

Note for Brian Martin

---

**From:** Ted Steele  
**Date:** Thu, Feb 23, 1995 8:34 AM  
**Subject:** Mickey Mouse Professors  
**To:** All Academic Staff; All General Staff; Forums & Debates

Dear Colleagues:

Over the past weeks and months I have had a number of vigorous and vituperative interchanges on the e-mail with a number of individuals and user groups. The incidences which triggered them were in themselves sometimes apparently trivial although I usually considered them important at the time [ space allocations, library cuts, unethical collegial behaviour, promotional barriers, executive obstacles on overseas/conference travel, funding cuts, parking fines, senseless executive edicts on the pasting of student notices,etc] . However each has been like the proverbial "straw which broke the camel's back".

I am of the belief that the origination of each e-mail exchange is directly traceable to the "Mickey Mouse Culture" which now , as McKinnon departs, deeply pervades the entire institution .

In short, this University has been thoroughly "Dawkinized" - it is therefore a pseudo-University [ not the case 15-20 years ago].

A University , as Karl Popper would say, is the "highest" school in the community. It must inspire and challenge its brightest and sharpest minds. It does this through its primary role in the CREATION of new knowledge and understanding. Its other role is the transmission of up-dated knowledge and hopefully wisdom to the next generation.

I stress the creative role of a University because the transmission or teaching function can be found in other types of institution [ high schools, TAFES, Colleges of Advanced Education, Open Learning radio etc]. The creative/analytical output of individuals/small groups within an institution is the KEY factor which allows identification of genuine Universities.

When one reads an applicant's CV a real [ or potential] Professor can usually detect whether the owner of the CV has "Mickey Mouse" credentials. Below on the left I have listed those factors which are good indicators of Mickey Mouse status - on the right I list those qualities to be found in real [or potential] Professors.\*\*

#### MICKEY MOUSE PROFESSOR

\* Few if any papers/books indicative of individual scholarly/research achievement [-1]

\* Many unpublished documents, such as consultancy reports [ to about the world. Govt and/or Industry-Commerce], position papers, unpublished speeches etc]. [-1]

#### GENUINE PROFESSOR

\* Large body of published work [peer reviewed or equivalent] showing evidence of a creative [originality] and critical contribution to the growth of knowledge and understanding [ the books/papers appear in quality outlets or acknowledged publishing houses] [+4]

- \* Clear evidence of community service. [0]
  - \* Publications in newspapers, magazines or authorship of best selling books. [0 to +1]
  - \* Sometimes a long list of papers "In Preparation". [0]
  - \* Evidence of generic management skills ["managerialism"] and administrative experience. [0]
  - \* Large numbers of publications turn out on closer scrutiny to be conference Abstracts. [-1]
  - \* Much evidence of committee membership [ both within and outside University] [0]
  - \* Demonstrated entrepreneurship - enhanced by links with Canberra or big companies etc. [0]
  - \* May have many "consultancies". [0 to +0.5]
  - \* Demonstrated 'peer acceptance' : "she/he is pleasant and gets on well with colleagues" ie. pleasant demeanour, smiles a lot etc. [0]
  - \* Demonstrative diplomatic skills; good track record of compromise , so-called skills at "conflict resolution" and other forms of negotiation. [0]
  - \* Individual appears to be "Politically Correct" [-1]
  - \* Individual is unknown in discipline or an acknowledged 2nd or 3rd rater. [-1]
- [ Throughout such a CV, key words , often appear such as, "relevance", "quality", "mediation", "community outreach" etc. etc.]

\* The individual has a CLEAR profile in the discipline [ ie. known as 1st rate] [+0.5 to +2]

\* Individual often known as "difficult" to get on with. [+1]

\* Another character trait is an unwillingness to compromise principles. [ does not follow fashions] [+2]

\* Career is defined by curiosity driven research and scholarship. [+4]

\* Clear evidence of intellectual pedigree [+1]

It is obvious that the list on the left bears no relation to scholarly or research prowess. Yet

we all now know that it is the list on the left which sets the agenda at Professorial selection committees conducted at this University.

I estimate that Mickey Mouse Professors outnumber Real Professors at this University by a ratio of about 9 to 1. This is a terrible state of affairs.

This problem has arisen because of the unfortunate tautology that "only a Mickey Mouse Professor can appoint a Mickey Mouse Professor". In the era of Ken McKinnon this process was elevated to an art form [ although surprisingly some genuine academics slipped though the net and were appointed ! ] .

Thus there ARE some genuine Professors at this University.

However the utility of the above comparative list is that it helps us identify and evaluate the Mickey Mouse species. As is common place nowadays in the " tabloids " allow -1 to +1 points for each factor ticked on the left and +0.5 to +4 points for each factor on the right [ as indicated] . Of course there will be a mixing of qualities as nothing is black and white. As a rule of thumb a Genuine Professor will score +8 or more and aspiring Full Professors will have notched up a score of about +4.

Associate Professors which achieve their promotions at this University are often judged, surprisingly, by the list of factors on the right [ many are +4 or above]. However the appointment of Full Professors over the past 13 years or so has usually relied on the list on the left and the genuine factors have been ignored. This has had disastrous consequences for the intellectual health of the institution.

This is because a single bad Professorial appointment can affect directly the lives and careers of other academics. If 9 out of 10 Professors are Mickey Mouse we have a Gargantuan problem on our hands. Maybe all academic [ AND executive !] CVs, should be PUBLIC PROPERTY and be placed on the Admin File Server open to electronic scrutiny by all of us.

But the usual argument is that someone has to be Head of an academic unit and that someone should be a Professor. However promotion on merit to Full Professor is common in advanced western societies like the US - in many cases the "Head "and the "Professor" are not the same, and there can be a number of Full Professors in any academic unit.

By continuing to support the present archaic UK-derived system rather than the merit-based US system we are effectively preventing recognition and/or support of staff with qualifications as listed in the righthand column.

Why do I find it important to vigorously attack and ridicule the cult of the Mickey Mouse Professor ? Apart from the obvious it is not a trivial matter : their appointments lead to Mickey Mouse decisions. I could point to a litany a mile long. For example a collective decision which has been blessed by Mickey Mouse acquiescence is to turn the library into a facade - in that half of the Department of Biological Sciences involved in Cell & Molecular Biology [ 6-7 fulltime staff, 20- 30 Hons and postgraduate students plus 100s of undergraduates] there are NO research journals in the Michael Birt Library. Our 3rd year and research students must travel to other institutions in Sydney and Canberra for library research. Short of a revolutionary reversal in executive attitudes I cannot see this shameful state of affairs changing in the future.

Ted Steele

\*\* It is given that that a real Ph.D would be considered common to both, although 2 year doctorates in say 'psychobabble' do not count.