What is a University?
Last year we ended the year with a special issue of what was then the Bulletin. We looked at 'Christmas Past, Present and Future' - a derivative lift from Charles Dickens. This year we're teasing at the notion of just what a university is and at the role it does, might or should play in modern society.

We've gone outside our own eucalypt covered walls and sought scattered comment from distinguished, (and undistinguished but particularly interesting) Australians. We thought it might end up being light-hearted, but it didn't, apart from Simon Reynold's perceptive rendering of the issue in visual shorthand. Universities in the 90's are apparently serious business for people who are involved, or even for those who are not.

Shon Walker of the University of Western Sydney, recently gave a paper outlining the nature of university evolution in the past half century. In the 1960's, he tells us, we lived, worked and studied safely within the Ivory Tower.

Then the 70's, when the equally towering Gough Whitlam opened Pandora's Box.
The 80's turned us to, and through, an era of deregulation with the fast forward mechanisms spinning us through amalgamation and competition.

But the 90's. Ah!!! The 90's.
In the 90's we have entered the era of the Corporate University. Now we are trying to stuff the wandering evils right back into Pan's Box. We have a new rhetoric, and emerging models of governance and employee relations and enterprise bargaining and performance indicators and market driven competition. The new ideas don't seem to fit the old box too well yet.

Still however, we have students. We are still driven by ideas and new knowledge. We still see colleagues whose passion for the novel fit of ideas is quite transparent. We are still stirred by the young minds accepting our pieces of paper with pride.

So how, one wonders, can such motivations fit within the Corporation?
All our writers seem quite clear on what they think a university is. But the totality conveyed lacks clarity. And nowhere more so than in government policy.
Scattered opinion doesn't support billion dollar decision-making very well at all.

Evelyn King

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"Education is what survives when what has been learnt has been forgotten."
Professor B.F. Skinner, "New Scientist", 21 May, 1964

"It's a place full of people who have absolutely no dress sense."
Lee Fuller: Surfer on Hobby's Beach.
The University is for me a place which integrates a number of ideals. It is above all an institution which brings with its establishment both the inheritance of traditions linking us with the great centres of learning from the past - Greece, Rome, Mediaeval and Renaissance Europe - and the responsibility to develop that tradition to the point of excellence in the present and for the future. It is a place which promotes the idea of humanitas, the great Roman word which Cicero used to express the Greek concepts of paidagogia and philanthropia: that is, a place where through education we develop our understanding of, and respect for, humanity.

It is a place which helps individuals to develop those skills and talents which will enable them not only to find fulfilling employment in the workforce but also to contribute something towards the community in which they live.

It is a place where knowledge and truth are the common goals of student and lecturer alike; where prejudice, ignorance and hypocrisy give way to individual or combined efforts to establish that which is true, to discriminate between fact and fiction, and to look beyond the image to the substance underneath.

It is a place which helps all those involved in the life of the University to develop and extend their perspective of themselves, their society and the world in which they live.

It is a place which challenges those forces at work in our society - the politicians, the media, the marketing gurus who set out deliberately to manufacture public opinion, to determine or dictate social trends and values and to manipulate the minds of men and women.

At the same time it is a place which recognises its role in and responsibility to the wider community. For far too long the University has suffered from the "ivory tower" image or from the traditional Australian anti-intellectual prejudice and that has not been helped by academics or students who actually believe in their so-called superiority. I cannot see why the ideal of a centre of excellence, or the ambition to be the best, should conflict with the fact that we are part of the world and thus, because the majority of people in the University environment have been blessed with many gifts, the obligation rests with this community to give the lead where necessary and to share whatever knowledge or skills we have which will benefit those less fortunate.

It is a place which promotes the philosophy summarised by the Roman satirist, Juvenal, in his satire on the vanity of human wishes (Sat.X). Mens sana in corpore sano - a healthy mind in a healthy body - has long been part of The University of Newcastle philosophy and it has been pleasing to see how much importance the University administration have attached to sport and recreation on this campus.

In so doing the University has completed the return to the Greek ideal of the fifth century BC which was attained through three principle subjects; grammaticke (learning), mousike (music) and gymnastike (the all round cultivation of the body). At Newcastle, the Sports Union and the Conservatorium are delighted to be equal partners with those who promote the love of learning.

Let me conclude with one memorable image of the man who did most to influence me in understanding what a University is all about. This is an image of Godfrey Tanner on his pushbike, wearing his academic gown over his athletic shorts and T-Shirt (suitably inscribed "Rowing - the ultimate Oargasm"), adorned by helmet and goggles (which made him a dead ringer for the lovable Spielberg character E.T.) making for the Union to give a lecture on Plato and the Environment.

It is a place where a community of people employ their intellectual, administrative and practical skills to provide the environment I have just described.

Bernie Curran is the Warden of Evatt House at The University of Newcastle. A past President and Life Member of the University's Sports Union, he is also a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Classics.

Cartoon by Peter Lewis.
It is clear to all that the idea of the University is in transition, and that it is not possible to fix the profile of the perfect university in a kind of snapshot, as J.H. Newman once did. Any attempt to grasp the essence of a university in the modern context is fraught with difficulty, and one can only come up with a mixed model. The changes of the last few years in this specific university context, at Newcastle, leave us now with the task of distilling the essence of what we have in the skills of our staff, and the problem of formulating our intentions for the future. In recent months I have had the opportunity of talking to a large number of staff, and have become acutely aware of both the mixed character of what we now are, and the kind of skills which staff are able to contribute.

In the first place it is clear that we should emphasise research, and that the pockets of research prowess which exist here and there throughout the University should be developed and encouraged. No university should, in my view, abandon the ivory tower element of the traditional academic picture. It is necessary to note, however, that there is no necessary contradiction between the research and inquiry characteristic of the university, and the community-service oriented characteristic which universities now present in a supplementary way. Inquiry is the foundation of the historic university establishment. As Aristotle says, "human beings naturally desire to know", and the university should be the place in which this desire is given its fullest and freest expression.

Secondly, we must emphasise teaching and student care. Various sections of the University believe that there should be a strong emphasis on this, both of the old University and the new part of it. There subsist some difficulties in making the various visions of teaching excellence coalesce, but the how is the question, not the whether. Thus there is a widespread view across the University that teaching excellence is important, and it remains to focus this more consistently. The bandying of insults across no-man’s land, about whether people are interested in teaching or not, should stop.

Thirdly, I believe that we should emphasise employment, vocational outlets, and work experience opportunities. In a sense this had been traditionally part of the University, since the Faculty of Engineering has close links with many of the local companies, and its graduates go into employment with the Hunter Water Corporation, Gominans, or similar such institutions. The former College brings with it a large number of people who are intent on the vocational dimension of university training and who are keen to see the University producing people who are well equipped so far as employers are concerned. This too is an issue on which there is a broad consensus in the old and the new, and which again remains to be focussed. I look forward to developing a dialogue in the University on this last matter in the New Year. There is no doubt that what many people now want from the University is to be rendered employable.

There is no pure essence of what a university might be in this day and age, such as the Platonic form of the university captured by Newman in his famous paper. The University will have a variety of functions and a variety of skills exhibited in its midst, and this variety itself should not be allowed to become the ground for disharmony. It is not only Government pressure which has forced this change of identity, since the students themselves and their families clamour for the University to provide training for actual employment. This does not mean that the University exists only for that, but it does mean that this purpose should co-exist successfully and happily with the other traditional inquiry based models of what the University should be. The term "academic" takes its origins from the ancient Greek word academia, and it was Plato who established the first of these in the 4th Century B.C. The original Platonic Academy did have some government funding, but also required students to enjoy some personal wealth if they were to profit from the education provided.

Already then, the contest between the pure Academy and the vocational training emphasis began to surface. In many cases the Sophists, denounced by Plato, represented the vocational training side of the debate in the ancient Academy. The word "sophist" has a negative connotation in the English language (indeed it acquired a negative connotation in ancient Greek because of Plato’s onslaught against them in large part). But in many ways the sophists were people who were training young people for a career in politics or law, and dispensed this training for a fee. They provided a strong emphasis on public-speaking, because in the Athenian democracy of the day he who could speak made his way in the democratic assemblies and became a person of great influence (I say "he" advisedly). This is why Demosthenes practised public speaking in a field, with stones in his mouth, in order to improve the strength and projection of his voice: there were no loud speakers at the ancient Greek political meetings.

Plato, on the other hand, represented the pure inquiry philosophy, and built his Academy around the Socratic concept. Socrates investigated the "why" of every question and did not hesitate to attack contemporary religious or political views. This led to his execution and also to the beginning of the idea that in a true Academy, staff need protection from the politicians, the soldiers, or religious authorities of the day. This has been translated into the notion of tenure, which has become a traditional concept in universities, and it is as well to remember its origins. The tenure concept was for many years simply a traditional and informal concept, but there was an Australian attempt to define it and enshrine it in the Academic Award governing academic staff employment. As with all attempts to codify rights there are some disadvantages in this process, and as all are aware the Vice-
Chancellors attempted to suggest ways in which the Award definition of the concept could be amended. This does not imply a rejection of the traditional and informal concept itself. (The Vice-Chancellors have not proposed execution to the Academic Staff Unions.)

We in Australia have inherited the British university system and in some ways the striking changes of the last few years in Australia have not drawn us away from this system, since they are mirrored in Britain itself. This background has given our universities the high quality and the traditional foundation which has caused them to have a good reputation in overseas countries. This heritage is a priceless one which should not be treated lightly. It is because of this that the export of higher education in Australia now is about equal to the export of wheat, in cash terms.

An odd feature of this system, however, is that it sees the universities as entirely public, and unlike the education systems of the United States and Japan for example, makes very little provision for private tertiary institutions. In the history of the Academy, this is an unusual situation, and has tended to put the academic career in the context of a standard public service career, with a few more freedoms added in. It is probably a defect in our whole system that university staff are in general so immobile, remaining within the Academy for the duration of their career, rather than swapping back and forth from the academic to the political to the commercial and so on, as has happened in many cases. The great German historian Mommsen had a 19th Century career which was as diverse as that which I have just outlined: President Pompidou of France was at one time an academic in Classics, at another time a Merchant Banker with Rothschilds, at another time Prime Minister, and finally President of the Republic of France. It seems to me that the public function doctrine of how universities should be managed has led to this sectioning off of academic staff into restricted no-go areas dotted throughout the country, usually referred to as “campuses”. This is to the detriment of both the community at large, which is deprived of the skills, knowledge and wisdom of academic staff, but also of the academic staff themselves who are kept in the dark about many processes which govern society, observing from the fringes on the basis of theory, or of external presentations of what is happening, rather than being actually involved in the process of the implementation of authority, power and knowledge in the community.

It is not easy for staff to co-exist in the mixed model which I have outlined, because it is always easy to say that one’s colleague is not a “real” example of a professional academic: in the mixed model we must make a place in our promotion procedures and in our assessment of each other for a variety of contributions. There is no doubt that we should find this task manageable: most organisations have great variety within them, in terms of the contribution made by different staff members, and every effort must be made by all to build a harmonious view of the University community, not based on the idea that every building block is identical to every other, but that there is a diversity in the elements which go to make up this whole.

The single change that stands out in the last decade is the shifting of the universities towards the fulfilment of the national agenda of government. National objectives are forced more and more upon universities, and the present Government treats universities as an arm of the Public Service, with which DEET officials can deal in a variety of ways, and which are brought to heel just as any other Government department would be, if it were not doing what the Minister wanted. This dramatic shift away from the old principle of autonomy is much to be regretted, and there are many other ways of guaranteeing national economic objectives: handing them over to the Public Service to implement is probably the least effective of such models.

Nevertheless it has to be said that with the great expansion of the University sector, and of the number of places available, and with the expenditure on the universities now moving to $4.5 billion per annum, it is in no way surprising that it should occur to the Government that the universities should contribute something to national economic progress. When universities were for a small group of students, and constituted an elite side-show, there was no problem about ignoring them (under the guise of autonomy) and not requiring much of them. But the full absorption of them into the national agenda was almost inevitable from the time in which the expansion of the sector was envisaged. All staff who are of about my age will remember a very different university system, and a very different university philosophy operating at the same time at which they began their professional careers. And we could of course say that those of us who do not like it should opt out and form private universities: I am convinced that this will happen more and more because the monochrome character of the institutions, which derive their colouring, style and emphasis solely from the Government of the day and the corporatist management philosophies currently permeating the Public Service, will not in the end be sufficiently palatable for large sections of the community. But those banding together to form independent alternatives will find, and here’s the rub, that the pressures coming from families who are willing to pay fees are in many ways quite close to those bearing down on us from the present Government: namely, the concern for employability, the concern for usefulness of qualifications, and the concern for competency.

What is the way ahead? Many phoney or temporary answers will be given. There will be many “Newmans” trying to seize an opportunity to distil a new essence of the university for the late 20th Century or 21st Century. It is something we are all thinking about, and the present author will have his go one day. One can only say at this point that the present structure is fragile, and it is almost inevitable that some sundering or fragmenting process will take place.

But we at The University of Newcastle will begin discussing our Strategic Plan in the New Year, and will begin to explore some of these questions again. It will no doubt be an exploratory process rather than a final solution. Were anybody in any Australian university to claim otherwise for their “mission statement”, they would probably be bluffing.

"A university is for people who want to extend their knowledge, become a fount of knowledge, and hopefully use that knowledge to improve things for everybody else.”

Peter Kiely: Taxi Diver.

Professor Raoul Mortley is the Vice-Chancellor of The University of Newcastle.
Traditionally universities have been places of learning for a privileged and elite group in society. Minister Dawkin's reforms in the Australian higher education sector were to enable greater access and participation by more Australians. Aboriginal participation has increased almost tenfold in the last decade from 667 in 1983 to 5,105 in 1992. This resulted in the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in all higher education institutions to achieve their targets and ostensibly to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In addition, the National Aboriginal Education Policy requires Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander involvement on the various curriculum and advisory mechanisms as a matter of policy.

The presence of Aboriginal people in tertiary institutions has yet to be properly accommodated by senior management in the higher education sector. Aboriginal demands will have a profound impact on higher education in the next decade. Aboriginal people have great expectations and see education as a major tool in securing a better future for themselves and their descendants.

Aboriginal people have moved from invisibility through a welfare phase into the Public Service and many now see higher education as a beacon promising a better lifestyle in the future. The challenge for all players in this elevated arena is to reconcile and accommodate some conflicting cultural values. The new team, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, may want to introduce some new and different rules. Higher education institutions have received Aboriginal people as students readily, to obtain the income attached to their numbers. There is a responsibility attached to ensuring a successful outcome which satisfies Aboriginal people as well as the number crunchers, and this requires a cultural shift on the part of non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people now wish universities to respect their views about all matters relating to Aboriginal education in the same way that the views of any expert group is taken. This requires university management to make a shift to accommodate aspects of Aboriginal culture. This means that some academics and senior management require re-education and cross cultural training. It brings too, a degree of conflict between particular Aboriginal groups, Aboriginal needs and wants, and the institution, as well as bringing longstanding traditional Aboriginal rivalries into the sector. Universities must find ways and the wisdom to meet the diverse and multi-faceted demands of Aboriginal society.

Eleanor Bourke is Director, Aboriginal Research Institute, Faculty of Aboriginal and Islander Studies, University of South Australia. A graduate in both Journalism and Professional Writing, she recently completed her Masters in Educational Studies at the University of Adelaide.
A PROVIDER OF "LIBERAL EDUCATION"

by Dr Paul Collins

I will begin with a confession: I am an elitist who believes that university education is about the training of minds to think, to work through an argument, and to be able to communicate the results in an accessible way. Universities are certainly not primarily about vocational training. They exist to provide an "liberal education".

We live in a society that is obsessed with qualifications and we assume that because a degree or diploma has been granted the recipient knows something or can actually do something. My experience of university graduates does not bear that out. We have sacrificed quality for access.

For instance, there are many innately intelligent young people working in the media; I meet many of them. Almost all have university qualifications. In my view their education has failed them because they lack fundamental training - training in using the language with some elegance and facility, training in criticism and the logical progression of thought, training in the most basic research abilities and above all, a conventionality and lack of originality that is quite frightening. I trace the origin of all of this back to their university education where they should have been taught to think critically, to argue cogently and to write and speak coherently. But, despite their native intelligence, most of them are unable to communicate with any real facility.

The core of the problem lies in the confusion between the educational and specialised vocational role of the university and the replacement of the liberal ideal of education with the myth of access to all who "want" tertiary qualifications. In my view universities exist primarily to educate and only very secondarily to prepare people for specific vocations. Also, we would have to be the first generation that has turned university education into a commodity. It is a tribute to the crassness of economic rationalism that education is seen as a product in the marketplace, like a used car or a washing machine.

So I think that we have to rediscover what education is about. I do not think that anyone has ever bettered J.H. Newman's definition of university education: the purpose of a liberal education is "to have a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life - these are the connotative qualities of a large knowledge; they are the objects of a university". (The Idea of a University)

While the Victorian prose is slightly sententious for the modern reader, his description of education still applies today. Clearly, Newman's ideas are not well known by the bureaucrats of the Department of Education and Training, let alone by Ministers J. Dawkins and K. Beazley. One suspects that few of the Vice-Chancellors have ever read him either.

The tragedy of contemporary tertiary education is that we have forgotten what universities are really all about.

Paul Collins is the Specialist Editor - Religion for ABC Radio. He is a graduate of Harvard and has a Doctorate in History from the ANU.

“Personally I'm always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught.”

Winston Churchill, Speech in Margate, 10 Oct. 1953

“It is ironic that although education is no longer an automatic passport to a job, the connection between education and the economy dominates government education policies.”

Simon Marginson, “Education and Public Policy in Australia”, 1993
"Like so many ageing college people, Pnin had long ceased to notice the existence of students on the campus."

Vladimir Nabokov, “Pnin”, Ch. 3, sect. vi

Picture this. A hardly dishevelled young woman is travelling to University for the first time on the commuter-train-from-hell.

Her Bubble-like H.S.C. world has just been burst and she is as ready as one can be to meet new expectations. Newcastle University takes her in without her conscious consent, an oscular, black hole of uncertain days, but she feels good. Confidence and nerves combine in her stomach to create the perfect energy. So now what?

Hmmm... gee things were different back then when I was acute little first year student. Suddenly four years of full time socialising and sleeping go by and the end of your degree jumps up and slaps you in the face. “Wake up babe, it’s time to burst another bubble”. So here I sit on my mound of knowledge and wave my bit of paper with the curly calligraphy on it at prospective passers-by. Small bits of shrivelled bubble lay at my feet reminding me to reminisce about those once seemingly uncertain days. So what is University? There is not one singular interpretation, definition or explanation that will give you an answer. That perfect and holistic summary of life in the big alma mater will never be written, there are too many infinite and endless descriptions. You have to go there and find out for yourself, you know.

The social aspect of a university environment turns out to be either detrimental or influential on a student’s success. I like to think my social life was a combination of both; my great mistakes have become conducive to my learning and personal growth. Some of my best friends have been made at University, the opportunity that is provided to be around “seething swarms of ambitious and intellectually inclined young’ns” by this institution is pretty extraordinary. People pack the joint out from the months of March to November, a huge variety of student-beings that swill caffeine-induced potions and perspire beads of stress-laden sweat. I love it, and who knows? I might even go back to do it all again (if they’ll let me back). Those salubrious and addictive hours of lectures and tutorials, the gentle and creative personalities of all the lecturers and staff (!) and who could forget the many wondrous, bountiful, even lonely nights spent drinking in knowledge, experience and the occasional beer. It is an institution of higher learning, love, and life, and I think a recommendation is in order, but you really do have to find that out for yourself.

Fiona Walsh will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts (Graphic Design) degree from The University of Newcastle in March, 1994. The photo of Fiona was taken by her flatmate, Owen Keenan, a first year Communications student at Newcastle.
"Oxford men think they rule the world, and Cambridge men don't care a cent who does."

Bishop Creighton

I know what a university ISN'T. Or shouldn't be. It shouldn't be a knowledge factory where thousands of people get processed. When I attended the University of London I commuted, like thousands of other students, to a large building in the middle of a population explosion?

Had immutable laws and complicated rights of entry? Could anyone seriously believe that an exchange of ideas, the supposed privilege to be able to join an exclusive club that is still that residual smugness that underpins society's culture. Within that, there equally properly appear the civilising qualities: to be critical, tolerant, creative, adaptable and wise. In a complex, dynamic and intricately interconnected society this position is not trivial. For example professional societies have been likened to sheltered workshops by the 'drier' commentators. They have endured extensive reorganisation, some of it justifiable. Now is the time to stabilise and to allow the intellectual flowers to bloom. The alternative does not bear contemplating. The universities in UK and Australia, at least, have withstood a state of siege for two decades. They have been likened to sheltered workshops by the 'drier' commentators. They have endured extensive reorganisation, some of it justifiable. Now is the time to stabilise and to allow the intellectual flowers to bloom. The alternative does not bear contemplating.

Robyn Williams hosts "The Science Show" on the ABC's Radio National.

A CREATURE OF SOCIETY

by Professor Cliff Hooker

Universities are creatures of society and have an obligation to serve. Their principal roles centre on knowledge, skills and understanding, specifically their accumulation ("scholarship"), augmentation ("research") and transfer ("teaching"). These tasks should be conceived broadly to encompass the full range of a society's culture. Within that, there equally properly appear the narrower economic tasks of augmenting and teaching the more immediately saleable, wealth-creating components. Since what is saleable today, though often instructive and durable, can often have been chosen on superficial criteria and may be obsolete tomorrow, universities best meet their social obligation when they maintain a balance between their narrow and broad foci. A healthy society will support them in this, though in practice there is constant pressure to aim at the short-term saleable. Though it is often less tangible, I suggest that the most valuable social contribution universities make is general, not specific, namely to help develop the basic civilising qualities: to be critical, tolerant, creative, adaptable and wise. In a complex, dynamic and intricately interconnected society like ours, even the narrow economic costs of citizens who lack these qualities, let alone those who are anti-socially destructive, is enormous. The wider long term costs to viable democracy, community peace, etc. are still greater. (Just watch your evening news.)

This position is not trivial. For example professional societies currently overly confine university students to learning all the momentary skills which various influential practitioner groups demand before granting professional recognition. At best the professions receive competent clones but not leaders; at worst they receive parrots who will ultimately discredit them. Other university groups equally confine their students, evidently out of disregard for education beyond their own field. They fail to understand either the history of their own field, or that minds and personalities are not narrow special-purpose machines but the most complex integrative systems known to us, and that our special-purpose capacities grow precisely out of our generalised adaptive capacities. A health university will show the intellectual leadership needed to ensure that it encourages the civilising qualities in balance with specialisation; paradoxically, the result will be vigorous specialisation and resilient professions.

Further, universities have a special interest not shared by other of society's institutions: they ought to be devoted to the promotion of open and critical inquiry as a primary duty. We humans have found it extremely difficult, over the course of history, to create open, critical institutions. The university, though glaringly imperfect, has been one of our successes in this regard, especially in the safeguarding of the liberty of open inquiry and the discipline of rational criticism. Western societies today, though equally glaringly imperfect, are nonetheless in that historically rare circumstances where a large proportion of all of the significant information created by humans and still extant is accessible to each of us, without fear of intimidation, and this is nowhere more true than in universities. I regard the preserving of access and inquiry as a task shared by their community, but also one which transcends any narrow establishment's unwillingness ever to "do anything for the first time." The consequent stultification is dreadful.

So if you wish to provide access, yet wish to avoid becoming a factory, what then is to be done?

First, be sure what a university is for. I believe it should be to provide teaching and research. That much is obvious. The research gives edge to the education process. Lecturers don't HAVE to be researchers. But having such on the team makes a difference.

The education should be for as many people as society believes it can afford, THROUGHOUT their lives. I went to university years after the normal "schooled" teenage state. I shall return (briefly) next year, to Oxford. Staggering one's time on campus could well relieve the crush.

But a university should, above all, be a bastion for the challenging ideas of modern society. This requires the wisdom of the elders plus the scepticism of youth in potent mix. It is not occurring today, except in muted form.

The universities in UK and Australia, at least, have withstood a state of siege for two decades. They have been likened to sheltered workshops by the 'drier' commentators. They have endured extensive reorganisation, some of it justifiable. Now is the time to stabilise and to allow the intellectual flowers to bloom. The alternative does not bear contemplating.

Cliff Hooker is the Professor of Philosophy at The University of Newcastle. He has a PhD in Physics from The University of Sydney and another in Philosophy from the University of York in Canada.
TAPESTRY
by Jean McGarry

A means to an end, the beginning of a career, a culture, the
opportunity to investigate areas of interest through learning, research
discussion and some of the ways students have described
universities. The people, buildings, grounds, trees (or lack of),
perceptions, feelings, a kaleidoscope of stimuli, all contribute to
your image of a University.

A university is a tapestry woven from memories: staff you
admired and aspired to emulate; the formation of lasting friend-
ships; networks of contacts made through staff and students;
administrative systems apparently designed to frustrate students to
the point of abandoning studies; and staff who assisted students
to navigate the intricacies of those systems; the intense “high”
experienced in stimulating tutorial debates; and those lectures
that you avoided.

Then, there are the memories of time spent with others in the
“gathering place” by whatever name it carried: Union, Bar on the
Hill, or other name. The place of camaraderie, discussions
(sometimes heated), or of study groups cramming for an exam the
next day. Memories of time spent in the library, hunting for the
critical volume needed to complete an assignment, and the frantic
activity to ensure its completion on time.

A University is a place where a period of significant change,
initiated by exposure to new experiences, knowledge and people,
occurs. The act of rising to a challenge presented by a lecturer who
says “work is good but you are capable of better” teaches you so
much about yourself and your capabilities. Parallels can be drawn
between a University and a family, both allow you to perform and
learn through correction, providing an environment within which
you are able to grow and fully develop as an individual.

The period of time spent as a student at a university is a time
of feasting: of taking and tasting all that is there to be had. Why
graduates choose to continue direct contact with a university
probably stems from recognising this period of “feasting and taking”
and the subsequent need to balance the scales and give something
back. This return may take the form of a gift of time, a gift based
on expertise and experience, patronage of university activities,
publicity or assistance in some other form.

What is a University? It is a
tapestry of living colour in one’s
mind: as colourful, intricate and
involved as you have allowed it
to become.

Jean McGarry is the Warden of
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Hunter Institute of Higher Education,
Curtin University and the University
of Technology in Sydney.

AN ENRICHING PERFORMANCE
by Professor Michael Dudman

I am content with traditional concepts of a university as a
community of scholars and a centre for scholarship. Against that
background I seek to provide some perspective for studies in music
within a university, reflecting that such studies have the capacity to
enrich community life.

Though the Faculty of Music and University Conservatorium is a
relative newcomer to our University (1989), we may reflect that
music has been a part of education systems from very early times.
Plato ascribes particular importance to music in education in his
Republic. In Christian Europe, studies in music were established
early in the universities. The first music degrees were conferred at
Cambridge in 1463 and at Oxford in 1499. By the beginning of the
present century, many British universities offered degrees in music.

The requirements for these degrees laid emphasis upon what might
be called the materials of music: harmony and counterpoint, fugue,
orchestration, analysis, and so on. There was no performance
requirement. The products of these programmes were splendid
“paper-work” musicians. They defended with commendable vigour
their perception of past traditions.

During the nineteenth century, schools of music were established
outside the universities. In these conservatoria and academies,
overwhelming emphasis was placed upon high performance skills.
The instructors were often eminent performers, teaching from what
they perceived to be a great and living tradition which had its roots
in nineteenth century virtuosity. Whereas it was the business of
universities to confer degrees, the conservatoria awarded diplomas.
The universities and conservatoria provided the two major systems
for advanced music studies.

During recent decades, bridges have been established between the
systems. Universities have understood the importance of requiring
musical performance in their curricula, and conservatories have
emphasised studies in musicology. Musicians in both systems have
realised that musicological studies which are not illustrated
by performance are likely to wither on the vine; similarly,
performance which is not illuminated by scholarship might be
deemed self-indulgent. The
theory and practice of music go
hand in hand; in retrospect, their
separation might seem difficult
to justify.

I believe that at The University
of Newcastle, studies in music
have a bright future. We are
committed to standards of
excellence in performance, supported by musicological research.
This commitment has been recognised by the building of the
University Conservatorium Concert Hall in 1988, providing our
University with the finest imaginable facility of this kind.

This concert hall, setting for more than one hundred public Faculty
concerts each year, serves to underscore the University’s strong links
with its community, as does the flourishing University Conservatorium,
providing tuition in music to hundreds of children. All of this brings
me, in conclusion, to contemplate my hopes for our University, as a
place in which scholarship and specialist studies are pursued at the
highest level, whilst reaching out into the community to enrich
community life. If a university is successful in these activities, then
it seems to me that it has fulfilled any reasonable charter.

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torium of Music at The University of Newcastle. A world renowned organist,
he is a graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.
NATURE OF THE MODERN UNIVERSITY
by Professor Bruce McFarlane

Concerning issues like the nature and control of the education process in universities, the pendulum has swung too far. From those days, 30 years ago, when outside corporations and government departments cautiously offered funding for particular projects, a kind of frenzy to accommodate to business culture has become all-pervading in tertiary education.

One possible danger involved here is over interference in University decision-making. However, the less overt pressures and influence-peddling are even more devastating in the implication for the University values I deem worthy of vigorous defence.

These values, in 1993, are still the following:
First, study. There can be no education without study, but study can be combined with a student’s practical experience as a worker in office and factory in fruitful ways. This can lead to the useful idea that we are not only interested in what is to be believed, but what can be done to improve society’s conditions. There can be a close relationship between the educators and the workers in other fields.
Second, critique. There has to be complete freedom of thought and opposition to all forms of censorship. Without these principles, knowledge cannot be effectively extended. This also implies that University members should fight for the right of any teacher to discuss views, no matter what they may be.

Third, a spirit of inquiry. I feel this is the best quality which can be developed within the contemporary University scene.

Certainly today it needs to be re-ignited and encouraged, after something of a slump in the Dawkins-Baldwin era at the Federal Ministry of Education. Inquiry, consistently and persistently pursued, is part of the notion of a good University atmosphere and of a decent education system and is, in fact, a condition for education development. This state of affairs can, of course, be more easily attained when narrow specialisation, both within a particular University or between Universities, is resisted as well.

It follows from the position adopted here that external pressure from such agencies as governments or corporations which fly in the face of the three principles should be opposed. This applies to such things as the profferings of the Tobacco Cartel, Weapons Research and “Think Tank” consultancy for military or diplomatic machinery.

University education will have to be on guard to undertake resistance to these powerful inducements and to ensure that control of the education process is basically determined by University persons and rules rather than by outsiders.

Bruce McFarlane is the Professor of Economics, University of Newcastle. He is a graduate of The University of Sydney.

MANAGING THE COLLEGIATE
by Dr Roy Green

The standard definition of a university as a community of scholars has a rather complacent, and dare one say patriarchal, ring about it. A more desirable goal for a university, and an increasingly accurate description, would be as a resource for the wider community, not just in teaching and research but also as an active participant in public debate.

This is the rationale behind, for example, the Employment Studies Centre, with members in a number of departments, including Economics, Management, History, Sociology and Geography. It conducts academic and sponsored research, but still sees as its primary function the obligation to inform debate on a range of issues, particularly those concerned with employment, industrial relations and the workplace.

However, it is also important to recognise that there is a limit to the extent to which research may be put at the service of the community, since the danger always exists, especially in a climate of salary and budget restraint, of serving exclusively those special interests which can offer substantial and ongoing financial support. That means the business sector, and, to an only slightly lesser extent, government.

Clearly, the more successful we are as academics and as an institution in attracting research funding from those interests, the more likely it is that the values we seek to acquire, of independence and impartiality, are threatened. This places a requirement upon academics to be vigilant and open about our sources of funds, and upon universities to protect our right to do so.

One final point. It is an interesting paradox that the further universities move away from the collegiate model, the more relevant this model becomes to our survival. There is great pressure on universities, as they get larger and more complex, to be run like private corporations, if only because they need to be more efficient and cost effective in serving the community.

This development is inevitable, and even desirable, provided that the corporate model is an up-to-date 1990s’ version, with its flatter management structures and devolution of decision-making power, rather than the traditional autocratic approach. In this sense, our success in introducing modern management techniques into universities may be gauged by the extent to which the positive features of the collegiate model are reproduced.

Roy Green is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Economics and Director, Employment Studies Centre, University of Newcastle. He is a graduate of both the University of Adelaide and Cambridge University, England.

“What do they want to be? Farmers?”
Sir Henry Bolte, on a request by Monash University to increase the size of their campus by something like 300 percent. Quoted in the "Bulletin", 11 May, 1982
In its “Green Paper”, the Federal Government defined universities in terms of financial and administrative parameters. It attempted to set their agenda by way of student and course loads, staff working conditions, graduate targets and research funding. The majority of institutions have been obliged to adhere to these governmental policies and thus, this is the definition of a University in 1993.

The real question is, of course, what should a university be. Classicists will remind us that the derivation of university is universus, Latin for the whole. This concept should, in terms of the university, embody both the scope and depth of study possible, as well as the methods of learning offered to the student. Inherent in this educational universus is the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, a capacity for independent research and those pillars of philosophical discussion possible in the structures of, for example, a strong Faculty of Arts. Weaken or remove any of these features, and universus is no longer possible. This is true no matter how strong an institution may be in those Faculties involved in teaching the skills of making money or of business management or, indeed, in teaching the delivery of caring and compassion, in areas such as medicine and nursing.

Recent Government “reforms” seek to describe a university in a functional way, in terms of what it should do for the community. Obviously, universities must benefit society, but defining the role of a university in terms of governmentally decreed policy objectives can never be workable, and is inimical to the whole concept of universus. More and more, Government sees the university as a service body to produce “educated” output, skilled to fill “community specified” niches and needs. It has set national priorities such as increasing the number of graduates with business and technical qualifications and has sought to negotiate the educational activities of individual universities from the Federal level. Ironically, the claim that universities should produce the scientifically and technically skilled graduates “required” by Australia does not appear to be matched either by demand for these skills in the workplace, or by any influx of students seeking training in them. Despite national, and alleged rational, planning, the unemployed university graduate has become, sadly, a commonplace, accepted by Australia in the 90’s.

Governmental policies can facilitate, however they cannot produce and should not direct learning. But the production, direction and encouragement of learning is precisely the role of a university. Universities can best identify the educational needs of the community specifically by upholding the freedom of the individual to pursue learning as she or he chooses. It is illogical to assert that the University can meet the needs or wishes of the community, separate from those of the individuals who comprise it. It is, in fact, only the individual who chooses to learn who can be educated, and the “clever country” and the “skilled workforce” are simply abstractions of what a concert of such people may achieve. We pay tribute to individual decision making in business. Through “The Trade Practices Act” we prohibit business entities engaging in anti-competitive practices, compelling them to make their own individual decisions. Yet strangely, this is the very antithesis of academic decision making which is becoming more, and tragically, centralised. Universities, of necessity, must have administrative autonomy and the ability to form their own institutional agendas. As one academic noted, “the distrust of the capacity of people of unquestioned expertise to exercise sound judgement in the area of their expertise may be unique to Australia.” (Craig, 1991)

A university is, therefore, an institution which educates in the broadest sense. It is both a reserve of expertise for society and a source from which people can gain education of the highest standard. The major function of a body worthy of the honourable title of “a University” must be the independent delivery of a universus of knowledge through which individuals who choose so to do, can better themselves in their chosen fields. This is an important contribution to the wealth of the nation, which benefits economically and culturally from the fulfilment of these roles. A university primarily should serve the individual’s freedom to pursue learning, independent of governmental agendas. This independence has come to be viewed as a privilege, maintained at the expense of an ever more grudging society and thus the current trend to “make universities more accountable” is met with acclamation. On the contrary, society should cherish its universities and clamour for their independence to provide that knowledge which society, not governmental directive, demands. Society can be made better only by individuals bettering themselves. This is the ideal which all universities should serve.

"What I am looking for is a more efficient and equitable distribution of university places in Australia, and a better balance between the expectations of students and parents and the realities of Australia’s labour market. These would be outcomes unambiguously in the national interest.”

Extracts from “Where do we go from here?”, Address by Kim Beazley, Minister for Employment, Education and Training, 15 November, 1993
Many people are suspicious of universities, seeing them as black holes that absorb tax-payers’ hard earned dollars and spit out graduates who couldn’t get a job cleaning windscreen at a set of traffic lights. For a select minority of my fellow students when I went to university, this perception was uncannily accurate. By second year, they had trouble remembering where the university was, let alone what it was or what is was for.

My particular course, the venerable Bachelor of Arts, is a particular magnet for those philistines who don’t understand the role of a university. Their first criticism of the humanities is invariably “That won’t get you a job”. Too often, a university is seen only as some sort of vocational training centre - which, of course, it can be. Some degrees of a more practical nature will ensure that you get a job, in much the same way that a Degree of Hamburgerology from McDonalds University will guarantee that you at least make drive-through attendant.

But I see a university as being more than a means to an end. In an odd way, a university is a means to a means. It doesn’t necessarily teach you what to think but rather how and when to think. The point of tertiary education is not to give you a complete understanding of the world (you’d be attending lectures till doomsday) but to enable you to begin to understand the world. It provides you with a set of tools and an instruction manual with half the pages missing. You have to then work out how to put everything together, but you’ve been given a valuable head-start over those who have no tools and no instructions at all.

Obviously, some other faculties are much more hands-on.

Do you remember Sartre’s conception of Hell in “No Exit”? I saw a production of it when I was ten years old. It made a deep impression upon me, and for some reason sprang to the front of my mind when first I was asked to write this piece. I have just completed eight full-time years at this University, which would be more of an achievement had I collected more bits of paper along the way to prove it, and thus feel that I should be qualified to at least venture a definition. The closest I can come is to say University is a state of mind with lots of buildings attached.

Back in the dark ages when I was seventeen and hell-fire keen on saving the world (mostly from itself), I came to Uni. and thought it was a place designed to cultivate intellectual development and debate. For about half an hour I thought that. Then I spent three years thinking it was a place to have fun, meet people, avoid lectures, and swing the tutorials so your tutor wouldn’t realise you hadn’t read the required text. It must have worked because they let me into the Honours year. Then I thought University was a place where you have to work hard, drink lots of coffee liberally flavoured with No-Doze, assume a position on French Neo-Feminist post-Structuralist Anthropomorphism, and actually read for your tutorials. Again, it worked sufficiently well for me, and apparently someone else, to consider myself suitable for post-graduate work. As a bonus they threw in a part-time tutoring job. That’s when I realised what an idiot I had been to think I might ever have convinced any tutor that I had read something, when the closest I had come was the blur on the back cover (that’s a little warning to any student contemplating the same deceit - they know). It’s also when any concrete views I had on University began to diminish. Slowly at first, then gathering momentum, like the proverbial snowball (or any snowball on a decent slope, in fact), my grasp on the function, status, significance, and even location of the University decreased in, coincidentally, direct correspondence with the rising tide of my HECS bill (but that’s another story).

Now, eight years on, I see University as being different things at different times, depending on mood, motivation, and memory. Most recently, it has been a good place to have a baby, though whether the baby has been good for my contribution to University scholarship is an entirely different proposition. Perhaps there is no such thing as a University at all. Just lots of people who think there is - you know, “I think, therefore I am, a University.”

Lucy Skilbeck is currently pursuing her PhD in Australian Literature in the Department of English at the University of Newcastle, although she does say that she would rather be on her farm with her horse. Her baby’s name is Conor.
A UNIVERSITY IS A GREAT PLACE FOR MURDER
by John Miner

A university is a great place for murder. Has been since Michael Innes published "Death of the President's Lodging" in 1936. Innes (aka John Innes Mackintosh Stewart, Jury Professor of English at Adelaide 1935-45, Student of Christ Church 1949-73 etc.) followed up with murders in universities strikingly similar to Oxford - "The Weight of the Evidence", "Silence is Observed" - or actually in that University -"Operation Pax" - before transferring his theatre of operations to absurdly great country houses.

Another great of the arsenic-and-old lace school, Dorothy Leigh Sayers, took up the University milieu with "Gaudy Night". Well she would, wouldn't she: she started at Somerville in 1912, when the term blue stocking was just being invented.

Bartholomew M. Gill delved into the world of Trinity, Dublin and its hangers-on for "Death of a Joyce Scholar", although he wasn't much of a scholar, according to my edition of the novel: it refers continually to something called "Finnegan's Wake". That apostrophe would be sufficient motive for some Joyceans to commit murder - witness Valerie Miner's "Murder in the English Department" (UC Berkeley's English Department, that is) or Amanda Cross's "The James Joyce Murders".

The biggest seller of them all, Agatha Christie, knew her market better than to introduce the shady sort of customer that inhabits the university. Although married to a professor of archaeology herself, she was educated at home - but studied singing and piano in Paris - and she knew that university people were somehow not quite Respectable. They might make good villains but were not likely to arouse the sympathies of her millions of gentle readers.

(Speaking of Gentle Readers, perhaps the most critical university murder in fiction was perpetrated in "The Moving Toyshop" by Edmund Crispin. A fanatical admirer of Jane Austen is found dead; Crispin's detective, who is also the Oxford Professor of English Language and Literature, comments without sympathy, "Well that's one Janeite the less.")

The popular historian and inamorata of Harold Pinter, Lady Antonia Fraser, took time out from her serious pursuits to indulge in some glossy, slightly sexy, light fiction and created a heroine called Jemima Shore, a television interviewer who found murder in a number of offbeat places but surrendered in her fourth outing to the lure of Oxford Blood.

Even the most serious author among contemporary British writers of mysteries, Baroness James, used Cambridge in introducing her female private eye, Cordelia Gray, in "An Unsuitable Job for a Woman". (The title was ironic.)

James M. Cain, who couldn't help his familiarity with academe, did actually use a reunion at Stanford as a medical catalyst for the murder in his fabulously short and pungent "Double Indemnity", but hard-boiled American authors took a distinctly anti-intellectual line on locale. "Professor" was usually only used as a nickname for a pianist and "Doc" for a safecracker by authors such as Jim Thompson or W.R. Burnett.

Ross Macdonald changed that. One of the three greats of hard-boiled writing, after Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, he effectively wrote the same novel 18 times, all to do with his own fatherless adolescence. (His "real" name was Ken Millar, but he was never sure where that came from.) Naturally, in writing repeatedly about adolescents, Macdonald - who taught briefly in Canadian universities before joining the US Naval Reserve in 1944 - put some in college.

More surprisingly, he cast his detective Lew Archer very close to the role of a psychiatrist or priest - Archer doesn't solve crimes so much as hear confessions - and then specifically put him up against doctors and professors (and shonky religious shamans) in his novels in order to show why he was not a therapist but an agent of justice.

Robert B. Parker, whose PhD dissertation at Boston University was largely responsible for adding Macdonald to the Hammett-Chandler canon, invented two hard-boiled characters: Spenser (no other name, but does anybody in the English Department fail to recognise that spelling?) and Hawk - a very, very hard-boiled criminal. Spenser, who is white, spends a fair bit of his time cooking Italian meals, working out with weights and hanging around universities, looking for missing girls, drug dealers ... you know the sort of thing that goes on at every university. Hawk, being black, doesn't cook and wouldn't know where to find Harvard Square.

A missing college student "Marilyn Lowell Mitchell, pretty eighteen-year-old freshman at Parker College in Bristol, Massachusetts", actually formed the basis of the first great police procedural novel, Hilary Waugh's "Last Seen Wearing". And it had a motive that actually bears some resemblance to university reality.

Quite the opposite is "Zombies of the Gene Pool" - a suitable sequel to "Bimbos of the Death Sun". This is an affectionate send-up of science fiction fans from Sharyn McCrumb, who rather self-consciously promotes the Appalachian culture, this time with three academics from an anonymous university in southern Virginia and one bearded, Levied, Jack Daniels T-shirted professor of (what else?) English at East Tennessee.

It also includes the earliest use I have found of the verb "to gafiate" - to Get Away From It All. Which is presumably what scholars are doing in their own way when they write, or read, mystery stories set in universities. Great place for a murder, a university.

John Miner, an Arts graduate from the University of Sydney, and a former Director of the Information and Public Relations Unit at Newcastle, is now with the Prime Minister's Press office in Canberra.

Illustration by Simon Reynolds
A DANGEROUS PLACE
by Patrick Filmer-Sankey

Universities are dangerous places. They are places where good brains have the time and the facilities to do the sorts of things that they want to do. They are places that challenge and stretch the societies they serve, they are outliers who bring us warnings and offerings from beyond our comfortable horizons. They ram home truths that we do not want to hear, they puncture comforting bubbles, they take risks.

Perhaps even more importantly, they expose our young to dangerous practices, they arm them to think and they equip them with critical and incisive tools. They infect the receptive with the viruses of doubt, self discipline and dissatisfaction, they keep them restless and creative...at least that's what universities should do.

Increasingly we find universities subverted by limited and shortsighted management, with economic rationalism enjoying a last destructive fling at their expense.

Influencing Outcomes
by Dr Des Griffen

Universities exist to increase and communicate knowledge and to increase understanding through original research, criticism of present and past interpretations and through teaching. The community of scholars, students and the wider community must all benefit.

The questions are: 1. how are achievements to be valued, 2. who should have most influence on that, and 3. what mechanisms are most likely to ensure that universities serve the community in the very long-term.

Valuing achievements is vital. The push for greater accountability is a response, amongst other things, to the seeming impossibility of understanding what is coming out of universities. (I am not saying that the Dawkins reforms have produced the right result. Whether increases in the number of places have led to increased access to education is not clear. Nor is it clear whether amalgamation of colleges and universities has produced economies which have been translated to higher quality education. And how much emphasis is needed on vocational training as opposed to learning for life? A balance is needed, not one or the other!)

Influence determines outcomes. Whilst most academics would assert that they are pursuing excellence, they are quite capable also of pursuing objectives by political means (the pork-barrelling tactics of US universities for instance), and of obfuscation and subsuming community goals to personal goals (including confusing the culture of the intellectual with the cult of the celebrity).

Universities don't contain all the intelligent people in the Australian community! Some presenters of programmes on ABC Radio National are at least as intelligent and certainly are very much better than most academics at communicating what they know (but don't benefit from the same employment conditions). Like many other countries, Australia doesn't always focus on the very long term or take the necessary risks of backing the presently perceived winners.

Australian academics are generally not heard in the vital debate about the future, including the future of education and knowledge and how that contributes to the advancement of Australia (Barry Jones said as much recently). University staff may claim the moral highground of concern for the education of the young but spend their time at endless meetings arguing about everything but how to respond to new demands and opportunities. The influence of traditional views and of subtle controls exerted by universities over the school agenda seldom surfaces.

Here, as elsewhere, the pragmatic world of business seeks to influence government to the view that if it had the major role in determining the outcomes of the education system we would all be better off. But do they have the track record of achievement that universities have? is the international regard for the excellence of Australian universities? Does business understand how to effect change without destroying the organisation in the process?

Strategic thinking and planning is necessary because available resources will always be less than those needed to satisfy all demands. Directions should be set through consultation with all stakeholders. Harsh perceptions of the gap between stated goals (and benefits) and actual achievements should be taken on board. The process should be no different from that in the arrogant view that only academics can judge academics will be productive: they don't advance credibility.

It is possible to arrive at some assessment of attributes like quality and performance. Just because the present approach might have shortcomings doesn't mean it can't be done, only that people have different views. The apathetic and the silent will have no influence. None of us will gain from that. Certainly few will be prepared to pay the costs!

The ancient clever societies of China lost their position of influence because their leaders grew up in the sheltered atmosphere of the ever greater refinement of their own ideas. Can't we learn from that?

Des Griffen is the Director of the Australian Museum. Originally from New Zealand, he gained his Science degree at the Victoria University of Wellington before completing a PhD in Marine Zoology at the University of Tasmania.
A TALE OF TWO SITTINGS

by Michael Legge-Wilkinson

"Go for it son, they've given you a second chance", the old man said, as I bid goodbye to re-commence study at Newcastle University. To clarify things here and now, I wasn't kicked out the first time, I chose to leave. Yep, I dropped out and it felt so good I swore then and there - as I placed my 'withdrawal from all studies' form into the slot - that I would never return. Two and a half years later I was back and now, at the end of my first year of return, I can relate my wicked, wicked tale of two sittings.

"Make sure you play rugby Mick, it'll keep you out of trouble" my older brother said, as he kicked me out of the car and left me standing, all alone, at the gates to Edwards Hall. The Gates of Hell they could have been, for I had turned my back on an opportunity to study art in Canberra, to take up an offer to study Engineering in Newcastle. Auguste Rodin may inspire me, but I knew that to cast in bronze I needed money, and what better way to earn money than to be an engineer?

Determined from the start to be a well rounded student I launched into football, Stan's bar, the beach, and student parties. No way was I going to devote all my time to study, it wasn't healthy. Besides, I was told if you went too well in your studies, you could end up spending the rest of your life in academia, and who would want that? So I fumbled my way through the first couple of years, passing some and failing others (subjects that is) but, by golly, I was well rounded. Of all the wisdom (for want of a better word) handed down from older students there was one I took to heart:

"Every mark over and above a pass represents time (spent studying) that could have been better spent partying."

I am not sure what triggered the change, but soon neither football nor social success seemed all that important. My creative mind was sick of being ignored, "what are you doing here", it began to murmur, constantly. It became obvious to me that my mind could no longer handle the mundaneness of engineering lectures, nor the superficial nature of conversations at student parties. I found myself sitting in exams, unable to focus on any of the questions, instead I would turn the paper over and jot my thoughts down. I would go to parties and sit in the corner observing but not taking part. It wasn't then long, before I bailed...

...I went far away and soon found myself painting murals in a church; then travelling up the coast painting beachscapes in soft pastel. It was good, and in my solitude I started to get a grip on my aspirations. To my surprise, I found Engineering was still an important part of these and so...

...I returned. This time things were different, not only did I have focus, I had something to prove - to myself. Taking my place again was not easy. I knew not, if this time round, I could handle the lectures; there were doubts and there were fears. Though I did not seek advice, the best was forth-coming, from an old hand, "don't think about em", he said in reference to my fears, "place them at the back of your mind and get on with it". And so I did: neither my doubts nor my fears got a look in, it was all 'head down and arse up', the first year of my second sitting; from one extreme to the other.

With distinctions behind me, I can now look forward to my final year. It may have taken forever to get this far, but by golly there are no regrets, for I'll be graduating a well rounded Mechanical Engineer. Thanks to all who have shared this experience with me.

Michael Legge-Wilkinson is a Mechanical Engineering student, environmentalist and artist. The illustration on this page is an example of his work.

I'D GIVE 'EM HELL!

by Ross Gittins

I only did Commerce at Uni - just one step up from the Engineers - so I don't have anything deeply philosophical to say on the question of what a university is. All I can offer is a few personal reflections. One thing a university has to be more than is a place where they fill your head with facts. The facts don't stay in your head. What you don't use, you soon lose. What you should retain is a faculty for critical thinking. It's something you absorb just by listening to your lecturers and tutors. It's something you practise during long (and, in retrospect, often pointless) arguments in the union coffee shop. I get the feeling that with the move to the semester system and continuous assessment, today's students have less time to spend hanging around the union. If so, they've lost something valuable from their time at university.

In my day, people doing technical degrees had to do a tiny bit of humanities. We were cynical about it, but it was a good idea. I did Sandy Anderson's little course in formal logic, which was part of Philosophy I. Now that was a useful subject.

One reason kids don't retain much of what they learn at Uni is that they know too little about their chosen professions to make sensible judgments about the relevance of what they're being taught. It all seems so theoretical and unrealistic, how could it be useful? After they've been out in the world for a
INNOVATIVE STAFF
by Professor John Fryer

When the Editor of "Van Gogh's Ear" asked me to answer the questions - "What is a University?" and "What is its Role in the Community?", I must confess that, considering the time of the year, I felt like being asked by a wide-eyed child "Is there a Father Christmas?" Where to begin?

The most satisfying occasions of the University calendar for me are the graduation ceremonies in May each year. They represent the culmination of many years work by hundreds of graduates. More importantly, these ceremonies demonstrate to the public audience of proud parents and loved ones that there is an organisation which aims to maintain high standards and is willing to reward those who can cope with the rigours of prolonged periods of concentration and application.

One must recognise that students do not attain the status of a graduate in isolation or by some biological process of intellectual osmosis. Rather, I would like to think that they achieved their goals through an academic system which proffered a combination of lecturing, personal guidance to discover information sources, and some good old-fashioned teaching.

Clearly, I believe that the academic staff are a University's greatest asset. How they develop the personal skills and maturity to be able to encourage and motivate their students and to be the prime agents in the process of information dissemination, is the side of the University's life which the general public, and some undergraduate students, never learn to appreciate. The time spent on pure and applied research, consultations with industry at the leading edges of technology, development of innovative teaching programs, revision of course structures to suit a changing world, and liaison with professional colleagues at conferences, seminars and workshops, equips academic staff for their primary task. It is a paradox that the many hours, days or weeks of us spend working on these background tasks, often culminate in results which are neither publishable nor tangible. Put simply, many of our efforts never gain any recognition. This is probably the essence of a University - a place where self-motivated individuals strive to gain personal satisfaction through innovation, and in the process, mould and develop the career paths of others who will become the well-known figures in our wider community.

Clearly, the processes of developing and encouraging undergraduates are not perfect. If they were, no University would ever be limited by a lack of public support in any of its endeavours. It would not need to go begging to politicians for survival funding if those same politicians were aware of the great benefits that a well-funded University could bestow on a community or a nation. One could cynically assume that our supply of politicians must be related to those graduates who do not gain an insight into the unrecognised work of academics. Perhaps things will change as graduate numbers from The University of Newcastle grow - or perhaps I should answer that there is a Santa Claus!

John Fryer is the Professor of Photogrammetry in the Department of Civil Engineering and Surveying at The University of Newcastle, the first Chair of Photogrammetry at Newcastle. He is the President of the University's Sports Union and only recently retired from the University Cricket Club.
KNOWLEDGE AND ZEST FOR LIFE

by Pam Wadeson

Dare I write the words? Alternative, non-traditional tertiary education. Such an idea has, in the past, been treated with amusement, fear and suspicion. Against the backdrop of greater demand for tertiary education, declining numbers of places available for would-be university students and the hazards of HECS, universities as we have known them, are being challenged by employers, prospective students, governments, parents and high school leavers.

Out of the challenge significant changes in tertiary education will emerge. Of all the projections one can make about tertiary education for the Australian scene, one stands out surest of all: there will be greater diversity. Part of that should be the development and growth of alternative or non-traditional higher education. If we take into account the world of work with its continual changes in terms of: what is work? where is it done? when is it accomplished? how do we work? and what we work with, a strong set of needs emerge.

Similarly, if we look at technology (and what it can do now, let alone the potential and impact in a decade) and consider family and individual responsibilities, and then the increasing acceptance of life-long learning then the notion of formal, traditional education is not always appropriate. It's a matter of relevance, of stimulation, of moving with the changing expectations of what universities should offer.

It's also a matter of the level of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) of graduates who have been through "traditional" degree courses. The non-traditional degree gives credit for what the individual knows, irrespective of where or how it was learned, awards are based on demonstrated competencies and skills. Traditional education bases requirements on the mediaeval concept of a mix of liberal education with some specialisation. Alternative education bases requirements on an agreement between the individual student and the faculty, which is designed to help the student achieve individual career and personal goals. In Australia, the traditional system considers the years from eighteen to twenty two as the optimum time for attending a university. Alternative education assumes that learning is desirable throughout life and that degrees should be available at any age.

There is a comparison, too, in the aims of both. Traditional education aims at producing a "well-educated finished product" ready to enter the job market or post graduate courses. Alternative education aims at producing life-long learners, capable of changes and positive responsiveness throughout their life to their own evolving needs and those of society.

When we acknowledge that there is a large group of Australians outside the formal, traditional structure of tertiary education who have obvious educational needs and aspirations, the concept of alternative education is very acceptable. This is certainly so when it puts the student first and the institution second, concentrates more on the former's need rather than the latter's convenience, encourages diversity of individual opportunity rather than uniform prescription and de-emphasises time, space and even course requirements in favour of competence and, where applicable, performance. It has concern for the learner of any age and circumstance.

Non-traditional higher education can be of equal quality to formal educational offerings (some attest that it can be better). Sound monitoring, maintaining close relationships among universities, and appropriate accreditation procedures can ensure quality outcomes. Where relevant education work experience could be an additional source of academic credit, effective verification measures can be established. Non traditional higher education has, in times past, been regarded suspiciously; but then, so too, was distance learning and the concept of the open university. A mix of all will serve us well in the next century.

Alfred North Whitehead believed that: "The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest for life".

Non-traditional education will help to well preserve the connection for many, many individuals.

Pam Wadeson is the General Manager of The Peer Support Foundation in Sydney. Pam's academic career has spanned the State with degrees from the Universities of Sydney, New England and NSW.

THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNIVERSITY

by Dr Bruce Kaye (Excerpts from Occasional Lecture at The University of Southern Queensland, 12 October, 1993)

During the last five years, there has been considerable turmoil in Australian universities and in some sense not a little malaise. For many Australian academics, there is the sense of being under siege. However, I think it is unwise to approach the present circumstances in the university in too apocalyptic a frame of mind. An institution with as long a history as the university must expect major changes and crises from time to time. The institution cannot survive without change. The current crises in the university however, is one of identity. The relationship of the university to society is simply the particular framework within which this current identity issue arises.

The university has shown a capacity to respond to social, political and economic circumstances and to adapt itself so that it is able to survive, but the persistent theme in its survival has been the congregation of intelligent people for the purposes of learning and inquiry. Universities have, in general, attracted intelligent people to their membership. They have regularly been allowed to congregate in universities by patrons as diverse as autocratic monarchs or elected governments, because their very activities as well as the results of their activities have been seen to have a social benefit. Some universities have come to hold strongly established positions and substantial assets of various kinds. But the dynamism and endurance of the university as a social institution in its sense of vocation has persisted through times when none of these favourable circumstances have applied.

Indeed the university has survived in such varied circumstances and in such varied forms that positional or pragmatic explanations do not seem to be adequate.
REDEFINING AUSTRALIA AND THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUALS
by Hon. Barry Jones (Excerpts from Occasional Address to University of Melbourne Graduate Ceremony, 11 September, 1993)

I will confine myself to the need to redefine Australia and its future directions in this last decade of the 20th Century and of the second Christian millennium, and for our intellectual community to play a more prominent and courageous role in that process.

Our intellectual community can be defined in four categories: public intellectuals, private intellectuals, passive intellectuals and specialist or super-professional intellectuals.

There are distressingly few public intellectuals in Australia prepared to engage in debate on major issues. The recent controversy about Manning Clark's *A History of Australia* has been deeply shocking, in part because the idea of a passionate engagement (however wrong, or excessive, or even correct it might be) on an intellectual issue is unfamiliar to us.

In September 1991, I wrote a cover story for The Bulletin, "Who are our intellectual leaders?", in which I argued that the number of certified intellectuals whose contribution to public debate received a run in the media and whose names were reasonably well known in the general community was astonishingly low. I could identify 17 who fell into this category - by a nice coincidence one for every million Australians.

But the worrying thing, assuming that my list is credible, is not only the limited number, but the age of its members. Of the glorious 17, eleven are more than 65, five between 50 and 65, only one under 50. Where are their replacements? Only 2 of the 17 are women, reflecting the heavy gender-bias in our professional and intellectual history. Only 2 of the 17 were not born in Australia.

Our collective national memory is very short, sporting achievements excepted, and politicians up to a point. But try and raise the names of important Australian intellectuals and the response may be blank. Intellectual activity is largely faceless, sometimes deliberately so when our achievers try to avoid media attention. It is difficult to feel empathy for names you don't know, faces you don't recognize, and experiences you can't identify with. No wonder teachers feel difficulty in attracting pupils to professions which provide large intellectual challenges but poor financial rewards. There are discouragingly few role models, especially female ones.

It is dismaying to ask Australian audiences to identify some of the great figures from our recent past. Americans are notoriously shaky about events, people and places outside the United States, but they have a pantheon of names associated with the great national myths.

Our national myths, The Gold Rush, the Kelly Gang, Federation, Gallipoli and the Kokoda Trail notwithstanding, have generated few names that still arouse a flicker of interest, let alone passion. This is where our derivativeness and willing acceptance of mediocrity lets Australia down. We undervalue our real achievements - or have a burst of enthusiasm, then let it fade.

Our intellectual leaders take a very low profile, many by choice. Comparatively few engage willingly in public debate. Few of our university Vice-Chancellors involve themselves in public discourse, on or off the box. The presidents of our four learned academies - Science, Technological Sciences and Engineering, Humanities and Social Sciences - prefer to apply their persuasive skills behind the scenes.

In the penetrating piece in The Age (27 February, 1993), Dr Judith Brett commented: "Something has gone seriously wrong with our politics when the leadership of the parties is so isolated from the groups and people they are supposed to represent".

We now live in a global economy, in which barriers whether psychological, cultural or physical are coming down, and it is an economy in which the dominant single factor is information - information more than raw materials, with information transactions occurring in real time, all over the world.

Are we prepared to take on the tough intellectual challenge of the late 1990s in the new environment?

"To the man-in-the-street, who, I'm sorry to say, is a keen observer of life. The word "intellectual" suggests straight away, A man who's untrue to his wife."

W.H. Auden, "New Year Letter"

Barry Jones, A.O., is the National President of the Australian Labor Party and the Federal Member for Lalor in Victoria. He is a graduate of Melbourne and Macquarie Universities, and the University of Technology, Sydney.

Bruce Kaye is a graduate in Theology from the University of Basel in Switzerland. He is currently the Master of New College, University of New South Wales.
LAST WORD

We’ve left that to the streets of Newcastle where we found out just what the community really thought about the role of a university.

BRAD MAYTOM: Skateboard rider on Nobby’s Beach.

“I suppose it’s a place of higher learning but since they wouldn’t let me in, I don’t really know.”

COLIN CHAPMAN: Managing Director of Colin Chapman Real Estate, President Newcastle Chamber of Commerce and Industry

“In our business we have a lot of contact with the University through our Residential Property Division and we’re very conscious of it as an institution. Our opinion of university students has improved during the last decade - back in the mid 70s landlords wouldn't let their properties to University students but that doesn't happen any more.”

“The Chamber recognises the importance of the University to the region and we are very aware of it as a place of higher learning.”

CHRISTOPHER ALLAN: Administrator of the Hunter Valley Theatre Company.

“As well as a place of learning, University is a place to learn about life and grow up.”

MARY MONTAGUE: Shopper in Newcastle Mall.

“The university provides a lot of opportunities, particularly for mature age women who missed out earlier because women weren’t encouraged to continue their education.”

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