THE CASE FOR A UNIVERSITY IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Introduction

The student who seeks to pursue post-school education in Australia is presented with a threefold choice:

- technical and further education;
- advanced education; or
- university education.

With the exception of the Northern Territory, the separate political entities of Australia are able to offer their residents access to all three possibilities. The Northern Territory alone has no university.

In March 1980, the Northern Territory Government announced its intention to establish the first university in the Northern Territory. In doing so, the Government was not motivated by a wish to establish a monument to progress, achieved but rather by the desire to provide the Territory with an agent which is essential to its continuing development and, consequently, to the overall development of Australia.

What is a University?

The case for the university depends upon the answer to the question: What is a university?

The concept of university has evolved from the time of the Socratics to the present day. Early developments which have influenced the modern university include: the concern of the ancient Greeks with systematic education of the young; the guilds or guilds which promoted business and craft and which fostered the concept of group support and loyalty; the long lasting influence of the Greek Church from which universities gained many ideas about structure and ritual practices as well as a concept of institutional autonomy; the emphasis on universities in medieval times on law, medicine and theology, the beginnings of endowments and of financial support from city and state, and the emergence of a strong Faculty of Arts at the University of Oxford. This liberal arts form and tradition, in which deductive reasoning is taught with the "seven liberal arts" of grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music was predominant at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Paris.

Successful centuries saw many changes in academic powers and in various styles of governance among European universities. During the 1930s the industrial revolution, urbanization, and secularization brought about the formation of new attitudes and behaviours which was growing interest in rational and scientific explanation. German universities by 1800 had developed new ideas about the nature and purpose of universities, placing emphasis on research and scholarship in all fields and on academic freedom for the professorate. In the last hundred years, universities have had to respond to the increasing technological needs of society and to the close consideration of manpower needs and the part which they -- the universities -- can and should play in meeting those needs.

Since 1945, two phenomena have emerged in the further development of universities internationally:

- an increasing demand for university education with a corresponding expansion of the number of universities; in 1945 Australia had six universities -- one in each of the state capitals -- and two universities (Adelaide and Canberra) today there are nineteen; and
- an increasing criticism and demand for greater responsiveness and accountability.

It was with regard to the second of these -- the increasing criticism -- that in November 1978, the Senate of the University of Alberta having become aware of the serious questions and concerns and the part of certain members of the University community, faculty, students, and administration alike, of certain members of the government, and of certain members of the public at large, regarding not only the functions but also the identified purposes of universities in general as well as of the University of Alberta in particular,

resolved to establish a Commission to inquire into the nature, purposes or purposes, and function of a University in general and of the University of Alberta in particular.

The Commission's report was published in April 1979. The Commission agreed that a university had four main functions:

- the discovery of knowledge
- the transmission of knowledge
- the preservation of knowledge
- service to society.

In proposing the first university in the Northern Territory, the Government of the Territory is seeking to establish an institution which will ultimately provide all four functions in the only politically distinct area in Australia which now has no such institution.

The Case For

The case for the establishment of a university in the Northern Territory must be evaluated in the context of the older universities of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Tasmania, Western Australia and Queensland, rather than the new group of post-Secondary Colleges. The University of the Northern Territory would rightfully be regarded as a "first phase" university, providing an initial institution for the Territory. It is neither a "second phase", like the second and third universities in capital cities, nor a "third phase", like those regional institutions located outside capital cities but within states already having at least one university. The University of the Northern Territory will fill a vacuum, not supplant an existing provision.

It could be argued that the accidents of history have denied the Territory that provision which it could have assumed to be its right by equity and natural justice. In this respect, the University of the Northern Territory, operated by South Australia meant that no official consideration was given to tertiary education provision within the Territory until the late 1960s. Local pressure for a university emerged even before South Australia could respond to the education needs of the Northern Territory. A strong local advocacy built up at precisely the time that university expansion nationally first felt the constraints of economic deceleration. The request was countered by a requirement of the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training, that an intermediate college, rather than a university, be established. The Darwin Community College was in the early stages of planning when the NT Government's report on tertiary education in the Territory was issued. The Darwin Community College was to be the second phase of university education in the Territory, while the University of the Northern Territory was the "third phase", like the liberal arts concept of a seven liberal arts. The University of the Northern Territory should establish a Northern Territory Research Institute, directed by representatives of Australia's three universities to provide the leadership and enterprise characteristic of a university.

The Northern Territory has no such institution nor is there one situated closer than 2000 km by air from Darwin or 1300 km by air from Alice Springs. The Universities of Denpasar and Singapore -- 1000 km and 2000 km by air, respectively, from Darwin -- are as close in (runway) time to Darwin as any of the universities in Australia, all of which are located at the same latitude as Darwin.

The encouragement and support of research is central to the university and Darwin is an important example. To provide for the next generation of academic staff and it is vital that a research base be developed. The Northern Territory Government has established a Northern Territory Research Institute, directed by representatives of Australia's three universities. The encouragement and support of research is central to the university and Darwin is an important example. To provide for the next generation of academic staff and it is vital that a research base be developed. The Northern Territory Government has established a Northern Territory Research Institute, directed by representatives of Australia's three universities.

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The opportunities for research in the Northern Ter­ri­to­ry are extensive: the need for research is urgent. Tropical Australia represents one-third of the land mass and 70% of its territorial waters. The future of Australia is bound up in no small measure with this area. The resolution of its range of social, economic, and environmental issues is of critical importance to the nation as a whole and the region beyond. Many of Australia's crucial questions are being confronted, not the North, but of them demand competent academic research.

Present activities overall, however, are fragmented and uncoordinated, derived from special interests of university researchers or specific needs of private enterprise or public bodies. Such fragmented activities, however, result in little benefit accruing to the Territory. Rather is the Territory used as the source of raw material to be extracted and exported for processing and use elsewhere. While in no way wishing to diminish the efforts of the institutions, the University of the Northern Territory will be able itself to undertake research and co-operate with existing institutions to ensure the maximum useful dissemination of research findings of consequence to the Territory and its region.

• The stage of development of post-school educa­tion in the Territory

Whereas all other political units of Australia have provision for a three-tiered structure in post-school education (TAFE, advanced, university), the Terri­to­ry provides only the lower two tiers — TAFE and advanced. More and more Territory students are enrolling in universities interstate because there is no provision for them within the Territory. Although the Darwin Community College currently offers some undergraduate and postgraduate Advanced Education courses, these do not meet the needs of all students or can no expansion of course offerings at that institution substitute for a university.

• The inability of institutions elsewhere in Australia to provide adequate numbers of suitably qualified persons who are willing to take up employment in the Northern Territory.

Any region which does not offer a complete system of primary, secondary, and tertiary education, is disadvantaged in two ways:

• the region loses the more able students who, quite naturally, seek qualifications and subse­quent employment elsewhere; and

• the region is unable to attract a sufficient number of suitably qualified people to meet its require­ments.

• The special needs of Aborigines within the N.T.

Existing universities offer little to Aborigines who comprise more than one quarter of the Northern Territory population. Even the few Territory Aborigines respond because of their unwillingness to travel away from their home base for any length of time. The School of Linguistics and the Bilingual Section of the NT Department of Education are already undertaking research at a high level; Batchelor College is mov­ing towards UQ courses for aboriginal teachers; the Task Force in the Darwin Community College is preparing Aborigines to university-entrance level; and the Alice Springs Community College is begin­ning to work on appropriate technology for aborigi­nal communities. All of these endeavours, with others in the creative and applied arts, philosophy, anthropology, history and sociology, could usefully be co-ordinated through a University Centre for Aboriginal Studies. Research would contribute to teaching programmes in the university both for abo­riginals and about Aborigines. While there is no question that the Territory is one urgent need remains unmet.

• The lead time required for a university to come to full maturity

There is an inescapable period required for a uni­versity to establish its goals, develop its policy-mak­ing procedures, establish lines of communica­tion, refine the academic and administrative decision-making processes, establish soundly-based research and teaching programmes, all of which are required before a university can genuinely be said to be producing graduates in sufficient number and quality for them to have a significant impact on their chosen professions and the com­munity in which they live. Those who argue that the Territory will need a university in twenty years time are, in essence, arguing that a start should be made now.

• The Commonwealth Government's policies on decentralisation

From the time of the first abortive attempts to estab­lish a European presence in the Territory until, until such time as a university was established. An extended Commonwealth Government separation from the students who have the ability and ambition to pursue univer­sity studies, nor would it provide that base of research and teaching staff which is vital to the wellbeing and prosperity of the Northern Territory. The Community College cannot be admitted to the institution status of universities. An expanded Community College could not be expected to attract sufficient staff or students of the highest quality. The Northern Territory Government's urgent wish to strengthen this university is more important.

• The need for the Territory Government to develop a University.

The Northern Territory Government has proposed that the new institution — whether it be a free-standing univer­sity or a university college — should enter into a system of multiple association with a number of existing universities. An expanded Community College, for the early years of the new institution, representa­tives of the associated bodies would participate as full members at all levels of governance, overseeing academic standards, providing expert advice and assistance wherever necessary and making it possi­ble for Territory students to complete their studies in disciplines which have not been fully developed at the University of the Northern Territory.

Consequential effects of a lack of a university

The lack of a university in the Northern Territory has led to the following results in their own States and both then and thereafter remain close to their homes. (For example, 1,486 members of Convocation of James Cook Univer­sity, 1214 are in Queensland, and, of these, 950 are in Townsville and North Queensland). This is denied at present to students in the Northern Terri­tory. As a consequence, not only students but also their families are not exposed to the full range of benefits that they seek entry to a university, or at the end of Year 10 or Year 11 high school in order to seek entry to a university. Their children are approaching the age for secondary or tertiary education. This locks the Northern Territory into a second-class position because, if you do not come, the projected growth rate of the number of Territory students (assuming present factors continue) is depressed to a point where a university is difficult to justify on a simple basis of demography.

The movement of people in this way has a cumula­tive unsettling effect and reinforces the concept that the Territory is a “camp”, a first-rate place for second-rate people. So long as the Terri­tory is without a university it will lack an important contribution to permanent residence (in itself an
important supporter of national policies of decen­
tralisation, and will be unable to begin the pro­cesses — university-level discussions — that led to the development of most of its professional and scholastic leaders in the com­munity with which they identify, and of undertaking research which is essential to the continuing devel­opment of the region.

The twentieth university in Australia or the first uni­versity in the Northern Territory?
To date, the Commonwealth Government has been that funding for a University in the Northern Territory will not be provided in the 1982/83 Parliament. The basic reasons for this deci­sion are:

- that the nineteen existing universities are able to provide sufficient places for Territory students;
- that a Territory university would be dangerously small in student numbers for many years to come (even though a projected enrolment of 2,000 by 1995 has not been seriously disputed by the Com­monwealth Tertiary Education Commission).

Since 1974 (and the introduction of full Common­wealth funding for universities) there has been a growing tendency to talk of universities as if they were solely national institutions (even though, with the exception of A.N.U., they were established by State legislation). In that they contribute to the national development and in that students from any part of Australia may apply for admission to any university, they are national institutions. However, that must not be allowed to conceal the fact that 99% of all Australian students are enrolled at a uni­versity within their home state, nor the fact that 75% of all students are enrolled at a university within 40km of their home (not term) residence. Thus while universities — like schools — do contribute to the national development, they obviously function primarily as agents for development within the states where they are established.

It is true but true to say that national circumstances, with respect to university places do not solve the needs of all potential students from the Territory, nor do they supply the Territory with the benefits of the other functions provided elsewhere in Australia by universities.

Demography, too, is a weak counter-argument. The first colony — New South Wales — was established in Australia in 1788, and granted self-governing sta­tus in 1842. Eight years later, the first university in Australia was established in Sydney. At that time Sydney had a population of some 50,000. The uni­versity commenced with a Chancellor, Vice­Chancellor and three professors, and an initial enrolment of 24 students. The growth rate of the new university was relatively high. Within 15 years after its foundation, the university had a total enrolment of about 4,000. Today the university enrols over 17,000 students and has established a national and international reputation for research and academic pursuits. Those who decried the founding of a small, colonial institution have been proved wrong.

The University of Melbourne was founded in 1853 and declared open officially in 1855 (the year in which the Port Phillip district was declared a separate colony with standing in Arts, Science and En­gineering began in 1850. Schools of Law and Medicine were established in 1857 and 1862 respec­tively. The Conservatorium of Music was estab­lished in 1895. Between 1904 and 1924 further schools were established — Dental Science, Agri­cultural Science, Veterinary Science, Education, Architecture, Commerce.

At its inception, the University of Melbourne had an enrolment of 16 students. As with the University of Sydney, growth was slow but by 1935 enrolments had reached 4,000. In 1951 (i.e. some 130 years after its establishment) the University of Melbourne had an enrolment of 16,000 engaged in a wide range of research and academic pursuits. Again, as with the University of Sydney, it has established a national and international reputation (as witnessed by the fact that almost 1,000 members of the student body come overseas).

More recently, the University of New England opened in 1939 as a College of the University of Sydney with an enrolment of 24 students which had risen to 239 in 1954 when the institution became autonomous. James Cook University opened in 1961 as a college of the University of Queensland with an enrolment of 92 full-time and 88 part-time students, and has developed into an institution drawing from and catering for North Queensland.

In its report on the proposal to establish a University in the Northern Territory, the Commonwealth Ter­ritory Education Commission made the following statement on projected enrolments:

On the basis of existing enrolment patterns, the potential growth of the Darwin region, and its own assessment of the extent to which the population would participate in university education, the Commission has concluded that the enrolment estimates contained in the proposal, while not unreasonable, are some­what optimistic.

Projected enrolment levels at the proposed university, selected years, 1982 to 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Commission Estimates</th>
<th>Northern Territory Proposal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>750-1,150</td>
<td>1,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>800-1,500</td>
<td>1,100</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,050-2,000</td>
<td>1,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1,200-2,300</td>
<td>1,800</td>
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The Northern Territory Government believes that the "not unreasonable" projections demonstrate the potential viability in terms of undergraduate num­bers alone and academic and other essential functions of the proposed university.

Surplus undergraduate places at existing Austra­lian universities will not meet the needs of the Terri­tory. The Territory with a base for relevant, locally-oriented research, it does not need to meet the needs of those who are unable to travel (for social or economic reasons) the long distances involved in enrolling interstate; they encourage the major universities to develop the community to drift away; they perpetuate a colonial attitude towards a terri­tory which is an integral part of mainland Australia moving towards statehood.

The Northern Territory Government is not seeking support for the twentieth university in Australia but for the first University in the Northern Territory.

The Way Forward
The decision by the Commonwealth — announced in the Review of Commonwealth Functions speech of 30 April 1981 — not to provide funding for the proposed University in the 1982/84 triennium has not diminished the conviction of the Northern Territ­ory Government regarding the need for the Univer­sity, the justice of the case, or the viability of the proposed University Planning Authority. The Commonwealth Planning Authority has been encouraged to continue with its three major areas of activity:

- promoting the case for Commonwealth recogni­tion and support of the proposal;
- planning the development of the institution; and
- providing for the evolution and development of those university services which may be undertaken in the Territory in advance of the estab­lishment of the University.

From its inception, the University Planning Authority (now the University Planning Board) has been concerned to promote university-sector activities in advance of the formal inauguration of the University.

The first publication produced for general con­sideration was a register of all research activities being undertaken in the Territory. Subsequently an amplified version of the initial register was printed and distributed. Revised and updated version is now in preparation.

A programme of public lectures was commenced. These are continuing, often in conjunction with other academic and social agencies. As they become available, printed versions of the lectures are distributed.

Money has been directed to expanding the hold­ings of the State Reference library, which, by Government decision, is to be incorporated in the University library. The Director of the NT Library Service is now designated Planning Librarian for the University Planning Authority, and in the latter capacity has visited several existing University libraries.

A research awards programme has been com­missioned to assist Territorians who are undertaking postgraduate studies. (It is worth noting that one of the products of which has been supported through this programme — low cost air-conditioning — has attracted international interest.)

The Authority is involved in the organisation of sev­eral major conferences of relevance to the University. Through a grant provided by the Menzies Founda­tion, a survey has been conducted to examine the feasibility of undertaking a longitudinal study of child development in the Territory.

The NT History Unit, formerly located within the Department of the Chief Minister, was recently transferred to the Authority.

On the recommendation of the Authority's Advisory Committee and taking into account the response to university-sector activities, the NT Government has now sought Commonwealth support for the pro­posed establishment of the University through the development of a series of postgraduate schools and centres specialising in matters of par­ticular relevance to the Territory and the surround­ing region.

The first such school — the Menzies School of Health Research — has been formally established in association with the Menzies Foundation, the University of Sydney and the NT Department of Health.

References
Hassell and Partners Pty. Ltd., The University of the Northern Territory at Palmerston: Master Plan Report, 1981.
Northern Territory Government, Proposal to the Com­monwealth Government for Support and Recognition of the University of the Northern Territory, 1981.
Northern Territory University Planning Authority, A Nor­thern Territory Research Register, 1983.
NOTES FROM THE NORTH — REACTIONS TO THE UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY PROPOSAL

The Present Situation
In order to understand the movement that led to the proposal for the creation of a university in Darwin one needs to bear the following points in mind.

First the proposal is not new. There has been since the late 1960s a lobby favouring some kind of tertiary institution in Darwin. This lobby has usually had two arguments to put in support of its case:

• that it was an inequity that parents in the Northern Territory (NT) who wished their children to have a university education faced quite crippling costs in sending their children to and maintaining them through an undergraduate course.

• that the presence of a university would civilise the north by its very existence. A university presence would provide an infrastructure for research and teaching in areas in which the NT lacked and thus act as a haven in a materialistic and anti-intellectual community.

The lobby favoured the creation of a university college and took part in the various parliamentary enquiries that led to the creation of Darwin Community College (D.C.C.) in 1972. This solution arose from a compromise between the university lobby and those in favour of a technical training institution.

D.C.C. came into existence as a compromise that hoped to bridge the social and ideological divisions implicit in its foundation. It has done so simply by continuing to exist as one institution and to grow at better than the national average rate, but it has not created for itself a publicly accepted role that enables it to be seen as a desirable solution to the problem of poor school education in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Government does not prize its existence and the CTEC (who inherited it with the creation of self-government in the N.T.) insist on treating it as a combination of a CAE and TAFE institution, which only magnifies whatever divisions of opinion exist within the College.

That the Northern Territory Government does not prize the existence of D.C.C. can be seen from a number of actions taken by the Government since 1979, e.g.

• It has diminished the D.C.C.’s autonomy by Act of the Legislative Assembly.

• It has, in making the university proposal, cannibalised the D.C.C. by removing from it U.G.1 and U.G.2 courses in their present CAE form, to form the nucleus of the proposed university.

• It has failed to make clear to the CTEC the unusual nature of D.C.C. thereby forcing the College back into the CAE and TAFE pattern which in turn has prevented it from breaking out of the Australia-wide mould of a three level, three institution post-secondary system.

The Northern Territory Government thus at best views D.C.C. as an interim solution to the creation of a full tripartite post-school system. It seems not to have questioned the wisdom of imposing that solution on the N.T.

Finally it must be realised that the advent of self-government, after sixty years of benevolent colonialism as Australia’s on-shore Territory, resulted in an upsurge of State’s-rights patriotism which takes a number of forms. Almost anything made in the Territory now bears a large distinctive logo to proclaim its superiority over southern products. Politically there has been a desire to create the infrastructure of a state, to wit art galleries, State libraries and so on. The university proposal I am sure belongs in the same genre. One cannot, for instance view the proposal as coming from any extensive public debate for a university, as the public remained mostly uninvolved in the initiation and planning of the proposal. There has been little public debate on the desirability of a university or on the form it should take. The ordinary citizen views it as an undefined ‘good thing’ if he or she thinks about it at all.

Against the background the proposal for a university can be readily seen as a proposal springing from the desire that the N.T. be a proper state, as well as from an unreflective dissatisfaction with the present situation of post-school education within Darwin. One must also say that the Planning Vice-Chancellor has made a proposal that maximises whatever virtues can be found within the practical limitations of the present situation. The CTEC’s rejection of that proposal is likewise couched in terms of practicability and so we can summarise the situation now as a stand-off. The Northern Territory Government thinks that a free standing, autonomous and quite orthodox university is practicable in Darwin now; the CTEC says no, it will cost too much.