Preliminary note:

The following application for research support from the Lotteries Commission was unsuccessful because the proposed topic was judged to “belong to the core business of the State’s education authorities”. Our question, of course, is whether they are doing this research – or even planning to do it. (June 2004)

**University participation and performance in**

**Perth’s metropolitan subregions - a comparative analysis**

## Expression of Interest for Lotteries Commission

## Social Research Grant

## Prepared by Peter Vintila

## for Friends of Midland City University (2003)

## *Official Name of Applicant Organisation*

## Friends of Midland City University Inc.

###### Postal Address

PO Box 2266 Midland 6936

###### Organisation’s E-mail

Co-ordinator’s E-mail: [cssc@multiline.com.au](mailto:cssc@multiline.com.au)

###### ABN and GST Registration

Recently applied for – ATO order No. 2407731

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## *1. Provide a brief description of the social issue to be investigated.*

The project will investigate how locational factors and access to university facilities are associated with university participation and performance in metropolitan Perth.

Initial research conducted by Friends of Midland University indicates that the distribution of university places in Perth is grossly unbalanced. Inquiry based on a division of the city (and its immediate peri-urban hinterland) into four notional university catchment reveals that the city’s eastern suburbs fare worst, enjoying the benefit of just 0.4 university places per 1,000 residents – see table below for comparative details.

**Table 1**[[1]](#footnote-1)**: University catchment profiles**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | Midland | Rockingham | Central | Joondalup |
| 1 | Total pop. | 270,929 | 258,655 | 649,088 | 136,442 |
| 2 | Number of uni. students | 7,593 | 4,956 | 30,250 | 4,430 |
| 3 | Uni students per  1,000 people | 28 | 19 | 47 | 33 |
| 4 | Uni. places | 98 | 552 | 42070 | 4218 |
| 5 | Uni. places per 1,000 people | **0.4** | **2.1** | **66.7** | **31.3** |

Note: The four catchments are defined in relation to current university facilities located in the central city region and in the regional centres of Joondalup, Midland and Rockingham. Local government areas included in each catchment are as follows:

**Central catchment**: Perth, Cambridge, Vincent, Stirling, Nedlands, Subiaco, Claremont, Cottesloe, Peppermint Grove, Mosman Park, East Fremantle, Fremantle Melville South Perth Canning Victoria Park and Gosnells.

**Joondalup catchment**: Wanneroo, Joondalup, Gingin.

**Rockingham catchment**: Cockburn, Kwinana, Rockingham, Armadale, Serpentine Jarrahdale, Murray, Mandurah, Waroona.

**Midland catchment**: Swan, Bayswater Bassendean Belmont, Mundaring, Kalamunda, Chittering, Northam, York, Toodyay.

### *2. Describe why this is a significant social issue for the Western Australian community. Include references to relevant experts, peak bodies, policy documents and reports that endorse the significance of the issue.*

## Social Sigificance

In his introductory remarks to the Commonwealth’s recent review of higher education (*Our Universities: Backing Australia’s Future[[2]](#footnote-2)*), the Minister for Education declares that:

Resilience, both economic and human, is driven by education, and universities in particular. The kind of Australia, the standard of living enjoyed by its citizens and its values, will be largely driven by research, teaching and scholarship undertaken by Australian universities.

Universities, according to the Minister, are institutions of strategic importance. Successful participation in universities dramatically affects the life chances of individuals and the well-being of communities able to take advantage of the opportunities they offer. At the same time, equality of access and opportunity are principles of vital importance here.[[3]](#footnote-3) Unequal access will mean unfairly diminished prospects for both individuals and communities. How, then, are equitable access and successful participation affected by the geographic distribution of opportunities for higher learning in Metropolitan Perth?

Initial research suggests that the geographic distribution of universities does significantly affect equality of access – even within a city as small as Perth. Thus turning again to Table 1 (row 3) above and to a primary indicator of university participation – enrolled students per 1,000 residents: all three outer regions enjoy participation rates well below those of central Perth where higher learning infrastructure is most generously provided.[[4]](#footnote-4)

To this must be added another very important point. The question of equal educational opportunity is becoming more urgent in the context of radical changes engulfing national and regional economies the world over: global integration and knowledge intensification. In a world moving in these directions – competing harder and competing smarter - unequal opportunities for higher learning are likely to become ever more critical and an ever more important source of generalised social and economic equality. This point has been extensively argued and documented.*[[5]](#footnote-5)*

The challenge facing educational planners in Australia is at least two-fold: Australia must clearly expand its higher education capacity in order to maintain national prosperity. On that point all parties to the current higher education debate agree. At the same time, however, new capacity needs to be developed in ways which increase equality of higher educational opportunity – not in ways which compound existing inequalities. This is the direction in which the future social cohesiveness and democratic character of our national community lie. The larger social (and policy) significance of the research proposed here is that it will contribute to these ends by helping to equalise the prospects of urban communities enjoying very different levels of higher educational infrastructure provision.

**Research significance**

A few words situating the proposed project in its academic and research context are also necessary here. There is a substantial and growing body of Australian research dealing with issues of equity relating to university participation. There is, however, a strong consensus in the literature that socio-economic factors are more important than geographic ones in their impact on university engagement.[[6]](#footnote-6) While not seeking to directly contest this widely held view, there are a number of reasons for treating it with caution – and for continuing to conduct studies which seek to investigate questions of proximity and location.

First, even if locational factors are not the most important factors restricting (or facilitating) access to universities, they could still be very significant. Even as secondary factors they retain some importance and they certainly remain essential to the development of a more complete understanding of differential university participation rates.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Second, understanding of the significance of locational factors (of the geography of higher learning) remains limited. A preliminary survey of the Australian research literature indicates that work done on this question has employed only very coarse spatial categories: “remote”, “rural” and “urban’. Sometimes finer differentiations have been introduced to deal with variations encompassed by non-metropolitan Australia – eg “very remote” and “provincial”. But differences in metropolitan centres have not been treated with the same respect. It is almost universally assumed that city residents all enjoy equal access to universities – and are equally privileged when compared with their rural and regional cousins. Clearly that is not true and to take just the simplest of illustrations: 20 or 30 minutes of daily travel in a car (perhaps in a new one purchased by well-to-do parents) is very different from 3 hours of public transport travel (perhaps involving vehicle and modal transfers). Yet these are differences which current research overlooks.[[8]](#footnote-8)

## *3. List the anticipated research outcomes and describe how these will inform policy and impact on service delivery.*

1. A clearer and more highly resolved picture (geographically speaking) of how locational factors within urban environments are linked to higher educational participation and performance;
2. A clearer and more highly differentiated picture of how tertiary students from Perth’s different metropolitan sub-regions engage with and move through the university system. Thus, the inquiry will provide a participation and performance analysis encompassing the following factors:
   * Matriculation rate
   * Take up rate of university places for matriculants
   * Rate of part-time study
   * Participation in workforce for full time students
   * Drop out rate
   * Graduation rate
   * Graduation by field of study
   * Honours graduation rate
   * Post graduate entry rate
   * Post graduate completion rate

# (See section 6 below for more detail.)

1. A clearer sense of whether or not regions currently enjoying poor access to higher education facilities can strengthen their claims for improved access by appealing more vigorously to principles of equal access and opportunity;
2. Information and discussion which helps to operationalise principles of equal educational access and opportunity in the domain of higher education;
3. Clearer direction for educational planners and policy makers answerable to principles of equal access and opportunity;
4. A series of regionally specific benchmarks against which to measure future equalising (or polarising) trends in Perth.

**4. Are there other community organizations and other stakeholders involved in this area and have they been involved in developing this proposal?**

The project has been discussed with the following organisations or agencies:

* Midland Community Forum (Francesca Irwin – 9250 3353)
* City of Swan (Fiona Weigall – 9267 9267)
* Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (Warren Hill – 9424 2222)
* Midland Redevelopment Authority (Kieran Kinsella – 9250 3047)
* North Eastern Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce (Sandra Wallis - 9374 5000)
* WACOSS (Lanie Chopping – 9420 7222)
* WA Department of Education and Training – Swan Districts Regional Office (Carol Strauff – 9442 6607)
* Department of Educational Services (Laurie Money – 9321 6800)
* Institute for Science and Technology Policy (ISTP), Murdoch University (Dr Dora Marinova – 9360 6103)

*5. Are there project partners and what will be their involvement with the project?*

In addition to the initial advice they have provided, all of the organizations listed in section 4 above (with the exception of WACOSS) have agreed to participate in a project reference group that will

* steer the project by way of providing advice and feedback to the employed research team;
* facilitate access to data sources and personnel within their own or relevant sister organizations;
* assist with problem solving and trouble shooting more generally;
* review draft documentation produced by the project research team.

It is anticipated that the reference group will meet on an 8 weekly basis.

The Institute for Science and Technology Policy at Murdoch University has agreed to assume the role of “principal research partner”. The Institute has agreed to assume responsibility for:

* the engagement of suitably qualified research staff in consultation with Friends of Midland University;
* the provision of office space;
* “day-to-day” project support and supervision;
* financial management of the project.

*6. Provide a brief outline of the research methodology to be used to undertake the research.*

The inquiry will seek to develop a more detailed picture of participation in university education using two complementary methods.

First, it will probe available quantitative data sources (ABS, WA Department of Education of Training and WA’s universities) to explore how tertiary students from Perth’s different metropolitan sub-regions engage with and move through the university system. Subject to further discussion (and refinement), the inquiry will develop a number of “participation and performance” indicators which will be assembled as “participation profiles”. Participation profiles for each of the four metropolitan sub-regions under investigation could include:

* Matriculation rate
* Take up rate of university places for matriculants
* Rate of part-time study
* Participation in workforce for full time students
* Drop out rate
* Graduation rate
* Graduation by field of study
* Honours graduation rate
* Post graduate entry rate
* Post graduate completion rate

Second, to supplement the quantitative investigation outlined above, the inquiry also proposes to directly survey relevant student cohorts. The principle purpose of this exercise will be to begin to seek explanations for statistical data which, by itself, often remains open to conflicting interpretations. Again, provisionally, and subject to further discussion, it is proposed to survey two groups:

* year 12 students from each region – in order to focus on higher educational intentions, aspirations and anticipated difficulties;

# students in the final years of their degree programs from each region – in order to focus on the experienced difficulties of university study.

### *7. How will the project be managed and by whom?*

### Basic management arrangements for the project have been outlined in section 5 above. Again in brief, the project will be managed as follows:

### strategic direction, advice and assistance will be provided by an 8-member reference group (identified in section 4 above);

### research team recruitment will be managed by the ISTP at Murdoch University in consultation with the project proponents;

### financial management will also be in the hands of the ISTP at Murdoch University.

Day-to-day research planning and execution will be in the hands of the project’s employed principal research officer who will be sufficiently senior to work independently and be self-managing at this level.

### *8. To whom and in what way will the research findings be made available. Include relevant policy makers, service providers and consumers.*

The research findings will be made available two forms – as full and summary reports – in both hard copy and digital versions. Copies of the report in suitable forms and formats will be made available to:

* Members of the Reference Group
* WACOSS
* TAFE Colleges
* Senior High Schools
* WA Universities and Schools of Education
* DEST
* National University Staff and Student Associations
* WA Local Governments more widely

*9. Who will be undertaking the research and what is their qualification to undertake the research. If this is not yet finalised, indicate how you propose to engage a researcher.*

The Institute for Science and Technology Policy at Murdoch University (major research partners) will, in consultation with the project proponents, manage the engagement of a principal researcher and research assistant.

*10. Provide a time frame for the project including key stages and tasks to be completed.*

Indicative project plan

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Time | Act Activity |
| Month 1 | literature review and project planning |
| Month 2 | data collection; survey design and piloting |
| Month 3 | data collection; survey design and piloting |
| Month 4 | data collection; survey administration |
| Month 5 | data collection; survey administration |
| Month 6 | data collection; survey administration |
| Month 7 | data analysis; survey analysis |
| Month 8 | data analysis; survey analysis |
| Month 9 | data analysis; survey analysis |
| Month 10 | preparation of draft report |
| Month 11 | preparation of draft report |
| Month 12 | preparation of draft report |
| Month 13 | review and finalisation of report |
| Month 14 | review and finalisation of report |

*11. Provide an indicative budget for the project.*

Indicative Budget

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Description | Amount | Basis of Costing |
| Salary Costs | $106,000 | 1 full time principal researcher appointed for 14 months on lowest rung of senior lecturer salary scale – includes provision for holiday and severance pay; 1 half time research assistant appointed for 14 months on lowest rung of associate lecturer salary scale – includes provision for holiday and severance pay. |
| Computer, Stationary and Data Purchasing Costs | $10,000 | Estimates |
| Administration | $26,100 | ISTP and Murdoch University charges (7.5% and 15% of budget respectively) |
| TOTAL | $142,100 |  |

Signed: …………………………………… Date: August 4th 2003

Name: Corinne Salmon Position: Co-ordinator

## Name of Organisation: Friends of Midland City University Inc.

###### Address: PO Box 2266 Midland 6936

###### Phone:

Co-ordinator’s Phone: 9250 4330 0417 907 257

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1. See [www.citizenonline.org](http://www.citizenonline.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. DEST website. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Equity” (along with “diversity”, quality and “sustainability”) is one of four foundational principles on which the *Our Universities* review rests. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It is true that Rockingham performs less well than Midland on this indicator but time and history are also important factors here. Until its small campus was recently built, Rockingham was more isolated than Midland. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Some recent examples include Paul Romer, “Economic Growth”, in *The Fortune Encyclopedia of Economics*, David R Henderson (ed), New York: Time Warner Books, 1993; Manual Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996; Alan Burton Jones, *Knowledge Capitalism: Business, Work and Learning in the New Economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999; Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, New York: Basic Books, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Richard James, *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation*, Melbourne: Centre for the Study of Higher Education Melbourne University, 2002; S. Sevenson, C. Evans, M. MacLachlan, T. Karmel and R. Blakers, *Access:* *Effect of Campus Proximity and Socioeconomic Status on University Participation in Regions*, Canberra: AGPS, 2000; J. Western, McMillan and D. Durrington, *Differential Access to Higher Education:* *The Measurement of Socioeconomic Status, Rurality and Isolation*, Canberra: AGPS, 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. And more complete understanding is essential - because some 3 decades of policy measures designed to overcome the problems of low socio-economic status backgrounds have failed. Participation rates for students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds have hardly changed over that period – they have hovered around 14.5% during the 1990s. What more complete understanding will ultimately mean remains open of course. It is, however, likely to support the increasingly widespread recognition that the social and cultural are situated in space (and embedded in place) and that place and space, in turn, are socially (and culturally) structured.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The example introduces socio-economic factors – but improved understanding here will be a question of introducing both finer analytical categories and more wholistic and (re) integrating perspectives. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)