MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS/SUB-DEANS’ GROUP

Notes from a meeting of the FAO/Sub-Deans’ Group held on Friday 12 March 2010 in the Board Room (Room 290, Wheatbelt Wing) Second Floor, New Business School from 9:30am – 11:00am

1. UPDATE FROM ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Sylvia Lang provided the following update on the Academic Council meeting held on Wednesday 3 March 2010:

• UWA Centres – Centre for Rock Art Studies (CRAS)

Sylvia noted that the establishment of the new Centre for Rock Art Studies was approved.

Sylvia also noted questions were raised in relation to funding of the centre which led to a discussion of the role of the Academic Council regarding resource related matters, especially as the Planning & Budget Committee considered such matters on Council’s behalf. There was general agreement that there was justification for consideration by Council where resourcing issues had teaching and/or learning implications.

• Reviews of Schools and Other Academic Units

Sylvia noted that the documentation for the review of ‘Schools and Other Academic Units’, had been revised following a recent review of the process instigated by Academic Council and the SDVC. The process for ‘Administrative Units’ was yet to be reviewed and the documentation updated.

Sylvia also noted a recommendation of the review of the University review process was that an implementation plan for review recommendations must be provided six months after the review is completed with a period of 18 months allowed for the follow-up report on the implementation of that plan.

• New Course Structures – The UWA Future Framework

Sylvia noted that the EOIs have now been finalised and Phase 2 proposals are currently being developed and due to be considered by Academic Council by September 2010.

2. UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Members were reminded that a template for University Policies is available at the Universities Policies website: http://www.universitypolicies.uwa.edu.au/policy_writers/policy_template. Sylvia emphasised that any proposal for a University wide policy must be made using the template.

Any feedback regarding the website, template and other matters regarding the establishment of policies using the University Policy template should be forwarded to Sylvia Lang.

3. MID-YEAR PROGRESSION CHECKING

Harvey von Bergheim noted that at a recent of Board of Examiners meeting, it was queried that while progress is checked at mid year and warning letters issued where required, no progress status is currently being applied mid-year.

Some faculties were concerned that insufficient ‘warning’ was given mid year for students who at that point were set to fail the whole year, and there was particular concern for international students, for whom the consequences were severe.

It was pointed out that automatically limiting the number of units in which a student who was struggling was permitted to enrol in second semester would not be appropriate for some courses and that it would not solve the issue of students who had already failed so many units that they could not redress the situation in second semester.
Dave Norman noted that the National Code requires that progress is checked at the end of every teaching period and that particular attention should be applied to international students due to the stringent enforcement of requirements eg they must be re-enrolled by the census date to avoid visa cancellation.

Mary Carroll said that while it was possible to limit enrolment for all students who had an ‘on probation’ status, any exceptions would need to be done manually, creating additional work for Student Administration.

Sylvia noted that intervention letters are currently being sent to all students who are failing half their units or worse, however, it was questionable how effective this is and it was suggested that more direct student contact would be a more valuable way of persuading students to contact their faculty offices to discuss progress.

It was noted that one faculty was using SMS to contact students in some transnational courses and that this had been very successful in ensuring that students contacted their faculty offices and addressed poor mid year results. Mary Carroll noted that while emailing students was not problematic, the cost factor in using SMS to reach students was significant.

There was not general support for applying a progress status mid-year. It was agreed that a robust system of early intervention was more appropriate.

It was agreed that adopting a direct communication approach with students who were failing or close to failing was the most effective way of ensuring that their progress was discussed and addressed as appropriate, including personally following up on those who did not respond.

4. STUDENT PERMISSION TO OVERLOAD

Also arising from a recent Board of Examiners meeting was the question of the circumstances under which students should be permitted to overload (eg should students with a certain WAM or GPA be permitted to overload automatically? In this case any other student seeking to overload would need to seek special approval.)

It was pointed out that SIMS was not currently capable of sorting students using WAM scores or similar.

It was queried if a ‘rule’ could be placed on SIMS to automatically stop students from overloading. Mary Carroll noted that by placing a rule on SIMS, it would be difficult to manage situations where students were allowed to overload and any change would need to be done manually, creating more work for Student Administration.

It was noted that many situations where students were overloading involved international students trying to finish on time or high achievers who were successfully managing the overload.

It was pointed out that in cases where enrolments were not checked individually students overloading would not be picked up. Also it was possible for students to add units that had previously been deleted by the officer responsible for checking the enrolment.

It was agreed that the decision to place a rule to stop students overloading should be made by individual faculties to suit their needs.

5. SHOW CAUSE PROCESS – UPDATE

Sylvia noted that the Show Cause process had been implemented at the end of 2009 and resulted in noticeably fewer appeals being lodged.

It was noted that most appeals related to progress status concerns, and that these could not be dealt with readily through the appeals mechanism. The Show Cause process provided a more appropriate and efficient avenue for consideration of merit-based requests for revisiting
decisions on progress status. Sylvia also noted that the majority of Show Cause applications had been dealt with at the faculty level without the need to escalate to the central committee.

There were some concerns with the management of the process for international students and most agreed that, particularly in view of the strict legislative requirements applying to this group and their stringent enforcement, careful management should be exercised in future.

A member expressed the view that the ‘show cause’ process had been very successful with very good outcomes. He also noted that the process quickly sorted at the outset applications which were not genuine.

Members agreed that the process had been very positive noting that any concerns were related to its late implementation, and were optimistic that those issues would be resolved by the next round. Sylvia agreed noting that the process would be well embedded by end 2010 and standard letters would be in place.

6. REVIEW OF POSTGRADUATE COURSEWORK ADMISSIONS AT UWA

Marion Bateman introduced the ‘Review of Postgraduate Coursework Admissions at UWA’ noting that Student Services had obtained CLTPF 2009 funding for a project to review postgraduate coursework admissions procedures at UWA. Marion advised that she was the project officer.

It was noted that the project accords with the Education Section of the University’s OPP 2009 – 2013 Implementation Schedule; namely to review postgraduate coursework admissions procedures with a view to providing one authoritative source of information (including clear statements of admission criteria) and developing procedures to ensure timely offers of places.

Marion noted that the review would involve considerable consultation with faculties and schools and requested any persons involved in the process to contact her direct on extension 3185 or email marion.bateman@uwa.edu.au.

Information being sought includes:

- resource allocation to admissions in faculties/schools
- monitoring – do faculties keep records eg. Who apply but don’t’ get offers, or receive offers and don’t proceed?
- criteria for admission - consistency
- assessing process – how could central support help?
- factors in assessing applications
- can administrative processes be improved?

The review aims to improve consistency and efficiency in the process across the University. Marion will collate information from faculties regarding any problems being encountered by them in relation to this process, including resourcing and other issues.

Marion advised that a Steering Committee and/or Reference Group would be established. Discussion was invited.

There was concern that this process involves a lot of personal interaction at the faculty level which would be lost if the process becomes too centralised. However it was agreed that clearly defined entry criteria could be managed centrally.

Mary Carroll noted that a pilot program is currently being run for AHSS and BUS where the initial application is managed online with decision making done at the faculty level.

There was some discussion as to where the ‘student experience’ starts and to what level a centralised application process would be most effective.

There was concern that borderline students would not be captured with a fully centralised admission process, as these are picked up via direct contact with specialised faculty staff.
The importance of interview feedback was also stressed, for example, why an applicant was not accepted, what else they might be interested in, how they could improve their likelihood of being accepted in the future.

The importance of faculty contact with applicants was underlined.

It was generally agreed that the International Centre model was a good one.

It was agreed that a centralised application process should be electronic and captured electronically when the initial application is lodged. That way, applications could be sent electronically to faculties for processing, especially as on many occasions specialised staff may be off-campus or overseas when contacted. It was also suggested that student numbers be allocated on the initial application document, as is the practice at the University of Melbourne, to clearly identify and facilitate tracking applications, and that the information should be stored on Callista. It was noted that data cannot be stored in TRIM in the absence of a student number.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

(i) Class Allocations (OLCR)

A member referred to the OLCR system which he said is unpopular with staff and students.

It was suggested that the current OLCR system be replaced with an alternative online model on Student Connect with selection being on a “first in best dressed” option, rather than the current preferences system, with places set aside for international students.

(ii) International Students – DIAC Letters of Support

A member noted situations where international students who had been suspended or excluded were being advised by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to obtain letters of support to provide to the department.

Dave explained the background to these requests and suggested that where an international student has requested such a letter of support to provide to DIAC the student should be asked to go back to the DIAC officer and ask them to email the faculty/unit coordinator direct; that any letter provided should be limited to facts; and that no-one should feel pressured to provide a character reference for someone who is not known to them.

(iii) Change Course – Post Commencement

Clarity was sought on whether it is possible for students to transfer courses once semester had started, with a member noting a recent query from a student referring to the following web page:

http://www.transition.uwa.edu.au/welcome/first/useful_information/managing_your_enrolment/swapping_to_another_uwa_course#first

Executive Officer’s Note: Amendments to the website are currently being sought to clarify what is possible.

(iv) Special Consideration

Harvey asked if there had been any progress with ‘Special Consideration’ and whether a meeting of the Special Consideration Working Party had been scheduled for this year.

Sylvia replied that funding to provide a project officer to manage this project had been unsuccessful last year and another submission had been made.