

---

## **Academic identity in themes for the Third Decade Strategic Plan at Divine Word University**

Philip Gibbs & Jeanette Baird

### **Abstract**

This paper, from a wider research study exploring how academic identities are constructed, maintained, presented and adjusted at Divine Word University, describes themes that academics would like to be emphasised in the University's current Strategic Plan, as a way of discovering significant features of their desired or projected academic identities.

Interviews with 57 academic staff on the University's three main campuses, and specifically their responses to a question on what DWU should be promoting in its Strategic Plan, provided a data set for analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify several key themes, three of which are aspirational and reflect achievements yet to be realised by the University. DWU academics are open to engaging with these aspirations. Other themes address more immediate issues of facilities, rewards and parity of esteem for branch campuses.

The findings indicate a general desire by academic staff to reinforce their academic identities and capabilities through international partnerships, professional development, the conduct of research and the use of e-learning. These desires are congruent with several strategic objectives in the Plan and with the organisational identity that they wish the University to project. Our research adds to knowledge of academic identity formation in developing nations and will help the University better to support its staff.

**Key words:** Academic identity, strategic plan, Divine Word University, Papua New Guinea

### **Introduction**

In this paper, we describe themes that Divine Word University academics would like to be emphasised in the University's current Strategic Plan, to reveal significant features of their desired academic identities. We explore interactions between the professional identities that academics would like to be supported and the University's organisational identity. The analysis of interviews with academic staff augments existing knowledge of academic identity formation in developing nations and will help the University better to support its staff.

Our research findings come from a wider research study that explores how academic identities are constructed, maintained, presented and adjusted at

Divine Word University (DWU) in Papua New Guinea (PNG). This study addresses a neglected aspect of academic identity studies by bringing to the fore the voices of academics from a developing nation.

Formerly Divine Word Institute, the University is a faith-based ecumenical tertiary institution established as a University in 1996. Students come from all 20 provinces of Papua New Guinea and abroad. The University has five campuses; three with full-time residential students: Madang with 1773 students, Wewak with 957 students and Rabaul with 532 students. The University also offers programs for students to study part-time in blended learning mode. In 2020 there is a total of 160 academic staff.

DWU's vision is to be recognised nationally and internationally as an innovative University, open to all, serving society through quality research, learning and teaching, and community service in a Christian environment. The third decade of DWU's Strategic Plan (2016–2026) assists in achieving that vision. Through implementation of the Strategic Plan, DWU expects to be seen as a well-managed medium-sized internationally-connected university with significant established research and online learning capabilities. Also, it will continue to be respected for the commitment of its graduates to Christian ethical conduct and social responsibility.

### **The research approach**

Our research for the wider study involved semi-structured interviews with academics at three campuses of DWU. A series of twenty-one questions was developed, exploring aspects of academic identity construction, academic values, and some broader questions on internationalisations, Melanesian culture, the Christian ethos at the university and the third decade Strategic Plan. Interviewees ranged from senior academic managers to new junior academics. In all, 57 interviews were conducted between July 2018 and May 2019 with volunteer interviewees comprising over a third of the DWU academic staff: 34 from the main Madang Campus; 11 from Wewak Campus; and 12 from Rabaul Campus. Three of the four interviewers were Papua New Guinean and the fourth is a long-time resident of PNG. Interviews were mainly conducted in English, which is an additional language for many Papua New Guineans.

The 57 interviews provided the data set for a reflexive thematic analysis of interview transcripts, exploring the words and concepts employed by academic staff. Themes for each question were developed inductively from the researchers' iterative readings of the transcripts. Initial themes were used for early coding using QDA Miner software, with a small amount of refinement of themes after some initial coding. From the detailed coding for each question, each of four researchers prepared a summary of the major themes and ideas from individual questions, shared with all researchers to enable identification and discussion of significant findings.

Our approach to the overall study is constructivist, recognising that individuals' ideas about their academic identity are constantly and reflexively adjusted through action and dialogue in response to various influences (Delanty, 2008;

Fitzmaurice, 2013; Billot & King, 2017). One corollary of this approach is that our interviewees were doing 'identity work' during our interviews. As they presented their ideas, they responded to concepts offered by the interviewers and, possibly, adjusted their conceptualisation of their own academic identity.

The DWU Strategic Plan is the major institutional plan articulating the strategic objectives of the university to achieve its vision and mission. Staff at DWU are aware that a Strategic Plan exists and are used to referring to the seven strategic objectives of the current plan in developing and monitoring annual operational plans. As a final question at the end of a lengthy interview about academic identities, the respondents were provided with a chance to comment on what elements of the Plan should be emphasised. Specifically, the question was: "DWU is now in its third decade. What, in your view, should DWU be promoting in its third decade plan?"

By including a question on the University's Strategic Plan, and other questions on the purposes of a university, the DWU ethos, and expectations of academics, we were seeking to explore an interplay between the academic identities presented in dialogue by our interviewees and the organisational identity of DWU. Various authors point to the potential for the trajectory of academic identities to be shaped by institutional affordances and priorities (McAlpine & Akerlind, 2010): "The university is not separate from its staff, but reflects the interaction of an institutional form with the values and priorities of those who work within the gates" (Davis, 2012, online).

The Strategic Plan was selected as a reference point that could help interviewees crystallise their views around DWU specifically, not just any university. In so doing, we recognised that a university's strategic plan is not just a roadmap but is "permeated by symbolic aspects that are closely linked to organizational identity" (Fumasoli, Pinheiro & Stensaker, 2014, p. 8).

We were not seeking to find out whether academic staff could recall the contents of the DWU Strategic Plan. Rather, we accept that their responses reflect topics they are aware of from the Plan but are conditioned by the matters that interviewees reflexively choose to express as their preferences for the University to promote, internally or externally. These preferences inform us about the type of identities that academics wish to project, the organisational identity they wish the University to exhibit, and the ways in which staff wish to be supported by DWU to develop further their academic identities.

Academics in any PNG university are working within an introduced, highly-westernised environment, largely Anglo-American, and they are involved in academic practices that are internationally recognised and referenced. Hence, we expect some global similarities in responses by academics on the future priorities of a university, especially in regard to human resources and facilities. Yet, responses to an open question about what this particular University should promote in its third decade plan also reveal how individuals view the University and present its aspirations and future through their experience as

academics. Discovering key aspects of academic identity reflected in their responses to the question is the objective of this paper.

### **Themes from asking for views on Strategic Plan priorities**

Five overlapping themes emerged in the response to the final question on what DWU should promote in its third decade Strategic Plan, a plan that is already being implemented. These themes are:

- A. Internationalization and partnerships
- B. Academic and professional development
- C. Aspirations for research and e-learning
- D. Areas for improvement
- E. Branch campus support (Wewak and Rabaul academic staff).

These themes touch on most of the seven strategic objectives in the current DWU Strategic Plan, with the exception of financial sustainability. In contrast to the Strategic Plan, where student transformation is a key objective, our academic interviewees did not seek to emphasise learning and teaching in their views on matters that DWU should be promoting. A small number of academics nominated supporting student formation, as discussed under D below. Support for branch campuses is included in this list as a significant theme especially for academic staff on Wewak and Rabaul Campuses.

A brief account of responses under each of these themes, with examples, is presented below.

#### ***A. Internationalisation and partnerships***

Respondents presented a challenging combination of sustaining indigenous identities and learning from the global. Western culture is seen as desirable whilst maintaining PNG and Melanesian identity (Madang, female academic #11).

“I think both cultures can be lived side by side and we can draw from each other. Draw knowledge and ways of doing things, in a way that we do not totally discard our own” (Madang, female academic #12).

The majority of respondents clearly considered globalization as desirable, several respondents suggesting that it was time for the University to become visible internationally, not only nationally.

"We should start to promote DWU as an international university, not just a local university. It has to be promoted at a world stage, international stage. We need to be able to provide the kind of quality tertiary education that is expected of an international university" (Madang, male academic #16).

As part of this recognition, there is a strong view that DWU has to meet ‘international standards’, accepting that these standards are determined by

those in overseas higher education systems. Other respondents referred to this consideration as "learning without borders" (Madang, female academic #11) or operating "at the same level playing field" (Madang, male academic #13). Globalization will mean that in the third decade DWU must prepare graduates with attributes desirable in the job market both within and outside of PNG.

Some feel that the University is well on the way and that the hard work of staff should be recognized: "I think we've done a lot in setting ground work for international standards" (Madang, female academic #20). Another staff member summed up their view as follows:

"On the whole, bringing the university in line with the third decade plan is setting a standard for PNG in the international arena in terms of education not just educating people for our own benefit, but citizens who can contribute meaningfully in the world as a whole and not just in PNG" (Madang female academic #20).

Strong engagement with other universities is an important part of internationalization, not only in terms of standards, but also in establishing avenues for staff development.

"The university should have a strong connection with certain universities internationally so that when it comes to staff professional development staff can go for studies if that connection is already in place" (Kabaleo Rabaul, male academic #9).

And, with an international academic presence, DWU gains more recognition:

"...globally exporting our national academics to other developed countries and universities outside that we can also compete and be at the same level playing field that's the thing that I would like to see. I mean it would be nice if we can have one of our academics or several teaching in UK or US, because we will be promoting the capacity building of this university within the country nationally and globally as well" (Madang, male academic #13).

Partnerships within PNG should also be explored. Negotiated agreements with the PNG government and local organizations may help ground what is offered for learning at the University but may also open the way for internships for experience and possible employment after graduation. As one respondent said, "I feel that if we partnered with, for example, Oil Search or Mineral Resource Authority, we could provide placements for them" (Madang, male academic #33).

### *B. Academic and Professional Development*

Coupled with aspirations for research and e-learning discussed below is the call by interviewees for more academic and professional development. The modest goal of the Strategic Plan is to increase the proportion of academic staff with doctoral qualifications to 20%. Currently there are 27 academic staff with

doctorates, which is approximately 17% of the total. Several respondents noted the importance of upgrading professional qualifications, with some specifically referring to the importance of having staff with doctoral qualifications: "Staff qualification is one of the things we should look at" (Madang, Male academic #26).

"One of the aims they are telling us is all of us should be ... at the doctorate level, all lecturers here. For all campuses. And that's one thing which I like with Divine Word, and I will stick with Divine Word because of that, the status they're trying to do with the lecturers, I think is good" (Kabaleo Rabaul, male academic, #1).

The majority of those with doctorates are on the Madang campus and there is a call for professional development on all campuses (Kabaleo Rabaul, male academic #1; Vunapope Rabaul, Female academic #5).

"Staff development, has to be a priority, so that we know, it has to be the immediate HoDs who should already have this plan for their staff, saying who's going for training, well, all these plans have to be in place so that we know who's going when, so that not that everybody is going at one time. And then we have staff shortage, there's no one to stay back and teach" (Kabaleo Rabaul, Female Academic #5).

### *C. Aspirations for Research and E-learning*

Many respondents mentioned research as an important dimension of the third decade plan. Research must be "embedded" onto any new strategies" (Madang, male academic, #30) and academics are called to promote a "research culture" (Madang, female academic #22). A research culture "has a lot to do in terms of researching and publishing and attending conferences and doing all of that because that's what academics are supposed to do" (Madang, female academic #7).

"...we should move up in terms of staff development and I think we've done a lot of teaching, we should be doing a lot more research so that we are implementing or doing the strategic objectives that are outlined in the third decade plan..." (Madang, female academic #18).

The big challenge is how to devote time to research without feeling guilty about neglecting students when spending time out of the classroom (Madang, female academic #1). Some admit to doing a lot of teaching but realize that they should be finding time and energy for research, which is part of the third decade strategic plan.

Respondents note how involvement in research will hopefully bring out the unique contribution of DWU, different from the other universities in PNG. DWU must take into account these other institutions because the university needs to be competitive in attracting international partners to come and support research (Madang, female academic #23). The reward for research is not "that you do research and your pay goes up" (Madang, female academic #22). The

same respondent affirms that research "for us ... is satisfaction, we publish something and we go and present something, that brings satisfaction." Others note that one of the university's assets must be competent graduates who are trained and motivated to do research.

The other main area identified as necessary for DWU, as a maturing university, is to further develop E-learning. Respondents acknowledge this as a potential strength, building on established support for ICT at DWU.

"We have relatively good global online connectivity but we need a support team to support the learning process with e-learning. Not only us participating in online programs hosted overseas, but for us to offer our programs internationally" (Madang, female academic #28).

E-learning capability is especially important for the University's primary teacher education activities in Kabaleo, Rabaul and Wewak, due to the importance of introducing technology in education. The internet functions relatively well on the Madang campus, but not as well on the other campuses. A lecturer from St Benedicts Teacher's College in Wewak comments, "I saw all the improvements at St Benedicts but then went to the office and put on the computer and it was so slow and I thought, OK, I think these are areas that need more, yeah" (Wewak, female academic #2).

Respondents from these campuses, and even one or two on Madang campus, considered it only fair for staff at the branch campuses to benefit from the same internet services as provided at the Madang campus so that "everyone is operating at the same level" (Madang, male academic #29). A respondent from Rabaul observed how "everything will come into place if we have online programs" (Kabaleo Rabaul, male academic #9).

An important aspect of maturity is higher academic standards. "We transform our students, we transform ourselves to instil higher standards. ... Because we are moving forward to go global and international, these strategies must also move along those lines" (Madang, male academic #30). Such comments set the scene for ongoing discussion of standards and pass marks, as appropriate standards might not be the same for all faculties. One might pass with 50% in the humanities, but is a medical student with a 50% pass really qualified to deal with patients?

"We have the Arts Faculty who have their own principles and guidelines and the Medicine should have its own. I'm not sure about the Business and Informatics" (Madang, female academic #18). Respondents from the Education Faculty, and especially the sites where teacher education occurs, are very concerned about the ability of their students to write well. Considering the skills of students coming to them in first year they are suggesting some form of foundation studies to up-skill students before they get into their first year of teacher training.

"We should give a foundation kind of year, for language and mathematics. These are two important subject areas. And the time that

we have to train these students is not enough. ... if I have it my way, I'd like to keep them here for one more year and really drum in the content and pedagogy, so they know how to go and teach it as well" (Wewak, female academic #10).

*D. Areas for improvement*

Not surprisingly, a number of academics called for better infrastructure and facilities to be prioritised. Consider, for example the response of a staff member involved with the Chemistry lab.

"When it comes to having that chemistry lab I just want to say that it would be the most expensive lab. The university has to upgrade this stuff so that when we have everything we are at the international standard, that's what I think" (Madang, female academic #14).

Presumably the respondent has a concept of what an international standard might be, and some impression of what would be required to attain it.

Several respondents brought up funding issues and improvement with better pay and rewards for academics. The issue is couched in language such as the University is "looking after" the staff in terms of remuneration. Others protested "we are struggling to survive here" (Madang, male academic #19) or as another put it, "we are wasting time here at Divine Word" (Madang, male academic #26). There is mention of a desire for "incentives" or of "other income generating opportunities supported by the University" (Madang, male academic #15).

Overall, the level of complaint over resourcing was fairly muted among our interviewees. The comments are not all critical, and progress is acknowledged, but it seems that cash takes precedence when it comes to rewards.

"...at least Divine Word has done a lot of these things already, you know, providing housing, the white goods are being provided and internet access, I think these are good things going on. But in the PNG context, they like to see a big pay packet" (Madang, male academic #26).

This response is an astute reflection of a common theme in PNG, where extrinsic rewards, and the affordances of such rewards for support of extended societal groups, are important. More money is frequently and hopefully described as a likely 'motivator' of staff endeavour, a construct that sits awkwardly with the intrinsic motivations of many academics. At the same time, it should be recognised that financial reward is a typical 'hygiene' factor (Herzberg, 1968), a deficiency in which will be demotivating.

Being still on the same wage scale as when one began with DWU is disheartening and comments were made that even a small increment in salary would be welcomed and would be a sign that the University "cares" for the staff. The implication is that such incentives would help retain staff and would



improve the situation and promote quality by retaining people who have experience.

In reality there are many, many, qualified staff who remain faithful to the University while accepting that salaries are not high. Several respondents however felt strongly that there would be an improvement in services if qualified people were given "the right rewards" (Madang, male academic #19).

“If the university is really serious about quality then it should come up with some innovative ways to retaining people, give them other income generating opportunities that are supported by the university so that can keep people in” (Madang, male academic #15).

A difficulty for many academic staff at DWU is that they cannot hope to achieve academic promotion unless they obtain a higher qualification. Only a small number of our interviewees have a PhD, although most have Masters degrees. DWU academics recognize the need for upgrading of their qualifications, as discussed in B above, but still would hope for some tangible recognition of their actual efforts in supporting student learning.

Improvement is also seen in terms of better formation of students and, specifically, in enabling graduates to be leaders of change in national development. This aim is related to the University's values of service and national advancement (Salonda, 2008). One does not enter and leave DWU as the same person. “We need the transformational change of our attitudes for the future of the country and the university” (Madang, male academic #25). The same respondent implies that DWU staff can do better: “We want change that appreciates our roots but at the same time promote, uplift your... contribution to development of our country.”

The theme of student transformation emerges strongly in responses to another question in the wider study about the purposes of a university, so it is not surprising that it receives some mention in responses to the question about the University's Strategic Plan. However, there were far fewer suggestions to prioritise ‘student transformation’ than there were statements about promoting other themes of partnerships, academic professional development, research, and e-learning. We suggest this relative lack of emphasis may be because our academic respondents believe that their work in supporting student transformation is already well-established, whereas achievements under these other themes are yet to be realised.

#### *E. Branch Campuses*

The study included branch campuses in Rabaul and Wewak and there are aspirations, particularly from those branch campuses, that "we all, the main campus with all the other small branches out there working together..." (Kabaleo Rabaul, male academic #9). As one respondent from Rabaul stated “DWU should be promoting oneness. That means whatever happens on the main campus happens at Kaindi [Wewak] and here as well” (Rabaul, female academic #2). This is seen not only practical, but also as fair.

"Madang campus probably is benefitting more than the other campuses, who knows. We need to find out from others as well whether they are also benefitting on the same services provided here. So that fairness and at the same time we need to build all these things up properly so that everyone is operating at the same level" (Madang, male academic #29).

Issues of equivalence and cooperation across campuses were felt by academics in the Wewak and Rabaul Campuses but, perhaps understandably, were mentioned by only one or two academics at Madang Campus. Some of these issues concerned equitable access to the resources to develop and expand technology-enhanced learning, as noted in the discussions above.

"So like, St Benedict campus, we don't have all of this in place... only the main campus, they have all the system in place. So like, in the 3rd decade, like all the campuses at [Port Moresby] or Wewak, and Kabaleo, they all should be digitalised" (Wewak, male academic #3).

Parity of esteem and sharing of experiences are crucial, as another respondent states:

"I think one thing that it could do is to look at our sister campuses and see how they are functioning. That would be very important. Maybe we will, we would need some academics from the main campus coming around to see how we are doing our stuff... So we may have staff exchanges, not them coming and staying permanently, but coming and giving us input..." (Wewak, female academic #8).

We have included these heartfelt pleas of academics from branch campuses as a separate theme to illustrate how a university can stress being "one university" in its plans while, from the point of view of branch campus academics, requiring much greater efforts to avoid blind spots and ensure actual cross-campus awareness, cooperation and access to resources.

### **Academic identity and the mediating effects of organisational identity**

In this section, we discuss interview responses in the light of two questions:

- What do the specific aspects of University life that respondents thought should be emphasized in DWU's Strategic Plan tell us about their conceptions of their own academic identity?
- What do academics' responses indicate about the relationship between their projected academic identities and DWU's organizational identity?

#### *The conceptions of academic identity that are emphasized*

We take the view, consistent with our constructivist approach, that the remarks made by interviewees in response to the specific question are a product of reflexive self-presentation, mingling aspirations, ideas from previous interview

questions, remembered phrases from the Strategic Plan, and current experiences.

Firstly, respondents presented a desire for DWU to reach 'international standards'. Often, the relevance of this aspiration to the realities of practice in PNG was not questioned. Other academics, however, reflect on the challenging combination of sustaining indigenous identities while learning from the global.

Academic standards are essential for maintaining and developing a mature university. Such standards must be respected internationally, but also suited to the local situation. Student teachers and medical students are both called to do well, though practically they face different disciplinary challenges. This implies that an academic will shape their application of standards according to the nature of the field of practice, while still preserving academic collegiality. Additionally, academics wish to position DWU not just as a local university but as a university to be promoted globally. As a consequence, they are presenting themselves as academics willing to function on the world stage, for example, by undertaking doctoral studies overseas. They associate this with well-managed staff development:

“Staff development has to be planned well so that one is on the lookout for someone able to take one's place when one goes for studies. A good preparation is support for presenting at conferences in PNG, which for DWU could be improved.”

Secondly, and relatedly, DWU academics express an identity that values ongoing academic and professional development, especially the possibility of obtaining a doctorate, regarded as the pinnacle of academic achievement by many in PNG higher education. In reality, the costs in time, effort and resources to even attempt to engage in doctoral studies are significant for most people and especially so for DWU (and many PNG) academics. An aspiration for a scholarship for overseas study is often presented as the only way forward, although there may be other options. There is a nascent appreciation of the link between salaries and doctoral qualifications but the barriers can be daunting and the University offers few specific incentives to support academics to pursue doctoral studies within PNG.

Thirdly, knowledge creation, research and promoting a research culture emerged as important dimensions of academic life for our respondents. “We should be publishing not just writing up proposals or reading about research, we should be actively publishing papers” (Madang, female academic #18). In reference to misgivings about their experience of a teaching-research balance, some respondents highlight the importance of research, not only personally, but in terms of being competitive as a university in attracting international partners. There are also suggestions that graduates should be trained in modern e-learning technology and motivated to do research.

DWU is mostly a teaching university. While research is recognized as a major purpose of any university, along with preparing future generations of leaders

for PNG, academic staff are conscious that most of them are not engaged in any research-related activity. If academics are going to engage more in research, it appears the University must find ways to channel their desires into meaningful, supported research projects and activities that can reasonably be attempted without jeopardizing teaching quality.

Fourthly, respondents referred to academics supported by good infrastructure and facilities and motivated by incentives such as just remuneration. They looked for income generating opportunities supported by the University with the implication that such incentives would help retain staff and would promote quality by retaining people who have experience. The intentions are not entirely personal. Academics also make an important contribution to the development of the nation. So, adequate financial reward and a sense of helping national development are presented by some as significant elements in construction of their academic identities.

Fifthly, the views of academics on the two main branch campuses amplify the need for partnerships and networking, equitable resources and ongoing opportunities for research and further studies identified in the first four themes.

Taken together, our interviewees provide insight into key aspects of their emerging and desired academic identities at Divine Word University. Although they are not profoundly discontented with their actual situation, academics are quite aspirational. Their desired academic identities envisage richer and more complex future engagements with international professional and higher education communities.

#### *The role of DWU's organizational identity in shaping academic identities*

DWU's organisational identity appears to exert a noticeable mediating influence on the construction of respondents' projected academic identities.

Among the academic staff interviewed, there is strong, if implicit, support for the collectivity that is the University. Interviewees generally imply that what is good for the University will be good for them. There is a sense of pride in what DWU has accomplished and its solid reputation within PNG. Many comments by interviewees reveal a wish for the University to project a stronger image of itself internationally, by delivering on its stated aspirations for research and leadership in e-learning. Respondents' conception of the University is essentially of an institution that is 'growing and developing', feeling its way into becoming a more mature higher learning institution. The Strategic Plan acknowledges that DWU is on a journey and this idea echoes the emphases that academics want DWU to promote.

Academics at DWU share a focus on 'growth and development' with academics round the world. Many newer universities – not only those in emerging nations – share this overall notion as a primary marker of their organisational identity. More mature universities stress the need for evolution and change but with a stronger element of preserving and extending already-

established reputations. The pronounced isomorphism of university missions and the effects of global status competition (Marginson, 2006) find echoes in the aspirations of DWU academics for the University.

At the same time, we suggest that academic staff at DWU rely for clues to shape their own academic identities more strongly on the University's ethos and managed organisational identity than would academics in a traditional secular Western university, or even academics at one of the longer-established PNG public universities, such as the University of Papua New Guinea.

There are several established features of DWU as an institution that are likely to support such a finding. Firstly, the University's Christian identity is significant for bringing all campuses together and contributing to the identity of many individuals as Christian academics. As one respondent expressed it:

“Christian ethics should be a standalone unit and it should be a compulsory unit for this university. Because that makes DWU as a different university to others in this country” (Madang, male academic #10).

Moreover, as a new university and because of its history and culture, DWU is characterised more strongly by top-down management than by longstanding academic collegiality (Salonda, 2008). In this respect, DWU might resemble new universities that have evolved from institutes of technology in many countries.

Many of our interviewees did not come to DWU with a prior background in higher education institutions; instead, they came from professional fields, including teaching, or from industry. Their norms of academic identity therefore will have been learnt mostly at the University, through their own activities and interactions with colleagues and management.

Further, hierarchy is a well-known and widely experienced form of organisation in many parts of PNG, so there is acceptance of the role of leaders in shaping expectations and roles. From emphases that academics say they desire but are unable individually to effect, namely, to engage in research and e-learning, we deduce that academics are seeking more senior and experienced leaders, who will bring these activities into being, thus facilitating a surer pathway for all academic staff.

We speculate that academic identity in a collectivist society like PNG might be quite closely aligned to a group sense of identity as part of an academic organisation but this would be a subject for future research.

### **Conclusion**

This summary of the views of DWU academics on what should be promoted by the University in its third decade reveals substantial congruence between individual aspirations and the objectives of the Strategic Plan. On a practical note, the responses of academics suggest some ways in which the University

can be more intentional about helping lecturers to enrich their academic identities in alignment with the University's strategic development.

DWU academics' preferred emphases in the Strategic Plan reflect their wishes to achieve academic identities that are more strongly networked with colleagues overseas, that have opportunities for additional financial rewards and professional development, and that are supported equally across all campuses. Individually desired academic identities are mediated by the need for the University as a whole to achieve these goals for all academics, through more dedicated leadership in research and e-learning. Academic staff are indicating that they are desirous of engaging in research, e-learning and international activities but, implicitly, they are asking for more structured and scaffolded experiences to bring them along these paths. Mere exhortations to 'just do it' and ad hoc professional development activities are less likely to be effective.

The words of academics appear to suggest the need for an even more managed approach to institutional development at DWU in its third decade. While this may be so in respect of planning, our interviewees indicate that what they would value are opportunities and support to expand their personal capabilities. Renewed attention to appointing pro-active and experienced academic leaders and mentors may help DWU lecturers to develop as autonomous, well-rounded academics, which at the same time will build the University's reputation.

## References

- Billot, J., & King, V. (2017). The missing measure? Academic identity and the induction process. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 36(3), 612–624. DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2017.1288705
- Davis, G. (2012). The Australian Idea of a University. *Meanjin*, Winter 2012. Retrieved from: <https://meanjin.com.au/essays/the-australian-idea-of-a-university/>
- Delanty, G. (2008). Academic Identities and Institutional Change. In: R. Barnett & R. Di Napoli (Eds), *Changing Identities in Higher Education: Voicing Perspectives*. Routledge, 124-133.
- Fitzmaurice, M. (2013). Constructing professional identity as a new academic: A moral endeavour. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38, 613–622. doi:10.1080/03075079.2011.594501
- Fumasoli, T., Pinheiro, R., & Stensaker, B. (2014). Strategizing Identity in Higher Education. ISL Working Paper 2014:3, Department of Political Science and Management. University of Agder, Norway.
- Hertzberg, F. (1968). *Work and the nature of man*. Staples Press.
- McAlpine, L., & Akerlind, G. (eds) (2010). *Becoming an Academic: International Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.
- Marginson, S. (2006). Dynamics of National and Global Competition in Higher Education. *Higher Education*, 52, 1–39. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-004-7649-x>

---

Salonda, L. (2008). Exploration of university culture: A Papua New Guinea case study. PhD thesis, Victoria University, Australia.

### **Authors**

**Philip Gibbs** is Deputy President and Professor of Social Research at Divine Word University. He is a Divine Word Missionary priest and has served in various capacities in Papua New Guinea since 1973. He holds a Post-graduate diploma in Anthropology from Sydney University, an MBA from Divine Word University, and a doctorate in Fundamental Theology from the Gregorian University, Rome.

**Jeanette Baird** is Adjunct Professor of Higher Education at Divine Word University. She is a higher education consultant specialising in quality assurance and governance. Jeanette holds the degrees of BA (Hons) and B Litt from the University of Melbourne, an MBA from RMIT University and a PhD from the University of New England in Australia.

**Acknowledgements:** The authors thank all members of the DWU academic community who participated in this research by volunteering to be interviewed and sharing their thoughts and insights. They recognise also Professor Maretta Kula-Semos who was part of the original team planning the project, and Graduate Researchers Peter Nasale and Danielle Tenakanai who are currently members of the research team on the wider academic identities project.

---oo0oo---