

The meaning of the anu motto essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Australian National University's (ANU) motto carries inherent profound roots and meaning. Since the institution's inception in 1946, the Latin phrase "Naturam Primum Cognoscere Rerum" has assumed a place within the university's crest. This phrase has fascinating origins, tracing back to ancient Roman times. Although the ANU has determined its translation to English to be "First to know the nature of things", an array of differing distinct interpretations, and indeed, meanings, exist.

The provenance of ANU's motto can be traced to the poem 'De Rerum Natura (III, 1072)' or 'On the Nature of Things', written by Lucretius, Roman poet, philosopher and scientist. This epic work was written to explain Epicurean philosophy to a Roman audience, consisting of six books; the phrase "Naturam Primum Cognoscere Rerum", translated by Cyril Bailey in 1946 to "First to know the nature of things", being taken from the third. This book demonstrates that "the vital and intellectual principles, are as much a part of us as are our limbs and members, but like those limbs and members have no distinct and independent existence, and that hence soul and body live and perish together" (Ramsay, 1867, pp. 829-30), effectively presenting the issues of the mind and body.

At the university's beginnings it was an institution predominantly focussing on research, being the country's only full-time research university and founded around four initial research institutes, consisting of physics, medicine, social sciences and Pacific studies (Australian National University 2010). The phrase "First to know the nature of things" was likely chosen to represent the university to capture its spirit and purpose. Whilst this was the

situation when the ANU was first formed, numerous alternate meanings exist today.

The phrase “ First to know the nature of things” carries many differing interpretations. Besides the actuality that the original Latin phrase can be translated to English variously, which may very well alter its meaning, ANU’s “ First to know the nature of things”, also holds different interpretations. The first Vice-Chancellor of the ANU, Sir Douglass Copland, defined ANU as the “ great intellectual adventure” (Australian National University 2010), possessing a spirit of discovery, and that was exemplified in its motto.

Similarly, during the 2008 Graduation Speech, Dr Allan Hawke stated the ANU motto, “ First to learn the nature of things”, before articulating that “ That’s what you have been doing here; some of you will undertake further formal study, but life-long learning should be your goal” (Australian National University 2008). Both understandings determine ANU’s role as one which provides students with discovery, with the second placing more emphasis on students obtaining a sound knowledge base before advancing their lives. A reasonable perception of this motto would be ‘ to have an understanding, or know the facts, of the world before you extend yourself further into it’.

Thus, I’m able to conclude the ANU motto, “ Naturam Primum Cognoscere Rerum”, carries deep, philosophical derivation, and several varying interpretations of the ANU’s translation exist. Its origins lie in the epic poem “ De Rerum Natura”, written by Lucretius, Roman poet, philosopher and scientist. Despite the ANU taking the translation of the Latin version to English as being “ First to know the nature of things”, this has differing

interpretations, although similar, with a reasonable interpretation being ' foremost, get your facts, or understanding, of the world right before you enter it'.

The Australian National University Motto in Latin is " _Naturam Primum Cognoscere Rerum" _. This translated into English means " First, to know the nature of things" (Australian National University 2010), which can be interpreted as " first to know the way things are". Essentially, this statement means that foremost, you need to get your facts right and have an understanding, of the world, both in a natural sense and of human nature, before you enter it.

However, this motto can also have a disparate meaning, bearing the absence of a comma, becoming " First to know the nature of things". This phrase could now be interpreted as the Australian National University_itself_ being the first to know ' the facts' or the way things are in the world, ' things' being nature scientifically and human nature.

REFERENCES

Australian National University 2010, _University history_, Australian National University, viewed 13 March, 2011,

Australian National University 2008, _2008 Graduation speech: Dr Allan Hawke_, Australian National University, viewed 14 March, 2011,

Australian National University 2007, _ANU Corporate Brochure_, Australian National University, viewed 14 March, 2011,

Ramsay, W 1867, _Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology_, Vol. 2, Boston.

Course: ASGS1002

Lecturer: Paul Waring

Student No.: u4844736

Date: March 18, 2011

Student No.: u4844736 Lecturer: Paul Waring