

TRANSCRIPT of Kevin Davis Profile Segments

KEVIN DAVIS, DIRECTOR DIT 1985-1988 & DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR NTU 1989-2003

01 Kevin Davis on: Darwin in the early 1970s before Darwin Community College

The options for tertiary education in Darwin in the 70s were almost non-existent - in fact they were non-existent. There was an adult education centre in the old Darwin Primary school which is now a car park. The place where there is a Boab tree. They assisted and helped students who mostly studied with The University of Queensland as external students. I was one of them actually.

02 Kevin Davis on: Darwin Community College 1974-1984

The Darwin Community College was based on the college concept from the United States. The rationale for it was that there weren't enough students to offer Higher Education courses.

They commenced in 1974. The college facilities got blown down at the end of 1974 and it took a year or two to get going after that by using factories and office space out at Winnellie and they restored some of the buildings around here - including the one we're in right now.

03 Kevin Davis on : Nan Giese

When I first joined the Darwin Community College Council Nan Giese was the chair person . She was an outstanding person - a great chair person of meetings - there was no nonsense allowed. Motions had to be well formed. There was no late correspondence. She ruled it with a rod of iron and she moved things along. And it was great that she was able to do that because she was the one that moved very hard to get the Community College concept agreed to by Government. She led a working party. At the time she was the chairperson of the Darwin High School Council and she pushed like mad to get government to do something about tertiary education.

04 Kevin Davis on: Paul Everingham and the efforts to get a Northern territory University.

My involvement in the university was when Paul Everingham decided to set it up. Alan Powell who is a retired professor from here, Margaret Clinch and myself were set up as a little working group to suggest what kind of model the university should be created in the Northern Territory. And we decided on what was called the Alaskan Model. Paul Everingham had just been to Alaska and saw how they had set up a University of diverse institutions into one institution for the whole of Alaska. We recommended that that would be a good model to go here.

05 Kevin Davis on: Darwin Community College and the moves towards a university

I guess the thing that stands out is the great desire of the people of Darwin to have a University but the people within the College particularly some of the academic staff weren't overly enthusiastic about seeing a University come to Darwin because they were busy setting up advanced education courses. They had weaned themselves off Canberra and were getting courses accredited in their own right.

06 Kevin Davis on: Becoming the Director of the Darwin Institute of Technology, 1985-1988

Well Nan and I became very close because we came together in a very unusual way. I had actually left the Department of Education at the beginning of 1984 and I became the chairman of the Housing Commission. And then at the end of 1984 Ian Tuxworth had become the Chief Minister, Paul Everingham had moved on. And he summonsed me to his office and asked me if I would become the director of the Darwin Institute of Technology which was a surprise because I said to him "What's that?". And he said, "Oh, that's the Darwin Community College revamped and you're going to revamp it!" And I know, because I was a member of the board that they were in the middle of recruiting the next director. And he said, "Oh we've decided to appoint you directly". I left his office at about Christmas time 1984 and drove out here to meet Nan and the acting principle to announce that I was the new director of the Darwin Institute of Technology which was about to be created.

The beginning of 1985, legislation was changed to create the Darwin Institute of Technology, modelled on the other institutes of technology around Australia at the time - RMIT being a good example. My appointment wasn't altogether popular - particularly with the academic staff. They happened to be on leave when the appointment was made and when they came back they got quite angry about that - demanded my resignation. They demanded that Nan stand down from the council because she should have been protesting about this government interference. She refused to do that, so she and I went through a fairly torrid time for a little while there in 1985.

07 Kevin Davis on : Darwin Institute of Technology 1985-1988

First of all, we got the budget under control and we were able to live within our resources - which got praise from the Government of course.

So as the Institute grew and began to get a reputation we were able to attract some very talented staff - one that springs to mind is Dean Patterson who came and fired up electrical engineering. And out of his work grew the solar car project, and his invention of a flux motor. And so the Institute was beginning to grow and mature.

08 Kevin Davis on: His role as director DIT and involvement with setting up the university

The University College was an important step for Government to take to make it quite clear to the Commonwealth that they wanted a University. the Commonwealth wasn't offering any funds so the NT Government decided to go it alone and that they would take the Commonwealth Government on - pass the legislation and create the Northern Territory University College. I was involved in a working group that actually drew up the legislation for the College. I saw that as no conflict with the Institute, or my role as the Director. I saw that as a wonderful new step to ultimately get to become a university.

09 Kevin Davis on: the stand-off with Hugh Hudson 1986

As i remember it in 1986, Hugh Hudson was the chairman of the Tertiary Education Council which embraced the three sectors of TAFE, Advance Education and University Education. Hudson was a supporter of the Northern Territory getting a University. But he was pushing for a multi-sector University which the local University Planning Committee, led by Jim Eedle, wasn't happy about. they wanted a pure University model. Hudson was keen to support, and was saying, that if the territory Government was prepared to have a multi-level University, he would be prepared to support it. What was unpopular about Hudson pushing for a multi level University was, there was no other multi level university in Australia. And so a lot of the local people were saying, 'this is not good enough because it's not a pure and proper university.'

10 Kevin Davis on: University College of the Northern Territory

My thoughts about the creation of the University College were a bit mixed, in that we had been asking for some additional financial assistance in our programs and the NT Government was very generous in setting up the University College and money didn't seem to be a problem. So I guess from that point of view there was a bit of sour grapes. But apart from that, as I said before, it was an inevitable step for us to have a University in the Northern Territory and so I was glad to be part of that and certainly enjoyed the celebrations.

11 Kevin Davis on: the Merger of DIT and UCNT 1988/1989

The next thing that happened, bearing in mind that UCNT started in 1987 and we created the University in 1989 - so they only existed for two years. What brought the change about was the Dawkins white paper. Dawkins was the Minister for Education of the Commonwealth. After a green paper he brought down his white paper.

Dawkins approached the NT Government and said "You've got an Institute of technology, you've got a University College - why don't you merge? But you have to take TAFE with you"

Kevin Davis on : The Northern Territory University

I can remember the excitement of the crowd at the opening - that at long last the struggle to get a University had arrived.