

The ANU Observer

BRUCE: OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Michael Turvey & Eliza Croft

This year has brought exceptional upheaval to Daley Road. Thrust into an unfinished building under new management, Bruce Hall has made the transition to SA5, and the college attempts to balance the energy of new residents with the frustration of returners, and establish a new community.

The black-glass colossus of SA5 is undeniably luxurious. Rooms have double beds, wall-mounted TVs, and stunning views. Modern bathrooms, the internal courtyard, and functional kitchens distinguish SA5 from other residences; one resident called it “what Lena Karmel should have been”. But despite hiring extra contractors and abandoning the planned roof garden, ANU hasn’t finished the building. Basic utilities are complete, but there are unplastered walls, unfinished cabling and ceilings, broken elevators, and limited access to outdoor areas. Residents have endured fire alarms triggered by low water pressure in sprinklers, and a lack of mobile signal in some areas restricts calls to an SR in emergencies. Common Room Committee (CRC) President Matthew Bowes took an optimistic view of the move-in, explaining “we definitely made the best of it”, but it’s clear O-Week was challenging – one Ursula Residents’ Committee member said she “witnessed first-hand the terror of the CRC” at dealing with the ongoing construction.

Also incomplete is the 2017 Schedule of Fees. Bruce is absent from the document, possibly resulting from a confusing fee disparity. Standard rent is \$433/week, but only recent transfers pay this fee. First-years, who were unaware of the rate when applying, pay \$392.05. Returners are further subsidised, paying the old Bruce rate of \$377. ANU argues this decision avoids pricing out existing residents, but some speculate that the ANU is concerned higher fees would hurt an already-low returner intake. While unconfirmed, it seems the \$433 rate will apply to future residents, and many worry the price-hike will exclude all but the most privileged from attending. One former resident explained, “Bruce was a place where anyone could

go... it’s eclectic. Bruce had collegiality. By making it the most expensive place on campus, you’re changing that.”

While reducing costs, the ANU’s decision to give building management to UniLodge troubles many residents. UniLodge-run CCTV monitors Bruce’s new common spaces, and residents will be charged UniLodge rates for cleaning, washing, and lockouts. These tensions flared early last week when UniLodge, without ANU approval, posted an advertisement for “our newest student accommodation property, Bruce Hall”. The ad was deleted after a tweet from VC Brian Schmidt, who affirmed: “ANU remains in charge of Bruce Hall”. Many questions about the Lodge/Bruce interaction remain ambiguous, such as who controls expulsion, a power both parties technically possess. SA5 feels distinctly different to Bruce, and despite the duct-taped Bruce banners in reception, there are clear physical and managerial similarities to the Lodges.

While the large first-year cohort is delighted with SA5’s amenities, there is disagreement among returners: according to one CRC member, “Some people are bitter-sweet, others are just bitter”. But the overall mood is reluctant acceptance, and a desire to make a mark. The five-story stairwell is chalked with drawings of dragons and other Bruce memories, and many returners proudly display scavenged memorabilia from the old hall. Shocked that SA5 would not include a Buttery (the social centre of old Bruce), students purchased materials and constructed their own bar. While it might not be Bruce, returners are drawing on the nostalgia and loss of their building to reconstruct a sense of community.

The significance of SA5 extends beyond Bruce. It’s likely ANU will use the same transition model, with UniLodge management and fast-tracked development in the many coming residential changes. Looking forward, Bowes expressed the view of many: “ANU is a business. Ultimately, we are buying their product. We care about the experience, but they just think ‘is the product good’... so in this time of change, it’s crucial that students stay engaged.”

ANU TO END THE ATAR GAME

Eliza Croft

ANU's new entry system increases requirements and changes the application deadline. Designed with "the ultimate sympathy towards students and families", according to Deputy Vice-Chancellor Marnie Hughes-Warrington (MHW), the change was first flagged last year, and builds on the Spirit of Excellence Entry Scheme, which awards early entry based on student's prior achievements. Applicants will be required to earn a minimum number of 'points,' for music, debating, sports and other activities. If a student has an ATAR of 99.95, but has no such activities, they will not be admitted, MHW told the *Observer*.

She concedes privileged students are better placed to participate in such activities. But the ANU has consulted with the Smith Family, a leading disadvantaged children's charity, to put counter-measures in place. Part time work will be highly regarded, and caring commitments will be considered. When asked to comment, Deputy Disabilities Officer Shae Nicholson expressed concern, calling it "near impossible to quantify the impact of a caring role", and noted students may be required to disclose the nature and impact of their disability.

ANU plans to implement a mid-year application process, meaning most students will apply for entry, scholarships, and accommodation in the middle of

Year 12. MHW explained this guarantees students and families adequate time to plan. Students who do not meet this deadline can receive offers in the main UAC round, but these students cannot obtain scholarships.

Students will now make one application for admission, scholarships, and accommodation. MHW claims this increased efficiency will help offset the added processing workload. Many interpret this change as Americanisation, especially in light of VC Brian Schmidt's support. MHW argued this point, given ANU's system will not require US-style personal statements or references; students will simply tick or write in activities they've done.

As part of the admission changes, the *Observer* understands ANU demanded inclusion in the tertiary entrance systems of all states and territories, rather than just UAC, owing to its status as the National University. When Western Australia, Queensland, and South Australia refused, MHW took them to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), causing Queensland to immediately relent.

ANU is interested in extending this change to international and post-graduate applicants. When it comes to international students, "the way you think about equity changes", said MHW.

The changes will go to the University Education Committee, ANUSA and PARSA later this year.

CLUB FUNDS DELAYED

Michael Turvey

ANUSA's promised new system for Club funding, intended to be launched last year, has been delayed, leaving clubs without any way to request funds from ANUSA.

ANUSA President James Connolly hopes the new system will be online in two weeks, and the ANUSA Clubs Council has requested that clubs keep receipts until funding is available. However, many club executives didn't get the news, and are unaware they cannot immediately seek reimbursement for O-Week expenses. Adding to the confusion, OrgSync still displays now-defunct funding request forms, despite requests from ANUSA to remove them, and some clubs have continued making requests on the old system. Connolly said these requests would be extracted after the new system is in place.

In 2016, after many complaints from clubs, then-President Ben Gill decided not to renew ANUSA's contract with OrgSync, the former provider of funding request forms. In its place, Gill chose Membership Solutions Limited (MSL), a platform which could also run ANUSA elections, host sign-up forms for clubs, and generate a universal club events calendar.

Gill planned to implement this system in 2016, however this required the ANU to share data with MSL. Data-sharing negotiations broke down, causing the delay of the 2016 ANUSA elections, and triggering the delays and compromises which caused the current lack of funding.

Disclaimer: Michael Turvey sat on the ANUSA Grants & Affiliations Committee in 2016.

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