

Applied Sociology Thematic Group
For Sociologists who work outside University

Contact email for June 2012

Mid-Winter or Mid-Summer Greetings (depending on your hemisphere),

This month I turn to a topic that is inside Universities, at least in Australia. It seems that 'Productivity' has become their new buzzword. The Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University recently wrote to his staff with the following message.

"As a research-intensive University, we are judged, and receive funding, based on our research performance. The University's proposal is that assessments of academic staff will be based on their research outputs. ... The process will be based primarily on relative research performance on a University-wide basis."

As a result of this policy it is reported that the University of Sydney will slash staff by 7.5%, with Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence saying "We can no longer carry members of the university who are not pulling their weight: it is simply too expensive to do so."

TASA has been looking at ways to get more recognition for sociologists. One avenue that has been explored is the ABS Classification of Occupations. The Bureau of Statistics has decreed that:

For "sociologist" to justify a separate occupational category, the number of professionals who primarily specialise and are practising in the sociology field must be statistically significant and comparable to other occupations within the "Social Professionals" Unit Group.

They also point out that University staff who teach Sociology are classified as "University Lecturers and Tutors" and not as sociologist.

Given the new decree from Sydney and other Universities about research output, it would seem that we can now claim that University staff is primarily employed in the exercise of their profession rather than any teaching role.

Whilst all this is going on, the world economy is falling apart and employment in commercial or government is rapidly reducing and this must reflect on the number of sociologists employed outside of Universities. The current membership of TASA is composed of 52% in academic appointments and 42% other work and 6% not identified.

It seem likely that at least some commercial and government employers may find it cheaper to hire university staff, who will now be looking for contract sociology projects, for any sociology work they may have, rather than meet the costs of employing their own sociologists.

Please share with us what you see happening in the world beyond the university.

In addition, TASA is keen to expand the services it can offer to those not in academia and if you can identify anything that would be of use, please let us know.

Alan Scott
Convenor