



Geoffrey Rush joins VCA protest

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Several hundred students rallied outside Victorian Parliament today in a demonstration against proposed curriculum changes at the Victorian College of Arts (VCA). • [Map: Melbourne 3000](#)

Oscar winning actor, Geoffrey Rush joined the chorus of voices railing against the planned integration of performance and fine arts courses into the so-called Melbourne Model, led by Melbourne University.

Opponents say the changes would force students to take more generalised, theoretical subjects and would reduce their ability to specialise.

Protesters gathered outside the VCA in Southbank and paraded through the city to State Parliament.

It was a colourful protest including acrobats, dancing troupes and marching bands.

Today's march topped off a week of protests by VCA students, including the construction of a tent embassy outside the college.

The VCA's Dean, Sharman Pretty says the college has a \$6 million deficit following Federal Budget cuts.

She said the college needs to broaden its curriculum in order to remain competitive.

She told the ABC that the proposed new course structure would help art students see their work within the broader social environment.

But at the rally today, students and staff cheered as Mr Rush accused the administration of having "economic rather than artistic priorities".

He appealed to the Federal Government for independent funding, similar to that received by the Australian Institute of Sport.

The former head of the VCA film school, Chris McGill, lamented recent staff cuts and the suspension of courses like puppetry.

"The University bean counters are hard at work," he said.

Lysette Lecerf, 19, wants to audition for the musical theatre course at VCA.

But she said if the changes go ahead, she may re-consider.

"When I did drama in school, we did a lot of theory and it was the lamest. You can't learn drama like that. You have to do it," she said.

VCA music student James Bowers, 20, said the new degree structure will make it harder to become an elite performer.

"In order to get good at music, you need to devote a lot of time and headspace to just music," he said.

In a recent letter to staff, Melbourne University's Vice-Chancellor Glyn Davis denied that the Melbourne Model would require VCA students to take "irrelevant" classes.

He says fine arts education "must continue to be thoroughly grounded in practical training."

Professor Davis says the VCA is currently being subsidised by other university faculties.

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