

Reviewed by Chris Mayer

The introduction begins with a reference to Transforming a College: The Story of a Little-Known College’s Strategic Climb to National Distinction by George Keller. In this book, Keller presents the strategy Elon University used to transform itself (p. xvii). While they praise Keller’s study of Elon, the authors distinguish their work from Keller’s through their focus on successful practices at multiple institutions instead of just one as well as their articulation of the two questions below that they have written the book to address.

“What matters most in the undergraduate experience?”
“What is possible when colleges and universities focus on what matters most” (p. xviii)?

The book employs the positive deviant approach to discover those who have achieved success despite facing challenges so that others with similar challenges may adapt these successful practices to their situation. For those unfamiliar with it, the positive deviant approach is described and applied in detail in Pascale, Sternin, and Sternin (2010), and Heath and Heath (2010) develop a modified version of it with their focus on ‘bright spots’. From their study of ‘positive deviants’, the authors propose the following six themes as essential for creating successful undergraduate experiences: Learning matters, Relationships matter, Expectations matter, Alignment matters, Improvement matters, Leadership matters.

Each of the six themes has its own chapter, and each of these chapters includes action principles illustrated by multiple examples. One action principle for the chapter on learning is to ‘help students integrate learning opportunities’, and it is exemplified by Carlton College’s approach to curricular integration through integrative projects that focus on transfer and synthesis across the disciplines (p. 35). The authors note that this curricular effort promoted collaborative course planning and led to academics and staff taking ownership for institutional learning goals (pp. 35-36).

Another theme is that relationships matter. One example that highlights relationship building is Elon University’s weekly College Coffee events that occur for 40 minutes at a time when no classes are scheduled. These weekly gatherings allow academics, other staff, and students to interact, and their success provides support for the action principle of ‘encouraging everyone on campus to cultivate relationships’ (p. 60). Another example is Duke University’s FLUNCH Program (Faculty Lunch) that funds ‘opportunities for students to invite faculty members for one-on-one lunches’ (p. 46). The FLUNCH Program is complemented by the FINvite Program (Faculty Invitation), which allows academics to invite students to dinner, with the University providing catered food and transportation for students (p. 46). These types of programs are not common across American higher education, but the authors argue that they should be because they strengthen relationships across the campuses in which they are used.
When describing the theme of institutional alignment, the authors describe how Christopher Newport University (CNU) calibrated course schedules, enhanced academic advising, provided early and frequent feedback on student performance, and created a comprehensive early-alert system (pp. 100-102). All of these academic programs and campus practices were aligned to achieve the institutional mission, which resulted in a 10 per cent increase in retention and a 20 per cent increase in six-year graduation rates (p. 103). Although the authors do not always identify quantifiable results associated with the practices in the book, in the case of CNU these results validate the action principle to ‘align academic programs and campus practices’.

In the chapter on improvement, the authors describe the Harvard Assessment Seminar initiated by Richard Light over 30 years ago (p. 118). These seminars were held over dinner each month and included academics and staff from other institutions. At each seminar, participants would ‘identify a question about students’ collegiate experiences and then create a plan to gather and analyse relevant evidence’ (p. 118). Participants discussed the results of their inquiry and used these results to inform efforts to improve student learning. While many academics bristle at the thought of assessment, the collegial research-oriented engagement described by Light presents an approach worthy of consideration.

The authors highlight the importance of leadership for those institutions seeking to improve. In exemplifying the principle of ‘articulating clear, aspirational goals linked to institutional mission and values’, readers return to CNU where the president, Paul Trimble, led a transformation of the institution. To accomplish this transformation, CNU ‘sharpened its focus on the undergraduate experience and the arts and sciences, eliminated professional programs not in keeping with that vision, increased rigor of academic programs, and committed to a student-centred institutional culture’ (p. 143). This led to a 500 per cent increase in the number of applicants in ten years and a significant increase in applicant standardised test scores (p. 143).

The authors end the book by highlighting the importance of culture, especially ‘positive restlessness’ and the development and implementation of a strategic plan (pp. 166-167). Another important component of successfully implementing the ideas in the book, they argue, is breaking down silos within institutions so that academics and other staff can collaborate to improve the undergraduate student experience (p. 172).

While the title includes the qualifier ‘American’ higher education, the book is relevant to Australian higher education, and its cases actually include non-American institutions. Those looking for in-depth case studies with rigorous application of theoretical perspectives will be disappointed. While the authors do employ some theoretical work, and actually rely on a significant list of references, their focus is on providing multiple successful examples in undergraduate education rather than focusing on just one or two. This makes the book of great use to practitioners (academics, staff, and administrators). The examples it provides are powerful, and the book would be very useful for an institution in the process of strategic planning. Because there is no discussion of criticism of the practices it presents or advice for implementation, those reading the book should consider it a launching point for further research and discussion of the successful practices it highlights. The book would also be an excellent read for an institution-wide professional development program focused on improving an institution’s undergraduate experience.

Chris Mayer is Associate Dean for Strategy, Policy and Assessment and an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the United States Military Academy (West Point).

References


Environmental Certification.

vegetable-based inks with alcohol-free printing initiatives

In accordance with NTEU policy to reduce our impact on

the members’ area at

notification rather than printed copy) for all NTEU

NTEU members may opt for ‘soft delivery’ (email

Visit

AUR

AUR is published using

vegetable-based inks with alcohol-free printing initiatives

on FSC certified paper by Printgraphics under ISO 14001

Environmental Certification.

Contributions

Please adhere to the style notes outlined on this page.

Contributors should send digital manuscripts in Word format

to editor@aur.org.au. Contributions should be between 2,000

and 7,000 words, although longer articles will be considered. All

articles should be accompanied by an abstract that would not

usually be longer than 150 words.

The author’s full contact details should be provided, including

email address, telephones and fax.

Contributions are sent to a minimum of two referees, in accord-

ance with DIISR requirements for peer blind review.

Contributors should read the website before submitting a paper:

It is presumed that authors have followed the standard scholarly

ethical practices involved in seeking to have their work pub-

lished. Authors should take their lead from the Australian Code

for the Responsible Conduct of Research.

Book reviews

Books for review should be sent to the Editor. Our policy is to

review books dealing either with tertiary education or with mat-

ters pertinent to issues in tertiary education. Book reviews should

be between 200 and 1200 words, review essays may be longer.

Replies and letters

AUR welcomes letters of response to articles published in the

journal. Longer responses to articles are also encouraged.

Responses should be a maximum of 1,000 words, and should be

received within a month after the publication of the journal so

that they can be properly considered by the Editor and the Edito-

rial Board for the following issue.

Subscriptions

AUR is free to NTEU members on an opt-in basis. Full details at


Annual subscription rates (inclusive of GST where applicable)

are $71.50 AUD (Australia and NZ), $89.00 AUD (overseas air-

mail). Overseas payments should be made by credit card or bank

draft in Australian currency.

Advertising

AUR is published twice a year, in February and September. The

current hard copy circulation is approximately 8,000 per issue.

Rates are available on application to aur@nteu.org.au.

Archives

AUR is archived online at


AUR is also available online as an e-book and pdf.


NTEU members may opt for ‘soft delivery’ (email

certification rather than printed copy) for all NTEU

magazines. To access your membership details, log in to

the members’ area at www.nteu.org.au.

In accordance with NTEU policy to reduce our impact on

the natural environment, AUR has been printed using

vegetable-based inks with alcohol-free printing initiatives

on FSC certified paper by Printgraphics under ISO 14001

Environmental Certification.

AUR Editor

Dr Ian R. Dobson, Monash University

AUR Editorial Board

Jeanrie Rea, NTEU National President

Professor Timo Aarnevaara, University of Lapland

Professor Walter Bloom, Murdoch University

Professor Jannie Doughney, Victoria University

Professor Leo Goedegebuure, University of Melbourne

Professor Jeff Goldsworthy, Monash University

Dr Teen Kho, La Trobe University

Dr Mary Leahy, University of Melbourne

Kristen Lyons, University of Queensland

Professor Dr Simon Margisso, University of London

Mr Grahame McCulloch, NTEU General Secretary

Dr Alex Millmow, Federation University Australia

Dr Neil Malherbe, UNSW@ADPH

Professor Paul Rodan, Swinburne University of Technology

Cathy Rytmeister, Macquarie University

Jim Smith, CPA National President

Production

Design & layout: Paul Clifton

Editorial Assistance: Anastasia Kotaidis

Cover photograph by Oleg Dudko.

Contact Details

Australian Universities’ Review, c/- NTEU National Office,

PO Box 1323, South Melbourne VIC 3205 Australia

Phone: +613 9254 1910

Fax: +613 9254 1911

Email: editor@aur.org.au

Website

www.aur.org.au

AUR is published by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) to encourage debate and discussion about issues in higher edu-

cation and its contribution to Australian public life, with an

emphasis on those matters of concern to NTEU members.

Editorial decisions are made by the Editor, assisted by the AUR

Editorial Board. The views expressed in articles in this publica-

tion, unless otherwise stated, are those of the authors and do not

necessarily represent the views of the Editor, the Editorial Board

or the publisher.

Although some contributions are solicited by the Editor or the

Editorial Board, AUR is anxious to receive contributions inde-

pendently from staff and students in the higher education sector

and other readers.

AUR publishes articles and other contributions, including short

commentary and satire. Articles will be assessed by independ-

ent referees before publication. Priority is given to contributions that are substantial, lively, original and have a broad appeal.

Responses to previously published contributions are encour-

aged.

AUR is listed on the DIISR (formerly DEEWR and DEST) register

of refereed journals.

References

References to be cited according to APA Publication Manual

6th edition (with minor exceptions).

References in the text should be given in the author–date style:

King (2004) argues...

or

as various authors (King, 2004; Markwell, 2007) argue...

Two co-authors should be cited in the text as

(Smith & Jones, 2013).

More than two authors cite as

(jones et al., 2011).

Page references should be thus:

(King, 2004, p. 314).

Page references should be used for direct quotations.

The reference list should be placed in alphabetical order at the

end of the paper, utilising the author–date system.

For a reference to a book:

Mikkelsen, J. & Knight, J. (2005). Higher Education in Austra-

lia: An historical Overview, in M. Belia, J. Mikkelsen & J.

Knight (Eds). Higher Education in Transition. Brisbane:

University of Queensland Press.

For a web reference:


Retrieved from http://www_coll.inwa.edu.au/__data/


Do not include retrieval dates for web references unless the

source material may change over time (e.g. wikis).
Letter from the editors: Introduction to the special issue – Challenging the Privatised University
Kristen Lyons, Jeremy Tager & Louise Sales

The conference: An overview and assessment
Richard Hill
Conferences come and go: some you remember, others you don’t. This event, organised by the University of Queensland and Friends of the Earth, and supported by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), National Alliance for Public Universities (NAPU) and the Ngara Institute, was in the former category.

The Brisbane Declaration

Part 1: An analysis of problems associated with the privatised university

Critiquing neoliberalism in Australian universities
Jeannie Rea
While students chanting ‘No cuts, No fees, No corporate universities’ may be dismissed as youthful hyperbole by some, it is not as superficial a characterisation of the state of our public university system as it seems. The withdrawal of government funding and fee deregulation is the core issue for Australian higher education. It is even more stark because we have a largely government funded system.

The Death of Socrates: Managerialism, metrics and bureaucratisation in universities
Yancey Orr & Raymond Orr
Neoliberalism exults the ability of unregulated markets to optimise human relations, but it is paradoxically built on rigorous systems of rules, metrics and managers. The potential transition to a market-based tuition and research-funding model for higher education in Australia has therefore been preceded by managerialism, metrics and bureaucratisation.

Democratisation or management and corporate capture? Theses on the governance crisis of Australia’s semi-privatised public universities
Andrew G Bonnell
This paper proceeds from the view that managerial capture has already become a fundamental problem after largely untramelled managerialism in our public universities, and that this problem is likely to be compounded by further shifts towards deregulation and de facto privatisation. This is the direction that current federal government policy is trying to take in the higher education sector.

Part 2: Impacts of the privatised university

Academics, the humanities and the enclosure of knowledge: the worm in the fruit
Nick Riemer
If we want to combat contemporary ‘neoliberal’ attacks on universities, we should start by refusing the way that their pseudo-rationalities already determine so many aspects of the intellectual and institutional regimes that we consider under threat.

Law student wellbeing: A neoliberal conundrum
Margaret Thornton
The discourse around student wellness is a marked feature of the 21st century Australian legal academy. This article argues that the neo-liberalisation of higher education is invariably overlooked in the literature as a primary cause of stress, even though it is responsible for the high fees, large classes and an increasingly competitive job market.

Agnosis in the university workplace
Andrew Whelan
A significant challenge for the privatised university is its impedance of particular forms of effective engagement and action in teaching and research, notably with respect to inequities in the broader social context, and the position of the university within that context. In the face of significant resource constraints, several factors combine to produce a particular form of ‘ignorance’.

Part 3: What constitutes the good university?

Learning by doing by learning: Reflections on scholar-activism with the Brisbane Free University
Fern Thompsett
As universities are swept by a near-global tide of capitalist restructuring, myriad forms of resistance are also on the rise. This paper explores the complex tensions involved in working simultaneously within the academy, and engaging in activism beyond it.

What are good universities?
Raewyn Connell
This paper considers how we can arrive at a concept of the good university. The best place to start in defining a good university is by considering the work universities do. This leads to issues about the conditions of the workforce as a whole, the global economy of knowledge, and the innovations bubbling up around the edges of this economy.
REVIEWs

74 Reflections on Critical Pedagogy
   Reviewed by Thomas Klikauer

78 Be national, not global
   The New Flagship University: Changing the Paradigm from Global to National Relevance, by John Aubrey Douglass (Ed.).
   Reviewed by Kaycheng Soh

81 Transformation by inclusion
   Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education, Edited by Daryl G. Smith.
   Reviewed by Kate White

82 Doing it UNSW-style
   Reviewed by Dennis Bryant

83 Improving undergraduate education
   Reviewed by Chris Mayer

85 An idea of union
   Reviewed by Howard Guille
Since 1958, Australian Universities’ Review has been encouraging debate and discussion about issues in higher education and its contribution to Australian public life.

Want to receive your own copy of Australian Universities’ Review (AUR)?

AUR is published by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) twice a year. NTEU members are entitled to receive a free subscription on an opt-in basis – so you need to let us know. If you are an NTEU member and would like to receive your own copy of AUR, send us an email at aur@nteu.org.au.

Subscription rates for non-members are available at www.aur.org.au.

If you would like to become a member of NTEU, contact the local Branch office at your institution, or join online at www.nteu.org.au/join.