

## Cultural Studies in Aotearoa-New Zealand

The state of cultural studies as a field in Aotearoa-New Zealand is one which no doubt mirrors the situation in other countries, albeit with its own inflections.

Cultural studies programmes exist at some institutions. However, given the standard “school” administrative structure, this means that there are no stand-alone programmes, which means cultural studies programmes are affiliated with anthropology, communications and sociology). As a result, there is a greater sense that the field and its practices are widely dispersed through other programmes that do not bear the namesake, taken up in schools that study film, media, new media, and other related cultural forms. As such, the coherence of cultural studies as a discipline is somewhat challenged by institutional constraints and structures as well as demands to be “more” interdisciplinary.

Certain of these facts are found also at the level of funding. Funding opportunities for research comes through a number of different sources, with much of it supported through intra-institutional grants and funding bodies. So much of it is internal. However, there is one large national fund to which those interested in cultural studies may apply, the Marsden Fund. The Marsden supplies grants for larger social science and humanities projects (which may or may not be collaborative), but the success rate hovers near 10%, of which a smaller percentage may actually be understood to fit the definition of “cultural studies.” Success with a Marsden is well-regarded by the scholars’ host institution, as the small success rate ensures it prestige.

There are funding opportunities, through the Marsden and other sources, for those interested in projects focused on indigeneity, with a Maori or Pacifica focus. While a smaller percentage of researchers in this area may call what they do “cultural studies,” it is clear that an interest in media and film and its relation to notions of indigeneity, as well as settler and migrant narratives in Aotearoa-New Zealand borrow terms and concepts from the field (recently funded projects here include work into Maori, the media and health issues).

In these varied academic funding contexts, collaborative work, which is often interdisciplinary (and in some respects intercultural), is generally rewarded higher status. The various funding bodies encourage work through different institutions, which has much to do with the scale of the country and the relative ease with which one can move between various institutions.

In terms of publication measurements, all university research output is subject to evaluation every six years through the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF). Much like the RAE in the UK, this is a mechanism recently put in place to better account for research outcomes. The last round happened in 2006, out of which a number of recommendations were made as to how to improve it. It is currently somewhat unwieldy and it is not entirely clear where cultural studies research sits. There is a general consensus among university researchers that the model for evaluation, which is based around panels which do not necessarily correspond to varied institutional clusters, needs to be revamped (the whole process is currently under review by an international observer).

The main obstacles that seem to affect the state of cultural studies here is the lack of a clearly defined field. The majority of people who do cultural studies work, in its “classical” sense, appear to be doing so from within other disciplines (media studies, film, etc.). There is a sense of dispersal, ameliorated at points through annual meetings of the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia (which most often happen in Australia), and, more recently, with the introduction of the MediaNZ conference, which first happened in 2007 and is designed to be a biennial event.

It is not clear how better funding opportunities might be addressed in terms of supporting cultural studies researchers. The re-evaluation of the PBRF, particularly its panel structure will have some impact, but whether or not this will affect cultural studies research is unknown at this stage. The same could be said for funding opportunities, both internal and external. The process should be more transparent, and it has been suggested by many researchers (both junior and senior scholars) that there be greater feedback allowed in terms of projects which are not forwarded to the next phase of evaluation, for example.

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