The University of Western Australia

MINUTES OF THE FACULTY OF LIFE AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES MEETING
HELD IN THE ECONOMICS AND COMMERCE CONFERENCE
ROOM ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2009

PRESENT: Winthrop Professor George Stewart (as Chair), Mr Greg Allen, Professor Neville Bruce, Dr Craig Clark, Associate Professor Jan Dook, Dr Jane Emberson, Professor Alan Everett, Mr David Faithfull, Ms Jenny Gamble, Winthrop Professor Bob Grove, Winthrop Professor Geoff Hammond, Winthrop Professor Alan Harvey, Assistant Professor Debra Judge, Mr Herb Jurkiewicz, Mr Alan Light, Associate Professor Nancy Longnecker, Professor Ian McArthur, Professor Dave Morrison, Ms Heather Morton, Mr Steve Parkinson, Winthrop Professor Don Robertson, Winthrop Professor Linc Schmitt, Professor Mark Spackman, Professor Tim St Pierre, Mrs Jenni Stevenson, Winthrop Professor Brendan Waddell, Associate Professor Karen Wallman, Mrs Kath Williams

APOLOGIES: Winthrop Professor Ian Dadour, Assistant Professor Dan Franklin, Professor Lee Yong Lim, Dr Shane Maloney, Ms Helen Tang

Imelda Ooi as secretary

1. MINUTES REF: F3059

RESOLVED – 1
that the Minutes of the Full Faculty meeting held on 15 October 2008 be confirmed.

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

The Chair invited members to declare interests in relation to any items on the agenda. No conflicts of interest were declared.

3. AWARD OF GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN SCIENCE COMMUNICATION
REF: F6294

Members noted that the current rules allow for an alternative exit from the Master of Science Communication to the Graduate Diploma in Science Communication. However, the Rules for the Graduate Diploma in Science Communication did not provide for an alternative exit from the course to the Graduate Certificate in Science Communication. As certificate/diploma/masters courses in Science Communication all articulated, the Faculty had sought approval from Academic Council to provide alternative exits from these courses.

RESOLVED – 2
that the proposed rules be incorporated as follows:

(i) Graduate Diploma in Science Communication (51340)

... Award of Graduate Certificate in Science Communication

9.5.39.6 A student who withdraws from the course before qualifying for the diploma but after completing the requirements of the Graduate Certificate in Science Communication may apply to the Faculty to be awarded the certificate; and
(ii) Master of Science Communication (51580)

Award of Graduate Certificate in Science Communication

9.6.45.8 A student who withdraws from the Master of Science Communication before qualifying for the degree but after satisfying the requirements of the Graduate Certificate in Science Communication may apply to the Faculty to be awarded the certificate.

4. DEAN'S REPORT REF: F1158

The Dean reported that 2009 had been a successful year for the Faculty. This was despite the fact that financially, the scenario had looked bleak due to the 3% cut in funding for all Faculties. The main points were:

- There was a big increase in student enrolments for the Faculty, 24% for domestic students and 10-11% for international students. The quality of science students was good with entry scores averaging 91-92%;

- The quality of teaching was highlighted. Of particular note was that Professor Geoff Meyer won the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Teaching Fellowship which was a highly competitive and very prestigious award in recognition of excellence in teaching;

- 2009 also marked the International Year of Astronomy (Secretary's note: UWA had received a major donation which enabled it to enhance its facilities for optical astronomy [Zadko telescope]);

- The WA Premier had recently launched the $100 million International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research (ICRAR) at UWA. The Centre, a joint venture between Curtin University of Technology and UWA, would coordinate WA's radio astronomy research and play a pivotal role in Australia's effort to secure the $2.5 billion Square Kilometre Array (SKA). The Chair believed this would have a big impact on student recruitment particularly for the School of Physics;

- Professor Mike Tobar from the School of Physics, recently won one of the 15 national Australian Laureate Fellowships which was a testament to his excellence in research;

- The Future Framework was targeted to commence in 2012. This would give the Faculty an opportunity to embrace changes to the Bachelor of Science. However, the Chair expressed concern over the implementation process for the new course structure. Schools would need to make adjustments as teaching requirements and student recruitment would be impacted over the next two years;

- There had been a comparative lack of success in terms of securing ARC and NHMRC funding. The Chair suggested that the Faculty undertake a thorough analysis of its grant applications and to look at ways to increase its recruitment of PhD students. Whilst there had been an increase in international numbers, there was a decline in the domestic intake;

- The Chair encouraged Schools to develop closer links with the World University Network. A Barry Marshall tour to Malaysia had been organized for next year. This would help to maintain and strengthen links with the country as well as increase awareness of UWA;

- Space was a problem for the Faculty especially for teaching post 2012. As it was unlikely that the Faculty would get another building, Schools would have to look at ways to factor in the areas of teaching that were growing; and
• The financial state of the University precluded staff appointments unless they were essential.
  In response to a query as to whether the moratorium on staff appointments applied only to
  new appointments, the Chair responded that it applied to both new appointments and
  replacements.

5. FUTURE FRAMEWORK REF: F26489, F28105

Members were advised that the Vice-Chancellor had confirmed that implementation of the new
course structure would commence in 2012. The Chair asked members whether they had any
issues of concern relating to the introduction of the new course structure.

The discussion was focused on three main areas of concern namely majors, broadening units and
postgraduate programs. The main points were:-

**Majors:**
Concern was expressed at the restrictions that were imposed on the structure of majors. Science
was unique in the overlap of content of its majors. This was due to the forefront of science
research being multi-disciplinary and, therefore, it was appropriate that there would be an
overlap of units between undergraduate majors. Requiring at least half the units in each major to
be unique to that major would rule out interdisciplinary majors, and/or lead to a proliferation of
units whereas sharing units across different majors would result in a reduction of unit offerings.
*Secretary’s Note:* The current rules of the BSc allow for almost unlimited overlap between
different major sequences, as long as 24 points at level 3 are counted by the individual student
towards only one major).

It was important that programs which were popular were registered as a major e.g. Biomedical
Science. Although this major would not comply with the guidelines for the structure of a major,
members felt that it should still be put forward for consideration by the Interim Board of Studies
for the Bachelor of Science.

**Broadening units:**
Concern was expressed about the restriction that broadening units in the Bachelor of Science
would only be available from disciplines external to the degree. Because science was broad, it
was appropriate for students to gain breadth across the sciences. The proposed structure would
mean that a student studying a major in Psychology in the Bachelor of Science could undertake
a broadening unit in Linguistics; however, a Physics student would be unable to study a Biology
unit and vice versa. This potential outcome was unacceptable to members.

**Postgraduate programs:**
Concern was expressed that mixed messages were being received in relation to whether the
postgraduate courses in science would be HECS based. Recent advice was that only the
postgraduate professional programs would be HECS based. One member commented that the
University of Melbourne had secured Commonwealth-supported places for some of its
postgraduate courses.
*Secretary’s Note:* University of Melbourne will be offering over 200 Commonwealth
supported places in the Master of Science in 2010).

Postgraduate programs were more expensive to teach because students expected closer
supervision and smaller classes. It was acknowledged that students were not willing to pay for
postgraduate courses unless they led to a professional qualification.

It was also noted that there would be a need to retrain or hire new staff in the new structure for
the proposed more vocationally oriented postgraduate programs.
Other issues raised were:

- A member questioned how the ‘communication skills’ requirement would be implemented, whether it would be a discrete unit or whether it would be taught in units comprising the major. The Science Communication Program co-ordinator commented that she was in the process of developing a collaborative communication unit, which would be taught in context through an assignment in a topic in the area of the student’s chosen major. Associate Professor Longnecker was seeking input from Schools in the development of this unit.

- A decision still had to be made as to whether the ‘graduating’ mathematics requirement would be retained.
  
  (Secretary’s Note: the mathematics requirement is likely to be completed through the bridging program and, therefore, would not impact on the degree requirements).

- Concern was expressed that little information had been released about funding in the new structure, which meant that it was difficult for Schools to plan.

- Concern was expressed about the unknown impact of the new model on international student numbers in the Bachelor of Science.

The Chair advised that the concerns voiced by members above would be forwarded to Winthrop Professor Grady Venville, the Chair on the Interim Board of Studies for the Bachelor of Science.

6. **ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCE REQUIREMENT** REF: F6294

Members recalled that the issue regarding the English Language competence requirement had been discussed at the recent Faculty Board meeting on 16 June 2009. At that meeting, consideration had been given to the fact that the English competency requirement had been raised for some courses (i.e. the Faculty of Law had resolved to increase the undergraduate requirement to an overall IELTS score of 7.0 with no individual band below 7.0). Members had been asked whether the Faculty should consider raising the English requirement to 7.0 for all its postgraduate courses. However, as a consensus was not reached, the Chair had proposed that the decision to raise the English requirement be deferred to a later date to enable the Faculty to obtain some data to assist in its deliberation on the issue.

Members had before them details of a breakdown of IELTS scores for recent postgraduate admissions provided by the Faculty Manager. Of the 56 students admitted with an IELTS score of 6.5 and no band less than 6.0, 67.9% of that group would be excluded if the IELTS score was raised to 7.0 with no band less than 7.0; 58.9% would be excluded if an IELTS score of 7.0 with no band less than 6.5 was applied; and 53.6% would be excluded if an IELTS score of 6.5 with no band less than 6.5 was applied.

Based on the above data, the Chair proposed that the Faculty would not change its English Proficiency requirement for its postgraduate courses which was supported by all members.

7. **VOTE OF THANKS TO ACADEMIC STUDENT ADVISER** REF: F1158

This was Dr Jane Emberson’s last attendance at the Full Faculty meeting. The Chair on behalf of the Faculty, expressed his good wishes on her retirement and thanked her for all her hard work and contribution during her term as the Faculty’s Academic Student Adviser.
ITEM FOR THE ATTENTION OF ACADEMIC SECRETARIAT

8. PROPOSAL FOR PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT BETWEEN UWA AND OPEN UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA (OUA) REF:

Members had before them a proposal from Professor Neville Bruce, Director of the Centre for Integrated Human Studies, for a partnership agreement between UWA and Open Universities Australia (OUA) to facilitate the delivery of the fully online distance learning options of its Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate in Integrated Human Studies. Speaking to the item, Professor Bruce stated that the proposed partnership with OUA would open up marketing possibilities for both courses and enable rapid penetration of the market nationally and internationally. Currently, 94% of OUA enrolments were outside WA. The potential greater student enrolment would be a significant revenue earner for the School.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- It was queried how many students were required to make the partnership viable. Professor Bruce responded that 5 students would make it marginal, 10 would be comfortable and 20 would be very good. He went on to say that the only cost would be the delivery of online tutorials which would require the services of a quarter of a full-time staff (0.25 FTE) for a group of 5-10 students.

- It was unclear as to whether the students would graduate with an OUA degree or with a UWA degree. It was also unclear as to what proportion of the fee would be taxed centrally, particularly in relation to international students.

The Chair acknowledged the concerns of members and advised that the agreement would be reviewed by the Legal Office.

RESOLVED – 3

to recommend that the proposal for a partnership agreement between UWA and Open Universities Australia (OUA) be supported, and forwarded to Academic Council for consideration.

Confirmed

CHAIR