Newton that he, and we, never travelled at anything but extremely "low" speeds so how could he know of this limitation before Michelson, Morley and Einstein? Hence, the realisation that knowledge is never finalised but, then, that doesn't mean that it should be dismissed or ignored. This is also a substantial part of Wheelahan's arguments.

Part of the problem that Wheelahan is addressing is that for the general public, the term "theory" has come to mean "that which would work in a Perfect World but which fails when tested in the Real World" rather than what Wheelahan and I and almost all our colleagues mean, which is "that which we know works very well in the Real World because it has been tested extensively there". Almost opposites.

Wheelahan's main point is that we all need to know about what others have deduced from the careful observation of the behaviour of this World in order to participate actively in debate about, well, all aspects of our lives and what is happening around us. This seems blindingly obvious to me as an engineer, but Wheelahan reports that there is significant and influential opposition to this view from Social Constructivists and Technical-Instrumentalists.

According to Wheelahan, Social Constructivists believe that a student learns best by being engaged with his or her own immediate environment in its present form. Consequently, curriculum designers sub-

scribing to this philosophical framework limit exposure to theoretical knowledge to that relevant to the students' immediate surroundings in the here and now.

Technical-Instrumentalist curriculum designers also impose restrictions on the breadth of knowledge introduced in courses by limiting it to the knowledge they see as identifiably "useful" for their students' foreseeable future employment.

Many readers of this review may think that engineering education is largely made up of a mixture of these two competitors for Wheelahan's Social Realist approach to curriculum design. I can assure you all that all the engineering educators I know would back Wheelahan's view that students should be exposed to knowledge well beyond their perceived immediate needs and environment and beyond what can be predicted about what they will need to practise engineering.

I do know a large group of Social Constructivists and Technical-Instrumentalists in my Engineering School – the bulk of the students. They have strong tendencies to believe that anything they learn has to be down-to-earth and immediately applicable. Many also believe that the knowledge they will need as practising engineers already exists, that it is possible to predict what they will need and that its application needs little further thought. We, their lecturers, say "wrong on all counts". We seem always to be fighting them to broaden their horizons and we sometimes wonder why anyone would want to join a profession so boringly predictable as the one they imagine as engineering.

A third stream of curriculum designers Wheelahan mentions – the Conservatives – are said to believe that there is a fixed and unchanging set of facts (knowledge) which must be passed on to the students. It seems to me that this group has few followers because part of the demise of respect for theoretical knowledge seems to stem from its rapid development. The reaction to this is to set aside theoretical knowledge on the grounds that it will soon be superseded. The latter is thought to be proof that the knowledge was incorrect in the first place. As Wheelahan points out, the constant refinement of knowledge expands its applicability rather than contradicting the earlier forms.

I believe the book has implications well beyond the area of secondary and tertiary education curriculum design. I believe that Dr Wheelahan has produced a significant contribution to the understanding of wider cultural and intellectual changes and issues in Australia and elsewhere over the last several decades. Wheelahan explains in detail at least some of the reasons why

esteem for theoretical knowledge has reached such a low ebb in current public debate.

The resulting lack of interest in, and even disdain for, theoretical knowledge also largely explains why the opinions of researchers and others with deep knowledge in a field seem to be on a par, in the public mind, with those of just about anyone else.

A current example is the debate over climate change and our response to it. This was the main topic of discussion earlier this year at the Science Meets Parliament gathering hosted by the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies (FASTS). There the feeling was that the ill-informed but well-publicised views of a few were winning the public debate against the well-informed, quite well publicised views of the many. Researchers in the field overwhelmingly believe that the effects are real and dangerous and something must be done. A few dispute this view. This disagreement seems to have caused a sizable portion of the public to give roughly equal weight to the two opinions. Certainly, the high qualifications and greater numbers of the climate change believers seem not to be a deciding factor in swaying opinion in their favour.

I can't resist mentioning some of the contrasts between Wheelahan's methods of argument and evidence and those used in engineering. Her arguments are intricate, highly esoteric and take many pages to unfold. They are delightful to follow (supposing that I did follow them). Engineering argument is shorter, more direct and never strays far from experimental evidence. Speaking of evidence, there seemed not to be a great deal of evidence presented in the work. I found the arguments very convincing but I realised after a time that the evidence I was comparing her theory with was what I had observed over the years rather than what the author brought to me.

Finally, I wonder what audience the book is aimed at. Wheelahan is presenting an argument that respect for theoretical knowledge ought to be re-established in curriculum but she is using a highly articulate and complex theoretical argument to make her case. Are non-believers going to accept such arguments or is it only Enlightenment people, such as me, who already believe that theoretical knowledge is of great value who will respond to her call?

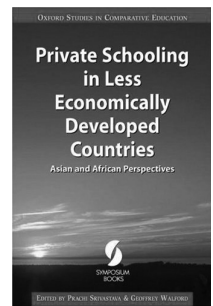
**Neil Mudford is deputy head of the School of Engineering and Information Technology at the Australian Defence Force Academy, ACT, Australia and is a member of the AUR Editorial Board**

# The Real Education Revolution

***Private Schooling in Less Economically Developed Countries: Asian and African Perspectives.* Oxford Studies in Comparative Education. Prachi Srivastava & Geoffrey Walford (eds)**

ISBN 978-1-873927-85-4, Symposium Books, Oxford, 2007

Review by Jonathan Sibley



In Australia we promote the 'Education Revolution'. We promote notebooks for all. We build new school halls to ensure the economy does not slip into recession and debate whether \$16b is too much, too little or whether the money should be spent on something else. In Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia the discussion centres not on school halls, or even computers, but on participation: how to achieve 'Education for All'. We take it for granted that our children can attend school. For many of the world's poor opportunities for even basic education continue to be either constrained or non-existent.

Public education systems have failed across the developing world. In response to this failure, the number of private schools in a range of developing countries is growing at a rate which far outstrips that of, frequently moribund, public systems. Most new private schools in developing countries target the children of low income households. This growth is fuelled, not by social policy favouring private provision, but by parental demand for access to basic education for their children.

*Private Schooling in Less Economically Developed Countries* contributes to the debate of the role of private schools in ameliorating the chronic and seemingly intractable constraints to the provision of an adequate basic education for the children of poor families in developing countries.

The contributors offer a range of perspectives, from skepticism, to cautious support, to enthusiasm. James Tooley and Pauline Dixon (pp 15-40) commence the discussion and occupy the enthusiast's corner, discussing their research into for-profit schools in several developing countries. The authors' argue private

schools produce educational outcomes comparable to, or better than, those of government schools. Therefore the promotion of private schools and the provision of adequate supervision is a better policy approach than continually trying to develop a public system with inadequate resources.

Arrayed against this are a range of perspectives which, whilst acknowledging a role for private schools, question either the quality of learning outcomes, or the wisdom of investing in private systems against evidence that countries which have succeeded in increasing living standards have also successfully developed public school systems. Keith Lewin (pp41-66), in a discussion of private schools in sub-Saharan Africa provides data which demonstrates that private schools do make a significant contribution to education in many of these countries. However, Lewin also notes that, whilst the secondary school infrastructure is commonly inadequate, there are enough places at state primary schools to enroll most but not all school-aged children. Pauline Rose and Modupe Adelabu (pp67-88), examine private sector contributions in Nigeria and conclude private schools do not provide opportunities for the children of the very poor and commonly have facilities which are no better than those of state schools. Igor Kitaev (pp89-110) examines the importance of regulation and practice, particularly in respect to funding, teacher certification and inspection in several developing and transitional countries. Colin Bangay (pp111-129) describes work done by NGO's in Bangladesh and argues that the division between state and private provision is likely to become increasingly blurred in the future. Santosh Mehrotra and P.R. Panchamukhi (pp129 - 152) discuss the role of the

private sector in universalising primary education in India and argue the emergence of private schools is primarily a response to the failure of the Indian public sector to provide adequate education. Prachi Srivastava (pp152 - 186) examines the challenges faced by private schools in low income communities, in particular issues resulting from low salary levels, lack of training and high staff turnover. The concluding chapter by Martha Caddell (pp187-207) examines issues consequent on the politicisation of private schools in Nepal.

Each contribution provides valuable insight and contributes to the discussion. There can be little doubt that the growth of private education results from a combination of factors: dissatisfaction with the performance of the public system, the politicisation of the public system, and in the case of the very poor, an inability to access the public system. There is also little doubt private schools play an increasingly important role in providing education in poor communities. That a well functioning public system can produce excellent educational outcomes is not in dispute. The question is whether, across sub-Saharan Africa and the Sub-Continent, governments are able to provide adequate education for the children of the poor, or whether they are even interested in the provision of universal education. If not, what is the role of the private schools?

All contributors acknowledge a potential role. The real question, which the discussions do not adequately address, even when acknowledging the persistent

failure of public systems, is how to support private schools in order to enhance the educational opportunities for the children of the poor. Whether the role of private schools is interim or longer term is a function of governments' ability to develop their public systems. Whether there will ever be adequate public systems in these countries is a matter of conjecture. As several of the authors acknowledge, there is a fundamental lack of good data.

The politics and preferences of the editors are evident in the ordering of the chapters. By commencing with Tooley and Dixon's advocacy for private provision and then presenting a range of arguments contesting this position, the potential role for private schools is continuously challenged and undermined. An equally valid approach would have been to present the papers examining the failure of the public systems and the role being played by private schools and to then present Tooley and Dixon's perspective as a possible alternative. A well funded and resourced public education system may simply be beyond the capability of many developing countries. The debate surely is how to leverage the entrepreneurialism of the private sector in order to better support achievement of the real education revolution: 'Education for All'.

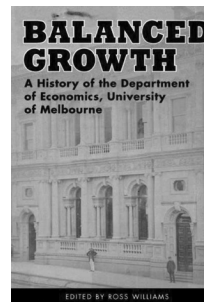
**Jonathan Sibley** is a research associate of Central Queensland University's Learning and Teaching Education Research Centre and lectures at CQU's Melbourne Campus

# The bottom line...

## ***Balanced Growth. A History of the Department of Economics, University of Melbourne* by Ross Williams (ed.)**

ISBN: 978 1 921509 35 3 PB Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2009, pp. xii + 275.

Review by Alex Millmow



Despite the rather off-putting title and dull cover this multi-authored and edited departmental history of Melbourne economics, one of Australia's oldest and most celebrated economic departments, is a good read even if you are not a graduate of that place. For proud Melbourne commerce graduates who specialised in economics it would be, I hope, a 'must have'. One hopes that Gen Y entertain some interest in their instructors and their research interests as I did with my lecturers at Monash in the seventies.

Economists and historians of economic thought, too, will find it an excellent history not just of Melbourne economics but also as a guide to the formation of economic discipline and the rise of the economics profession within Australia. It was two Melbourne school economists, D. B. Copland and L. F. Giblin that advocated that the arms of the state, namely the Commonwealth public service, hire graduates instead of just ex-servicemen. While it did not officially become an economics school or department till 1944, there was a lineage stretching right back to William Hearn who wrote one of the earliest economic tracts in this country in 1863.

In 1924, with the establishment of the Faculty of Commerce, Melbourne took a big step to becoming pre-eminent in economics even though Hobart and Sydney already had established chairs in economics. Melbourne did not actually establish a chair in economics till 1944. Under the inspirational leadership of the first Dean of the Faculty Douglas Copland, an émigré economist from Timaru, the Melbourne school made strides. With influential business and political connections Copland set out to make the Faculty of Commerce 'the Cambridge of the southern hemisphere' with graduates fitted out in 'Cambridge blue' gowns. By November 1930 it could be said he had probably succeeded in his ambition just as

another import from Timaru, Phar Lap stormed home at Flemington to take the Melbourne Cup. Melbourne had by then become the fountainhead of the Economic Society of Australia and New Zealand. The Society released its own flagship journal, *The Economic Record* and Copland and other Melbourne economists were to dominate its editorship.

In the public forum Copland and Giblin were to prove their mettle by being 'called in' to help the Scullin Government face the greatest economic crisis Australia has ever faced. Copland was singled out for special treatment from the press because he urged a comprehensive response to the economic maladjustment the Australian economy found itself in. Much later it was Melbourne, too, that hosted the first national Conference of Economists in May 1970. And, in the modern game of departmental research rankings, Melbourne comes tops if publishing articles in North American economics journals is the criterion.

The book's publication means that only two of the Group of Eight's departments of economics - Monash and UNSW - have yet to commission their departmental histories. Ross Williams' institutional history of Melbourne economics contributes to filling in the history of economics education in this country. The book features contributions from academics that have worked or still work at the school. Each was given the task of writing about a period of time, usually a decade. Marjorie Harper, though, had the more daunting brief of writing about the early years of 1855 through till 1944 including the compelling drama of the depression decade. Joe Isaac resumes the commentary for the post-war years and the slumbering 1950s. Peter Drake, founding Vice Chancellor of the Australian Catholic University, covers the sixties. The evergreen Neville Norman focuses on the swinging seventies lamenting

though the decline of the fellowship and fun in academic life today.

In the post-war era, indeed, right up to the seventies the 'Lucky Jims' of academe only had to bear the pressure of administrative and teaching load. Research was purely voluntary. It was a time, too, when the Commonwealth was actually pumping extra resources into higher education. The seventies, though, was a time when Melbourne was research-wise put in the shade by the Monash department. However the plain fact was that of the seeds that led to the intellectual ferment and outpouring at Monash originally came from Melbourne. In the previous decade many of the Melbourne staff had been pirated away to join the newly established Monash University.

The book hardly discusses another act of piracy in 1991, when Monash enticed Dr. Peter Dixon, the then Director of the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research and his team of econometric modelers to shift to the Centre of Policy Studies at Monash.

Today the rules of the game are making do with less but also having their efforts monitored by teaching evaluations and the dreaded KPIs (key performance indicators). In addition, certainly at Melbourne, there is an incessant and somewhat unnerving pressure to publish in A-starred journals on usually some esoteric, indescribably boring problem. The Melbourne school of economics has been able to lift both its research productivity and overall teaching standards. Peter Lloyd, Jeff Borland, John Freebairn and Robert Dixon complete the ensemble of authors with Lloyd taking care of the eighties and Borland from the 1990s up till the present. The latter makes especial note of the fact that Melbourne did not enter into amalgamation with any other tertiary providers thereby saving itself from possible enfeeblement. In that context, the Mel-

bourne school of economics completely avoided the dissipation of energies that their counterparts at the University of Sydney endured over the struggle about introducing political economy units into the syllabus. Of course the Melbourne-Sydney rivalry about which has the best school in economics has always been a perennial point. Each can boast a glittering alumni and academic celebrities. It was interesting, too, that both departments put out their respective histories in the space of a few months (Millmow, 2010).

John Freebairn, the current Ritchie Professor of Economic Research, one of the few research chairs in Australian economics looks at how the Melbourne school contributed to the furthering of national economic policy by making critical contributions in social policy and equity, trade policy, macroeconomic stabilisation, public finance and microeconomic reform. In the last chapter Robert Dixon lists some of the seminal intellectual contributions emanating from Melbourne including Hearn's *Plutology* (1863) Giblin's multiplier (1930) Brian Reddaway's systematic interpretation of Keynes's *General Theory* (1936) to Ian McDonald's work with Robert Solow on why real wages are rigid (1981). He concludes by stating that much of the work on theory at Melbourne today that revolves around the issues of trade, labour and economic growth were also those that intrigued the likes of Copland and Giblin.

**Alex Millmow is a senior lecturer at the University of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia and President of the History of Economic Thought Society of Australia.**

## Reference

Millmow, A., 2010, 'Economic schools and geography's accidents', 2010 Australian Financial Review, 5 January.



# Tribes and Territories

***Improving What is Learned at University: An exploration of the social and organisational diversity of university education* by John Brennan, Robert Edmunds, Muir Houston, David Jary, Yann Lebeau, Michael Osborne and John T. E. Richardson.**

ISBN 10 0-415-48016-7 Routledge, London & New York, 2010.

Review by Patricia Kerslake

How do we choose our first university? For undergraduates lacking any experience of tertiary education's realities or of its pedagogical tides and social magnifications, which alignment of factors tell us what and where to study? When offerings at many mainstream institutions appear to be fractured into specialised irrelevance or brain-numbing vocational clones, how then do we select one degree programme out of the multitude, or one institution over another? In a text which takes a behind-the-scenes look at the modus operandi of university experience in the UK, *Improving what is learned at university* provides a discourse on how the commonalities and diversities of subjects, students and socio-economics play a vital role in this most critical of decisions. In three main sections we are given a précis of (i) the institutions themselves; (ii) their differing cultural and reputational aspects, and (iii) the implications these differences may have for the future. This book examines not so much what universities do (i.e. what they teach), but rather how their structural similarities and differences frame and mediate a student's learning.

Many and varied are the narratives which remark upon or parody the British university experience, ranging from the Open University working-class drama of *Educating Rita* (1983), to the real-life challenges of Harold Abrahams at Cambridge (cf. *Chariots of Fire*, 1981). In a less theatrical tone, this book begins with an analysis of how widely differing universities manage to do almost the same things and how a comparability of student experience may be expressed through a variety of models. In contrast with their more egalitarian cousins across the Atlantic where, beyond the Ivy League, the national model tends towards a flattened matrix, British universities offer a distinctly hierarchi-

cal structure athwart its higher educational institutions. In the UK it is not simply a matter of what you choose to study, but of the place where you undertake this study. There is an enormous difference in 'doing a Bachelor of Accounting' at one of the 'new universities' (emergent since the polytechnic rebranding of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act), and 'reading English' at Oxbridge. To capture a traditional feel and mood of universities in the UK, one need only turn to E. M. Forster who once wrote: "Oxford is – Oxford: not a mere receptacle for youth, like Cambridge. Perhaps it wants its inmates to love it rather than to love one another;" (*Howards End*, 1910). So: which is better? It depends on what you want to study and what kind of university experience attracts you the most. Are these studies an element in a long-term search for knowledge, or will a degree qualification enhance your future prospects and career development?

Chapters one and two focus on identifying commonalities among British universities as well as the things that make them distinct. The authors ask a very sensible question at this point: how does a particular institutional model affect what is taught and what is learned? (p. 6). Of the four identified university structures, i.e. academic; collegiate; vocational and non-conformist (p. 25), which model is most suited to teach certain areas of knowledge? Conceptions of learning are painted with a broad brush as the book investigates how 'tribes' of educators and students in certain subject areas (biosciences; business studies and sociology) experience the teaching and learning in that field at their respective institution. Several student orientation typology mechanisms are discussed (Clark-Trav, Dubet's) which look at how a reflection of the wider influences of higher education is likely to inform their



learning. Is a student studying business better off at an academic university or a vocational one? Is the answer as obvious as it might seem?

In the second section of the book, 15 institutional case studies are examined along the axes of structural, cultural, environmental and reputational vectors. How do each of these, often nebulous, institutional qualities impact on a student's ability to learn and learn well? Imagine studying politics at UC Berkeley in the 60s, or medicine in pre-war Edinburgh – how does the mood and feel of the place affect, either directly or indirectly, the quality of the learning? Chapter four takes an interesting stroll around the 'territories' of different academic subjects where some increasingly generalised knowledge areas have infringed upon all manner of courses, as in the case of Sociology and Business studies. Then there are 'closed' fields such as math and science which of necessity remain within fairly discrete boundaries. There is an exploration of both institutional and staff differences (does Langtoft achieve better results than Givendale?) followed by a breakdown of differences between the students themselves: their backgrounds, lifestyles and different forms of engagement. Discovering there are commonalities and diversities between the students is not a major insight, but discovering patterns of student study behaviour across universities and fields of endeavour is a most useful observation calling for further pedagogical research.

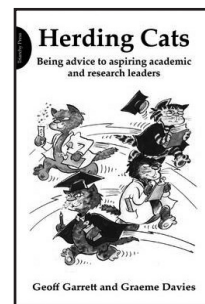
Chapters six and seven present an exploration of what students learned at university and then, intriguingly, what else they learned at university. While not precisely an examination of social skills development, this section does indeed consider the diverse perceptions of both students and staff along the pathways of student maturation. Thus not only does this text consider academic learning as an element of student prowess, but also that of the extraneous development

of individuals and members of a common society. This is probably the area that will be most subject to further enquiry as institutions of higher education around the world seek to impart the most productive and advantageous academic, vocational and personal student experience.

The book's final section focuses on implications for the future of higher education in Britain. In chapter nine, we are advised of the potential variables affecting first year undergraduates. Other than pedagogical issues (the form and environment of academic studies), the authors have also considered the effect of organisational culture upon learning, as well as informal support for students as they embark on their 'studentship' (p. 177). Is a residential experience of greater holistic value to the individual than a non-residential one? Does a general institutional competence and a personalised, individualised development support equip each cohort with a greater capability and employability in the external world? There is considerable engagement at this point with the implications of higher education in the future of all our societies, especially why further studies are becoming ever more vital in our technological and increasingly complex lives. Rather than arbitrarily eeny-meeny-moing when it comes to choice of place, selection of a university program is fast assuming the significance of a marriage proposal. In his personal papers, Anton Chekov was apposite on this point. "The University," he said, "brings out all abilities, including incapability." With this in mind university preference is no longer a matter of dreaming spires, but rather, consideration of the edifice as a whole. *Experientia Docet.*

**Patricia Kerslake is a Senior Lecturer in Arts and Communications and an Adjunct Research Fellow at Central Queensland University's Melbourne Campus.**

# Cat scan for dogmatic times?



## *Herding Cats: Being advice to aspiring academic and research leaders* by Geoff Garrett and Graeme Davies

ISBN: 978-0-9565379-5-9 Triarchy Press, Devon, United Kingdom, 2010

Review by Geoff Sharrock

This little book by a former chief executive of Australia's CSIRO and his co-author, the current Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, offers 'advice to aspiring academic and research leaders'.

The authors surveyed 50 senior practitioners from around the world, then selected from their thoughts and observations to highlight lived experience and lessons learned at the pointy end of institutional leadership.

The result is a rich haul of quotable quotes, risks to consider, and thoughtful tips. Readers with an interest in this topic will find much to appreciate here: insight, candour, clarity, modesty and wit. As with leadership itself, these attributes lend considerable credibility to an inherently difficult, endlessly makeshift project.

For those steeped in the study of leadership, or waist-deep in the work of it, the treatment here is refreshingly short and sharp. Ideas are presented in a language plain enough to tempt even Don Watson to refrain from yet another weasel-word safari.

Garrett and Davies highlight the foibles, frustrations, prejudices and paradoxes leaders are likely to encounter in research enterprises where, typically, funds are scarce, rules abundant, changes 'glacial' and disagreements 'ubiquitous'.

Their starting point is culture: these are enterprises staffed by 'women and men of high intellectual ability who pride themselves on their skill at thinking and acting creatively and independently...if you have to try to co-ordinate a very difficult situation, where people want to do very different things, you're herding cats.'

This 'cats' culture adds 'intrigue and complexity' to typical management tasks such as 'setting priorities... taking decisions...dealing with failure ...managing performance and handling financial setbacks.' In a setting where 'command and control' styles have real

limits, they observe that 'decision making - however sound, necessary and fact-based - can initiate what amounts to trench warfare'. And as they resist being organised by managers, well-connected cats may organise themselves into coalitions of the unwilling: 'When something...is planned...the old boys' network gets unleashed and I'll get thirty letters from around the world saying what a bad idea this is and how life as we know it will surely come to an end if it happens.'

The book assumes as its audience a new research leader, just taking office, and coming to grips with new responsibilities. It is set out in four main sections: Understanding the Culture; Getting the Job Done; Managing the People; and Leading Strategically. A wide mix of topics is covered under twelve 'C' themes, offering snapshots of typical leadership challenges in professional workplaces (collaboration, communication etc.).

Garrett and Davies have useful things to say about ways to build trust and tap enthusiasm; the need to let go of programs (and move people on) when they fail; and the need to consider when best to consult with people, negotiate with them, or make the decision. In a series of nutshells they examine the uses, abuses and limits of committees (to get things done, or not); of email (an essential tool for communication, but also a 'tyranny'); of performance metrics (to track progress, but with the risk of misdirecting effort); and of project management tools and professional advice (to handle critical projects such as new IT systems, where risks and costs are high).

The longest section in the book is Managing the People. Here we find guidance on familiar elements of the human side of the organisation: recruiting, developing, deploying, motivating, retaining (and yes, removing) people in a 'war for talent'. The main tasks

are finding good people, creating good work conditions, setting high standards, maintaining enthusiasm, recognising individual achievement, building teams: in sum, an endless balancing act as leaders attend in turn to enterprise, group, project, task and individual needs.

There is also a longish sub-section here on communication, the 'baton of leadership'. This central theme could almost have had its own section, to bridge the People and Strategy sections. Then in the final Strategy section we have a nice quick summary of the basic elements of planning strategically for the 'One Minute Vice-Chancellor' - a concept that every time-poor, task-rich, role-splayed and email-sprayed VC should welcome.

The authors close by recapping their twelve 'C's for leadership in this kind of context: Culture, Conflict, Collaboration, Charge, Composure, Committees, Cash, Colleagues, Communication, Credit, Choice, Change.

The book's weaknesses are generally the flip side of its strengths. Much of its advice is not new. Management literature has been telling us for decades why 'command and control' styles don't fit the dynamics of collegial, creative, and professional work cultures. In fact, the 'herding cats' analogy has wider currency (it has been applied to software developers, lawyers, politicians, astronauts, engineers, accountants, architects, and health care professionals; not to mention business networks, the United Nations and the European Union).

While mercifully free of jargon, the book offers no coherent theory of how to lead and manage in a research enterprise setting - and so fails to examine, much less resolve, some of the contradictions that managers live with. We are told for example, that people should be seen as 'colleagues, not subordinates'; but later find that this does not preclude their 'termination' or pushing them to leave by 'loading them up with dog work' or 'starving them of resources.' Staff unions (who don't feature as stakeholders here) would surely frown.

The structural ambiguity of managerial leadership, which occupies a space where competing aims and interests intersect, is most apparent whenever the points made here so deftly and entertainingly are summarised: 'nurture diverse perspectives, but these need to be channelled. We must be competitive but work in partnerships, action-oriented but reflective, planned but opportunistic. Change is critical, but so is the stability provided by continuity. Analysis is key, but so is making use of your intuition. Organisationally, we can appropriately centralise but empower through decentralisation; be big in scope and power but 'small' in terms of responsiveness.'

Occasionally the message is unconvincing even when taken as a shorthand guide: 'While many in academic...life object to being considered part of a 'business', many of the larger institutions of higher education and research [are] billion-dollar enterprises. In this context, we believe that... "All business is people business"...' For researchers who see 'commercialism' as inimical to their own professional aims and values, and those of the institutions that employ them, this play on different meanings of the term 'business' doesn't really name the issue, much less resolve it.

All in all, however, this is a highly readable, highly relevant 'guidebook'. Its messages are conveyed with a nice blend of ironic detachment and humane concern for the research enterprise and the people who work there. It won't answer a new leader's every problem (an impossible ask). But it will help identify some of the risks and options for busy people trying to lead and manage under unusual pressure, in an unusually complex environment.

So buy it and read it, for pleasure and instruction.

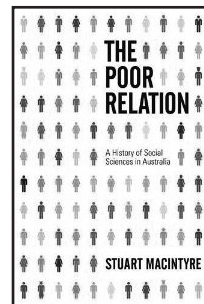
**Geoff Sharrock is programme director for the Master of Tertiary Education Management at the L H Martin Institute, University of Melbourne, 16 November 2010.**

# Chalk and talk?

## *The Poor Relation: A History of Social Sciences in Australia* by Stuart Macintyre

ISBN-10: 0522857752 Melbourne University Press

Review by Jen Tsen Kwok



During the late 1990s and early 2000s Australian race relations history resembled a blood sport, where academics would be inimically wheeled out in public debate to have their scholarship and reputations torn down. This garish, partisan spectacle was captured by Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark's award-winning *The History Wars* (2003). They observe that during the course of this debate, political points were often won by attacking the integrity of the profession itself.

As a discipline, history is sensitive to its social purpose and relevance. Through the fields of public history and memory scholarship, history has intermittently brought academic rigor to bear on its relevance within broader society. Stuart Macintyre's contribution to the *History Wars* delivered profound insight into the political meanings attributed to his discipline's methodology, its routines and scholarly outcomes. This sensitivity is a leading reason why an exploration of the fortunes of the social sciences in Australia is best served by the laureate historian. Macintyre writes history engaged in the world. His scholarship is a recurrent demonstration of the potential for historical method to address and redefine profound social issues and concerns.

In *The Poor Relation*, Macintyre turns his expertise to the history of key Australian social science professional peak bodies. The historical narrative episodically explores the successive organisations that have guided the development of the social sciences in Australia, beginning with the establishment of economics, anthropology and education in the 1920s, charting the rise of the Social Science Research Committee (SSRC) in 1943, its successor the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in 1952, and its transformation into the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) in 1971.

Throughout the various incarnations of ASSA, Macintyre confirms that Australian social science peak bodies remained small organisations 'working with lim-

ited means' (142), often dependent upon sponsors to sustain research activities. There is the contribution of philanthropic organisations such as the Carnegie Corporation in delivering the funding impetus to develop foundational research projects and activities. At the height of its powers the SSRC supported research that had profound and long-lasting effects, demonstrated in Charles Rowley's three-volume series *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, *Outcasts in White Australia* and *The Remote Aborigines*, and Jean Martin's *The Migrant Presence and Refugee Settlers*. The vitality of these bodies also heavily relied upon the enthusiasm of individual members. Macintyre pays particular homage to figures such as W. D. Borrie, H. G. Coombs, Douglas Copland, Kenneth Cunningham, Keith Hancock and Peter Karmel.

Nonetheless, the significance of Macintyre's study extends beyond the 'membership, structure and modes of operation' of these organisations, and his history delves into the national infrastructure that sustains the relevance of the social sciences in Australian higher education and national research policy. Interwoven throughout the book is the significance of government. By tracking the existence of the SSRC and ASSA against broader social and policy conditions, Macintyre locates their intersections and engagements as sets of social relations over time. This becomes particularly pivotal in the penultimate chapter, 'Persistence,' where he dispenses with the fortunes of the academy to detail the bearing of government policy upon higher education during the Howard years.

His narrative contains a sweeping history of the public policy environment, from the Murray Report (1957) to the Bradley Review (2008), and charts an epistemic transformation in the rationale of national research policy. Beginning in the 1970s, Macintyre captures a shift towards the prioritisation of science and technology, and the concentration of funding,

particularly expounded after the establishment of the Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC). The sectoral logic which began prioritising science and technology, increasingly framed national research policy through its applicability, its social relevance and impact. This is finally realised with the Howard Government's Backing Australia's Ability (2004) which brought the scope of the ARC's support for basic research down to four national priorities.

He concludes that government policy has been critical in modernising knowledge creation to meet the market, reorienting universities as instruments primarily geared at lifting economic competitiveness and national productivity. But these imperatives lead to a range of unsettling conclusions about the future of the social sciences, and by extension the Australian university. Macintyre writes, '(T)he danger is that in turning the university into an instrument of national innovation, we lose the very qualities that make it a university. This is the paradox of government research policy;' (335).

Macintyre's history of the Australian social sciences is important historical scholarship and timely for the sector in the wake of Labor's re-election. As Minister

for Education, Julia Gillard steered universities towards broader participation, she reinforced their role in expanding educational opportunity and developing skills and human capital. Strangely however, Labor's education revolution has had little to contribute with regard to the civic agenda of universities as autonomous public institutions. How contiguous is the Rudd/Gillard university with the Menzies university – 'a repository of learning and a custodian of liberty' (81)? Does the expansion of education opportunity and the lifting of productivity sufficiently capture the public interest and civic agenda of the Australian university in the 21st century?

To take seriously Macintyre's claims would admit that there is more to do in terms of taking stock. This is about more than pulling the right policy levers. By recognising that government intervention and national innovation policy plays the most critical of roles in shaping Australian higher education, it lends itself to an existential question about the intent and proper role of government itself.

**Jen Tsen Kwok is a researcher with the NTEU's Policy and Research Unit and a member of the AUR production team.**

## (Not just) 'Horror movies on my TV...'

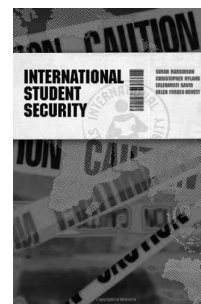
***International Student Security* By Simon Marginson, Christopher Nyland, Erlenawati Sawir and Helen Forbes-Mewett**

ISBN: 978-0-521-13805-5 Cambridge University Press

Review by Grant McBurnie

This book is a timely and informative examination of security-related issues facing international students, host country governments, and educational institutions. For the purposes of the study, international student security is broadly defined to include not only personal safety, but also 'financial issues and work experiences, housing, health and welfare services,

language problems, students' personal and social networks ... and experiences with government and university authorities'. The project team interviewed 200 international students drawn from 34 nations studying at 9 Australian universities, more or less resembling the gender and nationality distribution of Australia's total international student numbers.



The authors state that 'This is not a holistic survey of student satisfaction or dissatisfaction with international education, or a quality assurance exercise designed as a balanced assessment of strengths and weaknesses'. They make it clear that 'the book is focused explicitly on this one aspect - deficiencies in international student security'. Nonetheless, the volume is certainly not a simple catalogue of complaints and horror stories (though they are there aplenty). It presents a nuanced and generally well-balanced insight into the students' experiences of university life, and the wider complexities one faces as a foreigner dealing with cultural adjustment and the practicalities of everyday living. Whilst focussed on students in Australia, the book identifies problems that are applicable to other countries, places them into a comparative international context, and suggests possible strategies for improvement.

The volume is divided into four parts. Part 1 sets out the context, looking at the marketised nature of international education, the place of Australia in the global market, the legal and regulatory rights and responsibilities of international students, and the characteristics of the students interviewed. Part 2 examines students' experiences in the formal and public domain (interacting with government authorities, employers and landlords) under the headings of Finances, Work, Housing, Health, Safety, and The Immigration Department. Part 3 turns to the informal and private domain, with chapters on Universities, Language, Family and Friends, Loneliness, and Intercultural relations. Part 4 draws together the findings with suggestions for addressing the problems raised by the interviewees.

Much of the flavour and interest of the volume lies in the student voices quoted at length, unrestricted by the 'sound bite' brevity common to much media coverage. This provides a welcome depth and subtlety to the topics under discussion. The statistical aspect - the tabulated student responses to questions about their experiences and perceptions - also helps us to step back from the media spin. In response to the question 'Are you safe and secure in Australia?', more than 90 per cent of students answered 'yes', with an 'overwhelming majority' declaring they were 'at least as safe in Australia as at home'. Responses varied according to the sex of the student (with 93 per cent of men feeling safe compared with 88 per cent of women), the student's home country (for example, 96 per cent from Indonesia felt safe, compared with 86 per cent from China and 81 per cent from India) and where in Australia the student resided (23 per cent of Sydney

respondents felt unsafe, whereas only 5 per cent of Melbourne respondents felt unsafe). Note that these figures represent perceptions of safety, not actual experience of crime - the book reports one case of assault on an interviewee, and four cases of burglary suffered by students, whilst some students reported knowing of others who had been victims of crime. That is not to underplay the seriousness and profound impact of the incidence of assault and worse.

Commentators routinely note students are more exposed to crime by returning home late on public transport after completing night shift work, and newspapers carry articles on the exploitation of student labour. Employment is indeed a vital factor for many students. The authors found that 70 per cent of respondents had worked while studying in Australia, with 57 per cent currently employed and one third indicating that employment in Australia was their main source of income. Broken down by industry, educational and professional fields accounted for more than half of student employment (chiefly postgraduates), with most of the remainder working in hospitality, retail and labouring. Students in the lesser-paid categories complained of low wages and exploitative conditions, but noted that they were getting paid more than in the home country. Respondents did not associate workplace exploitation with racism; indeed it was observed that the more egregious cases involved exploitation by employers of the same ethnicity as the student. Nonetheless, there is undoubtedly scope for improvement in the provision of information about workplace rights. The authors also discuss the topic of locals being disadvantaged by the willingness of some international students to work for less than award rates.

For many, the possibility of migration to Australia was a key consideration in their study choice. The authors cite a 2007 AEI survey finding that 78 per cent of international student respondents had applied or were planning to apply to migrate to Australia. In this context, it is interesting to note that some of the students' - and indeed some of the authors' - strongest criticisms were directed at immigration authorities. Several students complained about bureaucratic delays and heavy-handed regulation enforcement. Some noted, however, that the bureaucracy in their home country was slower and more onerous. The poor English-language skills of certain immigration department staff was mentioned by some respondents, who stressed the irony that their application was being vetted by staff that had themselves only recently gained residency.

Whilst strongly criticising what they see as inflexibility and arbitrariness on the part of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (formerly the Department of Immigration, Multiculturalism and Indigenous Affairs), the authors acknowledge that problems arise from the tension between the two roles that the immigration department is required to perform: to facilitate the inward movement of desired citizens, whilst acting as a protective filter against unfettered mobility.

The writers offer numerous suggestions for addressing the deficiencies they identify. One possibility is that education institutions could offer students a price-differentiated choice of 'products'. For example, the basic option would be access to the teaching program with no additional services; a more costly option could involve additional English language learning support to a guaranteed standard; another option could offer one-to-one pastoral care; another the 'full package' combining all these 'extras'. This kind of market solution is interesting to consider – and given the authors' critiques of commercialisation of education, it is surely intended to be provocative. There may indeed be many students (or more especially parents) willing and able to pay extra for better service, and finding peace of mind in these options. Such an approach does raise several questions: is it acceptable to disadvantage those not in a position to pay for extras; does it imply that pastoral care and language support are not an intrinsic part of education, but just 'frills' for the affluent; what about domestic students – should they have the same options at the same or at a subsidised cost?

Other suggestions include: revision of the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act to take on board various security-related issues discussed in the book; the establishment of an independent body

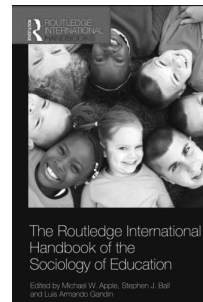
to monitor and advise on the Act; enhanced coordination between education providers, police and involved parts of government; improved mentoring and monitoring of international students, perhaps through a 'buddy' system of graduate students mentoring undergraduates; the abolition of detention for visa infringements and the expedited processing of appeals against visa cancellation. More generally, the authors urge governments and institutions to move beyond the perceived culture of denial and public relations spin (asserting that there is no problem) to a culture of assurance (putting steps in place to look after the safety of students). Looking to the future, the authors suggest the possibility of global regulation, picking up on a strand of globalisation literature arguing that the protection of globally mobile citizens is 'increasingly a matter for the world community'.

This book deserves to be widely read. As well its major contribution to understanding security issues as they affect international students, the book has broad interest as a study of international political economy refracted through the international higher education market, as well as the development and functioning of regulatory regimes, and the anthropology of the international student. It also makes an important contribution to the notion of the cosmopolitan or 'world citizen'. Finally, the study underlines the need for further work to tease out the rights and responsibilities of globally mobile students, the countries that host them, the countries they hail from, and potential roles for international bodies such as UNESCO and the OECD.

**Grant McBurnie is a Senior Associate in RMIT University's School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning.**



# Mapping the sociology of education: social context, power and knowledge



***The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education Practice* edited by Michael W. Apple, Stephen J. Ball and Luis Armando Gandin**

Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, New York 2010. ISBN 0-415-48663-7 (hbk)

Review by Jo Luck

Apple, Ball and Gandin, the three editors of this work are involved in The Freire Project (<http://freireproject.org>) which is dedicated to building an international critical community to work together to promote social justice in a variety of cultural contexts. This common interest drives their motivation in bringing this handbook to realization. The editors have brought together 46 of the world's leading educational sociologists to explore and address key issues and concerns within the education discipline area at the beginning of the 21st century. The book contains 37 chapters that draw upon research and theory to present fresh accounts of contemporary educational processes, global trends, and changing and enduring forms of social conflict and social inequality. One of the strengths of this book is the truly international scope and range of the papers. Nevertheless the editors admit there is a 'Western, Northern and Anglo-Saxon bias' (p.9) and propose a second volume that would ensure that the debates within the sociology of education would be even more international.

The research presented in this book reveals the emergence of two complex agendas, both inextricably linked, from the changes to education over the last quarter of a century. The first agenda is with respect to a clear articulation by the state of its education requirements. The second agenda is the promotion (at least in appearance) of a greater autonomy on the part of educational institutions to be able to deliver those requirements. The handbook analyses the manner in which the sociology of education has responded to these political agendas using three themes:

- Perspectives and theories where the emphasis is on the application of theoretical ideas or how the work of particular writers is used and the deployment of key concepts.
- Social processes and practices which concentrate on the critical interrogation of various contemporary educational phenomena such as families, the middle class and university reform.
- Inequalities and resistances which interrogate issues of class, race and gender with respect to education and forms of social and political struggle within education are examined.

*The Handbook of the Sociology of Education Practice* clearly articulates the breadth and diversity of the sociology of education and the nature of recent topical research in this field. It is a significant resource for educators who wish to explore internationally significant, contemporary issues with respect to the sociology of education. Additionally, it is a book that should be read by all educational sociologists as it will become known as a seminal publication in this discipline area.

A major fault with this handbook is the lack of an index. Given that there are 423 pages and 37 chapters written by 49 authors (paper authors plus three editors) an index would have made it a more user-friendly resource for readers when searching for particular topics or people. There are a few spelling mistakes and clumsy errors that should have been avoided, such as spelling George Siemens name as 'Siemens' (p. 92) and a case study description where one of the participants called Mary is described as being married to 'Gary' and three sentences later is referred to as owning a house

with a man called 'Mike' (p. 115). A consequence of having a large number of international authors is that there is an array of differing writing styles though some readers may not like this others will find that that varying styles make the handbook more interesting to read.

*The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education* has several Australian-based authors which increases its appeal to an Australian audience. Many of the international case studies and

discussions would translate well into the Australian context. For this reason it would be a very useful addition to every university and school library in Australia.

**Dr Jo Luck is a senior lecturer in information systems at Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia. Her main research interest is examining the social and technical aspects of implementing and using technologies in higher education.**

## Errata

### Lindsay, B. (2010). Rates of student disciplinary action in Australian universities, *Australian Universities' Review*, 52(2), pp. 27-32: Tables 1 and 2, p 29.

There were a number of minor transcriptional errors in the above paper, involving two tables and some of the text. None of the changes shown here make any change to the arguments in the paper.

- p. 28, line 30, '1606' to read '1602'
- p. 28, line 62, '9645' to read '9546'
- p. 28, line 77, '88.29 per cent' to read '88.5 per cent'
- p. 28, line 83, '1640' to read '1636'
- p. 28, line 86, '13.29 per cent' to read '13.32 per cent'
- p. 28, line 88, '86.7 per cent' to read '86.68 per cent'
- p. 30, line 2, '94.89 per cent' to read '95.13 per cent'
- p. 30, line 10, '72.04 per cent' to read '72.22 per cent'

University	Academic misconduct (local)	Academic misconduct (central)	Total academic misconduct	General misconduct (local)	General misconduct (central)	Total general misconduct	Total misconduct	Academic misconduct / onsore enrolments (%)	Academic misconduct /EFTSU (%)	Total misconduct /onsore enrolments (%)	Total misconduct /EFTSU (%)
A	188	17	205	NA	9	9	214	1.17	2.23	1.22	2.63
B	139	5	144	1	1	6 2	150 146	0.38	0.50	0.40 0.39	0.52 0.5
C	425	16	441	27	3	30	471	2.52	3.32	2.70	3.55
D	157	24	181	NA	5	5	186	1.30	1.85	1.34	1.90
E	174	0	174	1	7	8	182	0.44	0.64	0.46	0.67
F	112	49	161	4	0	4	165	0.42	0.58	0.43	0.6
G	190	28	218	0	20	20	238	0.67	0.94	0.73	1.03
All	1385	139	1524	33	45	82 78	16061602	0.77	1.09	0.98 0.97	1.38

Table 1: Numbers and rates of discipline proceedings, selected Australian universities, 2006

University	Plagiarism	Plagiarism/all misconduct (%)	Exam misconduct	Other	Total academic misconduct	Appeals (academic misconduct)	Summary action	Total general misconduct	Appeals (general misconduct)	Total appeals	Appeals/original proceedings (%)
A	193	90.19	12	0	205	NA	NA	9	NA	NA	NA
B	114	76.00 78.08	4	26	144	1	4	6 2	2	3	2
C	393	80.70 83.44	38	10	441	9	NA	30	3	12	2.55
D	118	46.39 63.44	8	55	181	NA	NA	5	NA	NA	NA
E	123	67.58	46	5	174	0	0	8	0	0	0
F	93	56.36	61	7	161	12	0	4	0	12	7.27
G	123	51.68	28	67	218	7	0	20	0	7	2.94
All	1157	53.66 72.22	197	170	1524	29	4	82 78	5	34	2.12

Table 2: Grounds for disciplinary action and rates of appeal, selected Australian universities, 2006

NTEU  
membership  
costs less than  
a coffee per  
fortnight...

It's the workplace insurance cover  
you can't do without!

**JOIN ONLINE AT [WWW.NTEU.ORG.AU](http://WWW.NTEU.ORG.AU)**



## CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO A SATIRICAL BOOK ABOUT AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

Australian Universities' Review regular satirist, Joseph Gora, is seeking contributions from university staff about their experiences of working in Australian higher education.

You can write anonymously or otherwise, and any word length will do. Joseph would like to hear about your perceptions of the daily grind, the funny and not so funny things that occur in universities.

What's it like working in today's university? Is it fun, or not, and why? What are some of the more quirky, strange, odd, bizarre things you have experienced?

What changes would you like to see? What hopes do you harbour?

**PLEASE SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO  
[josephgora@hotmail.com](mailto:josephgora@hotmail.com)**

# www.aur.org.au

Since 1958, the *Australian Universities' Review* has been encouraging debate and discussion about issues in higher education and its contribution to Australian public life.



Want to receive your own copy of *Australian Universities' Review (AUR)*?

*AUR* is published by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) twice a year. NTEU members are entitled to receive a free subscription on an opt-in basis – so you need to let us know. If you are an NTEU member and would like to receive your own copy of *AUR*, please send us an email at [aur@nteu.org.au](mailto:aur@nteu.org.au).

Subscription rates for non-members are available at [www.aur.org.au](http://www.aur.org.au).

If you would like to become a member of NTEU, please contact the local Branch office at your institution, or join online at [www.nteu.org.au](http://www.nteu.org.au).