

Collegiality to replace managerialism

COVID-19 has dominated 2020 and continues to shape 2021. Professor Raina MacIntyre (University of New South Wales) provided a highly informative overview of the pandemic at USAP's Annual Dinner on 5 November 2020. The dinner was a Zoom hybrid and this format will be continued in future.

Zoom has become the meeting standard also for USAP Council which was very busy over the past year not only preparing and hosting the first annual conference of the Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP) on 19 February 2021 ([1](#)), which was a resounding success, but also addressing major problems affecting the University sector, including our University. These include:

- Managerialism
- Bullying and harassment of academics
- Lack of consultation with academics
- Undermining of smaller disciplines

In this context, a number of injustices were brought to the attention of USAP Council. USAP has responded to these reports by creating a number of working groups. You can find contact details and the Terms of Reference for the following four standing committees on the USAP website ([2](#)). These working groups are:

The *USAP Committee on Emerita/Emeritus Appointments* has become active in response to several reports on unfair treatment of applicants for emeritus/emmerita positions and a letter has already been sent to the new Vice-Chancellor with a request to reinstate a scrupulously fair University-wide system which has worked well in the past.

The *USAP Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Development* will review the existing processes in use for academic development across the University as well as their possible abuses. There have been a number of reports on abuse allegedly happening particularly in one Faculty.

The *Disciplinary Integrity and Diversity Committee* of USAP has taken on the difficult task of finding an answer to the question of how to best enable the necessary protections for disciplinary integrity and

excellence. In order to explain the thinking behind this further, innovation and problem-solving are key to a society's survival and prosperity and the lifeblood of a university. There are not many ways to plan useful innovation, but one is to put specialists - in science ideally together with their specialist tools - in contact and to encourage them to interact with each other. Academic departments are places where this has proven to work very well. The same applies to the humanities. What is more, only looking at departments based on their student numbers results in threats of closure to smaller departments, which undermines the rich academic offerings of the University of Sydney and reduces its diversity and value for Society. This is of significant concern with the proposed restructure of FASS. It follows that too much organizational centralization and the running of a university as a business stands in the way of academic excellence. It is at the interface between disciplines where novelty most regularly materializes. In other words, bigger is not necessarily better and some mistakes made during restructurings in the past need to be corrected.

The USAP *Integrity Committee* is organizing an initiative to establish an independent integrity commission in line with what other leading academic institutions have already done.

Furthermore, the following point may be worth considering as it concerns a recently introduced new University value. This summary was taken from (3): "The University of Cambridge has voted against introducing a guideline that would have required students and staff to be 'respectful' of other people's opinion, favoring 'tolerance' instead. The 7,000 members of Regent House, the University's governing body, were asked to vote on changes to how free speech is upheld at Cambridge. About a third of them did - and of those, 87 per cent favored the amendment that calls for 'tolerance'. There had been concern that demanding respect implied approval, even of views that were patently false." This move by the members of Regent House appears wise, especially when considering that respect cannot be prescribed but has to be earned. When respect is demanded, or when the term is weaponized as not uncommonly done by individuals with weak natural authority, such abuse damages credibility, especially in a university environment. Thus, the University of Sydney could also vote on whether "tolerance" may be preferable over "respect" as an official University value.

Current newspaper reports on the appointment of our new Vice-Chancellor have referred to the University of Sydney as a "snake pit". A "snake pit" is a scene of vicious behavior that lacks the most important ingredient of academic life: collegiality. Collegiality requires trust which in turn requires integrity. Any accountant knows that figures and numerical assessments are completely meaningless if there is no integrity of standards. That is why managerialism (4) undermines the Pillars of a

University (5). Therefore, removing existing "snake pit" elements from the University is of paramount importance and urgent and the Vice-Chancellor will have USAP's unwavering support with this.

The problems the Australian University system and thus our democracy (6) is facing are very serious. Some were addressed at the first annual conference of the Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP). This organization in which USAP has a major stake keeps growing and now has more than 720 members nationwide.

Our professoriate can learn from this: Managerialism can only be defeated by the organized power of collegiality. Numbers matter! Therefore, do consider joining USAP (7). This is a critical time.

Our University has a new Vice-Chancellor, Mark Scott AO. We warmly welcome him. This is an opportunity to turn the page after the last decade. We wish to work closely with him to meet the challenges and problems that have arisen over the years and recently through COVID-19.

3 August 2021

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Manuel B. Graeber

USAP President

On behalf of USAP Council

Meet colleagues informally in the virtual staff club which is open 24/7, arrange your own time (8)
(password: Professoriate)

References

- 1) <http://www.professoriate.org/first-annual-conference-2021/>
- 2) <https://usap.sydney.edu.au/standing-committees/>
- 3) <https://www.cambridgeindependent.co.uk/news/University-of-cambridge-free-speech-vote-tolerance-wins-over-respect-9144582/>
- 4) <https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/07/28/academia-the-organization-insanity-of-the-modern-University/>
- 5) <http://www.professoriate.org/2020/03/21/statement-on-academic-freedom-the-pillars-of-a-university-what-a-university-should-be/>
- 6) <https://campusmorningmail.com.au/news/democratic-societies-depend-on-University-autonomy/>
- 7) https://sydney.onestopsecure.com/onestopweb/V9P/tran?UDS_ACTION=DEFAULT&UDS_ACTION_DATA=1334
- 8) <https://gather.town/app/CrhPPujvutfjl6YD/USyd%20Staff%20Club>