

Lip Service: Academic Voices on the Global Financial Crisis

Dr Todd Bridgman, Victoria Management School,
Victoria University of Wellington

This seminar reports the findings from an empirical study into the contribution of New Zealand academics to public understanding of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). The voice of academics has been muted, especially in the mainstream media, despite the statutory obligation of New Zealand universities, under the Education Act (1989) to “accept a role as critic and conscience of society”, which is typically associated with engaging with a general audience. The dominant voices have been experts who are not academics, whose participation in the media tends to be driven by commercial incentives and who are perceived as less independent than academics. The quality of public debate on the GFC has been further undermined by mainstream media newsrooms coping with fewer resources because of the recession. Based on interviews with academics, other experts and journalists, this seminar examines the reasons behind New Zealand universities’ limited contribution, considers its implications and suggests what could be done if we were to take the concept of universities as “critic and conscience of society” seriously.