

light-hearted look at university in 2020



Part of the Hypothetical team: students Mabel Chew and Hayden Woodley, Wayne McGowan and Patti Chong listen to Richard Pengelley

A sometimes insightful but more often just entertaining view of our University in 2020 kicked off Teaching Month in a hypothetical debate in the Sunken Garden.

Divided we fall: Diversity and the role of the University community provided a lively discussion between the 11 participants, moderated by the smooth-talking Richard Pengelley, a lecturer in Sport Science and chaplain of St Georges College.

The panel was made up of staff, students, graduates and community members including outspoken lawyer Patti Chong (also a graduate) and Frank Sheehan, equally outspoken chaplain at Christ Church Grammar School and director of their Centre for Ethics.

In the year 2020, all WA universities have joined together to form the United Universities of Western Australia (UUWA): it has achieved its aim of becoming one of the world's top-ranking universities with Samina Yasmien as the VC, Australia's first Indigenous Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (education) position job-shared by two men: a married gay man with three children and a married heterosexual who wants to spend more time at home with his new baby.

Wayne McGowan and Patti Chong are opposing Law lecturers. Responding to the question of how to get students involved, Wayne said that students wanted to be entertained, not educated.

"If they are incapable of switching off their mobile phones and unplugging their iPods, then that's their fault, they deserve to fail," he spluttered. "All this support we give them just encourages them."

Patti, on the other hand, said she favoured taking her students for coffee rather than running tutorials, and teaching her students about life, fashion and hair, as well as helping budding young lawyers to understand that some people do commute on buses, that not everybody drives a Porsche.

Siri Barrett-Lennard suggested that students needed a mix of both styles of teaching, and that Wayne and Patti could do with some peer review.

But Frank Sheehan was on Wayne's side. His multi-faith centre on campus had "lots of money but not many students turn up." To the question of how to advise those struggling with student life, he said: "I tell them to toughen up. Wayne's on the right track. I wish the Uni had a cadet unit."

As a first year social work student from Goa, Malcolm Fialho was set to sue UUWA because he failed his first semester and blamed his teachers.

In response, graduate Crispin Roberts, who was asked how he would manage this issue, as head of public relations and marketing, said he would set up an investigation, subpoena witnesses and fight the claim in court.

"By the time we're finished, it should take about six or seven years, by which time we hope the student will have given up and gone home to Goa," he said.

Other more serious events were scheduled for Teaching Month, including the announcement and presentation of the University Excellence in Teaching Awards. Some of the work of our award-winning teachers will feature in the next issue.