



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

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Faces in the Crowd?  
The 'Melbourne Experience'  
past, present, future

The **Sir Robert Menzies Oration** on **Higher Education**



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Professor McPhee was educated at Colac High School, Caulfield Grammar School, and the University of Melbourne, where he completed a BA (Hons 1st Class), Dip.Ed., MA (Hons 1st Class) and PhD. He taught at La Trobe University 1975-79 and the Victoria University of Wellington 1980-86 before returning to the University of Melbourne, where he has held a Personal Chair in History since 1993.

He has published widely on the history of modern France, notably *A Social History of France 1780-1880* (London, 1992) and *Revolution and Environment in Southern France, 1780-1830* (Oxford, 1999). In 1999 he also published a biography of the former Chancellor Roy Douglas ('Pansy') Wright. His most recent book is *The French Revolution 1789-1799* (Oxford, 2002).

Professor McPhee was Deputy Dean and Acting Dean of the School of Graduate Studies in 1994-96, then Head of the Department of History in 1996-99. He was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1997. In the same year he became an inaugural 'Universitas 21' Teaching Fellow. In 2003 he was elected a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, and awarded a Centenary Medal for services to education. He was an Officer of the Academic Board 1999-2003 and its President in 2002-03. He took up his current position in October 2003.

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- the establishment of the Menzies Research Institute, Hobart;
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- the funding of post-graduate scholarships in the fields of medicine, allied health sciences and law ;
- the sponsorship of grants, seminars and lectures on public health related themes;
- the sponsorship of the Sir Robert Menzies Oration on Higher Education;
- support for the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies in London;
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# ***“Faces in the Crowd?”***

## ***The ‘Melbourne Experience’ past, present, future”***

### **The Sir Robert Menzies Oration on Higher Education**

**Peter McPhee<sup>1</sup>**

**19 October 2005**

In 2003 we celebrated the 150th anniversary of the founding of the University, and in April 1855, 150 years ago this year, the University opened its doors to students. We had a far better staff:student ratio in those days – there were three staff and 16 students (today our ratio is 1:18) – but whereas today about 90 per cent of those who complete first year go on to graduate, only four of the 16 who began in 1855 finally did so.

Let us move forward 70 years, to 1925, when far fewer than one in 10 Australian children completed secondary school, and almost all who did were from private schools. The offspring of wealthy families often felt no particular urgency to complete degrees; for others, particularly the tiny minority of children from state schools, it was a privileged and exciting world of learning. There were fewer than 2,000 students, only one-quarter of whom were women, just 160 professors, lecturers and demonstrators. From its origins, Melbourne had been characterised by a commitment to the liberal ideal of disinterested learning but also by a recognition of its function as a trainer of professionals. Indeed, the epithet then most commonly used for the university—‘the Shop’—suggests a popular assumption of students choosing from a selection of degrees in return for high fees.

The University was utterly derivative in its scholarship: its teaching staff relied on British books and journals—far less commonly European or American—for their knowledge. Staff and students shared an assumption that real learning emanated from England. In the words of Kathleen Pitt, who completed her studies in 1925, ‘there were exciting prospects ahead, because while I was taking my degree in absentia Mother, my sister and brother and I were all aboard the good ship Nestor, bound for Europe, where it was the parental design that our colonial rough surfaces should be filed and polished, our academic education furthered and our serious education begun.’<sup>2</sup> Pedagogy was centred on lectures from the

professors, mostly of British background, who were often adept at oratory but with little experience in research or its popularisation. They relied on well-worn lecture notes and jokes: indeed, students knew from those who were repeating the subject precisely which joke would be told and when. Some lecturers dismayed a Tasmanian student who began his studies here in 1925, Roy Douglas Wright, soon known as ‘Pansy’. It was, reflected Wright in later life, ‘a sad little university’, the professors ‘punch-drunk’ from having to cover so much curriculum with little support.<sup>3</sup>

Change was in the air, however, at least in the nature of undergraduate life. While there had been a lively Public Questions Society since the end of World War I, the title of its publication, *Both Sides*, indicated a pluralism which the more *engagé* found unsatisfying. In April 1925 Brian Fitzpatrick, like Wright a bright state-school boy, became chief-of-staff of the new student newspaper *Farrago*. A Labour Club was founded in the same year by Fitzpatrick, Ralph Gibson, Macmahon Ball and others; Joan Finlason and Kathleen Pitt were among the women members, and were also *Farrago* editors. Almost immediately an opposition Liberal Club was formed by Ian Maxwell and Wilfred Kent-Hughes.<sup>4</sup>

In later life, Kathleen Pitt, now Fitzpatrick – she had been married to Brian Fitzpatrick – recalled that:

*When I entered the University of Melbourne in 1923 the campus was the same size as it is now, but in those days it seemed much larger because one’s general impression was of a few buildings scattered through a large park. In the middle there was a rather romantic lake, fringed with reeds and pampas grass, haunted by birds and student couples engaged in flirtation or courting. Into its shallow waters the more boisterous students occasionally threw those of their fellows who gave them offence. ... The water-supply was poor and no attempt was made to water parks in the summer, when the great extent of grass in the*



Kate Fitzpatrick c 1960

university grounds became as dry and brown as it still does on the Western Plains in a season of drought.

*The University of Melbourne in my student days was a small establishment, with two thousand students and few amenities: there was no Union, no theatre, no bookroom, no bank and little to eat except sandwiches and pies and cakes with pink icing. [Male and female students ate in separate lounges.] The size of the academic staff was drawn to scale and an arts department usually consisted of a professor, one or two lecturers and one or two tutors.<sup>5</sup>*

Ever since the University opened its doors, a series of graduates have looked backed with nostalgia to their student experience. Alison Patrick, an Arts student taught by Katie Fitzpatrick, recalled that:

*I found the university exciting. It was small by present standards, and a combination of fees (seventy guineas for a three-year arts course, when the basic wage was four pounds) and lack of competitiveness (anyone could come who could pass the not-very-exigent fifth-form examination) made it socially more homogeneous and intellectually more heterogeneous than it has since become. ... The air was lively, and meetings of the Labour Club, the only political club I can recall, were usually packed. And people talked, they talked all the time, to colleagues from their own departments and from other departments and other faculties, about politics naturally, but also about whatever they happened to be working on. It was the kind of place – I am not romanticising, I can still see the sun slanting through the windows – where one could sit in the Caf all afternoon, from lunch till six o'clock, arguing and seeing where the argument led. There was no such thing as having the last word. It was exhilarating, as it was exhilarating to be turned loose on libraries full of books new to me. There was no place anywhere I would rather be.<sup>6</sup>*

Students in the post-war years recalled like Patrick the heady mix of politics and friendship. Stephen Murray-

Smith remembered that 'within a few months in 1945 my father had signed me up in the Frankston branch of the Liberal Party, Geoffrey Serle had got me into the University Labor Club and through that into the Australian Labor Party, and Ian Turner and Jeanette Noye (later Jeanette Love) had persuaded me ... to join the Communist Party.<sup>7</sup> For Peter Blazey, likewise, 'My first year [1959] was a delirium of joining. ... I sniffed around the student newspaper *Farrago*, and for a bit of rude health joined the daggy Mountaineering Club. ... My first club was the Arts Association, an effete group of beleaguered Arts males (several of whom were obviously gay). We went on outings, read poetry and put out a quarterly poetry magazine called *Hashish*.<sup>8</sup>

Blazey was a contemporary of Jack Hibberd, a medical student starting to find that his distinctive humour and prose were more suited to play-writing. His essay is the best recollection we have of student life at Melbourne:

*The Cafeteria teemed with lost souls, the foyer of the Union with the captains of clubs and societies. The Melbourne University Film Society stall was manned by myopics (who affected duffel-coats draped over their shoulders), that of the Rationalist Society by lechers and sots. The representatives of the theatre societies, with their flute-pure vowels, corduroy suits and silk cravats, were enough to put you off theatre for life, even off life itself. ...*

*In first year Medicine cliques were particularly strong, structured around schools and social status. I'd never before met chaps who skied and rowed, who summered at Portsea and wintered in the Alps. I had spent a few weeks at Rosebud and Lilydale.*

*First year seemed dominated by the alumni of Melbourne Grammar and Scotch College. They stuck together like notes in a Swiss band.<sup>9</sup>*

Rita Ehrlich recalled with affection 'an innocent time: 1966. We still dressed up to go to classes. The girls wore dresses or skirts, not jeans, and we still wore stockings. Panti-hose and mini-skirts did not exist. The sophisticated drink was dry sherry, served from flagons and usually accompanied by chunks of kabana and soapy cheese at department parties.<sup>10</sup> At such parties larger-than-life characters dominated later memories. The journalist Louise Carbines recalled of the late 1970s that 'the chairman of the English department, Professor Howard Felperin, a maverick who had come to rescue the department from decades of the literary criticism of F.R. Leavis, liked to shock and amuse. Professor Felperin, an American, was about 40. He wore bright shirts and hipster pants. He did not keep any books in his room. He said they were an academic pretension.<sup>11</sup>

This University is now a very different place from the



The eastern side of the National Museum from across the University lake c 1890



small, mediocre, élite institution that 'Pansy' Wright and Katie Fitzpatrick inhabited in the 1920s. An obvious contrast is that it is 20 times larger than it was 80 years ago: we now have 42,000 students, 57 per cent of them women, and 6,300 academic and general staff.

Another is that we define ourselves as a comprehensive research university of international standing. Of course, universities have always been international in their assumptions about the borderless search for knowledge; only recently, however, has a university like ours sought to define itself as international in other ways, in its student body, its curriculum, its place in the world of learning.

Over the past 20 years we have lived through an information revolution that ranks in importance with the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in 1455 and the mechanisation of those presses in the first half of the 19th century. University libraries remain special repositories of print and microform but are increasingly gateways into data-bases. Students are as likely to access information independently through the internet as through subject websites. Only a minority of students – disproportionately those from overseas – routinely spend every day of the week moving between library and classroom.

The digital revolution and the imperatives or allure of part-time work make it unlikely that students will have the campus experience of their parents' generation. It is not enough for us to intone gravely about the centrality of the 'Melbourne Experience'. We need to redefine what the Melbourne Experience should be in this changed student world. We need to ask what it is about the campus which will make it a place where students will choose to be. This is as much a challenge about what goes on outside the classroom as in it, and it is about student electronic interaction with university administration, learning resources and each other as well as being about the quality of their interaction with other students, teachers and general staff.

Kerri-Lee Krause has described three types among contemporary students: the home-owner, the tenant, and the visitor. The 'visiting' or 'disengagement' phenomenon is in part a result of the campus not being perceived as an attractive enough place: why go to the campus if the experience is solitary and the environment uncomfortable or unattractive and the IT infrastructure less sophisticated than at home? We need to make the campus a good place to be, the interaction sociable and the learning collaborative.<sup>12</sup>

We believe that a campus-based university like ours can best thrive by creating pedagogical richness through the new teaching and learning technologies, technologies which enrich and supplement rather than replace direct interactions with fellow students and staff. One educational challenge within the 'Melbourne Experience' is to integrate better new and evolving technologies in teaching. This will require more flexible teaching spaces and a wider acceptance of the ways the new technologies may enrich face-to-face teaching and promote another sense of community. The new technologies also give staff an advanced capacity to introduce students to the excitement of research.

In other words, universities and their libraries no longer play the knowledge-guardian role they once did, even if they have never been more important in educating students to be sceptical about claims to knowledge. What else can we offer in place of this role? We often use the shorthand term 'the Melbourne Experience' to indicate what we now wish to offer our students. And it is especially what we call the 'Melbourne Experience' and

challenges to it which I wish to examine this evening.

The University of Melbourne seeks to offer its students excellent and stimulating academic programs for undergraduates and postgraduates. These are programs which provide an international as well as an Australian perspective. We see ourselves as shaped by a rich western institutional heritage and yet intellectually and culturally at home in the East Asian region. Our academic programs are imbued with the ethos and experience of research. We want our graduates to have a profound respect for truth and intellectual integrity, and for the ethics of research.

In 2002 the Menzies Oration was delivered by the Vice-Chancellor of McGill University, Dr Bernard Shapiro.<sup>13</sup> His comments on the challenges for 'research-led' universities like McGill and Melbourne were particularly pertinent. Dr Shapiro addressed the 'teaching-research nexus', defining its proper function as embedding research values throughout the university, and in particular in developing students who are 'intellectually and morally autonomous'. But he also addressed our obligation to raise with students explicitly and continuously the ethical dimensions of research.

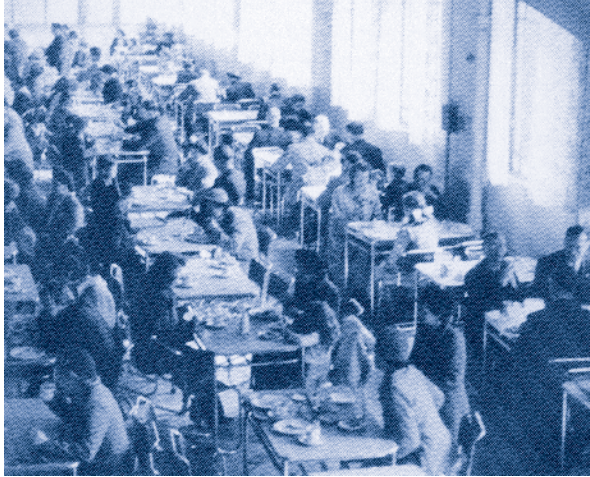
The 'Melbourne Experience' is a campus-based education in a learning environment characterised by both a rich architectural heritage and new technologies. At the same time we offer an attractive, stimulating university environment which also takes advantage of our privileged position in Carlton. This is vital, for we need to articulate what is different about being educated in Melbourne rather than somewhere else. We need a campus that matches our aspirations to be the place of first choice for the most able students from Melbourne, Australia and the region.

The University's ideal of the 'Melbourne Experience' is:

- An **educationally focussed community**, where staff and students work together to strengthen teaching, learning and the pursuit of knowledge;
- An **articulate and open community**, where freedom of expression is protected, and new and difficult questions are explored;
- An **international community**, for which the campus experience is made the richer by being located in the heart of a multicultural city;
- A **lively community**, where students are invited to participate in student clubs, debates, sport and community service;
- A **fair community**, where diversity is valued and the integrity of the individual is respected;
- A **principled community**, where explicit codes of academic honesty, of ethics and of good conduct guide behaviour and where students and staff accept their obligations to others;
- A **caring community**, where the well-being of each student and staff member is supported according to their individual needs and where service and the support of others is encouraged; and
- A **celebratory community**, where the University's history and achievements are known and honoured and its living traditions widely shared.

Through their participation in this environment, the University wants its graduates to be educated, well-informed citizens able to contribute to their communities wherever they choose to live and work. This should be an education in citizenship. It expects students to have an international awareness based on understanding of social, cultural and linguistic diversity, and on respect for the physical environment and individual human rights and dignity.

The Student Union at Melbourne was founded long ago, in 1884. The first building to accommodate Student Union activities was funded in 1911 through student fees and a government contribution of £2,000. In the decades that followed its founding, the Union provided a training ground for generations of politicians, including future Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies, who in 1916 was elected President of the Students' Representative Council.



*The student cafeteria c 1950*

For the past century and more student life outside classes has been a special characteristic of the 'Melbourne Experience'. *Farrago*, for example, has been a training-ground for people such as James Button, Kate Legge, Kathy Bail, Christos Tsiolkas, Kenneth Davidson, Louise Carbines and Patrick McCaughey. Campus life now faces three major challenges. The first of these is that in March this year the Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson introduced legislation requiring voluntary student unionism. The legislation will prevent public universities from collecting any compulsory levy on students which is not directly related to their courses. This year the University of Melbourne collected about \$12.6 million in student contributions to pay for services administered by the Student Union and Postgraduate Association. This amount includes the funding of Melbourne University Sport, child care services, student personal accident insurance and a host of other student services, such as legal advice, academic support, and some of the support services available to international students.

The VSU legislation will apply from 2006. Experience from Western Australia suggests that VSU will see a sharp decline in student contributions to student services, along with the inevitable closure of many activities long associated with university life, and a contraction of support for students. Whichever side of politics you are on, you will understand that this is a major challenge for us.

The second challenge is one that today's graduates have experienced at first hand. Most of those of my generation who were fortunate enough to go to university, like me, were in a very small minority: when I was an undergraduate Monash had just recently opened its doors and Melbourne still only had 14,000 students. We were either from families wealthy enough to pay fees or we were on scholarships. We were mostly full-time, doing summer jobs to pay our living expenses during the year. Today we know that 60 percent of full-time first-year students work on average 10 hours per week, and that both these figures increase thereafter: some full-time students are full-time in the workforce.

Many students are under pressure to do paid work at the same time that the academic year is more pressured and intense than it used to be. In the process, it has become more difficult for students to take advantage of the wider campus experience, to have time to debate, to reflect, to relax, to do other things. Two students in five pursue an extra-curricular activity here: I wish it was more. But it would be an abdication of our duties to respond to what is commonly called 'disengagement' by regretting a mythical past or by attempting to control how much time students spend in paid work. Instead we need to define and provide a campus experience which builds on new ways in which students are engaging with the physical campus and digitised banks of information where once they needed only to find a seat in the Baillieu Library.<sup>14</sup>

The third challenge is the increase in the physical size of the University. What was for almost 150 years the southern gateway into the campus, the Grattan Street entrance, is now in the heart of the campus. Kathleen Pitt recalled her student days in the mid-1920s that a 'lecture attended by a 100 students was regarded as huge ... In my student days I never heard of the problem with which I was to become familiar later, of students being so desperately lonely in the crowd that they had nervous breakdowns. In a small-scale university it was easy to make friends, not only in one's own year and faculty but in other years and faculties, a broadening experience now much less common.'<sup>15</sup>



*Looking south from the Gatekeeper's Cottage to University Square, 2005*

The University stretches from Tin Alley to Queensberry Street. How do we go about creating a sense of belonging to a learning community – the single most important factor in students valuing their education – in an elongated city of 50,000 students and staff? How can the Baillieu Library, for all its riches, meet the needs of such a city in the new millennium when it was built in the late 1950s for 10,000 students? This is why an important decision has been made to focus our approach to the physical infrastructure of the University around a series of precincts based on faculties. We will explore the possibility of creating multi-purpose learning 'hubs': a combination of resource centres, learning spaces and recreational areas.

In May this year the report was released of *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies*, completed by Kerri-Lee Krause and others in our Centre for the Study of Higher Education.<sup>16</sup> This national survey of first-year students is the third in a series conducted at five-year intervals: 1994, 1999 and 2004. The 2004 study provides a snapshot of first-year students in August of that year.<sup>17</sup> What does Dr Krause's study tell us? I am here quoting from the executive summary.



- Most students felt that university had lived up to their expectations, though significant subgroup differences emerged. Notable among these is the issue of international students' unmet expectations in some areas.
- Most found they enjoyed the challenge of university subjects and were stimulated by the lecturers, although low achievers were less likely to feel this way.
- Mature-aged students tended to have a higher academic orientation than did younger students, perhaps because of their greater sense of purpose. However, they often come with low expectations about how well they will perform and find that they receive higher marks than anticipated.
- Engagement with university life and learning was a central focus of the 2004 study. It is about both time use and involvement with staff, peers, and various aspects of the learning environment. In 2004, University of Melbourne students spent an average of 4.5 days on campus and significantly more time in course contact hours per week than the average first-year student.
- A large majority of Melbourne students really liked being a university student, though only just on half of them felt they belonged to the university community. Some potential indicators of disengagement, such as coming to class unprepared and being willing to skip classes were relatively common, although not frequent behaviours.
- Engagement with web-based course resources was high at Melbourne compared to the national average. Email use was somewhat lower, with between two thirds and three-quarters using email to contact peers or lecturers either daily or weekly. Regular use of online discussion groups in academic settings was limited, with only one-third of students using them daily or weekly. International students made use of this form of interaction significantly more than their domestic peers.
- Half of full-time students in the Melbourne sample were both studying and in paid work for an average of 10 hours per week during semester. Paid work had an impact on the available time for private study, the tendency to skip classes and time available for involvement in extra-curricular activities at university.
- Student ratings of teaching and teachers at Melbourne have improved significantly over the last decade, mirroring the national trend. In 2004, 83 per cent stated that the quality of teaching was good compared with 67 per cent in 1994. Lecturers and tutors are perceived as interested and enthusiastic about what they teach.
- However, only a minority of respondents perceived teachers as giving helpful feedback and taking a personal interest in students. The majority of first-year students in 2004 were well satisfied with their course and enjoying their studies.
- Males in the sample tended to be more positive than females about the quality of teaching and their university experience overall. They had a stronger sense of belonging than their female counterparts, who had made friends at university, but who were more likely to feel overwhelmed by all they had to do.
- International students face many challenges, not the least of which is adjusting to a different culture and approach to pedagogy. The difficulties of such adjustments are reflected in a number of places in this report. Nevertheless, there are many positive elements of their experience, including their valuing of social connectedness with peers in the learning community.
- Rural students in the sample tended to be purpose-driven, motivated and enjoying their study somewhat

*more than their metropolitan peers. Nevertheless they face the challenges of having to uproot and relocate themselves closer to university, and to relying on savings as a major income source.*

I began this oration with a series of recollections of our alumni of their years as students. One conclusion from these is the importance of memory, of vivid images that served to define that student experience. So Diana 'Ding' Dyason, a Science student during World War II, remembered student pranks, such as one when the clock in the Old Arts tower struck 13 times at 6.30 am, then a further 453 times (the count was established by a diligent caretaker).<sup>18</sup>

The memories of course are warmest of our own years. But these are romanticised. My own earliest memory of the University of Melbourne is as a 15 year-old being taken by my sophisticated sister and her boyfriend in an old car through the grounds of the University to see at the Union Theatre a grainy and endless Indian saga – no doubt one of the "Apu Trilogy" directed by Satyajit Ray – savoured through the smell of Gauloises cigarettes and old leather jackets. Jack Hibberd was probably there. Afterwards we went to her flat in Gatehouse Street, Parkville and drank red wine and black coffee. I was in what seemed to me a magic, adult world of intense discussion of things that really mattered. My sister must have been a third-year Arts student at the time.

Such memories privilege those who made their mark in student life or later, and whose activities and memories serve to elevate past student life to now unattainable heights. They are inaccurate as a guide to the experience of students in the recent or distant past. Of *Farrago*, dismissed 'Pansy' Wright, 'the founders were the little group regarded in the University as the aesthetes—each with high self-assurance in written and spoken expression and sporting Oxford bags'.<sup>19</sup> A pathbreaking study of women students at the University in the 1920s paints a very different picture than the heroic one of 1925 that I have outlined. Rather than focus on brilliant achievers such as Katie Pitt, Molly Lazarus and Joan Finlason, the History Honours student Sianan Healy studied the "unexceptional".<sup>20</sup> The precocious feminism of prominent women students who wrote for the magazines and organised literary societies was at odds with the dogged conservatism of most of the 800 women students, for whom the hot issue of 1925 was whether students should be required to return to the practice of wearing



*Intervarsity hockey team 1930*

academic gowns on campus, a step most women supported. Similarly, the diverse lot of students the political psychologist Graham Little interviewed for his brilliant 1975 book on campus life agreed about one thing: 'at university, thank god! You are left alone' to be yourself.<sup>21</sup>

A similar tone of amused detachment pervades Emma-Kate Croghan's 1997 film comedy, *Love and Other Catastrophes*, set at the University. In this Alice Garner, Frances O'Connor and others brilliantly portrayed campus life in the 1990s. The film is a delight: Croghan was just 23 when she made it, a recent VCA graduate, and her actors convey a sense of being themselves through relationship break-ups, late assignments, overdue library books, and dealings with eccentric academics.

Across these decades, older students and politicised alumni have intoned about the collapse of student life. The journalist Kate Legge recalled that 'the *Farrago* editors in 1976 were troubled by the demise of student activity on campus post-Whitlam. They published a special seven-page supplement headlined 'What does it all mean?', which carried interviews with lecturers and students. ... One of the eight students interviewed bemoaned the lack of political debate and protest, while several others said they deliberately avoided that kind of distraction, blaming the pressure of work.'<sup>22</sup> At about the same time, in 1975, Graham Little, as if anticipating our concerns this evening, began his book with the premise that 'university should be an experience, that scholars should dwell in a community, that an ... education requires expenditure on more than classrooms and bench fittings'.<sup>23</sup>

Earlier this year, Ross Gregory Douhat produced a brilliant, acerbic memoir of his years at Harvard after 1998. 'But Harvard was not what I expected', he charged, 'it was not a refuge of genius and a sanctuary of intellect. ... Such academic idealism is regarded as a quaint curiosity at best. ... At its crudest, a Harvard education is a four-year scramble to ingratiate oneself. ... Meritocracy is the ideological veneer, but social stratification is the reality.'<sup>24</sup> And yet, despite Douhat's conservative mockery of Harvard's liberal ethos and politically correct but often vacuous humanities curriculum which left him feeling cheated, he ended by loving the place, describing the tears mingled with rain at the graduation ceremony.<sup>25</sup>

The central reason for his affection, notwithstanding the *entrée* Harvard gave a bright middle-class boy into élite republican circles, was that he had lived in college. Likewise, one of Kerri-Lee Krause's conclusions about first-year students at the University of Melbourne in 2004 was that:

*Residential college students emerged as generally well adjusted and particularly well connected with peers out of class. They sometimes face the dilemma of managing an array of social activities and competing demands for time in the college setting. Nevertheless there is much to learn about strategies for successful academic and social integration into university life through close study of the college student experience.*

Earlier this year a former student of mine – I had supervised his History Honours thesis during his Law/Arts degree – came to have lunch with me during a visit to Melbourne from London, where he has been practising Law for five years. As we walked across the south lawn towards the Old Quadrangle and the Old Arts Building, he turned to me and said, 'You know, Peter, I can't tell you how moved I feel to be here among these memories; those were the happiest years of my life so far'. But he, too, had been a residential college student.

When 'Pansy' Wright came to Melbourne in 1925 about one student in four was in college: now it is less than one in 12. We know that residential colleges provide unequalled opportunities for friendship, for bridging cultural differences, for a distinct type of learning community. In a way, the Melbourne Experience must be a quest to provide to all our students the intellectual intimacy, social interaction and the sense of place and belonging that colleges already provide to some.

We will continue to place major emphasis on the quality of the overall 'Melbourne Experience' for students, but if the University is to capitalise on the value of a face-to-face learning environment, supported by an array of digital technologies, then we must find ways of ensuring that we are providing the right mix of infrastructure and student facilities. Each year about 70,000 graduates in Australia are asked to complete a Course Experience Questionnaire, administered to all graduates in the April after they complete their studies. Our results are good and improving – about 80 percent of our graduates say that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the course they took. Faculties have contributed to these results by taking a number of initiatives to improve success rates and student satisfaction, such as supporting the social as well as academic function of first-year tutorials.

But we have much more to do and my view is that we must further enrich the 'Melbourne Experience' outside the classroom as much as within it. Our goal must be to provide the best education in Australia and to provide a 'Melbourne Experience' that students will look back on as some of the best years of their lives.

Last month we considered the results of a survey of final-year international students on their experience at the University of Melbourne. They were positive in general: 70 per cent described their education as very good or excellent, and relished their success in overcoming the challenges of living and studying in this strange place. Wrote one:

*University is a great place to gain experience, to live an independent life and to be able to practise solving problems. Overall, uni life in university of Melbourne has been an exciting period of my life and I would definitely encourage the young to study in the uni. Just be yourself, work hard and at the same time have some fun. Keep it up, Melbourne uni! And another thing, Melbourne is an awesome place to stay!*<sup>26</sup>

Far more common, however, were remarks from international students that, although they valued highly the education they received at Melbourne, they were disappointed that they have not succeeded in making Australian friends as readily as they made friends among other international students. One in five final-year international students stated last year that socialising with Australian students had been a problem initially, but was no longer; however, two in five said it was still a problem. Plainly, if our goal is to provide a learning experience that is international in every way, we still have much to do. Some of the international students sounded rather like this Australian student who graduated at the end of 2003:

*As someone who moved from a regional area to attend University and who couldn't afford to live in a college, I found it difficult to make friends at uni. I'm glad that I studied but will look back at university as a lonely and isolating time in my life. This was partly my own fault as I'm quite introverted, but the size of classes makes it difficult to engage with students and teachers. Also, I think the University education system gives you no personal support because*



*the experience is meant to make you self-reliant and independent i.e. tutors aren't allowed to read your work and you get the impression that they are extremely busy ... Overall, I didn't feel like a person in a community where people learned together, I felt like a number.*<sup>27</sup>

We must seek to create instead an intellectual and social experience that our students will recall as fondly as the American exchange student who wrote to me after her semester here earlier this year: 'I truly had a fantastic semester at Uni Melbourne. The university was friendly, helpful, fun and most of all had an open and intellectual atmosphere! I will spread all of my wonderful memories.'<sup>28</sup>

My hope is that students' lives might be as rich as that of someone like Charles Hoadley, who graduated in both Engineering and Science back in 1909. He joined Mawson's expedition to Antarctica in 1911 and there is a Cape Hoadley. He was also a charismatic teacher who became Principal of Footscray Technical School. He

was Chief Commissioner of Boy Scouts and a lover of the outdoors: he established Gilwell Park in Gembrook. Charles Hoadley was the tenth of fourteen children. One of his brothers, by the way, became a confectionary manufacturer and named one of his crumbly inventions after their mother Violet.

Like Hoadley, many generations of students have cherished their campus-based education at the University of Melbourne. But we now face formidable challenges to our goal of providing a rich 'Melbourne Experience' in a changing world of part-time work, the internet revolution, the changing legislative environment, and continued growth in the size and diversity of the student body and the campus. We do not have a choice. We want this to be a place where the most able students from Melbourne, Australia and the region come because they believe that it is here that they will have the best education – and because they will have a campus experience, and an education in citizenship, that they look back on with delight.



*The South Lawn*

1. The author wishes to express his gratitude for insights and assistance to Rosa Brezac, Alice Garner, Gioconda di Lorenzo and Kerri-Lee Krause. Historical photographs are reproduced with the permission of the University of Melbourne Archives.
2. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'A Cloistered Life', in Patricia Grimshaw and Lynne Strahan (eds), *The half-open door: sixteen modern Australian women look at professional life and achievement* (Sydney, 1982), 124.
3. See Peter McPhee, 'Pansy': *A Life of Roy Douglas Wright* (Melbourne, 1999), ch. 2.
4. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'A cloistered life', pp. 121-4; Don Watson, *Brian Fitzpatrick: A Radical Life* (Sydney, 1979), pp. 11-27. The Labour Club was strongly socialist in sympathy: see the articles on socialism in the new *Melbourne University Magazine*, May 1926 and November 1927. Fitzpatrick and Pitt also edited this magazine.
5. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Solid Bluestone foundations: and other memories of a Melbourne girlhood 1908-1928* (Melbourne, 1998), 160; Fitzpatrick, 'A Cloistered Life', 124.
6. Alison Patrick, 'Born Lucky', in Grimshaw and Strahan (eds), *The half-open door*, 206.
7. Stephen Murray-Smith in Hume Dow (ed.), *Memories of Melbourne University: Undergraduate life in the years since 1917* (Melbourne, 1983), 121.
8. Peter Blazey, *Screw Loose. Uncalled-for Memoirs* (Sydney, 1997), 65-6.
9. Hume Dow, ed. *Memories of Melbourne University: Undergraduate life in the years since 1917* (Melbourne, 1983), 163-4.
10. Dow (ed.), *Memories of Melbourne University*, 158.
11. Dow (ed.), *Memories of Melbourne University*, 206.
12. See the Educause electronic book entitled 'Educating the Net Generation', which examines how current students prefer to learn, and the implications this may have on teaching, learning and the design of learning environments: <http://www.educause.edu/LibraryDetailPage/666?ID=PUB7101>. Note, too, the lecture by President Emeritus of the University of Michigan, James J. Duderstadt, 'Planning for Higher Education's Future', 22 July 2003.
13. The full text of Dr Shapiro's address is at: <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/ExtRels/majorations/BJShapiro23oct02.html>
14. See Craig McInnis, 'Signs of Disengagement? Responding to the Changing Work and Study Patterns of Full-Time Undergraduates in Australian Universities', in Jürgen Enders and Oliver Fulton (eds), *Higher Education in a Globalising World: International Trends and Mutual Observations. A Festschrift in Honour of Ulrich Teichler* (Kluwer Publishers, 2002), 175-89.
15. Fitzpatrick, *Solid Bluestone foundations*, 163.
16. Kerri-Lee Krause, Robyn Hartley, Richard James and Craig McInnis, *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies* (Canberra, 2005).
17. Kerri-Lee Krause, *Ten Year Trends in the First Year Experience at the University of Melbourne, 1994-2004* (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne, 2005).
18. Dow (ed.), *Memories of Melbourne University*, 95.
19. Dow (ed.), *Memories of Melbourne University*, p. 75.
20. Sianan Healy, 'Among the happy few': *women at the University of Melbourne, 1925-1929* (BA Honours thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 2000).
21. Graham Little, *Faces on the Campus: a psycho-social study*, MUP, 1975, 53.
22. Dow (ed.), *Memories of Melbourne University*, 187-8.
23. Little, *Faces on the Campus*, 52.
24. Ross Gregory Douthat, *Privilege: Harvard and the Education of the Ruling Class* (New York, 2005), 7-9.
25. Douthat, *Privilege*, ch. 4.
26. *Survey of final year international students on their experience at the University of Melbourne*, University Planning Office, 2005.
27. *Free-form comments received with the 2004 Course Experience Questionnaire*, University Planning Office, June 2005.
28. Lizabeth Shrier, personal communication, 15 June 2005, reproduced with permission.

## The **Sir Robert Menzies Oration** on **Higher Education**

Sir Robert Menzies considered that his contribution to the development of universities might prove to be amongst the most lasting of his achievements for Australia. In recognition of this vision and in order to strengthen the role of higher education in Australia, the University of Melbourne and the Foundation established in 1991 the Sir Robert Menzies Oration on Higher Education.

The theme for the Oration is higher education policy and practice in Australia both in view of its national importance and also because of Sir Robert's attachment to both the extension of higher education and the wise development of it. The intention is for each Oration to be a contribution to intellectual debate in Australia.

## Previous **Menzies Orators**

2004 Professor Stephen Leeder  
Professor of Public Health & Community Medicine  
The University of Sydney  
Global Health and the Future of Academic Medicine

2003 Professor Alan Gilbert  
Vice-Chancellor  
University of Melbourne  
(Some Heretical Ideas about Universities)

2002 Dr Bernard Shapiro  
Principal and Vice-Chancellor  
McGill University  
(The Research University: An Undergraduate Challenge)

2001 Dr John Hood  
Vice-Chancellor  
University of Auckland  
(The Research-led University - Reflections from New Zealand)

2000 Professor Sir Alec Broers  
Vice-Chancellor  
University of Cambridge  
(University Partnerships - Sustaining International Competitiveness)

1999 The Hon Sir Guy Green  
Governor of Tasmania  
(Governors, Democracy and the Rule of Law)

1998 Lord Dearing  
Chancellor  
University of Nottingham  
(A Time of Opportunity)

1997 Professor Wang Gungwu  
The National University of Singapore

1996 Professor Sir Stewart Sutherland  
The University of Edinburgh

1995 Professor Brian Wilson  
The University of Queensland

1994 The Honourable Nick Greiner

1993 Professor Henry Rosovsky  
Harvard University

1992 Professor Emeritus Peter Karmel  
Australian National University

1991 Professor David Penington  
The University of Melbourne



