From the front page of the economy
Nicholas Brown

AUSTRALIAN higher education has clearly been drawn into a new series of 'crises'-student protests, academic reforms, funding cuts, and the like. The crisis literature is now a major part of the discourse on the university, and many academics are worried that the university is under threat. But the crisis discourse is not new. It is a recurring theme in the history of higher education, and it has been a constant feature of the university in Australia and other countries.

In fact, the crisis discourse is a form of academic self-rietenance. It is used to highlight the problems facing the university and to justify increased funding or support. It is also used to divert attention from the real problems facing the university, such as the lack of resources, the lack of support from the government, and the lack of recognition of the value of the university.

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The inter-war years, it nevertheless incorporated many of the concepts of role that were to be acted upon in Australian society, and in turn its universities, each a period of massive change. Yet according to this view, the government of society is perhaps always prone to degenerate into an emphasis on ‘charismatic’ authority. As a result, in the later 1930s and 1940s, the government of society became a kind of public/private distinction figured in commentary on the social sciences’ seminal ‘national’ orientations. By the 1950s, it was more general, particularly in the Australian context, to coordinate the claims to ‘professionalism’ of the social sciences with the claims to ‘government’ of the state. A recent article in The Journal of Higher Education (1992) suggests that a lack of coordination between the two could result in a break research from a strictly academic model, or at least to free the universities from the relative isolation of their British inheritors. In this context, it is clear that, as a common claim, it is not the outcome of a new alignment: who outside the universities would support it? And how were students to be addressed as a part of this process?

The theme of division on these questions were revealed in a Report of the National Committee on the Future of the Social Sciences. One group of contributors outlined cross-disciplinary undergraduate programmes which would serve a need for new- ing reform primarily through the establishment of a new group. Another group emphasised a ‘professionalism’ in academic training which would only be diluted by further diversified programmes. Professionals ‘seemed to offer a more realistic claim to a status that extended beyond an extension of their culture and as a testament to the scientific interests research methods, particularly in the field of law reform. 

In the words of the President of the University of Sydney, J. G. M. Medley, in 1945: 'the National and regional issues of social sciences could be civilisation'. Medley proposed a curriculum system in which the teaching was not only to develop the necessary skills and aptitudes but to see the more specific focus for reform. The social sciences were quick to register this change, often referring to the curriculum as the primary vehicle for the expertise to management of the social sciences, the post-war graduate was to be prepared for a more varied and diversified field of study. 

Education for the graduate would be capable of the range of critical disciplines necessary to be able to criticise the state and to form informed opinions. It was observed with approval that the University of Sydney had established a ‘special school in the social sciences’ which included compulsory units in philosophy and history (in the absence of sociology), but led ‘considerably more freedom’ in the choice of other subjects than was available to other arts students. Despite this, the University of Sydney seems to have been influenced by the Australian ècriture’ approach to social science training. The emphasis on the training of students in the social sciences would lead to the establishment of a new alignment: who outside the universities would support it? And how were students to be addressed as a part of this process?

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Perhaps it is not irrelevant to recall that even Newman's 'liberal' ideal of the university had little in common with his strict practice as a teacher, as moral and religious guardian of the youths committed to him at Oriel College.

Related to these pre-occupations was the concern to make a clear distinction between courses of study which were considered to be the 'pure' sciences. At A.C.D. River, Chairman of the University Board of Studies, while in the late 1940s, not only were the days of a free international exchange in science over, but a new generation of students were entering universities who neither knew nor cared that 'families' had been основан in the Division of Science Research, G.A. Gray, stressed the importance of coming to know this new generation of students as individuals to establish their needs; recognising which 'subject' is the backbone of the faculty, social and economic circumstances. All of this knowledge was essential to the development of a modern liberal education. It became a useful tool of the radical and professional men: someone possessing independence.

The 'stoic adolescent', another counsellor suggested, has really nothing to offer a task that he has found when he was the young worker, for he must be taught to establish his own discipline and escape the prejudices of his family.

An AVC conference on student education recommended the following year that the university must, like industry, rely on incentives for students to continue studies since such activities are desired. The academic recognition and acceptance by other human beings.

In 1964, at an AVC conference on student resistance - another characteristic of the Murray Report, "citizenship" was again stressed, and the question was posed for every academic: 'Has the miracle happened and is the community no longer required to graduate the aura of an "university education", but become an independent mature person?'

This aspiration was clearly a long way from the left-right citizenship between self, society, work and study: what was sought instead was a mass-person system where young people, not some of the "steer" of "student" staff rub off, at least on the 'intellectual elite' who were no longer the basic components of university teaching but a service to society.

In such commentary the liberal ideal seems to have mattered more as a strategy of 'assimilation' than the character of the pursuit of intellectual freedom. It was a strategy which sought awkwardly with other questions of education and teaching.

At that time, for example, two out of every five internal students studying at Australian universities were part-time. What might these practices and policies have meant to them. Systematic attendance was only gradually being given to teaching techniques, especially in the sciences, and teaching was never discussed in these forums, but those who emphasised the formation of character were not always those who had much to say about how this was to be achieved.

Not even to the needs of the students who noted that the problems evident in failure rates had little to do with the backgrounds of students prior to gaining university entrance, but they were often limited with inflexible attitudes to assessment procedures.

Clearly, much of this commentary fits neatly with the attitudes of the university, and with the vocational construction site: the adolescent in the process of adjustment to a "way of life." Even student magazines adopted the formula of "living in" to which the "urban lifestyle is by definition" an adolescent, the university must combat "food poisoning" with the tools of social formation.

That emphasis seemed to be in spite of the fact that a significant increase in enrolments over 25 years of age was under way on the modern campus, and of course, outside of the traditional student groupings.

Teaching, especially after the Murray Report, was gradually introduced to remedying these problems, although an AVC study of 1969 did not regard teaching as of major concern. In 1971, then, the AVC teaching, especially in so far as pass students were concerned.

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The personality market

Denise Merolzy

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In response to the government's White Paper, there have been a number of personality tests that have been marketed to the general public, which have actually been characterized by an insistence on absolute oppositions between culture and utility, or between liberal and vocational education. Few efforts have been made to identify the specific factors that are driving these trends. The conventional form of arguments claims that a vocational education is socially inviolable, since it alone is able to form social leaders in schools, in the community, and to shape the lifelong development of young people. The argument is supported by the traditional link between liberal education and a vocation of public leadership - lost in the long drift of the universities away from the community - and to call for the redevelopment of more general vocational goals for the humanities, whether in forming citizens, or in building 'humanity' within a broad workforce. Others, however, have been offended by even these broadly-stated vocational rationales, often regarding the student who is re-made in the vocational arena as only half-made as a scholar. According to such commentators, vocational outcomes bear only an indirect and incidental relation to higher forms of ethical and scholarly formation.

A training in English can make for improved writing of reports in the public sector or for more imaginative advertising copy, just as a training in philosophy can produce better policy analysis in a politician or career handling of complex intelligence matters in a company. Whether these good things or not will depend on such matters as what is being advertised and who is being sold on for what purpose.

Despite efforts to produce more pragmatic rationales, current apologists for the humanities tend to repeat these circular claims and disclaimers. Aiming both to placate the public and to impress policy-makers, they stress the coexistence of liberal and vocational elements within humanistic teaching, pointing out that it is quite possible for the ethic of the scholarly pursuit of truth to coexist with vocationally conscious pedagogic goals. After all, it has been argued, the humanities produce the majority of personnel within the public sector, whether as teachers, public servants or administrators.

There is no teaching and learning in higher education that is shareable in principle or purpose... The vast majority of graduates in the humanities and social sciences enter administrative or middle-management positions: mainly in the public sector or specific professions such as teacher, welfare Officer or journalist... Training this large segment of the workforce has been the principal goal of the humanities and social sciences for decades. If the humanities and social sciences did not have this instrumental role, they would not receive much support. If the production of knowledge (research and scholarship) to the humanities and social sciences did not occur within those particular instrumental content, it would not receive much support.

However, this success has been weakened by the inclusion of more global claims to the existence of a unique and traditional link between the humanities and the vocation of public administration. Such claims are immediately undermined by evidence of reduced government spending on the public sector, and by indications that graduates in Business Studies and Economics are increasingly threatened by 'McJobs'. This encourages more open oppositions, in which current policies within public sector are viewed as requiring a 'humanistic' education for humanists-trained personnel, in which the vocational arenas adjacent to the Arts Faculty are depicted as rights by an inner tension between liberal values and principles of 'technicism'.

One corrective to such tendencies is an emphasis on the diversity of vocational outcomes from the Arts Faculty - a diversity which corresponds to the varied and personal needs of humanistic teaching regimes and the variety of attributes formed within them. Although both the public and the private sector make use of the expertise and ethical abilities developed in the humanities, these connections are by no means equate with a traditional and privileged link between the Arts faculty and the vocational service. There are in fact significant disparities between the regimes of humanistic pedagogy and the kinds of norms used in graduate recruitment.

It is not hard to find testicles to the marketability of 'personality' and to the vocational value of humanistic education. Most surveys of employer expectations of graduate recruits indicate a preference for a range of capacities which include 'personal' skills of written communication, logical thinking, ability to work with others and problem-solving, as well as emphasis on elements of character, decision-making, personal initiative, tenacity, enthusiasm, leadership and the ability to adapt, alongside numeracy, or 'understanding of business and work'. In elaborate norms provided for the in-service assessment of skill levels and performance, such major employers as HPH define 'interpersonal', 'personal' and 'people management' skills as half of their six-part catalogue of basic skill categories, equally weighed with technical, functional, business administrative and problem-solving facility. The personal capacities listed include 'breadth of vision', 'judgement', 'learning and maintaining trust', 'self-sufficiency', 'willingness to accept responsibility for one's own actions', and 'evaluating and improving one's own performance'.

Given that most humanities disciplines incorporate self-formative exercises aimed at cultivating personal attributes of sensibility, reactivity, as well as the specific capacities for problem-solving, group work and verbal and written rhetorical skills), it is not difficult to argue that Arts graduates are likely to have developed these vocationally desirable capacities. Indeed, this is a long-standing rationale for employing generalist graduates, used by employers in both the private and the public sectors.

University can take a person of intelligence, teach him or her skills, broaden his or her outlook and send him out as a marketable commodity in his discipline, or for that matter, even if his particular subjects have not set direct returns. Employers, the Commission on Human Capital, and the Next Generation all agree that the particular subjects are of marginal value, because intelligence, a broad education and the ability to think independently and communicate effectively are, in themselves, highly marketable.

Although such observations may seem very modest in comparison with more ambitious claims for the cultural mission of the