Chapter Nine: Envisioning Change: Quality and Creative Arts in Australian Universities

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Abstract

One of the recent growth areas in universities is the creative arts, now taught from undergraduate to doctoral level in institutions across Australia and globally. Its relative youth as a discipline means we can track the changes in its form, mode and identity over its university life.

In this chapter we focus on the arts as a microcosm of the tertiary education sector's investment in creativity. Creativity is, of course, not just about artistic vision, but is central to success in a wide range of endeavours. Higher education is one of the key potential generators of creative skills but, although most universities list creativity as a graduate attribute, the sector remains largely unexamined with regard to how, and how well, it develops and enhances the creativity of its graduates.

Recently a number of criticisms—from the public, the media and formal audit bodies such as the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA)—have been levelled at universities, and at their creative arts programs. We have been challenged to show that we do in fact adequately prepare our students for their futures after graduation. How we respond to such challenges will affect the sustainability and growth of the university sector. Analyses of creative programs—their recent past and their likely future—can provide insights into the issues of quality and creativity: how it is measured and evaluated, how students can be more effectively trained and for what we are training them. We outline the shape and health of these Australian university programs and, drawing on research we have undertaken locally and internationally, posit some mechanisms for a changed and refined approach, across the university sector, in the future.

Introduction: Creative Art in Australian Universities

One of the recent growth areas in Australian universities is found in the creative arts, a sector including visual art, craft, design, creative writing, the performing arts, film and television production, and music. These disciplines are taught from undergraduate to doctoral level in higher education institutions across the country. In 2000, some four per cent of all university course enrolments were in the various creative disciplines (Australia Council for the Arts, 2003, p. 5), and the numbers of programs offering training in these fields has grown rapidly since the 1970s. This rise in both programs and students mirrors a broader growth in creative arts programs offered at tertiary education level in the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Europe. Nor is this changing pattern of higher education a purely Western phenomenon; across the Pacific, universities have established schools and centres for creative practice. There are emergent programs in creative writing and visual art in Hong Kong universities; and across Asia, various art practices have a home in tertiary institutions.

This move has initiated some significant changes in the structure and focus of teaching and in thinking about what creativity means in the university context, whether and how it can be taught, and what is required of leadership in the creative disciplines.[1] But while it seems comparatively new in the Australian context, there is in fact a long history shared by the fields of artistic and scholastic practice, a history that dates, in Europe, from the earliest stages of university organisation, prior to the specialisation of disciplines and the consequent separation of art, science and philosophy. In medieval times, research carried out in monasteries (the proto-universities) was often expressed in the form of works of visual or performance art: illuminated manuscripts, paintings and musical performances, for instance (Webber, 1994, p. 17). Artists continued to have a home in universities over the centuries that followed, a tradition maintained in Australian higher education institutions. In the mid-19th century the official discourse around Australian universities was marked by an attempt to balance the often competing imperatives of instilling in the elite those "moral" and liberal values that would afford them the distinction deemed appropriate to their social position and training graduates for commerce and the professions—so badly needed then in Australia. It seems likely that the decision of the universities of both Melbourne and Adelaide to fund Chairs of Music in the 1880s[2] was an outcome of the former imperative, while the University of Sydney's decision at the same period to award law and medical degrees was an

1 In this chapter, where we write "art" or "creative practice", we include the various disciplines: instrumental music and singing, composition and conducting, painting and drawing, sculpture and printmaking, dance and choreography, poetry and fiction, travel and memoir writing … and so on.

2 Reported by Dennis Strand (1998, p. 14)

outcome of the latter.[3] It is important to note, though, that there is little evidence that early Australian universities took seriously the idea that creative practice, or creativity more broadly, might contribute to knowledge as an academic discipline. In the United States of America, by comparison, creative writing was taught at Harvard University from the mid-1880s, not as a vocational approach to education, but "for the sake of cultivation" (Myers, 1996, p. 47)—that is, obeying the moral imperative attached to higher education.

In Australia, apart from the support offered to music, creative practice was not considered an authorised scholarly practice with its own language, epistemology, pedagogy and research paradigms. Creative products were certainly considered valid objects of study, and an educated person would certainly manifest taste and distinction, but creative practice lacked the legitimating frameworks that would establish it as a discipline in its own right. English literature and art history were therefore acknowledged as valid fields of intellectual enquiry, while creative writing and visual art were considered craft-based skills better learned through practical, studio-based or apprenticeship systems. Where creative practice was incorporated into university programs, it was treated as decoration, as offering a "civilising influence" (Gibson, 2001, p. 36) or, in a reminder of the medieval approach, as a way of expressing knowledge generated through other scholarly means. And certainly it was a poor cousin compared with the liberal arts or sciences, left out of the mainstream curriculum. For the most part, creative art forms were taught in extra-university institutions such as the conservatoria of music, art schools, Technical and Further Education colleges or teacher training institutions. In the 1950s, the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA) was established in Sydney to train performing artists, and in the 1970s a number of Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) developed art training courses, building craft-oriented knowledge, pedagogies and scholarship in such areas as visual art, creative writing and performance art.

It was not until the Australian Unified National System brought the CAEs into the university network that the changing identity of the creative arts took hold, and they found a home in the academy. In the 20 years since the Dawkins reforms, along with other changes such as a greater professionalism and managerialism in universities, the creative arts have burgeoned. Overall enrolments in creative arts-related courses in Australia have increased rapidly: by 39 per cent overall between 1994 and 2000 (Australia Council for the Arts, 2003, p. 12). This change was the spur to others, associated for instance with the development of pedagogies relevant to the creative arts, and with increasing interest in creativity as an academic value.

3 The University of Sydney established its medical school in 1883, and the Faculty of Law in1890 (Barff, 1902 as cited by North, 2005, p. 42); and both Sydney and Melbourne established Chairs in Literature in the 1880s.

Creative Changes

The changing status of higher education in Australia brought about by the move to a national system, and the transplanting of creative courses into universities, suggest a need for attention to be paid to the changed identity of the creative arts in those institutions. Despite the increased presence of creative arts in universities, there is little evidence of a broadly based change in how such courses are perceived within the academy. Creative arts courses are popular among students, and enjoy high and sustained demand for places, but are frequently viewed, in the academy as less "serious" or intellectual than the more established discipline areas. Studio-based visual art and music are often sequestered in spaces outside the main business of the campus. Production courses such as creative writing, film and theatre tend to be regarded in humanities departments as "cash cows", but not as "real" areas of study: an opportunity for students to be self-indulgent,[4] and to engage in self-expression rather than critical analysis. In short, the creative arts are still, in many instances, viewed as being focused on the technical/craft domain rather than being genuine areas of scholarship, and as avocational rather than professional.

But alongside this backhanded acceptance of creative programs, the term and concept of creativity have been taken up enthusiastically by university administrators, government and industry. This, we suspect, is associated with the more general interest in the economic value of creativity asserted by writers such as Richard Florida (2002).[5] Governments and university administrators are not alone in their interest in the concept: "creativity" is used with enthusiasm in areas such as psychoanalysis, science, business and economics, and information and communication technology. Policy researchers point out the importance of creative thinking and creative products in organising society, and in building national culture and cultural identity. Educational researchers pay attention to creativity and the arts as a way of establishing better mechanisms for teaching children and preparing them for contemporary society. The term is also central to research discourse: the Australian Research Council, for instance, names as one of its four Designated National Research Priorities, "research with a focus on developing and fostering human talent, societal and cultural values favourable to creativity and innovation, and structures and processes for encouraging and managing innovation" (Australian Research Council, 2007).

4 Both students and staff in several universities have told us, for instance, that theatre performance and creative writing are 'bludge' courses, a break from the 'real' world of analytical essays or convoluted theories in 'real' disciplines like literary or communication studies. This (pejorative) perspective has emerged in studies at undergraduate, postgraduate and supervisory levels.

5 The books on creativity by Florida, an economist and urban studies theorist, are widely read; see, for instance, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), *Cities and the Creative Class* (2005), and The Flight of the Creative Class (2005). His interest in creativity is largely as a means for economic development, rather than aesthetic—or self-expression, research or critique.

What such policy documents and research reports mean by creativity is, however, rarely defined. Like terms such as "excellence', "quality" and "creativity" are often used in an unqualified or commonsense manner. In general, though, we can sum up its meaning as conveying one of the following—that creativity is: "impossible to define in words"; "what artists do"; "more innovative ways to generate economic production"; "the ability to see the world differently"; and "the ability to combine familiar ideas in unfamiliar ways." Few of the widespread definitions gesture towards the aesthetic logic of creativity; it is rare also to find a reliance, in contemporary official parlance or indeed in art discourse, on the old Romantic view of creativity as divine inspiration or individual genius. But parallel notions such as "novelty", "innovation", "better ways of doing things" and "high level thinking" are certainly current.

For the purposes of this discussion, we characterise creativity in two ways. The first is the definition in widespread use in the field of creative production, which takes account of the thinking and material processes that result in works of art (see for example Carter, 2004). The other, which is in more widespread use across society and its various fields, is creativity as an attribute of thinking and acting based on skills of perception, conceptual thinking and self-reflexivity. It is, in Margaret Boden's terms, "the ability to come up with ideas or artefacts that are new, surprising and valuable" (2004, p. 1), whether this comes from making novel associations, exploring a field of practice or conceptual space, or transforming that field or space. Such a definition includes the application of creative capacity and expert (or technical) knowledge, along with the ability to focus on an idea and develop its innovative potential.

All these ways of thinking are useful approaches to the concept of creativity; all have valence; and all recognise that creativity is not just about artistic vision. It is not a special gift, but an aspect of human intelligence all people possess in varying degrees. In other words, creativity is intimately invested in all intellectual practices, and is—or should be—deeply invested in the academic field. This is a very useful point from which the creative arts disciplines can make claims to their right to a place in the university. Generally speaking, though, these disciplines have not taken leadership in this area. Instead, the right to define what creativity means has been claimed by governmental and policy discourses, which reduce creativity to the sort of position taken by Florida (2002): that the point of creativity is utilitarian, and its value lies in its capacity to generate innovation and success in socio-economic endeavours. This is very evident in documents produced by the Australian government. For instance, the 1994 Creative nation policy—which was according to David Throsby "an exceptionally forward-looking document,

anticipating several lines of cultural policy development" (2003, p. 55)—was ostensibly directed at the field of art, but was in fact based on the nexus between creativity and economic growth.

The reduction of creativity to economic outcomes is not a good move for arts practice, which famously is concerned with *l'art pour l'art* rather than with cash. Nor is it a good move for art as creative industry, given the fact that arts practice rarely follows a precise and methodical— business-like—trajectory. This is evident in the pedagogical approaches to the field: compared with most other academic disciplines, the teaching of art works according to the principle of backward design. When teaching, say, history or literature, the university takes a group of students who know very little and introduces them to a field where a great deal is known. Facts, arguments, methodologies and discourses are well established and widely verified. Students come to know the known in the process of their training, and to produce work that fits the established paradigms—that adds to disciplinary knowledge but, in the process, confirms the logic of the field.

With creative practice, however, a different approach is employed. Though the field is well researched and the facts of particular movements, practices and practitioners established, each student is a new and unknown quality. And it is the students themselves, with their particular tendencies, interests and tastes—in Bourdieu's terms, their habitus—as well as their physical capacities, that determine what work they will make. Creative arts are not alone in this: Michael Polanyi writes, for instance, that research scientists are able to practise their "art" because their whole body, using "the trained delicacy of eye, ear and touch", is put to work to test scientific knowledge against observed events (Polayni & Prosch, 1975, p. 31). Doctors and scientists rely on their eyes (and ears, and senses of smell and touch) at least as much as on conscious reason, much as many artists do.

The usual approach in the creative arts is to teach "backward", as it were, sending students off to make work before providing lectures in theory, historical context or techne.[6] As Wiggins and McTighe write, "One starts with the end—the desired results (goals or standards)—and then derives the curriculum from the evidence of learning (performances) called for by the standard and the teaching needed to equip students to perform" (2001, p. 8). In this process, the students themselves find out what it is they do not know and therefore what they want and need to know. They move from the known (their sense of self, their understanding of the field) to the unknown (their own way of seeing, their own sense of value, their own competition for a place in the field) and forward again into new knowledge/s.

6 Techne, usually translated as craft or art, is the method involved in making an object, or attaining a goal. It is also a mode of knowing, one that has a practical, rather than a philosophical, engagement with knowledge.

But while such an educational process provides a rich environment for artistic training and production, it is not readily integrated into the managerial frameworks that now drive university organisation, and nor does it serve the economic face of creativity. This means that while those of us working within creative programs can produce data that demonstrates our contribution to the university (student load, community engagement, research outputs), because of the perceived "messiness" of our teaching (and research) practice this does not necessarily place us in a strong position when it comes to arguing how such programs might serve a university's strategic and operational plans, how they can position a university to compete for students and for cultural capital, how they might deliver educational and research outcomes, and how they can prepare students for the professional world in which they will find their careers. We remain, in other words, the poor cousin. In 1998 Dennis Strand noted that:

> The creative arts are at the forefront of universities' community service activities, although there is often not proper recognition of the financial cost to the creative arts schools of presenting these activities, nor are there formal mechanisms for acknowledging the contribution of academic staff to them. (1998, p. xiv)

We suggest that the situation has not changed considerably since then.

The New Creative Academy

Although the increased attention paid to creativity provides academics in the creative art fields with a point of entrée, creative art forms are still, for the most part, in the same sort of position they occupied in medieval institutions, where art served to decorate "real" scholarship rather than being seen as a mode of scholarship in itself. This is particularly evident in the research field where the formal reporting of creative research outputs—the J categories—had a very short life.[7] Not until 2006 and preparations for the former Research Quality Framework[8]—and in response to active lobbying—did the government agree to include creative works again in

7 Under the Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC) that partly determines individual universities' government funding, the categories of research outputs carry weightings that establish their value. Category J, 'other creative works', allowed outputs such as fictional prose, performances, and exhibitions of visual arts to be reported as the products of research in 1994 and 1995. While this was a significant point in the history of art/academic relations because it indicated recognition by the research/education gatekeepers, the weightings were regarded by the art sector as arbitrary and insufficient; and besides, the recognition was short-lived: in 1996 Category J was eliminated from HERDC.

8 The Research Quality Framework, was designed to assess the quality and impact of public research undertaken in Australia. Following the change of Australian government in late 2007, its implementation was halted and, at the time of writing, a new approach to research evaluation is being developed.

the evaluation of research effort. Meanwhile, academics and university managers generally welcome undergraduate students into creative programs, but creative arts postgraduates and academics regularly complain that they feel marginalised within universities, and have been told by colleagues that they are not "real" academics, and are not doing "real" research (see North, 2005; Sved, 2005[9]). The creative arts might therefore be embedded in universities, but they are not well integrated. This is not necessarily a problem, except insofar as university management and colleagues in the other humanities disciplines often find it difficult to articulate what we do in the creative arts, and how we evaluate and measure what we do. And this is potentially a significant problem, in a period marked by increasing student numbers, and the increasing pattern of tying university funding not to the (traditional) idealist or utilitarian views of higher education but instead to the hard economic rationalist mechanisms of performance measurement and evaluation.

A second approach for academics working in creative disciplines is to eschew the temptation to complain about lack of respect and understanding, and refuse to crow about our student numbers, and instead to find a way to balance the imperatives of heteronomous management and autonomous art. In this, creative arts academics have come slowly, it seems, to a recognition of the need to change their performance from being primarily "artists" to being also pedagogical experts and administrative and teaching leaders. The Strand Report (Strand, 1998) was a seminal publication on the presence and impact of creative practice within mainstream universities but since then, and despite the many "how to teach [writing/painting/music/performance]" books, there has been little research into, or analysis of, the teaching of creative practice as an intellectual, scholarly and aesthetic field of practice.

Nor have the learning and teaching centres in universities, which aim to support academic staff in their endeavours, contributed particularly well to clarifying how a creative arts practice is taught or learned. Most research into pedagogy fails to look far beyond the dominant paradigms or to understand the back-to-front nature of creative teaching and the combined technical/aesthetic demands of assessment. Nor is there much serious, or useful, research into what it means to teach creativity; or whether creativity can, in fact, be taught. Answers to this question remain largely individual and anecdotal despite the fact that most Australian universities list "creativity" among the generic skills gained by their graduates. The University of Canberra, for instance, is "committed to graduating creative professionals

9 Our research indicates that this is particularly an issue for creative writing and theatre production; this negative attitude is found in media stories about creative writing courses; reported informally to the authors; and recorded in public spaces: See for instance the Barbelith Underground blog (2006) at http://www.barbelith.com/topic/23806

who are capable of developing innovative solutions to problems facing society" (University of Canberra, 2002); the University of New England claims to graduate students who are "capable of applying logical, critical and creative thinking to a range of problems" (University of New England, 2006); and QUT "aims to develop graduates who are able to demonstrate … critical, creative and analytical thinking, and effective problem-solving" (Queensland University of Technology, 2005).

In none of these statements does "creative" equate to "art"; and nor should it, necessarily. "Creative" is a descriptor for a very wide range of human endeavour, and is fundamental to cognitive function. Our concern is that "creative" is now as, or more, likely to equate to "efficient". The slipperiness of meaning, where creativity equals both art and efficiency, is perhaps behind some of the problems faced by the creative arts in the academy. Those in the creative disciplines do not own the meaning or use of the term but, because it is integral to our name and identity, our practice is coloured by the meanings the term takes in various contexts and the expectations that are established—without any reference to the logic of arts practice— which academics teaching the creative disciplines are expected to meet. Without clarity of meaning, and without the capacity to delimit the use and meaning of the term, it is not possible to establish a useful vocabulary to engage in teaching and teaching leadership in the creative disciplines. When we market our programs as training students in creativity, for instance, are we understood to be using the term in its business sense—describing ways of enhancing the economic status of universities and the vocational futures of graduates? Or are we understood to be taking the Enlightenment notion of artistic production, and using the term to describe how we teach students to make the beautiful and the sublime—along with all the related epistemological, ontological and axiological issues? Perhaps many of us attempt to achieve both outcomes: financial and aesthetic, professional and expressive. We suggest that both meanings of creativity are important. But if this is so the differences between these meanings should not be occluded. It is thus the responsibility of leaders in university creative arts programs to provide both clarity and direction for the benefit of university management, students and public understandings of our work and our functions.

Whether those in the creative disciplines find ways to take leadership and manage the expression of our practice (teaching, research and arts practice) probably has very little effect on students' experience of these courses. After all, however, we name or define creativity, students in creative arts programs will learn something of the history of the field, a group of techniques, an understanding of how to operate as a practitioner and the capacity for critical reflection on their own work. But lack of clarity about what we do, how we do it and how we evaluate outcomes becomes a problem when it leads to

the appearance of a failure to achieve goals. For instance, if completion of a creative degree is marketed—or implicitly understood—as the gateway to a career as an artist, and most graduates from a program are not, a decade later, successfully practicing artists, then the program can be seen as having failed to deliver its promise. If graduates have become practicing artists, but are making a living by such means as teaching, driving taxis or working in the public service or the hospitality industry, the degree can again be seen as having failed to deliver professional (that is, economic) outcomes. If instead universities are transparent about the fact that a small percentage of graduates from creative programs will go on to practise as artists, and that only a tiny percentage of any practicing artists can earn a viable living from their practice (Throsby & Hollister, 2003), we will be in a better—a more realistic—position to establish what counts as success in creative arts education. Success will certainly include the quality of graduates' professional outputs but it may also include evidence of creative thinking, of ethical practice, of critical skills—the graduate attributes claimed by all Australian universities.

Of course, there is not a one size fits all approach to the teaching of creative arts or the logic behind that teaching. Some programs focus on training their students to produce work likely to find a commercial outlet; others focus on training their students to work as experimental artists more concerned with innovation than with provisioning current markets; while yet others focus on the philosophical or cognitive aspects of creative practice. Providing that students know the logic within which they are being trained, and are exposed to a range of possibilities and perspectives, perhaps the overarching thrust of the program is not particularly important. This is, of course, providing that students are trained in how to learn, how to research, how to experience and how to "play" with their particular form and/or genre of art. They must also learn how to analyse the field of practice for which they are being prepared, and be provided with a range of options for practice, research and dissemination, and the skills to deal critically, reflectively, practically and creatively with those possibilities.

Our concern for change in both the teaching and the leadership of creative arts programs is not therefore specifically with the logic of individual courses but with the need to be explicit about the drivers that shape them and analytical about the shape of this area of the field of higher education. What all such courses do, we suggest, is contribute to field specific knowledge. This means that creative art students become better consumers of creative products and better equipped to work in a range of creative arts related occupations than graduates trained only in, say, arts administration, business and management

or communication theory.[10] These courses also deliver broader graduate attributes, including creativity, communication skills, the capacity for lifelong learning and contribution to the community. If we take seriously the responsibility to produce graduates with these capacities, and establish valid performance indicators to be applied to the programs to establish the terms on which they should be evaluated, then it may be that the actual value of creative programs can be better articulated and demonstrated.

The next step is therefore to find a way to agree on those performance indicators and evaluative mechanisms. There are few if any accrediting bodies in the creative field and—despite the encouragement of the formal, and mandated, AUQA processes[11]—no regularised process of benchmarking among universities. This means, as a corollary, that there is a tendency among creative arts academics to shape courses based on how they themselves were taught or on their individual interests and tastes. This does not mean that many programs are not extremely well organised, or that individual academics do not arrange benchmarking, engage in national and international research into best practice or put on record the foundations of, and approaches to, teaching in a particular art form. But in the absence of a formal quality assurance process that allows close and critical evaluation of how, what and why we teach, and with what outcomes, creative arts programs, and the disciplines within them, are liable to remain disparate and idiosyncratic.

Case Study: Creative Writing

The discipline of creative writing provides a useful case study, as Australian university writing courses are a major site where creativity as a practice, a way of thinking and an intellectual field is being taught and researched. Creative writing has also long been important to Australians and to our governments. Reading and writing are valued practices, as evidenced in Australia's formal program of compulsory literacy and funding of public libraries since the 19th century, and as demonstrated by a number of research reports that show that reading is an enormously popular pursuit (AC Neilsen,

10 Graduates from theatre courses rarely find their careers in the theatre, but many are active audience members, on theatre boards or active in community theatre or work as managers, critics or arts event coordinators. Similarly, visual artists may work in museums or become collectors or dealers; writers may find work as editors, journalists or public servants; and so on, for the other creative disciplines. The point is not that few graduates go on to work precisely in their field of training (and this is not unusual; after all, few graduates from history become professional historians) but that they draw on their training in creative practice to establish themselves as professionals in allied or other fields.

11 AUQA, formally established by the Australian Government's Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs in March 2000, is an independent, not-for-profit national agency which aims to promote, audit and report upon quality assurance in Australian higher education (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2007).

2001; Saatchi & Saatchi, 2000). In 1998–1999, the total household spending by Australians on books was $1,155 million (Australia Council for the Arts, 2003, p. 30), and even those who do not read value the fact that there is a body of Australian stories in prose, poetry, film and television. Australian governments have traditionally supported creative writing, and continue to do so: from the institution of the Commonwealth Literary Fund (1908) and the Australia Council for the Arts (mid-1970s), to various initiatives offered up to the present, the Commonwealth Government has promoted literary culture. Its mechanisms include the regulation and protection of the publishing sector through legislation and policy that covers copyright, censorship, libraries and tariffs, inter alia. In the financial year 2000–2001 the Federal Government spent $22 million on the category "literature and the print media" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003, p. 12).

There are other good reasons for this investment: despite the low income earning potential of individual writers, as reported by Throsby and Hollister (2003), publishing contributed nearly $14,500 million to the value of Australian production in 1999-2000, an increase of some $2 million on the 1996-97 figures (Australia Council for the Arts, 2003, p. 34). Australian book publishers sold 126 million books in the financial year 1999–2000, a 13 per cent increase over sales in 1997–1998 (Australia Council for the Arts 2003, p. 23). Government reports show that in 2002-2003 the arts sector as a whole contributed $12.3 billion to gross domestic product and employed well over 800,000 people (300,000 as full-time workers). The government's involvement in the arts is therefore not just an act of benevolence: it includes the management of a sector that contributes to the national purse, to representations of what it means to be Australian and to the innovation economy.

Building on the above mentioned United States tradition of offering creative writing as a field of tertiary level study, but substantially different in its theoretical underpinnings and approach, the past decade has seen a rapid and unprecedented increase in the numbers of students studying creative writing in Australian higher education institutions. Although creative writing has been taught in these institutions since the early 1970s, it is in this past decade that courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels have been developed across the university sector (Dawson, 2005). From the period when creative writing was represented by a few units offered in Arts degrees, the discipline has grown to the stage where full courses in writing are offered across Australian institutions, and it is now an internationally recognised discipline**.**

Many commentators have noted that the creative writing discipline is in a period of significant growth, both in Australia (Dawson, 2005) and internationally. Marjorie Perloff, for instance, has pointed out that the number

of creative writing Bachelors and Masters degrees in the United States of America has quadrupled in the past 20 years (2006, p. 3). But impressions of Australian student numbers are anecdotal. There are no good data to indicate exactly how many students are enrolled in Australian creative writing courses and/or units because these figures are usually incorporated into the number of students enrolled in Arts, Communication or other degrees. However, some 35 Australian universities currently teach creative writing, and over 20 offer doctoral level degrees in the discipline (Australian Association Writing Programs, 2005). Creative writing is also included in undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in units and courses that are not named as such, such as Bachelor degrees in Fine Arts, double degrees (with Journalism, Cultural Studies, English/Literary Studies and Law), general Arts degrees with a writing major, Honours and coursework postgraduate qualifications, and various research degrees, including Masters of Creative Writing, Masters of Fine Arts (Writing), Doctorates in Creative Arts and Doctorates in Philosophy.

Australian creative writing programs are obviously popular, as the growth from a mere scattering of offerings in the 1970s to an established discipline in the 2000s demonstrates. More anecdotal evidence suggests that they are also successful, with universities now able to boast nationally and internationally recognised writers among their writing graduates. A survey of novels by first time authors published in Australia in the last decade reveals numerous links to Australia's higher education creative writing programs (for recent evidence, see Australian Association of Writing Programs, 2007). Moreover, creative writing course graduates are winning and/or making the shortlists for many of Australia's most prestigious literary awards. Such publishing success is not, though, the necessary goal of students who enrol in creative writing courses, as Tony Birch, a lecturer in writing at the University of Melbourne, explained. Talking to interviewer Ramona Koval about why his students take his writing courses, Birch said**:**

> You'll get those who are doing, I suppose, science or sometimes even degrees in medicine who will clearly say that they are looking for something as a creative outlet. And others who, really, already after one semester are a bit jaded by what they'll call the 'academic essay', and I think they're looking for creative writing to give them some relief and probably see it as an easier option. (2005)

With this range of reasons for doing such courses, it is difficult to justify the notion that all graduates will expect to be successful writers or even that they should be capable of writing the Great Australian Novel or the new award winning manuscript. Yet this is a criticism often sheeted home to creative writing programs. Contemporaneous with the enormous increase in the numbers of students studying creative writing in universities around the world, and the number of courses and the range of levels at which it is taught,

has been a plethora of misinformation, criticism and complaint. Critics of creative writing programs in Australia, Britain and (to a lesser extent) the United States of America have made highly negative assertions about the function, role and value of university training for creative writers. The main complaints offered are that universities do not train their students to produce publishable work, or fit them for careers: that is, the programs satisfy neither the aesthetic nor the economic aspects of creativity. These criticisms come from publishers and from the community of professional writers in Australia and overseas: Peter Pierce (2003), Helen Garner (as cited in Moran, 2003), Frank Moorhouse (2004) and others have emerged in print to complain about the bastardisation of their art form by universities, which are "flooding the country" with inadequate or uncommitted writers. A recent representative criticism by Robert Morrison (2006) posits that creative writing courses are "infesting the business of publishing" and producing an "unsolicited deluge" of "trash."

Nor is all this criticism coming from outside creative writing programs: a number of postgraduate degree candidates, as well as academics in the field, have expressed doubts about the value of such courses in preparing graduates for either the writer's life or the academy (see for example Ritter, 2001, p. 210). Many of these commentators insist that the best training for writers is to "get out in the real world." Those who study in tertiary institutions are often considered to be stifling their talent, vision and voice or to be taking an "easy road" to writing. This is despite the fact that many internationally recognised writers such as British Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, novelist Tracey Chevalier (*Girl with a Pearl Earring*) and Booker Prize winners Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro, are graduates of creative writing programs; and despite the fact that many writing students do not see themselves as the future published authors of Australia.

More than a decade ago, McKenzie Wark summarised what has become an enduring ambivalence to teaching the creative arts in universities: "Some critics seem to think that the connection with universities will be the death of good writing. Others think it's the cure" (1994, p. 34). Without good data, nationally agreed performance indicators and a resourced quality assurance system, it is difficult to say whether the connection between writing and universities is the death of or the cure for good writing. It is also not possible to determine what counts as best practice in teaching creative writing without these data and indicators or without a well established benchmark from which to begin the progress of evaluation. This is not to say that the matter has not had a great deal of attention. For the past decade, and principally through the Australian Association of Writing Programs' annual conference and its internationally recognised peer-refereed journal TEXT, teachers and postgraduate students of creative writing in Australian universities have

discussed and debated issues of course content (Webb, 2000), consistency (Costello, 2005), generic attributes (Brien, 2006a; Brien & Neilsen, 2001), supervisory and examination practices (Dibble & von Loon, 2004) and standards (Krauth, 2001), and the employability of graduates from the discipline (Brien, 2005). These discussions have focused on defining the nature of the discipline and its aims, exploring its potential and its outcomes (Edmonds, 2004; Webb, 1997), and addressing central questions such as "Can writing/creativity be taught?" (Brophy, 1998, 2003), "What is the nature of research in creative arts such as writing?" (Kroll, 2002; North, 2005; Webb, 2004) and "How can we best service the professional aspirations of our postgraduate students?" (Brien, 2005; Kroll & Brien, 2006). This has been, without doubt, a stimulating and productive period for those within the discipline. However, it is now necessary for the discipline to look to formal quality assurance processes to bring this significant but disparate work together.

Some Conclusions

While a discipline should not necessary react to every criticism directed to it, the creative arts disciplines have become highly visible components of higher education and, although relatively low cost areas of study, do absorb public and other resources and therefore have a responsibility to produce graduates with skills of value to the nation and its economy, as well as of use in graduates' future lives. In 2002, in relation to creative writing, Jeri Kroll (then President of the Australian Association of Writing Programs) noted:

> The disastrous state of affairs as far as accreditation of creative writing is concerned will only be exacerbated as technology encourages innovation and interdisciplinary work and collaboration increases. If we do not take control of the situation we will continue to find our efforts disregarded. We cannot simply insist, however, that we are the experts and we know best. (2002)

Despite this call, and later ones within the discipline (Brien, 2006b), there has been no national audit of programs and no formal benchmarking with international equivalents to determine the quality of local courses and their content, academic standards and student outcomes. Nor has there been any systematic evaluation of the relationship among students' inclination to engage creatively, the training they receive, and the transferability and sustainability of creative and other skills/attributes into their post-university lives and career destinations.

Now a change is in the wind, for creative writing and other creative arts disciplines. Until recently, Australian creative arts programs have had little more than anecdotal evidence or local studies to offer the many external and internal

quality assurance processes that all programs are beginning to face. This is, we suggest, not so much a failure of leadership as, on the one hand, a lack of recognition among many academics in creative practice of what is at stake in the new managerialism and, on the other hand, the failure of universities to collect systematic data about creative arts programs. But the combined effect of the AUQA process, the (now delayed) preparations for the former national Research Quality Framework survey that was to have been undertaken for the first time in 2008[12] and internal course group reviews have forced academics from the arts to take more seriously their role as administrative as well as creative leaders of programs and practice. The programs are beginning to collect data about student numbers, student experience, teaching methodologies, research practice and measures of quality and impact.

We believe that a stringent auditing and benchmarking process, one based on rigorous discussion about what creative art programs claim to offer and what they should offer, is a vital starting point for positive changes in the teaching of creative disciplines. Such a process ensure that Australian creative arts programs continue to contribute the most and the best they can to the national "pool" of creative capital; it would also provide a quality assurance process likely to generate rich data in the disciplines to answer queries and criticisms still being levelled at them. Developing the terms of reference for this audit process would necessitate the identification and mapping of key and essential disciplinary skills, attributes and knowledges taught, including: generic skills; entry requirements and pathways; degree content, structure and outputs; and supervision and examination requirements and guidelines. Benchmarking against international equivalents will facilitate the development of national standards; and assist in the development of best practice documentation to be utilised within the discipline and across the higher education sector with other creative arts disciplines. Importantly, it will help provide the foundations for an ongoing conversation between the creative arts and the universities more generally—a conversation between peers and not between the elite and the "poor cousins". For instance, such a process could illuminate the connections between the teaching and practice of the creative arts and the sciences, another highly creative set of disciplines within the academy. The development of clear pedagogical guidelines for the "back to front" teaching employed in most creative arts could be transplanted between the creative arts and medicine or botanical sciences, other disciplines where students are imbued with knowledges that depend on their own bodies and tendencies, not just on discipline-authorised discourses. Thus, creating a greater appreciation of what happens in creative arts programs, and a better articulated expression

12 Importantly, creative arts academics did not simply acquiesce to the government's determination about the shape and focus of the Research Quality Framework. Instead, they collated information and arguments, and presented a unified face to the government process, resulting in numerous changes to the Preferred Model.

of the strengths of creative arts pedagogies, which could enrich both sides of the academic field for the benefit of both staff and students.

Finally, we affirm the quality of leadership offered by creative arts academics in a period of significant and rapid change in Australian universities. This has not been without cost. An important price paid has been the loss of a "pure" and autonomous attitude towards creative practice, which has been so important to artists over the past few centuries. But a gain has been a more substantial ground from which to face university and government management, and a growing body of data susceptible to the sorts of analysis that will point to more changes, and a more rigorous future. An old joke in university circles holds that the battles in the academy are so fierce because the stakes are so low. The past three decades have certainly been a time of some fairly savage battles, but we would like to suggest that the stakes have been comparatively high. Mobilising both leadership for, and approaches to, teaching creative disciplines, and engaging with the challenges of change, remains at the heart of what we do as creative practitioners, teachers, scholars and researchers in the creative arts.

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