

Meeting 3/13

9 August 2013

For general publication

- Present:** Mr Chris Read (in the chair), Miss Melinda Ashcroft, Mr Alex Booy, Prof Melissa Brown, Mr James Hill, Assoc Prof Joe Rothnagel, Mr Mark Starkey (minutes), Miss Rose Trappes, Mr Vincent Were, Mr Alan Zhang.
- Apologies:** Mr Nick Deerain (new member replacing Paige Erpf while Paige on exchange overseas – had another commitment at short notice), Ms Mariska Marnane (clash with a class).
- Minutes:** Minutes of the meeting held 15 May 2013, having been circulated, were taken as read and were confirmed.

ACTION

1. Business Arising out of the minutes:

1.1 Molecular Design contest

The suggestions made at the May meeting for further promotion of the competition had been acted upon.

As at the 22 July closing date, only one entry had been received. Melinda Ashcroft and Melissa Brown had agreed that the student who entered should win the prize of a movie ticket from the School and \$50 cash and a certificate from the Molecular Biotechnology Student Club. The winner was Mr Arvey Oliveros, a MBiotech student. Melinda said that the quality of the entry was high.

It had been agreed not to further extend the competition, given the low level of interest and that the key courses are run in first rather than second semester.

A poster, screen slide and web news item of the winning entry would be made, mentioning the prizes won and calling for students to watch out for a similar competition in 2014.

Mark

Members agreed that before a competition was run again, its viability should be tested. Expressions of interest could be called for from students using an online survey tool. CSCC representatives could stand in front of classes with coordinator permission to speak about any competition. The matter would be considered at the first CSCC meeting of 2014.

Mark

1.2 Graduate Mentor Program – get-together of project students and potential supervisors

A project selection information session with lunch had been held 30 July, following on from the orientation welcome for new PGCW students that morning. Academic staff had set up posters on the Podium and talked to students. Staff from the IMB, AIBN and UQDI had also been invited to display posters. One hundred and twelve students had received an email invitation to the event and relevant course coordinators had been asked to promote it in class. Around 80 people participated and appeared to be well engaged. Melinda Ashcroft had attended and agreed that the session had been well-received.

1.3 Vacation scholarships

Further to the discussion at the May meeting about the number of winter vacation scholarships offered by SCMB, it had proven difficult to ascertain exactly how many projects had been offered, but there had been 19 applications for SCMB projects recorded by the UQ Office of Undergraduate Education (OUE). Nine scholarships had been awarded to students taking SCMB projects: three funded by UQ centrally, four by the School and two funded half by the School and half from funds available to the academic supervisor in the School.

Melissa Brown and Joe Rothnagel said that short time frames had been set by OUE for School responses and the project nomination process had initially been a little unclear. However, numbers had been reasonable in the end and the School expected to be better prepared for the winter 2014 round.

Meeting 3/13

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1. Business Arising out of the minutes: (cont'd)

1.3 Vacation scholarships (cont'd)

Meantime, members were reminded that applications for the 2013-14 summer vacation scholarships were due 31 August. Undergraduate student members reported having received advice by email about this.

1.4 Biotechnology Students Careers Event

This event had been tentatively scheduled for Monday 23 September at 6.00pm.

1.5 CHEM1010 quiz marking

It had been agreed at the May meeting that there was not a problem in the way the quizzes were being marked and Professor Garson's suggestion that the marking rationale might be better explained to students had been endorsed. This feedback was passed on to Prof Garson. James Hill reported that Prof Garson had since explained the rationale in class.

Members noted that course evaluation scores by students for CHEM1010 (and its predecessor CHEM1030) had risen over the last four years from 3.59 in 2010 to 4.07 in 2013. Melissa Brown suggested that a score of greater than 4 for a first year course with more than 1,300 enrolments is excellent, especially given the significant increase in students and associated logistical issues faced this year. She added that the scores clearly indicate a progressive improvement in the quality of the course.

1.6 Distribution of assessment across SCMB courses

Arising from the discussion at the May meeting about crowding of assessment in first semester courses such as third year CHEM and BIOC2000, the School's Academic Administration Manager had extracted all of the assessment due dates from second semester 2013 course profiles and had sent them to the School's three Discipline Chief Examiners (DCEs), whose role it is to approve course profiles prior to their publication.

The DCEs had found the data interesting, but had said that it is difficult to pick which students will be doing which courses.

Mark Starkey suggested to the meeting that the top four enrolled courses (core plus popular electives) in each semester of each year of the School's three main BSc majors (Chemistry, Biochemistry, Microbiology) and the most-popular BBiotech majors be identified. This information could be provided to the DCEs at the same time as the course profile data to make it of more use. Members endorsed this approach.

In relation to first semester third year CHEM courses, a response from Chemistry DCE Mark Riley was noted. Associate Professor Riley had found that it was possible for all assessment items to be submitted by students earlier than their due dates, except for the CHEM3010 presentations which had all been on Friday afternoon, and for which attendance had been compulsory. He had advised that in future this workshop would be timetabled earlier in the week to avoid being on the last day of semester. Additionally, the Bioinorganic Report deadline would be shifted to the second last week of semester.

1.7 Amount of continuous assessment

Arising from the discussion of the previous item, Joe Rothnagel reported that the Faculty of Science Associate Dean (Academic), Prof Peter Adams, wanted each School to review the amount of continuous assessment offered as he feels much of it is piecemeal.

One idea practised in Europe is to have some continuous assessment graded only as 'pass/fail' and to take a 'hurdle' approach that certain continuous assessment must be passed in order to be eligible to complete the end-of-semester exam (having taken account of students with exemptions for prior learning or illness or other special circumstances).

Mark

Meeting 3/13

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1. Business Arising out of the minutes: (cont'd)

1.7 Amount of continuous assessment (cont'd)

Members felt that different students learn in different ways and that a mixture of continuous assessment and examinations was appropriate. Students used feedback from continuous assessment tasks to adapt their learning in preparation for higher-weighted assessment items such as examinations. However, it was important that continuous assessment, such as that associated with practical classes, was meaningful and added to learning, rather than just a 'jumping through hoops' exercise or requiring a 'brain dump' of rote learning.

A number of members felt that practice exams, be they for no or a small number of marks (as in SCIE1000), were useful in providing important feedback.

In relation to prac reports, student members liked the idea of the assessment of the first two or three reports in a course being formative (ie, no marks towards final grade), with the final two to three reports being summative (ie, counting towards final grade).

A member added that in one third year CHEM course, the coordinator attended prac classes to provide one-on-one feedback on submitted reports. The member noted that this would be difficult to achieve in large-enrolment classes, but Melissa Brown felt that there might be a role for tutors in providing such feedback.

A member suggested that when marks are provided to students, the average for the class and the standard deviation be provided as well, so students have context for their performance. Joe Rothnagel agreed that this was a good idea.

Joe thanked members for their suggestions, which he would take to the School's Teaching & Learning Committee.

Joe

Arising, Chris Read reported that some students enrolled in CHEM3013 and CHEM3014 were concerned at the way in which workshop content delivery occurred in the same session as the content was examined. There was a lack of time to reflect on the material before it was assessed.

2. Student Club:

At the May meeting, Mark Starkey had undertaken to find out what other schools did to support student clubs. A summary of the responses had been included in the agenda papers. The Head of School had asked that the report be referred to the School's Teaching & Learning Committee for action.

The Teaching and Learning Committee had recently decided that it should be up to students if they wished to start a club and that the School should not be creating clubs and encouraging students to attend. If the School was to do anything it might be that the SCMB BSc majors/Honours camp be offered to more students or there should be two camps – one for students attending for the first time and one for returning students. The students who had already been to the camp could be asked to attend the new students' camp as mentors/guides.

CSCC members agreed that the Biotechnology and BSc majors/Honours camps were good initiatives. James Hill suggested that value would be added by encouraging follow-up get-togethers, perhaps via Facebook pages created by students for each camp. This suggestion would be passed on to Ross Barnard and Susan Rowland.

Mark

Rose Trappes suggested that it would have been good to have connected with students taking her major in the second semester of first year. Thinking of the Honours information sessions and the recent new postgraduate coursework project information session arranged by the School, members agreed that similar discipline-specific events for undergraduates would be a way of bringing students with a common interest together.

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2. Student Club:

A catered, informal lunch-time event for each of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, Biotechnology, Chemistry and Microbiology/Parasitology could be held on the Chemistry Podium in second semester each year to bring undergraduate students and staff together. Researchers could display posters and the School could promote opportunities for undergraduate research experience, vacation scholarships, work experience and the Stradbroke Island camp.

Alex Booy suggested that academic staff be invited to offer tours of their labs in SCMB or related Institutes that could follow on from the lunch.

Student members felt that the School could promote that students attending the sessions create a Facebook page and that social interactions or even student-driven clubs could eventuate from this.

In promoting the events, it would be important to stress what benefits attendance would bring to students. An online survey tool could be used to gauge forward interest in the sessions.

It was agreed that the School attempt to offer the sessions from second semester 2013.

Mark

3. BIOT7031, Quality Management Issues in Biotechnology:

A member reported that some students enrolled in this course were concerned that the experience of students who took it in 2012 not be repeated this semester. It was reported that, in 2012, the assignments had been set late in the semester and emails to the lecturer (who was external to the School) had bounced. There had been a lack of progressive feedback, with assignments returned to students in bundles of up to three at a time. When students had contacted the Directors of the Biotechnology program, they had been advised to continue to try to contact the lecturer.

A member who had taken the course in 2011 said that similar problems had been experienced then.

Joe Rothnagel undertook to investigate. (Subsequent to the meeting it was established that the course coordinator for second semester 2013 is SCMB staff member, Vito Ferro. Joe had alerted Vito to the 2011 and 2012 feedback. It was expected that the problems would not recur under Associate Professor Ferro.)

4. Mentor scheme for new postgraduate coursework students:

Melinda Ashcroft mentioned that the scheme, run by the Molecular Biotechnology Students Club (most of the members of which are SCMB PGCW students), had more mentors than mentees at present. She said that some new international students could be under the impression that the mentors were offering tutoring and that a cost might be involved. This was not the case.

Melinda had spoken about the scheme at the recent second semester PGCW welcome and would speak at one of Ross Barnard's classes in the coming week. She asked that the School consider sending an email to the first semester 2013 intake (ie, those invited to the March PGCW welcome) advising of the availability of the scheme and explaining what mentoring is. Mark Starkey suggested that a mentor and/or mentee who has participated be asked to contribute a testimonial. Melinda suggested Arvey Oliveros, winner of the Molecular Design contest as someone who had been both a mentee and mentor. Mark would approach Arvey for a paragraph and a photograph.

It was agreed that Melinda and Mark work on the email and that the School distribute it to the relevant students.

Mark,
Melinda

5. Next meeting:

Members agreed to hold the next meeting in the week following the mid-semester break. Mark would check member availabilities.

Mark

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