The University of Western Australia - Faculty of Life and Physical Sciences

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
FACULTY TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE
held in Room 1.58, First Floor, Physics Building
on Tuesday 11 August 2009

Present:
Professor Geoff Hammond (Chair)
Ms Jenny Gamble (Faculty Manager)
Associate Professor Nancy Longnecker (Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator)

Representatives from Schools:
Dr Jan Meyer (Anatomy and Human Biology)
Professor Don Robertson (Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences)
Dr Peter Whipp (Sport Science, Exercise and Health)
Dr Vance Locke (Psychology)

Other Representatives:
Professor Song Wang (Mathematics and Statistics)
Dr Thomas Martin (Director, Faculty Offshore Programs)
Dr Jane Emberson (Academic Student Advisor)
Mr David Enright (Senior Administrative Officer/Offshore Programs)
Ms Alison Hall (Representative from FNAS)
Ms Felicity Renner (Biological Sciences Library)

Apologies
Professor Ian McArthur (Physics)
Miss Tess Vermeulen (Undergraduate Student Representative)
Ms Rachel Owens (Postgraduate Student Representative)
Mrs Kath Williams (Executive Officer)

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED – 7

that the minutes of the meeting of Teaching and Learning Committee held on Tuesday 9 June 2009 be confirmed.

2. DECLARATIONS OF POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT OR PERCEIVED CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No conflicts were declared.
3. ITEMS/BUSINESS IN PROGRESS FOR NOTING SINCE PREVIOUS MEETING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item/Business in Progress</th>
<th>Progress Update</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and Learning Guide for Faculty Staff.</td>
<td>Draft to be checked by Faculty Student Advisor and Faculty Manager prepared by Ms Heather Morton</td>
<td>Retired</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audit of each major sequence to determine whether English Language Competency Skills are shown in at least one unit in each year level.</td>
<td>Audit to be undertaken by Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator. School to recommend major/s sequence</td>
<td>In progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Operational Priorities Plan (OPP) implementation strategies and targets.</td>
<td>Faculty Manager confirmed OPP was almost complete</td>
<td>Nearing Completion</td>
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4. CHAIR’S REPORT

Members were informed that the issue of Peer Review had been raised at the central Teaching and Learning Committee meeting and that guidelines would be distributed. The overall structure of Peer Review had been approved and was seen, in the first instance, to be a set of good practice guidelines. It was envisaged that it would be an informal process without trained reviewers and that no central records would be kept. Early Career Teachers would be expected to undertake Peer Review and others would be strongly encouraged. One member raised a concern that although participation was voluntary it would be expected when applying for promotion.

The first semester 2009 Peer Assisted Learning Program (PAL) Report had been circulated with the Agenda. The Chair acknowledged the work undertaken by Matthew Kohler and Joanne Castelli. The program helped students with the transition from high school to University and had been positively received by student participants and by group leaders. It was envisaged that PAL would help increase academic achievement and retention rates. Members were informed that the Dean was strongly in favour of retaining the program.

Members were informed of a free tool, developed by CSIRO, which allowed students to use their mobile phone in place of a clicker. This was available on the web at:

http://www.votapedia.com/

An article “Lost in the past” was tabled at the meeting (Attachment A).

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FUTURE FRAMEWORK AND THE OFFSHORE PROGRAMS

The PVC (Teaching and Learning) had asked how the Future Framework could be implemented in the offshore programs taught by the Faculty.

During discussion the following points were made:

- Students did not have any unit choice in the PSB programs and this is at variance with the Future Framework.
- It appeared that broadening units would have to be offered from another degree, which would impact on the financial return to the Faculty while not reducing its administrative costs.
- Broadening units might be unattractive to students in Singapore who were seeking a course that was linked closely to a career. This could result in a drop in enrolments in the PSB program as students transferred to other institutions.
- Students in Singapore were currently getting an International experience in a course taught largely by UWA staff.

Members noted that the Dean had requested that the Offshore Programs be exempt initially to the Future Framework and that there was a need to bed down the changes locally before applying them offshore. Members noted that if the PSB program was not financially viable the Faculty could not continue to offer it.
6. **NEW MEDIA FOR SCIENCE ALTC SUPPORTED PROJECT**

At the June meeting, the Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator reported on the use of ‘new media’ (such as pod casting and blogging) in teaching and learning. The multi-site project has been funded by the ALTC and it was proposed to trial some aspects of the project locally. Members recognised that there was a need to clarify what the costs and benefits would be for students and teaching staff. School representatives were asked to approach their schools and provide feedback to the Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator on:

- whether there were staff who were currently using these tools in teaching and
- whether any unit coordinators in their School were willing to discuss a trial with the Teaching and Learning Coordinator.

The Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator agreed to report back to the Committee on this item.

7. **EXAMINATION MARKING AND EXAMINERS MEETING TIMETABLE**

Members were informed that staff in Sport Science, Exercise and Health were concerned by not getting sufficient time to mark examination papers. This affected the quality of the examination and the marking processes. The suggestion was for the final examinations in first semester to finish on the Wednesday in the second week of exams, giving two days of marking before the weekend.

Members were informed that this issue was being discussed with the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

The Faculty Manager agreed to report the outcomes of discussions with the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor to the Committee.

8. **AMENDMENT OF MARKS**

The Manager in Student Administration had contacted the Faculty Manager about his concerns that schools were adjusting marks down or up so that none sat at X9%. Members were reminded that the Faculty only bumped marks at 49% as this made the difference between a pass and a fail.

Members were informed that there was to be a policy released on this issue and it would be circulated to members.

9. **SCHOOL REPORTS**

**Biomedical, Bimolecular and Chemical Sciences** – Professor Don Robertson reported that the School had been making progress responding to the Faculty’s Major Working Party request. There were issues associated with Biomedical Science and Genetics as these were taught across faculties.

**Anatomy and Human Biology** – Dr Jan Meyer reported that the School was investigating reasons for the failure rate for ANHB1102 at PSB. The School was also looking into restructuring its 12-point units to fit in the Future Framework.

**Psychology** – Dr Vance Locke reported that the School had been looking into distributional marking. Members were reminded that the Faculty does not have a policy on scaling and members agreed that distributional marking should be treated with caution. Psychology was also investigating the possible reasons for the discrepancies usually seen between continuous assessment and examination performance.

10. **TEACHING AND LEARNING CO-ORDINATOR REPORT**

The Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator informed members that she had attended an information session on the Future Framework and it was to be announced on 18 August 2009 whether it would commence in 2012 or 2013. There was to be an Open Forum on 21 August 2009, 11am to 12-30pm, in the Alexander Lecture Theatre (Arts G.57), which would be followed up by an online forum. A further session, by invitation only, would be run mid to late September.
11. PSB REPORT
The Senior Administrative Officer for Offshore Programs reported that the biomedical timetable had been endorsed and was to be sent to the Dean. The psychology timetable was still in progress. Members noted that the PSB presentation ceremony was to be held on 4 September 2009 in Singapore.

12. POLICY ON PASSING A UNIT BY INSTALMENT
Members were reminded that students cannot pass a unit by instalments; they need to complete the whole unit again.

13. POLICY ON TOOL USED FOR CHECKING ON PLAGIARISM
One member asked as to whether or not the Faculty had a policy on the tools that can be used for checking on Plagiarism. Members were informed that there was no policy on this.

14. INVITATION TO SCIENCE LIBRARY
Members were invited to tour the new Science Library.
Lost in the past
22 Jun 09 | Print this story | Send this story to a friend

Is an education revolution being derailed by archaic ideas and practices, asks Steven Schwartz.

Last week I attended a lecture on the future of higher education. Reading from a prepared text, the speaker railed against the conservatism of universities, their resistance to change and their failure to adapt to the modern world. My first thought was honi soit qui mal y pense.

The contrast between the lecturer’s message and his presentation method couldn’t have been greater, but I am pretty sure that he didn’t see the irony. Still, he had a point. We are now in the second year of our government’s education revolution, but you would not know it from visiting universities. Lecturers, like the one to whom I refer, continue to drone on as their fidgety students send text messages, twitter and surf the net.

Our universities have deployed all the technology that the 21st century has to offer, yet a 19th century academic would still feel at home in most of our classrooms.

Not for long, though. The advance guard of a revolution that will shake education in all its forms has turned up in the unlikely form of Arnold Schwarzenegger - former Terminator, body builder and governor of California since 2003. (Bliss it was that dawn to be alive.)

California is in a mess. It has racked up a $US24 billion ($30 billion) budget deficit and to save money, it intends to do away with traditional textbooks (which cost between $75 to $100 each) and replace them with cheaper digital readers that can hold the equivalent of 160 books. Mess or not, California has an economy twice the size of Australia’s and a richly deserved reputation for innovation. When it decides to do something, sooner or later the rest of the world follows suit. (Who can recall life before Google?)

Significantly, the decision to deploy digital readers is not just about the desire to save money. In announcing the change, Schwarzenegger made some points about education that are worth considering.

California, he said, is home to software giants, bioscience research pioneers and a first-class university system known around the world.

“But our students still learn from instructional materials in formats made possible by Gutenberg’s printing press,” he says.

“Today, our kids get their information from the internet, downloaded onto their iPods, and in Twitter feeds to their cell phones. A world of up-to-date information fits easily into their pockets and onto their computer screens.”

He concluded that it is “nonsensical” to rely on traditional hard-bound books when information today is readily available in electronic form.
Recently, I wrote about the California decision on my blog. Respondents divided into two main groups. Younger ones saw the decision to go digital as natural while older respondents waxed lyrical about the tactile feel of paper and the pleasures of ink. The introduction of music CDs produced a similar divide. Some folks just couldn’t imagine a world without vinyl records and now even the CDs that replaced them are obsolete.

Alas, nostalgia is not what it used to be. The times and technology are changing way too fast. Young people have already changed the way they process and understand information, but we - and here I include senior university managers and administrators - have not caught up.

We understand conceptually what is happening; many of us indeed are adept technology users, but in our hearts and minds we really don’t get it.

As creative education expert Ken Robinson says in his new book The Element (Allen Lane, 2009) digital technology is contributing to the “biggest generation gap since rock and roll”.

He is right. We are heading into a future we can’t even begin to grasp. Students leaving university this year will retire around 2050. We don’t know what the world will look like in 2015, let alone 2050.

All we can be sure of is that the world will change, and universities will have to change with it.

According to the 2007 federal Labor Party election manifesto, the primary aim of its “education revolution” is to make the Australian workforce “the most skilled in the world”. To achieve this, universities will have to supply business and government with skilled graduates.

That seems sensible enough until you try to write down exactly what skills graduates will need.

The skills required for employment today are not the same skills that will be needed in the future. Professions are advancing too quickly to even guess what that they will be like in future.

No one can predict how knowledge will evolve, so graduates need to know how to keep learning long after they leave university. To do this, they need some essential attributes: judgement, foresight, creativity, self-confidence and the ability to tell when someone is talking nonsense.

Few if any of these attributes can be picked up from lectures. Instead, students need to learn how to learn from new technology and they need to challenge themselves in the process.

There’s an old saying in military circles that generals are always ready to fight the last war. The trouble is that new wars always present different challenges.

I don’t want to stretch the military analogy too far, but it seems clear to me our universities are well prepared to deal with the challenges of yesterday but are not yet mobilised to confront the issues of tomorrow.

In writing about European universities recently, Simon Jenkins says they appear to be a thing “of archaic wonder”, their outlook and methods essentially unchanged since the Middle Ages.
Teaching terms still reflect the need to go home for sowing and harvest, and their teaching methods - from the mystic communion of the Oxbridge tutorial to the mass rallies that pass for lectures on the continent - are untested. They respond to criticism “with the blind reaction displayed by monasteries on the eve of the dissolution. They exist, so they must be good.”

I do not believe Australian universities are anachronistic. By and large we are making great efforts to modernise despite the lack of serious funding we have endured in recent years. We are not archaic and we accept sensible criticism adapting and changing where appropriate and feasible.

But some of our practices are relentlessly old-fashioned. I am not an iconoclast; I do not believe we should change for change’s sake. Instead, we need to be considered and reflect carefully about what to retain and what to reject from our curricula, and what new elements to introduce. Perhaps in time we may even have to build an entirely new and different model of higher education.

One thing I do know: we cannot say “stop the revolution, I want to get off”.

Professor Steven Schwartz is a member of the board of Universities Australia, UA lead vice-chancellor for student matters and vice-chancellor of Macquarie University.

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