

# Humanities and the Melbourne Model

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I will begin with a parable from thirty years ago when I was a teacher at Kingston College of Further Education in London. This involved teaching liberal studies to electrical and mechanical apprentices including those from Rolls-Royce. When the Head of the College heard of my teaching I was sent a directive that the 'free society' (whatsoever this maybe), abortion or the family were not to be mentioned in the classroom. This was from a Colditz escapee, a very conservative person who was a Catholic. So I learnt to teach from the doorway – though whether the apprentices ever understood remains a separate question. But thus was teaching in a tech; and perhaps it is returning.

My topic is arts at Melbourne. We are faced with two huge changes – one is the 'Melbourne model'. The other, which is separate, is the restructuring of the Faculty of Arts which is said to have a massive deficit and the threat has been made that 100 of the 350 staff in the Faculty will be made redundant. Both the Melbourne model and the job losses are proposed for 2007. The restructuring is especially disturbing since one would have hoped that if arts were going to survive anywhere it would be somewhere as rich and posh as Melbourne. Yet we may be reverting. In the UK I used to be a teacher in the history of British education; the UK Education Act of 1904 introduced elementary schools and grammar schools. Elementary schools were, according to the Act, to provide “hand and eye work for the working classes”; grammar schools were to provide arts and sciences for those lucky to be considered academically gifted. Such subjects were not part of 'hand and eye work'. We are in a strange sort of situation in Australia where it now seems that in future even the posh and rich will not get an arts education.

## The Melbourne model

The Melbourne model is to start in 2008. It is the brainchild of the new Vice-Chancellor, Glyn Davis and huge amounts of staff time and energy have been put into its development. The core part of the model is that vocational areas such as medicine, law and engineering become postgraduate degrees. Undergraduate programmes will be limited to six and have fewer courses<sup>1</sup> and will emphasise broad knowledge. The model is based on the elite Harvard system where undergraduates studies are broader and postgraduate ones are narrower. The overall claim is that students come out as more well rounded people under the new model than under the current specialist degrees.

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<sup>1</sup> On nomenclature; the term 'programme' is used at Melbourne for a degree and the term 'course' for a single component of that degree or what elsewhere is a subject or unit.

On another analysis the change is all about money. Undergraduate students are worth less than postgraduate ones and full-fee paying postgraduate students are much more valuable than HECS-funded undergraduates. The model proposes three undergraduate faculties feeding into the more specialised graduate professional entry programmes such as medicine, law, architecture, teaching, nursing and engineering. The three 'new generation' undergraduate areas are commerce, arts and biomedicine<sup>2</sup>. Notably, commerce is included as a foundation degree even though it is 'vocational'. This may have something to do with the number of fee paying overseas students choosing commerce degrees. Moreover, the commerce faculty is already a very rich faculty and seems to be resentful of cross-subsidising arts and humanities – they certainly are quite hostile to my views of arts being the 'beating heart of a university'!

The Melbourne model may go the way of Melbourne University Private which failed costing an awful lot of money. It was an idea of the previous Vice-Chancellor and disappeared without trace. But, the job of new Vice-Chancellors seems to be to come and try out new ideas. The new model is all about 'breadth and depth' and part of the plan is that undergraduates will be encouraged to study outside their main discipline. All students in all undergraduate programmes will be required to take 25/100 points (a quarter of their studies) each year in another faculty. This can be by taking either the new 'University breadth subjects' which are multidisciplinary or subjects from the other two undergraduate faculties. At one level it is very good that science and commerce students should do arts – though whether it is good for arts students to study science and commerce might be a different matter. Indeed, one effect is that arts students will not be able to do all the things they might want to do in arts because of the quarter of the time they have to undertake the breadth studies and because of the way these are being constructed. This also seriously impinges the availability of specialist courses and the ability of academics to pursue their specialisms at undergraduate level.

## **The impact on specialist studies**

All of the above has a direct effect upon my position. The current arts and humanities courses are being classified as generalist or specialist -though in a fascinating new language the term 'boutique' has been introduced to replace specialist or advanced. I teach 'boutique courses' including 'Sexual Politics' and 'International Gender Politics'. In the new arrangements, all first year courses (subjects) have to be 'generalist' – not just the inter-faculty ones. In my school (Political Studies), all courses in second year have to be generalist as well. These will be team taught with specialists like me invited to do a couple of lectures. At best, I might be able to retain one of my specialist courses in third year. As such, it will be impossible to offer students a coherent study sequence in feminist studies or to create new radical feminists. As a result of 'breadth and depth' anything radical will be lost and anything which is fascinating and interesting will go. I just cannot believe that an odd lecture here and there will cover the experience of 52% of the human race<sup>3</sup>.

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2 The official university view is at [http://www.futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/about/m\\_model/index.html](http://www.futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/about/m_model/index.html) (accessed June 2008).

3 The counter to this is the claim that gender has been mainstreamed. This is hard to accept - universities teach men's studies and there are even Human Rights courses that do not mention women's' human rights.

There is a shift from PhD by research to full fee-paying postgraduate courses – this is also a great detriment to boutique courses and specialist staff. PhDs do not bring the faculties money as they once did. In particular, under a new policy starting in 2008, there will be no payment to a faculty where a PhD student does not finish within three years. Previously there was a payment of \$15,000 when the student finished but now nothing unless it is completed within three years. In my experience as a supervisor only one student completed a humanities thesis within three years. We are being advised against taking students who may not finish on the dot of three years. Of course there are 'high risks' and one is mature age women with children!

Overall the academic groundwork is changing beneath us and changing very fast. The staples of undergraduate teaching and postgraduate research students are being replaced by an emphasis on full-fee paying coursework and on other money-making opportunities of which I will speak in a moment in terms of what Margaret Thornton talked about as the destruction of academic freedom<sup>4</sup>. My freedom to do anything useful is being restricted by the emphasis on making money since, given the areas in which I work, I have difficulties bringing in full-fee paying post graduate students and I am not very much of a cash cow. Indeed, we 'specialists' are beginning to be seen as a bit of a nuisance.

## **The Faculty of Arts Restructure**

The effect of the Melbourne model is overlaid with the restructure of the Faculty of Arts that was initiated by a new Dean in 2007. Under the restructuring, departments have been made into schools so that the Department of Political Science is now the School of Political Science, Criminology and Sociology. The School has a 'Head' and a small Executive. In my view, the restructure introduced a new level of managerialism or what I would call 'authoritarianism' and the removal of democracy from the Faculty. I note that such criticism could get me rapped over the knuckles as we have been accused of leaking to media and staff have been lectured about being respectful to university processes. The functions of the departmental policy committees which produced policy papers and put these to votes of the department have been reduced. The committees now receive directives from executive; they are not allowed to make policies but must carry out the directives. We have school meetings at which minutes of some six intervening Executive meetings are presented and we can look at them for half-an-hour but not taking them out of the room. We are lectured by the Head of School and there is no voting.

This managerial model removes all democracy and almost all ideas are now those of the Head of School. Indeed, we had an election for Head of School but the person who won was not allowed to take the position. You are no longer represented by one of yourselves and no longer allowed to have an input into policy or what happens in your workplace. You become a sort of cog. There are more administrative positions in the money-making activities – our School is to get as marketing person to market full-fee paying postgraduate courses. Meanwhile we have lost academic positions and cannot replace an international relations position. The restructuring was meant to save money and there must have been some plan for this though it remains unclear. I think it has a strong ideological element of stopping the rat bags governing themselves.

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4 Margaret Thornton, The Decline of the Humanities: are the Humanities Being Singled Out? *Journal of the Public University*, 6, 2008

## **A Narrow Definition of Academic Work**

A new workload formula has been introduced as part of the restructuring of the Faculty of Arts. It is a bean counting accounting model based on accruing points for various activities across the year. The workload formula further limits what academics can do by privileging some activities over others. For example, there is little credit for being invited to give a keynote address at an international symposium. Despite talk of 'knowledge transfer' (whatever that managerial phrase might mean), such symposia are not yet counted in the workload formula. However, we are told that if it were included, going overseas to present a keynote address will be worth ten (10) points. This is out of a total of 2,300 for the year. So, if I write a major speech, go overseas to deliver the lecture and spend some time in discussions with colleagues, it will count as one two hundred and thirtieth of my work-load which is about one day.

As yet, there is not even a place in the workload formula for public lectures and symposia and 'knowledge transfer' is about consulting. I have always thought that 'knowledge transfer' was about making getting ideas in public and making an impact in the world. This could be such things as getting articles in the *The Age* or the *Guardian* about a new book, appearing on television and radio. I have no problem with such activities and have done all of them in Britain and Australia. But none of these things seem to matter in the new era where the new game is bringing money through consultancies. To be personal not a huge number of people want to consult with me as a radical feminist theorist though my advice has been sought by governments including the Canadian, the Swedish and the South African. But there is little demand evident from the sort of people who make large payments to universities for the services of academics. I think this is a common situation for those in arts and humanities – the people who have money do not want or need our services and the people who want or need our services do not have much money.

More generally the workload formula for the faculty of arts at Melbourne does not include a lot of the things that academics do. For instance, there are no points for book reviews or for peer reviewing submissions for either journal articles or book proposals. Put another way there are very few points or work time allocated for collegial activity. On the other hand there is a huge amount of credit (and credibility!) from applying for competitive grants with 200 points just for making an application. Compare this with the 10 points suggested for an international lecture. And, of course, there are considerably more points in the workload formulae for those who actually get a grant.

These are all small but potent examples of the way in which academics are expected to be cash generators in the efforts to make universities self-funding and overcome the reduced government funding. The traditional roles of creating free knowledge to contribute to public discussion in arts and humanities in a creative and fearless way has been dramatically curtailed. Much more importance is given to apply for competitive grants and the staff appraisal scheme at Melbourne requires at least one such application each year. Not to do so is treated very unfavourably and it makes writing a book almost a samizdat activity. Yet applications for research grant funding are problematic in a large number of ways. They create extra work as it is very time consuming with at least six or seven weeks need to prepare an application to the ARC. And, of course, the prospects of success are very low with only around 20% of applications for Discovery Grants being successful. And, the entire research grant process is more difficult in arts and humanities since the underlying approach is quite scientific. The process is also orientated towards getting money for empirical work and to employ a research assistant. Again to be personal, these are things I neither need nor

desire. My academic life is writing books and I do not want grant funding and research assistants to write books.

## **A Normal and Model Academic**

Once upon a time I would have been a very normal and model academic. This was clearly the case when I was promoted ten years ago. But I would not be promoted now and, indeed, would probably not be appointed, because these require a record of gaining competitive research grants. At Melbourne it is highly unlikely that we could appoint someone in arts and humanities from the USA who has a proven intellectual reputation and a scholarly public profile, and even changes the world but does not have a record of competitive grant funding. They would not have the latter because they do not even consider that applying for grants is central to intellectual and academic standing.

The entire construct of arts and humanities has been changed by the overall changes described in the first two papers in this Last Post symposium. Detailed changes are made through restructuring and replacing broadly self-governing departments by schools with academic and resource managers and by the imposition of workload formula with rigid requirements and the downgrading, if not denigration, of collegiate and peer activities. These are fundamental changes which are having profound effects on arts and humanities. In the 1960s when I studied at university in Britain, Marxists got sheltered in the universities at which I studied. In the 1980s-90s radical feminists get sheltered therein. This did not make the universities either Marxist or radical feminist but it did ensure a catholic set of positions and did provide a basis for at least some people to be able to contribute to progressive debates. This will be impossible in the future. The new structures and new requirements to 'perform' are one reason for this. Staff must get research grants, courses must pay their way and post graduate courses attract fee-paying students. These limit the space for unorthodoxy and non-conformity so, in my area, gender studies has been reduced from a major to a minor and, as I described earlier, may well fare even worse under the Melbourne model. But there are pressures to conform as well as perform. The RQF is one instance of this since it (and any likely alternative) puts direct pressure on academics to publish in the 'top ten' journals. In my case, the top ten journals in women's studies are in health and economics and favour 'applied' studies rather than theoretical ones. A feminist academic who is committed to advancing her ideas is going to find it extremely difficult since career survival, yet alone advancement, will require playing the conformist game.