**Judith Brett – Social Science**

The Bachelor of Social Sciences is designed for students who are interested, when they graduate, in working in areas in government across a wide range of areas and in non government organizations, to do with policy – social policy, welfare policy and perhaps the social aspects of environmental policy. The degree has got a sort of contemporary edge. Its not – there’s options and plenty of electives if people wanted to study history, but it will be much more focused on studying the issues in the contemporary world and the ways in which they are impacting on peoples lives now and the sorts of dilemmas governments are facing in trying to solve many of which are really very difficult problems.

The social sciences have in a way, developed in the twentieth century hand in hand with the growth of government. As governments have tried to do more things for people – provide better employment outcomes, provide better education, provide better security in old age, they have needed to know more about the society and what people were doing and what people were thinking, and so social sciences and government if you like, have a sort of hand-in-glove relationship. So we have politics, international relations, anthropology, sociology, legal studies, working all together to develop subjects and courses in an interdisciplinary way. I think what’s special about La Trobe is that we’ve got a depth of experience in this area of the social sciences and we’ve got an interdisciplinary team – what we see ourselves as being able to do uniquely in this degree is to marry politics and policy with sociology social science knowledge. We also have built into the degree some what we call ‘method’ subjects but these are really skills based subjects to give students experience in social science research methods which are the sort of things that in the work place they may be able to draw on, for example statistical methods for designing of surveys, use of focus groups and that sort of thing.

One of the things that has also been a feature of the social science academics at La Trobe is that they have been very engaged in contemporary debates. Many of you will have heard of Robert Manne who has been very engaged particularly at the moment in debates about asylum seekers, debates about the stolen generation, and about climate change. Dennis Altman who has been very involved in debates about gay rights and the sorts of responses governments should make to AIDS. I have been quite involved in commenting on public political policy – and we have got an enthusiastic team of teachers who are really passionate about the role that social science can play in informing the issues of the day. And for our graduates who may go in to work in government, we want them to be as well informed and as skilled as they can to contribute to the very many social problems that Australia is going to need to solve in the immediate future.