



Creating Value through the Collegiate Way: *Key messages from the 2019 University Colleges Australia Forum*

The 2019 Forum provided an opportunity to pick up where we left off from our Hobart Forum: *Colleges, Culture & Change*, with our focus turning to the value of collegiate residence. Our guest speakers addressed areas where we can add value to our host universities and to society. Our member presentations delved into the impact of College programs on student wellbeing and highlighted programs to improve diversity in colleges, and our senior students reflected on where colleges can add value and where they can do better. To meet these challenges, UCA engaged professionals in fundraising and communications strategy. In response to the membership survey held earlier in the year, UCA looked to its own value proposition and presented its strategic plan.

The value of colleges to our host universities

At the Vice-Chancellor's welcome address, members were once again reminded that to add value to their host universities, colleges must alleviate social inequality by offering support, including financial support, to students. Colleges must lead programs that meet the demands of the tertiary education landscape, particularly when universities cannot meet these needs alone and must provide greater access to collegiate life by expanding their capacity **(1)**. This presents a daunting task, particularly with the sheer size of university campuses and ever increasing student numbers in proportion to students in collegiate residence and one cannot ignore the significant expense of 'going to college'. To answer this challenge Sophie Davidson and Young Dawkins reminded members of the need to harness the existing strong level of goodwill and support amongst their college communities and to transform this goodwill into intentional actions and fundraising **(2)**. Adam Connelly, Apollo Communications, demonstrated the importance of succinctly communicating the college's value in a way their competitors can't and provided members with a Value Proposition & Communications Plan, as distributed with the Forum papers **(3)**.

Much has been done but has anything changed?

Two years on from the release of the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in Australian universities, our Forum opened with a panel discussion involving The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP to consider the level of change in relation to safety on university campuses and the special role colleges play in guiding its young students into fully formed adults. Whilst there had been much activity in relation to safety on campus, Tanya questioned whether this translated into real change. For example, recent studies showed that only 6% of students thought enough had been done and whilst young men were getting the message in relation to consent, many felt beleaguered and she observed a consequent backlash. Tanya concluded that we don't know if what we are doing is successful unless we collect better data. *Read a summary of the panel discussion (4)*.

Working with universities to collect better data

Noting that incidents of sexual assault and sexual violence on campus are underreported, Tanya encouraged colleges to work with their universities on better data collection. We were once again pleased that Universities Australia, Dr Renee Hamilton, was able to join our Forum discussion and to inform of the follow-on Survey from the *Respect. Now. Always* initiative which is to be rolled out in 2020. It was agreed that the UCA is well placed to measure data on campus safety as a longitudinal study and the work of **UCA's Respectful Relations Response & Resources Advisory Group** in developing a resource base of good policies and procedures, across both prevention and response together with sharing information about expert-led Recommendation 9 Reviews was cited (5). Renee observed that where colleges do well is in implementing measures of best practice for cultural change.

Implementing measures for cultural change

Moving away from the bigger picture, and following on from Renee's observations, our Forum program turned to individual colleges and UCA Members' initiatives to implement and to measure cultural change.

- **The potential for sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention models in tertiary settings: engaging student voice and bystander approaches**

As part of her Doctoral research, **Donna Davies** is investigating student perspectives of prevention education and policies in reducing the incidence and acceptability of sexual assault and sexual harassment in university residential colleges. Her presentation outlined prevention approaches that may go some way achieving this goal (6).

- **Evaluating mental well-being, resilience and the effectiveness of in-house programs in a university residential college setting: a feasibility study**

UCA Research Grant Recipient for 2019, **Dr Hester Wilson**, shared some preliminary findings on a pilot project which aimed to assess the impact of college on our students' wellbeing. This study will continue over some years, however, early results suggest that college has positive effects on student wellbeing. Whilst this is something that those working in colleges know intuitively, it is important to have research data that supports this conjecture and Hester is keen to recruit UCA members to participate in her research.

- **The proof is in the pudding: evaluating the learning and development outcomes of residence life programs: A case study**

University residence halls have long been considered places of student education and personal development and extensive research over past decades shows strong support for residence halls to purposively consider their roles in student development. In this study, **Dr Bradley Kunda** and **Katy Cuthbert** employ a clarificative evaluation methodology to assess the efficacy of a mature residence life program at the University of Sydney's International House. The study may be used by student life professionals as a basis for further research and program development.

- **Working together: building a bicultural community at Dunmore Lang College**

We know that increasing diversity can only occur by increasing the level of financial support for students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and altering the selection criteria to give greater weight to those from disadvantaged circumstances. However, once at college, how do we ensure their experience is positive? In *Working together: building a bicultural*

community at Dunmore Lang College, Dr Alasdair Murrie-West shared his journey, from sensing there was a gap between the experience his college wanted to create and the actual lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, to a College where Aboriginal culture is becoming part of who they are and how they do things (7).

- **“We walk together as friends”: how an Indigenous residential scholarship program creates value within and beyond a college**

This year, the Shalom Gamarada Indigenous Residential Scholarship Program will celebrate its 50th graduating student. Over the past 14 years, the program has provided accommodation scholarships; tailored and culturally sensitive wellbeing and academic support; and a personal, inclusive and academic living environment at Shalom College. In her presentation, **Emma Parker** provides an overview of how a small college powered by a small staff and 130 residents from a diversity of backgrounds, has impacted on the Indigenous scholarship recipients, the resident body as a whole, and wider Australian society (8).

- **“I feel like I have been here before”: a pre-entry interaction online module for new students**

Many of us recall the daunting experience of leaving the familiarity and comforts of home to finding one’s way around a college layout, facilities, services and staff. Studies on the stresses associated with this transition highlight the importance removing barriers and facilitating a feeling of belonging and integration as crucial to students feeling welcomed and part of their new community. To reduce this initial stress as well as the time needed to become familiar with their surroundings, **Liza Allen**, developed a pre-entry interactive online module which is sent to all new students. Liza demonstrated this module to colleagues so that they may in turn create their own interactive online modules.

Student voices: where college is now and where we can make a difference

Feedback from our Forum survey highlighted the value of hearing from our students and developing our student leaders, participants appreciated hearing from students from Dunmore Lang and also **Samitha Ramanayake’s** discussion with senior students (9).

UCA Initiatives

As outlined in Barbara Green’s President’s Report (10), much of the work conducted by UCA in the past 12 months was intended to build on the work done by the previous Executive and discussions which took place in Hobart. Ongoing work by the Executive Committee will be further guided by the UCA Strategic Plan (11).

Putting it all in perspective and building a culture of compassion

Our Forum keynote address given by our final guest speaker and noted sociologist, **Hugh Mackay AO**, spoke of increasing social fragmentation and levels of anxiety in Australia. In meeting the needs of an increasingly socially fragmented and anxious society, Hugh observed that: “We are not living as though our physical and mental health depends on the community in which we are living.” Whilst there is no single solution in responding to this situation, he proffered that there is one single word at the heart of any strategy in responding to this human suffering and that is compassion, and compassion is the high octane fuel that runs our Colleges (12).

See further information on all of the Forum sessions and information handouts below:

1. The higher education landscape: implications for Universities and Residential Colleges
Dr Michael Spence AC, Vice-Chancellor, The University of Sydney – [summary of address](#)

2. Strategies in fundraising for residential colleges
Sophie Davidson and Young Dawkins – [notes from the address](#)
3. University Colleges: the Value Proposition
Adam Connelly – [Value Proposition & Communications Plan for Residential Colleges](#)
4. Colleges post the Australian Human Rights Commission Report and Recommendation 9
Panel discussion with the Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP – [notes from the panel discussion](#)
5. UCA Respectful Relations Response and Resources Advisory Group – resource base of good practice policies & procedures - [document](#)
6. The potential for sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention models in tertiary settings: engaging student voice and bystander approaches – [power point presentation](#)
Donna Davies, Director of Studies, Janet Clarke Hall, The University of Melbourne
7. Working together: building a bicultural community and Dunmore Lang College
Dr Alasdair Murrie-West, Principal, Dunmore Lang College – [power point presentation](#)
8. “We walk together as friends”: how an Indigenous residential scholarship program creates value within and beyond the college
Emma Parker, Resident Director, Shalom College – [power point presentation](#)
9. Student voices: where college is now and where we can make a difference
Discussion facilitated by Samitha Ramanayake, Head of Residence, Wright Hall – [key discussion points](#)
10. UCA President’s Report 2019 – [document](#)
11. UCA Strategic Plan – [major goals](#)
12. Building a culture of compassion, Hugh Mackay AO – [notes from Hugh’s address](#)
There are also podcasts by Hugh on this topic incl.:
<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/conversations/conversations-hugh-mackay-2018/9749264>