

PLENARY – Save Nursing

Speaker 1 – Mel de Silva, University of Sydney

Speaker 2 – Liesha, USYD (guest speaker, academic staff)

Speaker 3 – Graham Hastings, NUS

Questions & discussion

Reason?

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Sydney has not specifically been asked if the fact that HECS cannot be increased for undergraduate Nursing places is the reason for the closure of undergraduate Nursing. However, saying that, the question has been put to the University many times but has never been answered. Specific example was the Forum that was held for Nursing students shortly after the closure was reported in the media. A spokesperson for the Pro Vice Chancellor did not answer the question. However he did say that it is “just not financially viable to have the Faculty.” ‘What if’ questions were raised about other ‘non-viable’ faculties. These questions were not answered as they were “hypothetical”.

The University was keen to trade in Nursing places for more lucrative student places. There is a suspicion however that the question is not really about HECS but more about the really big money that is involved in corporate sponsorships and partnerships. Compared to other Health subjects, such as Medicine, Nursing just does not attract these sponsorships and partnerships.

This has not come out of the blue and has been on the cards since 2000.

Students

There will definitely be students for 2 years – this years 1st years. It will be a process of ‘natural attrition’. Supposedly students will be able to graduate with a University of Sydney degree until 2008. However it is likely that staff attrition will occur within that time.

Many students specifically chose to study at the University of Sydney because of the name and prestige. The majority of students would want to graduate with a University of Sydney degree and would want to be taught by university of Sydney staff etc.

This all feeds into issues of quality versus glossy branding and the possible fallout of not upholding standards that students want.

Staff

Staff are currently being audited and it seems this will have a role in staff fallout.

***Indigenous Nursing** is necessary as a course as there are numerous problems experienced by indigenous peoples, many more than by their non-indigenous counterparts. For example, the life span of indigenous peoples is twenty years shorter. Even other colonized countries have a better life*

expectancy than indigenous Australians. Indigenous peoples live in a 'fourth world'. There are the poverty and health problems of the 'third' world as well as the chronic diseases (such as diabetes, heart disease, cholesterol, obesity) of the 'first' world. It is imperative that Nurses are trained to think broadly. There is a need for a more wholistic approach, to think large and for that to be brought to the local levels.

There was discussion on whether the course should be 3 years rather than the 4 years that is currently, and whether it could be better integrated into the standard Nursing degree.

According to the Minister for Education, Dr. Nelson, the Bachelor of Indigenous Nursing will continue – the grant remains. However, the numbers are small and the course probably cannot survive in a Faculty that is only teaching this without an undergraduate program like there currently is at the University of Sydney. There is also the issue of staff morale and attrition.

The course not just be lifted and transferred at another University. Some of the issues include copyright, review period, cannot exist in a vacuum separate from Bachelor of Nursing degree.

The future of the course is unknown. There has been no review of the wide reaching implications for the Bachelor of Indigenous Nursing and the future.

In the Forum referred to above, the PVC spokesperson said that the University of Sydney was committed to keeping subjects like Medicine, Dentistry and Speech Pathology as they taught 100% of students in the State. Nursing is a smaller percentage at the University of Sydney, only 30% of the State's students. It was pointed out that the Indigenous Nursing degree is the only course of its kind in the State, in Australia and in the world.

Action

The NTEU approached the IRC but the IRC does not have the scope to stop the closure of the Faculty.

Look at what we can learn for similar fights in the future.

- *This was not turned into a National issue by students,(or the unions?)*
- *Broader alliances?*
- *Time-lines*
- *Faster momentum?*

Statements against the closure of undergraduate Nursing

Possible recipients of letters etc:

- *University of Sydney Senate*
- *Deans' offices (Nursing and Orange Principle)*
- *DEST*
- *Federal Education Minister*
- *Department of Health*

Formal statement by the National Conference of Research and Education Staff of Student Organisations, 2004, Sydney

This conference of RESSOs condemns the University of Sydney decision to deprioritise Nursing by closing the undergraduate Nursing course. We also condemn the closure of the Orange campus. We believe these are short-sighted decisions considering the nursing shortages experienced in the sector nationwide and the lack of educational opportunities for people in rural and regional Australia. We specifically deplore the effect that this will have on Indigenous Nursing and indigenous health. We support the efforts of the students, staff and community in their fight against these decisions.

Motion put: JR

Motion seconded: CL

Motion passed unanimously

It was agreed that this message would be spread throughout communities.