Mission Possible? An analysis of

Australian universities’ missions

Dissertation submitted by

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for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

in the Faculty of Business and Law

University of Newcastle

March 2013
Statement of Originality

The dissertation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my dissertation, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Acknowledgements

My special thanks to my supervisor Associate Professor Suzanne Ryan for her tireless support and guidance in the development and completion of my dissertation. I also wish to thank the many teachers at the University of Newcastle for enriching my understanding during the course of the DBA program.

I especially wish to thank Lesley Chow for her inspiration and encouragement, and for reading the many drafts of the dissertation.
SYNOPSIS

This dissertation represents the first comprehensive study of Australian university mission statements and mission-related documents. It comes at a time when universities are experiencing global challenges presented by the knowledge economy, global competition and rapid advances in information and communication technologies. In Australia, further pressure on universities has resulted from a government policy that attempts to align universities with these global challenges and to extend the traditional purpose of a university into new areas. The Australian Government’s introduction of Mission-based Compacts has provided an opportunity to address a deficit in Australian university mission document research. Hence the aim of this research is to compare a major Government policy directive, *Transforming Australia’s Higher Education System* (Australian Government 2009), with university mission statements and Mission-based Compact documents in order to evaluate the extent of alignment between the two. Content analysis is used to analyse the universities’ mission-related documents in relation to three specific questions: the extent to which universities specify formal mission statements; the extent to which mission-related documents reflect the government policy directive; and the extent to which mission-related documents demonstrate institutional diversity. The analyses find that: one, although Australian universities are reluctant to use the label ‘mission statement’, their statements include the majority of mission components required of corporate mission statements; two, with the exception of academic freedom, universities have complied with the government policy directive to meet the challenges of the 21st century and to extend their functions to incorporate greater access and equity, contribute to the economy and enhance Australia’s international standing; and three, institutional diversity within the mission-related documents is limited. Overall the university mission-related documents comply with the government policy directive and address the global challenges. However, the extent to which their stated goals are realisable is questionable given the Government’s contradictory and unitary policy settings and funding mechanisms. As the research is the first of its kind in Australia, it raises a number of important questions and opens the way for further mission-related research in Australian higher education.
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