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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
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ROUNDUP

It’s a new year. And, like many other large organisations, the University is changing, moving with the times. All of us face new challenges in our work.

As part of these changes the University is constantly upgrading the way in which it responds to the learning needs of both students and staff. Changes are necessary to maintain our commitment to innovative methodologies.

In this first edition of Van Gogh’s Ear for 1995 we profile some of the centres working within the University to promote academic excellence. Their purpose is to assist students and staff in their academic pursuits. The roundup includes the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CALT), the Learning Skills Unit, the Language Centre, the Curriculum Resource and Research Centre and the Adaptive Technology Centre.

Staff at all these centres have devised new programs for 1995 and have reviewed existing services. Their aim: to provide the necessary resources and an environment where the goal of academic excellence is paramount.

A GOOD LAUGH AND A SPLASH OF DECONSTRUCTION

Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet), by Canadian playwright, Ann-Marie MacDonald will open at the Drama Theatre, 8pm on February 28 and run until March 11.

The play is a comic exploration of academia in which a mousy, exploited lecturer tries to find her way through the worlds of Shakespeare’s Othello and Romeo and Juliet.

According to Ms Rachel Hennessy, Assistant Director to Professor Victor Emeljanow, Head of the Drama Department, only minor changes were necessary to make the script applicable to Australia. Indeed, she feels she has seen most of the characters strolling around the campus. “Canada and Australia have much in common. We seem to share a consciousness with Canada, as well as a similar sense of humour,” she said.

Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) is a must for anyone who enjoys a good laugh, a bit of sword fighting and a splash of deconstruction!

1995 CONVOCATION AWARDS DINNER

7.00pm on Friday 10 March, 1995.
Brennan Room,
Shortland Union Building

Eileen Doyle - Convocation Medal

Chosen to receive the 1994 Convocation Gold Medal for professional excellence, Dr Eileen Doyle will be recognised for her outstanding career in business management and industrial relations since she completed her PhD in Applied Statistics in 1985.

Marion Halligan - Newton-John Award

The recipient of the 1994 Newton-John Award, Marion Halligan, will be recognised for her service to the Arts. An award-winning novelist, Ms Halligan is the current chairperson of the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

Tickets cost $40.00 per head and are available from Kim Britton, Information & Public Relations Unit, The Chancellery.
Telephone: (049) 21 6459. Fax: (049) 21 6400.
IN PURSUIT OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

The philosophy of teaching has undergone a quiet revolution in recent years, as has the University’s Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT).

With the departure of some staff and the arrival of new personnel with new areas of expertise, the centre has renewed and revamped its 1995 programs for academic staff and students.

CALT was formed in 1992 from an amalgam of existing units. Its purpose is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the University by providing support for both academics and students through a variety of activities. These activities are carried out by a number of groups, including the Staff Development Unit and the Learning Skills Unit.

Classroom and Theatre Services, which provides audiovisual instructional resources, and The Media Production Unit, which helps produce materials to improve the quality of learning and teaching, also form part of the centre.

According to Ms Isobel Sendlak, who has just joined the centre from the University of Sydney, traditional models of staff development have not always been the best but things are now changing.

The concept that staff developers are to teach academics how to teach their students has well and truly passed on. The concept that staff developers are to teach academics how to teach their students has well and truly passed on, she said. Rather than dishing out wisdom, their role is to be facilitators and mediators in the process in which academics update their knowledge about teaching and learning and develop their professional skills by solving real problems.

"They also provide academics with resources and advice. This is a new approach but it is gaining popularity among academic staff developers in Australia and other countries," she said.

Some of CALT’s new programs will run at a departmental level rather than in the previous format, where faculties and departments were combined. “Although participants in general University workshops enjoyed meeting members of other disciplines and faculties, it was sometimes difficult to deal with specific problems in that context,” Ms Sendlak said.

"We need to deal with real people and their real problems," she said.

Grants are awarded by the University through CALT each year to encourage excellence in teaching. The Conference Fellowship and the Support for Women Academics programs, offered by CALT, have been successful in encouraging novice academics to establish their professional networks and giving women academics release time to accelerate their postgraduate studies.

All new academics complete CALT’s three-day Foundations for University Teaching Course which combines theoretical and practical aspects of university teaching. Follow up sessions are also available.

1995 will see a new emphasis on student evaluation of teaching, an area in which Ms Sendlak has a particular interest. There has been, she said, a movement towards standardisation of evaluation and this must be resisted.

“Student evaluation should provide information from students to teachers about their teaching methods. It should be tailored to meet the needs of each individual discipline and teacher, and students should receive feedback about what has been done to improve the course,” she said.

“But some people are using these evaluations as a way of comparing themselves with others and even ask what the University’s average is, so as to judge where they are placed. This is not the purpose of student evaluation. It promotes the false idea that teaching can be measured.”

New trends and initiatives in teaching and learning will continue to provide a focus for CALT’s activities this year and in the years to come. One such innovation has been group curriculum design.

"It seems that people are tired of working in isolation and, increasingly, are working together in groups to design curricula. This has a number of advantages and overcomes some of the negative effects of working alone," Ms Sendlak said.
THE LEARNING SKILLS UNIT

For the LSU, 1994 was a year of both rapid growth and consolidation of the programs and services offered to individual students and departments. The number of students assisted through individual consultations quadrupled from that of 1993, while the range of courses offered to students within departments at the request of academic staff was extended considerably. One very significant extension of the unit's services occurred at the start of Semester 2, 1994, when the unit's Mathematics Centre opened.

In 1993, the LSU began a program to assist postgraduate research students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science. The program continued throughout 1994 with a series of seminars and paper presentations. The seminars, which were a combination of panel-style discussions and speaker presentations, dealt with some of the issues which students had identified as being problematic in postgraduate study. These were 'Developing a Research Schedule', 'Building Motivation and Confidence', 'Student/Supervisor Roles' and 'Research Methodologies'. The program will be continued this year and will be extended to the Faculties of Science and Mathematics, Engineering and Nursing. Inaugural seminars for these Faculties will be held in Semester 1 this year.

Late in Semester 2, the LSU surveyed academic staff to assess the level of awareness about the LSU's activities and to collate ideas from other academics about how they think the unit might further its aim of assisting students to achieve at their full potential. The results suggested that most academic staff were aware of the unit's activities and were supportive of its aims. "The positive response to the survey is very encouraging and suggests that our approach to providing academic skills courses is meeting with widespread approval," said the unit's Head, Dr Anita van der Wal.

In October, a review of the Learning Skills Unit was conducted by Professor Bob Ross and Ms Jenny Pittman from Southern Cross University. This review assessed the unit's operational philosophy and its practical applications of these philosophies, resulting in recommendations for consolidation and for further improvement of the unit's services within the university community.

This review, together with the data obtained from the University-wide survey has guided staff in developing the programs and advisory services which will be offered in 1995. Among the courses that will be offered in Semester 1, 1995, are twice-weekly classes in essay-writing, twice-weekly writing workshops, weekly study skills workshops, weekly reading and note-taking classes, and courses in mathematics for psychology statistics. Classes in time management and five-week courses in public speaking will also be offered from the middle of Semester 1. Brochures with details of these courses will be distributed to all departments of the University before the start of the academic year.

Staff in the Learning Skills Unit are currently participating in research into various aspects of student literacy and student learning.

Anyone wanting more detailed information on the Learning Skills Unit's activities is welcome to contact the Head of the Unit on ext. 5890 or 6606.

The Learning Skills Unit helps students acquire the academic skills they need to achieve their full academic potential. The Learning Skills Unit offers a range of courses in topics such as essay-writing, study skills, time management, reading and note taking, public speaking, critical analysis, statistics and mathematics. Courses are offered to the student population in general. Further, at the request of Departments and/or Faculties, courses are offered to meet specific learning needs of students in degree courses.

The Learning Skills Unit also offers a drop in consultation service, where students are assisted to improve their individual learning skills, and a workshop service where students can work on assignments in small groups. Assessment for students with specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia is available through the Unit.

Staff of the Learning Skills Unit:

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NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The Language Centre is now settled into the new Language Centre Building (situated between the Auchmuty Library and the Students Union). It serves as the focal point for the learning of English as a second language at the University and also provides learning support facilities for students in the Department of Modern Languages.

The centre is an amalgamation of the former Centre for Language Study, which was housed in the McMullin Building, and the former English Language Centre, previously situated off campus in Tudor Street.

The centre comprises three language laboratories, a video and computing laboratory, classrooms and resource rooms for students and teachers.

It fulfils several purposes: to provide English instruction for overseas students wanting to enter undergraduate, postgraduate or Foundation Certificate courses; to provide ongoing English language support for undergraduate and postgraduate students; to provide support facilities for Chinese, French, German and Japanese, the languages taught by the Department of Modern Languages; and to provide private language study facilities for all University staff and students.

Teaching and learning languages now involves the use of new technologies which, according to the centre's director, Mrs Gay Reeves, allow students to work at their own level and pace in a relaxed and supportive environment, and to develop greater autonomy in their language learning. Video and computer programs allow similar opportunities for individual revision and repetition.

"Many present day courses integrate video, audio cassette and a communicative approach which enables students to learn in a variety of ways. Computer assisted language learning (CALL) programs have also been introduced in some courses," she said.

The centre's three language laboratories are used both as classrooms and for individual, private study. They each have a student capacity of 21-25 students with booths where students may listen to, repeat and answer material on cassettes. They may also record, listen to and compare their answers with that of a native speaker on the cassette.

The laboratories are arranged with booths around the periphery so the central space can be used for other classroom activities, thus making it possible for greater variety of learning activities. "These language laboratory classrooms are very attractive and allow considerable flexibility in teaching," Mrs Reeves said.

The Language Centre will continue to offer English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) this year and anticipates increasing the numbers of its students undertaking courses. Other overseas groups also come to study English at the centre for varying lengths of time. These include students on two to four week study tours who wish to study English in the morning and enjoy holiday activities in the afternoon. They live with Australian families so they can become better acquainted with Australian people and their way of life.

In January and February of this year, the centre, in conjunction with the Foundation Certificate Program, ran an Introductory Academic Program funded by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) for 26 incoming students.

An AIDAB group of nine postgraduate visitors from Thailand has already started a six month course. "They are undertaking intensive language studies as well as some work-based attachments in local institutions related to their particular field of expertise," Mrs Reeves said.

"Overseas students are keen to meet and make friends with Australian students," she explained. "An informal conversation hour is held each Thursday lunch-time during semester and Australian students are very welcome to attend these sessions. I can make arrangements for those who cannot come at this time if they contact me at the centre."

Apart from ELICOS, the Language Centre provides facilities for students from the Department of Modern Languages who wish to use the language laboratories, video and computer laboratories for developing their skills.

In addition, many staff and students, as well as the partners of overseas students, make use of the facilities for private, self-directed language study.
Keeping abreast of education policies and trends is a challenging task but one enthusiastically embraced by staff at the Curriculum Resources and Research Centre (CRRC).

Since moving into the Hunter Building four years ago, the CRRC has established a broad range of materials for postgraduate students of education - primarily Diploma of Education, fourth year Bachelor of Education, Masters and higher degree students.

In 1994 the centre provided resources for 130 Diploma of Education students and 400 Bachelor of Education students.

The centre's collection ranges from newspaper articles to large volumes of government policy on education. In between are curriculum documents with background information, subject materials, texts and research documents as well as the Masters and PhD theses of past students.

However, most essential to the students using the centre are the resources necessary for preparation of their practical teaching assignments. Teaching aids from games to maths exercises are stored on the centre's shelves and staff are generally available to help find just the right thing.

There are materials on the basic curricula as well as other programs, such as the gifted and talented program, integration of special education students, drug education, multicultural programs, equity and Aboriginal education programs.

"We try hard, within budgetary constraints, to keep up with material on government policy and curriculum developments," explained Director, Ms Neryle Sheldon. "And we keep some relevant materials from other states which are often useful for students. It's also important for students to be aware of new initiatives, such as the national profiles, so we keep these materials displayed prominently around the centre."

There are spaces within the centre for students to work individually or in groups and staff create a relaxed atmosphere in the arrangement of chairs for quiet reading.

The CRRC is well patronised throughout the year but when it comes time for students to go out into schools for their practical teaching, things can get very busy and a bit crowded, according to the centre's staff. Ms Sheldon, a librarian and two library assistants work hard to ensure students understand how the system works and what resources are available for their use.

"We use the OASIS cataloguing system because this is the system used in almost all government and private schools," she said. "Knowing how OASIS works means students can access the resources contained in school libraries without any difficulties. It also helps them appreciate the links between school teachers and librarians, which can be extremely valuable."

The CRRC is now fully computerised and expects to tap into the information superhighway once the necessary infrastructure is in place.

CD-ROM will be the next new resource because it is important for students to be aware of the technologies already available in schools.

In addition they have access to audio visual resources such as videos, overhead projectors and duplicating equipment (rather outdated but still useful) as well as photocopiers for transparencies and worksheets.

However, computerisation does not mean dehumanisation, according to the dedicated staff, who are often called on for emotional as well as practical support. "Students might come in in a bit of a panic but we can usually help them out," they said.
ADAPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES ‘INVALUABLE’

Opened in May last year as part of the Equity Unit’s services for people with a disability, the Adaptive Technology Centre (Adtech) is already experiencing an increase in demand for its services. Students who were frequent clients in 1994, rate the service as a vast improvement in the University’s services for students with a vision impairment or who are blind.

Cathy Mahony, a final year communications student, is now able to do most of her work using braille, her preferred medium of written communication. Using new technology at the centre, Cathy scans written texts which are then translated into braille using the centre’s Versapoint Brai11e Embosser.

Pre-Adtech, Cathy would have had some of her work translated into braille through the Royal Blind Society, a valued service. Students who were frequent clients in 1994, rate the service as a vast improvement in the immediate process.

"Being able to use braille affects they way I learn," she said. "You process information differently if you read it, rather than hear it. And reading braille is more like the experience of other students who read their material, take notes and then refer back to their notes for writing essays."

Genevieve Tavener found the centre’s services “invaluable” during the first year of her Bachelor of Health Science (Occupational Therapy). She used the centre’s technology in a variety of ways: to scan documents and then listen to them on the voice synthesiser, or using Zoomtext (magnified print) to read scanned material or the library’s catalogue system, NEWCAT.

“It is very helpful to have people with computing expertise to help with any technical problems. I have my own computer at home and often need help with setting up new programs or with maintenance problems,” she said.

The existence of the centre enables Stewart Hamling to communicate on the Internet with other vision impaired users and it means he is not as disadvantaged as he might otherwise be by the standard operating procedures of universities.

"Every lecture brings with it handouts and written texts to deal with," he said. "Imagine the frustration of sighted students if they were handed written essays in braille."

Stewart is familiar with computers and, he said, they are his only available medium of written communication. During sessions at the Adaptive Technology Centre, Stewart uses the Internet to access the Blind News Digest, a source of information on new ideas and technologies.

Ms Tanya McGovern (who has a degree in Computer Science), Ms Lyn Woodlands and Mr Trevor Wilks provide the centre’s expertise and, according to the students, act well above and beyond the call of duty. They find books on the shelves, proof assignments, counsel panick stricken students and provide emotional support when things are tough.

Adtech is part of a broad range of individually tailored services offered by the University for people with a disability.

The Disability Liaison Officer, Ms Val Shevels, sees it as an area of specialisation providing a unique and much-needed service.

Many of the students also visit Student Support Officer, Ms Liz Shanley, to organise the services of a notetaker and then link in with the brailling or large print services, “Integration is the key,” said Ms Shevels.

The equipment used at the Adaptive Technology Centre includes a Nomad System, Zoomtext text magnification software, an Arkenstone optical character recognition scanner, speech synthesisers, a closed circuit TV and a Versa Point braille embosser.

The centre will soon take delivery of a new Pentium (586 computer), and this increased processing power will help to provide a more efficient transcription service for students. Other equipment under consideration includes a faster, more accurate optical character recognition system, a new laser printer, a photocopier, and several “upgraded” software packages.

The Nomad, which was designed and written by Dr Don Parkes and Mr Richard Dear, allows students to read maps, plans, diagrams, line drawings and simple pictures. Students run their fingers over raised graphics, applying pressure when they require information. The Nomad then reads aloud the information stored about that particular item on the graphic.

Zoomtext magnifies text up to 16 times its normal size and then scrolls through at the speed selected by the user. Picture Braille creates a tactile image using a simple computer drawing program. A sighted person produces drawings and graphics which can be accessed by a user who is blind.

The Arkenstone scanner takes a printed page of text and retrieves it into the computer as an image file, which is then translated into a standard text file.

Such an array of complex technology could prove overwhelming to the average computer user but not to Cathy, Genevieve or Stewart, who depend on technology as far as their learning is concerned. “It’s not daunting,” said Cathy. “It’s exciting.”

Tanja McGovern (l) observes Cathy Mahony (r) using some of the Adaptive Technology Centre’s state of the art equipment.
UNIVERSITY APPOINTS WETLANDS EXPERT

The ecological importance of wetlands was recognised by scientists more than 20 years ago but the rest of the community is only now becoming aware of their significance. Research into the ecology of the Hunter’s wetlands has been underway for some time and the Shortland Wetlands Centre, established in 1986, is internationally recognised for its research into wetlands ecology.

One of the region’s latest projects involves the rehabilitation of wetlands on Kooragang Island and a University Research Fellow has been appointed to oversee the various research aspects of the project.

Dr Bill Streever from the University of Florida, USA visited the site briefly in February and will return in May to take up his position in the Department of Biological Sciences, which is involved in the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project.

According to Dr Streever, who has recently completed studies on rehabilitated wetlands in the United States, wetlands are an important part of the environment. "They are home to wide varieties of wildlife, fish and crustaceans, many of which begin their lives in wetlands," he said. "About 70 percent of plant families and many endangered species occur in wetlands. They are important for water quality because nutrients are removed in wetlands and they assist in flood abatement by absorbing flood water."

Apart from eight years in the oil industry where he was an oil rig diver in the Gulf of Mexico and parts of Asia, Dr Streever’s main work has been in estuarine ecology. His studies have involved comparisons between natural wetlands and rehabilitated wetlands which were strip-mined for phosphate.

"In my comparisons I found that, in some ways, you can’t tell natural and created wetlands apart. However, there are some differences," he said. "The vegetation, the geomorphology, the water and sediment chemistry are all different. They may become more similar with the passage of time but we don’t know if that will take five or 500 years."

Kooragang is a "severely impacted" site, according to Dr Streever, but there is substantial potential for improvement. The first step will be to change the hydrology of the site - a reasonably simple process.

"Tidal flow in estuaries is extremely critical because it carries waste products away and replenishes oxygen. On Kooragang Island the water flow has been inhibited by levees, roads and inadequate culvert pipes. We’ll restore tidal flows by putting in larger pipes and bridging creeks and this will encourage the establishment of more mangrove swamp and herbaceous vegetation," he said. In addition to overseeing research conducted as part of the project, Dr Streever will conduct his own research and supervise students during his three year appointment. He hopes to establish an estuarine ecology course at the University and believes that many people, including overseas scientists, will be interested in the outcomes of the Kooragang project.

Dr Bill Streever, formerly from the University of Florida, takes up position in the Department of Biological Sciences in May.

CONVOCATION AWARDS ANNOUNCED

Convocation Awards will be presented at the Convocation Annual Awards Dinner, on Friday, March 10.

The Chancellor, Mr Ric Charlton, announced the winners of the 1994 Convocation awards for outstanding graduates.

Maths graduate, Dr Eileen Doyle, has won the Convocation Medal for professional excellence, a prestigious award instituted in 1987 to recognise the achievements of graduates who are at the forefront of their chosen field. Currently Group New Product Development Manager for CSR Wood Panels, Dr Doyle has had a dynamic career in business management and industrial relations since completing her PhD in Applied Statistics in 1985.

Winner of the 1993 Fulbright Professional Award, which took her to study at the Columbia Business School in New York, Dr Doyle has undertaken business restructuring for BHP and the Hunter Water Board. She is a member of the Board of the Australian Mathematics Trust, a non-profit organisation aimed at enabling students to achieve their full intellectual potential in mathematics, and Deputy Chairperson of the Hunter Valley Research Foundation. "Dr Doyle is an outstanding role model for young people interested in maths, and a shining example of the way in which a maths graduate can translate her education into success in the real world," Mr Charlton said.

The Newton-John Award recognises creativity or innovation in any field. The 1994 winner, Ms Marion Halligan, will be the 20th recipient of the annual award, which was first presented in 1975 and was named in honour of Professor Brin Newton- John, a former Vice-Principal of the University. Ms Halligan, an award-winning novelist, is the current Chairperson of the Literature Board of the Australia Council. One of her nominators said of Ms Halligan, "She is without question one of Australia’s leading writers of exceptional range and quality."

Mr Charlton said Ms Halligan’s achievements fitted the criteria and original intention of the Newton-John Award perfectly. "One of the first students to graduate with Honours in English from the University, Ms Halligan’s literary achievements and her contribution to the arts in Australia are outstanding," he said.

"The Convocation Awards give the University the opportunity to showcase the achievements of our successful graduates,“
AN INSIGHT INTO FRENCH LITERATURE

Award winning French language novelist, Monsieur Claude Delarue, provided French students with an insider’s perspective into French literature during a visit to the Modern Languages Department late last year.

The Swiss-born writer of novels, plays for stage and radio, biographies and novellas, spoke frankly about struggles between two schools of thought in French literature and his own dislocation as a Swiss speaker of the French language.

He expressed concern that a diminishing proportion of French language novels is translated and read in the non-French speaking world. “French writers must be translated into English because English is read all over the world, even though a novel is always better read in the language of its origin,” he said.

A musicologist by profession, M. Delarue began his career as a writer at the age of 16. He has won a number of important literary awards, including the French language award for a first novel. This year he was awarded the prestigious Prix Littéraire Lipp Genève for his novel Le Triomphe des Elephants. In between there have been many other awards including the Prix Hennes in 1974 and the Prix Schiller in 1977.

In 1991 he was awarded the European Novel of the Year for Waiting for War, an enormous achievement for a Swiss writer. “Winning the European novel award was a great honour,” he said. “The jury was made up of people from all over Europe, not just Switzerland and France.”

After leaving Australia, M. Delarue spent time in Indonesia, the setting for his trilogy on archeology and the issues raised by archeological discovery. His inspiration for writing, he said, came from everywhere and everything but he feared that many European writers focused inwards as a result of a new nationalism emerging in their countries.

The writer’s sense of cultural dislocation is a predominant theme in his work. He is acutely aware of not belonging and is fascinated by evidence from the past which indicates cultural dislocation and the birth and death of minority groups.

Mr Michael Connon, senior lecturer in French, said that it is precisely because he doesn’t belong to any dominant groups or share in a strong identity, that M. Delarue is a truly international writer.

“The author’s visit to the University was important for students of French, raising their awareness of various identities and opinions within the French speaking world.

“It demonstrated to them that Paris is not the ‘be all’ and ‘end all’ of French civilisation,” Mr Connon said.

FRENCH PROFESSOR GIVES HIS ALL TO STUDENTS

The generosity and dedication of a former Professor of French has provided several new scholarships for third and fourth year French students.

Professor Kelver Hartley was the Foundation Professor of French at the University and retired in 1969. He collected his superannuation in cash and, through a series of investment portfolios and judicious investments in stocks and shares, turned $30,000 into almost $2 million by the time of his death in 1983.

In his will Professor Hartley bequeathed his money to future students of French in what has become several scholarships. The money will allow students to study at a French university for six months by paying for travel, living expenses, tuition and a personal allowance.

“It is not surprising that Kelver bequeathed his life savings so unselfishly,” explained Mr Michael Connon from the Department of Modern Languages. “He was an intensely shy man and lived like a hermit. He was totally dominated by his aim to provide others with the opportunity to study in France, as he had done.”

Mr Connon, who worked with Professor Hartley, said he was a fascinating character with a legendary dedication to his students.
GEOGRAPHY CELEBRATES 40 YEARS

The University's Geography Department, currently expanding at a rate greater than at any other time in its history, recently celebrated its 40th anniversary.

"As modern geography studies shifted towards the social sciences and sciences, the Faculty of Science and Mathematics became its more logical home."

Staff of what is now Australia's sixth largest geography department and the Faculty of Science and Mathematics' important research in Human Geography is centred on social, urban and economic geography through the expertise of Drs Hilary Winchester, Pauline McGuirk and Phillip O'Neil. The department is a leader in studies of soil erosion, air pollution, climatology and surface water studies through Professors Rob Loughran and Howard Bridgman, Dr Graeme McIntyre and Mr Phillip Geary. Dr Ron Kidd plays a leading role in studies of Environmental Management and Professor Eric Colhoun has an international reputation as researcher on the Ice Age in Tasmania and the Antarctic.

Until 1989, the Department of Geography was a member of the Faculty of Arts but, as modern geography studies shifted towards the social sciences and sciences, the Faculty of Science and Mathematics became its more logical home.

The department was one of the first post-World War II departments to be established in Australia. George Whelan started lectures, primarily for education students, in 1954 at Tighes Hill when Newcastle was a college of the University of New South Wales.

The Foundation Professor, Professor Alan Tweedie, was appointed as senior lecturer in December 1954. He established studies in climatology and the earth's water resources and his successor, Professor Ken Robinson contributed to the study of political and regional geography. Later came studies in geomorphology, regional and economic geography, historical geography and social and urban geography.

As a measure of its reputation, the department will host the Annual Meeting of the Institute of Australian Geographers in September this year when ANZAAS also meets in Newcastle.

"The combination of the 40th anniversary and the honour of hosting our national professional body not only makes for busy times, but also indicates the present strength and current prospects for study of geography and environmental science in the Hunter Region," said the department's Professor Robert Loughran.

NETHERLANDS MED SCHOOL DIRECTORS VISIT NEWCASTLE

The Directors of the Netherlands' five medical schools visited the University late last year for discussions with representatives from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences and the Hunter Area Health Service.

Their particular interest was in financial and administrative relationships between health services and faculties of medicine.

According to the faculty's Dean, Professor John Hamilton, governments are increasingly looking to separate the costs of education, research and clinical service.

"This is referred to as 'unbundling,'" he said. "But, how to equate costs with value is always a problem."

Professor Hamilton said the Netherlands visitors found their visit valuable and relevant to the Dutch situation.
...AND BE GENTLE ABOUT DEATH

"Be careful, then, and be gentle about death
For it is hard to die,
It is difficult to go through the door, even when it opens."

D.H. Lawrence,
All Soul's Day

Attitudes to death and dying have changed for both the medical profession and the community. A new openness in community attitudes has made people more willing to talk about their feelings when they are confronted by death. Professor Peter Ravenscroft's appointment to a chair in Palliative Care at the University is indicative of these new attitudes in the medical profession and he outlined his approach to the care of the dying in his inaugural lecture last November.

"Palliative medicine is the study and management of patients with active, progressive, far-advanced disease...palliative care, on the other hand, is the care by a team of people, doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, clergy and volunteers...and the goal of palliative care is the achievement of the best quality of life for patients and their families," Professor Ravenscroft said.

Based at the Mercy Hospice at the Mater Hospital, Professor Ravenscroft holds only the second chair in palliative care in Australia and the third worldwide, and believes Australia is leading the way in incorporating palliative care into teaching and research as well as clinical practice. The Mercy Hospice was made possible by the NBN Telethon in 1989, when the people of the Hunter donated $1.5million in 24 hours, demonstrating the growing need within the community for such a facility.

Professor Ravenscroft stressed the importance of team work in dealing with the varied needs of palliative care patients, who have previously been considered to be beyond the help of medical services. "Nursing care is the foundation of palliative care," he said. "And it is good to know that there is a diploma of palliative care available to nurses at this University. This will mean we will have nurses who are well trained.

"A major difficulty for many medical people is what Professor Ravenscroft described as distancing. "Distancing is a psychological means by which professionals try to distance themselves from patients, usually by pretending they're busy, investigating patients, and so on, rather than talking to them about the very important issues which are troubling their minds," he said.

"Control is a major issue with patients who come to us. They have often been attending hospital, their lives have been arranged around appointments with doctors and specialists and they need to be allowed to take over control," he said.

"The problems of families and caregivers are major problems for us to deal with. The studies show that caregivers suffer much more anxiety than the patient themselves." Relatives of the dying are supported into the bereavement period at the hospice.

It is not only the patients and their caregivers, however, who need help in coping with the emotional difficulties involved in treating and nursing the dying. The team in the palliative care unit must cope with 500-600 deaths each year, with the deaths of children and young people among them. "Professionals need to understand how they can deal with grief and how they can come to grips with the inevitable load of sadness that is constant," Professor Ravenscroft said.

The palliative care unit has recently received a $2.5million enhancement grant to extend its valuable service to Nelson Bay and Maitland, through an outreach service. The unit also provides academic leadership and research to the University. Professor Ravenscroft is undertaking research into morphine, attempting to isolate the more effective elements of this mystery drug that has been used extensively in pain relief for the dying.

Professor Ravenscroft addressed the many emotive issues that confronted the dying and the professionals who care for them. He concluded his lecture by reading a poem written by one of his hospice patients, Jean Bailey. VGE reproduces an excerpt of With Hungry Regret, in tribute to the author and to the dedicated team who nursed her through her last days.

With Hungry Regret

Yet my thoughts, my heart still plead
To talk a little more
With comrades.
With most regret I leave people;
With hungry regret I leave people-
Those I wave to unknowing;
Children, grandchildren,
Friends with whom I've worked for causes
My comrades
My Family.

I sorrow for all I wanted to say and do
Sorrow for the bedtime enforced on a woman
Tenacious, bright-eyed, passionate.
Eighty-six...
And still thirteen.

Jean Bailey
The assumption that soap operas are a contemporary phenomenon addressing modern day issues would be a common one. However, research to be conducted during the next three years may prove otherwise.

With one of the largest grants offered to the humanities in the last 10 years, Professor Victor Emeljanow from the Drama Department at the University of Newcastle and Professor Jim Davis from the University of New South Wales will conduct research into 19th century theatre.

The grant for $140,000 from the Australian Research Council will be used to investigate 19th century theatre audiences, their backgrounds, participation and reactions. In addition, the researchers will explore the contemporary relevance of 19th century theatre, particularly its music and the impact it had on audiences and, hence, the society of the day.

Professors Emeljanow and Davis are pioneers of University-based drama departments. The University of New South Wales established the first drama department in the southern hemisphere and the University of Newcastle was the third. Both are considered to be groundbreakers in the field.

According to Professor Emeljanow, much work has been done on Renaissance theatre and audiences but very little on modern theatre from the 19th century onwards. Nineteenth century melodrama, he said, developed as commentary on the society of the time, very much like today’s soaps.

“The type of melodrama that developed in 19th century theatre productions is now the staple diet of today’s television. There is an overlap in audience viewing habits, all that has changed is the medium,” he said.

“The fantasy of the performance then, as now in today’s television, is an antidote to problems, a form of escapism and a way of satisfying the desire for a better life. Nothing much has changed. It’s a means of easing social and personal pressures.

“Television is a way of estimating our current culture and is our cultural yardstick because of its impact on our lives. To a lesser degree, 19th century theatre would have had a similar effect in those times,” he said.

Professor Emeljanow will also be involved in some cross-disciplinary research during the year. He will be working with Dr Stephen Provost from Psychology to develop interactive CD-ROM Encyclopedia of the theatre intended for teachers at tertiary and secondary level, and with Professor Peter Eades from Computing Sciences to develop a three dimensional visualisation program for stage designers and lighting professionals.

The Drama Department’s first production of the year, Goodnight Desdemona, (Good Morning Juliet), will begin on February 28.

**CONVOCATION AND PACIFIC POWER**

**PROFESSOR GERARD LEDWICH**

**ELECTRIC ENERGY, A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE?**

Advanced Technology Centre
Lecture Theatre
at 5.30pm on Friday, March 17

Professor Ledwich marks his appointment to the Pacific Power Chair in Power Engineering with his lecture, which explores the impact of environmental and economic issues on the supply of electric energy.

Admission is free and a light supper will follow

RSVP to Kim Britton in the University’s Information and Public Relations Unit before Friday, March 10.

Telephone: (049) 21 6459 or Fax (049) 21 6400.
THE DOWNSIZING PARADOX

by Rachid Zeffane, Department of Management

In responding to the socio-economic challenges and uncertainties of our times, organisations around the world have resorted to dismantling their conventional structures and adopting ‘leaner’ structures, coupled with major cutbacks in the workforce.

These strategies have been shown to lack sufficient concentration on appropriate ways to control the flow of personnel within and across organisational boundaries. Staff reductions (or downsizing) have generally resulted from externally oriented initiatives, such as deregulation, or from internally oriented initiatives, such as technological automation.

The rationales for these reductions are attributed to cost reductions in conjunction with anticipated productivity gains. These have been fuelled by the strong belief that streamlining, eliminating, or reshuffling employees would reduce overhead costs and help to create a more flexible and responsive organisation.

However, restructuring followed by downsizing has raised a number of issues, such as the redeployment of existing employees; reviews of the organisation’s management systems, and the appraisal of performance.

In North America observers reported that companies which espoused a “downsizing strategy” experienced immediate restructuring dysfunctions: insignificant positive change in market penetration; declines in employee morale; and a gradual increase in their total payroll through new hires and overtime penalty rates.

In addition to the obvious short term negative effects, excessive reduction of staff positions caused serious long term problems, among them a rise in conflicts of policies between different sub-units and the dismantling of networks that help firms operate smoothly. In fact, many companies have not been able to derive positive gains from organisational restructuring.

Downsizing strategies also brought about serious declines in product quality, lost opportunities, and alienated consumers.

In the late 90’s organisations may, in fact, have to resort to a significant resizing. Clearly, there will always be a pervasive anxiety as people try to cope with a world in which the present is uncertain and the future almost completely unpredictable.

A major reduction in the workforce puts an organisation at risk by forcing it to accomplish its mission with a smaller (hence weakened) labour force. Planning for lean structures is a complex endeavour but, increasingly, there is a need to reflect on the viability of an approach that attempts to strike a balance between employee needs and budget constraints.

This approach is called ‘rightsizing’. One of the most promising aspects of the rightsizing movement is that it allows management to rediscover some basic truths about novel ways of structuring and the effects these can have on employees, and on the bottom line.

Downsizing strategies also brought about serious declines in product quality, lost opportunities, and alienated consumers.
RESEARCHER FLYING HIGH WITH NEW GRANT

Associate Professor Phil Moore, from the Department of Education, will continue his research into pilot learning after receiving a $15,000 grant from Air Nugini, Papua New Guinea's national airline.

Air Nugini has been involved for a number of years in research into motivational and strategic factors influencing pilot learning conducted by A/Professor Moore and Emeritus Professor Ross Telfer.

One such study involved 350 pilots from a number of other Pacific Rim and European airlines, in an investigation of the ways in which pilots approach their learning.

Another involved interviews with experienced Air Nugini pilots about the role of rote learning, learning where the intention is not to gain understanding. The study revealed that many experienced pilots decided to learn particular types of information using a non-understanding strategy (ie. rote learning).

"However, the use of such strategies was not an end in itself, as it might be for school or university students. Rather they saw the use of such strategies as a way to establish a knowledge base, from which they could then build understanding. They also provided a short-term strategy to enable vital deadlines such as licence renewal to be met," A/Professor Moore said.

The findings from these research projects have provided a practical way for airlines to identify strengths and weaknesses in their pilots' approaches to learning. Air Nugini uses this research to provide data for its pilot selection procedures.

The airline also uses a unique cadet pilot training program designed jointly by Air Nugini (Flight Operations, Personnel) and Professors Moore and Telfer. The cadets spend the first 12 months of their training in a "Head Start" type program where they work in several different departments (scheduling, loading, ticketing) gaining an understanding of the company, its expectations, its goals and its operational procedures. The use of experienced pilots as mentors means that the cadets have ready access to more experienced pilots. After the 12 month period, the cadets then move to do their flying training in Australia before returning to fly in New Guinea.

Professor Moore said the Air Nugini grant would allow for further dissemination of the ongoing research and a consolidation of the current work examining the ways in which pilots, instructors and management perceive learning.

In April A/Professor Moore will present a joint paper detailing the latest developments in this research (with Professor Telfer) at the upcoming International Aviation Psychology Conference to be held in Columbus, Ohio.

HAiku - A POWERFUL POETIC FORCE

Mr Bob Jones, who received his doctorate last September, completed his PhD thesis on the sublime form of Japanese poetry, Haiku. Having achieved local notoriety with his novels, The Silent Laugh and Tales of the Open (Secret), which were published by Newcastle's Nimrod Press, Mr Jones was granted a scholarship to carry out full time study on Haiku.

A very short poem about nature, Haiku is usually written in three lines. The following poem by Taigi is a good example:

bridge down
people on the bank -
a summer moon

"Haiku is becoming a powerful force in writing that I thought it was time for an in depth study," said Mr Jones. "Lots of new writers are trying to compose Haiku, but most of them don't realise how much is contained in these simple lines. Above all, we need to know what Japanese poets understand by 'nature'. It's mainly a kind of spirit, something more felt than seen."

The form has become increasingly popular outside Japan, particularly in North America, where several magazines are devoted to Haiku, Mr Jones said. Although Australia has no Haiku periodical, it boasts some world class experts in the field, notably the local poet Norman Thlbot, who was Mr Jones' advisor.

Entitled Haiku Nature, Mr Jones' study is already having an impact abroad, with a sizeable part of his thesis appearing in the prominent American periodical Modern Haiku even before he received his scholarship. The Haiku Society of Romania will present Mr Jones with an award for his contribution to the form. He is now in the process of seeking a publisher for a book version of his thesis.

"I think there is a good chance it will eventually be a textbook or library reference," Mr Jones said. "I'd like to sell it to an Australian publisher." Mr Jones believes universities should take a more aggressive approach to publishing, if only as a source of income. "Australian research is recognised around the world. But it almost never gets the full backing it deserves in this country. We lose all our profits to someone else," he said.
COMMERCE ENSURES STUDENTS’ SUCCESS

The University’s Department of Commerce is currently in the midst of a campaign to improve teaching arrangements and help students achieve their maximum potential. Departmental staff have re-evaluated past procedures and identified key areas where they think they can assist students in their pursuit of excellence. The result is a number of changes in teaching arrangements and procedures which range from reducing the numbers in lectures to providing mentors for first year students.

The new initiatives are aimed at improving student learning through participation, revision and feedback, according to the department’s Mr Mark Arnold. “We have decided to repeat lectures so there are fewer people attending each lecture. This encourages student participation,” he said. “We have also limited class sizes in workshops to a maximum of 20 and increased the number of workshops provided each semester.” “The smaller number of students in workshops should lead to more feedback on the difficulties students encounter and allow tutors to spend more time with individual students.”

The nature of accounting, in particular, requires understanding in basic principles before moving onto more complex applications, Mr Arnold said. If students do not understand the basic component, they have difficulty keeping up as the subject moves on.

“To address this we have nominated specific points in our subjects where these basic ideas will be revised and assessed so we can ensure that the maximum number of students master the basics,” he said.

In recognition of the fact that many students find their first year at university rather daunting, the department’s staff have agreed to ‘adopt’ specific groups of first year students and help them with difficulties they may be experiencing.

UNIVERSITY FEES REVIEW SHOULD CONSIDER EQUITY ISSUES: AVCC

The Australian Labor Party’s decision to review universities’ ability to charge fees should be much broader in scope, according to the Australian Vice-Chancellor’s Committee (AVCC).

“We will certainly cooperate with the Government in this review but it must take into account a much wider spectrum of issues relating to the way universities fund places for students,” said AVCC President, Professor Don McNicol.

“There is a danger that this review could lead to the imposition of more regulation on universities, on the heels of the Government’s de-regulation of the sector.”

Professor McNicol said the AVCC had previously advised the Minister on the inconsistencies of the current fee arrangements, in which some students already pay fees.

“It is nonsense for the ALP to say that the universities are “hungry entrepreneurs” because of our views on fees. We are talking about equity, about the ability of those students who have qualified for a place to be able to get into a university.”

“The AVCC acknowledges that the Government has provided increasing numbers of students places. However, at the moment, some 31,000 young people who have worked hard to qualify for university are turned away because there are insufficient government-funded places for them in universities around Australia.

“If universities were allowed to charge fees, some of these people may well opt to pay, knowing full well the advantages that a university education will give them throughout life.”

“The AVCC has never advocated charging up-front fees for those students who gain a government-funded place at university, but simply that universities should be able to charge fees for those Australians who are qualified to enter university but who are unable to obtain a government-funded place.”

Professor McNicol said that the AVCC had recently engaged a consultant to examine the way in which an undergraduate fees system would work. He said the AVCC expected to provide a report on the issue to the Government by the end of the year.

“The Government reviewers need to make sure they are not hypnotised by the rhetoric of protecting access and equity to higher education at the undergraduate level, but actually do something about assisting those thousands of Australians who currently miss out because they are not provided with a choice,” he said.
UNIVERSITY SUCCESSFUL IN GRANTS ROUNDS

Hunter Valley researchers attracted more than $3.8 million in National Health & Medical Research Council (NH&MRC) and Australian Research Council (ARC) grants for 1995. The majority of these grants will be used for projects undertaken by, or in conjunction with, the University of Newcastle.

A total of $2.5 million, which includes $1 million in continuing grants, has been allocated for 13 medical research projects, including a three year grant worth $519,664 for breast cancer research.

The Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences’ Associate Professor John Rostas was pleased with the outcome. “The NH&MRC uses an extensive peer review and interview system which has been praised recently by an international review panel for its rigour,” he said. “The excellent performance of Newcastle based researchers shows the high regard our research peers have for the work being undertaken in the Hunter Valley.”

In addition, the Faculty of Engineering received nine of the 14 ARC grants allocated to this University. The faculty’s grants totalled $1.4 million and, according to the Chairman of the Faculty of Engineering Research Committee, Professor Graeme Murch, will benefit staff and students.

“The national average success rate for gaining ARC large grants is about 20-25 percent. The faculty’s excellent result is a tribute to the depth of talent in engineering at this University. These funds will not only enable important new research to be undertaken, but the research will also enhance the already high levels of skills and knowledge amongst the Engineering staff. These benefits will also be passed on to students of Engineering.”

A Special Investigator Award ($466,000) was allocated for further research into the Jameson Cell, developed by Professor Graeme Jameson from the Faculty of Engineering. The cell is used in mineral processing and effluent water treatment and promises to play a significant role in reducing communities’ effects on the environment.

The University has performed particularly well in obtaining research funding when compared to other universities, Mr Peter Farley from the Research Office said. “The University of Newcastle is obtaining funding well above the level of many large metropolitan universities.”