

Push to put arts on commercial footing

Alexander Symonds

Universities offering postgraduate courses in research and commercialisation skills are looking to increase their appeal to arts and humanities students and assist this cohort in developing greater business acumen.

Research and commercialisation offerings tend to target scientists and engineers, whose work has a closer link with the development of new technologies and seeing these through to market.

But a number of universities hope to expand their target market to include arts students, as well as doctors and lawyers, to ensure more postgraduates are well equipped to deal with today's business world.

Universities also point to federal government funding — available through the commonwealth's commercialisation training scheme launched last year — as fostering the creation of more courses in the area.

The course co-ordinator of Southern Cross University's graduate certificate in research management, Kath Fisher hoped to attract more arts students over the next two to three years.

"We've had a couple of students from the creative arts enrol [in the graduate certificate] because they want to commercialise their own creative products, so it's a way in which they can make a living from their art if they understand about business plans," Dr Fisher said.



Deakin University's Morley Muralitharan will target arts students. Photo: JAMES DAVIES

"Most people in the arts and social sciences don't think about commercialisation, but there's a lot in the course that's relevant to them. We could be developing units perhaps more tailored to them. I'd like to head in that direction, it's one of my goals."

But she said the development of offerings for such students could depend on government funding remaining in place.

Deakin University has introduced a graduate certificate of research commercialisation this year.

Associate head, development, at the school of life and environmental sciences, Morley Muralitharan, said it was seeking greater enrolment numbers and would step up advertising efforts next year, including to students in the arts and humanities.

"The majority of the students will be in the sciences, but . . . some of the arts students may become managers, and if they become managers of industry, they need to know about commercialisation," he said.

The Australian School of Business at the University of NSW has also begun a graduate certificate in research management and commercialisation.

The program director for the graduate certificate, Wallace Bridge, said the program was designed for PhD students in science, medicine and engineering, but there was a desire to establish a similar offering for arts and humanities students.

"We'll need to develop a different program for arts and social science students because the business models are quite different to those based on science and technology opportunities. If you take all students into the one program, you will only give them generic skills rather than the professional depth of training they need."

Business developed from the arts was more likely to resemble small business and be funded through debt rather than private equity, as in the science-based technology field.

"Though both sets of students would benefit from learning how to start up a business, the processes involved and the emphasis on the various stages are very different."

Dr Bridge is also the program director of an undergraduate diploma in innovation management, conferred by the faculty of science at UNSW. He said he was looking at expanding the diploma to students in law and medicine.