

## **Nomination for MERGA Life Membership: Peter Galbraith**

### **Long association with the activities of MERGA**

As a founding member of MERGA who has a significant record of attending and presenting at annual conferences, Peter's association with the activities of the association could not be more longstanding. Much of MERGA's history and culture is embodied in Peter and the contributions outlined below.

### **Leadership within MERGA**

Peter served as MERGA President from 1999-2002; however, simply being President is not enough to warrant life membership. Peter's single term was distinguished by his diplomacy, organisational and leadership skills. His leadership of the Executive ensured that MERGA's affairs were properly managed and monitored after an earlier period of instability. During his term as President he ensured that MERGA claimed a much stronger political presence by working more closely with organizations such as the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers and FASTS, and this resulted in MERGA having a more clearly defined role in national lobbying activities such as Science Meets Parliament Day. Early in his presidency he was responsible for initiating overtures towards AAMT – after a period during which MERGA/AAMT relationships could best be described as “polite” – in order to encourage the two organisations to work together wherever possible for the good of mathematics education. (We elaborate on this later in our submission.) Peter's gift for connecting people and communities is further demonstrated by the way in which, during his term as President, he initiated procedures to ensure New Zealand representation on the MERGA Executive.

Peter's leadership of MERGA was also evident at a more personal level. For example, on discovering that some of MERGA's early life members had not received anything tangible to record their achievement, he commissioned certificates that were presented to existing life members at the 2001 conference dinner in Sydney. To amplify the historical significance of the occasion, he located and broadcast an audio recording of a mystery MERGA member presenting his paper at the first ever MERGA conference (much to the delight of dinner participants, who easily identified the mystery presenter as George Booker).

### **Innovation in MERGA's activities**

Peter's key contribution here was his commitment to nurturing new researchers and the way he institutionalised this commitment through MERGA processes. In this way he shaped MERGA through both his work as President and his individual actions as an experienced academic. For example, in his President's report to the 2000 Annual General Meeting he noted that one of MERGA's three main responsibilities was “a servicing/nurturing role”. He elaborated on this role in his final report as President to the 2002 Annual General Meeting:

During the past year I have drawn attention to some aspects that are of significance for the emerging future of MERGA. Without repeating the detail here I mention again the generational change that will continue to alter the face of the membership over the next few years, and the related need for members to maintain a balance between support for MERGA activities and other international activities that active researchers necessarily value and engage in.

New researchers benefited from Peter's (and hence MERGA's) nurturing in many ways. Three of his own students he introduced to the MERGA community have won MERGA awards: Marilyn Goos (Early Career and Practical Implications Awards), Gloria Stillman (Early Career Award), and Vince Geiger (Practical Implications Award), and Marilyn and Gloria also served on the MERGA Executive and as journal editors. Current Secretary Peter Grootenboer volunteered for service on the Executive, thanks to Peter's encouragement.

Other examples of Peter's innovative nurturing:

- He explored ways for MERGA to acknowledge and congratulate new research higher degree students in mathematics education (Executive minutes, 2000).
- At the 2001 conference he organised a special presentation targeting early career researchers aimed at nurturing new members of MERGA.
- He made the MERGA conference student travel award more flexible and therefore more accessible to students.
- He initiated the Research Graduate Awards to provide financial support for new graduates to attend and present at the conference.

### **Strong support for MERGA's activities**

Peter has been a consistent supporter of the annual conference, attending and presenting in most years since MERGA's foundation. He contributed to the Scholar's workbench that was organised as a pre-conference activity to support emerging researchers in 2003 (Geelong), and he regularly co-authors conference papers with other less experienced researchers, including secondary school teachers. Observant MERGA members would have recognised Peter's quiet talent for noticing conference "first timers" and making them comfortable, whether by making sure they are being looked after, striking up a conversation himself, or introducing them to other more "stellar" MERGA members who share their research interests. In all of these ways he has drawn people into the organization and anchored them to others who can help further their careers.

### **Enhancement of the standing of MERGA in the mathematics education community**

Peter has an almost unique ability to move easily amongst three communities that share a commitment to mathematics and mathematics learning but often find themselves at odds with each other: mathematics education researchers, mathematics teachers, and university mathematicians. He drew on this ability to foster connections between the three communities whenever opportunities arose. For example, during Peter's term as MERGA President, AAMT and MERGA organised a meeting of prominent mathematics educators, mathematicians involved with mathematics education, and policy makers concerned with mathematics curriculum to identify and discuss ongoing challenges to mathematics education and how various groups might contribute to addressing such challenges. The meeting was jointly organised and chaired by the Presidents of AAMT (Vince Geiger) and MERGA (Peter Galbraith). Further evidence of the closer ties between AAMT and MERGA that Peter was instrumental in achieving was his invitation to the AAMT President to speak on a plenary panel at the MERGA conference in Sydney (2001).

As president of ICTMA and a member of the ICMI Executive, Peter used his international standing to further Australasian mathematics education, promote more inclusive interactions between mathematicians, mathematics educators, teachers and students at all educational

levels, and foster emerging Australasian academics within these international organizations (e.g., Gloria Stillman is now a member of the ICTMA Executive).

### **Service to MERGA**

All of the arguments and examples we outline above are evidence of Peter's service to MERGA over a period of time that extends well beyond his formal service as President. He has always been strongly committed to fostering collective expertise by working closely with individuals in ways that increase their influence and personal capacity. Through this service, he has added substantial value to individuals as well as MERGA as an organization.