

Carol Hiller  
Personal Assistant to the Pro-Vice Chancellor  
College of Arts

College of Arts Change Proposal Submission

Dear Ms Hiller

Like many of our colleagues at this university, we are deeply concerned with the nature of the College of Arts Change Proposal. However, we are writing in order to highlight a potential clash of interests between the Change Proposal and the University Charter which was approved by the Hon Steve Maharey (Associate Minister of Education) in 2003. We feel that some of the actions put forward by the Change Proposal could potentially conflict with imperatives and goals explicitly set forth in the Charter. Of additional concern to us is the apparent disregard shown by the University's central authorities toward the University Charter's dictates concerning transparent decision-making procedures. In pursuance of these goals, we will first seek to highlight the positions regarding the American Studies and Theatre and Film Studies departments in both the University Charter and the Change Proposal, proceeding to our concerns regarding the opacity of the University's decision-making procedures, and taking these concerns as indicative of the fostering of a disregard for the role of the Liberal Arts in this university.

Section 10 (page 14) of the University Charter states that one of the roles of the governing 20-member Council is:

- “Ensuring ethical *behaviour and compliance with the Education Act*, other laws and regulations, auditing and accounting principles, and the *University's Charter and Profile*.” (Italics added)

The Charter:

- “...will remain in effect until 31 December 2010.” (page 1)

As far as we know and are able to ascertain, the Charter is not under review and will continue to be in effect until the date stated above.

Among the more concerning actions put forth by the Change Proposal are:

- The disestablishment of the American Studies (AMST) and Theatre and Film Studies (TAFS) departments (pages 14 and 17, respectively)
- The removal of 13.5 full-time equivalent staff (page 21)

The potential effect of the removal of these two vibrant areas of teaching/research from the University will be detrimental to the perceived reputation of graduates of the university (past and present), and the university as a research institution. It is a well known fact that universities (as opposed to polytechnics and other vocational training institutions) are qualitatively judged on the health of their Liberal Arts departments.

We have identified sections of the (still binding) charter which recognize the discipline of Theatre and Film Studies as a core programme in the University and essential to the university's responsibilities to the community as a whole. For instance:

- “The University's teaching programmes represent a heritage of solidly-grounded basic disciplines in the laboratory sciences, commerce, engineering, field sciences, forestry, humanities, information and communication technology, law, life sciences, social sciences and *visual and performing arts*. While reflecting a keenly felt university responsibility for stewardship of knowledge, these generic disciplines are also foundational to the development of specialist teaching and research programmes, particularly in interdisciplinary fields and postgraduate study.” (page 8 [italics added])

Within the College of Arts Change Proposal’s rationale for the removal of the TAFS programme we find the following statement:

- “Theatre and Film Studies is not core to the College of Arts Programmes.” (page 17)

This stands in direct contradiction to the ‘special character’ of the university as defined above by the binding charter. We therefore find that the proposed removal of a department that has been defined as essential to the University’s obligations to society by the binding university charter, on the basis that it is not ‘core’, of great concern.

The University’s mission statement, given in section one of the Charter (page 3), contains the following statement:

- “Our purpose [is]...to serve as a repository of knowledge and expertise; and to act as critic and conscience of society...and to contribute to the intellectual, cultural, social and economic well-being of our city, region and nation.”

The disestablishment of the TAFS and AMST departments, along with the removal of the academic positions associated with these departments, is in direct contradiction to both the spirit and statement of the University’s mission.

One of the stated ‘desired outcomes’ of the change proposal is an ‘improved identity’ for the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree (page 8). However, the University Charter states that

- “...the special character of the University of Canterbury is reflected in...[t]he generic nature of our undergraduate degrees and the flexibility this offers students.” (page 5)

It would appear that the “...need to...streamline the BA degree” (Change Proposal, page 7) runs in direct contradiction to this source of ‘special character’ of the university.

However, it would seem that the reasons for these proposed changes lie deeper than mere monetary concerns. For instance;

- “Theatre and Film Studies is costly with three theatres and general staff to support the programme.” (page 17)

Many departments have costly tools required for their research and development. The same justification can be made for the removal of many departments. For instance:

- Chemistry study is costly with many pieces of equipment costing hundreds of thousands of dollars and 17 general staff required to support the programme.

Thus, we deem that the rationale actually lies somewhere else, which is not transparently stated within the change proposal. The chemistry department is able to cover the cost of its technical staff and equipment through the commercialization of its research output, and is therefore able to seek funding external to channels open to the Liberal Arts. TAFS does not produce research that is commercially viable. Furthermore, open commercialization of its research output would directly compromise the quality of said research and the perception of the University as an intellectually independent entity. It would seem that the value it does produce, i.e

- “The University's strengths in the *visual and performing arts*, including the fine arts, music, *theatre and film*, [that] contribute to the cultural vitality of the Canterbury region, to the construction and projection of *New Zealand's national and cultural identity*, and to providing intellectual energy and content for New Zealand's creative industries.” (University Charter, page 8 [italics added])

is not seen to be value by the university administration. We agree with the University Charter, in that cultural vitality and intellectual energy are essential to New Zealand’s cultural identity. The Charter states that the University is not an institution devoted to the acquisition of wealth; this is corroborated by the University’s own ‘special character’, and the Ministry of Education’s definition of a university (as set forth in the Educaiaon Act, 1989):

- “(a) That universities have all the following characteristics and other tertiary institutions have one or more of those characteristics:
- (i) They are primarily concerned with more advanced learning, the principal aim being to develop intellectual independence:
- (ii) Their research and teaching are closely interdependent and most of their teaching is done by people who are active in advancing knowledge:
- (iii) They meet international standards of research and teaching:
- (iv) They are a repository of knowledge and expertise:
- (v) They accept a role as critic and conscience of society”

([http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0080/latest/DLM183668.html?search=qs\\_act\\_education+act+1989#DLM183668%22](http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0080/latest/DLM183668.html?search=qs_act_education+act+1989#DLM183668%22))

The University’s special character is defined as follows:

- “The contribution that the University makes to New Zealand's rich heritage of literature, art, music and theatre” (section two, page 5)”

We see this as meaning that the value of the output of the university’s Liberal Arts departments should not be quantified in terms of monetary value, - that the value an Arts discipline brings to wider society in terms of human expression, social conscience, advancing learning and developing knowledge, all come prior to the objectives of increasing the University’s financial output. This is an important understanding especially with reference to Liberal Arts departments, where the knowledge derived often has no ‘commercial’ value, and commercialization would have an extremely derogatory effect on the quality of the output. The knowledge developed should be valued in terms

independent of monetary concerns, as stated in section three of the University Charter (sited above). We find that we are not the only ones who believe this is the correct approach – it has even been passed into law by our government (Education Act 1989):

“159AAA Object of provisions relating to tertiary education

(1) The object of this Part, Parts 13A to 18, and Part 19 (which relate to tertiary education), and of the provisions of Parts 18A and 20 to 24 that relate to tertiary education, is to foster and develop a tertiary education system that—

- (b) *Contributes to the development of cultural and intellectual life in New Zealand; and*
  - (d) contributes to the sustainable economic and social development of the nation; and
  - (e) strengthens New Zealand's knowledge base and enhances the contribution of New Zealand's research capabilities to national economic development, innovation, international competitiveness, and the attainment of social and environmental goals”
- ([http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0080/latest/DLM183668.html?search=qs\\_act\\_education+act+1989#DLM183668%22](http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0080/latest/DLM183668.html?search=qs_act_education+act+1989#DLM183668%22) [italics added])

While it is clear that the government sees the value of research commercialization as important to the country, it is also clear that it sees there is more to the development of a nation than economic strength.

Nevertheless, this blatant disregard for the guiding principles of the University Charter and subtle sidelining of government legislation is not our only concern. The procedure followed by the University's central authorities in the setting of the dollar sum the Arts Future Governing Council were told to provide through cuts has been both secretive and surreptitious.

One of our greatest concerns is the University's policy of Contribution Margins (CMs). It is stated in the Change Proposal that the College of Arts' CM is 41.5%, meaning that almost half of the College's net income must be given back to the university's central authority for the maintenance of communal facilities, such as new signage, a statue for the registry, advertising and marketing, the flags on University Drive, bumper surplus and various other articles. To the best of our knowledge, the College has absolutely no say in how the CM is spent or how it is set. Also, there is no information available as to what the CMs of other colleges are. The Change Proposal states that the

- “Contribution margin is centrally set and will continue to be so” (page 9).

This is in direct contradiction with the University's policy of ‘transparent decision making’ as stated in the university Charter:

- “We will make a difference by...the inclusiveness and transparency we bring to our decision-making...” (page 3)

This level of disregard for the university's stated intentions and methods is absolutely unacceptable. As the research and productive ends of the Arts department are often not linked to commercially gainful knowledge, but rather its generation and distribution as an end in itself (as stated in both the University Charter and the Education Act, above), we question an ethos that demands high monetary returns on staff whose intellectual liberties are being curtailed by the ends of the administration's demands for them to justify their position in terms of commercial value in the form of Contribution Margins.

We are not alone in having deep concerns about the CM model. For instance, the Association of University Staff's Canterbury branch had this to say (<http://aus-canterbury.blogspot.com/search/label/College%20of%20Arts> [all italics are original]):

- "...we are concerned that the CM model is particularly prone to abuse by those who surreptitiously use it to effect de facto policies. *We believe that the CM is used to effect ideologically-driven policies without stating those policies explicitly and thus allowing either Council or the Academic Board to properly consult.*"
- "The CM thresholds are set by a formula which has never been subject to external scrutiny. The fact that these margins vary from year to year, sometimes within years, even for the same accounting unit indicates that the CM is fluid. Its secrecy and apparent arbitrariness lends it to being used to support objectives without having to fully articulate those objectives to Council and Academic Board. While this kind of use of the CM can only be speculated on at present, *what is certain is that the extremely poor communication around how the different CM targets are determined has led to significant staff unrest and ongoing morale costs to this institution.*"
- "...the CM model has an inherent contradiction. While the Colleges must respond to market forces such as student trends and the priorities of external funders for their incomes, they rely on non-market central planning by management to set both the capacity of services available and the costs of these services which are necessary to deliver on their teaching and research missions. These costs also include any strategic investments made under the direction of senior management...Hence, to call resource flow from colleges with higher profit margins to those with lower margins a "subsidy" while resource flow from income generating colleges to non-income-generating units "not a subsidy" is semantics. And of course this type of resource flow is legitimate and necessary. It would be absurd if every unit of the University had to generate direct income from the outside as the Colleges do, but *it is equally absurd to suggest that the flow of finances between colleges is a kind of internal welfare system while the flow of resources from colleges to other units is not.*"
- "Cross-subsidies can never be eliminated. For example, the University put its case to the *Press* which reported: "[w]ith the ratio of lecturers to students in the arts standing at 19:1 against 34:1 in the College of Business and Economics, there is a related argument that this is about spreading resources more fairly." [*The Press*, 11 March 2006.] Business and Economics benefits in other ways from Arts, just as all colleges and other units benefit from each other. For example, every student of Science that successfully completes a course in Philosophy will have learned to write critical essays necessary to both understand and then articulate complex concepts. How does the CM model measure this contribution? When a student advisor in the Science College Office directs a student to an Arts course, how does the CM measure that? In short, it doesn't. In fact, *the CM sets an incentive system that undermines good-of-the-institution behaviour at costs that management has never even attempted to measure much less report to Council.*"

It is obvious that the concerns we are not the only ones aware of the underhandedness and near-deception that seems to be becoming common practice in the University's central authorities. We believe that the specific concerns mentioned above are symptomatic of a wider disregard shown by the university decision makers for the guiding principles as set forth in the University Charter, the Education Act, and the reasoning tacitly accepted among educated persons as to the very existence of the University in the first place. From contrasting the (binding) University Charter with the Change Proposal, we have found the proposal to be wanting in a number of key factors:

- it is in direct contradiction with the charter on the core nature of TAFS;
- it contradicts the special character of the BA degree as a broad, general and flexible;
- it is not transparent in its goals;
- it is not transparent in the decision procedure motivating the setting of said goals; and
- that it shows absolute ignorance of the purpose of the Liberal arts tradition (despite lip service).

Thus, we find ourselves in the unenviable position of having to remind this institution of the fact that it is party to eight centuries of heritage concerning universities in the western world. The College of Arts Change Proposal belies an attitude that is putting current and future generations of Liberal Arts scholars, whose presence is a necessity in any society wishing to consider itself beyond intellectual infancy, in very dire circumstances indeed. We hope that this contribution will not be in vain, that the powers that be will realise that the Liberal Arts are vital to any culture wishes to possess institutions known as 'Universities'. We agree to our submission being made available on the University of Canterbury internet for others to read.

Regrettably yours,

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