

Academics Never Retire Part 1

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“Gentlemen, we will just have to spend our time thinking”

- attributed to Lord Rutherford when reporting to his team at the Cavendish that all funds for equipment had been cut.

“During the next 40 years, the over-65s in the population would go from representing one in six people to one in four and those over 85 from one in 200 to one in 20...the younger senior generation is the healthiest, best educated and best resourced to ever stop full time work”

- Julia Gillard, Prime Minister of Australia, *Australian Financial Review* 5 August 2011

Fortunately for the ANU, in 2000 a small group of retiring academics organised themselves in a way that would become very relevant in the Australian demographic which would unfold ten years later. This is their story. There is a lesson in the story which needs to be considered by the higher education sector.

This paper explores the contributions made by retired academics to teaching, learning and community service¹. Later we present a case study of the Emeritus Faculty at ANU illustrating the post-retirement activities of some 180 members. Finally we will outline how the Faculty is managed and speculate about some of its oddities.

First, however, we provide a context of increasing intervention by government and of consequent changes in the work of academics which helps explain the new opportunities for retirees. In particular we draw on a survey to show how government policies for funding and regulating universities have changed academic work roles including their teaching and research and contributed to the declining intellectual standards of degrees. And furthermore these changes are influencing academics' decisions about when to leave and roles in retirement.

Increasing intervention by government

Teaching is the most important thing universities do. This has been the case since the origin of the modern university in medieval times, and it remains so today despite all the attention given to research and despite academics' preoccupation with keeping up publication rates. Universities are supported by their sponsors primarily because they teach.

Over the centuries universities have had to find the income to pay their teachers. Student fees have always been important, apart that is, from a brief period following World War 2 when governments in Europe and Australia, for reasons of equity and increased participation, ensured that tuition was either free or substantially subsidised. In earlier centuries the church and philanthropy also sponsored universities but, following the industrial revolution, as universities

became essential producers of human capital, governments became increasingly involved.

Then, during the crisis of World War 2 universities were for the first time ever regarded as instruments for national survival. In Australia engineering, science and medical faculties were regarded as reserved occupations and subject to 'manpower control': students received free tuition and handsome living allowances but were precluded from enlistment in the armed forces. Also universities received substantial funding for research related to the war effort. Following the war *ad hoc* funding of universities continued as part of the massive program of post-war reconstruction when participation trebled, and new institutions were established across Australia. Formula funding by the government was established in the 1950s. At first state and federal governments shared the costs of financing higher education; but in 1973 the Commonwealth assumed full responsibility for universities: a move that would have profound consequences for resources and for autonomy.

Initially there was little direct interference by government in the internal affairs of institutions. An implicit bargain was struck: in return for educating the graduates required by society the government left universities free to decide what and how to teach, to set the academic standards of degrees and to decide on topics for research and scholarship. An academic career structure awarded tenure to suitably qualified academics, usually after three or four years 'apprenticeship' as tutor or demonstrator. The student to staff ratio was generous – about 12 to 1, although the Murray report, the first to recommend a national system of funding, thought this figure was far too high. Within universities collegial governance by academics decided on curriculum, standards and the allocation of research funds.

All of this was too good to last and from the 1960s things began to change as the commonwealth government, now the sole sponsor, began to steer from a distance via statutory commission charged with recommending funding for the balanced development of the university system. In 1967 funds were clawed back from budgets and redistributed for the competitive funding of research via what is now the Australian Research Council. Concern for increased participation and equity remained and in 1973 university education was made free.

Demand for university education accelerated and, by the mid 1970s, student participation rates reached the point where one third of each age cohort enrolled causing the bill for higher education to become so large as to attract the attention of the federal finance minister who, in the 1980s, decided that students should shoulder a substantial proportion of the costs of their education via a clever scheme which used the taxation system to deduct students' tuition fees from their salaries as graduates. At the same time universities were expected to contribute to their own costs through entrepreneurial activities and by charging overseas students full fees for their tuition. Government contributions declined from near 100 percent to the point where the core grant now meets only about half of universities running costs.

At the same time government took a much closer interest in the way universities were managed and, with ideas copied from industry, instituted a series of quality assurance reviews. Despite the fact that universities were comprised of loose federations of diverse professional and discipline based faculties or schools each with its distinct cultures, standards and teaching requirements, the quality reviews focussed on the total institution. The exercises contributed little to the advancement of university standards and were eventually abandoned. They did however serve to strengthen university administrations which were required to assemble vast portfolios of information in advance of quality visitations. Government also changed the way universities were governed, requiring university councils to be constituted more like the boards of corporations.

Per capita funding declined but direct government intervention in university affairs increased. The Higher Education Council, a representative statutory body which had advised government on universities' needs was abolished. The government demanded statistics to the point that their compilation required full time administrative officers and substantial additions to the academic work load. Not satisfied with this government became entranced with measurement and devised questionnaires to measure students' evaluations of their courses and graduates' intellectual attainments. A postgraduate research experience questionnaire purported to measure the quality of research supervision. None of these expensive exercises has any proven relationship to the behaviours they are supposed to measure.

In the research area publications, citations and grants are counted and their use affects the life chances of individual staff, the reputations of institutions and the sorts of research questions that are chosen. Because career advancement depends on a steady output of publications the volume of research has increased at the expense of quality, research topics are chosen that are likely to lead to positive results in a short time; more difficult research questions are eschewed.

The ratio of students per staff member has increased to over 20 to 1. Face to face encounters between undergraduate and staff are rare; and student time on campus is reduced because most full-time students engage in substantial paid employment. Within universities academic tenure is harder to obtain; the use of casual staff for teaching has increased. Collegial governance has declined and important decisions on academic matters were increasingly made by professional managers.

Changing Work Roles

This transformation of collegial academies into competitive corporate institutions has profound implications for the central business of universities of teaching and learning; and for the intellectual standards of degrees. And the work roles of academic staff are changing. This process has been documented in a national survey of staff which reported on changes (over a period of 20 years) in their teaching, research and administration; and evaluated whether any changes were for the better or worse. [Anderson, Johnson and Saha]

The survey found that morale was not high – and, although there were some differences between fields of study and between institutions, these were less significant than attitudes across the entire sector. A majority in all universities claimed that they would not recommend an academic career to a bright young school leaver – this is in contrast to school teachers surveyed at about the same time where a majority said that they would recommend teaching as a career. Consistent with this is the 25 percent of academics who said they were considering early retirement.

A majority also believed that the intellectual standard required for pass degree examinations had declined. Reasons given for this included the lower standard now required for a university place, the increased use of casual staff for teaching and the declined resources. In some universities there was explicit reference to pressure from management to keep pass rates high, and in particular not to fail too many overseas students.

Most staff said that their teaching was less important to them than research; some regarded teaching as a chore to be avoided if possible. Behind these attitudes was the belief that good teaching was neither recognised nor rewarded, particularly when it came to promotion. Furthermore with escalating rates of participation, there were more students needing help on a one to one basis if they were to make the grade.

Both collegiality and collegial governance was reported to be on the decline. The former was regrettable but due to work pressures, particularly the relentless pressure to write grant applications, get the research done and write it up for publication. The decline of collegial governance was not a big issue for many; in fact it was a good thing to the extent that it allowed more time to get on with research.

There is as yet no systematic account of the research and teaching undertaken by retired academics hired as casuals, or by retired non-academics for that matter. The growth of the casual sector has attracted the attention of the NTEU which has commissioned studies of what is regarded as a problem with industrial implications as well as a problem of standards. Initially NTEU was opposed to the development of a casual teaching force. But with the growth of this sector – there are estimates that half of undergraduate teaching and examining is done by casuals – the union policy appears to be to improve the rights and conditions for casual workers, including some sort of tenure. This could be the beginning of a divide akin to the former division of higher education between Colleges of Advanced Education where the staff were paid to teach, and universities where they were paid to teach and research: except that now the binary divide would be within institutions, not between them.

Roles for Retirees

In this paper we are drawing attention to the potential for organisations like the ANU Emeritus Faculty to promote and enhance contributions by academic retirees to teaching and research.

ANU is the only university in Australia with an organisation of retired members (and there seem to be very few in the world). But there is no reason to think that the role of ANU retirees is much different to that of retirees in other universities.

The ANUEF is aware, however, of potential industrial problems and that such contributions should not diminish the employment opportunities of younger qualified academics. This applies to teaching rather than to research and scholarship. It is a matter that has been discussed informally and amicably with staff association representatives and at the present time no problems have occurred. Invitations to undertake occasional lectures or tutorials, assistance with supervision of graduate students, mentoring of new staff, or just being available for consultation are welcome activities. Running a workshop on thesis writing may perhaps be acceptable. But designing a new course or giving a series of lectures should be remunerated under standard conditions.

At most universities a Visiting Fellowship may be offered where a department, not necessarily the original department, wishes to recognise and retain the services of a retiring academic. At ANU the status of Visiting Fellow includes all/most of the rights and privileges (access to library, computing services etc., membership of committees, car parking, and insurance) of a regular academic except being paid. Fellows are required to submit reports annually on their work, and may apply for reappointment. The delicate question of renewal in the case of VFs who may no longer be contributing can be politely settled by reference to the need for accommodation by new staff.

Research activities by competent retirees are generally welcome contributions to a department's programme and to a university's tally of publications. Most retirees continue to research and publish in the field where they made reputations. A few, delighted to be free from the unrelenting pressure to publish escape to new occupations altogether. There is significant role change for the retired researcher who no longer feels the pressures to choose a topic likely to yield positive findings within finite time that can be reported in multiple papers and lead to further grants. In fact there is the opportunity to move into an entirely new field of scholarship.

A survey of ANU Emeritus Faculty members' contributions found [ref] that, since their retirements:

- half had undertaken research,
- 40 percent had contributed to teaching and supervision,
- 33 percent had tendered expert advice (mainly to government) and
- 30 percent had undertaken community services (eg U3A, welfare, lectures, and conservation)

The research and scholarly activities of members has been reported in approximately 800 publications including about 50 books – contributions that are not an unwelcome in annual departmental reports. These contributions came from across the academic spectrum in almost equal proportions from the sciences, social sciences including economics, and humanities. Many members reported that they enjoyed the freedom to choose research questions without

the pressure of getting annual publications. Some chose to work in entirely new fields: for example an experimental pathologist who investigated the origins of World War 1 or the theoretical physicist who investigated reports of ball lightning. These latter were among the subjects of the monthly lecture series sponsored by the Emeritus Faculty.

Other activities we couldn't quantify include editing, reviewing, and contributions to their disciplinary organisations.

I've looked at the disciplinary areas of 201 members for whom there was information. The spread is pretty even across the major fields. The detailed percent distribution is:

	% of Total
Agriculture	2
Physical Science	11
Biological Science	7
Geology, Geography	7
Medical science	6
Economics, Business	6
Social Science	17
Education (mainly Higher)	9
Humanities, Languages	13
History	17
The Arts and Theatre	6
Ecology, Environment, Climate Change	7
Law	3
Architecture, Planning	2

Notes and references will be added if the paper is published.

Academics Never Retire Part 2
By Giles Pickford BA (Hons) ATEMAF
Secretary, ANU Emeritus Faculty 2000-2012

The ANU Emeritus Faculty is still unique in Australia. There are clubs, such as the one at UNSW, whose memberships are limited to Emeritus Professors only, but we see ourselves as different from those organisations.

We believe that we have earned the title "Faculty" because of these characteristics:

- The Faculty is conducting one self-funded multi-disciplinary research project at the moment
- Many of our members are conducting their own research privately
- We are collecting the oral histories of the ANU
- We write the obituaries of the ANU greats

- We publish “E-Texts”, an archive of the works of members.
- We have been involved in teaching honours students
- We are involved in the supervision of post graduates
- We conduct colloquia on matters of public interest
- We conduct a monthly public lecture series
- We have supported the Arts by sponsoring an Art Student
- We provide advice to the University Executive but only when asked
- We publish a monthly e-Bulletin which contains articles of major public interest
- We have run residential summer schools for secondary teachers
- We get involved with major events like the National Science Festival and the Centenary of Canberra in 2013

Our membership comprises academics from most areas of the ANU and members of the professional staff (this is the term which has replaced general staff, ancillary staff, non-academic staff and a plethora of other descriptors). Just as a university relies on its professional staff to carry the workload outside teaching and research so does the Emeritus Faculty.

The ANU supports us in many non-monetary ways. We are very grateful for this support, which includes a large room, assistance with phone and power bills, and IT support when needed.

We are self-governing, being an Association incorporated under the ACT Associations Ordinance. We do not interfere in the affairs of the ANU. Our members can act politically as individuals, but the Faculty does not act politically as a whole.

A Theory of Work and Play

When we consider why academics continue to work long after their pay has been stopped, we begin to realise that unpaid work is not work. By definition that means that it must be play which is the opposite of work.

Most really important mental work is play because it is unpaid: or insufficiently paid which is similar.

Coal mining is work because if you didn't pay the miners they would do something else and there would be no coal.

Thinking is play because people will think for the sheer joy of it. The only reason why thinkers are paid is in order to stop them wasting their time working.

Administration

Under our Constitution

http://www.anu.edu.au/emeritus/ANUEF_Constitution_2011.pdf we are administered by a Committee which is elected annually at the Annual General Meeting.

The Committee meets monthly and has 12 members elected at the AGM. The Committee elects the Office Bearers who are the Chair, two Vice-Chairs, Treasurer and Secretary. The rest of the committee has responsibility for portfolios, including web site manager, membership officer, annual excursion organiser, lecture series organiser, editor of the monthly newsletter, audio-visual officer, Centenary of Canberra organiser, and secretary of the research project.

It is not an onerous task to administer an Emeritus Faculty

Spreading the Word

When one of us was trying to persuade another Vice-Chancellor to start an emeritus faculty in his own university he replied “why would I want to set up a government in exile of all my most powerful enemies?”

This is a fear which fortunately our own Vice-Chancellor Ian Chubb did not have. Professor Chubb has never been frightened of anything, and he willingly gave us his blessing in the early days of our formation.

There are a bit more than 200 of us. It has been quite difficult spreading the word around the ANU because the Privacy Act apparently prevents the University from giving us the e-mail addresses of staff who are about to retire.

The fact that there is no privacy anywhere goes unnoticed. You cannot walk down the street without being video-taped many times over, News Ltd has read all your e-mails, and your bank has accidentally given all your financial details to thousands of strangers by mistake.

Anyway, if we can reach 200 members over ten years by word of mouth, there is no knowing what size we will reach if “privacy” is eventually abandoned as a lost cause.

The International Scene

The international scene has been revealed to us by Ken Rea, an academic at the University of Toronto. He has made a You Tube of his findings which is here: <http://tinyurl.com/88z2azz>

We feel that, for the reasons stated by the Prime Minister at the start of this paper, it will not be long before Emeritus Faculties start appearing around Australia and New Zealand.
