

The emergence of Communication Studies in Australia as 'curriculum idea'

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ABSTRACT: *Among the different ways in which the emergence of communication studies in Australia can be characterised, one particular trope is that it emerged as essentially a 'curriculum idea'. The first part of this article introduces this idea against the backdrop of the literature on the emergence of Australian communication studies. The second part then turns to a case study, that of the curriculum space at the Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education, which is explored through an interview with its foundation Chair of Department. By exploring this trope in a particular institutional context, the intention is to give greater insight into how communication studies operated as a curriculum idea.*

In Wilbur Schramm's account of the beginnings of communication study in the US, he recounts how the area of communications research was institutionalised in research institutes at the University of Illinois and Stanford University¹, and in doctoral programs servicing journalists who could earn a qualification in this (then) new area rather than political science, sociology, psychology, or history (Schramm, 1985, p. 206). This led to the inclusion of the name 'communication' in the official titles of journalism schools and departments. This early institutionalisation is not presented as an undergraduate affair. While Schramm tells of some 'cell-division' in existing departments of

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speech, the picture is one of an advanced graduate and research-driven professionalisation of the field. For Jesse Delia, this would eventually prove a 'special difficulty for the growth of the field as an autonomous domain [as it] grew out of the development of communication research essentially independent of those fields concerned with professional and undergraduate education in communication' (Delia, 1987, p. 72).

By contrast², in Australia, the origins of Communication Studies occur characteristically in the undergraduate curricula of newer universities, institutes of technology, and colleges of advanced education, founded in the post-1970s expansion of the higher education system³. It was only later, in what Irwin describes as a second period of growth post-1987, that a postgraduate profile was established (Irwin, 1993/1994, p. 160). To illustrate the point, while many programs first took intakes of students in the 1970s, it was only in 1990 that 'communication' was incorporated as a formal field of research category in the Australian Research Standards Classification. It was later still that the field found a place in older, more established universities.

The story of the emergence of Communication Studies in Australia can be (and has been) framed in different ways. Different narratives have formed to characterise this emergence. A dominant trope relies on an account of the changes to Australian Higher education allowing for new courses in non-traditional institutions (see Wilson, 2001, p. 3). For Putnis, 'the new institutions were open to innovations in curriculum design and academic organization' (1993b). Another trope focuses on 'the long dependence of Australian universities on British and US imports and European trends' (Gerbner et al., 1989, p. 364). This has led to an emphasis on the 'cross-currents' produced by the circulation of US and UK traditions in Australia (Putnis, 1986). This article seeks to focus attention on a different, though intimately related, trope: that Communication Studies emerged as 'a curriculum idea'. Or, as phrased by Peter Putnis, 'communication studies emerged in Australia as essentially a curriculum idea' (1993, p. 2). This idea is not exclusive from other tropes. For example, in the work of Putnis, all three co-exist. But, for present purposes, the emphasis will be on the distinctive aspects of this particular notion.

Within the literature, the characterisation of the emergence of the area as a curriculum idea is closely connected to the disciplinary standing of the area. For example: 'As a curriculum idea communication provides an organising focus for input from a number of disciplines usually psychology, sociology, linguistics and cultural studies' (Putnis, 1988, p.

32). Multi-disciplinarity became an important term: 'here was a "new" multi-disciplinary field of study which dealt with the contemporary issues and which, in its inclusiveness, could accommodate both the traditions of liberal education and the growing demand for "vocational relevance"' (Putnis, 1993a, p. 2). This focus led in turn to an emphasis on a 'diversity' of approaches. For Putnis, 'Here was a study which appeared to accommodate both theoretical and practical concerns, and which, depending on one's disciplinary/professional background and stance, could be a platform for social critique, a training-ground for professional communicators, or a new discipline which could address human communication in a way which transcended traditional disciplinary boundaries' (1993b).

Since at least 1993 (see Putnis 1993b), these notions have become linked to an account of innovation. Given the current prominence of the slogan-word 'innovation' as a Government policy objective in Australia—with its most concrete form in the Backing Australia's Ability Program (see <http://backingaus.innovation.gov.au>)—and also a public policy debate about diversity and differentiation between degree programs, it is not surprising that greater weight has been given to the idea of innovation in the field of communication and media studies (see Putnis & Axford, 2002; also Putnis, 1993b). Building on their earlier work (Putnis, Axford, Watson, & Blood, 2002), which also gave prominence to the theme of innovation in the growth of the field, Putnis and Axford remark:

Although the field of Communication and Media Studies is often portrayed as highly vocational in orientation, its development also demonstrates the willingness of those working in the area to push the boundaries of traditional classifications of knowledge. New technologies, their uses, and their role in shaping society and culture are major themes of communication and media research. The critical understanding of the uses and power of new communication technologies in particular contexts—for example, in journalism and advertising, and for traditional and new modes of production (print, film, multimedia)—is a central component in most communication and media courses.

Furthermore, new communication and media technologies are becoming part and parcel of the teaching and learning environments, with respect to both on-campus teaching and new modes of flexible delivery. The success with which academics in the field have responded to these challenges is evident in the

innovative curriculum models that have been produced and the engagement with flexible modes of delivery. These demonstrate the increasing maturity of the field, as does the central role the field plays in both the creation of the messages that make up our multi-faceted and media-saturated world, and in our ability to understand that world and shape it to democratic ends. This is not just an expanding field but an increasingly diverse and innovative one. (2002, pp. 3-4)

In this passage, the field of study as a whole is closely linked to innovation. Innovation in turn is linked to particular terms: particularly technology, professional contexts, and pedagogic environments. It is also linked to an increasing maturity in the field.

As stated above, my focus is the idea that the emergence of Communication Studies can be characterised as a 'curriculum idea', a notion that takes shape in the context of points and observations that exist in the relevant literature. For example, it is a commonplace to depict early Australian Communication Studies in terms of major tensions revolving around curriculum, a 'unique set of turf wars' (Putnis, Axford, Watson, & Blood, 2002, p. 5; Putnis & Axford, 2002, p. 5). In my earlier work on the development of the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association (Maras, 2004, pp. 16-22), I sought to show the variability of these turf wars and the dangers of 'paradigm-talk' in polarising the field. Perhaps as a side effect of the focus on 'turf wars', which tends to emphasise internal discipline disputes over the standing of the 'turf' (in this case field, or discipline) the curriculum space has been inadvertently cast as a site of conflict. By focusing on the notion of a 'curriculum idea' I seek to move beyond a conception of curriculum as a territory upon which conflict occurs, to a conception of curriculum as a site for creativity and invention. This is in keeping with the current emphasis on innovation on the field, but also requires us to think about the notion of a 'curriculum idea' more carefully, and more historically. This opens up questions such as Whose idea of the curriculum are we talking about? What was the context of the idea?

The two-part structure of this article fulfils this need for a more detailed treatment of the 'curriculum idea' in two ways. The current part establishes the idea of Communication Studies as a curriculum idea against the backdrop of the literature on the emergence of Australian Communication Studies. The second part of the piece focuses on Sydney's Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education as a case study to

discuss one early Communication Studies program, and its curriculum space. The focus on Kuring-gai CAE is not to suggest that it was an absolutely typical institution. The conditions and possibilities in different contexts would vary greatly according to policies and location. In place of a detailed comparison of different institutional contexts, this piece offers a detailed profile of conditions at a particular institution.

Despite the early characterisation of the emergence of the field through the notion of its being a curriculum idea, this has not remained as prominent, powerful, or perhaps as elaborated, as other tropes in accounts of the emergence of the field. This article attempts to give greater definition to this 'idea', and provide greater insight into the process of curriculum innovation itself as a way of responding to, rebelling against, or re-defining, institutional briefs.

While this article builds on existing references to curriculum, and curriculum contexts in the literature, I do not have space for, and will not attempt to provide, a reading of the curriculum forces behind 'local' textbooks such as John Fiske's *Introduction to Communication Studies* (1982) or Gunther Kress's *Communication and Culture* (1988). Nor will I engage in depth with surveys of the field such as those by Molloy and Lennie (1990) or Putnis, Axford, Watson, & Blood (2002), or a survey of different courses and a report of a seminar 'Curriculum Issues in Communication Studies' held in March 1988 (Putnis, 1988).

Providing a better picture of curriculum innovation in early Australian Communication Studies necessarily involves giving some background context for readers not familiar with Australian higher education. While this context can be gleaned from the contributions below, as well as other studies (see Galvin, 1990; Lewis, 1982; Irwin, 1993/1994), it is worth noting briefly (especially for non-Australian readers) the impact of what has been termed the 'binary system' of higher education. As a product of the Martin review into tertiary education in 1964, 'the Commonwealth government established a number of new universities and put in place a binary system consisting of the university sector and an advanced education sector. Within this new binary system, institutes of technology, institutes of higher education, and colleges of advanced education took over from what had been teachers' colleges and some technical and agricultural colleges' (Putnis, Axford, Watson, & Blood, 2002, p. 5). Introduced into the curriculum for various reasons (from teacher training to business education), eager individuals and groups rapidly sought to give scholarly integrity to the area, and effectively reformed it in the image of their individual and collective research

and teaching interests. These early efforts in an emergent field were assisted by the Australian Communication Association—formed in 1980, and re-named in 1994 as the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association—acting as a place of exchange of ideas about communication education.

Putnis et al. characterise the milieu of the new sectors in the following way.

These new institutions were exciting places to be in the 1970s. Staff were generally younger and more radical, influenced by the intellectual ferment sweeping the industrialised nations—the Civil Rights movement in the USA, second-wave feminism, post-colonialism—and less beholden to established disciplinary structures and traditions. (Putnis, Axford, Watson, & Blood, 2002, p. 5)

The new sectors were characterised as more vocational, but also had great flexibility in pedagogic approach and direction, and a remit to be 'centres of applied education and research' (Putnis, 1993b). In 1987, with the introduction of the Unified National System by the Hawke Labor Government, the binary system ended, and a set of re-structures took place that worked to the advantage of the field of Communication and Media as a contemporary area of study in a mass education system⁴.

In this article, curriculum innovation is a term used in a number of ways. It can be used to refer to the introduction of a new teaching area into the system (e.g., public relations or popular media). It can also refer to experimentation within the curriculum, special projects, and pilot studies (efforts that if implemented eventually become normalised, prompting a new cycle of change). Finally, it can refer to a process of innovating within dictated institutional ideas of what a communication program is about.

As our field grows older, images of curriculum innovation will change with the times. It is hoped that this focus on the emergence of Communication Studies as a curriculum idea, and also the focus on this idea in a material situation, gives greater historical context to this term. This article does build on some existing accounts of curriculum work. Bruce Molloy has recently recounted some of the thinking in 1972 behind establishing a terminating degree in Communication (a Bachelor of Business (Communication)) at the Queensland Institute

of Technology (now Queensland University of Technology), emerging out of a 'general studies' program that offered little in the way of a career track (see Maras, 2003, p. 4). In her Afterword to *Australian Communications and the Public Sphere* (1989), Helen Wilson describes the influence of Bill Bonney on shaping the new degree in communication at the New South Wales Institute of Technology (now University of Technology, Sydney). She also provides a sense of the milieu of that degree, influenced by linguistics, leftist politics, feminism, and British Cultural Studies, and a radical pedagogic approach that valued a non-authoritarian pedagogy ('small classes, team teaching and the valuing of non-academic knowledge') that led to a pass/fail system of unit assessment.

Establishing Communication Studies at the Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education: An Interview with Harry Irwin⁵

What is your own background?

I joined Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education (CAE) in Sydney in January 1975 following three years lecturing in Macquarie University's Teacher Education Program and previous experience as a teacher, head teacher (social sciences/commerce), and deputy principal in NSW state high schools. My undergraduate degree (New England) included specialisations in economics and geography and I held an MEd (Sydney) and an MA (Hons)(Macquarie) that focused on curriculum development, innovative teaching strategies, and the professional in-service development of teachers. My PhD (Macquarie) in management communication followed in 1980, and was shaped by the work I was doing at Kuring-gai.

What attracted you to Kuring-gai?

In applying for the Kuring-gai position, I was looking again to be involved in something different and challenging after the stimulating experience of working in Macquarie's innovative teaching program. The position at Kuring-gai promised just that, as the college moved from offering only non-degree teacher education courses to introducing, in 1975, an innovative undergraduate degree program in business studies, the Bachelor of Business (B Bus), via a newly established School of Financial and Administrative Studies. The new program included studies in communication, Australian society and culture, and Australian

politics in ways designed to set the traditional business subjects of accounting, economics, business law, management, marketing, and so on into their broader social context. The communication subjects were also intended to impart skills and understandings to students that they could draw upon throughout their undergraduate program and transfer to the workplace. The advertisement for the position made clear that 'the College is anxious to experiment with new approaches to business education' and that the work involved would use educational resources 'with a view to contributing to the overall development of communication skills'. Unusually for the time and for a College that had attained corporate status only months earlier, it also indicated that 'opportunities exist for research and experimentation at all levels'.

What was the institutional context like?

Until renamed when it gained corporate status in 1974, Kuring-gai CAE was the William Balmain Teachers' College, which had moved to Lindfield in Sydney's north in 1971 from the inner city suburb of Balmain. Sulman Award-winning new buildings, adjacent to national parklands, were designed to accommodate just 1000 students but held triple that number by the time Kuring-gai was absorbed into the University of Technology, Sydney in 1990.

Despite the building having an indoor 'street' (building spine) that in numerous ways, including via its café-style, all-staff tea and meeting rooms, effectively brought people together, interaction between new business studies staff and teacher education staff was initially limited. The conservative culture of the teacher education staff was threatened by, for example, the new, more university-like culture most obvious initially in the less formal attire of business studies staff and students, business staff-student interactions being conducted on a first name basis, and even the introduction of developments such as student evaluation of course units and teaching.

Were there any special people fostering the development of communication?

Bill Birkett (who came to Kuring-gai from the University of Sydney and later moved on to become Professor of Accounting and Associate Dean, Development, Faculty of Economics and Commerce at UNSW), the most widely read accountant I have met, was head of the new business school. He represented quite a change, an innovative young business educator with a strong will to inspire and bring about change. He had conceived the communication subjects, sketched out what

was to be their content, argued for them, and won approval from the NSW Higher Education Board for their inclusion in the program. Bill was a strong advocate for an approach to accountancy and business education that was liberal in orientation, and included knowledge of communication and Australian society. The then principal of the College, George Muir, formerly principal of Wagga Wagga and Armidale Teachers' Colleges and NSW Director of Teacher Education, was no stranger to curriculum innovation, was a strong supporter of the new business school, and was keen to see it use experimental curricula. Because Kuring-gai was a CAE and not a Teachers' College there was a strong sense that things needed to be done differently, and staff with university experience were valued for this reason. I recall George Muir once saying to me something along these lines: 'I don't really know what you are doing with those communication courses but they are getting a great response so keep it up'. George Muir knew how to lead without meddling and his support was essential to ensure that innovative subjects were up and running in an environment that up until then had been very conservative and resistant to change.

*What did the two compulsory first-year communication subjects involve?
How were they staffed?*

The first semester subject explored the extent, forms, and importance of communication in personal and professional contexts, paying particular attention to the influence of perception, observation, inference, images and cultural experience, and contact on communication and illustrated these by reference to relationship communication, non-verbal communication, language, and persuasion. The second semester subject focused on argument and rhetoric in personal and academic discourses, evidence, fallacies of argument (psychological, material, statistical, and logical) and the analysis and construction of extended arguments. We soon expanded the titles of these subjects to reflect their content, and they became Communication I: Interpersonal Communication, and Communication II: Argumentation and Reasoning.

Two existing staff members of the college, Ron Underwood (Head of Production Services) and Rosemary Lewis (Lecturer in English), had worked with Bill Birkett in developing the subject statements and were to be involved in the initial teaching, but it now became my job to take charge of co-ordinating both subjects and developing detailed teaching materials, assessment tasks, and so on. Unfortunately, all this began only a week or so before over 250 students were due to begin

their studies and we were caught so seriously short in preparation that we cancelled the first week's classes and filled in the second week's time with some sort of business aptitude test that had nothing at all to do with the subject, but which solved our immediate problem of filling the class time. By week three we were organised with teaching materials and from there we never looked back.

In addition to having Ron Underwood, Rosemary Lewis, and myself teaching the communication subjects, Bill Birkett wanted as many of his lecturing staff in mainstream business subjects as possible to rotate through turns teaching the subjects. The idea was to expose them, as a professional development exercise, to the subjects' ideas (that were central to the whole business program and which they could then relate to in their own teaching) and teaching strategies (many of which he hoped they would adapt to their own subject area). So we had the advantage and the challenge of economists, accountants, lawyers, and quantitative methods specialists teaching in our team. None was coerced to join us for a few hours a week for a semester but, over time, about 30 business studies staff had an involvement (plus an additional half dozen from teacher education who put up their hand for a turn). Only a few who were invited declined to participate, and several became involved with a class in both subjects over a period of years and made an ongoing and valuable contribution to subject development.

For our second year, Shirley Saunders from the School of History and Philosophy of Science at UNSW joined the group. A year later—in response to demand for further undergraduate and postgraduate communication subjects for a newly established School of Library and Information Studies (led by Margaret Trask, who was influenced by Bill Birkett to follow his lead in including communication subjects in the programs she was introducing)—Elizabeth More, also from UNSW's School of History and Philosophy of Science, and Glen Lewis, from the Department of History at the University of Queensland, were recruited and this 'Gang of Four', as we were sometimes known, was established as the College's first cross-School Department. This was 1976. Usually, departments sat within schools and were linked to areas of teaching within a single school. But as a cross-school department, we offered our subjects in several degree programs based in different schools and we built our department staffing profile and operating budget in negotiation with several schools. Staffing and budgetary structures to support the communication offerings were bent around existing institutional arrangements. Before then the new communication project

had been 'parked' temporarily within the College's production services unit that had previously taught several instructional communication subjects to teacher education students.

Why was communication introduced into the curriculum?

When the Department of Communication Studies was formed, I was appointed as Chairman and Head of this initially small group. We worked, along with those from other Departments who joined with us from semester to semester, to provide what essentially were communication 'service subjects' to B Bus and B Lib Sc courses, and also to the Grad Dip Ed.

We were all on steep learning curves, with our varied backgrounds, mine in education, Shirley's in the history of astronomy, Elizabeth's in drama, and Glen's in Australian history. But while we four had the advantage of focusing full-time on our newfound field of Communication Studies, this was a luxury not afforded to those linguists, accountants, lawyers, sociologists, and economists who taught communication classes with us. When I once asked Bill Birkett why, in the absence of local specialists in communication at the time, he hadn't employed several organisational psychologists to develop and teach the communication subjects that he wanted, he answered along the lines: 'If I'd done that, they would have taught communication for three or four weeks and then reverted to their own subject speciality—you lot can't do that so we'll develop unique communication offerings'.

Did your department adopt any special approach to learning?

For the Communication I: Interpersonal Communication and Communication II: Argumentation and Reasoning subjects that were compulsory for all first year B Bus students (enrolments reached 450 one year) we decided on an experiential learning approach that would make no use of formal lectures. Teaching/learning occurred through carefully structured workshops and assessment activities based around detailed weekly workshop notes and exercises (later bound into workbooks), many of which encouraged discussion and debate with the aid of mediated stimulus material presented in the (pre-electronic) electric classrooms of the day. At one stage the argumentation and reasoning subject included a simulation game (The Westernport Game) that involved, over six weeks of class time, assessing evidence, making argument, and debating environment-friendly development options for Melbourne's Westernport Bay. Because both the content of the subjects, and the student-focused way in which they were taught,

were new to most staff involved, planning was supported by printed Lecturer's Guides (including background reading materials for staff), for each week and by weekly lunch meetings to brief and review. All this was highly experimental: staff found it exciting and fun. Students responded well, although initially we had to work to convince some that communication had a legitimate place alongside accounting, economics, law, and the other subjects they had anticipated studying for their business degree.

Was the initial institutional brief for communication respected, or did it start to change? If so, were these pressures academic, financial, aspirational?

Almost immediately, the four of us (Shirley Saunders, Elizabeth More, Glen Lewis, and I) began talking about where all this (including the more information and media oriented subjects offered to library students) was taking us—and our careers. The teaching of service units left the department vulnerable, especially if key institutional supporters such as Bill Birkett, Margaret Trask, or George Muir left the institution. Staff in the department had in a sense taken a gamble in coming to Kuring-gai and there was interest in getting more security. The curriculum was crowded. Service teaching gave us a budget, but we were always teaching students who belonged to other programs, and the lack of long-term security meant we were reliant on casual hires. We saw opportunities to develop sequences of subjects that would be attractive and beneficial to students and that would help us put Kuring-gai's new department on the developing national Communication Studies map being drawn in the late 1970s⁶. We enjoyed the work at Kuring-gai and looked forward to staying there and developing our work, including research projects we had initiated, in our new field. We were looking to extend our original brief for reasons that were a mix of the academic, intellectual, and aspirational. We had aspirations for the subject field and for ensuring Kuring-gai would become one of the leaders in Communication Studies in Australia at that time. And we had aspirations for ourselves: we wanted to teach more advanced students and subjects, and we wanted to grow in personal professional competency and competitiveness to meet criteria for promotion and perhaps eventual movement to other institutions—as it turned out we all eventually successfully chased opportunities elsewhere.

What steps were taken to improve this situation?

The logical step to take towards these goals was the development of a 'major'—in Kuring-gai's terms of the day, a 'disciplinary sequence', made

up of six subjects⁷—which was allowed to include the notion of a cross-disciplinary sequence, provided certain criteria were met. A disciplinary sequence had to be predominantly observational and descriptive in its early stages; be progressively abstract in later stages that emphasise methodological issues; involve progressive development of depth and rigour by asking more difficult questions of more complex phenomena; involve the progressive development of analytic and constructive skills; and require applications with phenomena and research into those phenomena. The greatest encouragement to develop a disciplinary sequence in Communication Studies came from the business faculty, which also provided the greatest competition for limited guernseys.

By mid-1978 we staked a preliminary claim to form a sequence with a draft proposal that added to the existing subjects in interpersonal communication and argumentation and reasoning new subjects in media audiences and effects; media agencies and control; urban communication and telecommunications⁸; and theories of communication. In the US or the UK, each of these single unit titles would have represented a major sequence in themselves. But in our Kuring-gai context the offerings were far more eclectic. The units were a series of introductions to selected major areas within Communication Studies.

A disciplinary sequence was a fairly tentative first step in expanding the footprint of Communication Studies in the College's curriculum. Students enrolled for degree courses in accountancy, management, or librarianship and we were competing for their limited elective curriculum space against other departments that were also actively building their academic profiles. So, from a first year enrolment of 450 students, upper level enrolments in our disciplinary sequence units might be 25.

Perhaps because of funding, or concern over changing too fast, Kuring-gai was moving slowly in considering disciplinary sequence proposals and that draft lay on their shelf during the time I was overseas on study leave in the second half of 1978.

Did you have a plan for that study leave?

That study leave was planned to allow me to further contacts previously made with people in leading United States' communication programs and in smaller programs, and to establish international connections for the Department of Communication Studies. With my wife, and four

children aged six to thirteen, I hired a car in Philadelphia and left it five months later at Los Angeles airport after visiting over 20 institutions, among them the two Annenberg Schools of Communication (University of Pennsylvania and University of Southern California) and the Schools/Departments of Communication at the Universities of New York, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pittsburgh, Illinois, and Washington, and those at Stanford, Purdue, and Ohio State Universities. My overall focus was upon course/program design that could inform a Kuring-gai disciplinary sequence and, in the longer term, a BA (Communication). I met with department and program heads, co-ordinators of huge enrolment (5000+) basic courses in interpersonal communication, and research directors. I sat in on curriculum development meetings and lectures (the first time I had ever attended a lecture in my new field!), and had my first contact with teaching in intercultural communication, health communication, and political communication. One of the more memorable experiences was sitting in lectures over several weeks at the University of Pittsburgh in the immensely popular, highly critical, and brilliantly taught Presidential Rhetoric and Senatorial Rhetoric subjects. This, and numerous other first-hand experiences that the visits allowed, confirmed to me that there was much more to US Communication Studies than its ill-informed critics knew about or were prepared to acknowledge.

At this time at Kuring-gai we were rapidly building the library collection to support our ambitions. Elizabeth More, working with James O'Brien, the College's first-rate librarian, took on a key role in this work. I recall wandering US university libraries and bookshops writing down book and journal titles (including many originating in the UK and Europe) directly onto air letters and then posting these off to Elizabeth.

Would it be fair to say then that your original curriculum focus was on the US?

The intention was not to confine enquiry to the United States: separately a great deal of course design and subject organisation information was obtained from UK universities. Those that responded enthusiastically to our approach with information about their developments in cultural studies, women's studies, media studies, social psychology, management, and organisation studies included Dublin's National Institute for Higher Education, Birmingham University, the University of Kent at Canterbury, the Universities of Lancaster and Leicester, The Polytechnic of Wales, and the City of Birmingham Polytechnic.

Back to Kuring-gai, what was happening there?

Because of the developments we were contemplating, and continued growth in numbers enrolled in our existing subjects, it was imperative that we significantly increase our staff numbers. This was achieved through an agreement with the College that, within reasonable limits, we could advertise externally for a new member of staff for each existing member of the College's over-staffed School of Education staff we were prepared to take on board. This was a win-win situation for the Department of Communication Studies because, over a period of about three years, we selectively acquired Jean Gledhill, Bill Ticehurst, Michael Kaye, and Sam Heyman, all outstanding and committed teachers and all enthusiastic about a career change from teacher education, and at the same time we hired Virginia Nightingale (fresh from her media studies at Leicester University), Elly Lenz (a health communication expert with German and US qualifications), and several well-qualified senior tutors and tutors (associate lecturers).

Another significant development in the Department's staffing occurred when the College accepted my study leave recommendation that a senior position be made available within the Department as a Visiting Fellow. The agreement was that up to four successive one-year appointments be made from varying sub-fields of communication to assist staff development, and that, each year, the position be advertised in the US and the UK. Applications from the US were stronger and more numerous, and over a four year period from 1979-83 we had with us a succession of outstanding fellows: Jim Van Leuven (journalism and media), Chairman, Department of Communication, Washington State University; Joe MacDoniels (interpersonal and organisational communication), Chairman, Department of Communication, Hope College, Michigan; John Leipzig (organisational communication), Department of Communication, University of Alaska at Fairbanks; and Joe Ayres (interpersonal communication), Washington State University. It says something about the contribution these Visiting Fellows made that half a dozen or so of the Department's staff of the time continue to maintain contact with them 25 years on!

The 1983 conference of the recently formed Australian Communication Association (as it was then) provided the opportunity to put Kuring-gai's programs and staff on the national map and to gain some international exposure⁹. As incoming ACA President, my role was to host the conference. Elizabeth More was program manager and everyone in the department was involved in some way with organising the

conference, which attracted over 180 participants. We were fortunate to win Fulbright Senior Scholar funding to bring in Jesse Delia from the University of Illinois and British Council funding to bring Andrew Wilkinson from the University of East Anglia as keynote speakers. Again, they proved valuable long-term contacts for departmental staff and, like our Visiting Fellows, long-term assets in our staff development work.

What was happening with your moves towards a disciplinary sequence at that time?

The disciplinary sequence in communication, now modified to include subjects in interpersonal communication, argumentation and reasoning, small group communication, organisational communication, media studies, and applications of communication theory and research (which became a vehicle to study some health communication) was introduced in 1980, and approved by the NSW Higher Education Board (which then had to approve all major course structures in all NSW Colleges of Advanced Education!) in 1981¹⁰.

By 1983, we had introduced a Graduate Diploma (later a Master's program) in Communication Management that included four semesters of core studies in communication (managerial communication, group and organisational communication, mass communication analysis, and applications of communication theory) supplemented, according to elected specialisation, in training and development, public relations, or communication technology. And by late 1984, our interpersonal and argumentation subjects had been adopted for introduction in the new nursing program, and interpersonal communication was being taught to students in new B Ed (Physical Education) and BA (Leisure Studies) programs.

In 1983 and 1984, we announced our willingness to move quickly towards offering a BA (Communication) and/or a BA (Applied Communication). Such a development would, however, have needed support and approval by the NSW Higher Education Board, and this was not forthcoming. As I recall it, they saw communication degrees as lying within the humanities and social sciences, and Kuring-gai was seen largely in terms of business and library studies, which, although everything was going well, and Kuring-gai was a great place to work, represented problems for our future plans. Within the NSW college system they confined their approval for communication undergraduate degree programs to country colleges (Mitchell and Newcastle) that

were unable to build their numbers with part-time (evening) business students. An exception was made in the case of the NSW Institute of Technology, despite its CBD location near the University of Sydney, to allow it to 'balance' its otherwise technical orientation. And, at this time, the Nepean College of Advanced Education (later part of the University of Western Sydney) was attempting to build numbers, and successfully argued to the Higher Education Board that its Penrith campus, then on the very outer edge of Sydney and remote from existing university programs, should be regarded notionally as 'country' and given the green light to proceed with developments in the humanities and social sciences. Keen to continue the type of developments I had been planning, I applied for and was appointed Foundation Dean of Nepean's new Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences¹¹. While the brief was to develop courses across a range of areas in the social sciences, our initial courses at Nepean were a BA (Applied Communication Studies) and an MA (Communication and Cultural Studies)¹².

Notes

1. The Institute of Communications Research at Illinois was founded in 1947, followed by the Institute of Communications Research at Stanford in 1956. Both, of course, were founded by Wilbur Schramm.
2. Of course, given the differential in dates, the developments in the 1970s in Australia were paralleled by developments in Speech departments in the US that found communication to represent a new way of defining the field. The first President of the Australian Communication Association, William Crocker, was active in speech education, and the proposal to form a new association was put at a conference on examining the nature of oral competence in children. Debates around speech education and teacher training in the 1960s thus form an important backdrop to developments in the 1970s in Australia (see Crocker & Lindsay, 1963). Crocker notes 'no account of the history of Communication Studies should overlook Allen, R.R. and Brown, K.L. (eds.) *Developing Communication Competence in Children* (1976)... It was largely responsible for Speech Departments all over the USA changing their names to Communication Departments, and journals such as *Speech Education* changing their name to *Communication Education*' (Bill Crocker, personal communication, June 30, 2003).
3. A 1990 compilation of programs, terminating degrees and commencement dates—some as early as 1971—titled 'programs in communication in Australian tertiary institutions' can be found in the *Australian Journal of Communication*, 17(3), 1990, 95-146.

4. Putnis, Axford, Watson, & Blood (2002), take up more fully this issue of the significance of the Unified System for the field, as does the 1990 report by Molloy and Lennie.
5. The following account emerges out of an invitation to interview Harry Irwin regarding curriculum innovation in early Australian Communication Studies, and is edited by Steven Maras, who also provided prompt questions. The interview itself took place on the 15th February 2006. While our focus here is on Kuring-gai CAE, however, clearly the conditions at other institutions were different, and a further avenue for research (a task perhaps for keen Honours students?) would be to further explore how the curriculum idea worked at different institutions.
6. Clarification from Harry Irwin: 'National developments were important as, although we were a dynamic area of the institution, no one in management had direct experience of our admittedly embryonic field, and attempts to explain what we did through showing them unit outlines were limited. There was a need to provide evidence that our developing field had a national and not just institutional profile. Thus the significance of the conference in 1983 when we had 180 attendees—it was the kind of event a University might have. Our credibility received a big push from that. At the same time, as we were feeling our way, it was crucial to have contact with other people in a similar situation through organisations such as the Australian Communication Association, but also people like Henry Mayer, who might visit or be on staff selection panels and was always ready to offer assistance, and contact with people such as Bill Bonney at the NSW Institute of Technology, Tom Dixon and Rod Miller at the Queensland Institute of Technology, and Russ McKinnon at the Warrnambool Institute of Technology.'
7. Clarification from Harry Irwin: 'The Kuring-gai programs were three years in duration, one subject from the major in each semester, each year.'
8. Clarification from Harry Irwin: "'Urban communication" was a term we gleaned from a 1969 report by the Metropolitan Fund of Detroit, looking into the importance of computer information systems, home computers, video recorders, and Cable TV, for citizens to function in complex urban metropolitan areas. We didn't ride with that title for long. Despite the impression that Kuring-gai may have had a focus on interpersonal communication, in fact the spread of units crossed media studies, and telecommunications'.
9. The proceedings of this conference were published as Smith, 1983.
10. Clarification from Harry Irwin: 'The NSW Higher Education Board at the time comprised a Chairman, Deputy Chairman and part-time members. They monitored the advanced education sector of higher education in NSW

and had particular responsibility for accreditation and reaccreditation of all courses at all advanced education institutions in the state. Accreditation and reaccreditation was carried out by committees established by the Board: these committees represented academia and industry and were chaired by members of the Board's Panel of Chairpersons.'

11. Clarification from Harry Irwin: 'A small number of Kuring-gai staff at the time worried that I was having a mid-life crisis and advised that getting students and staff would be difficult (and initially it was). But there was strong support for the idea of a degree program and some Kuring-gai staff and students did make the shift to Penrith, where they joined Virginia Nightingale who had earlier left Kuring-gai to teach communication in the business school with Michael Galvin.'
12. See Irwin, Galvin, & Nightingale, 1986.

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