MISSING STUDENTS BLOW UNI BUDGETS

A DROP-OFF in undergraduate demand has pitched another two regional universities into multimillion-dollar budget black holes. Stringent belt-tightening measures, including job cuts, are almost certain to follow.

Edith Cowan and James Cook this week are the latest universities to concede they cannot fill their student quotas and will have to hand back commonwealth-funded places. ECU has abandoned its forecast of 8 per cent revenue growth while JCU has had to hand back more than 500 places it could not fill, at a cost of $5 million to $10 million.

At ECU, funding to faculties and service centres had been quarantined in an effort to counter a $12 million shortfall. Central Queensland University had to hand back 490 places at a cost of $5 million in January.

The announcement last week by federal Education Minister Julie Bishop that universities could accept fee-paying students into popular disciplines before less-popular disciplines had achieved their quota of commonwealth-funded places was welcomed by metropolitan universities, but regional universities said it was unlikely to help them.

They said there would not be enough students in country areas with the money to pay for places and those with money would rather attend city universities.

ECU vice-chancellor Kerry Cox said: "This type of thing is happening to a lot of the newer universities as people default to a brand that has been around for decades."

He predicted a painful future for ECU and said in a statement that its projected 8 per cent revenue growth for this year would not eventuate. "It is estimated that the university’s revenue will fall short of the budget target by about $12 million in 2006," Professor Cox said. "Sensible, if in part painful, measures" were needed "to protect [ECU’s] long-term operation".

JCU vice-chancellor Bernard Moulden also warned of pain. "The university needs to reshape itself ... in the expectation that demand will not recover over the next five years," he said in a statement. "Nothing will be off the agenda in our determination to [cut costs], including our management structures."

A planning group at JCU would look at merging schools, "putting the squeeze on employment" and cutting expenditure on travel.

JCU deputy vice-chancellor Harry Hyland said that while the university was handing back commonwealth-funded places from unpopular courses, it was turning applicants away from courses that had filled quickly.

He said JCU would ask the federal education department for a change of profile, "so we can take more in the areas of allied health and swapping them for places in some of the other areas, such as IT and the humanities."

Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee figures show that applications for this year fell by 1 per cent from 2005, which was lower than 2004. Nationwide, between 2005 and 2006, applications from school-leavers fell by 2 per cent. Applications from people with higher education experience fell by 6 per cent.

CQU executive director of corporate services Ken Window said there were many reasons for the decline. "Record high levels of employment are an alternative to full-time study; an apprehension by prospective students to take on significant student debt; and access to other education options, including TAFE, which lead to lucrative trade and other jobs," he said.

ECU has instigated two groups for cost reduction and revenue generation. It will put a freeze on hirings and will defer some building projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside this issue:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
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<td>India</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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A new layer of management is being introduced to universities with DVCs getting greater responsibility.

A reshuffle at the top at the University of Sydney confirms a shift to US-style business managerialism at Australian universities in which a new layer of management, deputy vice-chancellors, wield unprecedented executive power. Sydney vice-chancellor Gavin Brown has appointed a layer of six deputies to handle the day-to-day running of the university. He is just one of 38 vice-chancellors now forced to focus on “visioning”, “positioning” and getting money through the door in the highly competitive market environment created by the Nelson reforms. I’m responding to the fact that increasingly in Australia the chief executive has to be doing a lot of political lobbying, external connections, fundraising and so on,” he said.

From next month Sydney will have deputy vice-chancellors in six portfolios: provost, chief financial officer, international, infrastructure, research and community. The latter two positions are yet to be filled.

Professor Brown said in a letter to staff the university required “a quantum leap in performance”. “Nobody should feel threatened and everybody should feel stimulated,” he wrote. But it appears three provosts formerly in charge of the university’s academic colleges have effectively lost power.

Victoria University vice-chancellor Elizabeth Harman said the move confirmed a shift, even among the sandstone universities, to a flat structure of specialist senior management in which deputies were responsible for broad functions right across the “business” rather than confined to separate academic disciplines.

Once simply the vice-chancellor’s assistant, deputy vice-chancellors over the past 15 years have assumed formidable authority, often overseeing billion dollar budgets. About 150 positions in Australian universities are designated deputy and pro-vice-chancellors or their equivalents, up from 99 in 1996. Less than a third of them are women.

They are variously tagged heads, executive directors, vice-presidents and provosts, most with a specialist portfolio attached. PVCs, the next rung below DVCs, jokingly call themselves either plastic gods or protectors-of-the-vice-chancellor.

"As the complexities of universities have increased it’s been necessary to divide up the overall functional responsibilities," education consultant Gregor Ramsey said. The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee’s list of DVCs and PVCs reveals an expanding range of portfolios. The core ones, and often the most powerful, are DVC research and DVC academic or teaching and learning.

But in the past decade international has also become a standard portfolio. The number of DVCs quality have increased, as have equity, technology and development. A number of registrars are also calling themselves PVCs or DVCs administration.

And as universities strive for stronger external links a DVC community has emerged. Some universities have a senior DVC who has automatic responsibility for the university when the VC is away and is more likely to rise to chief executive level.

The deputy vice-chancellor, usually on a salary package worth $200,000-$350,000, was once considered a vice-chancellor on training wheels. But their prospects for elevation to the top job are diminishing, not just because the field is so crowded, but because their skills are becoming too specialised.

Universities are increasingly recruiting leaders from business, government or even lower in the university ranks. “So the poor old DVCs have heavy competition to go to the next step”, Professor Harman said. (Glyn Davis, now at Melbourne University, went to Griffith from a senior public service post. Richard Larkins went from dean of medicine at Melbourne to VC at Monash. Helen Garnett at Charles Darwin was head of the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation.)

Rob Southey, partner with executive recruiters Cordiner King, said there was huge diversity in the roles of deputies across the sector, and the job was not an assured path to chief executive. "I think some of the
DVC jobs are narrow so I think we might increasingly find people planning their careers to encompass more than one DVC role ... to avoid becoming type cast and to broaden their credentials,” he said. “Some people would assert that being dean is actually a better grounding for being VC than being a DVC or PVC. While there are a lot of splendid DVCs there are also some who you feel will finish their careers as DVCs.”

Senior deputy vice-chancellor at the University of Queensland Paul Greenfield, often touted as a future vice-chancellor, is one of a handful of deputies in the system without a designated portfolio. He said he split his time evenly between external and internal roles. And unlike at some institutions, the DVCs at UQ have a level of budgetry control and the authority to make decisions on behalf of the vice-chancellor.

Professor Greenfield said the DVC was often the bearer of bad news, particularly when it came to university restructures. They also influenced senior promotions. “The hardest thing about the job is that you get to tell all the people who apply for professor why they did not get promoted,” he said. One of the best things was “you can avoid going to AVCC meetings”.

Brown said as more demands were placed on universities they had to consider their roles as businesses. That required more professionalism from DVCs than in the past. “One of the big challenges is to respond to this while at the same time not converting the university into a managerialist sort of organisation,” he said. “That's why the demands on the job are really heavy. You need to have people who balance the traditional academic objectives and the professional delivery aspects.”


GRADUATES LACKING JOB SKILLS

UNIVERSITIES and TAFE colleges are turning out graduates who are not “job-ready” and have skills better suited to academic pursuits, warn leading Australian business groups.

The Business Council of Australia accuses universities of stifling the “culture of entrepreneurship”, producing graduates without adequate problem-solving skills.

The group, which represents the nation’s 100 biggest companies, says this failure is choking creativity and limiting Australia’s competitiveness in the global market.

In a major report backed by companies across many industries, the BCA will urge academics to put greater emphasis on communication skills and to ensure that students are given a solid grounding in the basic skills required in the workplace.

The BCA report, due for release today, comes as federal Education Minister Julie Bishop considers proposals to introduce a “job-ready” rating into Year 12 certificates.

“Employers are concerned about the lack of skills regarding creativity, initiative, oral business communication and problem-solving among graduates,” the report says. “Research still shows a significant lack of entrepreneurial skills among Australians. There is increasing recognition of the importance of delivering ‘employability skills’ associated with communication, teamwork and problem-solving for innovative business.

“Courses and programs needed to be practice-based, relevant and appropriate for business innovation needs – rather than suiting particular academic interests and pursuits.”

The report also says that red tape, infrastructure gaps and Australia’s tax system all work against innovation.

Companies warned that the tax system requires reform to encourage business innovation and the personal taxation system was a “major constraint” in attracting talented workers from overseas.

The BCA argues for a broader definition of innovation that includes business strategy and training. “Many companies also raised various concerns about the ability of the education and training system to deliver the skills that were essential for business innovation success,” the report warns.

“Many companies noted that the education and
training systems were not providing graduates with the technical skills appropriate to industry innovation needs. For example, a number of companies noted that university engineering graduates were not skilled in simulation techniques that were being increasingly used throughout business."

The claims prompted an angry response last night from one of the nation’s most respected university chiefs, Melbourne University vice-chancellor Glyn Davis, who urged business to “produce the evidence” that graduate quality was in decline.

The chairman of the Group of 8 "sandstone universities", Professor Davis said the opinions of the BCA did not constitute evidence.

"The fact is that 95 per cent of graduates are snapped up within three months of leaving university," he said. "I don't know if there's much graduate-bashing around but I do know we track performance. I do know our graduates get jobs and they are highly skilled. One of the big issues for Australia is the big number of graduates who head overseas and have no trouble getting jobs in the UK, China and India."

In a separate report also due for release today by the BCA, Changing Paradigms, one of Australia’s biggest car manufacturers, Holden, says engineering graduates are a particular concern. "Holden Innovation considers that universities have fallen behind in the ability to meet industry needs," the report says.

Australia’s biggest independent oil and gas exploration company, Woodside, also notes that the education system is "not turning out enough skilled people". Insurance Australia Group also raises concerns about the shortage of workers in the panel-beating and motor vehicle repair trades.

Opposition industry spokesman Stephen Smith said the report underlined the federal Government’s failure to tackle the skills crisis. "At a time when the Australian economy is benefiting from an unprecedented minerals and petroleum resources boom, the Howard-Costello Government is doing nothing for Australia’s innovative future," he said.


$2M FUNDS CUT AS UNI AXES UNION

A VICTORIAN university has dumped its student union and withdrawn almost $2 million in funding after political infighting left thousands of students without services at the start of the academic year.

Swinburne University yesterday cancelled funding to the Student Union, which had been paid to provide services and amenities, after weeks of turmoil left a handful of staff servicing 40,000 students across six campuses.

"The university’s confidence in the SSU to deliver student services such as clubs, weekly social activities and student advocacy has been undermined," Swinburne vice-chancellor Ian Young said yesterday.

The crisis in the Student Union became public last week after its former executive officer Balrama Krishnan - an employee of more than 20 years - launched action in the Industrial Relations Commission over his sacking in a row over the union’s reorganisation.

Mr Krishnan took the union to the IRC for unjustified dismissal. The Weekend Australian understands police were called to the campus before Mr Krishnan left the university last week of his own accord.

According to an email written by a union staff member, and obtained by The Weekend Australian, staff were angry at Mr Krishnan’s dismissal. "The police were called in by Vicky Kasidis (Student Union president) to escort him off the premises. We, the staff, were appalled, as never in the history of the Swinburne Student Union have the police ever been called, and especially not to remove a member of staff who has dedicated over 26 years to this union," the email says.

While many universities are still negotiating the number of jobs that will be lost as a result of the Howard Government’s legislation on voluntary student unionism, the Swinburne student body has been in tatters since it cut more than half of its 35 positions. A new student association, set up by the university in the Under the VSU legislation, which comes into force on July 1, universities are banned from charging a fee for any non-academic service. The Government has provided $80 million to institutions over three years to help cover the shortfall in fees of about $160 million.

Professor Young said the situation at Swinburne was not VSU-related but was part of student politics. "It is an internal Student Union matter, it is not connected to VSU legislation," Professor Young said. "Swinburne is totally committed to ensuring student services are provided, and is monitoring the situation to ensure students are not affected."

lead-up to the introduction of voluntary student unionism, will take over the union’s duties.

However, Ms Kasidis denied student services had suffered

Maiden, Samantha et al
MATHS MORALE PLUMMETS

UNIVERSITIES are second-guessing the effect of the proposed research quality framework to run down departments they consider will not be money-spinners, especially mathematics, the discipline’s national society has told the HES.

Yet already employers said they could not get the graduates with the quantitative and analytical skills they needed, Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute executive officer Ian Thomas said. "The CSIRO can’t get the statisticians and mathematicians it needs, BHP Billiton can’t get the graduates it needs, the Australian Bureau of Statistics can’t get the people it needs," Ms Thomas said.

Universities were being short-sighted about maths and its sister discipline, statistics. "[They] are starting to second-guess what the RQF will be like and saying, ‘if maths is not a strength, well, we won’t bother too much about filling positions. We’ll build up somewhere where we think we might get a few more bikkies out of the RQF,’” Ms Thomas said. "Nobody knows how the RQF is going to operate. Some universities are being very short-sighted about that because they’re all dependent on having good statistical advice to do most of their research successfully.”

AMSI said maths and statistics were being mishandled at many universities, particularly at Central Queensland, New England, Canberra and Charles Darwin, where Ian Roberts is the last research mathematician.

AMSI director Philip Broadbridge said “cash-driven” universities had a “counter basic sciences and arts mentality”. "They are looking only at their own cash supply and they seem to think that if you get rid of basic sciences and humanities, and bring in extra professional degrees, then there’s a surer supply of cash from full-fee-paying students,” Professor Broadbridge said. "They fail to recognise a lot of their ARC grants go to mathematicians.”

UCQ mathematician Russel Stonier said senior mathematicians had been spread around a number of faculties. "I was never asked which faculty I would like to go to,” he said.

The number of mathematicians at the University of Canberra had fallen from about 12 three years ago to 5.6 now, lecturer Mary Hewett said. "We’ve had redundancies kind of enforced. We’re very much depleted," Ms Hewett said. "It’s been really difficult to be positive. The morale ... you can imagine.”

An internal review had recommended that the remaining mathematicians stay together as a service teaching unit with a discipline head. “One outcome of the review was to increase the profile. It did wake people up to mathematicians and statisticians here and what we can do,” Ms Hewett said.

The university’s bachelor of science degree contained no maths and only introductory statistics, Ms Hewett said.

The university’s pro vice-chancellor of business, law and information science Deborah Ralston said the review had “supported the work of the maths and stats group”. “They’ve started to talk to the divisions they are servicing and student numbers are picking up.”

A University of New England proposal to cut its 6.5-position maths department down to four full-timers, reported in the HES on March 1, will go to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission on Friday.

Ms Thomas said the problem with maths nationwide went back to the 1980s, when a federal government "relative funding model" considered maths cheap to teach.

“The model predated maths departments having to run extensive computer facilities and to offer much more differentiated courses to cater for the variety of students coming in,” Ms Thomas said. "It has been stuck with a funding model that says it is cheap to teach, whereas in fact it's anything but cheap to teach and should be funded at, at least, the level of computer science.”

O’Keefe, Brendan ‘Maths morale plummets ’
U.K.

LONDON MET 'THREATENING INDEPENDENCE OF STUDENT UNION'

THE students' union at London Metropolitan protested today against plans by the university to end its autonomy. The university said it was seeking to make the union more democratic and accountable to students.

The union said management was trying to neuter its role as a watchdog and prevent it from challenging the university in the interests of students. A suggested constitution which goes to the board of governors next week for approval proposes that senior managers from the university take overall charge of the students' union.

Last year the students' union issued a statement in support of industrial action by lecturers against London Met but then withdrew it "for legal reasons" under pressure from the university. "Under the new constitution, taking such a standpoint in the future could see the students' union being automatically shut down," said the union.

The current student union leaders fear that managers could cut funds to clubs, societies and advice centres if they see fit. A university spokesman said: "The university and the students' union agreed last year that a review of the constitution was required. A process and timetable were agreed and have been followed. The union has been fully consulted on possible changes and offered the opportunity to put forward proposals which it failed to do. A committee of the board of governors considered proposed changes last week and agreed without dissent on recommendations to the board. The president of the union is a member of that committee and was present at the meeting.

"The changes proposed are all within the law and centre on encouraging the participation of students in the Union (currently only 3% vote in annual elections), and the accountability of elected Union officers to the membership, a feature currently lacking and something the current officers seem unhappy about. It will actually give the members of the union more control. "The legal status, number of officers and functions of the Union remain unchanged."

Michelle Louise Harris, the president of the London Met union, said: "We've been calling for reform of the students' union for some time and put forward some sensible suggestions which would ensure we could continue to operate in the best interests of students and offer improved services and facilities.

"The university have chosen to ignore these and have seized the opportunity to move in and take charge which completely contradicts the ethos behind a strong, democratic and independent students' union. Under their proposals, the union could be completely wiped out if we take a decision that doesn't agree with their policies and practices. This completely undermines the autonomy all students' unions should have from their institution."

The National Union of Students said the proposals were "out of step with the sector" and breach the 1994 Education Act, which makes it clear that universities which are dependent on public funding must have a democratic, effective students' union which is independent of the university.

The proposal will go before the board of governors on March 22 and if approved would come into effect from August.

Macleod, Donald. 'London Met 'threatening independence of student union' The Guardian 11 March 2006 Electronic http://theguardian.co.uk

CONCERN OVER CHEMISTRY COURSE CLOSURE

SUSSEX University's decision to close its chemistry department has alarmed scientists and industrialists.

The Society of Chemical Industry (SCI) said today that coordinated action by government, industry and academia was needed to protect the UK economy by ensuring there were enough qualified scientists to meet the demands of industry.

Students are not informed well enough about the career benefits of a science degree, believes the SCI. A distinguished past, including two Nobel prize-winners, did not save the Sussex department. It has not been attracting enough students (there are 20 a year) to make it viable, according to the vice-chancellor, Alasdair Smith, who has followed Exeter, King's College London, Queen Mary University of London and Dundee in cutting back on chemistry.

Andrew Ladds, the SCI chief executive, said: "The threat posed by inaction on these warnings will not be confined simply to chemistry but will touch almost all parts of our everyday life - food, healthcare, electronics, energy, transport and construction to name but a few."

Sussex, with a small department that has lost leading researchers to other universities in recent
years, plans to concentrate on organic chemistry and chemical biology which it hopes will fit in with biochemistry and genome research, and biology and environmental science which will be expanded. From 2007 the department will be renamed chemical biology. The university’s decision was strongly criticised by Sir Harry Kroto, a Nobel chemistry laureate, who last year quit Sussex for Florida State University.

A statement from the university said that if the plans were approved by the governing bodies, the current staff of 14 academics in chemistry would reduced to seven through voluntary severance. All current students will be able to finish their degrees at Sussex.


THE TESTS TO SELECT THE BEST

BE prepared for the aptitude exams, and you’ll have a vital advantage. Competition for entry to university is at its most intense among the professional classes, particularly would-be lawyers and doctors. Law and medicine remain the most demanding and competitive courses. Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester dominate, but Bristol, once among the elite, has sunk to 16th in law and 19th in medicine.

Five of the top six in law — Manchester is the exception — received 5* research ratings. So did Queen Mary in 19th place and Keele in 23rd, although both have entry requirements that are lower by as much as an A-level A grade.

Medicine’s requirements may seem uniformly forbidding, as none of the top ten accepts much below four A grades. But there is greater variation in teaching and research quality. Of the top five, Oxford and Cambridge have the lowest teaching scores, 21 each, compared with the maximum of 24 at the other three. Both, however, are the only ones in the top ten rated 5* in three of the four research areas.

As the A level pass rate climbs for the 22nd consecutive year, the most popular universities have embraced aptitude tests to cope with the overwhelming number of applicants clutching straight As in all their examinations. For the past five years Cambridge has used admissions tests to weed out the brilliant medics from the merely very good. Critics complain that such tests favour wealthier students who can afford coaching, but Geoff Parks, director of admissions, says that this is simply not the case. He advises applicants to try out the sample questions on the website instead.

“Performance rates have not risen since it’s been in circulation, which is reassuring,” he says. “The differences between independent and state-educated students have also diminished in recent years, so all indications are that it is coaching-proof.”

Dr Parks says that though most students score in the top third, interviews at Cambridge are equally important because the tests are limited to “identifying potential in scientific aptitude, but not whether you would be a good doctor with a good bedside manner”.

For those balking at further exams, Southampton’s medical faculty, which ranks third equal with Cambridge, relies entirely on Ucas information to assess applicants. There are 4,500 applications for 240 places, and tutors say that interviews tend to favour girls who have been coached, rather than boys. Southampton, before making an offer, emphasises
that non-academic criteria, including work experience, are as important as grades.

To distinguish between hundreds of A-grade candidates in law, 11 top faculties are sifting candidates with the aid of the new Law National Admissions Test. University College London (UCL) is fourth in this year’s list, but tipped by insiders as the best law faculty in the country. Rodney Austin, who oversees law admissions, swears by the test.

He says: “It has enabled us to distinguish between candidates. But obviously we still take into account all the other factors, such as the reference, GCSEs, predicted A-level grades, work experience and of course, whether they read The Times Law Report.” The test was useful at UCL in whittling down the 2,500 wannabe lawyers who applied for a mere 150 places. Of 4,700 candidates who sat the test at universities that require it, only four scored the top mark of 21 out of a possible 24, 100 scored 20 and about 200 scored 19. The average national score is 13.5 and candidates with less than 15 points are marginal.

Again, the test does not appear to discriminate against either state or privately educated students, but 29 applicants from lower-performing schools were made slightly lower offers by UCL as a result of exceptionally high scores.

Controversially, the Law Society has recently suggested that the legal profession would be more accessible if law degrees were scrapped altogether. Graduates holding any honours-level degree would instead be required to fulfil a series of assessments, followed by an Budding dentists face a similar challenge and, among the 13 universities that offer dentistry, only Queen Mary and Cardiff consider those with fewer than 400 Ucas points. Applications were up by 25 per cent this year to almost 11,000, so competition is intense. But employment is virtually guaranteed as regular reports of patients queueing to register with new NHS dentists attest.

The increasing complexity of nursing has made it a graduate profession, and 60 universities offer degrees. There are five applicants for every place, and almost two thirds of students arrive without A levels.

Cardiff heads this year’s table for architecture and also requires fewer Ucas points than Sheffield, Cambridge or Nottingham. And because Wales has ruled out tuition-fee increases for 2006, Cardiff looks a particularly attractive opportunity. Cambridge, which successfully fought off attempts to close its architecture department, requires more than four A grades at A level, the most of any institution. Northumbria, in 13th place, has the only 100 per cent record for graduate employment or postgraduate study. Along with law, architecture commands the biggest salary premium for female graduates. A female architect earns, on average, at least 40 per cent more over a career lifetime than a non-graduate woman who left school with at least two A levels. Arts graduates earn only about 17 per cent more.

Accountancy and finance is a new subject table, reflecting its growing popularity. There were nearly 28,000 applications last year. The subject is dominated by established institutions and Portsmouth is the only new university in the top 30.

Business studies remains on offer at 98 universities, but the flood of graduates on to the market is not good for employment. Bradford, just outside the top 20, has the best record: 85 per cent find graduate jobs or continue their studies. It also demands fewer Ucas points than any other in the top 25.

Blair, Alexandra "The tests to select the best" The Times 26 May 2005 Electronic http://timesonline.co.uk
U.S.A

HARVARD’S ALLSTON CAMPUS

IT’S good news for the economic prospects of Boston that Harvard, despite its troubles, is continuing to expand into Allston.

Just before Lawrence Summers announced his decision to resign as president, the university unveiled plans to relocate its Stem Cell Institute. But a better test of Harvard’s ability to create a vibrant space comes with its attempt to move the Charlesview apartments off a crucial site.

Charlesview, 213 units of subsidized housing built in the 1970s, is due for replacement, but the tenants are concerned that they get better apartments in a convenient location.

Early this month, Harvard proposed a site, where a Kmart is now located at a shopping plaza on Western Avenue. The tenants’ reaction was tepid at best. A meeting with abutters provoked opposition to the notion that a large complex would be put in a neighborhood of two-family houses.

There’s a shortage of affordable housing in Allston, and the Kmart site is well-suited for it. Densities at the site have to be higher than they were when the existing homes were built.

Abutters thought they heard that 300-400 units are to be built there. That’s too much for the five-acre parcel. Harvard ought to provide land elsewhere for a couple of hundred apartments, reasonably priced, beyond the 213 at Charlesview.

Relocation of Charlesview would offer Harvard a site, at the intersection of North Harvard Street and Western Avenue, that is ideal for a museum or other building for use by both the university and Allston communities. Charlesview ought to be moved to a site acceptable to tenants and its board of directors.

The Boston Redevelopment Authority, which is enthusiastic about the Kmart site, needs to push the process to successful resolution and the creation of housing. University development in Allston holds the promise of job growth for the region and, with prodding by the city, an expansion of opportunities to live in this changing neighborhood.

http://boston.com

CAMPUS LEADERS DISCUSS MAJOR ISSUES

MEMBERS of a Bush administration commission on higher education heard testimony yesterday from seven Massachusetts college presidents on issues affecting their institutions, including accountability, cost, and quality.

In remarks at the forum, the presidents spoke of a need for curriculum innovation, the complexity of financial aid, and the role of universities in student life. "Our institutions should be motivating students to become active, engaged, and effective citizens,” said Lawrence S. Bacow, president of Tufts University. "This is the role of a liberal education, not just to convey knowledge, but to convey values also."

The presidents largely steered clear of the most controversial issue before the commission: standardized testing for college and university undergraduates. The chairman of the commission, Charles Miller, former head of the regents of the University of Texas, has suggested that a nationwide performance-comparison system would foster greater accountability in higher education.

Susan Hockfield, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said testing would harm universities. "Standardized curricula or testing would limit our ability to educate, to develop new curricula, and to train the innovators we need," she said.

Bacow said, "I would ask the commission . . . that you not recommend changes to the system that would . . . impose uniform or common standards such as exist in many other nations."

There is growing pressure from some political and education sectors to require standardized testing for college students. The No Child Left Behind Act, which was enacted under the Bush administration in 2002, requires standardizing testing in public schools from kindergarten through grade 12 and penalizes schools whose students do not improve their grades.

The commission is expected to discuss testing more fully as accreditation comes to the fore on its agenda, said Cheryl Oldham, the panel’s executive director. "No one is talking about mandating testing,” she said in an interview. "But it could be tied to accreditation,” Oldham said.

The public hearing at the Fairmont Copley Plaza was
conducted by five members of the 19-member Commission on the Future of Higher Education, which was appointed last fall. The commission has until August to make a report. In addition to Bacow and Hockfield, the college and university presidents who spoke yesterday included Jack M. Wilson of the University of Massachusetts, Dennis Berkey of Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Robert Brown of Boston University, Richard Miller of Olin College of Engineering, and Mary Fifield of Bunker Hill Community College.

Schweitzer, Sarah ‘Campus leaders discuss major issues’ The Boston Globe 21 March 2006 Electronic http://boston.com

COLUMBIA GETS $200M FOR NEUROSCIENCE CENTER

NEW YORK --Columbia University announced Monday that it has received a record $200 million from the widow of a distinguished graduate and will use the money to build a research center devoted to the study of the brain. The donation from Dawn Greene and the Jerome L. Greene Foundation is the biggest gift ever received by the Ivy League university. The Jerome L. Greene Science Center will study such disorders as Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, autism, dementia and schizophrenia. It will be led by neurobiologist Thomas Jessell and Nobel laureates Richard Axel and Eric Kandel.

Greene, who graduated from Columbia College in 1926 and from the university’s law school in 1928, was a lawyer and real estate investor. He died in 1999.

‘Columbia gets $200m for neuroscience centre’ The Boston Globe 13 March 2006 Electronic http://boston.com

GEORGIA COLLEGE PUSHES FOR IPOD INGENUITY

MILLEDGEVILLE, Ga. -- The campus of Georgia College & State University boasts traditional college fare: spacious greens, historic architecture and a steady stream of students with the familiar white headphones of iPods dangling from their ears. But here in the antebellum capital of Georgia, students listening to iPods might just as well be studying for calculus class as rocking out to Coldplay after the school’s educators worked to find more strategic uses for the popular digital music and video players.

Apple Computer Inc. Chief Executive Officer Steve Jobs speaks as he launches Apple’s music download service, the iTunes Music Store, in Tokyo, Japan, Thursday, Aug. 4, 2005. Apple Computer Inc. faces a serious challenge in France, where lawmakers have moved to sever the umbilical cord between its iPod player and iTunes online music store, threatening its lucrative hold on both markets, Friday, March 17, 2006. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi) (Shizuo Kambayashi - AP)

QUIZ

What Disney film was released on iTunes, making it the first feature-length film to appear on the popular download? At least 100 of the rural school’s employees are turning iPods into education or research tools after the school’s educators worked to find more strategic uses for the popular digital music and video players. History professor Deborah Vess asks students to download 39 films to their video-capable iPods so she doesn’t have to spend class time screening the movies. Psychology professor Noland White has found a new-age answer to office hours: a podcast of the week’s most asked questions. And the 5,500-student campus has organized a group of staff and faculty to conjure up other uses for the technology. Called the iDreamers, the team bats around ideas that could turn iPods into portable yearbooks and replace campus brochures with podcasts.

“The more you free up your classroom for discussion, the more efficient you are,” said Dorothy Leland, the school’s president.

Campuses throughout the nation have transformed the gadgets into education tools, a trend iPod maker Apple Computer Inc. hopes to capitalize on with “iTunes U,” a nationwide service that makes lectures and other materials available online. And GCSU isn’t the only school that wants the music players to be more than just a tool for catching up on missed lectures.

At North Carolina’s Duke University, where incoming freshmen have been handed the devices as welcoming gifts,
foreign language students use iPods to immerse themselves in coursework. Administrators at Pennsylvania’s Mansfield University want to use podcasts _ broadcast messages that can be downloaded to iPods and other players _ to recruit high schoolers to the 3,000-student campus. The school also used a podcast to address student and faculty concerns after a New York man who had contracted anthrax visited campus with a dance troupe. Yet few campuses have embraced the new technology as doggedly as GCSU, which was rewarded for its iPod ingenuity when it was chosen to host Apple’s Digital Campus Leadership Institute in November. The school has been a leader in “integrating the iPod into the curriculum to enhance teaching and learning in creative ways going all the way back to the original iPod,” said Greg Joswiak, Apple’s vice president of iPod product marketing.

After Leland and Jim Wolfgang, the school’s chief information officer, began seeing iPods around campus in 2002, they decided to explore educational applications for the devices. They started by farming out 50 donated iPods to faculty who offered the best proposals. Soon Wolfgang’s office was flooded with applications from educators suggesting new uses. Now some 400 college-owned iPods are floating around campus _ some loaned to students in certain classes, others available for checkout at libraries. The iPods run the technology gamut, from the bulky first-generation devices to the latest video-capable models.

Apple Computer Inc. Chief Executive Officer Steve Jobs speaks as he launches Apple’s music download service, the iTunes Music Store, in Tokyo, Japan, Thursday, Aug. 4, 2005. Apple Computer Inc. faces a serious challenge in France, where lawmakers have moved to sever the umbilical cord between its iPod player and iTunes online music store, threatening its lucrative hold on both markets, Friday, March 17, 2006. Hank Edmondson, a government professor known around campus as “The Podfather,” was among the first to use iPods to supplement his course lectures. Edmondson now makes lectures, language study programs, indigenous music and thumbnail art sketches available for download to the iPods of students in a three-week study-abroad program he leads.

During a recent visit to the Prado in Madrid, he recorded a 20-minute lecture on the museum’s artwork. Downloading it in advance will let students spend their time at the museum exploring, not listening to Edmondson talk. “You want to pack everything in, but you’ve got a lot of travel time,” he said.

Vess said having her history students screen films on their iPods allows her to dedicate class time to discussion and analysis. Ditto for the weekly graduate course on historical methods that she teaches. “Now I can devote my whole three hours to Socratic dialogue,” she said with a grin.

While iPods can be useful tools for reviewing coursework, some critics argue donning a pair of earphones is not the same as actively engaging with material in a classroom.

“Learning is through interaction, discussion, critical questioning and challenging of assumptions,” said Donna Qualters, director of the Center for Effective Teaching at Northeastern University in Boston. “Those cannot be duplicated on an iPod _ you have to be there to experience that learning.”

GCSU officials say the school makes sure its iPod lessons supplement classroom work. “We don’t have any project that repeats what’s going on in the classroom,” Wolfgang said. “All this is value-added.” He said the school’s iPod ingenuity is helping promote GCSU’s decade-old effort to remake itself as Georgia’s only public liberal arts college. Long a school that attracted a regional crowd of students who often left for other schools after a year, Wolfgang believes the focus on iPods is helping retain more students.

This school year, it started iVillage, a virtual community that encouraged incoming students to start communicating before the start of classes. The first dozen freshmen recruited for the effort were asked to think up innovative uses for the iPods. The team is creating an iPod-based freshmen survival guide that includes advice on classes, dorms and nightlife in this sleepy community 100 miles south of Atlanta.

Bobby Jones, a freshman from Rome, said he’s found life in a “virtual community” surprisingly satisfying. “(You) think it will never get the same sense of community living together, but we definitely found that sense of belonging,” he said.

INDIA

CRAFTY BUSINESS

IT IS often heard that India is fast emerging as a knowledge economy. But is it really? Different educational boards across the country are incurring an annual loss of over Rs 9,000 crores due to high failure rates in the standard X board examinations.

Industry experts believe that if these numbers are to be brought down, vocational education must be introduced right from the pre-primary level. The National Council for Educational Research and Training’s (NCERT) Curriculum Review Framework 2005 too, laid emphasis on vocational education. Union Ministry for Human Resources Development (MHRD) is also planning to strengthen vocational education and training to boost our country’s unskilled labour force, which amounts to a staggering 85 per cent of our population. According to MHRD sources, the ministry is planning to make vocational education compulsory from the pre-primary level onwards, as well as linking community colleges with the help of NGOs to integrate vocational studies.

Established under the aegis of NCERT in 1960, Pandit Sunderlal Sharma Central Institute of Vocational Education (PSSCIVE) acts as an apex level research and development organisation in the field of vocational education. It provides academic support to the various programmes. Says M Sengupta, joint director, PSSCIVE: “When such a huge number of students fail to qualify in their class X exams, either they are useless or the system is not providing the type of education required.

They may have certain inherent talent and may do well in other areas. It is the responsibility of our education system to provide opportunities to such students.” Policymakers are now advocating vocational education right from the school level. The CBSE at present, offers 36 courses that fall under vocational studies, which can be either optional or a complete vocational stream. Explains G Balasubramanium, director academics, CBSE, “The 36 vocational subjects are a package. Either students can take three vocational subjects and two languages or one vocational subject along with conventional subjects.

In the class XII boards, certification for vocational studies is on par with conventional subjects.” Post-school, universities like the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) offer a number of vocational and awareness courses.

However, there are concerns about vocational studies in its present form. Stating that vocational education has been a big failure in the country, Dinesh Singh Bist, secretary, National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), says: “There is no link between our education system and market economics. With the emergence of newer industries, jobs generated require different skill sets, which we haven’t been able to provide due to time-lag. We churn out skilled personnel in various sectors without realising its demand in the market, leading to a mismatch. “ According to Garg, “The treatment given to vocational studies and training in our educational system leave much to be desired. The emphasis has been diluted.” The present scenario reflects what the experts opined. The national Policy on Education (NPE)-1986 had set a goal of covering 25 per cent of the +2 enrolments in the vocational stream by the year 2000. However, today, less than 5 per cent of the students have registered.

Sengupta opines that even though the scenario is not
encouraging diversification at the +2 level has helped. "Even if it is less than 5 per cent students, the diversification has helped. In Tamil Nadu for instance, about 20 per cent enrolments are in the vocational stream. At least vocational education has not faded away," he adds. Vocational education and training (VET) is also a viable option for women and the physically challenged. PSSCIVE has developed several courses especially for the disabled and for women.

NVTI offers basic, advanced and post-advanced courses for women. "VET equips students with industry-relevant skill-sets. A lot of our students are pursuing their graduation through correspondence and are taking our courses simultaneously to increase their employability and entrepreneurial skills," claims Vidyeswari.

NIOS has been offering vocational education programmes since 2002. Presently, it offers over 100 courses in different subject areas through its 750 accredited vocational institutes spread across the country. "Our target audience is students out of school, several of whom dropped out of regular school years ago and are now coming back to education. Others are employed and undertake VET is to improve upon their employability and income generation capability," says Bist.

NVTI and NIOS are now working towards encouraging greater industry involvement in VET. "We are holding conferences with FICCI and the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) to have a better interaction with the industry and understand their requirements," Bist adds.

Based on the UNESCO document of 1974, vocational education was demarcated under six categories: Engineering and technology, business and commerce, home science and home economics, healthcare and para-medical, humanities science and education and agriculture and agro-based industries.

"Medical transcription, institutional housekeeping, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, air-ticketing, multimedia and mobile industry are among the new avenues which have emerged," concludes Sengupta.


GOVERNANCE MATTERS

SCIENCE COLLEGE CLOSURE IMMINENT?

PATNA: Patna Science College, a premier institution of higher education in the state, may have to be closed soon following a directive issued recently by Patna University.

In the directive to the principals of all colleges and heads of post-graduate departments, the university has reportedly asked them to terminate immediately the services of all class three and four employees working on daily wages or on ad hoc basis failing which the university would lodge an FIR against the heads of the institutions concerned and deduct from their salaries the amounts paid to such staff.

Principal of Patna Science College S N Guha, when contacted, told TOI here on Tuesday that if the directive of the university is followed, there would be no sweeper or night guard in different departments. Consequently, the college would have to be closed, he added.

Most of the class three and four posts in the college have been lying vacant for the last several years and no effort whatsoever has been made by the authorities concerned to fill these posts.

Hence, the college was forced to appoint some necessary staff to protect its property and pay them from its own resources. Many of these casual staff were being paid at the rate of Rs 25 per day only. Can any department or college function without having a single sweeper? Guha asked.

http://Indiapress.org
GOING GLOBAL: MONASH UNIVERSITY EXTENDS ITS REACH

AUSTRALIA’s Monash University was one of the few foreign universities from Down Under that decided to make its mark in Malaysia by setting up a campus in Kuala Lumpur in 1998.

Money was not the main reason for its expansion to Asia, explains university vice-chancellor and president Professor Richard Larkins. Rather, the university was interested in providing quality education to Malaysian students, as well as to reach out to as many students in the region as possible.

By getting out of Australia and going international, Monash gives students the opportunity to learn about various cultures and other countries’ experiences. “We gave it careful thought before deciding to spread our wings to this region,” Larkins says. “There are a lot of things to consider when you want to go international.”

Larkins, who was in Kuala Lumpur recently to attend a seminar on international education, says that going global benefits universities but there are, of course, challenges that come with it. Maintaining the quality of education, for instance, is crucial to ensure that students, despite their location, learn the same things.

“It is a difficult task to ensure that Monash Malaysia students get quality education, just like those at our campuses in Australia. And we also have to make some adjustments to the syllabus here (in Malaysia) to suit the local environment and culture.”

Apart from Monash University Malaysia (which is the university’s first off-shore campus), Monash has also set up a campus in South Africa in 2001. “If we can overcome the challenges, setting up an off-shore campus can benefit more students from all over the world. Imagine... students studying in Malaysia learn the same thing as those in Australia. This makes their degrees globally recognised and the students globally marketable”

And because Monash has campuses in Australia, Malaysia and South Africa, our students learn things that are important in all three countries, giving them the chance to understand issues from an international perspective. Students also have a choice to continue their studies at any of Monash’s campuses worldwide.” Going global also encourages healthy competition among tertiary institutions in a particular country.

“Monash making its appearance in Malaysia somehow encourages other universities in the country to provide good education as well.”


BRAND IT LIKE UKM

YOU entertain visitors to Malaysia and jet around the world. It sounds like a job with the tourism board to promote Malaysia but Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)’s Centre for Public and International Relations (PUSPA) undertakes these tasks to bring the university to the world’s attention

“PUSPA has the job of enhancing UKM’s image in the local and international arena,” says director Professor Yang Farina Abdul Aziz. The centre was set up on January 2002, as part of the university’s efforts to boost internationalisation but Yang Farina, who took over the helm in 2004, can testify that the job is not all cushy. “There’s a fair bit of travelling but there’s a lot of work too. We’re constantly promoting the university.”

Currently, PUSPA is busy compiling information on all research conducted at the university for a yet-to-be setup website. “One of the ways to promote the university is by highlighting its achievements, particularly those pertaining to research.”

Already, the centre has compiled the curriculum vitae of all UKM’s academic staff at www.ukm.my. This effort, Yang Farina hopes, will publicise the scholars’ expertise. "We can no longer work alone. We have to
engage in smart partnerships." Yang Farina and her team have been busy globe-trotting, attending education fairs and introducing UKM to the world.

Last year alone, the team went to Australia, Germany, Belgium and Ireland, visiting renowned universities such as the University of Western Australia, Driusberg-Essen University, University College Cork, University of La Rochelle and Bremen University to look at possible collaborations.

The trip to Australia saw the participation of student leaders from UKM to see what Australian education is all about.

"Not only that, we produce Resonance, an in-house magazine to share university news. Editors of major publications, embassies and high commissions, international education offices and public and private libraries get Resonance monthly."

Razak, A, 'brand it like UKM' The New Straits Times 12 March 2006 Electronic
http://nsto.com.my

GOING GLOBAL: LITTLE AMBASSADORS OF EDUCATION

'INTERNATIONALISATION' is a household word in the Malaysian education sector. ARNI ABDUL RAZAK looks at how it has helped some universities achieve recognition beyond the country’s shores.

PROFESSOR Datuk Mohd Salleh Mohd Yasin was delightfully surprised when several Singaporean academicians told him recently that they are now “watching closely” the progress Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) is making in terms of research.

"That's good news to me," says Mohd Salleh, who has been UKM vice-chancellor since 2003. "Because of our internationalisation efforts, people outside Malaysia are beginning to pay attention to the university and acknowledging our work."

Getting recognition is important to UKM. For months now, Mohd Salleh has been travelling around the world to promote UKM in a move to attract foreign students to Malaysia and to seek partners for various research projects. He even presented a paper on Internationalising a National University at Oxford University last year. The paper highlighted UKM’s strategies on going global.

"With globalisation, we now have no choice but to internationalise our programmes and promote the university to the world. These days, many realise that Malaysian education is of high standing," Mohd Salleh says.

But UKM is not the only tertiary institution in Malaysia that is scrambling to present itself to the world. Ever since the government introduced the policy in the early 1990s, public higher learning institutions in the country have been busy promoting themselves abroad.

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), the University of Malaya (UM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, International Islamic University and many others have seen a rise in foreign student intakes following internationalisation efforts in early 2000. This phenomenon has indeed taken the country by storm. Datuk Seri Effendi Norwawi’s appointment as a Special Envoy to the Higher Education Ministry in 2004 underscored the importance of the exercise. Though Effendi is now holding a different portfolio, these efforts show no signs of abating. In fact, universities are doubling their efforts to brand themselves in other parts of the world.

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), for instance, designed a programme to disseminate information about the university for ambassadors and high commissioners to the country. "We invite officials from foreign missions in Malaysia to UPM and we brief them about our programmes. We hope they will spread the word about the university," says UPM public and international relations director Associate Professor Jambari Ali.

The programme, introduced last year, is already a success. A delegation from the University of Zagreb in Croatia will be visiting UPM soon to look at potential joint research initiatives.

"We also go on promotional trips to encourage more people to come and study or work with the university. We will be going to Libya as well as Iran," Jambari says. In the case of UKM, its lecturers and students sometimes act as "little ambassadors". UKM Professor Dr Lokman Saim, who performed the nation's first cochlear implant in 1995, is now busy conducting surgeries not only in Malaysia but also in Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines.
Mohd Salleh says: "I think research is pivotal for us to compete globally. Dr Lokman, for example, travels extensively to help with surgeries overseas. This shows that his expertise is recognised and needed overseas as well."

Internationalisation as a concept is one thing, implementing it is another matter, says Professor Datuk Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, director of both the Institute of the Malay World and Civilization and the Institute of Occidental Studies (IKON) at UKM. A recent public lecture organised by IKON, which featured Dr Leslie Sklar, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, is a good example of internationalisation in practice. Sklar was invited to kick-off IKON’s public lecture series.

Sklar was also one of the main discussants at a round-table discussion after his talk. The session centred on Professor Datuk Abdul Rahman Embong’s professorial inaugural lecture entitled Development and Well-Being which was presented at UKM in September, 2003. UKM vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Sukiman Sarmani adds that the university is also looking at opportunities to develop programmes with foreign universities. “At the moment, UKM is conducting a double degree programme at the undergraduate level with the University of Duisberg-Essen in Germany where students can choose to study in either country. "We are also looking at more of such collaboration with universities in Indonesia,” Sukiman says.

For USM, the university’s outreach programme has gone beyond Europe and the United States. The university has strong ties with Cuba, especially in research dealing with vaccinology. And UM has gone a step further by housing the Asia-Europe Institute in 2000. The institute offers international master’s programmes in regional integration, small and medium enterprise, Asean studies and information management. Public universities are also participating in international associations such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities, Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning, Asia University Federation, Global University Network for Innovation and the Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific while IIUM is a member of two Islamic organisations — the Federation of Universities in Islamic World and the Rabitat (the league) of Islamic Universities. Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) dean of the Institute of Graduate Studies Professor Datin Zubaida Syed Alwi Alsree says the university has long forged linkages with other foreign universities and professional bodies back when it was known as Rida College, offering the United Kingdom based London Chamber of Commerce Institute in the 1960s. Since then, the university has always offered programmes of international professional bodies such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (UK), Chartered Institute of Transport (UK), Chartered Institute of Marketing (UK) and Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators UK).

UiTM also has tie-ups with professional bodies, such as the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (US) and the Chartered Institute of Building (UK), to gain international recognition. This means students can acquire recognised professional qualifications without leaving the country. "We also send students and lecturers overseas to present papers at international conferences and seminars. Students can also conduct research overseas but it is normally up to the faculty to look for partner universities who are willing to work with it and fund the projects,” Zubaida says. "Universities are redesigning their curricula to make them competitive worldwide.”