



The School of English, Media Studies & Art History

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31 January 2014

**Peer Reflection
Professor Amareswar Galla**

I hereby certify that I appointed Prof Galla as the first full Professor of Museum Studies in Australia when I was the Head of the School in December 2005 and continued to work with him as the Faculty Associate Dean of Research from 2009.

I have known Professor Dr. Amareswar Galla (Amar) for more than a decade, both at Griffith University and the University of Queensland. My systematic engagement with him dates back to 2002 when I organised and chaired a public seminar given by Amar at Griffith University when I was the Director of the Australian Research Council's Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy. Amar also served as a member of the Centre's Advisory Committee becoming an Honorary Professor of Griffith University.

Since coming to the University of Queensland (UQ) in 2004 I have had the opportunity to participate in workshops, master classes, lectures and collaborative learning sessions directed by Amar at the Australian National University, University of Queensland and with various cultural institutions. In the lead up to my term as Head of the School of English, Media Studies & Art History (2005-2008) I negotiated with Amar to come to UQ as the first full Professor of Museum Studies in Australia. Prior to coming to the UQ, Amar was the full Professor and Director of Sustainable Heritage Development Programs in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University in Canberra. At the time I had responsibility for developing Museum Studies at the UQ. Prior to coming to UQ While my own expertise is in media and cultural studies, I have had an opportunity to engage with Amar in both the class room as well as outside in forums and workshops to be in a position to provide this peer reflection.

Amar is a committed teacher. He regularly connects his teaching of Interdisciplinary Museum and Heritage Studies with his own cutting edge research and practice thereby affording students the opportunity to see knowledge in action. He has consistently sought meetings, workshops and grants to enhance collaborative learning and teaching. E-learning is a particular passion of his and he uses it creatively as a means to bridge the gap between the teacher and

learner. Amar is an excellent communicator who is at the leading edge of developments in his field. He also has a commitment to bring his teaching knowledge to the rest of the faculty and peers within the broader University and museum and heritage sectors.

Amar is at home with different forms of web based tools to support collaborative learning and teaching. At the ANU he used WebCT and at UQ, Blackboard. Once he moved to the UQ, he discussed with me and other colleagues the benefits of web tools for maximising research, teaching and learning environments. In these discussions we worked through the development of new courses and web based tools for monitoring and understanding the demographics and psychographics of students. Such sensitivity has become critical in Australian universities due to the significant cultural and linguistic diversity of the students and staff profiles. Web based tools were also important in the delivery of courses within the Museum and Heritage Studies program as a scoping study identified the need for intensive day or days as a necessary pre-requisite for meeting the study needs of students who would often be employed within museums and galleries.

Amar has been a national leader in innovation and developments dealing with cultural diversity and his class room and colleagues benefit from the developments that are beyond the confines of the university cloisters. He has been receptive to constructive feedback from both the students and his colleagues. The need for appropriate capacity building for both the students and staff has been emphasised by Amar through out the development and review of his courses.

The above formative considerations are not only based on my first hand interaction with Amar in the class room and forums but also access to Amar's Blackboard courses throughout the semester. The result of these innovative teaching and collaborative learning efforts has been recognition within the Faculty of Arts of what our Dean called the 'Amar Model' as an important approach of broader utility within the Faculty. This approach is being emulated by other university colleagues in Australia. The model has essentially four elements.

Appropriate Course Development: First and foremost the lecturer and his professional and academic networks inform the curricula for courses. Each module, with its aims, anticipated learning outcomes, content and readings, in a course is sent by Amar for comment by at least three peers outside the UQ and then revised. This is customised to the Blackboard/ Web CT environments through appropriate inputs from the former students and the Teaching and Development Institute (TEDI) at UQ. This is road tested with at least one colleague at UQ at the beginning of each semester.

Immersion: Each course Amar taught had a week long immersion in the high tech Teaching and Collaborative Learning studios at UQ. In addition to the enrolled graduate and research higher degree students (PhD candidates) the intensive is advertised to attract a limited number of working professionals in museums, galleries, libraries, archives, World Heritage sites and other heritage management institutions and official agencies. A diagnostic map of this mixed cohort is then prepared through on-line introductions that links the Blackboard with the various tools on Web 2.0 environment. The aims and learning outcomes of the immersion are workshopped and agreed to through a learning contract by the cohort during the first session of the immersion.

International Guest Faculty: The additional fees paid by the Professional Development Participants is used to bring a significant national or international museum professional to come to Brisbane to teach in the one week immersion that is facilitated as an intensive using the various museum sites in addition to the teaching studio. This business planning step helps to pay for the costs of bringing an external expert with no cost to the faculty and at the same time complements and enhances Amar's ability to deliver a top quality course for the cohort. Guest faculty included so far practicing professionals from major museums in Europe, The USA, especially the National Park Service and the Smithsonian Institution, Southeast Asia and also post doctoral fellows from outside the UQ.

Learning Cohort – Real and Virtual: Finally the web based environment is used for a virtual cohort that has jelled together for almost a week in the face-to-face intensive. There are many challenges with this approach as different students enter the learning environment with varying degrees of networking capacity and prior knowledge. Amar continues to engage with the issues and at times such questions as to what is appropriate feedback and the timing of it continues to come up. As Amar is in high demand with UNESCO and ICOM professional work, he has ensured that the Web environment created during the immersion enables him to be in regular contact with the students and PhD candidates that he supervises. He has used to the maximum advantage the Web 2.00 tools for continuous interaction with his students. The Australian Government's ruling that overseas students need substantive contact throughout the semester rather than only in intensives has posed a recent dilemma. However, as not all staff teach in the intensive format the model developed by Amar is able continue to work alongside more traditional modes of delivery and be beneficial for the program as a whole.

This model has worked well for us and Amar has been using a similar model for his PhD students in Museum Studies. This research student model is a useful improvisation in research student pedagogy—providing in an online environment the kind of learning effects associated with research higher degree seminars. In 2008, the School made a decision to examine it and then adopted it to create a Web based environment for all the Research Higher Degree students in the School and their supervisors. Amar has run workshops for his colleagues to share his experience and knowledge commanding in the process the respect of his peers. He continues to seek feedback to refine this virtual environment for research higher degree learning. This is a particularly important initiative as in Australia the research higher degree is predominantly thesis based with minimal coursework requirements.

Professor Galla's collaborative teaching and learning skills and research competencies are of the highest quality. His leadership as a teacher and supervisor is significant for the field of museum studies and heritage management. He is diligent and conscientious. He continues to show how critical evaluation of past practices and strategic thinking for future developments are critical to museum and heritage studies alive to the changes of the 21st century.

Professor Galla's commitment to benefit analysis from heritage resources is such that he worked closely with Professor David Throsby, the UNESCO and international guru in cultural economics, to inspire and supervise the first ever PhD dealing with valuing heritage in

Australia. This thesis by Dr. Deborah Tranter is revised and published by Common Ground Publishing, USA. His recent volume with Cambridge University Press entitled *World Heritage: Benefits Beyond Borders*, is testimony to his ability to bring theory, standards and practice together for ensuring measurable impacts for all stakeholders, especially economic benefits.

I am happy to answer any further questions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom O'Regan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Professor Tom O'Regan
School of English, Media Studies and Art History