

**Cultivating Human Intelligence and Morality in the Age of Artificial Intelligence:
The Imperative for Good Universities that provide Education as a Public Good**

Higher education in Australia has become a commodity, but it must become a public good again. As artificial intelligence (AI) begins to massively transform various industries and aspects of our daily lives, there is growing concern about its impact on society. While AI has the potential to bring about significant advancements, there are also legitimate fears that it could exacerbate existing societal inequalities, further erode privacy, and potentially pose a threat to national security.

In light of these concerns, it is imperative that we prioritize investing in high-quality universities where human intelligence and morality can be cultivated. This is crucial because the development of AI will require not just technological expertise but also an understanding of its societal implications, including ethics, privacy, and security concerns.

By fostering a culture of critical thinking and moral responsibility in our universities, we can ensure that the next generation of AI developers and decision-makers are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of this emerging technology. Moreover, good universities that treat education as a public good provide a fertile ground for interdisciplinary research aimed at understanding the impact of AI on society and developing strategies for mitigating its potential negative effects. In fact, it is precisely through such research and academic principles that we can develop effective solutions to address the challenges posed by AI.

The University of Sydney Association of Professors (USAP) has been actively promoting academic values and freedom within our institution and, through its contributions to the Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP), in other Australian universities. Over the past seven years, we have developed the first version of the "10 Pillars of a University," which became part of the AAUP constitution after an extensive national consultation.

As a founding chapter of the AAUP, USAP aims to provide advice to local politicians and advocate for the needs of universities and society. Through our work, we have highlighted the importance of credible academics taking on leadership roles to support the university's true purpose. We have also emphasized the need for collaborative leadership and concerted action between university executives and professors to navigate the current crisis and rebuild the system with a focus on academic values.

Our association has addressed various issues affecting our university, including managerialism, bullying, lack of consultation with academics, and the undermining of smaller disciplines, among other problems. We have submitted a proposal to the Vice-Chancellor's 10-year strategic plan, advocating for a more academic and democratic university culture. Our submission emphasizes the need for adherence to academic principles at all levels, including management, HR, audit, and legal counsel. Through our efforts, we have highlighted the importance of protecting

democracy through critical thinking, fundamental research, and academic freedom. We have also called for the inclusion of diverse disciplines, particularly in the humanities, to achieve a truly inclusive university culture.

Our concerns about the infiltration of private consulting firms in universities and the lack of academic representation on the Accord panel and ministerial reference group have led us to support Public Universities Australia (PUA). We have also made a submission to the NSW Minister of Education, emphasizing the importance of academic principles and offering assistance to the Vice-Chancellor.

As we look to the future, our Action Manifesto (the latest version is attached) aims at a radical reform of public universities in Australia, prioritizing academic values and freedom as the guiding principle. We call for governance to be placed predominantly in the hands of well-credentialed scholars, ensuring that vice-chancellors and presidents excel in disciplinary scholarship and operate with suitable management expertise.

If you are a financial member (or want to become one: usap@professoriate.org), please attend this year's USAP AGM, scheduled to be held on 8 August 2024. The final version of the Manifesto will be discussed, where USAP members may be interested in being involved and making some finishing touches. It has already been circulated nationally and found much support. We can then send the final version out to all MPs, Senators, and the media, as with previous communications.

Our key actions for reform aim to promote human agency for scholarship, entrust autonomous expertise, foster mutual respect between academics and the wider community, and create a tolerant environment for all members of the academic community. By adopting these reforms, we believe that our and other Australian universities can reclaim their academic integrity, promote human agency, and contribute to a globally sustainable environment. We need good universities to control the rise of AI.

Most importantly, do not give up. The changes initiated by the launch of AAUP and PUA, which could not have happened without USAP's support, are irreversible, as other democratic countries have had similar organizations for much longer periods. They have been dearly missing in Australia. Persistence and perseverance are essential in bringing about meaningful change. While bureaucratic hurdles and political delays can be frustrating, giving up only maintains the status quo. Bureaucracies and political systems are designed to be stable, but by consistently engaging with these systems, individuals and groups can gradually influence policy and reform institutions over time. This persistence not only leads to significant improvements but also builds valuable skills, social contacts, and credibility that may prove instrumental in achieving long-term goals. Remember, many impactful changes were the result of sustained effort in the face of daunting obstacles.

Therefore, patience and determination are crucial in creating a better higher education system.

23 July 2024

Manuel B. Graeber

USAP President

On behalf of USAP Council

A Manifesto for the Reform of Public Universities in Australia

Highlighting key actions:

- 1- Enshrine and protect academic values and freedom to debate contesting ideas as the guiding principle of the university.
- 2- Put the governance of universities predominantly in the collegial hands of well-credentialled scholars.
- 3- Foster mutual respect between the academic and the wider communities, enacting a shared role in guiding university management.
- 4- Entrust the autonomous expertise of academics with the academic freedom to teach and conduct research as they best know how.
- 5- Provide suitable venues for disciplinary and cross-disciplinary interaction.
- 6- Engender respect and tolerance for different worldviews and beliefs.
- 7- Create a tolerant environment recognising all members of the academic community, including students, emeritus scholars and alumni.
- 8- Respect each University's unique tradition and capacity for excellence in teaching and research, enhancing and strengthening human intelligence with expert guidance for our future in a globally sustaining environment.

Preamble

Increasingly, in recent years, the shift from collegial governance to hierarchical corporate management has restricted the freedom of scholarship in Australian universities. Nor is the education of our young people principally seen as an investment in the future well being of the nation. Education and the roles of the university as an autonomous community of scholars committed to creating and disseminating knowledge, and in serving as a deep reservoir of expertise for the nation to draw upon, have been subjugated to immediate financial profitability. Universities have lost academic integrity.

This is detrimental to the disciplined, informed, open inquiry and innovation which universities have promoted, guiding the intellectual development of human society for millennia, helping to shape the liberal-democratic modern world. Too often, modelling based on a consensus is substituted for creative hypotheses that can be tested against observable real-world data. The fundamental commitment to seeking the truth, irrespective of how inconvenient or unpopular it may be, has been lost. Such disrespect for the well proven traditions of scholarship has often resulted in overturning "truths" rather than in advancing them.

Underpinning this disrespect for scholarship and truth, is increasingly authoritarian abuse of academics and students by university management that is dissociated from the academic mission, sometimes allowing bullying and harassment with casual disregard for truth based on reason rather than emotion. The University as an autonomous community of scholars teaching students must be restored.

How can this unproductive university management be reformed?

Promote human agency for scholarship in research and teaching

Regardless of each person's genetic identity, sex or cultural background, all must have the freedom to contribute the best of themselves to society. Furthermore, everyone has the inherent right to be supported in developing their character, intellect and expertise. For those in academia, methods of research and teaching are inseparably bound and should be practiced together so students should not be taught in regimented ways. This kind of well-rounded practice should seek to provide a diverse enriched environment for teaching.

Our Action Manifesto

So how should the governing principles be prescribed?

1- *Enshrine and protect academic values and freedom to debate contesting ideas as the guiding principle of the university.*

Core academic values and freedom to debate contesting ideas include; rigour in expertise; commitment to

advancing and promulgating knowledge; collegiality; freedom of speech; robust intellectual discourse; freedom of academic research; and truth in all academic work. Understanding must be based on empirical facts and reason, rather than emotion. New schools of thought and innovation tested robustly should be possible.

2- Put the governance of universities predominantly in the hands of well-credentialed scholars.

Vice-chancellors or Presidents and their deputies must excel in disciplinary scholarship, operating with suitable management expertise and advice; they should be nominated for selection with major input and ownership by the academic professoriate. Restoration of an elected academic professorial board with power to promote genuine academic values is essential to the University's autonomous future.

3- Foster mutual respect between the academic and the wider communities and enact a shared role in guiding university management.

Through its role in research and education for life and as an interactive public forum between town and gown and the country at large the university should justify it is worthwhile supporting. We can advance knowledge collectively through interactive use of its facilities.

4- Entrust the autonomous expertise of academics with the academic freedom to teach and conduct research as they best know how.

Academic appointments should always be chosen from the best applying, free to develop their discipline and given adequate infrastructure and financial resources. For grievances from poor management such as lack of sufficient support, harassment or bullying, a visible mechanism (or ombudsman) for independent hearing, accountability and reconciliation should be available. Management must serve the academic mission and adequate time, funds and support for research, teaching and administrative tasks must be guaranteed.

5- Provide well-funded venues for disciplinary and cross-disciplinary social interaction.

Such venues should facilitate interaction in disciplinary departments and with the public in clubs or designated social meeting places. Management must guarantee adequate time and funds for such interaction, providing mentoring, testing of ideas and intellectual developments. Many breakthroughs and innovations arise from such informal ambiance and serendipity.

6- Engender tolerance and protect respect for different worldviews and beliefs.

Tolerance and due respect for culture should be enshrined in a code-of-practice. Grievances are best solved by the principle that prevention is better than cure or issues resolved, if possible, discreetly. However, for disrespect of diversity, an appeal to a neutral inspector for support or to an ombudsman may be required.

7- Create a tolerant environment for contributions by all members of the academic community.

From students through to current and emeritus academics and alumni, recognise all the key agents who deliver the work of the University, acknowledged publicly in a collegiate and cooperative manner. Credit all involved in significant achievements, particularly by junior staff. Freely volunteered, all such services and exercises of wisdom should be respected by practical support. Rather than dwelling on past grievances, look to the future.

8- Respect each University's unique tradition and capacity for excellence in teaching and research, enhancing and strengthening human intelligence with expert guidance for our future in a globally sustaining environment.

Collectively, all universities can value their diversity of heritage but promoting mobility in scholarly expertise with equity of opportunity for diversity developing options for a productive human future. Respect should be encouraged to the philosophers and practitioners of all scholarly disciplines in the evolution of human intelligence and culture. There is room for all in discussions, though with reason guiding emotion.

Confirmation by universities of their action manifesto performance

Responsible university management should consciously comply with all the principles enunciated above. National needs for professional expertise should be considered, never using a system of increasing gross net income to abolish faculties or for minimum class size. The criteria for management performance should be collectively scored by academics, and revised on a regular schedule, ensuring improvement of universities.