

TEXT

The Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs

EDITORIAL

The Need for a National Mapping of Writing Courses in Tertiary Institutions

The lack of formal links between writing programs around Australia prior to the establishment of the AAWP in 1996 is probably the main reason for there being no reliable national statistics relating to numbers of students and staff involved in the teaching of writing courses at tertiary level.

As **John O'Toole** suggests in an article published in this issue, figures produced by DEETYA in relation to the visual and performing arts (the recognised category most likely to apply to creative writing in the university context) don't appear to include writing studies at all and probably don't include all of theatre studies.

The organisations that have been most ready and able to respond to the vexed Research Quantum situation are associated with music and the visual arts - not surprisingly, because those areas have their distinct institutions in Colleges of Art and Conservatoria of Music in each state.

The May 1997 VCA symposium focussed on the perspectives of music, visual arts and dance. Without clear knowledge of the extent of writing and theatre courses - these being, as O'Toole points out, buried in a variety of departments (English, Creative Arts, Communications, etc.) - the symposium had difficulty representing and reporting back to writing and theatre teaching areas.

Due to the two AAWP conferences, and in the pages of *TEXT*, we are gradually forming an idea of the extent of writing courses around the country. Somewhat belatedly, the pressure is now upon us to quantify the contribution of writing courses to the overall teaching and research business of our universities.

The kind of information we need - to press the case for Research Quantum recognition of creative product as research - has its basis in statistics that give a clear picture of the extent to which university study (at all degree levels) concerns writing.

Glen Phillips' article, also published in this issue, reflects on the fact that most creative writing courses came under the aegis of the universities at the time of the Dawkins amalgamation process.

This is a factor which needs to be addressed. Not all university administrators and high-level academics were necessarily happy with the idea that practice-oriented teaching and research, inherited from the CAEs, should achieve equal status with the established 'research' disciplines.

We have always thought that if the universities now profess creative writing and other forms of writing, if they produce Bachelors, Masters and PhD level graduates in these areas and encourage an overall research culture, then the AVCC should also acknowledge that the task of working out research-equivalence for creative products is a matter of the highest priority.

O'Toole indicates that the commitment of Australian universities to the graduating of 'creative-trained' specialists represents over five percent of the total university industry. This is a significant proportion of the national tertiary education product. These graduates move into Arts industries which, in themselves, generate a significant proportion of the national economy.

The key initial factor required for the AAWP to join into the national debate over the Research Quantum and the significance of creative-oriented graduation and research in the universities is the collection of real data related to writing's participation in the university context.

The statistics able to be collected in this respect do not exist either for the university or TAFE sector. It is up to the AAWP to collect them. We therefore urge you to fill in the form provided under The Mouse heading in the contents page of this issue. Armed with real data, the AAWP can move forward in various national contexts to validate the significance of its existence.

Also In This Issue

In the pages of this issue Kevin Brophy reveals what he says to incoming creative writing students at first year level while Jeri Kroll scrutinises the relevance of creative writing courses to the industry the students are headed towards.

Terri-ann White investigates the role of the creative writing lecturer and its implications for those who are also practising writers. Tess Brady and Nicole Bourke advise on the nature of research for fiction writers, and Christopher Kelen takes an illuminating perspective on teaching poetry via second language teaching methods.

Descriptive analyses of teaching community writing at Edith Cowan and playwriting at the Queensland University of Technology come from Glen Phillips, Don Batchelor and Peter Copeman. Also Claire Woods and David Homer demonstrate successful text intervention techniques employed in workshops at the University of South Australia, while Mary Hutchison gives an account of a dynamic women's community writing project. In the sharing of professional experience, these articles indicate the vitality of thinking underlying creative writing courses across Australia.

The extract from Matthew Karpin's soon-to-be-published novel shows the degree to which writing's theoretical self-examination is undertaken in writing itself. The simultaneous roles of creator and theoretician are powerfully demonstrated in this extract.

Additionally, there are refereed creative pieces from Molly Travers, Margie Cronin and Glenda Guest. The publication of good practice amongst staff and students of creative writing programs in Australia is an on-going project for TEXT.

Several of the articles published in this issue are based on papers delivered at the second AAWP conference held in Melbourne in October 1997 and hosted by the writing programs at Deakin University and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

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