

Premier’s University of New South Wales Creative Arts Scholarship

Entrepreneurship in museums and galleries

Participatory and entrepreneurial projects for creative industry education and training- and beyond.

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# Introduction

In the latter part of the twentieth century, museums and galleries both in Australia and overseas were subject to vigorous scrutiny and criticisms. As public funding retracted, claims of elitism and lack of relevance to contemporary life forced cultural institutions to radically re-evaluate the way they conducted their business and operations, and to demonstrate their relevance to much wider and more diverse audiences.

Museums and galleries needed to extend their reach, by developing programs and practices that generated greater participation and engagement from a broader range of people. They also needed to embrace entrepreneurial funding models, to supplement traditional and contracting forms of funding.

The resulting changes in business and operational cultures and audience engagement strategies, now form a normal part of practice in the museum and galleries sector. These imperatives are also found within other cultural organisations, including those in the education sector. The aims of addressing diversity and increasing participation and relevance form part of good corporate citizenship for many business entities.

There has never been a more relevant time than now to demonstrate the viability and relevance of the cultural and creative industries in reaching, developing and measuring new audiences, and authentically representing and (not simply re-presenting) cultural and other diversities. By exposing students to these approaches, TAFE NSW will develop graduates who think deeply about best practice in the creative industries, and how the aims and intentions of cultural organisations are echoed elsewhere within the economy.

The creative industries by their very nature arrive at innovative solutions. Creative industry training within the TAFE environment needs to embrace entrepreneurial and socially responsible business models. In this way, we will produce graduates whose innovative and creative thinking skills meet the aims and objectives of contemporary cultural organisations - and beyond.

# Focus of Study

 My scholarship tour centred around formal study at the internationally acclaimed Goldsmiths College, University of London, where I undertook the equivalent of half a Post-Graduate Certificate in *Museums and Galleries as Cultural Entrepreneurs*. It was an extraordinary opportunity to think deeply about key issues in the creative industries, whilst being immersed in best-practice through site visits, lectures and guest lectures.

The Goldsmiths’ course work gave me the opportunity to reflect about creative projects that could be part of the TAFE teaching and learning environment. TAFE’s simulated workplaces are key to its educational success, in tandem with strong engagement with industry. This is as relevant to the creative industries as it is to the more traditional trades. Through my study opportunity, I sketched out currently speculative projects that could be tested at a local level, and, if proven successful, adapted and / or adopted more widely.

Any sponsors or partners would be determined within the business rules of our organisation.

# Significant Learning

The significant learning of this report presents some currently speculative projects that I contemplated as part of my study. The ideas presented embed the significant learning I undertook and hypothesise it in an applied context. It is my hope that they form the seed or impetus for projects that are one day realised. I called the initiative *Co/Lab;* an umbrella branding under which any number of projects might sit. Goldsmiths is famous around the world for its training in ideation and critical thinking. As such, the teaching and learning was embedded and applied, and we were encouraged to undertake and assimilate our research findings in a way that might be applied in our own professional contexts.

This section of the report was generated as a result of my study and adopts the language of a museum or gallery publication. I hope it may prove useful for anyone who wishes to write a business case or otherwise initiate an industry relevant project within TAFE. Any sponsors or partners would be determined within the business rules of our organisation.

## **Welcome to Co/Lab**

This exciting new initiative from TAFE- Western Sydney Region is a cluster of culture and creative industry projects, gathered together under the Co/Lab umbrella. Each is designed to reflect, invigorate and expand the vibrant cultural expressions already found within the Western Sydney Region. The projects seek to build enterprise, opportunity, collaboration and industry engagement for creative industry students, and involve our broader community in this work. Co/Lab embodies the cultural industry’s best-practices, including collaboration, working with diversity, and inclusivity.

At launch, Co/Lab comprises of three projects. The TAFE Western Sydney Region Health Collection is an exciting new exhibition space. Made by TAFE is a gallery/shop that sells student-made art and design. The TAFE Western Sydney Region Art Lending Library loans original works of art for borrowers to hang in their own home.

It is envisioned that the number and nature of the projects will change. Like the contents of a petri dish, we anticipate that projects will yield both failures and successes. For anyone wishing to create enterprise and innovation, this is valuable learning. You won’t always find penicillin on the first attempt.

### Using new museum models of participation and inclusion in a vocational education and training environment

*Co/Lab* reflects a commitment to the importance of developing, expanding and experimenting with a range of new museum practices in the context of a vocational education institution. We stand as a strong assertion of the importance of fine art as practice-led research. Equally, we argue for creative practice as a teachable skill that creates a sense of belonging and a sense of place, activates a sense of individual and collective agency, and nurtures critical thinking skills.

The Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in Australia has a long and proud history as a hands-on teaching environment. Emerging from trade schools in the1880s, TAFE, as Australia’s largest VET provider, has always been synonymous with skills–based and second-chance education. The values of inclusivity and diversity, and the ethos of community development are central to the way we do business.

Creating knowledge via an experiential model of learning is described by Kolb as a result of “the combination of grasping and transforming experience”(1984, 41) Experiential learning models are central to TAFE teaching methodologies, and unsurprisingly they are also found at the heart of the *Co/Lab* projects.

Multiple opportunities are created by locating museum and gallery projects in the VET environment. Participatory strategies and collaborative approaches are designed to develop unexpected and critical ways of thinking. The projects are designed to develop peer and mentored learning, and create connections and catalysts across areas of study, demographics, sub-cultures and abilities. The various projects provide creative industry students with an immersive experience in the operational realities of their field. This includes encounters with sponsorship, partnerships, promotion, fundraising, metrics, measurement and evaluation methodologies, reporting and collection management. These concerns are at the core of contemporary cultural industries. Accordingly, the projects serve as an incubator for students requiring the work-readiness to succeed in the field.

*CoLab* exemplifies the best practices of the new museum. Being situated within TAFE means that we can be a catalyst for cross-disciplinary projects that expose innovative teaching and learning approaches to more conventional classrooms. Sounds exciting, doesn’t it? Maybe not to everyone. When considering the museum or gallery as a site of learning, it is reasonable to assume that some learners will feel naturally at home, and others will not.

Sociologists Bourdieu and Alain Darbel claimed that feeling comfortable in museums is a product of class. They proposed that: “if the love of art is the clear mark of the chosen….museums betray their true function, which is to reinforce for some the feeling of belonging and for others the feeling of exclusion.”(2013, 112)

As a result of the criticisms of Bordieu and others, over the past decades there has been a mighty push to change the visitor experience. Many of the shifts in practice that occurred as a result, including those that encourage diverse audiences, are now built into museum funding models, and are reflected in government legislation both in Australia and overseas.

For many Western Sydney residents, the circumstances of their upbringing and the complexities of daily life put art and culture low on their list of priorities. *Co/Lab* has an obligation to challenge the barriers that prevent inclusive and enriching participation in culture. In Western Sydney, access to cultural services does not match that available in city centres. For many who have been excluded, they require need not only the possibility, but also the reason to take part. Bourdieu and Darbel again: “objects are not rare, but the propensity to consume them is, that ‘cultural need’, which, in contrast to ‘primary needs’ is the result of education.” (2013, 27)

Bourdieu and Darbel highlight the causal connection between educational and cultural opportunity. Our location in Western Sydney is factored in to every project development. Many *Co/Lab* projects aim to create a dynamic relationship between cultural engagement and study pathways for the disengaged. Western Sydney has a culturally and linguistically diverse population, and it is central to *Co/Lab* to understand our diverse population. According to the Australian Census, in 2016, 42% of people in Greater Western Sydney spoke a language other than English at home. This once working-class heartland is experiencing rapid growth and gentrification. The gap between the rich (or at least the comfortably well off) and the poor can be clearly observed on our streets.

From a challenging starting point, health services struggle to meet increasing demand. Shocking statistics surround the incidence of heart disease, stroke and obesity in Western Sydney. Co/Lab aligns with the stated aim of the NSW Health and the Arts framework, by exploring the arts as a tool to promote health and wellbeing.

Surrounded by complexity, it is our aim to continue to explore our singular and collective agency to make sense of the world, and make the world, in a new way.

Read more about three Co/Lab projects below.

### 1. The TAFE Western Sydney Region Art Lending Library

*The TAFE Western Sydney Region Art Lending* *Library*’s physical exhibition space is in the home of library borrowers. The *TAFE WSR ALL* is a service that makes the experience of living with an original work of art available to a wider audience.

Through the generous commitment from our sponsors, this service offers loans of original artworks for a period of three months to current library members. The artworks are curated for inclusion in the library, with our selection criteria including a commitment to a diverse representation of artists, and themes that reflect our community consultation and engagement. The power of art to inform daily life is shared with ALL.

Advice is given to the borrower on the installation and care of the work whilst on loan. Many of our borrowers may never have lived with an original artwork in their home, and we take a particular delight in providing this first experience. If along the way we nurture an art collector, this will be a happy by-product.

### 2. Made by TAFE and Co/Lab online

This hybrid gallery and design store occupies a position where the boundary of our campus meets with the busy street. With opposing glass walls that create both inward and outward facing perspectives, the building links the campus to the greater community, and encourages these two constituent groups to meet in the middle. With open and inviting access and comfortable seating inside and out, the architecture combines a welcoming ambience with a sophisticated flair. At night, the front-facing glass window is illuminated, and by use of an innovative sliding mechanism, a feature wall for a selected artist or thematic collection is created.

Works exhibited at *Made by TAFE* are curated on a competitive basis from our student and alumni body. An initial open call and nomination process is followed by a shortlisting, then final selection by an industry expert guest curator.

*Made by TAFE* encourages innovative and collaborative working methods, and its locus within a multi-disciplinary, workshop-based learning environment puts it is in a strong position to incubate new and interdisciplinary art and design projects. Our creatives are selected for the quality and commercial viability of their work, their professionalism, and the visible and sometimes invisible diverse and inspiring stories that surround their creative journeys.

Currently in development is *Co/Lab online*. This online gallery will serve as a platform and archive for exhibitions, events and projects. Linked to this site, the *Made by TAFE* web store will curate and promote for sale work by art, design and photography students from not just Western Sydney, but from locations across TAFE NSW. This federated approach will develop networks and collaborations within our student body and showcases the breadth and scope of creative practice across NSW.

### 3. The TAFE Western Sydney Region Health Collection

*The TAFE Western Sydney Region Health Collection* is embedded in the heart of a teaching and learning space. The collection is embedded in and around classrooms and simulated workplaces for student health workers. The exhibition space utilises the wide, long corridors and clinical practice rooms typical of a hospital environment. This makes it a perfect test site for trialling exhibitions and other creative and design interventions that centre around health, wellbeing, and community health education.

Through the generosity of our project partners, we are embarking on a program of commissioning, acquiring and displaying individual works and exhibitions that that challenge us to think in new ways about health, the body, sickness and wellbeing. Our partnerships will allow us to develop a program of participatory workshops and exhibitions, designed to encourage health and allied-health students to think about the role of the arts in the health system, including the opportunity to collaborate with creatives to use creativity as part of community health education initiatives.

# Conclusion

The immersive experience which the Premier’s University of NSW Creative Arts Scholarship provided created an extraordinary chance to think deeply about key drivers in cultural organisations. Studying at Goldsmiths was a chance to learn in an applied way, harnessing and sharpening my critical thinking skills. The fictional projects synthesise the complex information and experiences through lectures, site visits and industry guest speakers. The projects as I have presented them here are not designed to be definitive, but rather serve as a loose guide or point of departure for anyone who wishes to collaborate, contribute, or be inspired.

The aims of the projects include the intention to assert the value, increase the visibility, and extend the involvement of creative practices from within the TAFE environment to a larger and more diverse audience, supporting experimentation with expanded practices and participatory methods.

The Premier’s University of NSW Creative Arts Scholarship has brought into sharp relief how best practice in creative industries aligns strongly with best practice pedagogy, and the TAFE core values of integrity, collaboration and excellence. The opportunity exists for creative industry skill areas within TAFE to drive collaborative ventures across the curriculum, bringing creative and critical thinking skills with them.

I will continue to disseminate my findings this year, including at a presentation to students, alumni, and industry on September 19 as part of TAFE Western Sydney Region’s Creative Forums, and as via the recently formed TAFE Academy staff development unit, and the TAFE Creative and Design Ideation Skillspoint.



Figure 1: Goldsmiths Banner, New Cross, London, 2018 (Photo by Cath Barcan)

The *Co/Lab* projects imagined during my study tourreflect a commitment to the importance of developing, expanding and experimenting with a range of participatory museum practices in the context of a vocational education institution. The name itself may never be formalised. Let *Co/Lab* be a cipher for the best use of creative practice wherever it can be created: as a teachable skill that creates a sense of belonging and a sense of place, activates a sense of individual and collective agency, and creates innovation, engagement and inclusion.

 [Let me know what you think](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/59SDGC6).



Figure 2: Tate Modern, London, 2018 (Photo by Cath Barcan)



Figure 3: Customer feedback board, Tate Modern, London, 2018 (Photo by Cath Barcan)

# Acknowledgements

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