

## THE GOULBURN VALLEY OFFICE – FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The University has been involved with the Goulburn Valley through its links with Dookie College for many years, in 1910-22 and 1943-63 and then from 1992. In 2001 it expanded its presence to establish what has become known as the Goulburn Valley Office (GVO).

To assist in the development and administration of the GVO, the University established a secretariat and purchased a building in Nixon St., Shepparton. This meant that the GVO was close to Council offices, other community organisations and companies, and provided the University with a visible presence and the physical proximity to the Council, industry and community.

The GVO has had a number of components, including tertiary courses in health, education and agriculture, clinical student placements, research activities, and community outreach.

### i) Tertiary Activities in Health, Education and Agriculture:

- In 2000 the University sought and obtained Federal Government funds to enable the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences to set up a clinical school, based at Shepparton. This initiative was designed to boost the numbers of medical professionals in rural Victoria. Through the School of Rural Health it offers an undergraduate and a postgraduate course in nursing, and clinical placements for medical students, including work with the Rumbalara Indigenous community in Mooroopna.
- The University also developed and offered undergraduate and postgraduate courses designed to provide teacher training for local students. The Faculty of Education also oversees the programs associated with the Academy of Sport, Health and Education (ASHE) program. ASHE is a collaborative project between the University of Melbourne and the Rumbalara Football Netball Club. ASHE offers a six months TAFE course - Certificate 11 in Sports - designed specifically to address school dropout rates amongst Indigenous youth. The ASHE program focuses on health, life-skills and general education; the certificate is nationally recognised, and is delivered in close cooperation with the Football Netball Club.
- Through Dookie College, the University has offered a number of diploma, degree and postgraduate courses in agriculture since 1910.

### ii) Clinical Placements

- The students on clinical placements are based at the Parkville campus and spend varying times from one to six weeks in rural placements on medical, nursing and physiotherapy rounds.

### iii) Research Activities

- The University has a number of research centres in particular: the Joint Centre for crop Innovation, the Centre for Water and Landscape Management, the Wine Industry Centre and the CRC for Sustainable Forest Landscapes.

### iv) Community Activities

- In recognising that early intervention can assist in encouraging regional students to consider taking degree courses, the University also established the Melbourne Access Program (MAP). MAP brings together Melbourne undergraduate students from the Goulburn Valley with years 10, 11 and 12 students in selected high schools in Shepparton. The first 'graduates' of the program are now at universities in Melbourne.
- In addition, the GVO office has conducted community outreach activities, including public lectures and seminars, arts events (the University is the major sponsor of the Shepparton Arts Festival), and a Council meeting and Town and Gown dinners.

## **Issues/Intended Outcomes**

During the period the University was expanding its course offerings in the Goulburn Valley it offered a number of teaching and nursing courses. It did so on the basis that, if students were to remain in the region during their tertiary years, they would be more likely to remain in the region and meet the region's health and education needs. What it has found, however, is that there is neither the local demand nor the students with sufficiently high enter scores to justify the University continuing to offer these courses. The University's experiences in education and health courses has been mixed:

### *Faculty of Education*

1. Bachelor of Early Childhood Education
2. Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary)

The courses run at the Shepparton campus sought to attract and retain secondary teachers in the Goulburn Valley. They also offered local mature-age students retraining opportunities. In 2004 The Bachelor of Early Childhood Education in the Goulburn Valley had seven students. In 2005 it was decided not to run the program locally as the demand was too low. From 2005 students in the Goulburn Valley may apply to do the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education at the Parkville campus. It was also planned to offer a Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary) in the Goulburn Valley in 2005. However, the Faculty only attracted 3 eligible applicants and has now cancelled the course. Total numbers from the Education Faculty in undergraduate programs in the Goulburn Valley in 2004 were 7; and in 2005 they were nil.

In 2004 the University sought extra places for an Associate Degree program in the Goulburn Valley involving the faculties of Education and Arts, which would have offered a pathway for high-achieving students to articulate into full-degree programs at Parkville. This bid was unsuccessful.

### *The School of Rural Health*

Through its health-related programs the University has sought to establish a major regional hub for the development of teaching, research and innovation in regional health issues and training of health professionals within a rural and regional context. The School of Rural Health has two major components:

1. Bachelor of Nursing Science and Bachelor of Nursing Science (Accelerated); and
2. Clinical placements for students enrolled in medicine, dentistry and physiotherapy.

In 2002 a specific nursing tertiary degree program was established in Shepparton, with its own academic staff. In 2004 the numbers of students undertaking the Bachelor of Nursing Science program was 20, with 60 students there in total. In 2005 the numbers of commencing students were expected to increase; however, the University was only able to fill 16 places of 20 available HECS places. There will be no new intake to the course in Shepparton in 2006; currently enrolled students will be able to complete their studies in Shepparton in 2006 and 2007.

The numbers of medical students on placements are in the hundreds but, as noted, they are only there for short periods. Nevertheless, such placements appear to be the best way of ensuring that medical students have experience of rural placements. With this in mind the University will seek to establish a six-week rural rotation to the Goulburn Valley by nursing students.

### *Developing Partnerships with Indigenous Communities*

Another major issue is that of the future of partnership programs with Indigenous communities. The University has made a major commitment in its Strategic Plan to consult and work with Indigenous Australians to assist their communities to meet their social and educational needs and aspirations. The ASHE program is the major University initiative towards achieving this outcome, but its funding has not yet been guaranteed beyond 2006. There may be other opportunities for expanding related activities, for example through government grants, such as the Youth Mobility Program. In this

context it is also of note that one of the recently announced Collaborative and Structural Fund grants, went to Indigenous Pathways@Caboolture, a collaborative project to extend educational opportunities for the Indigenous community

## **Options**

Whilst the University sought to resource and market the above courses, it has not been possible to create or sustain sufficient demand for the University to justify offering all of them. The University needs to focus on what it does best in Shepparton, as part of the Goulburn Valley region, both to support regional outcomes and to ensure its resources are best utilised.

1. Continue with the full range of GVO activities, considering new award courses where there are both new Commonwealth Supported Places and demonstrable, adequate demand from eligible students. A program of non-award educational activities, such as seminars and short courses, could benefit from the location of the Nixon Street office opposite the Shepparton Arts Centre.
2. Refocus the GVO on evident strengths in public health through the School of Rural Health and the ASHE program, where possible expanding ASHE and Indigenous health activities. A small secretariat would organise seminars and events related to the AHSE, SRH and research programs. In time it may be desirable and possible to locate the secretariat close to the School of Rural Health to facilitate a more cohesive approach.

## **Implementation**

A new Shepparton component of the Goulburn Valley strategy will need to be based on the following:

- A clear focus on the University's major contribution to Goulburn Valley communities through specialist training and public health programs.
- While undergraduate health and education courses have now been discontinued, the health clinical placements in medicine, dentistry and physiotherapy and the Master of Advanced Nursing Practice will continue to provide health practitioner training in the Goulburn Valley. There are plans to open officially a new Clinical Skills Laboratory in November.
- While undergraduate and graduate teacher training courses delivered in the Goulburn Valley have been discontinued, students are of course able to apply for these courses at Parkville, and the Melbourne Access program allows for increased numbers of disadvantaged and rural students.
- The research and commercialisation opportunities in rural health, in Indigenous health and education and in agriculture, water and sustainability are still to be fully explored. The Melbourne Water Research centre is currently developing a water and river management project to develop fine-scale water accounting. All research activities should be retained and reviewed on an annual basis to track their progress and results.
- The community programs ASHE and MAP will be continued as the University continues to seek to meet its longstanding commitment to rural and regional Victoria.

## **Recommendation**

It is recommended that option 2 is adopted as reflecting the more efficient and cohesive approach to programs in the interests of the Goulburn Valley and the University.

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