

Teaching European Studies as an Academic Discipline in Australia

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Abstract

What have been the main driving forces behind the introduction of European Studies in Australia? In this article I outline some of the history of European Studies programs at various Australian universities, as an introduction to the theme of this issue, based on the CESAA 2017 Sydney European Studies Conference, "Teaching European Studies in Australia."

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Introduction

The Contemporary European Studies Association of Australia (CESAA) is now over a quarter of a century old. Founded in 1991, the organization witnessed the emergence of a new era after the Fall of the Wall and in the wake of the epochal Maastricht developments for Europe and the European Union. CESAA was established with the mission of promoting the study of contemporary Europe from the Australian perspective, and the history of the organization mirrors, perhaps, some of the ups and downs of its subject since those early days of euphoric recognition of the new possibilities of Europe after the Fall of the Wall and the demise of Eastern European socialism. As Europeanists, we are all probably aware of the level to which Europe and the EU are at once taken for granted in Australian society and government, and treated with a certain disregard in the press and in political discussion. Julia Gillard's June 2012 "lecture" to the European Union, so vociferously rejected by Jose Manuel Barroso, is perhaps indicative of Australian attitudes which reach only half-truths about the topic. Essential to the CESAA mission has been the focus on teaching and learning as well as research, publication and the dissemination of knowledge about Europe within different paradigms to those which have been dominant in Australian civic discussion and Australian universities for so long now.¹

¹ "Europe won't be 'lectured' by Julia Gillard, EC chief Jose Manuel Barroso has said," *The Australian*, June 19, 2012. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/europe-wont-be-lectured-by-julia-gillard-ec-chief-jose-manuel-barroso-has-said/news-story/dda4e097b51ec66d23a4772ec373739a>, accessed May 10, 2017.

The Rise of European Studies

In a report written for the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1998, I charted the rise of European Studies departments in Australia primarily in the context of the domestic administrative restructurings that took place in Arts Faculties as a result of the decades-long decline in tertiary language enrolments, as well as to the rise of a new awareness of “Europe” and of European area-studies issues in the wake of the Fall of the Wall in 1989.² European Studies departments emerged partly in response to the dramatic changes after 1989 that could not be ignored. During the nineties and certainly after September 11, 2001, however, attention turned elsewhere, to more pressing global and regional issues. Moreover local faculty issues of resourcing and institutional resourcing and structure played an important role as well. At the University of Western Australia where I established a European Studies program in 1994, Europe did not feature in the Departments of Politics or International Relations and there was little interest in or understanding of the mechanisms of the EU. This may have been an extreme situation, but it was not unique in Australian universities at that time. Europe was present in many departments in terms of its nations, their languages, histories, economics, politics and cultures, but in a rather passive sense. Europe remained a place of tourism and increasingly distant family connections for Australians, as something known, reasonably familiar and relatively unproblematic.

Nevertheless in the wake of 1989 and as the broader implications of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty became clearer, some Australian universities developed European Studies programs in which Europe and the EU, rather than their component parts, made an appearance as a leading actor. In the meantime, Australia, especially during Paul Keating’s tenure as Prime Minister during the nineties, was becoming aware of its geo-political and economic position in an increasingly globalized Asian-Pacific environment. Area Studies, understood in terms of international relations, became a catch-word. Asian Studies had made considerable impact as a teaching and learning structure alongside the Asian languages at university level, and previously unproblematic national links and self-understandings were changing as Britain became more closely bound to Europe, and Australia to the countries of Asia and of the Indian Ocean and Pacific rim. Isolated European Studies programs were established with a new focus on the EU, especially as that body strengthened its position as an Australian trading and investment partner, overtaking both the USA and Japan in important areas by the mid-nineties.³ During the nineties and into the new century, European Studies programs at the University of Western Australia (UWA), Melbourne and Sydney universities developed very different models. The UWA model stressed Europe as an intellectual, cultural and historical concept and entity, focusing contemporary studies in its level one units around four socio-historical and cultural pillars, the history and genesis of which were traced in upper-level units.

My approach to this issue when designing a European Studies program at the University of Western Australia in the early nineties was to try to identify the main

² “European Studies,” chapter 12 of *Knowing Ourselves and Others: The Humanities in Australia into the 21st Century*, The Strategic Disciplinary Review on Research and Research Training in the Humanities. Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1998. Vol. 2, Pp. 117-126.

³ Field 1. The possibility of Australian membership of the EU was first raised in the early nineties, but was unlikely to progress given the intensified focus on Asia which began under the prime ministership of Paul Keating (1991-96). It resurfaces every now and then, most recently for example in Luke Slattery’s piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Australia has a strong case for joining the EU,” (June 27, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/australia-has-a-strong-case-for-joining-the-eu-20160627-gpslot.html>, accessed May 10, 2017).

pillars of contemporary Europe in the level one units, and to build a course structure based on these pillars in the later years of the major sequence. This was in the immediate wake of the Fall of the Wall and the massive re-alignment that was beginning to take place in terms of the Central and Eastern European nations vis a vis Russia and the ex-Soviet Union. The term “pillars” here represented a pedagogical tool for imparting broad conceptualizations of European civilizational value-systems, understandings of individual and national identity, and of European modernity. The aim at that point was to pre-emptively create a viable, coherent and integrated European Studies syllabus in an environment in which the European languages were not flourishing and risked being amalgamated *ad hoc* into departments of European Studies. In these programs fragments of society, history, culture and language were melded together into administrative majors, the rationale of which was to preserve existing staff resources and to bolster very small enrolments through the creation of generalist programs. Disciplinary coherence was often the major casualty of these programs.

European Studies at the University of Western Australia

The Level one units at UWA focused on contemporary Europe, namely the Europe of the previous five years or so, since the Fall of the Wall. The approach was informed by Central European area studies, as well as by histories, sociology and cultural studies, and introduced large amounts of case-study material in the form of films and novels as well as contemporary political and current affairs. István Bibò's seminal work and the important ongoing work Jenő Szücs in *The Three Historical Regions of Europe* as well as of figures such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Johan Arnason, Samuel Eisenstadt strongly guided my approach. Recent social theory over the past decade has engaged at a more profound level with the EU than had been the case before around 2007, stimulated no doubt by the problems brought forward by the effects in Greece and elsewhere of the Global Financial Crisis and the recognition by Europe's leading social theorists, that the EU was in danger of fragmenting for the first time in its history, and after a period of extraordinary growth since the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992. Figures such as Zygmunt Baumann, Jürgen Habermas, Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, Jan Zielonka and others have made substantial recent contributions to a broader understanding of the EU.

The four pillars that I identified in 1994 were:

1. the idea of Europe (including early ideas as well as the EU)
2. the nations, groups and communities of Europe (different conceptualizations of group identity, including ethnicities, nations, regions etc.)
3. the European concept of the self and the European individual (how the idea of the autonomous modern individual developed in the European context, leading to the underpinning of the EU citizen).
4. modernity, forward thinking and social planning in Europe (how forward social thinking emerged and influenced European development, including utopias, dystopias, socialism, up to contemporary welfare capitalism of the EU).

These foundational units led to more specialised units at Level two, focussing on each of these aspects from historical, political and cultural-intellectual history perspectives. The UWA major was surprisingly successful as a generalist course, with only a relatively small number of language students, especially in the Level one units, together

with a much larger cohort of generalist students taking the units alongside English, History and Political Science. At the University of Sydney since 2010, important aspects of the original structure have been retained, in particular the focus on the context and historical background to current events. Changes to the structure of the major sequence at Sydney, particularly for the new Bachelor of Advanced Studies introduced in 2018, have entailed greater focus on the institutions of the European Union alongside the broader definitional aspects of Europe in the 21st century. Upper levels have increased in the areas of social sciences as well as cultural history, with a suite of Level two units covering a broad range of specialisations, such as EU institutions, language policy, migration and refugees, political extremism, the Balkans, literature and dictatorship, modernity, east-west relations, religions etc. Level three units are currently in place on contemporary European social theory and Level four units focus on Global Europe, alongside exchange units and internships.

An important new development has been the increased numbers of international students, especially from China, taking the major sequence. Few of these students have any experience of Europe and many have relatively low level English skills with which to negotiate quite difficult learning materials. This has necessitated some re-orientation of the teaching material for this group. As of 2018 a pilot program with the Learning Centre has been established to help international students with the demands of complex texts and writing assignments in English.

“Siloization” of European Studies Programs

This UWA European Studies program was developed from within a languages department (German) and became a core unit for the later amalgamation of the European languages into a School of European Languages and Studies. Melbourne University followed a rather different route, developing a European Studies program around a core of political scientists, international relations and EU specialists; and the University of Sydney program originated in Economics and Government, moving to History before being settled in the School of Languages and Cultures in the early 2000s.

As a result of faculty structures, European Studies tended to become the preserve of one or another department in Australian universities, leading to the peripheralization or even exclusion of others. While History retained the overview of “Europe” in terms of the *longue durée*, the EU was largely the preserve of political science or international relations departments. The European language departments, by and large, retained their narrow focus on language and national cultures, despite the increasing importance of Europe to the social and cultural components of their courses. Other areas, such as Music, Art History or Architecture continued to operate with conceptualizations of Europe which coincided tangentially or on the periphery of European Studies. While international relations in particular engaged with the challenges of globalization in terms of area studies, this engagement remained defined by synchronic disciplinary perspectives on the present, largely ignoring the histories, cultures and dynamics of global regional interactions. Economics and Business Faculties also tended to remain a preserve unto themselves in regard to European Studies.

A case study in this “*siloization*” of European Studies and failure to engage even in a dynamic tension in regard to the competing determinations of the discipline, might be

found in Heather Field's 1999 claim that a language other than English was not necessary in order to carry out EU studies.⁴ Field suggested a "Proposed syllabus on the EU" consisting of:

5. Institutions
6. The Treaties: *From Paris to Rome to Maastricht to Amsterdam*
7. Economic Integration: *Theories and Consequences*
8. Theories of Political Integration
9. Enlargement
10. Foreign and Defence Policy
11. The Budget, the Importance of Specific Policies
12. Cultural Policy and Common Identity
13. Social and Industry Policy: *Business and the EU*
14. Citizenship and Immigration
15. Interest Groups, Problems of the EU Model & the Need for Institutional Reform⁵

At one level, Field is correct in her assertions about the importance of languages. It is entirely possible to access all official EU documentation in English. However at another level, it indicates a narrowness of focus and of scope that must, in my opinion, lead to a skewed view of even the EU, let alone Europe. Field's proposed unit focuses on the EU, paying no attention to the long shared history of Europeans which underpins every aspect of the present-day European Union. The danger of such a course, at least at undergraduate level, is clear: it can become overly focused on the functional, technocratic, and bureaucratic aspects, losing sight of the longer term objectives as well as the past histories leading to this particular structural complexity. There is thus a danger of presenting merely the institutions, structures and main policies of the EU, or even simply following the outlines of the EU's own voluminous self-presentation and documentation, without ever actually reaching a point of critical engagement and analysis. Without an understanding of broader and wider issues than merely the functioning of the EU institutions, bureaucracy and related organizations, Europe is unlikely to be comprehended in any meaningful way by our students. As Goodman notes, "there is a constant dilemma over how much theoretical or comparative context is required" in order to adequately prepare students to handle material.⁶

Contextualization has most often occurred from a historical or more recently political science and international relations angle, focussing on aspects such as democratic deficit, eastward and southward expansion, and the complex relationships between nationalism and federalism, including issues of supranational functioning and national sovereignty. However even this can be too narrow a level of contextualization to understand certain aspects of the functioning of the EU, in particular those socially and

⁴ Heather Field, 'Teaching and Researching the European Union in Australia: Aims, Methods and Content,' in Aleksandar Pavković, and Catherine Welch (eds.), *Teaching European Studies in Australia: Problems and Prospects*. Papers from the first CESAA workshop on Teaching European Studies. CESAA: Carlton South, 1999, p. 3.

⁵ Ibid, pp. 11-16.

⁶ James Goodman, 'Putting it "In its Place": Contextualising European Union Studies,' in Aleksandar Pavković, and Catherine Welch (eds.), *Teaching European Studies in Australia: Problems and Prospects*. Papers from the first CESAA workshop on Teaching European Studies. CESAA: Carlton South, 1999, p. 27.

culturally determined characteristics which departments of language and culture rather than of political science and international relations are equipped to handle.

Over the past decade or so, globalization has led to a new awareness of language study and its importance for employment opportunities as well as cultural awareness among the broad body of students, not merely language students. In the interests of globalization, university Vice Chancellors have discovered the importance of languages other than English and this is translating into increased interest in language acquisition and study abroad by students other than language-majors, although the levels of linguistic achievement remain low for meaningful involvement at non-English-speaking universities (leading to the recent proliferation of units run in English at European institutions). Changes are now underway at some universities to create interrelations where earlier there were none.

The “Discipline” of European Studies?

Many European Studies programs were cobbled together from existing History, languages and other disciplinary areas in order to satisfy local institutional needs regarding departmental rationalization and utilization of staff resources. The structural environments in which European Studies has been taught have been determined by institutional rather than academic and disciplinary interests. This history has led to the failure of European Studies failed to develop coherently or strongly as an area studies “discipline” across Australian universities. Nevertheless, part of the reason for the failure of European Studies to flourish over this period also lies with our failure as Europeanists to have engaged from the beginning in a dynamic and constructive dialogue as to what European Studies is. We cannot just move the blame for the weakness of the discipline to the stronger claims of more pressing interests in Asia and the US on students’ attention.

Over the past decade CESAA, in tandem with its journal, *ANZJES (Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies)* under the leadership of Bruno Mascitelli (Swinburne University) and with Matt Killingsworth (University of Tasmania) and Natalia Chaban (University of Canterbury, New Zealand) as foundational editors of ANZJES, has attempted to rectify this situation by functioning as a meeting point for interdisciplinary engagement with matters relating to Europe. The organization and its journal represent the broad body of Australian “Europeanists,” as opposed to those “political scientists, students of culture, economics or art historians working on Europe.” These are of course overlapping categories. The point I am making is that there is a place for European Studies that is more than the sum of its sometimes unrelated parts. As Europeanists, we need to engage more strongly with the interactions rather than merely with the narrow disciplinary focus of our subject. Moreover those of us who identify as Europeanists, need to encourage our colleagues who work on Europe to also think along a different axis of institutional and intellectual identity than the merely disciplinary. And as practitioners of an area-studies approach we need to engage much more profoundly with the ways in which we conceptualize Europe, not depend merely on the self-advertisement of the EU for our self-understandings. The same applies *mutatis mutandis* to other area studies programs, particularly Asian Studies and there is great potential for those of us working in different regions of area-studies to also communicate better with each other, especially given the importance of global studies in contemporary curricula.

The area in which the discussion and engagement of Europeanists at the moment might best begin, however is at the level of undergraduate teaching. For it is there that we have to present a coherent model of European Studies in a concrete sense. Our major and Honours sequences must provide students not with a supermarket aisle of disconnected units, but rather with a clear pathway of interrelated and deeply connected learning outcomes.

The rationale for this particular opening session of the inaugural conference series at the University of Sydney, *European Studies in Australia*, is to bring us together as Europeanists across the full range of disciplines to ask what European Studies is? What we teach? How we teach it? And even to whom are we teaching it in Australia in 2017, with its relatively large numbers of international students primarily from China? How do we introduce this broad and complex field of European Studies to our students? What do we begin with? What do we include? How do we structure the material? Where do we draw the limits? Do we take an *ab initio* approach or do we restrict ourselves to the EU? Do we start with the Sack of Rome or with the Treaty of Rome?