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## Partnerships and Collaborations: The Importance to Humanities, Social Sciences and Creative Arts

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# Partnerships and Collaborations: The Importance to Humanities, Social Sciences and Creative Arts

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In 2001 a week in the life of a dean of humanities, social sciences and the creative arts is radically different from that of only a few years ago. Of course we still meet daily with staff and students, liaise with heads of schools and work with budgets and finances. But diary entries tell the tale of a more complex web of activities. A few days from one weekly diary, for example, might feature meetings with a leading urban developer and accompany a letter to the Minister for Planning to negotiate a Chair in urban design; a lunch with the executive director of the West Coast Eagles Football Club to discuss the prospects of a scholarship for indigenous students named after a great footballer; morning tea with an eminent epidemiologist about the prospective national partnership for human development; meetings with the Minister of Community Development about partners and projects; or with the Minister for Culture and the Arts regarding the future of a major festival; and, believe it or not, a meeting with a major bank to negotiate plans for a joint Chair and Research Centre for something other than finance and banking. And the week is barely half over.

There is not a dean within the humanities and social sciences in Australia whose diary does not look like that sketched above. Partnerships with the community, industry and other universities are the only way forward in the environment in which higher education now finds itself. The vision of the current deans in Australia has increased their determination to pursue relationships with outside partners, as has the dynamism of the Academies of Humanities and Social Sciences. The imperatives are visible enough. The level of real government funding to Faculties and Divisions of Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts has dropped in recent years from well over 80 percent to below 60 percent in some instances. Yet there is no doubt that the humanities and social sciences must play a pivotal role in the future of our nation's education and economy. Last year Robin Battelham (2000) acknowledged this in his report 'The Chance to Change', and the concept of the knowledge economy has since been supported by the Prime Minister's 'Backing Australia's Ability' statement and by Kim Beazley's 'Knowledge Nation'.

There are enormous opportunities for the humanities, creative arts and social sciences contained in these statements, as well as some threats. A rejuvenated deans' association has emerged in the past twelve months to cooperatively tackle such issues.

as these. It has also given rise to the national summit of the humanities and social sciences in July 2001 by the Academies of the Humanities and Social Sciences, DETYA, the Deans of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and the Business Higher Education Round Table. The concept of partnership and collaboration is central to our repositioning in the affairs of the nation and in the 'new economy'. Through such ventures we will also better serve our students—the alpha and omega of our existence

### Concepts of Partnerships: Learning from Business?

The concept of partnership and strategic alliance has been the buzzword in the world of business for much of the past decade. The unique environment in which universities operate, though, has meant it has occasionally taken longer for the importance of such partnerships and alliances to be fully appreciated by members of the academy. Nonetheless, it is the opinion of our colleague, Professor Paul Rossiter, deputy-vice-chancellor of Curtin University (and a former professor of Engineering at Monash), that the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences were early pioneers in the global move towards partnership and collaboration. This is partly due to the fact that the humanities and social sciences have had well-established relationships with social, artistic, government and business communities outside of the university environment for some time. He contends that, by contrast, the hard sciences have more often maintained a limited, 'transactional' relationship with external clients. We suspect, too, that the sense that humanities and social sciences have less quantitative material available to sell has encouraged them, instead, to pursue cooperative relationships

Where the humanities and social sciences have been active in strategic partnerships to date, business and industry have undoubtedly steamed ahead in exploring the advantages of this operating method. Whereas in the 1970s business was concerned mostly with product performance, and in the 1980s with acquisitions and mergers, it has been said of the 1990s that corporate organizations have instead looked to strategic alliances for viable long-term options to grow their market share and increase revenue. The globalisation of world markets, the blurring of industry boundaries, scarce resources and the intensifying competition for consumer loyalty have all contributed to the new reality of business in the twenty-first century. Perhaps predictably, over fifty percent of corporate alliances struck are within the telecommunications, computer hardware and software, biotechnology and medical services industries (Harbison and Pekar, 1998, pp 11, 13, 25). The humanities and social sciences can gain a lot, we believe, from examining models of such alliances which the business world has established

Corporate experts assure us that the concept of partnerships and collaboration is simple and effective. John Harbison and Peter Pekar suggest in their book *Smart Alliances* (p. 11) that:

*When a company scans its environment and assesses its own resources and capabilities, it often discovers ... a gap between what it would like to achieve and what it is realistically able to achieve.*

Sensibly, then, a company or organisation in this position would seek to cooperate with another which *did* have such capabilities, combining their resources to achieve a better product and to reach a greater consumer audience. Many corporate leaders

now realise that their business cannot exist without collaboration or partnership Robert Galvin, for example, was Chairman of Motorola when he announced that:

*As each commercial organisation marches to its objective of customer satisfaction, it is self-evident that the quality of our offerings will be the sum total of the excellence of each player in our supply stream ... Virtual perfection cannot be accomplished without cooperation. Cooperation is a synonym for partnership (1989)*

There have been some very successful examples of partnership in business to assure nervous humanities and social science scholars of the benefits that a strategic alliance can bring. There may be messages for universities in knowing that some of these have been within a single industry between potential competitors, such as the British Airways-Qantas partnership, the long-standing Ford Motor Company-Mazda Motors relationship, and an alliance struck in more recent years between Hewlett-Packard and Canon. Other successful relationships have been wrought across industry boundaries. Microsoft, for example, formed an alliance with the American NBC television network to create MSNBC—a cable television and internet service.

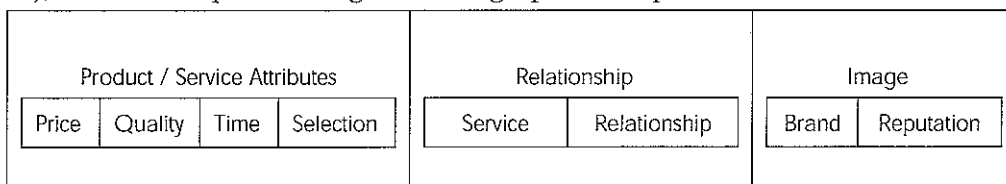
Lessons from business have prompted a few observers to define the meaning of strategic alliances or partnerships, which may interest the humanities scholar and the social scientist. Generally observers agree that a successful partnership is at least:

*The cooperative development of successful, long-term, strategic relationships ... based on world class and sustainable competitive advantage for both parties; relationships which have a further separate and positive impact on the respective ... organisations and outside the partnership itself (Lendrum, 1998, p 2).*

The strategic alliance in business is also considered likely to mean at least:

- a long-term commitment of between five and ten years;
- the complementary capabilities and/or equity of each partner; and
- a reciprocal, interdependent relationship which is based on a common, shared strategy

It must be remembered that partners of a successful alliance combine to strengthen their resources, produce a better product or service, and so increase customer satisfaction and, hopefully, customer numbers. In seeking a business partner, organisations tend to assess merits of others according to the product they are able to offer, the image of the potential partner, and the relationship they may provide over a given period of time. Hence, as in business, members of the humanities and social science professions may seek partners according to their strengths and weaknesses in product, image and relationship. Of course, reciprocally, the potential partner would consider a relationship in return based on the same criteria as the humanities scholar or social scientist. The following diagram, adapted from Kaplan and Norton (2001, p 88), outlines the qualities sought in strategic partnerships:



Some organisations considering a partnership with members of the humanities or social sciences may place more emphasis on the quality of the product available

For example, a large newspaper or television company may wish to partner a university media school in order to build relationship with highly qualified journalism graduates. In this case, the external partner assumes that the relationship between itself and the school will be sufficiently cooperative, is pleased that the particular university has a strong reputation for its journalism degree, but is particularly interested in the quality of training being undertaken by the journalism students

Alternatively, other organisations may be keen to foster a partnership with a university because of the likely relationship and service on offer. A university and a major cultural institution such as a museum or art gallery, for example, may jointly establish a teaching or research position. In this case, the image of the university will be important and the quality of its teaching or research assumed as a given—but the cultural institution will be most significantly interested in the ongoing relationship between itself and the university to guarantee the success of the project and the partnership.

Finally, some organisations may be most interested in the reputation or image of the partnering institution. A resources company, for example, may be considering its approach to a new mining venture. It would recognise that its future activities need to conform to evolving social expectations of big business and environmental standards in the twenty-first century, and may seek the assistance of a highly-profiled, highly-regarded social scientist or social policy research institute to review its practice and to improve its community relations. In this case, the image or reputation of the partner is vital. In truth, most organisations will consider all three issues of product, relationship and image in each partnership, but is likely to value one more highly than the others. It is vital, then, for humanities and social sciences scholars pursuing a strategic alliance to thoughtfully consider the qualities most highly regarded by a potential partner, and to market itself accordingly.

### **The Humanities and Social Sciences: Partnership Potential**

It is interesting to note that in the two major reports commissioned in 1998 by the Humanities and Social Sciences Academies, *Knowing Ourselves and Others* and *Challenges for the Social Sciences and Australia*, scant space has been given to the role of partnerships within the professions. Papers of notable exception in the social sciences report include those by Dennis Sligar on industry and Graeme Hugo on funding, but even there the linkages seem insecure. In the report from the Academy of the Humanities, hints of community partnerships are scattered through the chapters, most forthrightly in that of Janet McCalman.<sup>1</sup> Despite this comparative silence, much of note is already happening in the universities.

Like many such institutions, Curtin University has been considering the value of partnerships. The market in which it operates today is increasingly competitive and, despite the decrease in Commonwealth funding it receives in real terms from 80

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<sup>1</sup> Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, *Challenges for the Social Sciences and Australia*, vols 1-2, AGPS Canberra, 1998; and Australian Academies of the Humanities, *Knowing Ourselves and Others. The Humanities in Australia into the 21st Century*, vols 1-3, AGPS, Canberra, 1998, online at <[www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/aah/research/review](http://www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/aah/research/review)> See Graeme Hugo, 'Funding', in *Challenges for the Social Sciences*, vol 2, pp.319-342; Dennis Sligar, 'Social Science Research and Industry', in *Challenges for the Social Sciences*, vol 2, pp 343-356; and Janet McCalman, 'Community Interaction: The Community and the Humanities', in *Knowing Ourselves and Others*, online.

percent in 1987 to 40 percent in 2001, the student demand for excellent service, teaching, image and flexibility is on the rise. Curtin must constantly explore new opportunities in order to become a world-class university. Strategic alliances and partnerships, it has been realised, offer increased access to resources, learning and knowledge. It also enables the university to share its own intellectual and other resources. The benefits of partnership, Curtin recognises, include the following:

- building our capabilities and accessing resources to better meet the expectation of students and other clients;
- enhancing the university's profile, reputation and brand image within the community;
- sharing our intellectual and other resources with partners;
- providing new opportunities and markets by accessing complementary or additional resources;
- reducing risks through sharing experiences;
- facilitating economies of scale and in the non-duplication of activities; and
- accessing opportunities to provide better services to the community and gaining an improved understanding of community needs (Adams and Schultheis, 2001, p.2)

As for other disciplines, such partnerships for the humanities and social sciences will become increasingly, even vitally, important. Yet in some instances members of these creative professions may question the value of their own resources when pursuing strategic relationships. Certainly the humanities and social sciences battle a lingering, unfavourable image within the business, government and media communities. In her paper for the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1998, Janet McCalman noted the reclusive or monastic nature of scholarship in previous centuries that separated academics from the rest of the world. This practice in the past, of course, has produced the image of the academic being cloistered in his or her fabled ivory tower. McCalman commented that:

*We still have the notion of an intellectual sanctuary, where minds are free to roam where they will and where rhythms of work are different from those of the marketplace. In fact that very distance from the marketplace has been cherished as a necessary condition of intellectual freedom and creativity (1998, Online).*

This image, unfortunately, has led to many misconceptions about the role of the humanities and social sciences in contemporary Australia. To an 'extraordinary degree', McCalman adds, 'the humanities are intimately involved with the wider world, with human society'. On a daily basis, in fact, members of the professions are communicating and relating with our wider community—through media, through government, through schools, and a whole host of other portals. This activity has not been transmitted well to politicians and ministers.

The humanities and social sciences scholars should be encouraged that, increasingly, industry is realising the vital significance of the role of the liberal arts and social sciences. And it makes sense. The truth is that many of the serious issues which faces humanity in the coming decades are of a sociological nature. The renowned Colorado School of Mines, for example, recently issued a survey of anticipated global population growth. In the year 1650, it was estimated, approximately 75m<sup>2</sup> of land was available per person. By 1900 this amount had shrunk to 22.5m<sup>2</sup>; by 2000 it had reached only 7.5m<sup>2</sup>. In 2030, according to the estimate of the Colorado School of

Mines, the amount of land available per person in the world will reach 0m<sup>2</sup>. The implications of this dramatic rise in population will be largely social. Nor will Australia, in the midst of this, remain isolated from the problem. The increases in illegal immigration that we currently witness will, undoubtedly, rise further as social and economic disruption abroad increases. At home we will see significant demographic changes. Already the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001, Online) expects that by 2051 Western Australia and Queensland will accommodate nearly 39 percent of the nation's population—a dramatic swing from the concentration of people that presently exists in the continent's southeast corner.

The knowledge of the humanities and social sciences will be vital as Australia faces major upheaval in social and government policy. In many instances industry already recognises this fact. Hugh Morgan, chief executive of the Western Mining Corporation, has recently acknowledged that the major problem facing the resource industry today is social disapproval of its activities, as the reaction to such issues as the pollution of the Danube River and Ok Tedi have demonstrated. The major problem facing mining ventures today is not to exhume the minerals from the earth, but to win social acceptance of their practices. For this the industry requires the assistance of the social or 'soft' sciences.

The Colorado School of Mines has taken dramatic steps in this area, establishing a Division of Liberal Arts and International Studies. In so doing, the world leaders in mining science have realised that their responsibilities extend 'beyond the technical mastery of science and technology to the consequences for human society and the rest of life on earth'. The school's mission statement includes the following lines:

*The liberal arts exist for their intrinsic value. They are the arts of the free mind developing its powers for their own sake; they are the basis for the free, unhindered development of intellect and imagination addressing intrinsically worthy concerns. They are essential for preserving an open, creative, and responsible society . . .*

*The LAIS mission is crucial to CSM's commitment to stewardship of the earth and to the permanent sustainability of both social organization and environmental resources that such a commitment requires. A good foundation in the subjects provided by the LAIS Division is essential for graduating men and women who can provide the technical means for society's material needs in a manner that leaves posterity an undiminished level of both social and environmental quality (n.d., Online).*

## Where to from Here?

The truth is, as many leading industry representatives recognise, the humanities and social sciences have vital skills and resources that are increasingly important to business and to the knowledge economy today.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore necessary for members of our disciplines to remind themselves—even reassure themselves—of the social capital and collective assets which they have to contribute to our national discourse. In looking for partnerships, the humanities and social sciences can—and should be—confident in what they have to offer to both a partner and a 'client'.

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<sup>2</sup> This paper will not deal with the relative industries; for further discussion, see Stuart Cunningham and John Hartley's chapter in the current volume.

In the essays accompanying the *Knowing Ourselves and Others* report, many leading scholars assessed the valuable assets and resources of the humanities and their partners, the social sciences. Researchers and teachers from these disciplines, to a large degree, produce our national and cultural memory; they are products of prolonged, specialised training with specific skills; they are 'opinion-makers' and are called upon every day by the media as expert commentators and by government as advisors; they have specialised skills in communication and in technology; they contribute heavily to our public culture and film and publishing industries; they have prevented us, so far, from becoming an 'intellectual colony'.<sup>3</sup> The humanities and social sciences have many skills which contribute to the well being of the nation. Often, though, the assistance of a strategic paper is required to make such qualities most readily available

### Some Examples of Partnerships

The question then remains about the kind of partnerships which might most benefit the universities generally and, more particularly, the humanities and social sciences. The type of partner that may suit is likely to include the following:

- students, as partners in learning;
- internal partnerships with members of other schools, faculties or divisions at the same university;
- another university;
- other educators, such as teaching associations and secondary education practitioners;
- cultural institutions;
- government and quasi-government institutions;
- community organisations; and
- commercial organisations from business and industry.

Some organisations within the creative arts have been practicing successful partnerships for many years, an exercise which is particularly apparent in the collaborative efforts between cultural institutions such as art galleries and museums in convening specialist exhibitions. One of the most successful of these that has lately received national attention is the Monet and Japan exhibition, recently on display in the National Gallery and now at the Western Australian Art Gallery. The partnership of those and other Australian galleries, corporate sponsors and many overseas institutional or private owners of priceless art pieces brought this billion-dollar exhibition to fruition. But many university schools and academics have also been increasingly successful in partnership ventures, and there are some inspiring examples.

Fundamentally the greatest relationship that can exist at university is with students as partners in learning. The Boyer Commission recognised this in its 1996 report, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for American Research Universities*. One of

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<sup>3</sup> See *Knowing Ourselves and Others*, vol. 3, particularly Janet McCalman, 'Community Interaction'; Stephen Gaukroger, 'The Relationship of Research in the Humanities to Science and Technology'; and Meaghan Morris and Iain McCalman, 'Public Culture'. Online at: [www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/aah/research/review/c\\_contents.html](http://www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/aah/research/review/c_contents.html).



the other most readily available and successful collaborative relationships in which a university school or academic can participate is that with other staff and schools on the same campus. Many academics will have experienced such a collaborative relationship while working on a research project—whether it be funded by the ARC, industry or others—as well as in teaching units which transcend the normal school or departmental boundaries. Women's studies, cultural studies and Australian studies are often units that are convened collaboratively by different schools within a single faculty or division. Increasingly, though, universities are seeing inter-disciplinary partnerships forming across campus. At Curtin University, for instance, progress has been made in the past year on a collaborative approach to sports studies. This project, as it continues, will enlist the cooperation of staff members from such professional backgrounds as the medical sciences, allied health, tourism, cultural studies, architecture, anthropology and business.

Undoubtedly, partnerships between other universities will prove to be fundamentally important in the future production of higher education. Already we are witnessing some important, strategic alliances developing between universities across Australia and, in some cases, across the world. The National Centre for History Education has been established this year with the support of the federal government, and should see a revolutionary approach to history studies in Australia in the coming years. It is the result of the collaboration between Curtin, Melbourne, Monash, La Trobe and Sydney Universities and the Curriculum Corporation, and has gained the support of such organisations as the Australian Historical Association, the History Teachers' Association and the Australian Council of Professional Historians.

One of the most exciting of emerging university partnerships is undoubtedly that between Queensland, Curtin and Melbourne Universities. In this case a triangular relationship is being formed between the Australian Studies Centres of Curtin and Queensland and the Australian Centre at Melbourne. Currently under discussion is the possibility of jointly convening postgraduate studies across the three institutions, offering components of the courses on each campus. The Centres are also considering a collaborative project to provide travel and writing fellowships for new and emerging scholars. The triangular relationship becomes even more exciting with the addition of corporate partners. In a new initiative, the University of Queensland Press is set to collaborate with the three Centres to produce up to twenty monographs each year for the work of new scholars. A national network of experienced, scholarly mentors is being established to assist these emerging writers to develop their books. With the pre-press work done by Curtin and the publication by UQP, Penguin books will act as the national distributor of the books. Such a project is unique in its partnership and, particularly, in its sponsorship of new scholars.

Universities can also partner other providers of education or other cultural institutions in the service of similar student groups and subjects. Curtin University has been working with the Western Australian Public Education Endowment Trust and the Association of Independent Schools for a school-teacher residency scheme, while the Sir Charles Court Young Leaders Program brings together schools, parents and the university annually. There are also many examples of universities working with government or government-funded institutions. Curtin, for example, has established a joint appointment with the Western Australian Museum in material culture. At the Queensland University of Technology, the Creative Industries program is one of Australia's most innovative collaborative projects, in this instance with the Queensland government.

There are undoubtedly many relationships also operating between universities and commercial or professional organisations. In June 2001, for example, Monash University and the St Kilda Football Club announced plans for a new long-term partnership which would see the football club 'gain access to educational programs and a range of high quality sporting facilities' while the university's sports research and teaching program will be significantly enhanced (2001, Online) Many universities have also benefited from partnerships with national and international foundations, financing research positions, scholarships and teaching appointments. The possibilities for these kinds of strategic alliances are often challenging, but mostly prove rewarding and successful.

The operation of partnerships is far from without its challenges. The truth is that many government, community and industry groups which were formerly antipathetic to the humanities and social sciences have, in the past few years, been more sympathetic to benefits of working with academics from the liberal arts. Challenges lie in making opportunities in areas not already open to humanities and social sciences. At Curtin, for example, some large partnerships are under way between the university, Optus, Woodside Petroleum and CSIRO. The opportunities for humanities and social sciences to participate in cases such as these may not always be immediately apparent. With further discussion, conversation and negotiation, however, many more possibilities for non-traditional relationships may unfold in the future.

### **Partnering New Technology**

Harnessing new technology will offer some of the most exciting opportunities for partnerships in the humanities and social sciences in the future. We are increasingly using the world wide web for storage of significant documentary sources which had previously been accessible only in print on a library shelf. Electronic scholarly journals are rising in reputation and readership, and provide the most accessible and cost-effective methods of publishing in today's environment. Already some extraordinary new ventures are being developed in our work-place. The Division of Humanities at Curtin University, for example, is partnering the University of Queensland Press, Fremantle Arts Centre Press and the Australian Public Intellectuals (API) Network to provide an electronic gateway to Australia. The API Network is already using internet media to broadcast over the web major events and lectures, such as Kim Beazley's John Curtin Memorial Address in July 2001. Regular on-line conferences are being convened on such topics as 'Creativity and the New Economy' and 'Illegal: Refugees, Queue-hoppers and Detention Centres'. This latter conference received over 3,000 on-line participants. In fact, the API website has received over 1.8 million users since January 2000.

The future for the humanities and social sciences is rich. As the nation meets evolving community expectations about the way we see ourselves, our environment and our relationships, many of the issues which are yet to be faced will require the participation of universities and, specifically, of the many people who work within the liberal arts and social sciences. Increasingly we are seeing business, government and community groups responding to that fact. It must be the role, then, for leaders within the humanities and social sciences to encourage one another to boldly contribute to the national debate about Australia's future, and to do so in an inclusive and collaborative manner.

**Professor Tom Stannage** is the Executive Dean of the Division of Humanities at Curtin University. He was previously Professor of History at the University of Western Australia and Research Fellow and Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies at the Australian National University. Stannage received the inaugural Prime Minister's Award as Australian University Teacher of the Year in 1997 and the National Humanities Award for Teaching Excellence. He is a Member of the Order of Australia and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences of Australia. His research interests include the history of Australia and Britain and museology.

**Dr Deborah Gare** is a historian and research associate in the Division of Humanities at Curtin University. She also teaches history at the University of Notre Dame. Her research interests broadly cover Australian studies, historiography and biography. Gare is a member of the editorial collective for *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*. At press is her book, *Lady Onslow's Legacy: A History of the Brightwater Care Group*. She is also a co-editor of the volume *The Blainey View and Views of Blainey*, due to be completed by mid-2001. Gare has published articles in *Quadrant*, *Australian Historical Studies*, *The Historical Journal (Cambridge University)*, *Campus Review*, *Nursing Review*, and *Limina*.

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