

AAPAE Conference, 2004

The 2004 Annual Conference was held at the University of Western Sydney – Richmond campus in a pleasant rural setting. While some of our interstate guests may have preferred to sit in the sun on the last day rather than be drenched with rain at departure time, the NSW delegates were delighted to see the first good rain in a very long time.

The conference theme was “Power and Responsibility: Ethics in the 21st Century?” and was chosen to highlight the relationship between power and responsibility and the implications for our ethics agenda.

The conference was launched with a thought provoking “Welcome to Country” by Shirley Gilbert, one of the committee members. Following the welcome, Dr Paul Brock from the Department of Education and Training in NSW shared his moving journey from a traditional professional ethics focus to a more personally located one as he lives with Motor Neuron Disease. Paul provided both a moving academic analysis related to ethical issues for himself, his family, and the medical and support staff who are now a part of his life, as well as a highly personal account of the implications for day-to-day life.

Paul’s presentation set the tone for our other excellent keynote speakers. Professor Marie Brennan from the University of South Australia gave an amusing and eloquent account of some of the ethical implications of power and responsibility in the modern university as she spoke on “Beyond privatized ethics: Building community frames of ethical engagement”. Linda Burney, M.P. also spoke movingly about her life and experiences breaking ground in many “firsts” as a female, indigenous educator, bureaucrat and politician in her discussion about “Ethics and public life”. All participants agreed that our speakers added great value to the conference.

Stimulation was added to our debates following a panel discussion in which participants discussed “Ethics – Is it above the law?” Professor Marie Brennan joined with Michael Antrum, a lawyer with expertise in children’s law, Mr Afroz Ali from the Centre for Islamic Sciences and Human Development, and Ms Eva Cox, a sociologist with expertise in child and youth issues from University of Technology Sydney. The panel was ably mediated by Professor Michael Singh from UWS.

Participation in the conference was lower in 2004 than in other years, but evaluations showed that those who did attend gained greatly from the variety of sessions presented, the opportunity afforded by the small numbers to engage meaningfully with the guests and other speakers and the depth of meaning and understanding drawn from some of the presentations.

Further highlights of the conference noted in evaluations were the presence of an undergraduate student team who ran registration, organization and the chairing of sessions, the performance of a “philosophy night” play at the dinner, and the great food!

Thanks to all who attended, the hard-working conference committee, the students who gained a lot from the experience and the members of AAPAE Executive who jumped in “on the day” to help out with technology and other tasks.

Linda Newman
Conference Convenor