

Submission to Senate Education, Employment & Workplace Relations Committee:

Inquiry into Academic Freedom.

Applicant: Norm H Canton, PO Box 19, Garbutt East Q4814

Background: I have been an employee with the ground staff at James Cook University, Douglas Campus, Townsville, NQ since 1980, having left school at aged 15. Over the years I have enjoyed numerous stimulating conversations with staff and students – some of who later joined the academic staff. In 1999 the University introduced certificate courses which allowed people whose circumstances had not allowed them to complete year 12 to experience University as mature aged students. I seized the chance and must first thank the University for this opportunity which changed my life and understanding.

With regard to the committee's terms of reference a. – the level of intellectual diversity and the impact of ideological, political and cultural prejudice in courses at Universities I would like to submit the following.

1. Curriculum: I studied Contemporary Australian Studies and while the course was widely informative of recent events I was stunned to find Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War was slanted and appeared to be based solely on the views of the anti-war movement of the 1960's. Though the war was unpopular here in Australia I found it particularly offensive that the lecturer seemed untouched or dismissive of the effects the war had on the Australian soldiers who served there. My brother fought with the 8th battalion and was wounded when his APG drove over a land mine, with serious effects on him and his family. As a seasoned soldier he has the greatest respect for the Vietnamese who he describes as tenacious fighters. None of this side of story was portrayed in the lectures, delivered to mostly young students including overseas students. My concern is that other staff and these students follow these narrow views and become lecturers in history themselves I wonder at how the current conflicts in the Middle-east and East Timor are being portrayed.

2. Conduct of teaching professionals: I would also like to raise the issue of lecturers expressing their political views on subjects outside of the curriculum. A lecturer in Law admitted to me that during the recent local government elections in Queensland students had spoken to him about their confusion over the candidates. I expected him to have pointed to the constitutional basis of local government, the relative merits of the forced local government amalgamations and to suggest students investigate the motives for the candidates to stand for public office and the skills they would bring in running a large regional city – to make an informed decision. Instead the lecturer admitted that was going to vote for the mayor, along political lines and vote informal for the councillors. This lecturer also referred in conversations to the previous Prime Minister Mr John Howard as 'a rodent'.

Both of these issues suggest to me a total political bias, and ignorance of issues outside of their narrow expertise. It might be that lecturers could actually be recruited on the basis of the left-wing ideals and not on the principles of freedom of ideas and speech. I can only applaud the committee for looking into this issue and hope they introduce a charter of academic freedoms. I have not named the lecturers in this submission but am willing to appear before the committee if requested.

Norm H Canton 31 July 2008