

The value of university residential colleges

The Ashley Lecture 2010
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It is an immense pleasure and privilege to be here with you at Trent University as Ashley Fellow for 2010, and to be invited to deliver the Ashley Lecture.

In doing so, it is a pleasure to be able to pay a tribute to one in particular of the distinguished panellists who will respond mercilessly to this lecture, my friend of many years and the founding President of this University, Professor Thomas H B Symons – one of the great figures in higher education in the Commonwealth in the last half century, and someone of whom it may truly be said in this place, as of Sir Christopher Wren in London, ‘if you seek his monument look around you’. And I join in my tribute to Tom the warmest and warmly-merited recognition of Christine Symons.

The Ashley Fellowship at Trent was created with the bequest left on his death in 1974 by Professor Charles Allan Ashley. When Tom Symons was an undergraduate at Trinity College in the University of Toronto, Allan Ashley, professor of accounting, was also resident in that college. Through their interactions, Tom Symons learned much, including about the value of informal conversation in the collegiate environment. From their own experiences - including in Tom’s case later as a student at Oriel College, Oxford, and at Harvard - both Allan Ashley and Tom Symons developed well-founded enthusiasm for colleges as a valuable component of student life at university. It is said that Allan Ashley was one of the few people whom Tom consulted when he was approached to consider taking up the task of founding Trent; and Allan Ashley contributed much to the early development of the University, including as a member of the Academic Planning Committee that shaped the founding of the University, and as a member of the University Senate in its early years.

Another of the early leaders of this University, whom I regarded as an exceptional human being and whom I was also deeply privileged to count as a friend, was Dr Eugene Forsey. Dr Forsey was the long-time research director of the Canadian Labour Congress and one of the Commonwealth’s greatest authorities on constitutional conventions. He was also an early and long-standing member of Trent’s Board of Governors and the second Chancellor of the University. The historian of the University, A O C Cole, writes: ‘Forsey was universally respected and raised Trent’s image wherever he went.’¹ Through shared interest in constitutional

¹ A O C Cole, *Trent: The Making of a University 1957-1987*, Trent University, 1992, p. 112.

conventions, I came to know Dr Forsey, and in 1985, then a young Australian postgraduate student briefly visiting Canada, I was honoured to accompany him and another guest to Rideau Hall for his installation by the Governor-General as a Privy Councillor. When in 1991 I reviewed Dr Forsey's memoirs, *A life on the fringe*, soon after his death, my review was published in the journal *The Round Table* under the title 'Canada's best', amongst whom he certainly was.

Eugene Forsey, like Allan Ashley and Tom Symons, had real experience of the collegiate system at its best – in Eugene Forsey's case as a Rhodes Scholar for Quebec at Balliol College, Oxford. It is little wonder that they all supported the founding collegiate vision of Trent, expressed this way at the opening ceremonies for the University in October 1964 by Tom Symons, as its first President. Quote:

The philosophy which inspires Trent is based upon the conviction that education is, inescapably, an individual experience – individual to each student, to each teacher, and to every other scholar who may come to it. And this philosophy is reflected in the teaching methods of Trent University which seek to encourage each student to find a close and a direct contact with his teachers through the tutorial and seminar approach to instruction. ...

This philosophy of our University is also reflected in the decision that Trent should be a collegiate university – that is, that it should be made up of a number of smaller, sister colleges, which will be the fundamental units and the chief features of Trent University. Every student and every faculty member at Trent will belong to one or another of these colleges. In this way, through the colleges, members of the University may be helped to preserve a sense of individual identity as the University grows larger, and to find richer personal associations and a greater measure of academic assistance than would otherwise be the case.²

A document prepared by current President Steven Franklin's Vision Renewal Review Committee stresses that, and I quote, 'We honour our legacy of commitment to the individual student...', and continues:

Trent was founded on a vision of undergraduate education that saw each student as an individual who would flourish in an instructional environment of close interaction with faculty and their peers, in both formal and informal situations. Seminar teaching and college life are two hallmarks that have characterized that vision.³

It is not for me, even if I were capable, to discuss that vision or the particular aspects of the colleges at Trent today. I have been asked to speak about the value of university residential colleges in the wider world of higher education, and I hope that what I can report from elsewhere may be of interest, or even of use, to you. Above

² *Trent University Official Opening Ceremonies*, 1964, p. 16.

³ Vision Renewal Review Committee, 'Elements of Trent University Vision For Discussion' - <http://www.trentu.ca/planning/visionrenewal/> - accessed February 1, 2010.

all, I want to argue that, well run and under the right conditions, residential colleges can contribute enormously to the education of students, and so to achieving the core purposes of a university, and thus can contribute to the wider community.

I will do so under four broad headings – first, general observations about colleges and the value they can contribute; secondly, brief consideration of the collegiate ideal in history and especially the resurgence of interest in it in many places in recent times; thirdly, some recent empirical data from Australia on engagement through colleges; and finally, some food for thought on problems for colleges and the conditions needed for their success.

When I speak of a university residential college, I mean to speak, not of a building or set of buildings, but of a community – a group of people, not merely a physical facility. Quite simply, for me a residential college is a residential academic community, ideally a community bringing together students of diverse backgrounds and disciplines in close contact both with each other and with more senior scholars and teachers, also of diverse disciplines, and others who work to ensure that the college is a rich learning environment for its students.

In many instances, a residential college will also embrace in its community students as well as faculty and staff who are not actually resident in the College. This is in many cases a very important fact, highlighting for us that a college, if it is genuinely a college and not simply a boarding house, should be regarded as first and foremost a provider of education – at very least, a significant enricher of the all-round educational experience of its students – rather than as simply a provider of accommodation.

It follows inevitably, I think, from the nature of a residential academic community that each college will over time develop its own characteristics, culture, activities and offerings, and expectations of its members: and such diversity is in general to be welcomed. Expecting uniformity or standardisation between colleges will in general damage the very nature of the college as a welcoming and distinctive human community. Colleges necessarily imply some form of decentralisation and diversity.

Similarly, although the universities and colleges of many countries, certainly including Canada, the United States, and Australia, have developed from ideas originally imported, especially from Britain and in some cases 19th century Germany, and have many features in common, it is important to recognise that universities and colleges have evolved differently in different places, for reasons sometimes hidden in history. Most relevantly, residential colleges have developed differently in extent, shape, and impact in the countries I have mentioned, and features which seem natural to me – an Australian with collegiate experience in Britain, the United States, Australia and only this last week in Canada – may seem very different to you or to others. Even the same words may mean different things.

Examples of this diversity include whether colleges are affiliated to or actually owned by the wider university and their degree of autonomy within the university, their governance, the extent and nature of their academic programs and the involvement of senior academic members, what proportions of students are undergraduates and

what proportion postgraduate, whether they are religious foundations, and so on. I mention these examples of diversity to highlight that what I refer to in other places may be of greater or lesser relevance here, and I do not seek to prescribe what Canadian universities – and certainly not Trent – should do.

When it is working well, a residential college enriches the education of its students, resident or non-resident, in many ways:

- through giving them a sense, and a reality, of belonging to a community
- through thus enabling a greater sense of identity and a lower risk of alienation as a member of a smaller unit than in the larger university of which the college is part
- through academic tuition
- through academic advising, and personal and professional mentoring
- through academic support in other ways, from learning resources such as libraries to prizes and scholarships which encourage and acknowledge academic success
- through pastoral care
- through informal interactions between students, and between students, faculty members and staff – informal interactions which contribute to the social as well as intellectual development of students
- in some cases, through interactions facilitated by the college between students and members of the wider community, including for example leaders in the professions and in public life
- through opportunities to participate and excel in extra-curricular activities, such as sport, music, drama, the visual arts, debating, religious activities, political and advocacy activities, community service, and more – with all the benefits in personal development, such as in leadership development, and in community contribution which such activities can bring
- through social activities
- through the development of life-long friendships, and
- through the encouragement of the values, such as living with integrity and respect for others, that should be nurtured through college life because they are essential to the success of college life.

The value of such collegiate experience for individual students can be immense, and with it the value for universities, including:

- as I have suggested, through integrating learning with living in ways that enrich education
- through enhancing the attractiveness of the university to prospective students, perhaps most especially when it is used as a selling point, and so improving recruitment
- through increasing student engagement within the university
- through encouraging student retention
- through encouraging alumni loyalty and support for the university
- through providing a means of engaging faculty members more profoundly and enrichingly in the life of the university

- through connecting members of the university with the wider community, and much more.

As I have already suggested, it is often argued that residential colleges can be environments in which students and faculty members from diverse disciplines can come together to understand and solve issues which cannot be fully comprehended from the standpoint of a single discipline. The Cole history of Trent suggests that colleges here have been particularly important at some points in the development of interdisciplinary programs.⁴ This can be one of the ways – and there are others – that colleges can contribute positively to the research mission of a university.

It is often argued that colleges can, and ordinarily do, provide a particularly welcoming and supportive environment for students new to university, and especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are the first in their family to come to university, for whom university can seem a very foreign experience. It is argued that colleges can, and ordinarily do, provide an especially good way in to university life for students from rural families, from distant parts of the country, and from overseas. In these and other ways, including through the provision of scholarships, it is argued that colleges can play crucial roles in the outreach, equity, and access agendas of universities, and in promoting the international, inter-cultural, and inter-faith understanding that is so crucial for the world's future. All this, of course, depends on colleges being such welcoming, and not alienating, environments: at which some colleges are better than others.

I give as one example that, at a number of Australian universities, colleges have played an important, even leading, role in the provision of support for Indigenous students. This includes:

- providing a welcoming environment in which Indigenous students can feel at home
- with Indigenous visiting fellows and others helping to promote wide understanding of Indigenous culture, experience, and knowledge
- with summer schools and university preparatory programs for Indigenous students provided within the college, and
- with generous scholarships for Indigenous students, often provided by significant philanthropic support.

I know of one case, and it might not be the only one, where the Chancellor of the University has said that a college has led the University in its work for Indigenous students.

It may be that provision for Indigenous students is in one or more cases an example of the wider phenomenon of colleges undertaking roles for the university which the larger university is, for whatever reason, less well able to undertake itself. To give another (I hope not too immodest) example: the college I used to head in Melbourne undertook several roles for the University of Melbourne which were said to be of

⁴ Cole, chapter 6.

great value to that university – roles such as providing a welfare safety net and excellent foundation studies for young overseas students, and providing a collegiate base within the university for visiting scholars such as the four Nobel Laureates who came for periods each year.

It is also the case that fundraising by colleges for scholarships and for other activities will be aided by the loyalty of many of their former college resident students. This is strongly evident in, for example, the loyalty of members of so many Oxford and Cambridge colleges to their college, loyalty reflected increasingly in philanthropic support. The potential of college loyalty to generate philanthropic support for activities within colleges which are of real benefit to the whole university will, I think, be reflected in some further examples I will mention later. Loyalty to a college may also contribute to loyalty to the wider university, with real potential for philanthropic support.

The collegiate ideal in education has, of course, been at the heart of the great universities of the world for hundreds of years – in Cambridge and Oxford since at least the 13th century. In the 19th century, John Henry Newman wrote of the need to combine what he called ‘the system of Professors’ with ‘the system of Colleges and College tutors’. By a ‘College’ Newman meant – quote - ‘a place of residence for the University student, who would there find himself under the guidance and instruction of Superiors and Tutors, bound to attend to his personal interests, moral and intellectual’. Newman insisted that colleges in this sense were essential to the ‘wellbeing’ and ‘integrity’ of a University.⁵ This vision contributed to the creation of residential colleges in several mid and late 19th and early 20th century universities in what were or became the dominions within the British Empire and Commonwealth.

As the person responsible for the running of the Rhodes Scholarships around the world, I am especially conscious that at the end of the 19th century Cecil Rhodes chose to give his scholarships to Oxford, rather than to Edinburgh, which he considered as the alternative, precisely because of the existence of residential colleges in Oxford.

Although in various ways, including in liberal arts colleges, it had long been fundamental in much of US higher education, the residential collegiate ideal reached its modern expression at Harvard, Yale, Princeton and elsewhere only in the last century, most famously associated with the early initiatives of Woodrow Wilson at Princeton, the creation of the house system by President Lowell at Harvard, and the philanthropy of Edward B. Harkness creating residential colleges at Yale.

But the classical ideal of collegiate education is by no means a thing of the past, or a matter for nostalgia. Quite the opposite.

In 2007-08, when I was Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) of the University of Western Australia, that University – aspiring to become by mid-century one of the

⁵ Newman quoted from Donald Markwell, *A large and liberal education: higher education for the 21st century*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2007, p. 134.

world's top 50 universities - commissioned papers on the educational, research, and community engagement activities of the world's top 50 universities. The major paper researched by Dr Carolyn Daniel on *The educational attributes of some of the world's 'top 50' universities* concluded:

The majority of the top ten universities have over 90 per cent of their undergraduates living on campus; many more institutions have high percentages of students in residence or have students living in university-run accommodation very close to the campus.⁶

Amongst other benefits identified, including some of those I have already mentioned, was that 'Colleges can be used to introduce innovative educational programs and to target particular segments of the potential student market'.

Dr Daniel concluded, and I quote: 'There has been something of a renaissance in the college system in particular recently with many universities establishing, planning or expanding internal systems of residential colleges.'⁷ Moreover, in many universities, steps have been taken to strengthen the role of existing residential colleges.

That there has been 'something of a renaissance in the college system' can be illustrated with examples from around the world – from Columbia, Princeton, and Yale in the US, to the National University of Singapore, to the Chinese University of Hong Kong, to Fudan University in Shanghai and Yuanpei Honors College at Peking University, to the Universities of Melbourne and Western Australia, and many, many more besides. The details of some of these may be found through the website collegiateway.org, which I recommend to you.

Part of the reason for this resurgence of interest in the college ideal in many countries today is that, in an intensifying global competition between economies and universities, universities in many countries are aspiring to become among the very best in the world, are looking at the attributes of the world's finest universities, are seeing that they are overwhelmingly residential universities, and are therefore seeking to adopt and adapt for themselves this key attribute of the world's best. Many have also noticed that some of the world's leading universities, with already strong residential college systems, are strengthening them further.

For example, Princeton has been one of the leaders of the so-called 'renaissance' in residential colleges, including with the opening in 2007 of Whitman College, made possible through, amongst other donations, a \$30 million gift from eBay's Meg Whitman and her family. Please forgive me for quoting at some length from Princeton's own description of its residential colleges. Quote:

One of Princeton's most distinctive characteristics is its close-knit residential community. On-campus housing is guaranteed for undergraduates for all four

⁶ Carolyn Daniel, *The educational attributes of some of the world's 'top 50' universities: a discussion paper*, University of Western Australia, May 2008, p. 49.

⁷ Daniel, p. 50.

years. The University's six residential colleges are the center of residential life and offer an array of academic and social programs that enhance the undergraduate experience.

In fall 2007, with the opening of Whitman College, the University inaugurated an expanded residential college system that provides more housing and dining opportunities for all undergraduates. The new system establishes three four-year colleges and pairs them with three two-year colleges, enabling juniors and seniors to remain linked to a residential college, regardless of whether they live there.

Each college has a faculty master, dean, director of studies and director of student life. Academic advising for freshmen and sophomores is centered at the colleges, and juniors and seniors also are encouraged to confer with their college advisers for nondepartmental academic advising throughout their undergraduate careers. Undergraduates also benefit from the guidance of residential college advisers, who are upperclassmen, and resident graduate students.⁸

It is likely that Princeton's routine success in assessments of US undergraduate education is in no small part attributable to its residential college system.

In responding in February 2008 to a report he had commissioned and which recommended the creation of two new colleges at Yale, the President of Yale, Richard Levin, said:

The residential college system is one of the glories of Yale, and it is a major reason why students choose to come to Yale and a major reason why Yale College students report greater satisfaction with their education than students at most peer institutions.⁹

In June 2008, Levin announced that Yale would indeed proceed with creating two new residential colleges. Already \$140 million had been donated for the purpose.¹⁰ In September last year, in responding again to the financial constraints arising from the global financial crisis, President Levin said that, while 'no major construction will proceed until funding is available from donor support or financial markets recover', Yale had 'secured donor support to continue the design of the new residential colleges and to undertake site clearance, the first phase of which [would] occur [in the] fall'.¹¹

⁸ <http://www.princeton.edu/main/campuslife/housingdining/colleges/> - accessed February 1, 2010.

⁹ <http://opa.yale.edu/president/message.aspx?id=68> – accessed February 1, 2010.

¹⁰ <http://opa.yale.edu/news/article.aspx?id=5868> – accessed February 1, 2010.

¹¹ <http://opa.yale.edu/president/message.aspx?id=88> – accessed February 1, 2010.

Last November, in marking the renovation of one of Yale's existing colleges (part of a long-term program of college renovation), President Levin 'affirmed Yale's unique residential college system as central to undergraduate life and excellent preparation for citizenship'. It serves, he said, as 'the locus of students' intellectual, social, and personal development, where they learn about community and working with others'.¹²

It is clear from these and other examples that could be given that, in the last ten to fifteen years, many leading universities have been increasing their commitment to residential colleges. This is also evident further afield. Australia has seen a renewed focus in universities on residential colleges, and renewed efforts by several residential colleges to enhance the quality of the all-round educational experience that they offer. While in some universities there has been a retreat from autonomous colleges and from the collegiate ideal, quite a few Australian colleges have seen, in various ways, such positive developments as - considerable improvement in their tutorial programs; the introduction of mentors for every student; increased focus on community service activities and 'service learning'; greater emphasis on distinguished visiting scholars who enrich the life of the residential community; and increased scholarship support for resident students. Much of this has been done with growing philanthropic support from alumni and other friends of the colleges. Several colleges have strengthened positively their connections with the wider university with which they are affiliated, or of which they are a part.¹³

For example, in the years 1997 to 2007, I was fortunate, as Warden of Trinity College within the University of Melbourne, to be a participant in developments at the University of Melbourne which I think observers would agree saw a significant enhancement of the contribution of the colleges to the life of the University. This enhancement has continued with the announcement in January 2010 of the offering by the colleges of non-resident places, with academic as well as extra-curricular and pastoral benefits, open to all students of the University – a very significant development in that context, and a further sign of the renaissance of colleges in one of Australia's leading universities.¹⁴ This is part of the University of Melbourne's wide-ranging and profound efforts to enhance the culture and student experience there, which also include major (if controversial) curriculum reform in the direction of broader undergraduate education leading into specialised or professional postgraduate education or training. One of the oldest of Melbourne's colleges has recently re-articulated its purpose as being 'to create a new generation of leaders through an unrivalled learning and living experience'¹⁵ – a noble goal, and the kind of clarity of purpose which, in my view, all institutions benefit from having.

¹² <http://yaletomorrow.yale.edu/news/calhoun.html> - accessed February 1, 2010.

¹³ This is elaborated at <http://collegiateway.org/news/2008-markwell-naauc> - accessed February 1, 2010.

¹⁴ <http://www.colleges.unimelb.edu.au/assets/uploads/Voice-Article-20090111.pdf> - accessed February 1, 2010.

¹⁵ Ormond College website – www.ormond.unimelb.edu.au – accessed February 1, 2010.

Within the University of Western Australia, which is also undertaking major curriculum or course structures reform, many steps have been taken to strengthen the role and contribution of the residential colleges in the student experience, especially to encourage student engagement in a rich campus life. For example, the University has been providing financial assistance for further residential development within the colleges, and giving colleges access to funding for leadership development, mentoring, inter-cultural competence, and other enriching activities. Some of the University's major scholarships specifically cover college fees. The colleges are recognised in the University's key planning documents, and are contributing to the discussion of how the University can achieve its goal of becoming one of the 'top 50' universities in the world within 50 years.¹⁶

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne from 1996 to 2004 was Alan Gilbert, now Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manchester. In his current role, from which he will retire later this year, Alan Gilbert has led a review of teaching, learning, and the student experience at Manchester. In one of the discussion papers he authored to commence that process, he wrote:

... the kinds of multi-layered, close-knit, highly-interactive learning communities that good university colleges and halls of residence create are likely to remain among the hallmarks of any great undergraduate educational experience.¹⁷

The Manchester review, like developments at Melbourne and the University of Western Australia, reflects an increased focus in universities and colleges around the world over the last decade or so on the quality of education, including student experience. The increased focus on collegiate education in many places is part of the wider drive in many institutions to improve the educational experience of students, perhaps especially undergraduates, with increased attention to student engagement, out-of-classroom as well as in-classroom activities, the quality of teaching, greater student-faculty interaction, on-campus and virtual learning communities, curriculum reform, and so on.

Many advocates of collegiate education argue that its benefits have been evident over hundreds of years of experience. There have been empirical studies which have provided support for this. For example, in 1991, in their review of longitudinal studies of university impact, Pascarella and Terenzini noted that 'living on campus is perhaps the single most consistent within-college determinant of [university] impact'.¹⁸

¹⁶ More detail is at <http://collegiateway.org/news/2008-markwell-naauc> - accessed February 1, 2010.

¹⁷ http://www.manchester.ac.uk/medialibrary/staffnet/briefing_paper_ug_education.pdf - accessed February 1, 2010. Also quoted in Daniel, p. 51.

¹⁸ Pascarella and Terenzini quoted from *Engaging College Communities: The Impact of residential colleges in Australian higher education*, AUSSE Research Briefing, Volume 4, June 2009, p. 2 – available at http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/AUSSE_BriefingVolume409.pdf - accessed February 1, 2010.

Richard Light's best-selling book from 2001, *Making the most of college: students speak their minds*, based on detailed interviews with some 1600 undergraduates at Harvard and other leading US colleges, provides evidence of what he calls 'the remarkable amount of learning that occurs in residential interactions' and the 'critical role of residential living arrangements'¹⁹ such as intermingling, rather than concentrating, students from diverse cultural, national, and other backgrounds. One of the most important findings of Light's study is that, when asked about their most profound learning experience, fully 80% of students quoted something that happened outside the classroom – including in many cases activities in their residential college or hall. This simple, striking fact helps to explain the renewed focus on student engagement outside as well as within the classroom, and including in residential settings.

Student opinion surveys in Australia tell a similar story. A June 2009 analysis by the Australian Council for Educational Research of data from the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) compared the experience of students resident in colleges with students not resident in them.²⁰ It suggests, for example:

- that resident students are more engaged than non-resident students, including in active learning, student and staff interactions, and enriching educational experiences, and most significantly, in experiencing the university as a 'supportive learning environment'
- that these differences, what appear to be benefits, are actually greater for later-year undergraduates than they are for first-year undergraduates
- that resident students are much more likely than non-resident students to plan to take part in such enriching experiences as practicums or internships, community service, and study abroad or student exchange
- that resident students are more likely to find student, teacher and support relationships as friendly, helpful, and considerate than non-resident students do, and to experience much better relationships with other students
- that resident students have greater overall satisfaction with their university experience, and
- that the greater benefits for resident over non-resident students are especially significant for international students.

These results provide strong evidence of the educational benefits of residential colleges, while also, as the authors of the research briefing argue, encouraging further research and thought on 'ways in which to further enhance the contribution that college communities make to higher education in Australia'.²¹

For all these positives perspectives on the renaissance of residential colleges, it is crucially important to acknowledge that many residential colleges face real

¹⁹ Richard Light, *Making the most of college: students speak their minds*, Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 5.

²⁰ *Engaging College Communities*, AUSSE Research Briefing, Volume 4, op cit.

²¹ *Engaging College Communities*, p. 13.

challenges, and that obtaining the benefits of collegiate education requires a certain set of conditions. In some universities, colleges are in retreat rather than resurgence. Some so-called 'colleges' lack the educational focus truly to merit that name. In some cases, unwisely led, colleges are bastions of privilege, not centres of excellence or points of access and inclusion. In some cases, the ability of the college to attract talented people with appropriate vision, values, and capacity for positions in governance and college leadership is unreliable. While some colleges have prospered financially, others have found it hard to implement a sustainable business model.

To give another example of a challenge and opportunity: colleges provide one of the best potential environments for encouraging mutually rewarding connection between students from many different cultures and countries – but such positive interactions do not just happen by chance, and leadership within colleges is needed to encourage them and create good preconditions for them.

I quoted earlier from Professor Alan Gilbert saying – and it is worth repeating – that the rich 'learning communities that good university colleges and halls of residence create are likely to remain among the hallmarks of any great undergraduate educational experience.' Notice that Alan Gilbert spoke of 'good university colleges'. In 1998, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, he wrote an article for a college magazine that, drawing on his experience in several universities, began:

'College life! When it is good it is very, very good, but when it is bad...' ²²

He wrote of his 'considerable knowledge and experience of just how superb, and nurturing, and uplifting, life in a university college can be – and just how dehumanising, humiliating, abusive and tyrannical the "college experience" can become for sensitive individuals if shallow, chauvinistic or anti-intellectual values are allowed to emerge as the dominant culture.'

I am sure that Professor Gilbert had seen, as I have seen, where colleges, founded with noble ideals, have become places where conformism, sexism, racism, anti-intellectualism, and an over-emphasis on alcohol have damaged people – not enhanced their personal development, but subtracted from it.

Professor Gilbert had great hopes for what colleges could contribute to the development of students. But his warning about what he called 'the consequences of unbridled chauvinism, anti-intellectualism and invidious peer pressure' is not to be dismissed lightly. This warning was given not long after the publication of a book by a former head of a college in another Australian university, under the title *Finishing School for Blokes*, which reflected offensive and vulgar behaviour which clearly negated the positive educational effect the college was meant to have. As recently

²² Alan D. Gilbert, 'The Challenge to Colleges – and Trinity's "formidable" contribution', *TrinityToday*, Trinity College, University of Melbourne, Summer 1998 – available at http://www.trinity.unimelb.edu.au/publications/trinity_today/summer1998/TTpp13-21.pdf - accessed February 3, 2010.

as last November an apparently pro-rape – yes, pro-rape - Facebook page apparently belonging to one or more members of an all-male college at the University of Sydney produced profound outrage and controversy.

These examples highlight the damage that can be done when values go askew, discipline is lax, and vulgar conformism replaces individual responsibility. It is part of the role of college leaders – including student leaders - to work to prevent this, and to ensure that the best and not the worst is brought out in students.

Some colleges have worked hard to nurture cultures of inclusion and respect, and genuine gender equality. My book *A large and liberal education* gives a brief account of such strenuous and at least partly successful efforts at Trinity College in the University of Melbourne.²³ Despite 30 years of co-education or co-residence, the culture of the institution remained male-dominated. This, I think, has been true in many other contexts: once all-male institutions, becoming co-educational, have continued for decades to have essentially masculine cultures. In such cases, gender equality does not arise spontaneously; a transformative process is required. I am pleased that the President of Princeton, Shirley Tilghman, has recently commissioned a committee chaired by Nan Keohane to review women's undergraduate leadership at Princeton: a study that I hope will contribute to understanding and action in universities and colleges far beyond Princeton.

Although I do not wish to be prescriptive for Trent or indeed any other university, perhaps I might, in conclusion, mention some of the conditions that I regard as important, even essential, for the best educational potential of colleges to be realised in the circumstances of the 21st century. They include these:

- that colleges be inspired at all levels by a vision of themselves as educational institutions and not merely as accommodation providers
- that they be diverse communities, with people drawn from many backgrounds – socio-economic, geographic, cultural, racial, and so on – but also that they take deliberate efforts to draw the greatest benefits from this diversity
- that they be genuinely co-educational, with a real and energetic commitment to gender equality
- that they embrace (as evenly as possible, in my view) students of all year levels, and not only or primarily first-years, and ideally including post-graduate as well as under-graduate students
- that they be environments in which considerate and respectful behaviour is both expected and insisted upon – if you will permit the old-fashioned language I prefer in this instance, where there is discipline
- that they be environments in which senior academics take an active, leading part, seeking deliberately to enhance the education of students and not simply providing a venue for parties
- that this be reflected in programs of academic enrichment, ideally other programs for encouraging leadership, service and personal development, and

²³ Markwell, pp. 183-9.

the provision of pastoral care, as well as support for a rich array of high-quality extra-curricular activities, and

- that they be embraced by the leadership and administration of the university as respected and valued partners in enriching and supporting the education of students.

Where such conditions are met, the immense potential value of university residential colleges can be fully realised – value which is reflected in so many of the world’s finest universities, and has been for centuries; and value which many universities and colleges around the world are working hard today to realise and increase. Doing so is, they rightly believe, of great benefit to their students, to their universities and colleges, and ultimately to the communities – local, national, and global – which they serve.