

THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY: GEOSCIENCE STUDENT DEMANDS AND BETTER MANAGEMENT OF SYDNEY UNIVERSITY FOR MORE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AUSTRALIA AND BEYOND

Background

UG students in the School of Geosciences at Sydney University are angry that some of their courses have had subject options cut from them without consultation or notice. The cuts have disrupted the career planning of many students and have also forced them to choose from and pay for subjects which are far less interesting to them, given their career aspirations, than the ones they would have chosen if those subjects had not been cut.

Students consider they had an expectation which has now been unfairly dashed. A student pointed out a Sydney University white paper calls for engaged inquiry and mutual accountability so they now call upon the university to meet its side of the original bargain the students assumed they were entering into. This included subjects now cut.

Recommendations to students and others on what to do for a better deal for all:

1. Maximize student choice in regard to subjects they are allowed to undertake across the organization
2. Categorize student subject choice as being principally related to either Governance or Health or Built and Natural Environments
3. Allocate staff rationally in terms of their teaching, research or related work contributions to one or more of the above areas so student choice and administrative efficiencies are maximized
4. Attack the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) policy of a fixed ratio between insecure and secure academic jobs and all related policies which hinder cheaper, better education, organizational growth and sustainable development
5. Make managers manage rationally to grow the business and to cheapen and improve the quality of education and research for more sustainable development
6. Put subject content on-line and administer subjects to maximize economies of teaching and related administrative scale and jobs for PG students and others

See the attached and related response to the NSW 'Governance of Universities' (2009) report which argued that universities should take their direction autonomously, like a private sector organization, but be driven by their broader social and environmental goals, which financial goals should support. This is necessary for sustainable development.

Also see the attached submissions sent to the Minister for Resources and Energy and Tourism, to the Productivity Commission (PC) and to others. The first was made after a trip to China, Mongolia, Russia and Singapore. It urged government discussions with Ho Ching, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Temasek Holdings and relevant others in order to develop an investment plan aimed at mutually reducing debt and improving trade relations through better coordinated, self-determining approaches to gaining sustainable development while cutting unnecessary costs. Readers of the Australian Financial Review may note that the Australian and Singapore stock exchanges are currently discussing a merger so this is an important time to understand related issues.

The second attached submission argues that the PC draft report entitled 'Rural Research and Development Corporations' is excellent and all its recommendations should be adopted immediately for best research and business directions. This can also provide support for the new Australian and international government and community paradigm which attempts to attain more sustainable regional development through more stable and competitive investment and risk management to meet key environmental and social goals.

What the undergraduate (UG) students in the School of Geosciences want:

Besides being angry about all the subjects that have been cut, students made clear that a subject called 'Cities and Citizenship' would be particularly missed. One student claimed her friend from commerce would also like to take this subject (which deals with governance matters) because 'it teaches you to think'. This is also, apparently, a quality her friend finds lacking in the commerce degree.

As long as students are paying for their studies, their subject choice appears most properly to depend on their particular taste and informed choice, since the location of any subject in a university setting vouches, one assumes, for its intellectual legitimacy in the eyes of a community of scholars, if not necessarily in the eyes of other communities.

The way to make education much cheaper, more open and flexible for students is discussed later. However, why should students pay for any subject before they know exactly what is in it? All subject content should also be available on-line so that if students miss lectures the information contained in the lecture is still available. (See www.Carolodonnell.com.au for an example of this teaching approach.)

In general, universities are in powerful positions to fix many of the problems which account for the increasing inequality between rich and poor communities; for the degradation of the earth; and which brought us to our latest global financial crisis. However, they do little to tackle these problems as they serve as nests for traditional powerful, secretive, professional interests. The NTEU is a key part of the problem.

Further discussion supporting the above recommendations:

The piper who pays for education should call the tune. Students demand that the money be found so they achieve this to the maximum extent, which seems reasonable to me.

Students probably do not realize that the more powerful groups of academics (who are usually the long serving and older ones in the most attractive professional disciplines) and their closest supporters protect themselves from cuts by narrowing the range and putting pre-requisites on subjects which students have to take to gain qualifications which are created increasingly to be more specific and specialized.

The capacity to win research grants through academic peer approved channels or from other sources is highly valued by the university. Many old men started building up their research track record with their peers a very long time ago. This means newer, competing researchers, teachers and others less established in the institution are sacked first when funding cuts are made, unless under the patronage of a comparatively old, well-connected man. How research hinders sustainable development is addressed later.

If students were allowed much broader subject choice across the whole university, the management efficiency of the institution and the education of students could be greatly improved because staffing could be more effectively restructured to follow more genuine student demand. At present the apparent student demand is artificially created by academic requirements which are very specific and reflect the interests of the longest serving and most secure networks of academic mates.

I live in Glebe and taught for eleven years in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Sydney University until I got the boot and golden handshake at aged sixty. I was happy about this except for the very important fact that I had spent the previous decade working in government to help develop the governance paradigm necessary to support sustainable development. When I got sacked from Sydney University I hated to see the subjects I taught disappear because I knew it meant the old brigade would take over all teaching. They had already sewn up all the research grants over the years. My subjects, lectures and related background and policy discussions are on www.Carolodonnell.com.au

In regard to research retarding sustainable development, see the later discussion of the research developing around The Social, Economic and Environmental Factors (SEEF) questionnaire from Sydney University. It claims to look '**at which social, economic and environmental factors** play a key role in the **health and wellbeing** of the people being studied'. This claim is not true. The questionnaire is mainly a self-evaluation of one's level of physical and mental disability or distress. When I received the questionnaire to fill in I puzzled over what the researchers thought they could do with the results except employ more doctors, drugs, physiotherapists, etc. This questionnaire research does not appear to address social and environmental development for health in any regional context, yet it pretends to do so. It is also argued later that this research seems likely to be highly unethical because it is not clearly advising research participants about what it seems more likely to be used for, which I guess is cost-benefit analysis of services so that money is less likely to be wasted on treatment for patients who will get no benefit from it.

The NTEU is the enemy of students because it fights against economies of management and teaching scale which would provide a cheaper, more open and hence better

education. Policies about the ratio of comparatively insecure to secure jobs are also disgusting in a university context where growth and sustainable development should increasingly be the goal of tertiary institutions. I support trade unions and have been a member all my working life. The NTEU is an atrociously backward looking union which retards organizational growth and has no interest in serving the student customers.

This policy interferes with the most obvious and best way to organize work, which is often for a single lecturer to define and control UG subject content, which is on-line as well as delivered in lectures, and to undertake quality control in relation to post-graduate tutors who also do the work of marking the assessment exercises. The tutor will naturally be expected to have undertaken and passed the UG subject, but is naturally also free to take issue with the views of the lecturer. This ideally assists healthy debate by students. (Ideally the lecturer should also take a couple of tutorials to improve their understanding.)

The NTEU policy of a ratio between insecure and secure jobs prevents management flexibility and the capacity to grow the business. For example, I would have liked millions of overseas students to do my subjects. However, if lecturers have to do all their own marking this increases the pressure for multiple choice exams, which are often very inadequate forms of evaluation. In the traditional academic model lecturers like to have as few students as possible, or multiple choice tests, with more time for their research. The current organization of on-line education may be multi-skilled in that the lecturer contacts all her students herself, but is intellectually and administratively irrational.

To understand what the NTEU supports one must first understand that Sydney University has an ancient governance structure traditionally modeled on the notion that the university is a community of scholars, composed of smaller communities of scholars. These scholars reflect the traditional feudal view that the pursuit of their own interests is identical with the pursuit of the interests of society. Traditionally, academic management has supported direct democracy rather than conceptualized the university as an ideally independent element in Australian society, which is based on representative democracy.

As a result of their feudal self deception, Australian universities are most powerfully aligned with courts, lawyers and with their supporting professional associations, who naturally see their brotherhoods as better than the elected politicians or their constituents engaged in business, whose social legitimacy and knowledge gained through experience they may also despise. The approval of their collegiate peers is traditionally put above the approval of all others and this also defines their management structure which is composed of a multiplicity of theoretically driven academic silos, who also take little notice of each others' doings. Since the cultural revolutions in academia of the late 1960s and 1970s they generally do not debate with each other. Instead, they help others very like themselves in government bureaucracies to multiply jargon, red tape and costs which students must bear. ('Oh what a falling off was there', as Hamlet said to his mother.)

In the above collegiate contexts, many administrative and technical staff may find themselves happily underemployed, at least until their particular service gets cut out, because those employed in the academic parts of institution have no interest in economies

of scale in relation to their production of teaching and research. Their main interest is not in purveying knowledge but in the reproduction of a widening range of increasingly narrow and strongly defined elite qualifications for supposedly elite jobs. Many of the students, however, may find that the elite jobs they sought are actually not available to them, especially in more desirable cities, in spite of the huge amount of money they paid for their education. Under such circumstances students should at least have the opportunity to do subjects that interest them rather than be forced into those they hate.

When the government and universities begin to cut the budgets and the related number of subjects in universities, the various theoretical specialist groups (disciplines and sub-disciplines) close ranks. The oldest, most prestigious and largest will normally get what they want. Their traditionally handmaidens (female and male) will naturally support them as it would be unwise for the latter to bite the older, supposedly wiser hand which feeds them. If one is a statistical expert in a health faculty, for example, one may soon find one is supposedly not needed because every person with a computer now finds they can make up a questionnaire, put it into their computer and claim the results show they have done great research. Since many of these people appear never to have even heard of the concept of the Australian Bureau of Statistics or industry, this is a major problem.

For example, shortly before I got the boot from Sydney Uni. a Review of Basic Sciences in the Faculty of Health Sciences praised the customer service culture. However, it seems that those who wrote that Review report did not even recognize health care as being in an industry. Page 16 stated about the Bachelor of Health Sciences (BHS):

‘The BHS is designed to give its graduates the opportunity to become involved in contemporary healthcare by linking the three arms of healthcare – practitioners, the healthcare system and industry – in a unique manner.’

As I wrote to the review – ‘practitioners, the healthcare system and industry are not the three arms of healthcare. This statement is nonsense because practitioners and the healthcare system are ideally part of broader health and community service industry approaches to obtaining health nationally, regionally and internationally. People who do not appear to understand or be willing to accept the concept of health care as work in an industry cannot talk seriously about implementing a customer service culture’.

It is vital for Sydney University to develop financial management systems which are more stable and which meet the aims of Australian taxpayers, citizens, investors and related communities better than all the traditional management systems which brought us the global financial crisis. The job and career structures of Sydney University staff and students are ideally also constructed in this national and related global context. However, Sydney University thinks in locally and professionally interested ways to act globally, so frustrates nearly all national or regional interests in more sustainable development.

As a retired staff member of Sydney University, who ideally expects to be supported by the investment of my accumulated superannuation funds, I would have been a lot happier if UniSuper, the university superannuation fund, had not lost \$70,000 of my retirement

money in a very short period after the global financial crash in 2008. I would also have been happier if groups of different kinds of tradesman did not then converge on our strata title block to do work. We prefer not to consider ourselves a shovel ready safety project.

Never in my life have I lost as much money as Unisuper lost for me, let alone in such a short time period. However, if I had invested my retirement fund in so-called green investments instead of in lower risk UniSuper investments, I would be much worse off than currently as such investments were often the worst performers in the financial crisis. As the newest and hence most powerless arrivals on the scene, which may often challenge traditional production, the high risk status of many greener investments is understandable from all the older financial and legal perspectives which rule us and which I bet the university teaches most assiduously. Broader social and environmental perspectives should rule economic competition. The university should help not hurt us.

The NSW Auditor-General's Report to Parliament in May 2009 focused on the corporate governance of universities and large government agencies (p. 13). It identified a number of issues of concern relating to universities, including:

- A combined operating loss of \$66 million in 2008 compared to a surplus of \$388 million in 2007, largely as a result of the global financial crisis and volatility in financial markets.
- An increase in unfunded superannuation liabilities to \$3.1 billion
- Increased reliance on overseas students as a source of income, with overseas students now contributing nearly half of total student revenue.

(Why is the last considered a problem for Australia? The primary aim should be to increase income through open education and research and development partnerships locally and in other countries. See attached discussion on carbon pollution reduction and sustainable development in Singapore, China and elsewhere. Suggestions are made to deal with related financial problems.)

- Financial exposure due to excessive annual leave balances of academic staff
- Significant maintenance backlogs of nearly \$1 billion (p.13-14)

University governance aims or objectives and related support to attain them must be designed to solve the above economic problems and achieve sustainable development. It would be highly desirable if the financial systems of the university were primarily designed to achieve social and environmental aims, rather than designed to support the casinos managed by related financial and professional interests, as is the situation now.

A TYPICAL EXAMPLE OF RESEARCH PROBLEMS: THE SYDNEY UNIVERSITY SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS QUESTIONNAIRE: (THE SEEF PROJECT)

The SEEF questionnaire is primarily an evaluation of disability, not an evaluation of the social, economic and environmental determinants of wellbeing, as is claimed.

What is its purpose in the minds of those who devised this questionnaire? Is its true purpose to pursue calculation of costs and benefits of treatment in medical settings? If so, the fact that this aim was not clearly pointed out to participants is highly unethical and the Ethics Committee and related researchers should all be shot.

The Social, Economic and Environmental Factors (SEEF) questionnaire from Sydney University claims to look 'at which social, economic and environmental factors play a key role in the health and wellbeing in the 45 and Up Study'. This claim is not true. The questionnaire is mainly a self-evaluation of one's level of physical and mental disability or distress. When I received the SEEF questionnaire I puzzled over what the researchers thought they could possibly do with the results. I would be grateful for an answer.

The SEEF questionnaire reminds me of the problems addressed in a National Health and Medical Research Council video entitled 'The Best Laid Plans' (shelved at 362.1) which I used to show to my first year students in the Faculty of Health Sciences in order to help them understand the requirements of the World Health Organization (WHO) Declaration of Alma-Ata on health promotion and how to consultatively initiate related community planning and development actions, in the face of much self-interested opposition. I heartily recommend this video to all people trying to understand governance.

The NHMRC video deals with how government bureaucrats and professionals may impose closed questionnaires on communities in a process which ignores their real wants and needs in order to construct a building which houses a bunch of health professionals instead. All the controlling politicians and workers are then happy. The building industry can construct the building and the health professionals can fill it full of their own in order to continue with their apparently central mission of inviting us to become more like narrowly self-interested invalids with a right to be dependant. The preferable alternative is to assist people to gain work and related training and education to become more independent, responsible and contributing adults, who are capable of work and enjoyment without depending on sitting at the feet of expensive, key professionals who may be far away. The national broadband network is very important in assisting this development.

In the WHO Declaration of Alma-Ata, primary health care 'involves, in addition to the health sector, all related sectors and aspects of community development, in particular agriculture, animal husbandry, food, industry, education, housing, public works, communications and other sectors; and demands the coordinated efforts of all those sectors'. The related WHO approach to healthy action sees all work, play and related living as located in regional communities and environments from which risks and many related environmental challenges arise and are accordingly prioritized for remedial action. The identification and control of the major risks to health are ideally conducted in this regional context. The approach to handling environmental risk and social (health) risk are ideally treated in coordinated ways - in the Murray Darling Basin, for example.

From the WHO perspective the SEEF Project appears to be part of the social problem rather than part of the social solution to poor health. The health problems people face appear often to result from poor diet, lack of exercise, smoking, unemployment, alcohol, accidents and work. Solutions for many common health problems are likely to be found in encouraging healthier food and drug consumption, more vigorous exercise, more paid work, and more fulfilling and supportive education and entertainment. Instead of this, many problems appear to have been deemed medical in order to control them. For example, as the cane is banished from schools, the teacher and psychologist may naturally respond by calling for a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder so as to pacify lots of boys who hate school and who are ruining it for everybody else. (Given the difficult choice between the current discipline approaches I prefer the cane as being more honest and less disabling than delivery of legal drugs at taxpayer expense.)

I will discuss specific aspects of the SEEF questionnaire later. To clarify my criticism of it let me explain that last year I went to the small, historic and attractive town of Lake Cargelligo to investigate potential for a green building demonstration project on land that a friend in the construction industry had bought there. The lake had recovered after ten years of drought which had seen it gradually emptied and which had also impoverished the surrounding farming community and generated considerable business decline. Lake Cargelligo appeared to suffer from a lack of skilled building workers, which would make greener construction hard and expensive. However, it had other good services for a country town because there was a doctor, hospital, child care centre and a technical and further education centre as well as primary and secondary schools and a reasonable amount of public transport available to its inhabitants. There were lots of cheap empty businesses and fibro houses in the town, sporting lots of broken air conditioning systems.

On very superficial examination it seemed to me that if anyone was concerned about health promotion or any related community development in Lake Cargelligo, they would first have to work out how the town could produce goods and services that people could afford to buy and would want to use. Would the SEEF questionnaire help? I doubt it. The proposed construction of a new technical and further education building at Orange, where people will have to go if they want to learn green building techniques does not seem to help with the problem either. People need to be able to work and learn where they live and often cannot afford to leave their dependants in order to go to sit at the feet of teachers at some big new building far away from where their communities are located.

On the other hand, I can see how the SEEF project could lead to the consumption of more legal drugs to medicate various forms of actual or supposed disability. The culture of the administration of legal drugs, of which the SEEF questionnaire appears to be a product, is predominantly inhabited by women acting to support the power of male specialists who are also academics. It is part of the same social process that denies or denigrates the skills and demands upon many of Australia's most productive men who work in trades or in related forms of production more skilled than much of the work which goes under the name of health or social care. The provision of good care, like all good work, is often a result of caring states of mind and practical experience, rather than the result of the

accumulation of specified professional knowledge and related certificates. (This is not to deny the knowledge or skills of nurses, physiotherapists, doctors and others which are acquired in practicing institutions, or to deny the key place of certificates of competence.)

If I lived at Lake Cargelligo, I guess I might first suggest a work project to beautify and build a pathway around the whole lake because this would be inviting to people like me as well as beautifying the town centre and creating basic work, exercise and training opportunities. As the takeaway shop does a roaring trade I might suggest exploring the potential for a community garden which grew salad and other foods for the shop as well as for delivery into an ordering community. Mung beans, green and red lentils and other hippy foods can also improve diets if they are attractively prepared so that more traditional Australians are willing to eat them. I also guessed that a concrete skateboarding shell and cheap skateboard hire service might be welcomed by teenagers. Obviously, however, the people in Lake Cargelligo are likely to have a much better idea of what they want and need for healthy development than I have. I merely point out a better approach to ascertaining the social, economic and environmental determinants of health, which may be more appropriately conceptualized as wellbeing in many cases.

My guess is that the SEEF questionnaire was designed partly to assist investigation of the calculation of the costs and benefits of treatment in medical settings. According to Professor Stephen Leeder, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald (23-24.10.10, News Review p. 12) the quality-adjusted life year (QALY) and the disability-adjusted life year (DALY) serve to compare diseases and treatments with a view to stopping the wastage of treatments on people who, for whatever reason, will get no benefit. Those of us participating in this questionnaire appear to me to be likely to be helping health professionals to make decisions over life and death matters we cannot control ourselves.

For example, I demand the right to kill myself easily and conveniently when I eventually tire of life in order to donate my body for its most useful purposes, rather than continuing to be an expensive drain on taxpayers or my daughter, while living for years in a helpless state which is the total antithesis of dignified to me. Since the law denies me any control over the circumstances of my own death it is highly unethical if any health professionals are now developing their self-interested ideas about such matters through delivering questionnaires which do not make their purposes clear to respondents. This is disgusting.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

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