



UCA Forum 2018

Colleges from a Vice-Chancellor's Perspective

Notes from the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Tasmania, Professor Rufus Black's keynote address:

Wayne Erickson introduced Rufus as the outstanding thought leader in university colleges. Rufus urges people to challenge authority when it refuses to explain itself.

- 1. Tasmania - globalisation and regions**
Globalisation is not kind to the regions. Tasmania in particular, which is geographically isolated.
- 2. Economic inequality**
20% poorer than the rest of the country
- 3. Volunteering**
30% higher volunteering rates.
- 4. Mission of UTas..**
University education is transformative. More broadly, Rufus described UTas mission as one that aims to serve Tasmania and Tasmanians while contributing to the wider world.
- 5. Jane Franklin is currently the only independent residential college in Tasmania**
As a former independent college Head, Rufus noted with some regret that Jane Franklin was UTas only independent college. He noted the loss of other independent colleges which had been taken over by the University of Tasmania and the vector of change.
- 6. How do colleges look?**
When Rufus first commenced at Master of Ormond College he wondered how the colleges looked from where the Vice-Chancellor sat.
- 7. Did not matter very much - their Rhodes scholars not ours, their alumni not ours**
Whilst it was very humbling to have such super impressive present and past students, including 40 Rhodes Scholars, it didn't much because our scholars also belonged to and were formed by the university.
- 8. Origins of donors – colleges. Difficult to admit the contribution of college**
Whilst it is true that donors overwhelmingly have a college experience, this is hard for the V-C to acknowledge.
- 9. Impossible to put every student through a college - Beds matter**
Whilst college Heads bemoan the reduction of college residency to “beds”, from where the V-C sits, beds matter and somewhere to live matters a great deal. In the case of Hobart which is

suffering a housing crisis and there are UTas students currently struggling with homelessness, “We have to find a housing model that enables regional students to have access to affordable accommodation.” **Colleges will become irrelevant if this is not acknowledged.**

10. Negative competition

Rufus sees competition amongst colleges as self-defeating and petty. Moreover, it can act as a handbrake and deterrent from dealing with the real issues.

11. VCs want to see open conversation about the real issues.

Real issues such as sexual assault and sexual harassment must be talked about openly and honestly by college heads. Competitive politeness is a great danger. Colleagues need to be supported to “do the hard yards”. College heads need to work as a system and not a single college.

12. Advancing the mission

Rufus proffered, what would a V-C want the colleges to do to advance the university’s mission?

a. Excellence

Excellence matters and the colleges have a vital role to play here. Rufus recalls when the V-C asked the Melbourne Heads to provide accommodation for National Scholars, the Heads said yes but they wanted to choose which Scholars they accepted rather than making a blanket offer. Rufus now sees this as a strategic mistake.

b. Scholarship offerings - be bold

c. Equity

Universities do care about equity and scholarships are essential. Universities need to break the access to accommodation barrier. Access to university and colleges ought to be needs blind. National aspiration – work towards being needs blind.

- i. Privilege perception
- ii. Academic aspiration
- iii. Could??? What does this look like?

d. Jane Franklin - connection with community - something special - special trust

Relationships matter and here Rufus cites Jane Franklin Hall noting that the parents of those students from highly disadvantaged communities trust where their child lives.

e. Programs that help break areas of disadvantage

Here Rufus cited the Trinity College Indigenous Program, and in particular, the BA Extended Program. Trinity partnered with The University of Melbourne and the University’s Centre for Indigenous Education to introduce the Bachelor of Arts Extended (BA Ext), a four year program open to students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent who have an ATAR but have not obtained the results required for direct entry into the University. This program also uses the Trinity Foundation Studies Program and students are expected to live at one of the colleges.

f. Experience a greater scale

Colleges need to be prepared to grow and to engage in other programs (such as Trinity’s Foundation Studies Program). Rufus recalled the Melbourne V-C asking him to run another college. Rufus declined this offer and he now sees this as a serious mistake for it would have been far better for a ‘safe pair of hands’ to create and run another college. This would have created a collective branding.

g. Built into the strategic agenda

Rufus urged Heads to think of what they can do that the universities cannot do on their own. Examples include the Trinity Foundation Studies Program or Ormond's Wade Institute of Entrepreneurship. **Build yourself into the university's strategic agenda.** It may be a program that can be offered by a collective set of colleges.

13. End of Sexual Harassment

Rufus acknowledged that not all issues can be eradicated and things will continue to go wrong, this is the reality. However, the colleges have not done enough or worked fast enough in dealing with cases of sexual harassment and sexual assault. He recalls how he was appalled at what was going on at some of the colleges nationally and decided to withdraw from any form of association with them. This, he now concedes, was a mistake. He should have 'showed up' and held these colleges to account. Rufus endeavours to make UTas more collegial.

14. College culture and alcohol

To gauge how the brand of colleges is travelling in Australia, read Kate Jenkins' Report and particularly in relation to alcohol.

- We don't lead community practice. Eg., how safe do students feel to come out?
- Are we sure there are no hierarchical practices? i.e. O'Week
- Responsible service of alcohol i.e. how many alcohol free days are there in O'Week? Does the function charge for the alcohol consumed?
- Heads need to have the tough conversations with their student communities. Too many things are alcohol related.

15. Social Media

Closed Facebook groups – students stop students. Rufus believed that minimal intervention was required with social media because collegians themselves are ensuring appropriate standards.

16. Meeting of Board Chairs and Chancellor

It needs to be asked, is the Head in charge of the College? Or is it confused with the Council? Heads must be able to take control and colleges that are not run on this basis will struggle to make their students respect their authority. The Head needs the authority to "stare down" students and Heads need to be prepared to run colleges at half full in order to get the right culture. V-Cs will cut colleges out if this does not happen.

17. Colleges/ Universities

Universities are not Values based and are moving towards a Principles based Restorative model rather than a Punitive model. Colleges do have leading practice and are places of profound expertise. Rufus noted that Prof. Margaret Otlowski, UTas Pro Vice-Chancellor (Culture and Wellbeing) found the Melbourne Colleges' collective policies and deep knowledge and expertise very useful in her new position.

a. People

Colleges are first and foremost all about people! This is what we pay attention to and the big universities have lost sight of this. More broadly, Rufus is seeking to put university leadership closer to students.

b. Values based

Independent colleges are largely founded on religious or humanist ideas and therefore strongly reflect their underlying values.

c. Collegiality

Collegiality really matters.

d. Professional and academics together

Professional and academic staff are just one team of people.

e. Every individual counts - lost sheep

Don't forget that every single student counts. Colleges do go after the one that wanders off. We need to care about the individual and this is the V-C's job.