THE CHANGING OPTIONS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

Over the last ten years the choices of where to study and what to study beyond school have been changing and growing. The number of Colleges offering courses has increased, the choice of Universities and their courses has increased and TAFE has been developing new opportunities of learning as well. In 2008 the Federal Government commissioned the Bradley Review of Higher Education, which will now see further changes to higher education being implemented.

The Government recognised the need for a highly skilled population to ensure we remain economically competitive in the global economy. “The nation will need more well-qualified people if it is to anticipate and meet the demands of a rapidly moving global economy” (Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report Executive Summary, pg. xi). This does not mean that they expect everyone to attend just University after school but that all students leaving school should be attaining a minimum qualification of Certificate III for any job undertaken in Australia. Ongoing education throughout life to take a person’s qualifications to a higher level is also encouraged. It is about avoiding future skills shortages and lifting workforce participation rates as well as improving numeracy and literacy levels across the population.

To enable greater access to a variety of qualifications and one of the major impacts on learning beyond school of the Bradley Review is the recommendation that there be one learning environment at the tertiary level. This means that whereas previously when people talked of ‘study at the tertiary level’ it was usually referring to study undertaken at University, what Bradley is saying is that ‘study at the tertiary level’ should now refer to any courses offered by TAFE, Universities or Colleges that meets the Australian Qualifications Framework. http://studyinaustralia.gov.au/Sia/en/WhyAustralia/AQF.htm

Therefore the type of qualifications the various higher education institutions can offer is also changing. No longer are Degree courses only available through Universities, nor are Diploma courses just available through TAFE or Colleges. The process of education beyond school is now about vocational pathways and educational institutions specialising in their areas of expertise. Allowing people to study in a career area across either one educational institution or several. Changes are already taking place with TAFE looking to introduce degree courses in disciplines they have a strong level of expertise. For example, Sydney Institute of TAFE is looking to offer a degree course in design through their Enmore College.

The mission behind this is seen to be to –

- Enhance and expand opportunities for students from all communities to attain higher education qualifications
- Encourage the exploration and development of inquiry and applied skills within a vocational and industry based learning environment
- Strengthen pathways and outcomes for students across the Australian Tertiary Education Sector

(Sydney TAFE Institute Careers Advisors Day Presentation)

Jenine Smith

23/04/2010
Macquarie University is also looking to be part of the new tertiary education landscape with talk of franchising degree courses to TAFE colleges. “We would be looking at courses which would be a best fit for TAFE such as accounting, commerce, IT software engineering and things like that” (Vice-Chancellor Steven Schwartz – SMH April 2-4 2010 pg. 7). Agreements already exist between TAFE colleges and Universities to recognise TAFE qualifications for a selection of University courses and this would be the next step. Colleges also offer a range of courses to either diploma or degree level and have articulation agreements with a variety of universities for student to continue their studies to attain higher qualifications.

What does this all mean for our girls here at Marist Sisters’ College Woolwich? Simply that when choosing what to do beyond school the girls need to think about what is best for their skills, interests and abilities. What course to do should be chosen on how relevant it is to what they want to undertake as a career path rather than which tertiary institution it is available at. Research is essential. Where a course is offered, as well as what the course content offers, should be considered. The questions I ask the year 12 girls to consider are

Am I interested in this course? and
Am I prepared to travel to the location for this course?

If the answer is yes to both then they should think about applying for the course. More than ever before it is important that the girls look carefully at what they want to study beyond school and investigate all options.

All courses cost money now and the federal government has stepped up to assist students with fee payment at all levels. Once only fee help was available for University courses and was known as HECS. Now there are three forms of government assistance, they are –

HECS-HELP – for degree courses at public universities

FEE-HELP – for degree and postgraduate courses at all tertiary institutions

VET-HELP – for vocational courses (e.g. Certificate and Diploma courses) at all tertiary institutions

Detailed information is available on the website:

The changing tertiary landscape is an education for us all and it is important to remain up to date with what is happening. The girls need to do the research but it is also useful for parents to undertake some research as well to understand what your daughters are undertaking beyond school, and where is the best location for them to do that study.

Website link for the Executive Summary of the Bradley Review of Higher Education:

Jenine Smith

23/04/2010