



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Dr Michael Spence AC
Vice-Chancellor and Principal

12 December 2018

The Hon Robert S French AC
Suite 2, Level 13
Allendale Square
77 St George's Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

Via email: freedomofspeechreview@education.gov.au

Dear Mr French,

Thank you for your response to my earlier letter which included Richard Fisher's recent paper, and for your request received 29 November for information to assist you with the review of policies supporting freedom of expression and intellectual inquiry in Australian higher education.

University documents upholding freedom of expression and intellectual inquiry

The commitment to free academic inquiry is a central tenet of the University of Sydney, enshrined in its establishing Act. Section 6(1) of the [University of Sydney Act 1989](#) states: "The object of the University is promotion, within the limits of the University's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence." Section 6(2) further commits the University to "participation in public discourse".

We have a high-level set of University rules, legally binding agreements with staff and codes of conduct, which together represent our institutional framework for upholding free intellectual inquiry and freedom of expression. These include:

1. The [Charter of Academic Freedom](#), which commits the University to "free enquiry" and "affirms its institutional right and responsibility, and the rights and responsibilities of each of its individual scholars, to pursue knowledge for its own sake, wherever the pursuit might lead". The Charter of Academic Freedom was endorsed by the University Senate and the Academic Board in 2008. As part of our review cycle, it is currently under review by a working group of the Culture Strategy task force.
2. The [University of Sydney Enterprise Agreement 2018-2021](#), which in section 315 commits staff and the University to "the protection and promotion of intellectual freedom", and in section 315(b)(iv) specifically accords all staff the right to "express unpopular or controversial views".
3. The [University of Sydney \(Academic Board\) Rule 2017](#), which in section 2.1(2)(a) mandates that the Academic Board has responsibility for "assuring the highest standards in teaching, scholarship and research and, in so doing, safeguarding the academic freedom of the University".

4. Codes of Conduct, which outline the responsibilities of University staff and students when exercising academic freedom of expression and intellectual inquiry:
 - a. The [Code of Conduct – Staff and Affiliates](#) provides a clear statement of our expectations of University staff and affiliates and specifically the conduct of staff and affiliates in upholding and advancing the freedom to pursue critical and open inquiry in a responsible manner.
 - b. The [Research Code of Conduct 2013](#) sets out our commitment to responsible research and our expectations of researchers. The current code is being reviewed in order to ensure it complies with the new version of the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) released in June 2018.
 - c. The [Code of Conduct for Students](#) sets out our expectations of students in relation to academic matters and personal behaviour.

These higher-level documents are supported by a suite of policies, procedures and processes designed to give clear guidance at the granular level of University operations.

- The [Research Agreements Policy](#), which, among other things, provides for the “protection of the University’s role as an independent teaching and research institution that operates with integrity for the dissemination of knowledge and the promotion of public debate” and promotes “free and critical enquiry”.
- The [Public Comment Policy](#), which supports our vision to actively encourage and facilitate high-quality contributions by staff to public debate and deliberation on issues spanning local, national and international boundaries.
- The [Gift Acceptance Policy](#), which, among other things, requires that a gift to the University may only be accepted if it is consistent with the University’s legislated object and its core values which include: “the freedom to pursue open inquiry in a responsible manner; recognition of the importance of ideas and ideals; tolerance, honesty, respect, integrity and ethical behaviour; and an understanding of the needs of those whom the University serves.”

Free intellectual inquiry can only flourish in an environment where freedom of expression is supported and encouraged. Unorthodox and even offensive ideas are welcome; lawful protest is supported. Our proactive encouragement of healthy disagreement is only limited by expectations imposed on community members’ behaviour. Policies setting out these limitations have been developed in accordance with internationally accepted norms for academic freedom, and consistent with legal limitations on freedom of expression. For example:

- The [Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Prevention Policy](#) affirms our commitment to provide a safe and healthy workplace and learning environment.
- The [University of Sydney \(Student Discipline\) Rule 2016](#) includes in the definition of misconduct in section 2.1(1)(a)(iii) conduct which “impairs the reasonable freedom of other persons to pursue their studies, research or work in the University, or to participate in the life of the University; and in section 2.1(1)(h) “intimidating, assaulting, vilifying, abusing, threatening or endangering another member of the University community.” The rule also outlines penalties for misconduct.

Further, we are required to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of all members of our community, as well as anyone else involved in University activities. This primary duty of care relates to both physical and psychological safety. We are bound to comply with the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#) through “effective and appropriate compliance and enforcement measures”, section 3(1)(e).

Our [Work Health and Safety Policy](#) applies to all staff, students and visitors and provides for a safe and healthy work environment. A suite of [infrastructure policies and procedures](#) is in place to protect order and safety in the University, such as the [University of Sydney \(Campus Access\) Rule](#), which allows University security to manage access to University property, if required.

Other relevant information and observations

In October, a speech on our campus titled “Is there a rape crisis on campus” by Ms Bettina Arndt was incorrectly reported in parts of the media as having been blocked by student protesters. This was widely cited by conservative commentators as definitive evidence of political bias and repression of free speech at the University of Sydney and at Australian universities more generally. Our decision to charge a fee for security for this event, in accordance with our normal processes following a request for security from the event organisers, was also the subject of criticism in some parts of the media. We have vigorously defended our commitment to academic freedom and being a place for debate. We set out our position on the necessity of charging organisers moderate fees for additional security in an [op-ed in the Australian](#). Our position was further outlined in our response to a request for information from the TEQSA Chief Commissioner, Professor Nick Saunders (attached).

We are deeply committed to fostering a culture of ‘disagreeing well’. A 2015 discussion paper (attached), sets out our core values around this topic. We committed to the principles in this paper in our [2016-2020 Strategic Plan](#), by committing specifically to the values of courage and creativity, respect and integrity, inclusion and diversity, and openness and engagement. A joint University Executive/Academic Board culture taskforce was established in 2017 as part of the implementation of *Strategy 7: embedding our values* (Strategic Plan, p. 46). It considers ideas and initiatives at monthly meetings and contributes to academic discussion papers on the value of disagreement in academic discourse, on disagreeing well, and on the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity across our workplaces.

Your suggestion that a code may be the outcome of your Review is a welcome development and we look forward to the opportunity to comment on your findings.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Spence AC

Attachments to email submission:

1. VC to TEQSA Chief Commissioner 5 November 2018
2. A culture built on our values. University of Sydney discussion paper, 2015



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Dr Michael Spence AC
Vice-Chancellor and Principal

5 November 2018

Professor Nicholas Saunders AO
Chief Commissioner
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
GPO Box 1672
Melbourne VIC 3001
Level 14, 530 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Email: Nicholas.Saunders@teqsa.gov.au

Dear Professor Saunders,

Thank you for your letter of the 30 October regarding the recent speech "*Is there a rape crisis on campus*" made by Ms Bettina Arndt at our University. Whilst we are disappointed that we are in the position of having to respond to TEQSA on the basis of inaccurate newspaper reporting we will share with you the information we have been able to confirm thus far. The investigation into the incident is not yet complete but we will send you a full report once this is available.

A student society, The Sydney University Liberal Club, invited Ms Arndt to speak and the society requested additional security for the event. If event organisers request security above and beyond that normally provided for an event, then a charge is made to cover the additional cost of this. This policy is long standing, widely understood and applied to all events where this request is made whether the event organiser is a member of staff, a student or a member of our broader community. I recently wrote about the University's position on freedom of speech and the cost of security at events held on campus in *The Australian*. A copy of this article is enclosed.

In response to Senator Stoker's questions I would like to clarify, first and foremost and contrary to claims currently circulating, that the talk went ahead as planned and without interruption.

The University engaged an external provider to conduct an investigation into this event after receiving two formal complaints – one from a student and one from Ms Arndt. The preliminary findings of the investigation do indicate that there was a group of approximately 30 protestors gathered outside the venue and that there was some vigorous shouting of political slogans as people entered the venue. The corridor leading to the function room (which was selected for use in agreement with the hosts of the event) was relatively narrow. When as a consequence of this some slight jostling occurred, the police were called as a safety precaution. When the police arrived, the protestors moved off in an orderly fashion and the talk proceeded as planned. We have no reports of any damage (except that a fire alarm was set off) or injury inflicted by the protestors. The protestors left peacefully and the talk proceeded.

Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal **T** +61 2 9351 6980
F23 – Administration Building **E** vice.chancellor@sydney.edu.au
The University of Sydney **sydney.edu.au**
NSW 2006 Australia

ABN 15 211 513 464
CRICOS 00026A

While the investigation has at this point found no serious physical events or attacks on individuals it has highlighted some issues with respect to refining the University's security procedures. It has also highlighted that some of the political chanting involved disrespectful and derogatory comments and we are finalising allegations with respect to this evidence to be put to the students concerned under our *Code of Conduct* policies. The complaint from one student attending the event about the jostling and pulling of some clothing has not been substantiated beyond reasonable doubt. Even if it occurred, it was committed by a protestor who was neither a staff member or student and thus was an outside person over whom we have no authority. The next step in the process will be to put these allegations to the relevant students.

With respect to the issue of 'freedom of expression' at the heart of the concerns raised, the facts clearly show that we upheld the right of freedom of expression through our normal protocols and procedures and that Ms Arndt was afforded her right to express her view on campus. However, it should be noted that the protestors do also have a right to freedom of expression, and we have no evidence at this stage that this protest was anything other than noisy.

In line with our policies we have requested that all parties to the investigation maintain confidentiality and do not victimise other parties. Regrettably Ms. Arndt has refused to comply with this request on more than one occasion. A copy of our correspondence in this matter is enclosed.) She has publicly named the students she believes were involved and put their names up on her web site, rendering them vulnerable to harassment before the findings of the investigation had the chance to establish the facts.

As a consequence, the students named by Ms Arndt have suffered social media harassment. The treatment of some of the young female protestors by Ms Arndt's supporters has been appalling. Whilst we are sure that Ms Arndt had no role to play in this the protestors have been subjected to a campaign of harassment with repeated threats of rape. A copy of the screenshots is enclosed so that you are aware of the comments made; these student protestors now feel far from safe in expressing their views.

I trust that this provides some reassurance that we place the utmost importance on our responsibility to maintain an institutional environment in which intellectual inquiry is upheld and protected but that we also have a responsibility to ensure that these rights apply to all.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Spence

Attachment 1: Op Ed "Security is the only cost in the marketplace of ideas", *The Australian* 25 September 2018

Attachment 2: Correspondence with Ms Arndt

Attachment 3: Screenshots of social media comments

sydney.edu.au/strategy

A culture built on our values

The University of Sydney

Strategic Planning for 2016-20
Discussion Paper no. 5
September 2015



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



FOVRIER

SCHOOL OF PHYSICS

A culture built on our values

Strategic Planning for 2016–20, Discussion Paper no. 5

September 2015

Foreword

As we continue the consultation phase of our strategic planning process, I am heartened that so many of you have provided considered feedback on our proposals and joined our values workshops and consultation sessions. Your contributions are essential to shaping our next strategy.

To this point, we have focused our discussion papers on *where* we should go with our next strategic plan. We have outlined a set of proposals that will drive excellence in our research and education. In this discussion paper, we continue the conversation that began in the second education and research discussion papers about *how* we build a culture of excellence.

This paper looks at the culture of the University as an institution. We introduce and explain some core values that have been proposed by our University community and describe some key mechanisms that will embed these values into our everyday behaviours. We outline personal responsibilities for creating an empowering work environment that enables everyone to flourish and achieve their academic or professional goals. Finally, we outline some questions and ask for your comments, ideas and feedback.

I would very much like this paper to generate a lively discussion about how we can create a culture that will support the University's pursuit of excellence. I encourage everyone to get involved in that conversation.

Dr Michael Spence
Vice-Chancellor and Principal

Contents

Foreword	1
1 Introduction	3
2 Our shared values	4
2.1 Courage and creativity	5
2.2 Respect and integrity	6
2.3 Inclusion and diversity	8
2.4 Openness and engagement	9
3 Building a culture grounded in our values	11
3.1 Leadership	11
3.2 Rebuilding processes and governance	12
3.3 Building our values into staff policies, processes and practices	13
3.4 Messaging and celebration	13
3.5 Empowering staff and students to use our values	14
4 Questions for consultation	15
Notes	16

1 Introduction

It is a truism often attributed to American management guru Peter Drucker that the culture of an organisation “eats [its] strategy for breakfast”. As the University considers its next five-year strategic plan (agreeing on what we want to do and where we want to go), it is essential also to consider the culture we want to develop here (the questions of who we are and who we want to be).

American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, drawing on German sociologist Max Weber, evocatively describes culture as “webs of significance” in which we are “suspended”.¹ If Geertz is right, it is not surprising that our institutional culture determines so much of how we understand and conduct ourselves as members of the University. An institution is shaped by its culture, and its culture either facilitates success or renders it more difficult.

Of course, to a large extent the culture of an organisation is the product of its history and there is much in our history of which to be proud. The University was founded as a part of the 19th century movement for public education with twin commitments to excellence and public service. Our motto, *sidere mens eadem mutato* (“the constellation is changed, the disposition is the same” – a reference to following the traditions of universities in the UK) reflected a certain colonial insecurity. But it was also a radical claim: a claim that the same intellectual excellence could be found here as in the more established universities of the northern hemisphere. Moreover, this was to be a university more radical than those in the UK in its commitment to public service.

We are rightly proud of the stirring vision of University founder William Charles Wentworth’s Second Reading Speech on the Bill establishing the University in the NSW Legislative Council and, in particular, of its bold affirmation that the University would be open to all, regardless of class or creed, and committed to the service of both the community of which it was a part and the broader world. This tradition has been carried on through the work of our staff, students and alumni, in countless ways.

However, an institution’s culture is not only the product of its history; it is also the product of the values it evinces in the ways it conducts its business and the ways in which staff and students relate to one another and to the community of which they are a part. For this reason it is important to articulate these values, and perhaps at no time more important than in the writing of a major strategy.

The values of an organisation are those for which it stands, those by which it distinguishes the good from the bad, the desirable from the undesirable. To be authentic, these values need to be widely held in the organisation and widely used as standards for decisions and behaviour. Of course, any individual, and the organisation as a whole, will occasionally act in ways inconsistent with the values that they hold. Values are always aspirational. But they must have a currency in an organisation in order to shape its culture.

In the past six months we have consulted with staff and students about the values of the University of Sydney and the extent to which they reflect the culture of the institution. It has been a sobering process. Staff and students have identified a fairly consistently held set of values, but have been critical of the extent to which these values shape the culture of the University. It is clear that things need to change in our culture if our strategy is not to be “eaten for breakfast”.

This change is everyone’s responsibility. It is true that those with formal leadership responsibilities have a particular duty to ensure that their own behaviour, and that of the communities of which they are a part, reflect the values of the institution. But culture cannot be created by command and control.

There is a parallel in the University’s experience of the implementation of our *Wingara Mura – Bunga Barrabugu* (“thinking path to make tomorrow”) strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. This core responsibility of the University was once seen as the responsibility of only a few. It is only since our strategy has stressed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is the responsibility of every part of the University that it has taken a place at the very centre of our work. And that strategy is beginning to yield real results. In the same way, our culture will only shift when people feel empowered to use our shared values as standards for their own decisions and behaviour, and those of others, and to speak of them as such.

This paper outlines what seem to be emerging as our shared values, and makes some suggestions as to ways in which these may better inform our decisions and behaviour. We invite feedback both on the nature of the values outlined and on the mechanisms for giving them effect in our collective life.

¹ Geertz, C., “Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* New York: Perseus 1973 3 at 5.

2 Our shared values

In workshops with staff across the University, four clusters of values began to emerge as shared throughout the institution. Moreover, it became clear that each cluster was, in different ways, related to our core commitment to excellence.

A culture framed by these values will not, of itself, guarantee that our work is excellent: excellence is built upon the talent and dedication of our students and staff, and the other parts of our proposed strategy are devoted to building with them the quality of the University's education and research. But that culture is arguably a necessary condition for the achievement of the highest levels of excellence that we can attain, because only a culture clearly defined by these values will empower all staff and students to achieve their full potential.

The four clusters of values that have emerged from our consultations relate to:

- courage and creativity
- respect and integrity
- inclusion and diversity
- openness and engagement.

These values make more explicit some of the ideas fundamental to the two values underpinning our last strategy, those of engaged enquiry and mutual accountability. But they are also more comprehensive than those two. Diagrammatically, they may be represented in this way:



Each of these clusters of values merits separate consideration.

2.1 Courage and creativity

Creativity is core to the work of the University. Universities are distinctive as educational institutions in that they do not merely transmit knowledge and teach skills – they create knowledge and develop new skills. This is core to our vision of the relationship between teaching and research. Researchers and students are engaged in essentially the same activity, honing their skills to develop new understandings, building upon that which has been discovered before.

This mission to develop new knowledge and skills entails a strong commitment to academic freedom. Academic freedom has always been a core value of the University of Sydney. It is entailed in our commitment to creativity and sometimes takes courage to defend.

The concept of academic freedom is incredibly elusive, almost beyond definition. It has been said that there is “no clear and widely accepted definition or justification of academic freedom and no settled account of the way in which claims of violation may be assessed”.² Perhaps the most widely cited statement of academic freedom, the *1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, offers no straightforward definition of the term, but something of a mish-mash of associated norms and ideas.³

Professor of Media Law at University College London Eric Barendt has pointed out that most statements of academic freedom involve ideas about the freedom of individual researchers and teachers; ideas about institutional autonomy; and ideas about academic participation in institutional governance. But he goes on to admit that “[i]t is not particularly helpful to attempt a single definition of academic freedom” and that “[d]oubts are expressed not only in respect of borderline claims [of academic freedom], as with freedom of speech or personal privacy, but with regard to its central meaning”.⁴

Even in relation to questions of an individual’s academic freedom, far less as to questions of institutional autonomy, issues arise as to the scope of the concept that have important practical ramifications. For example, does it apply only when an academic is making comments within her area of academic expertise, or also more generally? Questions such as these routinely arise when the concept is invoked.

In resolving these questions, it may be useful for us to have recourse to a powerful contemporary justification of academic freedom. This justification has particular force in secular liberal institutions such as our own. In his paper “We need a new interpretation of academic freedom”, Professor Ronald Dworkin of Oxford University argues for a particular justification of academic freedom for universities in the liberal tradition.

Dworkin dismisses what he calls “the instrumental ground” that academic freedom is about the pursuit of truth and that “[w]e have a better chance of discovering what is true ... if we leave our academics and their institutions free from external control to the greatest degree possible”.

Instead, he advances what he calls, in a way that may be somewhat terminologically problematic, “the ethical ground”. He says that at the core of liberal societies is a commitment to “ethical individualism” which “insists, among its other components, that we each have responsibility for making as much of a success of our lives as we can, and that this responsibility is personal, in the sense that we must each make up our own mind, as a matter of felt personal conviction, about what a successful life for us would be”.

He says that “[e]thical individualism needs a particular kind of culture – a culture of independence – in which to flourish” and that academic freedom is essential to maintaining such a culture “by creating a theatre [that is, the university] in which personal conviction about truth and value is all that matters, and it trains scholars and students alike in the skills and attitudes essential to a culture of independence”.⁵

² Pincoffs, E. L. “Introduction” in Edmund L. Pincoffs (ed) *The Concept of Academic Freedom* Austin: University of Texas Press 1972 vii at vii.

³ American Association of University Professors *1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure* available at www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure

⁴ Barendt, E., *Academic Freedom and the Law (A Comparative Study)* Oxford: Hart 2010 at 16 – 17.

⁵ Dworkin, R., “We Need a New Interpretation of Academic Freedom” in Louis Menand (ed.), *The Future of Academic Freedom*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996, 181 at 185–91.

It can be argued that Dworkin is wrong to dismiss the “instrumental ground” in favour of the “ethical”: both are important. Liberal societies have found, over a long period of the development of the university as a social institution, that having places in which both academics and students are free from unnecessary interference in the pursuit of their understanding of the truth leads to a more productive and creative exploration of the truth, and fosters that culture of ethical individualism that is integral to the maintenance of a liberal society.

There is a reason western universities have been such powerful engines of innovation, as well as important institutions in maintaining a liberal political culture. But the “instrumental” and “ethical” grounds for academic freedom between them give us tools with which to explore the appropriate application of the value of academic freedom in our institutional life. They reflect our core commitments to creativity and courage. They are central to the ethos and success of our institution.

Importantly, it is not only in our academic life that the University should reflect the values of creativity and courage. If we are to have an authentic collective life, we also need to look for ways in which to demonstrate that creativity and courage in our organisational life.

A good example might be the way in which the University now manages its endowment with a commitment to reducing its carbon footprint over time. The approach that we have adopted involves methodological innovation that has put us in the vanguard of thinking about environmentally responsible investment. The decision to explore these issues and to resolve them took both courage and creativity.

Similarly, it often takes courage for individual members of staff and students to speak out about ways in which the work of the University could be improved, and a confidence that they will be heard. It takes courage for leaders to accept responsibility for the decisions that they make and to admit when they are wrong. But it is only with such courage that the creativity of our community will genuinely be harvested for the good of the institution.

2.2 Respect and integrity

Core to the University’s position as a trusted institution, and to the credibility of its work in education and research, is a deep integrity of two kinds. First, the work of the University needs to be characterised by academic honesty. Academic freedom only has value if it is freedom to pursue truth wherever it may lead. Dishonesty undermines the whole enterprise of education and research and makes the work of other researchers and academics in their own pursuit of new understandings unnecessarily difficult.

Both student and academic dishonesty so betray the underlying purpose of a university that, when discovered, they become appropriately the subject of considerable public outrage.

However, second, the work of the University also needs to be marked by integrity in the sense that while the values to which it expresses commitment may be aspirational, those values are all routinely respected in the processes of University decision-making and in the behaviour of both staff and students.

One particular value has been the subject of considerable conversation in the consultations leading to the writing of this paper. That is the value of respect. As Stephen Darwall of Yale University in the United States has pointed out, the concept of “respect” has at least two uses. The sense in which the term seems to have been used in recent University conversations is a type of what Darwall calls “recognition respect”, the claim that persons “are entitled to have other persons take seriously and weigh appropriately the fact that they are persons in deliberating about what to do.”⁶ In other words, all members of the University are entitled to be treated by one another as full and equal participants in the University community.

An important context in which the discussions of respect often arise at the University is that of disagreement and dispute. The question is often raised as to what, in light of the value of respect, it means to disagree well, to disagree respectfully.

6 Darwall, S. L., “Two Kinds of Respect” (1977) 88 *Ethics* 36 at 38.

Indeed, members of the University arguably have an obligation to model for our community more generally what it means to live well together in contexts of deep disagreement and in which ideas are fiercely, but respectfully, debated. These include not only ideas about the life of the community outside the University, but also ideas about the work and direction of the University itself.

This is because the issue of disagreeing well is not only an issue for the University of Sydney, it is one to which theorists of democracy have devoted considerable attention. Interestingly, as David Schlosberg, Professor of Environmental Politics at the University has pointed out, even those theorists most committed to notions of agonistic pluralism highlight “the need for an ethic of agonistic respect across difference”.⁷

Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe, for example, describes an ideal in which “the ‘other’ is no longer seen as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an ‘adversary’, i.e., somebody with whose ideas we are going to struggle but whose right to defend those ideas we will not put into question”.⁸

How much more then, should dialogue at the University, particularly about issues in the life of the University itself, be marked by such respect? How do we ensure that members of the University community see and treat each other as genuinely equal participants in that dialogue?

In contexts of disagreement, this value of respect needs to involve at least:

- an empathetic willingness to listen carefully and be open to the opinions of others
- a recognition of the particular expertise and experience of individual participants to a dispute
- a recognition of the particular responsibilities within the organisation of any individual participant in the conversation

- a choice of language commensurate with the goal of increasing levels of communication and understanding
- an orientation towards finding common ground with the other
- a desire to identify with some precision those points on which difference exists, rather than to create an “enemy” of the other.

The various contexts in which such disagreements are played out will place different demands on the participants to the disagreement: what might be an appropriate form of language for a coffee room debate may be inappropriate for a whole-of-unit circular email.

Indeed, the question of how we should disagree well arguably impacts all the forms of expression appropriate to a University. For example, while we would clearly wish to affirm the right of members of the University to conduct passionate and vigorous protests against those things regarding which they believe it important to take a clear and public stand, the question of how the value of respect is maintained applies equally at the protest as it does in the academic seminar and the professional staff team meeting.

The point is not that every discussion must be oriented to consensus or pacified, far less that we must avoid difficult issues for fear of causing offence. Rather, for a community to be able to disagree well is to acquire the capacity not only to live with disagreement (as opposed to being torn apart by it), but also to be able to take advantage of the “positive residue” left over from well-handled disputes.

This means that, over time, members of the University community become more likely to trust each other when contentious issues arise and thus more willing to engage in a more productive dialogue.

7 Schlosberg, D., “The Pluralist Imagination” in John Dryzek, Anne Philips and Bonnie Honig (eds) *Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* Oxford: OUP 2006 142 at 150.

8 Mouffe, C., “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?” (1999) 66 *Social Research* 745 at 755.

2.3 Inclusion and diversity

From its foundation, the University has been committed to being open to all members of the community it serves. At a time in which other universities had religious or property tests for admission, whether formal or informal, the University of Sydney was arguably the first in the world to base admission solely on a written examination.⁹ With rhetoric more designed to make a point than a description of the University's first cohort of students, Wentworth had said in his Second Reading Speech that the "gates [of the University] should be open to all, whether they are disciples of Moses, of Jesus, of Mahomed, of Vishnu, or of Buddha".¹⁰

A commitment to inclusion and diversity has thus been, from its foundation, central to the University's understanding of its role. This commitment received renewed support in the statement of purpose guiding our last strategic plan, a statement that has been reaffirmed by staff and students in a recent survey: "We aim to create and sustain a university in which, for the benefit of both Australia and the wider world, the brightest researchers and the most promising students, whatever their social or cultural background, can thrive and realise their full potential."

Our ideal is to be a place in which every person is valued for the contribution that they can make to our collective success, rather than for who they are, or their position in the organisation.

Notwithstanding the strength of this tradition, however, there is much about the University that does not yet reflect our commitment to inclusion and diversity. Though we have been working to diversify our student body in terms of its socio-economic draw, students from low socio-economic backgrounds are still significantly under-represented. Similarly, staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are substantially underrepresented in positions of both academic and professional staff leadership. And although we have a University-wide program for the empowerment of women, they as yet constitute only 27 percent of the professoriate.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is not, for us, a matter of inclusion and diversity. It is a matter of identity for an Australian university, a part of knowing what it means to be an Australian university and not merely a European university transplanted. However, notwithstanding the initial success of the *Wingara Mura* strategy, we also have a considerable way to go before we can say that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia is holistically represented in the culture of our institution.

Once again, this pattern of a strong commitment to inclusion and diversity, coupled with a less strong institutional performance on this score, reflects the culture of the broader society of which we are a part. For example, notwithstanding the educational success of East Asian students over several decades in Australia, only two members of the Federal House of Representatives claim some type of non-European cultural background. No member of the Reserve Bank of Australia Board or the Board of the Australian Securities Exchange, and few of the members of the boards of the ASX top 100 companies, self-identify in this way. If the University can enact its core commitments to inclusion and diversity, it will again be a model to the broader community and true to its meritocratic roots.

It is important to recognise that this commitment to inclusion and diversity entails far more than a commitment to excluding discriminatory practices. We know that the contribution of people of all kinds, from white American athletes to women mathematicians, is impeded by a complex set of cultural cues that create barriers to performance.

Social psychologists such as Claude Steele have demonstrated how universities can create minefields of these cues for particular staff and students, but also how they can work to create an environment in which as many as possible can flourish and contribute.¹¹

Creating such an environment will require genuine self-reflection on the part of the institution, but no more so than is already implicit in, for example, our strong commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, or the commitment to including cultural competence as a part of our undergraduate programs proposed in our Education Strategy consultation papers.

⁹ Horne, J., and Sherrington, G., *Sydney and the Making of a Public University* Melbourne: Miegunyah 2012 at 51 ff.

¹⁰ *Speech of William Charles Wentworth Esq., Member of the Legislative Council of New South Wales. For the City of Sydney, On moving the Second Reading of the University Bill on 4th October, 1849* Sydney: David Wall 1850 at 9.

¹¹ Steele, C., *Whistling Vivaldi: How stereotypes affect us and what we can do*, New York: Norton & Co, 2011.

It is clear that acting on our value of inclusion and diversity will increase our institutional performance, both by requiring of us this process of self-reflection and by releasing the potential of all our staff and students. For example, a team from the London Business School led by Professor Lynda Gratton has conducted a study testing across a range of indicators the innovative potential of balanced gender and single gender teams.¹² Not surprisingly, the mixed gender teams outperformed the single gender teams on all the relevant indicators. Work across a range of diversity indicators demonstrates that a higher level of diversity increases institutional performance.

Similarly, it can be argued that the success of the American university system as opposed, for example, to its Continental European competitors, has at least in part been due to a much greater willingness to recruit the most able academic talent wherever it may be found. A more diverse University will without doubt be a stronger one.

2.4 Openness and engagement

The final of the four values that have emerged from our consultation process relates to openness and engagement – to valuing connection with the communities of which we are a part. At one level this is a part of both the education and research papers outlined in other consultation papers. But it is also clear that it represents a value, an orientation, in our work and planning.

It would be possible, though somewhat difficult, for a University to exist solely to serve the advancement of human understanding and to be detached from the communities of which it is a part. However, whether easy or difficult, this approach has never been a part of the ethos of the University of Sydney, which was clearly founded to serve the people of NSW and beyond.

The University's founders had confidence that in the establishment of the University "a beneficial and a holy light [would] shed its beams on the lowliest dwelling of Australia – a light which will give warmth and life to the humblest aspirant after the great and good". Victorian hyperbole aside, the University's purpose was to benefit the growing colony and, indeed, "the whole family of the human race".¹³

We need to engage, not only with those communities and organisations with which we have existing relationships, but with new ones too, as we open up both what we can learn, and what we can offer.

This value of engagement was a strong driver of our strategic plan for 2011-15. The establishment of a number of multidisciplinary initiatives, the largest being the Charles Perkins Centre, was fuelled by a conviction that it is only in harvesting the intellectual resources of the whole University that we can address many of the pressing questions for which our community is seeking answers.

This is not to devalue excellence in the disciplines, which must certainly be pursued. Nor is it to devalue the importance, or the joy, of solving intellectual problems for their own sake. But it is to say that a large part of our mission must be to address the needs of the community we serve and that we can only do this through genuine engagement with government and with both private sector and not-for-profit organisations. This spirit of engagement drives much of both the education and research strategies that have been proposed in other consultation papers as a part of this process.

¹² Gratton, L., Kelan, E., Voight, A., Walker, L., and Wolfram H., *Innovative Potential: Men and Women in Teams*, London: Lehman Brothers Centre for Women in Business 2007.

¹³ *Speech of William Charles Wentworth Esq., Member of the Legislative Council of New South Wales. For the City of Sydney, On moving the Second Reading of the University Bill on 4th October, 1849, Sydney; David Wall 1850 at 9.*

Importantly, this value of engagement must come with a certain mindset that is also demanded by several of our other values. This mindset is marked by two core characteristics. First, by a certain intellectual humility, an openness to listen and to understand the complexity of the issues our community faces, and a willingness to learn from those outside the academy as much as to offer solutions.

Second, and this is essential, it is marked by a collaborative turn of mind. We will only address many of the pressing questions, both in education and research, if we are willing to work together. Too many of our best efforts have been thwarted by a tendency to create silos that fragment effort and reduce critical mass. Our education and research strategy papers demonstrate the need to overcome this tendency in the institution, so that we can engage better with one another as we engage better with the communities we serve. In different ways each of our values, while not strictly entailing it, implies an openness to collaboration.

Moreover, this value of engagement also comes with a need to simplify our structures. Many individuals and organisations find the University, with its complex internal structure, both academic and administrative, extremely difficult to navigate, and a key challenge for our next strategy is to render the institution more navigable for those with whom we engage and, especially, to provide helpful points of first contact. Thinking this problem through will be a key task for our new Vice-Principal (External Relations), in conjunction with the Education, Research, Indigenous, Registrar, Global Engagement and Alumni and Development portfolios, as well as the faculties and schools.

This issue of the University's navigability and transparency is important, however, not only for people in the broader community, but for members of the University themselves. In particular, the importance of openness has been a constant theme in our conversations about values. Information about the University and its decision-making should be as open and transparent as possible at every level of the organisation.

While greater transparency about financial and research quality information was an achievement of our last strategy, and while the establishment of structures such as the Senior Executive Group has done much to increase the transparency

of decision-making in the institution, it is clear from staff feedback that much about the University, its position, challenges, and decisions, remains opaque to staff beyond a large, but relatively contained, leadership circle.

This is exacerbated by institutional complexity and by the difficulty of determining responsibilities within a large but loosely structured leadership group. The value of openness needs to be one that the University seeks to honour as we move into our next strategic plan.

These, then, are the four clusters of values that have emerged from conversations with staff and students over the last six months:

- courage and creativity
- respect and integrity
- inclusion and diversity
- openness and engagement.

As suggested above, we believe that they are a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the achievement of excellence in both our research and education. Together they present the vision of an institution in which:

- new ideas are vigorously explored and robustly tested
- it is safe to experiment with innovation and safe to fail as well as to succeed
- disagreement and debate are looked upon as ways of achieving an outcome
- there is respect between different categories of staff and between staff and students
- our cohort of staff is genuinely diverse at every level of the organisation and people are valued for their contribution rather than their status
- the University is open in its dealings with staff and students and open and engaged with the external community.

Consultations with staff have revealed how widely this vision of the University is shared but also how far we have to go to see it fully realised. The challenge, then, comes in building a culture grounded in these values.

3 Building a culture based on our values

We are in a strong position to build a culture grounded in our values. Consultation has demonstrated just how widely shared the four value clusters are across the institution and how eager people are to see them honoured more explicitly. To build a stronger culture, however, there are five factors that the experience of other organisations identifies as crucial.

3.1 Leadership

In many different ways, from staff engagement and strategy surveys to workshops as part of our program for empowering women, staff have been emphasising the role of leadership in effecting culture change. This focus is also supported by the literature, and authors such as management consultant Jon Katzenbach place effective leadership behaviours highly as a mechanism for culture change.¹⁴

Leadership is crucial both in modelling the desired values and also in calling out behaviour that fails to reflect them. When in a recent workshop women at the University were asked to identify those barriers that prevent them from flourishing here, they overwhelmingly pointed to the fact that leaders at every level of the organisation tolerate behaviour that holds back their careers.

An important part of bringing change, therefore, is effective leadership identification and training, and the University has been making some slow progress in this direction. In particular, recent leadership training workshops have been extremely well received; and 360-degree review processes for senior leaders have enabled us to open up conversations about the extent to which these leaders model our core values.

However, a problem remains that the leadership structure of the University is extremely complex and responsibility is highly diffused. We lack a clear understanding of structures for administrative, financial and academic responsibility. This makes it difficult both to nurture good leadership and to identify and work with leaders who struggle to foster an environment in which the University's values are honoured. It also makes openness in decision-making more difficult to achieve.

A separate consultation paper on organisational design is aimed at creating simpler structures for leadership accountability in the University, in part so as to remedy these difficulties. In addition, we need to work more carefully on processes for the recruitment of people into leadership positions, and to ensure that an ability to model and promote the University's values is every bit as high on our selection criteria as skills in financial management and academic planning.

¹⁴ Harskhak, A., Katzenbach, J., *Stop Blaming your Culture*, New York: Strategy+Business Magazine 2011.

But however we simplify our structures and select our leaders, there will always be a large group at the University with some responsibility for overseeing the working life of others. At the moment, that group comprises about 1000 people. Over the strategic planning period we need to work with this group to encourage them to reflect on how their decisions and behaviours model, or do not model, the core values that we share.

Encouragingly, at least three large faculties are already running values workshops to encourage precisely this type of self-reflection. Similar work is going on in the professional service units. But this is only one mechanism for holding all leaders in the institution accountable to the values we want to shape our culture. It needs to begin with the University's Senate and extend throughout the leadership structure of the whole organisation.

3.2 Rebuilding processes and governance

An additional tool for bringing culture change relates to our formal processes for conducting the business of the University at every level. During the period of our next strategic plan, we will be working to improve many of our University processes and systems.

At the moment many of our systems do not reflect our core values. They have understandably developed as "control" systems designed to reduce risk in particular areas of activity. However, the effect of the whole is to punish courage and creativity, to show inadequate respect for our staff, and to make navigating the University more dependent than it ought to be on arcane knowledge of our own processes, and therefore less inclusive, open and engaged. As we work to redesign our systems, particularly our administrative systems, we need constantly to be asking how any new proposal measures up to our professed values and how it enables the culture change that we are seeking.

We should also adopt a similar approach to the reform of our internal governance processes. At the moment, the University makes decisions through a complex network of school, faculty and University committees. One staff member claims she is a member of about 40 committees – and it is unlikely that she holds the record.

In theory, decision-making by committee should be open and transparent. It should increase a sense of empowerment across the institution. However, in practice, our committee structure is so complex that it often merely leaves people with a sense that they do not know in exactly which forum a decision has been made, and so accountability for decision-making within the institution is obscured.

A radical simplification and an opening up of information about our decision-making processes would considerably improve the extent to which our governance structures reflect our core values. In our consultation paper on organisational design, we will also propose a simplification of this kind, at least at the University level.

3.3 Building our values into staff policies, processes and practices

Our current processes for recruiting, supporting and promoting people do not always take adequate account of issues surrounding our values. Where they do, those issues are not always given adequate weight in practice across the University as the processes are implemented. Thus a candidate's ability to help build a culture of excellence reflecting our values is not always a part of our recruitment or promotions process for either academic or professional staff leaders.

Similarly, our Code of Conduct needs to be revised in light of the values that we agree as a part of this strategy process, and this code needs to be used more regularly as a resource for considering behaviour. Codes of conduct are contentious in academic communities, often seen as a tool for neo-liberal managerialists to silence criticism in the name of values such as "civility".

There is no doubt that a code of conduct could be used in this way. But there is also an opposite danger, and one to which the University has arguably been more exposed: that is, the danger of writing a code of conduct and filing it away, letting it have no life in empowering staff to identify behaviour that falls short of agreed norms built upon our values. We need a thorough audit and review of our staff policies, processes and practices to determine the extent to which they support the culture change that we are seeking.

3.4 Messaging and celebration

The University does not have a strong history in celebrating the remarkable contributions of our staff and students. We need to change this if we are to see a change in our culture. We need to find both formal and informal ways of celebrating moments in which individuals, groups, and the institution as a whole really demonstrate the values at the core of our desired culture.

Telling these stories has a powerful effect in role modelling and in changing the discourse of success. Our recent *Leadership for Good* campaign is an example of such an approach, but we need to find more consistent and public ways of celebrating the change in our culture that we are seeking to build. For example, alongside our proposed annual awards for teaching and research excellence, we could recognise the work of staff who have made an outstanding contribution to the University in ways that reflect our core values. Individuals across the University need to know that their commitment to developing our culture is recognised and valued.

Similarly, Steele's work (see page 8) demonstrates how important it is that universities send powerful messages about inclusion and diversity in the stories they tell, in the ways they create spaces, and in the visual representation of the institution.

3.5 Empowering staff and students to use our values

Katzenbach (see page 11) attributes about half of the success of any culture change to mobilising the informal organisation.¹⁵ When staff and students are empowered to use our values as justifications for decisions and behaviours, as ways of identifying positive interactions, and as ways of informally calling out bad behaviour, culture change really takes hold.

Women in the University have identified a failure of leadership to identify particular behaviours as building a culture in which their careers are held back. That failure must be addressed.

Leadership strongly aligned with our values is crucial. But an organisation in which it is only, or even principally, those with formal leadership responsibility who celebrate its values and use them as standards for their own and other people's decision-making and behaviour, is one that will never see culture change. The question we need to face as a community is how, through strong peer support, we collectively make it safe for people to use the values that we share. This requires people who are willing to speak out and others who are willing to support them in doing so.

Examples of how effective this type of community self-moderation can be often arise in circular email conversations. The nature of email correspondence means the tone of these conversations can quickly lose respect for the community to which they are addressed or for individuals within it. Yet we have all seen occasions on which the tone of such a conversation has been turned towards a more respectful register through the intervention of a member of staff with no particular leadership responsibility in the University. This type of intervention is to be admired.

¹⁵ Katzenbach, J., Khan, Z., *Mobilizing the Informal Organization*, New York: Katzenbach Partners 2009

4 Questions for consultation

This short paper has outlined the four clusters of values that have emerged from six months of conversation with our staff and students – values that are widely shared across the institution. The paper has also begun to explore ways in which these values might be used to build cultural change in the institution of the University as a precondition to building a stronger University and excellence in both education and research.

However, for this paper to stimulate change, it needs to be part of an ongoing five-year conversation in which everyone in the University takes responsibility for effecting the culture change we so clearly need.

Our current cultural challenges are not the product of the decisions or behaviours of any one group within the institution. They are the product of a complex system of interactions that facilitate creation of one type of culture or another. Changing this system is a task for every individual in the institution, to a greater or lesser extent, and every individual has a responsibility to ensure that the values we share “go viral” as they genuinely become norms for our collective life.

We will sometimes fail in this endeavour: values are always aspirational. But articulating our values more clearly and adopting them into the discourse and practice of the institution on a day-to-day basis will bring a genuine and radical shift in the life of the University.

For this reason, there are just three questions on which this paper is seeking feedback from the University community:

- What questions does the exposition of our values in this paper raise?
- What practical measures might the University adopt to ensure our decisions and behaviours align with our values?
- What practical steps might we take to effect the cultural change we are seeking?

It is precisely in discussing questions such as these that we shall begin to effect the cultural change for which the University has a strong appetite.

We encourage you to take the time to share your thoughts. Please do so by 15 October via our online form:

- sydney.edu.au/strategy

Notes



Contact us

Rebecca Murray

Director of Strategy

Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal

+61 2 9114 0636

university.strategy@sydney.edu.au