I wish to comment on the proposal to disestablish the School of Cultural Enquiry and the relocation of the various components. Specifically, the proposal to move Art History teaching to the School of Art is a concern to me as a student, as is the proposal to locate heritage and museum studies within Anthropology and Archaeology.

As a student of Art History who has also undertaken Visual Arts studies (although not at ANU) I am disappointed that the University would take this route for teaching of Art History. While it is beneficial, often integral, to be aware of the technical aspects of visual art, there is no intellectual benefit to be gained from this co-location. Indeed the intellectual rigour of Art History can best be maintained by co-location with other humanities studies, for example with literature studies, cultural studies and to a lesser extent languages. The interrogation of art history is not reliant on artistic techniques, but more often relates to co-developments across the humanities, to social and anthropological change and to philosophical and historical values. Close relationships with these disciplines should be maintained to ensure a more rounded view is gained by students. In the modern era, it is imperative that students and teaching staff do not exist in a ‘bubble’ which can limit their ability to see past their own favoured discipline.

I do not wish to suggest that the Art School is not disciplined or intellectual, but its focus is by necessity to encourage and develop practising artists, not to develop art historians, and moving art history teaching staff to the Art School would not enhance the School’s primary function – the Art School does that well in any case. It would not be considered essential to literature studies for students to have undertaken or be familiar with creative writing, for example, it is the analysis and research skills which are important. Some interaction with the School of Art is desirable, and beneficial, but not critical to the study of humanities subjects.

In addition, there is considerable cross-over in the teaching of Art History and the development of cultural and heritage studies. In Canberra, with such a range of cultural institutions, it is important to encourage the study of both, recognising that many of our institutions have collections which are fairly eclectic, not limited to visual art, but encompassing a wide range of objects and media. It is not appropriate to separate the curatorial functions and heritage studies from art history, as these areas are closely related.

I think the proposed changes should be re-considered so that the intellectual integrity of the art history discipline is maintained, and it should be properly located with relevant humanities subjects which promote research and analysis, not practice, an entirely different focus.

Regards

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