


 First Year in Higher Education Conference
 30 July 2008, Hobart, Tasmania

The University of Melbourne >
 Centre for the Study of Higher Education

The first year experience in a new higher education landscape:

What are the factors influencing the quality of the student experience? What are priority areas for change and innovation?



 Richard James

So much activity around transition and the first year ...

- Three major national studies in Australia, at five year intervals (and the fourth being planned for 2009).
- Over a decade of annual conferences.
- First year transition and support programs now part of the HE landscape in Australia and NZ universities.
- Intensive institutional research and evaluation activities.
- High level of research and publication.


What has been achieved? Where is there 'unfinished business'? What is affecting the character and quality of the first year experience?

What are the major research issues? What issues might we explore nationally in 2009?


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This morning's presentation and discussion

1. The changing international and national higher education landscape
2. What do we know about the student experience of higher education in Australia?
3. Six priority areas for change and innovation



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Teaching quality under 'grave threat'

Minister v-c blames widening access and long-term underfunding. Research: Richard James



Poor data may put teaching cash at risk

Sector's lack of 'spare' in taking expenditure may undermine future budgets, warns Richard James



English scholars digest a Dickens of a chair






Everyone will still get a chance with us, v-c says

Research and data work change debate evidence policy, George Yelland tells Richard James




The forces affecting universities worldwide

- The massification of higher education
- Internationalisation/globalisation (the importance of university rankings, the rise of China)
- The digital revolution
- Changing relationship between universities, higher education and work
- A new dynamic tension emerging between research, teaching and learning.



The forces affecting universities worldwide

- And specifically on the educational front, relentless pressure on the curriculum to do more and more!
- Recognition that many social issues and problems require multiple perspectives and multiple modes of inquiry and analysis. Knowledge boundaries becoming more porous, disciplines intersecting and interacting with each other.
- So, interdisciplinary education is all the rage! (*The idea of disciplines is so 20th century*)



In Australia (and probably NZ too) ...



aware
bdgy
anscripts



VET sector sets sights on degrees

Can TAFE be upgraded without blurring a crucial distinction? Andrew Trounson reports



Focus shifts to the curriculum



Sculptor cries havoc



And much institutional re-branding and re-positioning in the market in order to climb above the rest ..



Schwartz drives radical reforms

James Beeson chief's role; solutions to HE in Australia's Macquarie University. John Gill reports




Opportunity is unlimited

Steven Schwartz explains why Macquarie is going its own way



We do not want our ambitions to be limited by history, central planning or pressure to conform

Review of Australian Higher Education
Discussion Paper June 2008




The Bradley Review of Higher Education

Three closely interrelated themes ...

Social inclusion

HE-VET relationships

The student experience

Compacts and institutional diversification ...

Will 'compacts' accelerate curriculum diversification? The scene appears set for a significant curriculum diversification in Australian higher education.

Numerous reasons for this, including:

- * the curriculum is now a point of institutional differentiation, strategy and marketing; and
- * a rethinking of the purposes of undergraduate education is underway.



What we can predict with confidence

1. Mass higher education, globalisation and internationalisation are here to stay.
2. Students' patterns of (dis)engagement with study and campus life will grow more complex and diverse.
3. More people will dip in and out of higher education more often and at different stages in their lives and careers.
4. What makes higher education 'higher' will be unclear. Standards will be a hot topic.
5. Students' expectations for easy, fast access to digital information will be high, global information repositories for learning will become ubiquitous.
6. But paper is here to stay! And the lecture is probably here to stay.
7. The way in which human brains learn won't change much at all (?)



The prescience of Martin Trow ...



Trow's Conceptions of Elite, Mass and Universal Higher Education

	Elite (0-15%)	Mass (16-50%)	Universal (over 50%)
Curriculum and forms of instruction	Highly structured in terms of academic or professional conceptions of knowledge	Modular, flexible and semi-structured sequence of courses	Boundaries and sequences break down; distinctions between learning and life break down
The student 'career'	'sponsored' after secondary school; works uninterrupted until gains degree	Increasing numbers delay entry; more drop out	Much postponement of entry; softening of boundaries between formal education and other aspects of life; part-time working
Academic standards	Broadly shared and relatively high (in meritocratic phase)	Variable; system/institutions 'become holding companies for quite different kinds of academic enterprise'	Emphasis shifts from 'standards' to 'value added'
Access and selection	Meritocratic; achievement based on school performance	Meritocratic plus 'compensatory programs' to achieve equality of opportunity	'open'; emphasis on 'equality of group achievement' (class, ethnic)

From John Brumby, 'The Social Role of the Contemporary University: Contradictions, Boundaries and Change', in *Ten Years On: Changing Education in a Changing World*, Center for Higher Education Research and Information, Milton Keynes, The Open University, 2004.

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The data sources on the student experience ...

- The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)
- The Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE)

And research by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education:

- The national First Year Experience study.
- Studies of international students by Simon Marginson and colleagues
- The recent *University Student Finances and Equity and Participation* studies for Universities Australia

In general, 'soft', self-reported, attitudinal data. We're still missing a trustworthy measure of graduate outcomes and the 'value-added' effects of the university experience.



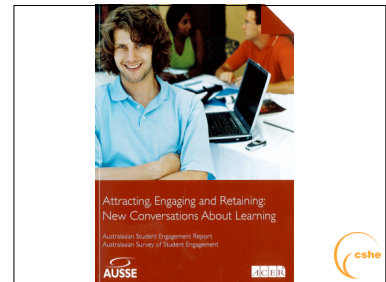
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Generalisations are risky ... a large number of variables to consider ...

- Institution, field of study, course
- Part-time, full-time
- Indigenous, non-Indigenous
- International, domestic
- School-leaver, mature-age
- Gender
- Socio-economic background
- etc.



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Broad conclusions on students' overall satisfaction with course/university experience

- Most students happy most of the time - the overall level of satisfaction with the university experience is high (say 70-75%)
- Typically, the level of dissatisfaction runs at 10-15%
- Disappointing responses to survey items on 'belonging to a learning community' (and similar) and an obvious degree of disengagement.



Broad conclusions on satisfaction with teaching



- Slightly lower levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching (65-70% happy)
- Least satisfied responses on:
 - Clarity of expectations (especially first years)
 - Feedback (35-40% unhappy)
 - Interest shown in progress by academic staff (40-45% unhappy)
 - Availability of academic staff



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First year students ...


- Signs of increased sense of purpose and greater clarity around career expectations.
- Nonetheless, only a minority of school-leavers report that school adequately prepared them for university study. One-third feel they weren't ready to choose a university course.
- Overall, first year students appear less engaged than later year students

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International students ...

- Slightly lower levels of satisfaction with teaching and courses
- Feelings of isolation, desire for better integration.
- Financial circumstances not well understood.



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CAMPUS REVIEW
 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:
 shield them or yield them




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Student use of and experience of ICT ...


- Very difficult to understand given the rapid shifts in technology, among other things.
- Much diversity in the levels of student engagement with ICT and the patterns of its use.
- Not all 'Netgen' students are expert in using ICT, or all that interested in using it (see Gregor Kennedy's work)



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AUSSE findings (and some USA comparisons)


- 'Active learning' lower than in US
- 'Student and Staff Interactions' much lower than in US
- 'Enriching Educational Experiences' lower than in US. In particular, fewer students reporting participation in community-based learning activities, service learning and the like.
- Low levels of international exchange experiences.



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Student finances ...

- A large proportion of students lack adequate financial support and many are highly anxious about 'making ends meet' on a week-to-week basis.
- There is anxiety about accumulating debt.
- One in eight students indicate they regularly go without food or other necessities because they cannot afford them. For indigenous students, the comparable figure is much higher — **one in four**.




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**Student finances in 2007 compared with 2000
 The situation may have worsened, slightly ...**

A smaller proportion of students with annual budgets in deficit, but ...


- Greater reliance on paid work — paid work providing a higher proportion of income.
- More students taking out loans.
- Increase in levels of non-cash assistance.
- Decline in C/wealth assistance for income support
- More students reporting missing classes to work.
- More students reporting that work was having an adverse effect on their studies.



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Patterns of work


- 70.6 per cent of full-time undergraduates reported working during semester.
- On average these students were working 14.8 hours per week.
- One in every six of the full-time undergraduate students who were working during semester was working more than 20 hours per week.
- More than one-third of the nation's full-time university students — 35.2 per cent — were working at least 13 hours per week during semester.



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Some important relationships ...

- **Limited** paid work is positively related to student engagement with study.
- Positive course evaluation is related to engagement. That is, students who report positive course experiences also tend to show stronger patterns of engagement.
- Positive course/university experience seems to be associated with more time spent on campus.
- Engagement appears to increase across the year levels.



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Six priority areas for research & development in relation to the quality of the first year in higher education


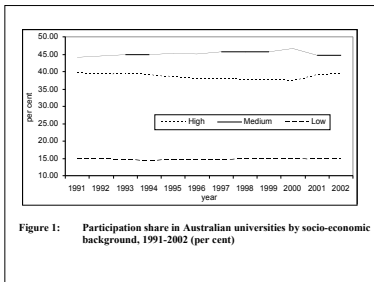
1. Social inclusion, curriculum and standards
2. New expectations and new patterns of engagement with university life, including the patterns of paid work
3. Work-related learning, community engagement and knowledge transfer, jobs on campus
4. The era of unprecedented access to information and the rise of 'google scholarship'
5. The rethinking of campus layouts and the blurring of 'home-classroom-library' boundaries
6. Research experiences in the first year?



1. Social inclusion, curriculum and standards

Continuing social imbalances in HE access and participation in mass systems, despite expansion and compensatory programs.

In Australia, and elsewhere, a *growing* social polarisation in the most prestigious institutions and courses during the past 5-10 years.

Access %, lower SES (all ages) in the Group of Eight universities, 2001 and 2005

	2001	2005
University of Sydney	7.6	6.5
University of Adelaide	17.0	16.6
Australian National University	5.2	3.6
University of Melbourne	9.1	8.5
Monash University	14.0	12.7
University of NSW	5.7	6.0
University of Queensland	16.9	15.2
University of Western Australia	8.4	8.1

Note:
SES based on postcode of home address
Population reference point is 25%

Working-class students have the right stuff to succeed


Reference: *Messoud reports on a study that calls paid tuition fees non-meritocratic and 'high cost'.*

Reserve



How to widen participation?

- Relationships with schools?
- New selection criteria and processes?
- The curriculum in the first year?
- Support in the first year?



How to widen participation?

Uni expands student selection system

From: *Age*, June 25, 2008
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AUSTRALIA'S largest national university has moved away from using year-12 scores to select students, saying character and community service are also important.

The decision by the The Australian Catholic University could prompt other universities to place less emphasis on ENTEE scores, which critics treat as a crude measure of suitability for tertiary study.

The university — the largest producer of nursing graduates in Australia and among the top five for teachers — will announce on Tuesday its intention to select candidates based on their community work or 'mentality of service', rather than relying solely on an ENTEE score. The scheme will operate at the university's six campuses nationally, including Melbourne and Ballarat. Courses available include arts, business, nursing, education and youth work.

"We need to get away from the idea, in selecting people, that intellect is divorced from character. They are two sides of the one coin," university vice-chancellor Greg Craven said.

The Melbourne 'Age', Saturday 28 June



And the reaction didn't take long!

This morning's Melbourne 'Age'

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Directions ...

- With massification and more open entry how do we reconcile deeply held academic (and community) values about 'merit' and 'excellence'?
- With 'openness', how do we respond to differing levels of student preparedness while maintaining academic standards (whatever they may be)?
- How do we deal with academics' concerns about the basic skill levels of school-leavers — and the perception that many students are 'not ready for higher education'?
- What fundamental changes might be needed in first year programs?

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Some personal thoughts on 'getting real' about standards ...

- Massification implies that notions of standards shift from achievement on entry to 'value-added' effects and graduate attributes.
- Thus the emphasis in academic standards must shift from inputs and processes to outcomes. The processes for assessing and reporting student learning grow in significance.
- Globalisation will continue to focus attention on standards. We must give more attention to cross-institutional, cross-national reference points.

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2. New expectations and new patterns of engagement with university

- There is a new diversity in student expectations of higher education that is not well understood. Dysfunctions resulting from the apparent mismatch of staff and student expectations.
- Higher expectations of level of service/availability, possibly deriving from a stronger consumer orientation.
- The contradictions of Generation Y:
 - * digital savvy but oriented towards retro-culture;
 - * rebellious but reliant on 'helicopter parents'.

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Directions ...

- Do we need more research into the ways in which university marketing is affecting student expectations?
- How can we actively influence the expectations of first year students?

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Accommodating the working student

Significant risk of diminished quality of educational outcomes: many students under significant financial pressure, working students not benefiting fully from higher education.

Directions ...

- Should we put to rest the idea of a F-T university student?
- Can we achieve a better integration between work and the development of higher education attributes?

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3. Work-related learning, community engagement, knowledge transfer, jobs on campus

The curriculum is transforming to embrace new relationships between universities, industries and communities. This is a **highly complex arena.**

Directions ...

- How do we construct pedagogically effective activities in these domains?
- To what extent can we create work opportunities on campus?
- How can assessment practices change to reflect these experiences?
- Are first year students ready for these experiences?

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4. The era of unprecedented access to information and 'google scholarship'

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An information-rich environment is wonderful for educators, but there are traps to be avoided

- Excessive amounts of undifferentiated information can cause bewilderment.
- The shuffling and storing of e-files can mistakenly be being thought of as studying.
- 'Information skimming' can replace sustained engagement with theories and ideas.
- The memorising of fragments of information can be mistaken for knowledge acquisition.

'Web 2.0 has become a warm and dark space for people with too much time and too few ideas. They are shielded through the flawed assumption that if more "people" (and as a visitor to Second Life, I use this word advisedly ...) are involved in doing "something" then it becomes important.'

Tara Brabazon, *Times Higher Education*, 3 April 2008



Directions ...

How do we learn to teach students to be 'information discerning' ... that, is to differentiate between sustained scholarly work, meta-analyses, the sketches and snapshots in Wikipedia-like formats and sheer nonsense?

By the way, can you please help me to find an important reference for my essay? As u know, the text book is really too thick, and as I search online using some keywords, I often end up with thousands of pieces, finding the reference really freaks me out!

2nd-year undergraduate student,
University of Melbourne, April 2008



Directions ...

Striking a balance between the tailored and targeted information we directly provide for our students and the guided navigation and frameworks we offer for the wider body of information they will encounter?

How can we use technologies to enhance the first year experience?



4. The rethinking of campus layouts and the blurring of 'home-classroom' library boundaries

- Contemporary IT challenges are closely associated with the problem of campus infrastructure.
- Many Australian universities have old, obsolete and in some cases overcrowded teaching and learning spaces. (Note the often sharp contrasts between new research labs and teaching spaces!)
- **The renewal and rethinking of campus spaces is central to enhancing the quality of student engagement and student learning.**



What are the specific educational problems we are facing?

- Many students go home as soon as they can.
- Most universities have poor 'decanting' spaces: the educational experience is interrupted by the pragmatics of room timetabling.
- Information technology is often poorly integrated into classrooms (and the rate of 'churning' is high).



Directions ...

What, precisely, are the influences of learning spaces on student learning?

What needs do particular disciplines have for classroom design?

How do we achieve four possibly incompatible goals:

1. high aesthetic standards;
2. maximum flexibility in modes of teacher-student and student-student interaction;
3. seamless integration of ICT; and
4. realistic budgets?

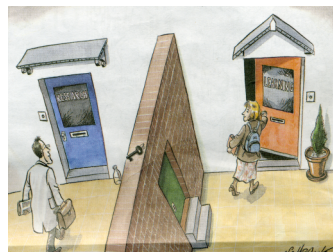


Some more personal views ...

- Adopt a stance that is eclectic and pluralistic rather than doctrinaire — recognise that a variety of approaches to teaching and learning are valuable
- Assume a 'law of diminishing returns' with regard to the educational returns from investment in teaching spaces — don't over-engineer.
- Avoid a cargo-cult mentality that attaches undue emphasis to the role of the learning space.



6. Research experiences in the first year?



Directions ...

Do first year students truly benefit from the research character of universities? Ought they?

What research experiences might they have? How do these differ across disciplines?



