

**Melbourne Conversation on Thursday, 10 May 2007**

**Supper Room, the Melbourne Town Hall**

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An extraordinary shift has occurred on Australian university campuses. At the University of Melbourne, for example, about 22 per cent (9,500) of our 43,000 students are from overseas: 20 years ago they represented less than 6 per cent, and in all they numbered 974.<sup>1</sup>

But 'internationalisation' is of course far more than this demographic shift. There are two wider challenges and opportunities that we identify at the University of Melbourne:

#### 1. Educational

The *2006 Growing Esteem Strategic Plan* gives priority to making the Melbourne Experience a truly international one, producing highly educated, globally aware graduates with a rich understanding of other cultures.<sup>2</sup>

#### 2. Cultural literacy.

Concurrently the University is aiming for more active recognition of the presence of a diverse international cohort of students to promote cross-cultural engagement amongst students.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Student Enrolment: Historical Summary 1855-2005 (1), University Planning Office: [http://www.upo.unimelb.edu.au/Public/WV\\_Historical\\_Summary.xls](http://www.upo.unimelb.edu.au/Public/WV_Historical_Summary.xls).

<sup>2</sup> The *Growing Esteem Strategic Plan* is available at: <http://growingesteem.unimelb.edu.au/strategicplan/>, or please see [http://www.unimelb.edu.au/publications/docs/strategic\\_plan2006.pdf](http://www.unimelb.edu.au/publications/docs/strategic_plan2006.pdf) for a PDF version of the plan.

<sup>3</sup> A study by Dr Sophie Arkoudis of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, (CSHE) entitled, *Teaching International Students: Strategies to enhance learning* (2006), examines culturally inclusive practices in learning, teaching and assessment, revealing the implications of learning in a different culture and learning while developing English language proficiency. This report can be found at: <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/international.pdf>. Other relevant publications include *Understanding and Promoting Student Engagement in University Learning Communities* (2005), by Dr Kerri-Lee Krause, CSHE: [http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/Stud\\_eng.pdf](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/Stud_eng.pdf).

A global perspective is clearly recognised among our desired graduate attributes.<sup>4</sup>

Two of the five are particularly relevant:

### **Attuned to cultural diversity**

Our graduates will be expected to:

- ◆ value different cultures
- ◆ be well-informed citizens able to contribute to their communities wherever they choose to live and work
- ◆ have an understanding of the social and cultural diversity in our community
- ◆ respect indigenous knowledge, cultures and values

### **Active global citizens**

Our graduates will be expected to:

- ◆ accept social and civic responsibilities
- ◆ be advocates for improving the sustainability of the environment
- ◆ have a broad global understanding, with a high regard for human rights, equity and ethics

The most ambitious and radical review of curriculum structures in the University's history – undertaken last year under the heading of the Curriculum Commission's design of the 'Melbourne Model' – has an international education as one of its underpinnings.<sup>5</sup>

So, the University of Melbourne is committed to providing its students with experiences that ensure they are able to operate in, and contribute to a world that is global and interdependent. The questions to be answered then are –

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<sup>4</sup> A full list of the University's graduate attributes (2006) is located at the following website: <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/student/attributes.html>.

<sup>5</sup> The 2006 report of the University of Melbourne Curriculum Commission is available at: [http://growingesteem.unimelb.edu.au/docs/cc\\_report\\_on\\_the\\_melbourne\\_model.pdf](http://growingesteem.unimelb.edu.au/docs/cc_report_on_the_melbourne_model.pdf)

- how do we internationalise learning and teaching to achieve student attributes?
- How do we encourage productive interaction inside and outside the classroom?

This is not a new issue for this University. Academic and professional staff are very aware of the importance of diversity and of the need to be culturally aware:

- Melbourne has had a cultural diversity policy since 1998 and an extensive suite of publications.<sup>6</sup>
- Guidelines for inclusive teaching practice were passed by Academic Board in 2002.<sup>7</sup>
- In 2004 the Academic Board adopted the recommendations of a report on 'Students from Asia'.<sup>8</sup>

What is much more difficult however, is how to put these policies into practice. How do we encourage interaction both inside and outside the classroom? The integrating experiences of domestic and overseas students at our residential colleges are very difficult to replicate, particularly in large classes. There are many successes to which I could point: the deliberately chosen syndicate groups in some subjects, the actions of Law students and staff in organising cultural diversity activities, and much more. But the challenges remain.

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<sup>6</sup> Please see <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/diversity/downloads/CDPolicy2004.pdf> for the University's Cultural Diversity Policy. The University's cultural diversity publications are listed at: <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/diversity/supporting/publications.html>. Links to a range of the University's policies guiding cultural diversity and equal opportunity for students and staff can be accessed from the following website: <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/diversity/about/policy.html>.

<sup>7</sup> In March 2002, the Academic Board approved the *Nine Principles Guiding Teaching and Learning in the University of Melbourne*, a statement on the scholarship of learning and teaching in a research-led University and a reference guide to good teaching practice and resources. The principles, developed for the Academic Board by Professor Richard James and Associate Professor Gabrielle Baldwin of the CSHE, include objectives for providing an international and culturally diverse curriculum and learning community for students. The principles are located at: <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/abp/policies/teaching.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> The report, *Students from Asia: Issues in learning and teaching* (2004), was an initiative of the Faculty of Education in association with Asialink: <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/abp/policies/students-from-asia.pdf>.

Finally, I would point to our responsibilities to international students. These are young men and women who, with the support of the families, are making major commitments of time, money and engagement to succeed in our distinctive city and its institutions. The media's focus is, of course, on the failures in what is seen as a purely transactional presence: the 'cash cow' mentality which sees overseas students as either victims of rapacious institutions and individuals or as ill-prepared, sub-standard students. They do not focus on how they have made this city and its institutions richer in every way, nor on their academic successes: our domestic students have academic progress rates of about 94 per cent, and our international students 93 per cent.

Overwhelmingly, international students are positive in our surveys about both the quality of the education they have received and the experience of living in Melbourne. It is true to say, however, that at least one-quarter of them have regrets or criticisms about both. Questions remain. That is why I find this report important and look forward to hearing some answers.