

# Discounts undermine scholarship credibility

Clear definitions are needed to preserve basic principles

ANN WHITELOCK  
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Higher education institutions award scholarships for myriad reasons but it has come to light that the process for international students gaining a scholarship into higher education is increasingly non-transparent, and that there is misuse by some providers with reputational consequences for Australia's tertiary sector.

Under pressure to recruit ever more students from overseas, how can we be sure so-called scholarships are real, rather than simply a discounted place? To be clear, discounted places dressed up as scholarships debase and devalue every genuine scholarship offered by the sector at significant expense for institutions and donors. These emerging practices undermine our reputation, erode trust and also may fail the compliance test.

As chairwoman of the scholarship program at private higher education provider International College of Management, Sydney, I believe basic principles need to be laid out and what is a scholarship needs to be defined and protected. The definition needs to uphold and preserve this prestigious and equitable channel to accessing higher education.

At ICMS, a process is adhered to, set apart from the regular admission process, with an open and close date creating a pool of applicants. The pool completes a criterion-based written appli-

cation with an essay component. The next qualification stage is a panel interview.

The panel comprises senior members of ICMS. Applicants attend in person or via Skype and wear business attire. Interviews are standardised and objective outcomes are achieved. The panel must have no prior relationship with the applicant. Key categories inform the selection: an applicant's interview, their overall achievements including academic, and socio-economic situation. Scholarships then are awarded based on known criteria and robust assessment of a competing field. The process creates a true ranking system providing opportunities to award scholarships to students who have earnestly and respectably earned the honour.

What should not be considered a scholarship is the mere admission of a student in a discounted place without assessment of claims and comparison against the field.

With 22 years' history, the present ICMS scholarship program was established more than eight years ago and maintained with robust and unwavering implementation. More than \$1 million in scholarships are awarded annually to new and existing students. A select few benevolent corporations partner the program, enhancing it greatly.

"I think one of the proudest parts of my association with ICMS is their determination to provide education opportunities for many students who, without these scholarships, would have no options for further education," says Mike Baird, the former NSW



premier and a director on the ICMS board.

Through this channel at ICMS, I have witnessed many changed lives, and it's a blessing to have this enabling platform. What's troubling is the lack of definition of a scholarship and the actions of some Australian providers in international markets.

Practices that are undermining the notion of a scholarship have a corrosive effect on the integrity of the higher education sector and are diluting its integrity. Providers need to find new ways to boost international student numbers.

Further, the notion of continuously open admissions at some institutions, including public providers, indicates a systemic problem that makes qualifying, ranking and selecting applicants impossible. How can continuously open admissions result in a competitive pool?

In *The Australian* ("Discounts catch on as international lure," September 3), International Education Association of Australia chief executive Phil Honeywood is quoted as saying universities around the country are resorting to offering discounts "dressed up

as scholarships" to enhance their market share. How is offering discounts dressed up as scholarships a professional and ethical practice? If this continues, then how long will it take before the rest of the world places zero credibility on a student obtaining an actual scholarship in Australia?

It is tough in the international arena. Students increasingly are mobile and savvy in leveraging options. However, international education must be about developing solid and meaningful ways to provide a quality experience for our students so they end up em-

ployed in the field of their studies. If you can do that, you can get students to come. Publicly funded universities, especially, should be setting the example for the sector.

It is a question of standards and compliance, and I advocate a clear definition for scholarships that is aligned to an objective qualification, ranking and selection process.

Ann Whitelock Courtney-O'Connor is chairwoman of the ICMS Professional Scholarship Fund and Aspiring Education Fund.

## Debate can go on only if all agree in advance

Attempt to discuss untested hypothesis thwarted by timidity

STUART MACDONALD

Mid-last year, the editors of *Prometheus. Critical Studies in Innovation* told their publisher they were organising a debate on shaken baby syndrome. The journal often organises debates on contentious issues with a bearing on innovation.

The shaken baby syndrome hypothesis is that certain signs in a dead baby's brain reveal the baby has been shaken. Their presence allows the conclusion that shaking caused the baby's death and that the person last in charge of the baby was responsible.

The SBS hypothesis can be traced back a half-century to an age when the divide between the medical literature and a popular press demonising muscular, foreign nannies was not always clear. Some of this fervour endures in the National Centre on Shaken Baby Syndrome in the US, an influential organisation promoting the hypothesis, and intolerant of criticism. In 2010 a serving Metropolitan Police officer gave a presentation at its annual conference, arguing that SBS conviction rates could be increased by digging the dirt on nonconforming expert witnesses.

Though SBS remains an untested hypothesis, it is sufficiently venerable to be accepted as orthodox in medicine and in court. When Waney Squier, a leading pediatric neuropathologist based in Oxford, Britain, questioned the hypothesis as an expert witness, she was struck off — not for her opposition but for the way she expressed it. Her fate has done nothing to boost the supply of expert witnesses challenging SBS. Squier is the author of the proposition paper in the *Prometheus* debate.

If the justification for SBS is flimsy, resistance to an alternative is anything but. Expert witnesses supporting SBS have only to assert their conformity: dissenters have a mountain to climb. The court, unlike the academic literature, has no time for nuance. It permits no digression from core expertise (so a shaking expert may consider the consequences of shaking but not of falling). Yet the innovation literature is redolent with the benefits of crossing disciplinary boundaries.

Only expert witnesses opposing SBS need find support in the literature, all the while refraining from criticising majority thinking — and especially majority thinkers. Moreover, the failure of these maverick experts to restrict themselves to the conclusions section of cited papers attracts accusations of misrepresentation and cherry-picking. Yet social scientists question the whole of academic papers and expect particularly little from their conclusions. Definitely material aplenty for a decent *Prometheus* debate.

In seeking respondents worthy of Squier's paper, we became aware of just how temperate medical opinion on SBS can be: "I don't think I would have anything to add by way of comment to Waney's paper ... Waney is dogmatic, inflexible, inconsistent, evasive, inaccurate, unresponsive to the opinions of other experts and misleading, although not dishonest."

We were advised, in the nicest possible way, not to proceed. We proceeded.

Squier's draft went to the *Prometheus* publishers, Taylor &

Francis, in October last year for legal review. We heard nothing for months. Then, in February, T&F managers demanded all 11 debate papers. T&F lawyers somehow had formed the opinion that, even if her own paper was not libellous, Squier herself was unreasonable and would sue the other debate authors for libelling her.

"Any responses which are critical/potentially defamatory of Squier (must be) run past her before publication so that we can get her comments on those allegations/criticisms, for potential incorporation into the responses so that they are balanced."

They wanted a debate where everyone agreed in advance.

By late March, it seemed that T&F's internal lawyers were at last satisfied. Publication could go ahead — but not before external lawyers had been consulted. This second legal opinion, not delivered until June, was that the 11 debate papers were all likely to be libellous. Changes were required to the lot, but what changes? The lawyers refused to go into detail and T&F managers, anxious to avoid accusations of censorship, deferred entirely to the lawyers.

We asked for the lawyers' annotations on the papers. There were none: "This is not an issue that can be resolved by changing some sentences, which is why our libel lawyer has not gone through each article line by line."

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Knowing next to nothing about SBS, the lawyers failed to appreciate that two papers likely to be libellous had been written by lawyers, one by a senior Metropolitan Police officer and another by the chairman of the General Medical Council. The lawyers made plain that any mention of the GMC, the body that brought charges against Squier, was unacceptable.

In mindlessly following mindless legal advice, T&F managers set new standards for its authors, adopting wording and logic strangely similar to the constraints on expert witnesses in court: "The main issue is that the debate goes well beyond discussion and criticism of the science, which is relatively safe ground in libel terms ... (papers must be written) ... without making specific allegations about named individuals or organisations, unless we are able to completely verify the facts."

So discussion must not go beyond the science of a subject and there must be no criticism of identified individuals or organisations unless the publisher verifies the facts.

Just about every paper *Prometheus* has ever published would fail these criteria, as would many papers in many other journals.

On July 13, T&F managers announced a "suitable resolution" to the SBS debate problem. Without warning and with immediate effect, they declared that T&F would rid itself of *Prometheus* altogether. *Prometheus* now seeks a new publisher, one that respects academic values. The search may take some time.

Stuart Macdonald is the general editor of *Prometheus*.

## UNE's online reach makes it an inviting target for a possible merger

University's expertise would benefit a less efficient institution

KEITH HOUGHTON

This year Purdue University in the US created Purdue University Global. It came into existence from its acquisition in April last year of the Kaplan University operation, which had ceased operations after a period of mixed fortunes.

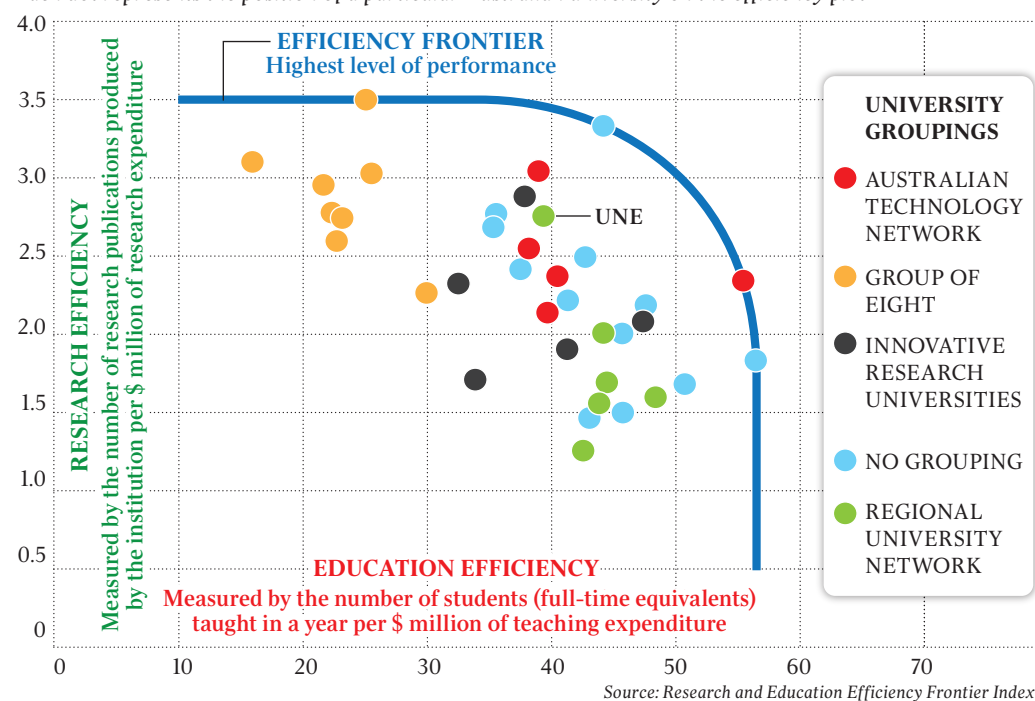
Through a series of what appears to be complex contracts, Purdue uses the "back office" (that is, the online expertise) of Kaplan to support a large array of online educational programs targeting mostly part-time adult students. The offerings attract thousands of American (and foreign) students.

Some see the PU-G strategy as an attempt to push forward the online educational programs of Purdue in a highly efficient manner. The move provides more easily accessible educational offerings of a mainstream university that is putting itself at the leading edge of online education.

Australia does not yet have the same type of institutional arrangements; however, there are a small number of universities that have strategic engagement in, and

### Australian university efficiency 2016

Each dot represents the position of a particular Australian university on the efficiency plot



significant levels of, online education (other than the special case of Open Universities Australia).

With the recent announcement of the retirement of University of New England vice-chancellor Annabelle Duncan, it is worth reflecting on one aspect of the presence and effect of on-

line education in the Australia university sector.

There are several higher education institutions achieving significant productivity growth. Of the 13 universities that achieved productivity growth of greater than 30 per cent across the period from 2011 to 2016, there was only

one smaller institution (with equivalent full-time student load of less than 15,000) that achieved this level of improvement — that being UNE. It achieved productivity growth of 35.2 per cent across the period.

This is markedly higher than other institutions in the Regional

University Network, where the mean level of growth is just more than 12 per cent. No other RUN member achieved the efficiency position that UNE has (see the chart in which RUN institutions are shown in green).

Why did UNE achieve this level of productivity when others did not? It is likely that the leadership skills of Duncan and her predecessor, Jim Barber, were particularly important here. Another explanation is that for many years UNE, Australia's ninth oldest university, has built expertise in distance education including, in more recent times, online education.

Recent data shows that about 85 per cent of students of UNE learn in whole or part via online education. This is believed to be the highest in the country. Other institutions that are present in the online space include Deakin and Swinburne, although these don't have the same long-term focus on off-campus education.

With the existing presence of merger activity in the Australian sector — the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia are considering the merits of merging with each other — the coming change of leadership at UNE may trigger further consideration of another merger, this time with a strong focus on

online education. As with Purdue, an Australian "bricks-and-mortar" focused university may seek a merger with an institution specialising in online education such as UNE and thereby acquire a highly developed and expert online platform.

Metropolitan institutions that might benefit in merging with UNE could include any institution that has lower levels of efficiency overall than UNE, and with an interest in enhancing their online profile.

In 2016, UNE was at a level of 87 per cent of what we term the sector's efficiency frontier. NSW institutions under the level of UNE's efficiency with a more modest portfolio of online education include the University of Technology Sydney, Macquarie University and the University of Sydney, to name just three.

With university education increasing looking to online solutions, the possibility of integrating a highly efficient university with demonstrated expertise in online education into a more conventional institution seems a viable option worthy of consideration. It is, after all, exactly what Purdue did.

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## Flexible and continuous learning can produce the X-factor workforce employers desire

Lifelong employment will make way for lifelong study

LAN SNELL  
YVONNE BREYER

The characteristics of the labour market have changed considerably and universities must act now to respond to the way that work is likely to look in the future.

Established large corporations are re-identifying themselves as start-ups. They have introduced flatter structures driven by teams, with parallel projects that aim to innovate and sandpit areas to accelerate prototypes in a safe envi-

ronment. All this encourages the intrapreneur mindset to stem the bleeding of talent.

Notwithstanding, many employees are leaving their corporate roles to pursue their passion and create their own start-ups. We see the rise of the contingent worker or the gig economy, with many looking to control their work through platforms that connect with new clients.

This disaggregated labour market brings about new expectations and different needs in terms of how we learn and how that learning is consumed.

Tech-enabled disruptions have shifted the paradigm of how businesses work and the economy at large. Connecting platforms that

match resources to customers are becoming mainstream. The increasing sophistication of machine learning and artificial intelligence has the potential to reset, displace and create new markets.

The digitalisation of the workforce is having a significant impact on how we work and how we learn. The concept of lifelong employment typically has been a linear journey, from school to university, to work, with a steady ascension through one profession. This is no longer the norm.

The model of learning has shifted from a front-loaded model where most learning is completed at the beginning of adulthood, through to continuous learning

No matter how sophisticated machines become, they will not replace core human capabilities

that varies to suit different learners' needs. Lifelong employment has been replaced by lifelong learning.

We cannot keep pace of these rapid changes. What we can do is reimagine what learning may look like to future-proof ourselves. No matter how sophisticated machines become, they will not replace core human capabilities such as creativity, curiosity, and empa-

thy. These soft skills are the sought-after, future-focused abilities that employers seek.

Deloitte's 2018 Global Human Capital Trends Survey identified complex problem-solving, cognitive abilities and social skills as the most important capabilities for the future, with "businesses clamouring for workers with this blend of skills, not pure technical competency". Future-focused employees have to find the sweet spot in the "T intersection", a metaphor used to describe the evolution from "disciplinary" or "vertical" workers, to "multidisciplinary" or "T-shaped" workers.

The vertical represents domain expertise, whereas the horizontal represents generalist capabilities.

The future of work narrative extends this metaphor, where employers are looking for the "X" worker: someone who not only has the requisite domain level of expertise and the generalist leadership capabilities but who also is able to work in teams, is adaptive to different environments, works collaboratively and knows when to lead and when to follow.

The so-called "lateral hires" practice, where employers are recruiting outside the traditional disciplines, reflects the increasing importance of the "X" factor as employers struggle to find workers with future-focused capabilities.

So, what are higher education providers doing about it? Although universities have been less

than agile in the past, a dramatic shift is taking place.

Providers are experimenting with various platforms, different learning management systems and online provider management models in an attempt to meet and anticipate changing learner needs. Providers are realising that the future of learning is about offering different sizes and shapes of learning including free courses, short courses, massive open online courses, micro-credentials and traditional award programs.

It is important to acknowledge upfront that the introduction of new learning options does not replace present options or suggest that they are redundant.

Quite the contrary; formal

qualifications that are delivered face-to-face offer rich learning interactions that suit certain learners. The future of learning is about catering to learners seeking different modalities (whether face-to-face, blended, hybrid or online), focuses and pricing points. It is entirely possible to have a range of programs for different buyer behaviours.

Most call it segmentation — we call it the future of learning.

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