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## A DAY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FUTURE

I had run out of milk. As I lived near the Monash University Caulfield Campus, I grabbed by pod, hopped on my scooter and made my way over to the university supermarket. Desperate for a cup of tea I decided to take a seat in one of the many campus cafes, whereby I watched with great fascination the students and others, chatting, reading, interacting, eating and drinking of course; but most of all, learning. I became both nostalgic for my own long past experience of studying for my postgraduate degree, and envious of the wonderful learning community that was evident before me.

I struck up a conversation with a nice young man named Arnold. He was an information technology student, majoring in ceramics; a unique combination I suggested to him, but he explained that any combination of faculty was possible in obtaining a tailor-made qualification. There is no longer such a thing as a homogenous degree. If you want to major in law or business, you now consult a TLS (teaching & learning specialist), create a personalised four year learning plan, and determine which units best meet that learning plan. I wondered how such a system could be managed, given that 125,000 students attend the Caulfield campus. Arnold explained that the student-led revolution of 2020 resulted in government and universities having to reinvent themselves to become more customer focused. After all, students pay enormous fees to advance their learning; why shouldn't students be able to get the education that is relevant to them? This shift in power resulted in faculties becoming flatter organisational structures, with academic staff being trained as TLS's, trained in methods of flexible delivery.

'What about lectures?' I asked. 'That was in the olden days', Arnold said. 'Lecturers standing at the front of a room attempting to fill students' heads with information while they passively sat half-asleep were thankfully a thing of the past. Nowadays, lecturers make recordings that are uploaded onto the intranet and students can watch or listen whenever and virtually wherever they like.'

At this point Arnold showed me what appeared to be a small, slim laptop. It was his Interactive Monash Portal, or IMP, as he called it. It suddenly occurred to me that almost every student in the café also had an IMP. Without needing to be plugged into any power or data source, Arnold was able to show me his ceramic work. Arnold had his own website, as did every student, through which he was able to post, email, chat and upload every component of his learning. His ceramic data presented as a multimedia collage of schematic sketches, development of three dimensional pieces, moving images of his final piece, complete with voice-over explaining his theoretical basis. Impressive, and so far removed from the long essays that formed the basis of my own learning experience. 'But who tells you what to do, what to learn and when to do it by?' I asked Arnold in growing amazement at the realisation of how far higher



education had progressed. 'A TLS works with students to provide assignment outlines, deadlines and general guidance on their progress; but ultimately it is up to each student to manage their time and advance their learning. Many of the assignments involve working with other students, and they tend to be able to solve the majority of assignment problems themselves. Once a week, students check in with their TLS to discuss any issues.'

'What about exams?' I dared to ask. Arnold explained that assessment was carried out either by the TLS, or by the student tutorial group. 'You assess yourselves? That must be the fast way to achieving honours!' I was becoming really disoriented now, in this foreign landscape of learning. Arnold explained it was actually harder to get a great mark from your peers, as they were trained in assessment methods and utilised assessment rubrics that were difficult to misinterpret.

I could tell Arnold had somewhere else he had to go and thanked him for describing his experience as a tertiary student. He packed up his IMP, and disappeared into the throng of his community. As I looked around I suddenly saw the campus in a different light. Not only were there services, shops and cafes that local residents such as me could utilise; the students themselves appeared to be thoroughly engaged in what they were doing. Engaged in a community that respected the way they wanted to learn and recognised them as the most important entity of the university system. I scootered home daring to imagine myself undertaking further studies. At eighty four, would I have the required skills to cope? My memory wasn't as it used to be; I realised that I had forgotten the milk.