

Meeting 2/10

27 May 2010

For general publication

Present: Mr Akash Boda, Assoc Prof Melissa Brown, Ms Melissa Fenwick, Miss Katelin Haynes (in the chair), Ms Kekini Kuppan, Mr Alexander Metcalf, Dr Steve Reid, Assoc Prof Joe Rothnagel. Miss Nicole Silajew, Mr Mark Starkey (minutes), Ms Prahatha Venkatraman, Dr Simon Worrall.

ACTION

Apologies: Mr Adrian English, Mr David Mogg, Prof Alastair McEwan.

Minutes: Minutes of the meeting held 15 April 2010, having been circulated, were taken as read and were confirmed.

Business arising out of the minutes:

Spread of Assessment

Members recalled that at Meeting 1-10 it had suggested that the iMark system might be able to produce a report of when assessment items were due across a range of courses.

Mark Starkey referred members to a list in the agenda papers of compulsory courses in each year of each of the significant majors administered by SCMB and the courses most commonly taken with those compulsory courses.

Mark added that reports of iMark course assessment due dates for the course combinations were in the process of being produced. There had been a delay due to some assessment due dates being missing from the iMark system. The reports should be available at the next meeting.

Mark
Starkey

Student Cohort Experience – Majors-Based BBQs

At Meeting 1-10, helpers had been sought for the proposed Chemistry and Biotechnology BBQ to be held early in second semester. Alex Metcalf advised that, after discussions with the SUSS executive, it was felt that there might be a better way to address the aim of an enhanced cohort experience.

The trial BBQ for MBS Major second year students in the first half of semester one had not been as successful as had been hoped. Although there were things that could be done to improve future BBQs, SUSS felt that its resources could be put to better use by taking a different approach.

The Faculty of Science puts on an extensive 'Majors Day' in semester two, where students are given the chance to walk around and talk to prospective major coordinators. Alex reported that SUSS was considering working with the Faculty to run a social event in conjunction with the day, in lieu of the Chemistry/Biotechnology BBQ.

Alex advised that he would keep the Committee informed of developments. Katelin invited members with any other ideas about an enhanced cohort experience for BSc majors students to contact Alex.

All
members

Identification of career paths for BSc students – credit for industry

Mark reported that, following Meeting 1-10, Ross Barnard had pointed out that the Biotechnology industry placements course alluded to in the minutes was coded as BIOT3007 and would be first offered in summer semester 2010-11. (The course was not yet searchable in the UQ Programs & Courses database and this was being resolved.) The prerequisite was BIOT2002 (or BIOT6006), so it was designed to serve Biotechnology students.

The concerns of members that a SCIE coded course would be better than a BIOT coded course had been passed on the Faculty of Science Associate Dean (Academic), Prof Peter Adams, but no response had been received to-date.

Meeting 2/10

27 May 2010

For general publication

Business arising out of the minutes: (cont'd)

Identification of career paths for BSc students – credit for industry (cont'd)

Joe Rothnagel undertook to follow the matter up with Peter. He noted that the Faculty was looking at decentralising the administration of SCIE3012/3044 such that each School would have ownership of these project courses for its disciplines and could offer industry placements if it wished. The School would need to ascertain how much resource it could put into assisting students to obtain placements.

Joe
Rothnagel

First Year Courses SCIE1000, STAT1201 and MATH1051

Mark reported that comments raised by members in Meeting 1-10, about the workload to assessment value ratio of some assignments and the accessibility of practical sessions, had been passed on to the Faculty of Science Associate Dean (Academic). No response had been received to-date.

Mark reiterated that students should make their comments on the Student Evaluations of Teaching forms. He added that the School's Teaching & Learning Committee looked at the evaluation results as they became available each semester. Recently, the T&L Committee had resolved that the coordinators of courses with lower-than-average scores be asked to comment on their view of the reason for the score and what, if any, changes they were proposing for the course. The T&L Committee has a student representative. Additionally, Course Profiles now provided space for a coordinator to indicate what had changed since the last offering of the course as a result of student feedback (see current SCIE1000 profile for an example).

BIOC3000, *Biomolecular Structure & Function*, and laboratory space constraints

Following Meeting 1-10, comment had been sought from the Course Coordinator, Luke Guddatt, and the Biochemistry & Molecular Biology Major Convenor, Susan Rowland, regarding the amount of wet practical class contact in this capstone course. Members considered the responses, which appeared in the agenda papers. Both staff members had indicated that a lack of wet lab and CAL space at desired teaching times had restricted the practical component of BIOC3000 and other courses they were involved in.

The SCMB Teaching Laboratory Services Manager, Sue Bennett, had indicated that the competition for space was concentrated in the afternoons of Tuesday to Thursday in Weeks 2-12. Although most courses wanted pracs to run for only a limited number of weeks, these often overlapped, whereas if they were sequential (eg, Course X runs pracs Tues pm weeks 2-5 and Course Y in weeks 6-9), they could be more easily accommodated. Ultimately, had said Sue, there were plenty of vacant slots in the lab schedule, but they were scattered. She had added that other dynamics impacting on the booking of space were the availability of equipment; the workloads of lab prep staff; and ambit claims for lab space that did not eventuate, but managed to shut other classes out.

Student members queried whether there was scope for better communication between course coordinators and Sue Bennett about prac requirements. Staff members present indicated that Sue was pro-active in this regard. They added that part of the problem at present was that it was difficult to predict enrolment numbers for new courses as they had come on-line in 2009 and 2010. This should settle down after 2010. SCMB monitored enrolment numbers in the lead up to each semester, comparing them to numbers at the equivalent point in time in the preceding year, in order to anticipate potential problems.

Mark added that, in relation to lab facilities, the smaller Microbiology lab, 76-225, would be expanded during the next summer break to accommodate another 12 students. The Head of School had indicated that when Level 4 of the Chemistry Building was eventually refurbished, additional generic teaching laboratory space could be included in the footprint. Additionally, the T&L Committee had recently recommended that evening classes be offered where lab capacity was compromised. This already occurred successfully in first level BIOL courses and, in SCMB, would be introduced initially for first level Chemistry if the need arose.

Meeting 2/10

27 May 2010

For general publication

Business arising out of the minutes: (cont'd)

BIOC3000, *Biomolecular Structure & Function*, and laboratory space constraints
(cont'd)

Katelin suggested that the 2011 Consultative Committee monitor the situation.

Participation of the wider student body in Consultative Committee activities

Members noted that a slide had been prepared with the input of members and forwarded to course coordinators 7 May, inviting them to put it up in lectures and to ask if any members of the SCC are present in the class to speak to it. Use of the slide was made optional for course coordinators.

Student members present reported that the slide had been put up by Joe Rothnagel and John Fuerst, but others had not seen it yet. It was agreed that the slide be recirculated for use in the first week of second semester.

Mark
Starkey

1. Course Structure Variations:

BSc Year 3 Molecular Biosciences Majors representative, Alex Metcalf, said that he and a fellow student had recently reflected on courses that had varied from the standard delivery format of 3 x 1hr lectures per week + 1 x 3hr practical per week + possibly a tutorial + mid-semester exam + lab report + assignment + final exam.

Whilst he appreciated that this format worked effectively and efficiently for the majority of courses, it was pleasant to experience some variety, such as BIOL3004 with its heavily weighted mid semester exam and no final exam, and its elective module which allowed students to pick five weeks of computer practicals and an associated assignment based on interests. BIOL2006 had included problem based learning tutorials involving deconstruction of real experimental designs lead by a tutor; and BIOL3006's PBLs the investigation of concepts/findings lead by a tutor.

Alex said that these alternatives were appreciated because they helped with the spread of assessment and could provide an incentive such as no lectures/fewer lectures for a period when the practical component was requiring more work.

Akash Boda said that students appreciated mid-semester exams that did not re-examine the material in the final exam. Joe Rothnagel said that University policy was that the final exam cover all course material. Student members reiterated that they liked mid-semester exams in terms of spreading assessment and providing feedback. Joe mentioned that mid-semester exams had become increasingly difficult over recent years to organise, responsibility for them having been devolved to Schools and with a requirement that the exams be held in class time. Scheduling the exams outside of class times, eg on a Saturday, required executive-level approval and was normally only given for large classes where holding the exam in class time under reasonable invigilation conditions was impractical (eg, due to a lack of suitable venues).

Akash, in the second semester of his first year, felt that it would be good to extend the PASS scheme to second year courses.

Katelin Haynes said that having practice exams available would help, particularly for new courses where there are no past papers yet. Staff members said that past papers should be on the Blackboard sites of courses. Akash pointed out that this was not the case for BIOL1020. Melissa Brown suggested that this might be an oversight on the part of the new BIOL1020 coordinator, and recommended that Akash contact the coordinator to rectify this. Akash was invited to let Melissa know if a problem remained. In relation to new third level courses, student members were reminded that the course profile indicates which previously-offered courses are incompatible with the new course because of substantial content overlap. Past papers for these incompatible courses should be in the library.

Akash
Boda

It was agreed that the comments made by Alex and others above be passed on to the School's Teaching & Learning Committee for consideration.

Mark
Starkey

Meeting 2/10

27 May 2010

For general publication

2. BIOC6007, *Directed Studies in Biomolecular Structure & Function*:

On behalf of a number of other students, Master of Molecular Biology representative, Prahatha Venkatraman, reported concerns about the assessment structure of BIOC6007 undertaken in second semester 2009 and due to be offered next in second semester 2010.

In particular, 9% of the assessment had been for lecture participation, but this was not just for attendance, but also for small, one-page assignment items to be submitted via Turnitin the day before each lecture. Each assignment item had been worth 1%. In some weeks, these items had coincided with other assessment items, such as CAL report. The students had found the effort required for the lecture participation items outweighed the 1% value.

Prior to the meeting, a response had been sought from the 2009 course coordinator, Susan Rowland, a summary of which appeared in the agenda papers. Susan had indicated that students in BIOC6007 often had diverse backgrounds and took some time to adapt to completing formative assessment tasks (ie, those not for assessment) in a timely and consistent manner. Lecture attendance in 2007 and 2008 had not been strong. Accordingly, Susan had introduced summative tasks (counts for assessment) to the weekly lectures.

Susan had argued that the tasks had not been demanding, in that an attempt, regardless of source or accuracy, was all that was required to receive the 1%. She had estimated that the task would take 1-2 hours per week, which she had seen as reasonable for a course with two hours of weekly contact. She had also made it clear to students that a half-page written answer would score the same mark as a 3 line answer. The worksheets had aligned with the final exam questions and this had been made clear to students.

Prahatha responded that it had been three or four weeks into the course before the coordinator had made it clear that a perfect answer was not required to obtain marks. She added that students felt obliged to make a substantive effort when a piece was assessable.

Other members felt that there could be scope to ensure coordinator expectations are fully understood by students at the commencement of the course. Postgraduate Molecular Biology Program Director, Simon Worrall, undertook to convey this to the coordinator of the 2010 offering of the course, Alan Mark.

Simon
Worrall

3. Research Project in MMolBiol:

Prahatha queried why MMolBiol students could not start their research project in their first semester of enrolment in the program. She suggested that having more time in the lab would enhance student practical skills and introduce them to the research community sooner.

Program Director, Simon Worrall, replied that the reasons for not allowing students to start their research project until their second semester were primarily practical in nature:

- All students must undergo a safety induction which did not occur until week 2 or 3.
- Students would have to find a supervisor before most of them had arrived. Generally they were encouraged to find a supervisor for their second semester small project during their first semester.
- Until students had completed some studies at UQ, academic staff are unaware of the students' skills base. All students did a course with an associated laboratory component during their first semester so that their bench skills could be assessed. Students came from such a large number of institutions that is often difficult to access their standards.

Prahatha noted that in a first semester neuroscience course offered in the School of Biomedical Sciences, a lab rotation was available. Simon responded that neuroscience was a relatively narrow field compared to the diversity of research in SCMB, meaning that students could end up on a rotation in SCMB doing something that did not interest them. This diversity also increased the range of OH&S concerns. Melissa Brown felt that the lab experience would be of a better quality if a semester of prior study was completed first. Kekini Kuppen (MBiotech representative) agreed that it takes time to find a supervisor.

Meeting 2/10

27 May 2010

For general publication

3. Research Project in MMolBiol: (cont'd)

Katelin asked whether the USSER concept of lab experience for undergraduates might be extended to postgraduate coursework programs. Simon said that he would give this consideration, but noted that there was an implication of additional workload for academic staff.

Simon
Worrall

Melissa Brown suggested that most research group leaders in the School would not object to one or two postgraduate coursework students sitting in on their weekly lab group meetings, particularly if the students were undertaking their literature review with an academic staff member in the group. Simon undertook to suggest to those students seeking more lab experience to approach staff about sitting in on lab group meetings.

Simon
Worrall

4. BSc Student Focus Group Outcomes:

Since the progressive introduction of a new BSc curriculum from 2008, the Faculty of Science had surveyed focus groups of BSc students about their student experience.

A summary of the results of focus group surveys completed in 2008 and 2009 for first year students and in 2009 for second year students had been included in the agenda papers for the consideration of members.

Joe Rothnagel reported that he had recently circulated the report to academic staff of the School, inviting them to consider any changes that could be implemented for SCMB courses to address any issues raised by students. He understood that the responses of staff would be published on the web along with the full focus group results by the Faculty of Science in due course.

In relation to the summary results, student members echoed in particular the feedback about group work and practical class tutors.

Students preferred to self-select for groups to align themselves with peers who have similar work ethics and/or who are in similar programs (to better enable group meeting scheduling).

Melissa Fenwick said that prac class tutors who explained the process and its relevance to lecture materials and careers and facilitated students finding question answers were more appreciated than tutors who simply gave out the answers. She added that in CHEM2054 last semester, there seemed to have been an inadequate number of tutors. Mark Starkey responded that a fairly generous tutor:student ratio was usually applied for Chemistry courses, but he undertook to look into this.

Mark
Starkey

Mark went on to say that SCMB had reviewed the quality assurance it employed in selecting tutors for appointment and had started implementing new approaches in 2009. All tutors were now interviewed prior to appointment to assess their practical skill levels. This facilitated better matching of tutors to courses and more targeted training of tutors. Tutors were required to get their students to evaluate them, and the results, along with formal feedback from course coordinators and lab prep staff, were used in making decisions about reappointment of tutors. The Faculty of Science had introduced a new training module for tutors in first semester 2010 that was dedicated to how to be an effective teacher.

Later-year student members of the Committee commented that they had noticed an improvement in tutor quality in 2010, and this was echoed by Melissa Brown, from a course coordinator's perspective.

Melissa Fenwick noted the feedback of second year focus group students that, when asked to consider their transition to third year, they had been generally positive about choosing courses aligned to their career aspirations. She felt however that some students would like academic advisors to be able to better link majors to career outcomes.

Joe Rothnagel said that information on the kinds of careers the various majors can lead to was included in publications such as the undergraduate Science prospectus and the Faculty booklet 'Careers that Started in Science', and in handouts made available at the annual Majors Day. Melissa said that printed information was useful but that a face-to-face affirmation added value.

Meeting 2/10

27 May 2010

For general publication

4. BSc Student Focus Group Outcomes: (cont'd)

Joe noted that most of the majors were 'foundation' in their content and it was not well known which jobs students taking the majors ended up in and if the majors were useful. Mark added that the University, Faculty and SCMB were trying to build alumni relationships so that more stories of where graduates ended up could be sourced.

Members discussed the idea of a careers evening, possibly involving members of the School's Industry Advisory Board, its alumni and representatives of the discipline-specific professional societies and of companies (eg, Kelly Scientific), together with academic staff, where current and prospective students could talk about career options. There was general support for exploring the idea, and Mark undertook to take the proposal to the School's External Relations Committee.

Mark
Starkey

First year representative, Nicole Silajew, added that more-specific careers advice would be welcomed by prospective students closer to the enrolment period. Prospective students often attended TSXPO in July to get a helicopter view of institutions and programs, then Open Days in August to narrow their choices. When OP results were released in December, little discipline-specific information was available. So-called 'decisions' evenings offered by universities just prior to Christmas were very broad in nature.

5. Next Meeting:

It was agreed that the next meeting be scheduled for Week 3 of second semester.

Mark
Starkey

* * * * *