

The Buck Stops Here

The origin of philanthropy is a love for mankind and where better to show this, than in education.

PHIL BROWN REPORTS, PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS STACEY

International fundraising expert Laura Fredricks has some good advice for universities seeking to increase philanthropic contributions: ask and you shall receive.

As Vice President for Philanthropy at New York's Pace University, Fredricks raised US\$92 million between 2002 and 2008. She says Australian universities can be equally successful and shouldn't be coy about asking for money.

"The number one reason why people do not give is they have not been asked," Ms Fredricks explains.

Learning to be up front about fund-raising is an integral part of creating a culture of philanthropy towards universities according to Griffith University Vice Chancellor and President, Professor Ian O'Connor. Professor O'Connor acknowledges that the generosity of Australians hasn't extended to the higher education sector in the past and says changing that will mean changing some common misconceptions.

"Many people still think most of our income comes from government but the proportion of government guaranteed funds has dropped dramatically," Professor O'Connor says.

"Government funding is now running at about 30 per cent. Clearly universities make a major contribution to the community and we must look within the university, as well as outside, for the money to continue that good work."

The 2005 report *Giving Australia*, commissioned by the Federal Government, indicated individuals and businesses were more likely to give to community service or welfare, health, arts, culture, sports and recreation before education. This contrasts with US data indicating education is the second largest cause for individual giving (after religion) in that country.

Not much had changed by 2008 according to the Philanthropy in Australia's Higher Education System report.

"Australia does not have a well-developed culture of philanthropy in the higher education sector," the report concluded. "The reticence of Australians to make donations to higher education institutions is at least partially linked to a strong tradition of government funding universities."

With that in mind philanthropy was high on the agenda at the Universities Marketing, Communications & Development Conference in Brisbane in April. This was reflected in the choice of Laura Fredricks as keynote speaker. Ms Fredricks, author of the best-sellers *Developing Major Gifts: Turning Small Donors into Big Contributors* and *The Ask: How to Ask Anyone for Any Amount for Any Purpose*, stresses that developing a culture of philanthropy means Australian universities must first develop a culture of asking for funds.

"The idea that people will give when they want to so it is better not to ask is a complete myth," Ms Fredricks says. "If you truly love what you do, believe in the transformational power of education and what it can do for generations to come, then asking for money on behalf of your university should come naturally."

"All philanthropic organisations, particularly universities, need to have a commitment, focus and priority from everyone in the institution that philanthropy is something that is earned, it does not happen on its own. The institution needs to have a solid strategic fundraising plan on how it is going to cultivate, ask and steward many gifts from all its constituencies."

This year's Griffith University Annual Appeal is "our first effort to build a culture of philanthropy in a systematic way" according to Professor Ian O'Connor. Before looking outside the university Professor O'Connor points out that the first step involves encouraging staff and alumni to give.

"People want to support important research that would make a difference to the lives of others," Professor O'Connor says.

"Funds are needed to provide an enriched experience for students and to support research in vital areas like climate change adaptation or drug discovery."

"If you're asking other people to give you should give yourself."

Megan Cullinan, development and alumni co-coordinator, Griffith Law School, agrees and was one of the first to do just that. Ms Cullinan, also a Griffith University alumnus, believes individual giving is important for the next generation.

"I truly believe in the product of Griffith University and its vision," she says. "When talking to others about pledging it's important to lead by example. For me personally it's about staying with Griffith for a lifetime through giving."

Director Development and Alumni, Patricia McGarr, says the Griffith University Annual Appeal will foster an "environment of philanthropy within the university community."

"We've just launched a workplace giving program and staff can make a donation out of their salary on a fortnightly basis," Ms McGarr says. "Our philosophy is: we're proud to be a part of Griffith and we want to give back." ■

If you would like to make a donation to Griffith University, please contact Patricia McGarr on +61 7 5552 7218.