

Meeting 4/10

7 October 2010

For general publication

- Present:** Miss Katelin Haynes (in the chair), Mr Akash Boda, Assoc Prof Melissa Brown, Mr Adrian English, Ms Melissa Fenwick, Mr Alexander Metcalf, Mr David Mogg, Assoc Prof Joe Rothnagel, Ms Rebecca Saleeb, Miss Nicole Silajew, Mr Mark Starkey (minutes), Dr Simon Worrall.
- Apology:** Prof Alastair McEwan.
- Absent:** Ms Prahatha Venkatraman.
- Minutes:** Minutes of the meeting held 26 August 2010, having been circulated, were taken as read and were confirmed.

**ACTION**

**Business arising out of the minutes:**

**Spread of assessment**

Members considered graphs of the number of assessment items falling due in each week of the semester for the most-common combinations of enrolled courses in each year of the Chemistry, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, and Microbiology majors of the BSc for semesters one and two 2010. The data had been circulated to members by email ahead of the meeting and had also been included in the agenda papers.

Members queried the numbering of the weeks, suggesting that Week 14 on the graphs was in fact Week 13 of classes. (Subsequent to the meeting, Mark Starkey confirmed that the week count is inclusive of the mid-semester break, given that assessment could theoretically be due in that week. Accordingly, Week 14 on the graphs is Week 13 of classes and not an error.)

Members also queried some of the course combinations in second year. Mark explained that the methodology was to identify compulsory courses in a given semester of a given year of a major study plan (or where there was no compulsory, the most popular elective). Having identified these courses, a report was run to show the other courses taken by students enrolled in the compulsory course/s. The three most popular other courses were selected to arrive at a combination that could be regarded as the most frequent for a full-time student. As many students did not declare a major until late in their program (if at all), selecting by recorded major was seen to be unreliable. It was possible that the methodology sometimes identified a cohort of students enrolled in a combination of courses that did not necessarily correspond with the combination for students enrolled in the major in question. However, the methodology did identify the majority-student combinations for a given compulsory course and it seemed reasonable to attempt to seek an even assessment spread for such majority.

Mark Starkey explained that the data from iMark was not 100% complete, as some assessment items did not have due dates recorded in the system – typically some practical assessment which could be submitted by students at varying times during the semester, depending on which prac group a given student was assigned to. Some end-of-semester exam items lacked dates (affected by the timing of release of the exam timetable), but members agreed that the School had no control over the timing of final exams and noted that no other assessment in a given course was permitted to fall due in the exam period if an exam had been set for the course.

Members also noted that the number of assessment items due in a particular week did not necessarily correlate with workload, depending on the value of the individual assessment items. Mark explained that it would add considerably to the already significant data compilation task to include this dimension.

Chair of the School's Teaching & Learning Committee, Joe Rothnagel, suggested that the graphs be regarded as indicative of the spread of assessment for significant cohorts of the School's students and that if 'hotspots' could be identified from the graphs, the coordinators of the courses could be encouraged to consult with each other prior to semester to delve more deeply into the value of the items and to see if adjustments to assessment timing could be made.

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

**Spread of assessment** (cont'd)

Members analysed the graphs and identified the following concentrations of assessment for the consideration of the School's Teaching & Learning Committee in terms of the course of action suggested by Joe:

- First semester, Chemistry major – 1<sup>st</sup> year – Week 10.
- First semester, Chemistry major – 2<sup>nd</sup> year – overall spread.
- First semester, Chemistry major – 3<sup>rd</sup> year – Week 13.
- First semester, BMB major – 3<sup>rd</sup> year – Week 13. Members also queried that the graph heading included BIOC3006, which is not a valid course code. (Subsequent to the meeting this was checked. The code should have been BIOL3006. Mark replotted the graph including data for BIOL3006. The spread remained relatively even, with the peak remaining of four assessment items due in Week 13.)
- Second semester, Chemistry major – 1<sup>st</sup> year – Week 9.
- Second semester, BMB major – 1<sup>st</sup> year – Week 7.
- Second semester, Microbiology major – 1<sup>st</sup> year – Week 7.

Mark

Members agreed that there was less need to produce data for the BBiotech and the postgraduate coursework biotechnology and molecular biology programs, as these programs were more structured and self-contained. However, Ross Barnard suggested that a check be done of the two most populous majors in the BBiotech – Microbiology and Drug Design & Development.

Mark

**Majors information session**

Mark Starkey reported that, in investigating what would be involved in arranging a majors information session for SCMB-administered majors, he had spoken with the Associate Dean (Academic), Faculty of Science, who had initially expressed some enthusiasm for having a Faculty-wide event, similar to that last held in 2008 (before he was Associate Dean). However, Faculty staff had advised him that attendance at the 2008 event, despite adequate publicity at the time, was very poor, with staff outnumbering students for most of the time.

The Faculty now planned to email all first year students before the end of second semester reminding them of the need to choose majors and how to access information, including face-to-face with an academic advisor if desired. The Faculty intended to monitor demand for academic advisor appointments as a possible pointer for demand for an information session.

**Student cohort social events**

Bachelor of Biotechnology first year representative, Akash Boda, felt that concept of events to bring together second year BSc students enrolled in particular majors was worthy and could be extended to Biotech undergraduate and postgraduate students. Akash said that he rarely met up with fellow Biotech students. He suggested barbeques and/or seminars by specialists from industry or a particular research area.

Director of the Biotechnology program, Ross Barnard pointed out that a camp is run for Biotech students at the UQ Moreton Bay Research Station on Stradbroke Island each March-April, which is a good opportunity for students to get to know each other. He added that students could, of course, organise their own social functions for their own cohorts and use existing on-campus clubs and societies to add another dimension. There was also a Facebook page and LinkedIn page for UQ biotech students, which Ross observed as ways of tracking colleagues in the biotech program and alumni and seeing their great job destinations.

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

**Student cohort social events** (cont'd)

Akash felt that having events to follow up from the annual camp would be valuable. Katelin said that in the year she had attended the camp, students had organised their own follow-up events. Akash said that he was willing to organise an event. Alex offered to provide advice based on his experience of organising the MBS majors BBQ in first semester this year. Ross and Mark were willing to give advice to Akash regarding support the School could provide.

Akash

**Undergraduate research courses**

At Meeting 3-10, during a discussion on the amount of lab class content in courses, Melissa Fenwick had asked what proportion of BSc students completed the *Introduction to Research* (SCIE3012), *Special Project* (SCIE3013), *Further Perspectives in Science Research* (SCIE3017) and *Vacation Project* (SCIE3044) courses.

Mark reported that the number of students enrolled in the BSc in 2010 with a program equivalent year of '3' in SI-Net was 627 (which appeared likely, given total BSc enrolments in 2010 is 2,084). The number enrolled in 2010 in one or more of SCIE3012/3/7/44 (repeat enrolments counted once only) was 105. Thus 105 of 627 third year BSc students in 2010 were doing one of the research courses, which was approximately one in six.

Members suggested that some students would take one or more of the courses in second year, which would increase the proportion.

**Educating students about issues dealt with by the Committee**

Alex Metcalf had volunteered at Meeting 3-10 to research issues dealt with by the Committee since its formation and summarise them into a document, with a view to the Committee discussing how best to communicate the issues and solutions to students.

Alex referred members to a slide he had drafted, appearing in the agenda papers. Members made a number of suggestions:

Alex

- Acronyms should be avoided.
- The first point about the practical component of third year courses should emphasise the solution rather than the problem.
- The Committee's work on spread of assessment should be added.
- The name of the Committee should be put on the slide with information on how to contact representatives.

Arising from the discussion, members noted that the due date for Faculty of Science summer research scholarship applications had been late August this year, compared to late September last year. Student members felt that late September was better, because by then students would have a better idea of their plans for the summer (eg, holiday trips, paid work, family commitments, etc).

Mark for  
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Also arising from the discussion, it was felt that photos of student representatives should appear on the webpage which listed Committee member contact details. This should be arranged at the first meeting of the Committee each year and as new members joined. Photos of current representatives were taken at the conclusion of the meeting (and have since been published).

Mark

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**1. Computer Operating Systems, SCMB Postgraduate Coursework Student Room:**

Mark reported that, just after Meeting 3-10, he had received an email from a student suggesting that the Macintosh computers in Room 322 of the Chemistry Building (postgraduate coursework students' common room) be configured to run the Windows operating system. The student had argued that more students were familiar with Windows than MacOS.

Mark was able to reply to the student that all of the Macs in the room run PC emulation software and can be booted directly into Windows. The computers are then indistinguishable from using a PC (apart from the keyboard and mouse, but because a number of Mac keyboards and mice had gone missing from the room, the School was replacing them with less-expensive PC versions in any case).

Mark had suggested that some notices with instructions on how to run the computers with Windows be posted in the room. The student had agreed that this would be useful. The notices had since been installed.

**2. Membership:**

As this was likely to be the final meeting of the Committee for 2010, the chairperson thanked retiring members for their contributions and asked if other members were happy to be continue their membership, provided they remained eligible as they moved on in their programs. Those present responded that they would like to continue if eligible. Mark said that he would be in contact with continuing members prior to the start of the academic year in 2011.

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Mark