Alumni Association, Faculty of Architecture Design and Planning
The University of Sydney

President’s report for 2012

This report, which covers the calendar year to 31 October 2012, is my last report as I resigned on 16 October 2012 after nearly a decade as president. The year has been marked by a number of successful events carried out in difficult circumstances.

The last event was our 2012 Careers Fair held in the Faculty Hearth on Tuesday 4 September. In 2011, we partnered with the University Careers Centre in promoting an over-ambitious event which did not come to fruition, depriving the Association of its major income source for the year. A more focused event, with the same professional approach, succeeded this year. Eleven firms came to a two hour event, much shorter than the five hour events previously staged. Together with the professional trade fair booths, the shorter time frame actually generated a level of interest and excitement never before achieved. Both exhibitors and the Association were very pleased with the event which was run along lines recommended by the Careers Centre to whom we owe great thanks.

Earlier in the year, we ran the annual Alumni Awards which are designed to match the equivalent university wide awards. We are the first alumni association to match the wider award system and continue to provide excellent candidates for the whole of university awards. Our batting average in the wider awards is beyond that expected of a small faculty, a fact which engenders great pride for the Association. The Awards ceremony was also a much slicker event, ably organised by Nell King our Alumni Development Officer. One of our alumni, prominent architect John Richardson of Cox Richardson, confessed to his award being the first personal award since winning the ancient history prize at high school! His firm, of course, has won many awards under his leadership and that of Phillip Cox, a previous alumni awards winner. An important by-product of the awards program is the nomination of distinguished alumni for honorary degrees, recent recipients being Drs Ken Woolley and Clive Lucas.

The jury for this year’s awards comprised mainly alumni under the chairmanship of distinguished alumnus, Ken Woolley. Having regard to the considerations that should be applied, it is our view that the jury should consist of alumni only, except for those awards which are for current or very recently graduated students. Alumni have a better understanding of the contributions to the professions for which we educate than do staff members.

The event which started the year for the Association was an exhibition of the drawings of the McConnel collection. Three years in the making, the exhibition was organised and curated by Brian Griffin to whom we owe great thanks. His patient negotiations with the University’s art collection administration has resulted in a practical solution to the storage of the collection. Scanning of all of the drawings has made them accessible to scholars and the public.

At the time of writing this report, I had already resigned together with two other members of the Alumni Council, David Turner and Ken Woolley. Another Council member, Brian Griffin, has retired. In varying circumstances, we have all found that the Association is not valued or welcomed by the Faculty which has shown little interest in, or support for, the Association. The Faculty has run parallel, independent functions for younger alumni in competition with the Association. The Faculty obstructed the Careers Fair administration and marketing forcing the Association to fall back on the resources of the Careers Centre and the Alumni Relations Office. I thank the heads of those two units, Ms Nitsa Athanassopoulos and Ms Tracey Beck for their unstinting support.

Attached to this report is a financial statement for the year to 31 October. The Association’s financial health is sufficient for its functions. What is not shown is that the Association increased its 2012 contribution to the annual Architecture Revue from $500 to $1,000 with a similar increase contributed
to the annual student end of course exhibition. We also gave $2,000 to the Faculty student bursary fund. I thank David Turner for stepping in to the position of Association treasurer as well as managing his other university obligations.

We would like to have made bigger gains in fund raising for the bursary fund which needs to attain a size of about $150,000 to meet reasonable annual payments to students who need help to cope with difficult situations such as illness or injury. Payments from the fund are currently limited.

It is clear that the Association can make a much larger contribution to the life and welfare of the Faculty than has been the case over the last few years. However, the leadership of the Faculty will need to abandon its view that the Association should exist “in a parallel universe” and limit its function to fundraising. I cannot imagine any association with the Faculty not involving alumni engaging with, or assisting, the Faculty and its programs. As long as this view is not shared by the Faculty leadership, the Association will satisfy neither alumni nor the Faculty.

By its dissociation from the Alumni Association, the Faculty deprives itself of the strong ties that bind the university to the professions, especially architecture. The Faculty is examined on a regular basis by visiting panels from the architecture and planning professions. Links to the professions can be important supports for the work of the Faculty as well as for the benefit of students seeking to enter the professions. These links need constant cultivation not neglect.

I thank all members of the Alumni Council and Nell King, our Alumni Development Officer, for their contribution to the work of the Association. I especially thank David Turner who has provided constant support for all of the years in which I have been President.

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