

University in Community – The Homo sapiens Centre

Executive Summary

We humans are a species, *Homo sapiens*. Our cultures, languages, religions are the thin veneer of identity we pick up from our immersion in our fellow human environment from birth onwards through life. Our occupations and professions are a subset of these cultures. Recent advances in modern science have given us deeper insights into the three most deeply existential questions we humans face –

WHO am I? (That is, my relationship to other humans and ancestors.);

WHAT am I? / WHAT is my 'I'? (That is, my biological origins and grounding.); and

From WHERE have I come? (That is, the origins of our species in relation to our present-day genetic profiles.).

Our world is in a sorry state – species extinctions and climate change; brutal wars and challenges to the international rule-of-law; basic human rights violations; widening socio-economic divide; racism, caste and slavery; misogyny, domestic violence, and abuse of children; misinformation, disinformation and challenges to liberal democracy; the persistence of endemics, and resurgence of pandemics.

This submission argues that there is a way for humanity to think more deeply, past the cultures and belief systems which divide us, towards an understanding of our core selves and what might help unite us. This may help us to fully realise our predicament and develop possible solutions in more meaningful discussion. Our universities, in their communities, would play a central role in achieving this. Universities are probably the most multi-cultural centres in the Nation. Considering both staff and attending students – across the age spectrum; the sexual identity spectrum; indigenous/non-indigenous spectrum; socio-economic spectrum; religious/non-religious spectrum; occupation/profession spectrum; political spectrum, and many more.

This submission proposes that a 'Homo sapiens Centre' be established in every public Australian university. This Centre could be housed within the main library complex of the university so that there is ready access for all staff and students no matter what areas of study they are following. Associated facilities would need to include a specific section of the library dedicated to the reference material, individual computer booths for private study, and at least one or two discussion rooms with a central table, comfortable chairs around three sides, a large computer screen on the wall and a large white board to one side.

The software prototype discussion framework for the Homo sapiens Centre is called 'A Biologist's Workbook'. The core of the framework used is the contents page list of the biology textbook 'Biology'. The three parts of the Workbook use as their starting point the most relevant chapter relating to the topic to be developed, updated, and discussed. This approach demonstrates from the

beginning that the following Mind Maps are thoroughly based on a firm, modern biological grounding.

Part 1 of 'A Biologist's Workbook' is a timeline Mind Map, and develops and discusses the origins and evolution of religion up to the Axial Age and the dawning of rational scientific thinking. The five Core Concepts of modern biology are presented as examples.

Part 2 of 'A Biologist's Workbook' also has a timeline Mind Map format, and summarises the Homo sapiens story from early related species seven million years ago to three hundred thousand years ago when our earliest Homo sapiens ancestors emerged in Africa. The timeline then follows in more detail H. sapiens developments to the present day. What is known of the multitude of cultural and technological developments over time, and the three main migrations out of Africa and the colonising of the planet are followed, and the present-day genetic patterns across the human species are presented for discussion.

Part 3 of 'A Biologist's Workbook' has a tree-and-branch Mind Map format. The focus is on reproductive strategies and behaviours across primate species, including humans. Other branches of the interactive Mind Map include examples of reproductive strategy variations across a variety of species; kinship and social structure variations in humans; and mother and child survival strategies across human cultures.

The establishment of the Homo sapiens Centres in the main library complexes of our public universities would address two of the five 'modest, sensible, priority actions' recommended to be considered by the Australian Universities Accord – Interim Report. These are – 'building a caring society', and 'strengthening our democratic culture'.

The university Homo sapiens Centre would –

- strengthen and renew our egalitarian values and humility;
- strengthen higher education's mission to make a better future possible for Australia by empowerment of its citizens through confidence building, improved self-awareness, and participation in meaningful discussion;
- foster international engagement through awareness of our common histories and origins;
- recognising and formalising the university's crucial role in serving the community; and
- strengthening university institutional governance by being a central focus for coming together of the disparate faculties, and the improvement of student self-knowledge, wellbeing and safety.

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