

THE HELLENIC SOCIETY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Modern Greek Studies at the University of New South Wales 2009 and beyond

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Continued from yesterday's edition
Section Two

The objectives of the Hellenic Society of the University of New South Wales

Looking at the objectives of HELLSOC from its own constitution it becomes apparent as to the reasons for HELLSOC's unconditional support of Modern Greek studies at the university.

"3. The objects of the University of NSW Hellenic Society shall be to encourage, foster, promote, develop and extend:

- a. Hellenism
- b. A union and membership of predominantly Greek students
- c. A membership of non-Greek students who have a genuine interest in the objects of the University of New South Wales Hellenic Society
- d. An affiliation of associate members who are outside the jurisdiction of the Arc
- e. Cultural, Social, Political, Educational and Religious awareness
- f. The maintenance of the Modern Greek Program
- g. A media service for the purpose of communication and an exchange of information
- h. Accessibility of the University of New South Wales Hellenic Society to the Greek Community with an emphasis on potential members, e.g. high school students and alumni
- i. A Society which cannot align itself with any political party
- j. A society which is affiliated to the Arc
- k. A Society which has the freedom to comment upon any cultural, educational, social, political and religious issue
- l. Official contact with Greek Student Bodies in Australia and overseas
- m. Combined functions with other organizations that have similar objectives to the University of New South Wales Hellenic Society
- n. A policy of student exchanged sponsored by the National Government of Greece
- o. A policy of unrestricted visiting rights in Greece by abandonment of conscription for Australian-Greeks born in Australia
- p. Continual support either financial or otherwise to other worthwhile organizations promoting Hellenism
- q. The Association shall comply with Anti-Discrimination legislation in all of its activities or procedures, including the granting of club membership" (emphasis added).

It is important to address each of the emphasised points in detail separately in no specific order of importance. Such an ordering would diminish the merits of each objective and they are equally important. The current problems that HELLSOC deems the university to be suffering from will also be addressed.

Cultural, Social, Political, Educational and Religious Awareness

It has become blatantly obvious that the Faculty of Arts is trying to take advantage of a lack of educational awareness of students. This situation cannot continue and so HELLSOC as an active member of the student community has taken it upon itself to help raise awareness as to the quality of education being offered at the university.

HELLSOC will not stop being vocal on this point until standards are raised across the entire university. A situation of declining educational outcomes has been building over the years and they are slowly starting to diminish the reputation of the university:

- Lecture and tutorial class lengths have been shortened and class sizes increased across a majority of faculties at the university which has resulted in lower educational outcomes from the university and an apparent lowering or 'dumbing down' of academic standards;
- Subject offerings have been drastically

cut back with Russian Studies among one of the casualties and Modern Greek being the next target;

- The shifting of hiring full time professional academic staff for the teaching of tutorials in the Australian School of Business and instead using inexperienced students who have not completed their studies;

- The failure of 'UNSW Asia' and how it is blatantly apparent that many of the cost cutting measures at the university are in relation to this poor decision to attempt to establish a campus in Asia; and most recently

- The shortening of semester lengths from the traditional fourteen weeks to twelve weeks in 2009 (another blatant cost cutting measure) which was accompanied by a shorter student vacation period before examination seriously diminishing the mental health of students who had to adjust to such a cruel and unfair change.

These and other issues are symptoms of a disease that is spreading through the university which threatens to lower educational standards for both current and future generations of students. Immediate action must be taken by the university to reverse this trend.

The maintenance of a Modern Greek Studies Program

A question that should be in the forefront of every student at the university from any background is that if the university succeeds in no longer offering a major or minor in Modern Greek studies, then which subject offering is next? As a society of predominately young Australian Greeks it is saddening to see the university completely disregard such an active group within university community. It is alarming to think how the university would treat groups who are inactive or only just becoming active if this is how they treat such an integral member of their community. HELLSOC fears for those members of the student community who do not have a mechanism to voice their concerns to the university.

More generally, it is HELLSOC'S view that the decision by the university to no longer offer a Major or Minor in Modern Greek studies is an insult to the wider Greek Australian Community which has given so much to the university. It is amazing that in the sixtieth year since the university was founded that they would act in such a disrespectful way towards both past and present students of Greek background who have contributed so much to the university over the years and continue to do so.

In July 1995 an Agreement was reached with the then Vice Chancellor John Niland that if the Greek Community could raise \$250,000.00 then the University would match this amount and make Greek permanent. A very successful campaign raised \$280,000.00 in less than three months and a final agreement was signed in a formal ceremony attended by the Greek Ambassador and professors from Athens University. The Agreement and supporting correspondence confirm that Greek was to be permanent provided there was a demand for the course. This is just one example of the unconditional support that the Greek community has given the university. The current actions of the university in HELLSOC'S are opinion not

in good faith, dishonest and a disgrace. HELLSOC demands that if the university maintains this policy that any funds should be returned to the Greek Community.

At present Australia is perversely monolingual. It is scandalous that so few students at high school and university study a language other than English. Through our indifference to language learning we have thrown away huge resources of language and cultural knowledge brought here by immigrants and passed on, to some extent, to their children. Our monolingualism puts us at a disadvantage in many parts of the world. The present government is aware of the need and intends to address it. In these circumstances it is particularly disappointing that a university appears to be moving to close a language department. The university could be leading the way towards a future Australia in which language learning will be valued and developed in both quantity and quality.

It seems that development of language study would be entirely consistent with the objective and strategies regarding community engagement set out in the University of New South Wales' Blueprint to beyond. It would also contribute to strategies formulated there regarding the student experience objective. It may be argued that priority should be given to Asian languages and cultures. However, the study of any second language facilitates the learning of further languages. Students of Greek background already have an introduction to Greek language and culture, which can be developed in their school years, provided that there are teachers with appropriate qualifications. Some will go on to study a further language or languages, which may well be among those with priority status.

A knowledge of Modern Greek language and culture can be a valuable asset for a career in business (including the travel industry), medicine, the law, school education, the arts and the media, as well as in various academic disciplines. The cultural value of studying Greek has been put to the university on numerous occasions. HELLSOC reiterates, though, that the study of this language offers valuable insights into the structure and lexicon of English and other languages. It can help significantly to develop the kind of linguistic awareness which Australians generally lack. It also offers an entry into a culture whose history can be traced back continuously to the beginnings of European civilisation.

There is real potential for Modern Greek at the university. It would be possible to develop an extensive series of courses, of high quality, which would be both professionally useful and culturally enriching. The university has numerous students of Greek background, representing a considerable potential demand. Courses should be made available and publicised to students in all Faculties, who may be able to take them as subsidiary or Gen. Ed. type units.

A policy of student exchanged sponsored by the National Government of Greece

It has been made apparent that the university has made representations to students that they can no longer take ex-

changes as part of their studies to Greek tertiary institutions. This situation has arisen supposedly because the university purports to no longer have an affiliation with Athens University. These actions are in HELLSOC'S view an act of aggression by the university against Modern Greek studies and representative of the systematic attempt by the university to annihilate any chance of studying Modern Greek at the university. HELLSOC again urges the university to reconsider this as it deprives students of the opportunity to study Greek culture, history and language in Greece. Such moves by the university somewhat discriminates against the Greek culture when considering international linkages the university has with other institutions of cultures which are non Greek. The university must be held to account as to why they no longer see a benefit it having links with Greek Universities.

If the university had bothered to consult with HELLSOC at any junction over the past five years they would have been aware of the fact that HELLSOC has a number of contacts with the universities in Greece and Cyprus. HELLSOC could easily arrange affiliations with a number of Greek and Cypriot universities which would be of benefit to the university. Instead the university has supposedly allowed their affiliation with the Athens University to discontinue.

Section Three

The Hellenic Society of the University of New South Wales position on the format for a viable Modern Greek studies department at the University of New South Wales

A Modern Greek studies program involves a full offering of courses and opportunities for further studies in Modern Greek at the university. In HELLSOC'S opinion for the university to fulfil this in good faith this requires:

- A Major and Minor in Modern Greek studies;
 - Course offerings in the undergraduate coursework level for Modern Greek language comprising a Beginners Stream, and Intermediate Stream and two Advanced streams with the highest level of Advanced Modern Greek being for professional translation;
 - In addition, contextual studies courses should be provided. This involves a full set of subject offerings in culture, history and literature with at a minimum of six subjects
 - An honours year in Modern Greek with advanced honours level coursework comprising of at least four subjects and a thesis component
 - An offering in the Diploma of Languages of Modern Greek studies
 - A PhD program in Modern Greek studies to enable a strong academic research contribution to the university and to the subject of Modern Greek studies
- It is HELLSOC'S final position that a Modern Greek studies program that incorporates the following points as a starting point is what is required at the university. Any proposal that falls short of HELLSOC'S expectations in this regard will be met by vocal dissent.