

## Vice-Chancellor's Article for *Monitor*

5 October 2000

### 'UC from a Distance'

To be discovered as Australians absent from their country during the Olympic Games led to jesting questions in country after country. I quickly developed a standard reply: we had made room for the thousands of visitors from their country. It wasn't wholly a joke. The Australian Embassy in Dublin, according to our taxi-driver there, had issued 45,000 visas just to Irish people under 25.

I saw bits of the Opening Ceremony in Dublin airport, the first week of the Games in the USA, and the second week in Mexico City. What we saw was at breakfast, and focussed exclusively on the successes and disappointments of local athletes. We arrived back in time for the Closing Ceremony, but after the very long flight from Mexico City sleep was more important than partying by remote control.

My Spanish is rudimentary, and not up to following sports commentaries, but the NBC coverage of the Games in the USA was extraordinarily favourable to the qualities and abilities of the host nation, and a friend says that the same was true for French television. I congratulate those of our students who participated, whether they entered, won medals, worked, volunteered or just watched. I guess it won't happen again in our country for another fifty years.

I was away at the time because of an invitation to address a UNESCO/World Bank/OECD Conference in Hannover, Germany, which more or less dictated the beginning of the month of 'professional leave' that I get in lieu of OSP. I went then to Oxford, Ireland, the USA and Mexico, mostly to look at some other universities that seem to me to have special claims to our attention.

In the coming world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we will need to exhibit 'best practice' in all that we do. It is easy to dismiss such notions intellectually, on the usual grounds of criteria, measurement, relevance and so on, and many people in universities and other large organisations do just that. My own response is to move quickly past the endless loop of debates like this and focus on the things other universities do that are applicable in our own place.

At the invitation of energetic and effective Presidents of the universities concerned, I spend the best part of a week in both the University of Limerick in Ireland and Central Connecticut State University, in New Britain, Connecticut, USA. Each is about our size and scale, each has a similar mission, each has a similar history, and each seems to offer the same kind of programs. CCSU began life as a teachers college in 1849, and became a university twenty years ago. UL was once the National Institute of Higher Education, and became a university even more recently. UC is the most recent creation of all.

What can we learn from them? To begin with, UL has the largest and most effective Co-operative Education program in Europe. That is, all UL students spend some time in industry or a professional environment in the course of their study, and the University has partnerships with more than 500 major firms and organisations in Europe and North America. UL graduates are highly sought after.

Both universities have gone down the path that we are entering with the University of Canberra Innovation Centre, to which Council gave the go-ahead last week. CCSU has a most impressive Innovation Centre, which is rather more like an industrial incubator than what we are planning, while UL has a technology park right next door which houses some very big names indeed.

We can't, and shouldn't try to, copy what they have done. New Britain was once 'the hardware capital of the world' and is still the home of the Stanley Knife Company: traditions of manufacturing are very powerful there. Ireland has become the point of entry into Europe for many American corporations. UL also benefits from the generosity of wealthy Irish-Americans who made good in the USA and are returning some of their wealth to a university in their homeland which did not exist when their ancestors left Ireland, and to which they could not have gone had it been there.

There are some things that we don't have to copy. CCSU, a most attractive and peaceful campus, nonetheless has a campus police force of 29 and the cars and other accoutrements of such a group. That costs a lot more than our six unarmed Security people. Nor do I have to make provision for \$7 million for campus sports, and worry about what the alumni think of the performance of our basketball team (that of CCSU was once the champion university team of the USA).

All in all, I came back thinking that UC stands up well in comparison to both. There was a lot I could and did learn, but I think the same would be true for my counterparts in both countries. I look forward to welcoming the President of CCSU here next year, when he comes to have a look at us. The President of UL was in Canberra earlier this year, but I've invited him to return to have a closer look at UC. He probably will: his university has been designated as the Irish 'sports' university, with coming programs in sports administration, coaching, media and the like.