PROGRESS IN AUSTRALIAN DEMOGRAPHY

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In marking the tenth anniversary of the Journal of the Australian Population Association, this paper focuses especially on the teaching of demography in Australia at graduate and undergraduate levels. The paper also discusses the contribution of universities and other research organizations to the development of demography in Australia.

This special issue of the Journal of the Australian Population Association is to celebrate ten years of life, to assess the progress in the development of demography and what it should be aiming to do in the near future. Professor Caldwell discusses the progress of international demography; Dr Ruzicka the progress in demographic methodology. There are also articles by Dr Lucas on priorities in Australian research and by Professor Hugo on emerging research needs concerning Australia's population growth, composition and distribution. My task in this framework is to assess the progress of Australian demography to the present, which, knowing only too well the fragility of demographic projections of the future, is comforting if somewhat restricting. I shall, as appropriate to an Emeritus, stick to the past.

First, however, may I enjoy the privilege of a Patron to congratulate the APA on its achievements in its fourteen years of life. It is still not a large organization. Its current membership is now about 411, including 109 corporate members, and it has a healthy mix of professional demographers and the users of demographic methods and analysis. This mix has been one of the major factors in its successful and dynamic biennial conferences which have ranged over almost all areas of interaction between professional demographers and the consumers of demographic data in business affairs and in the formation of both private and public policies. So, congratulations to the APA on its success so far, and may that success continue.

One mark of the success of a learned society is its capacity to run or to be associated with a quality publication with high intellectual standards. This the APA has achieved through its Journal and here success is associated with the quality and dedication of the Journal's appointed editors. In this respect, the APA has been served extraordinarily well with Dr Lado Ruzicka as its first editor, followed by Dr Gigi Santow, and now Dr Don Rowland. Editing a learned journal is one of the most thankless, but yet prestigious tasks that an academic can undertake. The APA owes its Journal editors a sincere vote of thanks.
More will follow shortly relating to the content of the APA’s Journal. The question to be now asked is what lies behind the Journal? Surely it must be progress in the teaching of demography and in the recent output of professional demographers. What is demography? As far as I can ascertain the name was concocted from the root ‘demos’ (people) in 1855 by a French scholar, Achille Guillard. Broadly, his definition is close to that to be found in the brochure for students interested in applying for entrance to Graduate Studies in Demography in the National Centre for Development Studies at ANU:

Demography is concerned with the study of human population. Demographers deal with the collection, presentation and analysis of data relating to the basic life-cycle events; birth, death, marriage, household formation and migration. They examine and compare the structures of different population groups in terms of characteristics such as age, sex, marital status, place of residence, education and occupation.

Demographers seek to understand the determinants of changes in the size and structure of populations (through births, deaths and migration) and the consequences of those changes.

The definition goes on to stress the relevance of demography in studies of the environment, human resources, health and mortality, family structure, the role of women and the social, cultural and institutional context of demographic change. All this adds up to a fairly large slice of the social sciences in general. If accepted as an appropriate definition of demography, it gives demographic studies in both teaching and research, licence to stray outside what non-demographers might judge to be their ‘proper’ fields of study, that is, the ‘political arithmetic’ of population.

This wider approach, which emphasizes the interrelation between the mathematics of the subject and the social system in general, was the path taken in founding the Department of Demography in the Research School of Social Sciences (RSSS) at ANU in 1952, in competition with long-established disciplines such as economics, geography, history, anthropology and sociology and others. At that stage the School was wholly post-graduate, set up to take scholars only for the PhD and, with rare exceptions, only students with first class honours in their initial degree were accepted.

The strategy was right for the time and for the ANU as it then was, that is, a wholly post-graduate and research institution. By the test that demography in Australia benefited, the strategy was successful. Of the 35 doctoral graduates for the period 1959-1976, 11 were Australian and the remaining 24 came from a wide range of countries, with the Asian region predominating. Graduates and staff members who left the Department of Demography to seek career positions elsewhere in Australia in posts that were seldom designated ‘demography’, but which had at least a substantial demographic content with regard to both teaching and research, included: Professor J. Zubrzycki, Sociology, The Faculties, ANU; Professor F.L. Jones, Sociology, RSSS, ANU; Professor R.T. Appleyard, Economic History, Western Australia; Professor G.J. Hugo, Geography, Flinders University and now University of Adelaide; Dr D.T. Rowland, Population Studies Program, The Faculties, ANU; Associate Professor F. Yusuf, School of Economic and Financial