



New behaviours, new skills

Date: 13 May 2014 Topic: Strengthen commercial and entrepreneurial capacity

Professor Ryan Daniel discusses the responsibilities of higher education programs to prepare students for the reality of work in creative industries....

The tertiary education of creative and performing arts students offers particular challenges, given employment patterns for artists are complex. These patterns are rarely linear, based heavily on reputation and networks, and driven by the individual who must maintain employability over employment. In north and far north Queensland, these challenges are exacerbated by distance, isolation from metropolitan centres and relatively limited infrastructure and funding opportunities. In addition, the global creative industries sector where graduates will seek work are competitive, rapidly changing and oversupplied with workers.

The majority of students who enrol in tertiary arts study, be they school leavers or mature age, have a passion for an art form and the production of creative artefacts. While I am not here to debate the merits of creative activity as a method of meaning-making or self expression, many of these same students also typically believe that after a three-year degree they will immediately walk into a well-funded position in a creative studio or commercial business, or they will receive ongoing and substantial financial subsidy through grants or receive successful commissions and make sales. In addition, some strongly resist the notion of thinking in any business or commercial context, referring to such an approach as ‘selling out’ or signing up to the ‘creative industries’ and its neoliberal agenda. In my experience, this has applied as much to traditional art forms such as theatre, visual arts and music, as it has to disciplines that tend to be more commercially oriented, including photography and design in its many forms.

It is a challenge to shift these attitudes; however, many students learn to appreciate the curriculum I have developed over ten years which requires them to establish career goals, undertake internships, research employment patterns and career development strategies, as well as learn about commercial structures and the opportunities that emerge when thinking in a business or entrepreneurial sense. Ultimately, it is about making clear to students that they have a choice and there is a continuum to consider. At one end, the pursuit of art for art’s sake is laudable; however, this has various financial and longer-term implications that most tertiary students are simply not made aware of. Similarly, a strong commercial or end-user focus has its own set of issues. Assisting students to find their professional identity and place along this continuum is what I believe requires greater attention in current higher education programs.

Ultimately, we live in a rapidly changing world, one where many of the practices of today will be obsolete in only a few years, given the overwhelming speed of technological change and new patterns of engagement amongst the wider public. It is no longer enough to rely on traditional models of creative production and consumption. It is about being smart, about being future-oriented, and about being prepared to think creatively about how to maximize opportunities in an increasingly challenging world where governments will have less and less money to subsidise all sectors of the economy. New modes of working and of capitalising on what opportunities exist now and into the future will be critical for those that seek a sustainable, meaningful and rewarding career as an artist. It is not about abandoning the values and principles of art-making, but about a different mindset and attitude. As tertiary educators, it is our responsibility to ensure graduates are aware of and prepared for the opportunities and challenges they will face as they seek to establish a viable, meaningful and sustainable career.

Ryan Daniel



Professor Ryan Daniel is an active researcher, teaching scholar and postgraduate supervisor, with interests in leadership, creative industries and continuous improvement in higher education arts environments. After completing a Bachelor of Music Honours degree in 1994 (Class I and University Medal), Ryan completed a Master of Music degree on scholarship at the University of Cape Town where he studied with the renowned chamber musician Lamar Crowson. Following a short period in Manchester where he worked with the renowned Beethoven scholar Dr Barry Cooper, Ryan returned to commence an academic career at James Cook University, completing his PhD in 2005. Professor Daniel was formally appointed as Foundation Head of School of Creative Arts from 2007-2011, leading the establishment of the new suite of undergraduate programs on both campuses as well as the specialist facility on the Townsville campus. He maintains an active performance, teaching and publishing profile, the latter in leading international publications including the British Journal of Music Education, CoDesign and Music Education Research. Professor Daniel is an ALTC citation winner as well as being twice winner of the JCU Vice Chancellor's citation for teaching excellence.

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