

Meeting 3/10

26 August 2010

For general publication

- Present:** Mr Akash Boda, Ms Melissa Fenwick, Mr Alexander Metcalf, Mr David Mogg, Dr Steve Reid, Assoc Prof Joe Rothnagel, Ms Rebecca Saleeb, Miss Nicole Silajew, Mr Mark Starkey (in the chair and taking minutes),
- Apologies:** Assoc Prof Melissa Brown, Miss Katelin Haynes, Prof Alastair McEwan, Ms Prahatha Venkatraman, Dr Simon Worrall.
- Absent:** Mr Adrian English.
- Minutes:** Minutes of the meeting held 27 May2010, having been circulated, were taken as read and were confirmed.

ACTION

Business arising out of the minutes:

Spread of Assessment

Mark Starkey reported that iMark reports were being compiled (with second semester common course combinations having been only recently identified on the basis of stabilised enrolments at Week 3), but were being delayed by UQ computer network problems following a small fire in the Prentice Building on 22 August and by staff absences. Mark undertook to circulate data to members as soon as it was available and before the next meeting.

Mark

Student cohort experience – majors-based BBQs

Alex Metcalf reported that the plan to hold a BBQ coinciding with Science Majors Day had been abandoned after it was discovered Majors Day was not being staged by the Faculty of Science this year. An Honours information week was scheduled for the coming week, but it was too late to organise something.

Joe Rothnagel suggested that the School consider staging an information event for its majors later in the semester. Mark Starkey undertook to investigate if the resources to do this would be available. First Year BSc representative, Nicole Silajew, said that a majors information event would be useful. Alex indicated that he had too many commitments to arrange a student social event coinciding with any School majors event, and no other volunteers had stepped forward.

Mark

Identification of career paths for BSc students – credit for industry placements

Joe Rothnagel reported that the Faculty had advised that industry placement is possible under the *Introduction to Research* (SCIE3012, soon to be SCIE3261) and *Vacation Projects* (SCIE3044, soon to be SCIE3260) courses if the School and Faculty was satisfied in advance that the industry projects provided an equivalent research experience to that offered by School projects. This implied that the projects needed to research-like in an industry setting. Students needed to seek out their own industry projects. A link to an application form for the courses is available under the course description on the UQ Programs and Courses webpage.

Alternatively, students could enrol in BIOT3007, specifically set up for industry placements for Biotechnology students, but available to other Science students who had the prerequisite of BIOT2002. Steve Reid advised that a limited number of projects would be available and not all students would necessarily be placed. However, if there were projects which did not require Biotechnology knowledge and no Biotech student wanted to take them, BSc students could take them.

Steve added that small companies often contracted their R&D to universities and CSIRO, so students could find that they could do a UQ lab project under the SCIE codes which had an industry focus in any case.

Joe suggested that the School review its support to industry placement assistance in the future if there was a large cohort of students seeking industry based research experience.

Meeting 3/10

26 August 2010

For general publication

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

Participation of wider student body in Consultative Committee activities

Mark reported that the lecture slide promoting the SCC was recirculated to SCMB course coordinators by email 21 July, requesting coordinators to consider putting up the slide at the start or end of their classes early in the second semester. Coordinators had been asked to help encourage students to contact their representatives. Student members of the Committee reported that they had not seen the slide often. It was resolved that a slide be distributed each semester regardless.

Mark

BIOC3000 and other third year courses – insufficient lab content

Although this had been discussed at the previous two meetings and it had been resolved that the 2011 SCC monitor the situation, Alex Metcalf reported that a fellow student had recently expressed dissatisfaction at the amount of practical class experience offered in third year courses, in particular as preparation for the lab-intensive honours year. The student had written:

I think that there should be more of a practical focus in third year than there currently is. This semester none of my subjects (BIOC3003, BIOC3005 and BIOL3222) have wet lab pracs. I think it's particularly important to include pracs in capstone courses such as BIOL3222 Advanced genetics. Additionally BIOC3000 and BIOL3006 both only had 2 pracs. I just think as most 3rd year students don't have the same research experience (through ASPinS) as we do that there should be as much focus as possible on developing practical skills before they enter research/industry.

Members noted that CHEM3016 provided chemistry major students with an intensive lab experience, but no such equivalent existed in the School's molecular biosciences majors. Staff suggested that biology was more diverse and it would be hard to fit a good range of experiments into a #2 course. It was also pointed out by staff that the Honours year was about developing lab skills (rather than necessarily starting the year with them) and that the year timeframe provided time to run and re-run experiments properly, which was desirable training.

Joe Rothnagel added that the reduction in prac classes had started ten to fifteen years ago when funding to universities per student was reduced by the Commonwealth. Growth in student numbers since had not helped. He also mentioned that the course coordinator of BIOC3006 was thinking of adding another prac module to that course in any case. He suggested that students use their in-class evaluation forms to communicate that they wanted more lab experience, so that it might be seen as a widespread concern.

Alex suggested that prospective third year students could be warned that the courses were not lab-intensive and they could then consider seeking enrolment in the *Introduction to Research* and *Vacation Projects* courses. Melissa Fenwick asked what proportion of BSc students do the research and vacation project courses. Mark undertook to find out.

Mark

Course structure variations

Comments made by members at Meeting 2-10 were noted by the School's Teaching & Learning Committee at its 24 August meeting. The T&L Committee had a large staff membership and a student representative and the minutes were made available to all academic staff of the School.

BSc student focus group outcomes - CHEM2054 tutor-to-student ratio

Melissa Fenwick had indicated during discussion in Meeting 2-10 that there had appeared to be an inadequate number of tutors in CHEM2054, *Experimental Chemistry*, when it was offered for the first time in second semester 2009.

Meeting 3/10

26 August 2010

For general publication

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

BSc student focus group outcomes - CHEM2054 tutor-to-student ratio (cont'd)

Mark reported that a review of the figures indicated that 75 students had been enrolled in CHEM2054, each attending two sessions per week, giving 150 'student-sessions'. Three tutors were employed for each of the five sessions, giving 15 tutor-sessions. This indicated that the student/tutor ratio was 150/15 or 10:1.

In second semester 2010, the sessions for CHEM2054 and 3016 were combined. There were 86 students in 2054 attending for 2 sessions per week and 60 students in 3016 attending for an average of 2.5 sessions per week. Thus, there were $(86*2) + (60*2.5) = 236$ student-sessions. There were 5 tutors on 2 sessions (recently increased from 4), 4 tutors on 3 sessions and 3 tutors on 1 session, giving $(5*2) + (4*3) + (3*1) = 25$ tutor sessions. The student/tutor ratio was $236/25 = 9.44:1$.

Mark added that the student/tutor ratio in advanced-level Chemistry courses had typically been from 6:1 to 12:1 over the years, depending on the course.

Laboratory prep staff had indicated that there was a need for more tutors for the Year 2 and 3 experimental chemistry courses this year, partly due to a larger than usual enrolment in CHEM1020 this semester (which was sucking up more tutors than usual), and partly because of the need for tutors in the experimental courses to be across so many experiments, demanding a particular level of expertise. The result had been that the lab prep staff themselves (Dave Rosolen and George Blazak) had been tutoring. To address this problem, top-performing third year undergraduates were being sourced to be tutors in CHEM1020, thereby freeing tutors for CHEM2054/3016.

David Mogg, who was enrolled in CHEM3016, said that he felt that the tutor ratio was acceptable, but that there was a shortage of equipment due to competition from CHEM2054 students. Mark undertook to pass this information on to the School's Manager of Teaching Laboratory Services, because she compiled a list of teaching equipment to be purchased each year and this could be addressed in 2011. Mark also mentioned that two inactive fume cupboards on Level 5 of the Chemistry Building would be coming on-line over the summer as part of major refurbishment works being funded by the University on upper floors.

Mark

Careers Evening

The idea raised at Meeting 2-10 (page 6 of the minutes) had been considered by the School's External Relations Committee at its July meeting.

ERC members had agreed that such an event, which would take some preparation to conduct and might require assistance from the Faculty Office, could ideally be held in September before the 30 Sept QTAC applications deadline. Otherwise, October would be the next best period before classes for current students end.

[Subsequent to the ERC meeting, the chairperson and Mark Starkey agreed that, given the extent of other external relations activity in 2010, such an event be planned for 2011. Mark Starkey and Ros Boulton (the School's Marketing Officer) would commence preparatory work in the meantime, as their schedules permitted.]

1. Course marks and exam script viewing:

Alex Metcalf posed two questions:

1. Is it possible for students to receive the marks for the final piece of assessment in each of their courses?
2. Can exam script viewing sessions be made available in all courses?

Alex acknowledged that there could be a substantial administrative burden in implementing such changes.

Meeting 3/10

26 August 2010

For general publication

2. Course marks and exam script viewing: (cont'd)

Mark reported that advice had been sought from the School's Manager of Coursework Academic Administration, Athol Reid.

Regarding 1, the School was obliged to release the results of any piece of assessment in a course. However, in relation to end-of-semester exams, University policy on the provision of feedback (HUPP 3.30.1, section 4.9) stated that this will occur only after the release of course grade results and upon request from the student. As most students have a final grade which meets their expectations or is at least a passing grade, there are very few requests for the exam marks. Where such requests are made, they are met. Some academic staff feel that automatically forwarding the exam marks to all students would stimulate demand for meetings in which students seek the granting of extra marks, and for remark requests, where the chances of granting extra marks was slim or a remark not really warranted, thereby wasting everyone's time.

Regarding 2, exam answer viewing sessions are held in SCMB on an as-demanded basis – that is, if a course coordinator would prefer to deal with script-viewing requests via a supervised session rather than by appointments with individual students, a session is arranged. There is an administrative overhead with script-viewing sessions:

- Rooms must be booked and, as the sessions must be held after the supplementary/special exam period, the viewing sessions for first semester courses are held early in second semester, when room bookings are difficult to secure due to timetabled classes. Similarly, at the end of second semester exam periods, many international students flew home immediately and did not return until the start of first semester, when a script-viewing session would compete with classes for space.
- Students must be contacted to be advised of the time and venue of the session and a register of students proposing to attend must be maintained.
- Exam papers for the attending students must be collated and ferried to and from the venue.
- Staff must be assigned to conduct the session under conditions somewhat similar to exam room conditions (no writing implements or bags, presence of invigilators).

For the above reasons, exam script viewing sessions are not automatic. Mark Starkey reported that he had previously managed a School where it was decided by the Teaching & Learning Committee to have exam script viewing sessions for all courses, except those where a course coordinator opted out and preferred to retain the exam papers and see students on an individual basis. In the School of ITEE, up to three sessions are scheduled during the semester following the exam period and students can attend one 15-minute block per course to view the final exam paper. The system works reasonably well, but the School is smaller and the numbers are easier to manage.

Student members of the Committee felt that SCMB's arrangements, as explained, were adequate, but most were unaware that they could view exam papers.

2. Educating students about issues dealt with by the Committee:

Student members of the Committee observed that for most issues that had come before the Committee since its inception in 2009, the School had provided adequate responses, but suspected that many students would be unaware of how things worked.

Alex Metcalf volunteered to research issues raised since the Committee was formed and to summarise them into a document for a future meeting, with a view to the Committee discussing how best to communicate the issues and solutions to students.

Alex

3. Next Meeting:

It was agreed that the next meeting be scheduled for the week following the mid-semester break. The meeting will be held on Thursday 7 October at 1.00 pm in 68-303.

Mark

* * * * *