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Peter Sheehan – Hon FAPS

By David Siddle, FAPS

Peter Sheehan is a major figure in Australian and international psychology. His achievements include his contributions to psychological science, to teaching, to the Australian Psychological Society, and more generally to the social sciences.

Peter was awarded his Bachelor of Arts with first class honours from the University of Sydney in 1961 and his doctorate from the same university in 1965 for a thesis entitled, "*The investigation of visual imagery and some of the correlates*". He held a post-doctoral position from 1965 to 1967 at the Institute of the Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia before obtaining an Assistant Professorship at the City University of New York. He returned to Australia in 1968 as Lecturer and then Senior Lecturer at the University of New England. He became Professor of Psychology at the University of Queensland in 1973 and Academic Director of Research at that University in 1987. In 1992 he became Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Postgraduate Studies). The bare bones of Peter's career hide a rich diversity of contributions to Australian and international psychology.

Peter's scientific contribution to our discipline is revealed in many ways. He was one of the first in the modern cognitive era to study systematically mental experience through an examination of imagery and the processes involved in hypnosis. His 1967 paper entitled "*A shortened form of the Betts' questionnaire upon mental imagery*" which was published in *Journal of Clinical Psychology* has become a citation classic, and his 1982 book *Hypnosis and experience: The exploration of phenomena and process* won the Arthur Shapiro Award for the best book published in 1982 in hypnosis. He has also been the recipient of the Henry Guze Award for the best research paper in hypnosis on several occasions (1971, 1981, 1982, 1985). Perusal of Peter's list of 168 books, chapters, journal papers and monographs reveals an enormous range of expertise. For example, he has published not only in the area of hypnosis and imagery, but on topics as diverse as verbal operant conditioning, cross-cultural aspects of eidetic imagery, establishing validity in psychological experimentation, psychology and the law, and television viewing and aggression among children.

But his contributions go beyond his own discipline in that he has had interesting and important things to say about censorship, the relationships between pure and applied research in the social sciences, and television violence. In addition to his own scholarly work, Peter has supervised successfully seven PhD students, edited the *Australian Journal of Psychology* (1986-1991), served as Associated Editor for the *Australian Psychologist* (1974-1982) and currently serves on the editorial boards of five international journals.

Peter's important contributions to the Australian Psychological Society have an extensive history. He was Chairperson of the New England Branch (1970-72), a member of the Course Development and Accreditation Committee (1973-80), a Councillor representing members at large (1975-76), and a member of the Working Party on the Social Responsibility of Psychologists doing research (1975-79). He became a Fellow of the Society in 1973 and served as its President in 1977-78. His

President's Select Committee to examine the structure and organisation of the Society was instrumental in developing the two division structure and Peter served as the founding Chairperson of the Division of Scientific Affairs. He was President of the International Congress of Psychology held in Sydney in 1988, and was a member of the Executive Committee of the International Union of Psychological Sciences from 1988 to 1992.

Although Peter's contributions to the discipline and the profession of psychology are enormous, his contributions to other aspects of educational life cannot be overlooked. He has held a number of Ministerial positions, including Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities Panel of the Australian Research Grants Committee (1984-85) and the Australian Research Council (1990-91), Chair of the Research Grants Committee of the ARC, Deputy Chair of the ARC (1993-94) and Chair of the Commonwealth Cinematograph Films Board of Review (1986-87). He served as President of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia (1991-93) and chaired the Consultative Committee of the Australian Academies from 1991 to 1993.

Peter Sheehan has made and continues to make important and lasting contributions to psychology in both Australia and internationally. He is an outstanding colleague for election as an Honorary Fellow of the Society.