

*Cultural renewal at St Mark's College,  
and an eye to the future for university residential colleges and halls*  
University Colleges Australia Conference, Hobart, 26-28<sup>th</sup> September 2018  
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*As the President of University Colleges Australia, I would also like to pay respect to the traditional and original owners of this land, the muwinina and palawa people – to pay respect to those who have passed before us and to acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community who are the custodians of this land.*

We are all aware that cultures of residential colleges and halls have recently come under the spotlight in Australia and around the world.

This has been the dominating external influence on my time as President of UCA, and on the last few years as Master at St Mark's College.

We all know that most of what is reported in the news is not reflective of what occurs in everyday life in a collegiate residence.

UCA remains firm and consistent in statements regarding the landscape with respect to sexual misconduct, and it has not, and has never been the remit of the national body to micro-examine the circumstances around individual and independent colleges.

St Mark's College is not perfect, and I acknowledge and accept where my College has failed its students in the past. We are deeply sorry that those students, who, for whatever reasons, were not able to reach out for support within the College at the time.

It is a matter of record, that any student who witnesses or experiences any form of sexual misconduct at St Mark's College will be listened to, they will be believed, and they will be supported. We want all our students to take their responsibilities as ethical bystanders seriously and to continue to promote a culture where it is safe to report.

I am not here today to debate the voracity of the allegations aired so publicly, nor am I here to discuss the analogies to McCarthyism and the Crucible.

And, this is not the forum to discuss the appropriateness - or otherwise - of the media's behaviour or motivation.

What I want to discuss this morning was set out skillfully in the lecture that our keynote speaker, Professor Rufus Black, delivered when he was Master at Ormond College, in 2017 as part of the St Andrew's College sesquicentenary celebrations. Rufus said:

*“at times like this we must not lose our nerve - and that the task of leadership is to assert the substantiveness of what a College is about and not allow it to be an unhealthy cocktail of traditions that reflect an understanding of social relations long recognised as at best limiting of human development and at worse concealing egregious violations of human decency<sup>1</sup>”*

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<sup>1</sup> Black, Rufus, the role of the College in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century University, page 10  
<http://www.standrewscollege.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Speech-for-the-150th-Anniversary-of-St-Andrews-CollegeFinal.docx.pdf>

In addition to Rufus' lecture more generally, those words continue to resonate strongly with me, and form the challenge for what I intend to speak about:

- St Mark's' response to recent reviews and our process of cultural renewal;
- the need for colleges to convey the message to the public to regain its trust and confidence; and
- the importance - now - more than ever before, for colleges to distinguish themselves even further from the plethora of 'student housing' which is emerging across Australia.

Drawing inspiration from Rufus' comments, as the Master of St Mark's ultimately responsible for the leadership of the College for ten years, I have been particularly conscious of preserving and enhancing the very best of traditions but equally conscious of the need to ensure that our College reflects changing social mores.

My father went to two university colleges, two of my daughters and one of my sons went to a university residential college and the youngest son has just started his first year at a college in the United States - and I also lived at a residential college - and therefore, I have been, and will always be, a fierce advocate for the residential college experience, and at the same time, have aimed to be a champion of, and steward for, change and progress.

As Master, I also understand that students must be empowered to own and lead change. I am therefore equally proud of those current and former students who have debated and argued against change, because that is a critical part of the process.

Over this ten-year period, I have spoken privately and publicly to alumni groups, and current and prospective students, on the importance of embracing change to stay relevant, without losing the perspective that the College gains from its own history.

We have, together with the College Board and students, achieved considerable cultural change.

At St Mark's, we are concerned with the overall wellbeing of every person in our College and with the quality of our life together. Helping to integrate the academic with other aspects of life; questions of vocation; personal relationships; experiencing native and diverse cultures; spirituality, and physical and mental health, are all very much a part of our mission.

And I am sure that you all agree that finding the right balance between giving young adults the space to grow and ensuring that they do not indulge in unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour is a challenge we all face within our colleges and halls, and in wider society.

St Mark's has been, and is committed to meeting that challenge.

The overwhelming evidence from the independent *Review of Student Residential Colleges* conducted by the South Australian Equal Opportunities Commission<sup>2</sup> for the University of Adelaide demonstrates that St Mark's plays a leadership role in positive change and cultural renewal.

To have our ongoing journey verified objectively by the South Australian Equal Opportunities Commission is welcomed by the St Mark's College community.

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<sup>2</sup> Bohill, Vincent and Cirocco, August 2018 *Review of Student Residential Colleges, Examining ways to address incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault*, South Australian Equal Opportunities Commission

In this short address, I do not have time to go into details of the EOC review, however, I wish to provide a balanced view of the facts presented, both positive and negative, as they relate to St Mark's College.

The Commission commended St Mark's on our whole of community, integrated and holistic framework for preventing and responding to sexual misconduct. Our two standalone policies, developed in 2017, address separately sexual harassment and sexual assault, and they meet all six elements for best practice policy standards according to the Broderick Review<sup>3</sup> and the Universities Australia Guidelines<sup>4</sup> that Dr Renee Hamilton spoke about this morning, that were launched in July this year.

I have shared these with colleagues and encourage the collaboration and sharing of resources that form good practice among all of us here.

We are addressing recommendations that refer to perpetrator accountability through overhauling our behaviour management policy. Student reporting will only increase if they know that perpetrators will be held to account, and this is another area where we must do better.

As with many other residences represented by colleagues here today, we provide extensive training in sexual assault and sexual harassment, which is outsourced and delivered by external experts and first responder training delivered by our local rape and domestic violence service, Yarrow Place. We have committed to increasing the frequency of training to improve further our education program, and will continue to seek leading practice in this area.

Alcohol remains a challenge for St Mark's, and I support the significant resources and good will dedicated by UCA to addressing alcohol harm minimisation through the work of our committee chaired by Professor Tim Corney, through Andy Gourley and the Red Frogs Australia Team and through Alcohol Drug Education Services and others. Whilst our 2017 Orientation Week met the standard to which was referred to earlier of 50% of evening events being alcohol free, further improvements can be made with respect to alcohol and drug harm minimisation

Key challenges highlighted through the Equal Opportunities Commission report include social pressure, bystander responsibilities, and binge drinking - and the need for more education around the potential impact of alcohol use on consent to sex is required.

In May this year, St Mark's introduced a hazing policy, consistent with the recommendations from the Broderick review which expresses zero tolerance for hazing and any other behaviour that undermines the safety and well-being of students.

Gender equity, the theme of which was carried through all three presentations this morning remains an issue in many of our residences, but it is much more than just numbers.

Recommendations from Broderick's findings seek to address gender equity in colleges. The Equal Opportunities Commission raises issues of masculinity associated with power, notoriety, popularity

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Broderick & Co (2017) Review Cultural Renewal at the University of Sydney Residential Colleges <https://sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/news-opinions/Overarching%20Report%202017.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Guidelines for university responses to sexual assault and sexual harassment <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/Media-and-Events/media-releases/Students-at-the-centre--new-guidelines-for-university-responses-to-sexual-harassment-and-sexual-assault#.W7RG9fbhWUk>

and entitlement, resulting in male student leadership positions reflecting popular choices rather than choices that reflect male maturity and experience.

The Equal Opportunities Commission argues that male leaders on residential student committees are often idolised, which may lead to a toxic culture. This is a critical issue that requires a considered response.

At St Mark's this year, we piloted a program run by YWCA, which included a segment on masculinity and equality, power relations, consent and alcohol consumption and the way in which masculinity is tied to social status, gender inequality and violence towards women. The pilot is a start, and education at college is important. But, ideally, education should begin much earlier; in schools, rather than waiting until values and personalities are already formed.

Symbols are important, and of the eleven portraits which hang in our dining hall, there is one woman, the wife of the first master, and of the 40 photographs, there are two women. This may reflect our history, which we cannot change, however our young women at the College must feel confident that their contribution is not just valued, but they will be supported in their leadership aspirations.

At St Mark's this year, 58% of our students are female and 42% male. In our 36 years of co-residency, however, we have only had five female Presidents, and three of those have been in my time as Master. We recognise that much more needs to be done to encourage and promote the participation of women at all levels in our College.

I believe that all of us have a responsibility to educate our future leaders about the steps to achieve gender equality and it requires a commitment of both men and women - and all stakeholders in the ongoing success of colleges.

So, what has been our response to the public?

Earlier this month, St Mark's prepared a detailed action plan launched by our new Chair, Ms Linda Matthews (former Equal Opportunities Commissioner for South Australia), which gives priority to specific areas of College life including events, discipline, training and communications. It is a dynamic work in progress. We will continue to consult extensively with students and College stakeholders to refine the 'Plan.

A high-level version of our Action Plan can be found on our website.

Key immediate initiatives include:

- replacing Orientation Week with a new Welcome Week, where we will welcome people into our College rather than orientating them to a way of life;
- requiring online training on consent prior to turning up to College; and
- in relation to responding to sexual misconduct, engaging an independent investigator.

And I assure you, we accept and understand that we will be held accountable for our progress or otherwise. The College has committed to public reporting to our stakeholders.

We are doing our very best to ensure a future for St Mark's and the college lifestyle, which we all know has many benefits for our students today and into the future.

But all of us, all the members of UCA, are in this together and as the Vice Chancellor said in his address this morning as heads of colleges and halls, we must hold ourselves accountable, ask ourselves the tough questions and have honest conversations with one another.

With that I mind, we must not forget the vast majority of students who have a productive and positive time at college. We must work for them as well.

Returning to Rufus Black's 2017 lecture, and the task of asserting the substance of what a college is about, and removing the public perception that colleges are places of wealth and privilege, with entrenched and systemic cultures of sexism, harassment and bullying.

I am not saying that we should be blind to past excesses of behaviour, but these stories mask much of the enormous value and worth that is gained by so many from their time in a college or hall<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, as adults in an adult community, our students must take responsibility for their behaviour and their decisions. They]must be able to say without equivocation, that they welcome any person from the public - including the media - without fear nor favour into their College, at any time to observe the values, behaviour and culture of their college. Critical to our success, is an attitude that "we have nothing to hide, and therefore we do not fear the media."

The next steps are clear.

We must work together to regain the public trust and convey our message that university residential colleges and halls serve as the nexus for the integration of academic and non-academic life, offering a vast array of academic and social programs to enhance the university undergraduate student experience.

Increasingly, colleges and halls, along with other residences, are taking lead roles in, and providing extensive education on student wellbeing, safety and harm minimisation issues.

Close, trusting, collaborative and collegial relationships between staff and students in residential communities, where people are known (where they are from, their siblings interests and hobbies) and where there is regular meeting, conversation, mentoring, advice and support, are absolutely critical to the most positive living and learning experience.

There is an opportunity for UCA to lead this, through devising a carefully articulated strategy and then devoting the necessary resources to explore the best ways in which university residential colleges and halls provide students with social and intellectual community, engagement, support, advice and mentorship.

Many of you will recall the report prepared by Hamish Coates through the Australian Council for Educational Research<sup>6</sup> (AUSSE) which was published a decade ago next year. It is time for UCA to complement the work on alcohol harm minimisation and sexual harassment and assault and to undertake current research that points to the value of and impact of residential colleges.

We need to think about our goals for the residential colleges system in Australia, especially as the undergraduate population becomes more diverse, and the subsequent need to cater to the diversity and to be reflective and critical of our practice.

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<sup>5</sup> Walker, Ian (2016) *From Colleges to Commercial Investment*, page 14

<sup>6</sup> Coates, Hamish Bennett, "Australasian Survey of Student Engagement : institution report" (2008).<http://research.acer.edu.au/ausse/17>

For those colleges who have expanded to include significant postgraduate students in their residences; how might they encourage a greater connection between undergraduate and graduate students?

How can we work more closely with the universities so that they have greater confidence in the residential college and halls model?

The collegiate system has been operating for hundreds of years across the world, and has provided a student experience that enhances well-being and mental health, and supports career and life goals, while also fostering increased opportunities for student leadership – something about which I can personally testify.

How can we convey to the broader community and public the support that is provided to students in the transition from school to university life and the opportunities that exist for students from low SES families, the increasing numbers of first-in-family students that attend university that require the additional support provided by colleges and halls, which improves student retention in the universities? How can we provide financial support to ensure no matter your background or financial circumstances

Residential colleges and halls must continue to move with the times as society develops while still fulfilling one of their core purposes, which is to answer an unchanging need for meaningful human connection and engagement within a community.

Universities provide society with great scholars and great professionals; university colleges and halls, however, provide society with great people and great leaders. And that is our primary purpose.

It is this, that distinguishes Colleges even further from the plethora of ‘student housing’ which is emerging across Australia.

A “room” is not a community; a room is not a lesson in diversity, a room is not the opportunity to grow as a human being. A room is just a room.

And we must continue to distinguish ourselves as leaders in creating successful human beings and inclusive and welcoming communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning and to serve UCA as President.

St Mark’s, like the colleges and halls that you represent here at this conference, has built a community that is the foundation of lifelong friendships and unique experiences that provide opportunities to grow. It provides invaluable life lessons.

We can and must continue this; together.

It is possible to honour good traditions while holding up the mirror, and at the same time having an eye to the future, as we continue to evolve and change for the better.

Together, let’s be the champions of change and progress confident in the substantive good of what we provide to our students, the community and the nation.