



**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE FORUM – 18 SEPTEMBER 2009
MINUTES**

Minutes of the Student Representative Forum held at 9am on Wednesday, 18 September 2009 in the Council Room, Administration Building.

PRESENT: Ms J Di Blasio, WUSA
Ms M Eady, Faculty of Education
Mr R Estherby, Faculty of Informatics
Mr W Hudson, Academic Senate
Ms S Karmel, WUPA
Ms L LARBALSTIER, University Council
Ms B McCormack, WUPA
Mr C Mowbray, UniCentre Board of Directors
Mr J Seedoyal, Faculty of Commerce
Mr D Sperring, Academic Senate
Ms A Zhou, WUSA

IN ATTENDANCE: Professor R Castle, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
Mr C Grange, Vice-Principal (Administration)
Mr B Flint, Director, Buildings and Grounds
Ms K Callaway, Director Research Student Centre
Ms M Huisman, Acting Academic Registrar
Mr M Gillmore, General Manager UniCentre
Mr R Stace, Head, Centre for Academic Systems and Resources
Ms M Dwarde, HDR Events Officer
Dr N Huggett, Senior Manager, Corporate Governance
Mr L Jeffery, DSN Project Officer
Mr P Randles, Minute Secretary

APOLOGIES: Ms J Bruce, Faculty of Creative Arts
Ms L Frencham, Academic Senate
Ms D Jensen, Faculty of Arts
Ms J Nealon, Faculty of Science
Mr C Whittaker, UniCentre Board of Directors
Mr B Winton, University Council

A Preliminary Business

A1 Welcome to the forum and appointment of a Chair

The Acting Academic Registrar, Ms Megan Huisman, welcomed the Student Representatives to the Forum and spoke of the valuable feedback the Forum provides to the University. She thanked participants for taking the time to attend and also thanked those who had prepared agenda items.

The Acting Academic Registrar informed participants that student elections for positions on the University Council, the Academic Senate and the Wollongong Undergraduate Student Association were underway and encouraged anyone interested in nominating for one of these positions to contact the Manager, Corporate Governance, Nancy Huggett.

The Acting Academic Register advised that the Student Services and Amenities Bill had been narrowly defeated in the Senate but may be reintroduced in November.

University Council representative Elizabeth LARBALESTIER was elected Chair.

A2 Arrangement of Agenda

The items were discussed in agenda order.

B Business Arising for the Minutes

B1 Tutorial Enrolment Systems

The Chair introduced the item, noting that the agenda paper set out the details of the e-Learning and Teaching Subcommittee's examination of the current arrangement of tutorial enrolment systems.

RESOLVED 2009/11:

that the Student Representative Forum note the information from UEC on tutorial enrolment systems at UOW and the improvement recommendations as provided in the agenda paper.

B2 Internet Quota

The Chair introduced the item and noted that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) was in attendance to answer any questions. A Student Representative enquired as to the implementation of the shaped quota system. It was noted that the system would be in place for Autumn session 2010.

A Student Representative noted the recent visit of members of the Australian Computer Society to the Faculty of Informatics and their judgement that the current undergraduate student internet quota was insufficient. The DVC(A) noted that there were a number of pedagogic issues to be considered in making a change to the undergraduate student internet quota system.

RESOLVED 2009/12:

that the Student Representative Forum note the information concerning student internet quota at UOW as provided in the agenda paper and the University update the next Student Representative Forum on the implementation of changes to the undergraduate student internet quota.

B3 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED 2009/13:

that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2009 be received as a true record of that meeting.

C1 International Student Safety

The Chair invited the WUSA International Student Representative to speak on this issue. The Student Representative began by noting recent violent incidents involving international students in Australia and drawing participants' attention to incidents she was aware of involving UOW international students including robberies, assaults, and exploitative treatment by landlords. The Student Representative noted that international students manage the financial burden of study costs by living in cheaper accommodation, and this exposed them to considerable risk.

A student representative endorsed the WUSA International Student Representatives' remarks and stated her belief that the University had responsibility to ensure international students had a positive experience on campus and in the community generally. The student representative also stated that racism was a core concern in this regard. Another student representative noted a recent egg throwing incident at a campus bus stop. The WUSA International Student Representative added that such matters often received exposure in the overseas media and reflected poorly on the University. A student representative enquired whether there were female security officers on duty at all times. The Vice-Principal (Administration) advised that, while he couldn't be sure female security officers were on duty at all times, there were several female security officers on staff.

The VP(A) began by noting that matters of robbery, assault and violence were not specifically international student issues but issues for the community at large and part of broader patterns of crime throughout Australia. He suggested that walking alone at night was a risk for any individuals in any large city and not recommended.

Outlining the University's recent measures to improve student security and safety, the VP(A) pointed to the increase in closed circuit television surveillance, improved lighting, the introduction of free bus services, and strong collaboration between the NSW Police, Wollongong City Council and the University security service. The VP(A) advised of planned initiatives to further enhance student safety including increasing University accommodation on campus by 400 beds; trialling a free bus service between the University and neighbouring suburbs of Gwynneville and Keiraville; and expanding CCTV coverage to areas adjacent to the main campus.

The VP(A) drew attention to the recent KordaMentha audit of safety and security on campus which made use of student focus groups. The audit found that the greatest weakness was awareness and understanding of security arrangements on the part of students. This lack of awareness led to poor reporting of incidents and limited information for police and security officers to work with. He noted that when incidents are reported the police take the matters very seriously and perform admirable work. The Chair suggested that the measures being considered by the University to improve student safety and security were largely long term solutions and called for further short term measures such as alerting new international students to safety issues as soon as an offer is made to them.

A student representative related a threatening incident at a student residence and enquired about the placement of CCTV cameras at student residences. While the exact position of cameras at the specific residence wasn't available, the VP(A) advised that CCTV cameras usually focused on entry and exit points, driveways and stairwells. The student representative noted that students in residence may not realise that CCTV cameras are in operation and that informing them would give them added reassurance. Asked what other security arrangements were in place at student residences, the VP(A) advised that there was physical perimeter security, regular security patrols and that University staff and senior residents were on call 24/7 to answer student concerns. Together with the CCTV cameras, these measures had, over past years, meant that incidents at University accommodation were very rare and, when they did occur, they often involved non-residents.

The Forum discussed the issue of anonymous reporting of information. The Director, Buildings and Grounds stated that it was possible but not preferred since prosecutions could not be derived from anonymous reporting. The Director pointed out that the importance of reporting could not be overstated, and that, without information, preventative strategies could not be effectively developed.

The WUSA International Student Representative offered that international students did not report incidents because they were scared and did not believe that reporting would help;

international students therefore relied on their friends not on the University. The VP(A) understood this and noted he was open to suggestions as to how to better engage international students. A student representative suggested that police could be involved at orientation or that a Police-UOW liaison officer could be appointed. The VP(A) advised that the police set up a stall at orientation but that a more interactive information session during orientation may be possible. Another student representative suggested that an advocate for international students may provide useful assistance

A student representative noted how difficult it can be for international students to communicate effectively after traumatic incidents and spoke on the virtues of providing interpreters. The VP(A) noted that the police have extensive access to interpreters and that on the few occasions where a police interpreter was not available; the University has been able to provide one.

The Forum then discussed how important it was to communicate effectively with international students from the first offer of a place and thence throughout the students' time at the University, alerting them to security issues and providing information in their first language. The General Manager, UniCentre noted that international students were contacted soon after the initial offer was made, usually in their first language, regarding the range of accommodation options available.

The Forum extensively discussed the role of the University in providing accommodation and access to accommodation for international students. A student representative enquired if the University could be involved in the procurement of private rental accommodation for international students. The VP(A) advised that this was a possibility but that for the University to act as an agent it would be required to quality assure the accommodation providers, a process which is difficult, expensive, and not always possible. Nevertheless, the University was closely examining the issue.

It was suggested that an education and information campaign, including workshops, might provide the awareness necessary to improve the international student security concerns. The VP(A) noted that it was hard to draw students to workshops and that the best opportunity to communicate with students was during enrolment and orientation. He acknowledged that it was the responsibility of the University to communicate effectively with international students but admitted that it was sometimes difficult to do so given the amount of information communicated to students and the number of events they are expected to attend. The VP(A) noted that the Forum has raised valid concerns about racism on campus and that these were concerns the University took very seriously and would continue to engage with, especially through the Dean of Students and the EED unit.

The VP(A) undertook to consider the suggestions raised at the Forum and to report back to the next meeting on initiatives taken in this area.

RESOLVED 2009/14:

that the Student Representative Forum:

- (i) note the response from the Vice-Principal (Administration) regarding international student safety issues; and*
- (ii) request that the University report back to the next Student Representative Forum on the viability of putting the suggestions raised at the forum into practice.*

C2 Completion Rates of HDR Students at UOW

The Chair invited the student representatives from WUPA to speak to the agenda item. The student representatives from WUPA described their concerns regarding what appeared to be long completion times for research postgraduates. They suggested that there needed to be stronger structures applied to research progress and support. While

acknowledging the annual progress reviews, it was pointed out that some students presented positive annual reviews so as not to cause a fuss and that problems with supervisors were therefore not always raised. The student representatives from WUPA noted that several distressed students had come to the WUPA offices regarding supervision problems.

The Director of the Research Student Centre (RSC) stated that there were a number of HDR policies and procedures in place to monitor progress and provide mechanisms for students to voice their concerns in a confidential manner. There is also supervisor training, the Code of Practice Supervision, a Comprehensive HDR Handbook and Website and other various grievance policies and are repeatedly communicated to students at enrolment and throughout their candidature, as well as to HDR supervisors. The Director advised that it was possible to lodge a confidential annual review with the RSC if there were supervision problems that students did not want to raise directly with their supervisors. She encouraged WUPA to consult with the RSC regarding research student issues.

The Director advised that the RSC ran numerous workshops to assist research students with their candidacy, including the popular “Endnote” seminars. External facilitators were also commissioned to run additional workshops. She noted that, while some seminars were oversubscribed, 34% of those applying to attend do not show up at the seminars.

Asked whether research supervisors received training, the Director advised that training programs were run for supervisors and that making these training programs mandatory was under consideration.

The student representatives from WUPA and the Director of the RSC agreed to form a working party including supervisory staff representatives, international student representatives and other key stakeholders to discuss research student issues.

RESOLVED 2009/15:

that the Student Representative Forum note the formation of a working party with interested stakeholders to address HDR concerns and that any outcomes be reported back to the next Student Representative Forum.

C3 Personal and Property Security Audit

The Chair invited the Director Buildings and Grounds to speak to this agenda item. The Director advised that the audit had been undertaken by external auditors specialising in security concerns. The Director noted the recommendations regarding closed circuit television, lighting and security at remote campuses. The challenge, said the Director, was raising student awareness and communicating effectively.

A Student Representative enquired about any recommendations that had not been endorsed by the University. The Director replied that recommendations that required additional resources had to be judged in terms of their effectiveness. The Student Representative enquired about the release of the audit report. The VPA replied that audit reports are confidential but that if elected student representatives wished to sight the document they should email the Director, Buildings and Grounds and the audit report would be made available to them for reading but not copying.

RESOLVED 2009/16:

that the Student Representative Forum note the information on the KordaMentha-UOWIA audit of Personal and Property Security as provided in the agenda paper.

C4 UniCentre Shop Lockers

The Chair invited the Student Representative who raised this item to speak to the issue. The Student Representative stated he understood that there were valid reasons for not allowing bags in the UniShop but, while acknowledging the check-in system for valuables, pointed out the risk of theft associated with leaving bags outside the UniShop in a position easily accessible from Northfields Avenue. He suggested the installation of short duration timed lockers to enable bags to be left securely.

The General Manager, UniCentre noted that security experts had advised that the provision of lockers in high traffic areas was not appropriate due to the possible security threat. He advised that two CCTV cameras overlooked the shelves and that the incidents of theft were low, adding that 50% of thefts that did occur were recovered with the aid of the CCTV cameras. He encouraged students to use the check-in system for valuables and pointed out that the refurbishment of Building 11 next year would see the entry point to the UniShop moved to face in to the campus which should reduce the risk of theft. The refurbishment may also provide the opportunity to install short duration timed lockers in the building but not directly outside the UniShop.

A student representative suggested that shelving be provided inside the UniShop to reduce the risk of theft. The General Manager advised that this may be possible outside of the busy first few weeks of session. He noted that, in the busy times, security officers were stationed outside the UniShop.

RESOLVED 2009/17:

that the Student Representative Forum recommend:

- (i) that the UniCentre install secure lockers for short-duration use as part of the Building 11 redevelopment in the vicinity of the UniShop;*
- (ii) that the UniCentre introduce internal bag shelving outside of peak session times.*

C5 Provision of Powerpoints

The Chair invited the Student Representative who brought this issue forward to speak to the agenda item. The Student Representative noted the marked increase in the use of laptop computers and the need to regularly recharge batteries. The Student Representative noted the hazards associated with running cables across access-ways and asked if the University would be installing powerpoints in under-seat areas in lecture theatres.

The Director, Buildings and Grounds, advised that under-seat powerpoints had already been installed in a number of locations around campus including the Building 35 courtyard, the ARC centre in Building 67, and the Building 41 atrium area. He advised that planned refurbishments, such as the Hope Theatre, and new buildings such as the SMART Infrastructure Facility would also include the installation of significant numbers of accessible powerpoints. An enquiry was made about additional powerpoints in tutorial rooms. The Director replied that this was more difficult due to changing furniture configurations in tutorial rooms and the need to avoid trip hazards.

RESOLVED 2009/18:

that the Student Representative Forum recommend the University continue to increase the number of safely accessible power points for student laptops.

C6 Student Study Spaces

The student representatives who placed this item on the agenda were invited to speak to their concerns. A Senate representative asked about the 24 hour access at Education Centres and if this could be replicated at the Wollongong Campus. The Director, Buildings and Grounds advised that many faculty and non-faculty buildings were open across a large span of hours. He noted that the Education Centres and some faculties (eg Informatics) has 24 hour access via swipe cards. Swipe card access ensured that the University was aware who was entering and leaving buildings at any given time.

It was proposed that a 24 hour study centre be trialled within an existing building such as the ITS building (Building 17). The Director, Buildings and Grounds advised that it would be costly to issue swipe cards to every student on campus. It was then suggested that student that were interested in 24 hour study access might register to obtain a swipe card. The Director advised he would consider the issue. Another student representative suggested that the number of students who were in the Library or ITS buildings at closing time be monitored to give an indication of demand for 24 hour services.

A student representative noted the curricular emphasis on group work and described a shortage of group work spaces. The Director, Buildings and Grounds acknowledged that the dedicated study rooms in the Library were in demand and advised that the a number of informal learning and breakout areas such as in the ARC space in Building 67 were available. The General Manager, UniCentre noted that the refurbishment of Building 11 would also provide small hubs and spaces for groups to work in quiet areas. Students noted that the current availability of informal spaces such as the ARC space were not promoted and that the usage would be higher if students were aware of the facilities on offer.

RESOLVED 2009/19

that the Student Representative Forum:

- (i) recommend that the University establish a 24-hour Study Centre at Wollongong Campus;*
- (ii) recommend the University create more group study rooms to support the level of group work currently required in subjects;*
- (iii) recommend the University increase promotion and signage regarding informal learning spaces; and*
- (iv) ask that any outcomes achieved in this regard be reported to the next Student Forum.*

C7 Digital Signage Network

The Digital Signage Project Officer briefed the Forum on the signage project and provided a handout with examples of the digital signs to be used on campus. He advised that the content would be provided by the UOW community and centrally co-ordinated. The signs would become operational in February 2010 with a pilot program to start running in late 2009. Student representatives suggested the signs could be used for emergency and transport information purposes. The Digital Signage Project Officer agreed that these were likely uses.

RESOLVED 2009/20

that the Student Representative Forum note the information provided in the agenda paper and at the meeting regarding the Digital Signage Network.

C8 Minor Recognition on Testamur

As the student who placed the issue on the agenda paper had to leave the meeting early, the item was held over until next Student Representative Forum.

C9 Textbooks Included in HECS

As the student who placed the issue on the agenda paper had to leave the meeting early, the item was held over until next Student Representative Forum.

C10 Lecturer Evaluation Proposal

The Student Representative who raised the issue spoke to the paper, asking that specific questions about lecturer's communication skills be added to Teacher Evaluation Surveys. He pointed out that his intention was not to concentrate on who spoke English well but on communication skills in general, noting that some of his best lecturers did not speak English as a first language and that some of the worst communicators were Australian staff. He thought that some staff may be unaware they have poor communication skills without such feedback.

Another student representative noted the difference between the Subject Evaluation Surveys and the Teacher Evaluation Survey, pointing out that the Teacher Evaluation Surveys were only undertaken at the request of the lecturer and were used for promotion purposes. He suggested that Teacher Evaluation Surveys be made mandatory and that students be able to give confidential feedback on their lecturers at any time during the semester. He said that without a mandatory feedback mechanism it was very difficult for students to raise areas of concern as many did not want to confront the lecturer directly and did not feel comfortable making a complaint to the Course Coordinator, Head of Department or Dean. While noting that it was not a specific lecturer evaluation feedback mechanism, the Acting Academic Registrar advised that the "Tell us" feedback link on the current students webpage received feedback across all areas of the student experience and that feedback that was collated by Student Central was forwarded to the relevant area for action.

Another student representative echoed the need for comprehensive teaching evaluations. She felt that there was a strong emphasis on research outputs from staff but not enough emphasis on a tenure track based on strong teaching performance. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) advised that academic staff choose the weighting to be given to their teaching and research activities and that strong teaching performance has been a recognised tenure track for the past two decades.

The Forum asked that the questions in the draft resolution be added to the Teacher Evaluation Surveys and that a mandatory feedback mechanism is investigated.

RESOLVED 2009/21

that the Student Representative Forum:

- (i) ask the University to add the following questions to all Teacher Evaluation Surveys: "On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your lecturer's verbal communication skills?" and "On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your lecturer's written communication skills?";*
- (ii) request that the University investigate a means for students to provide feedback on a lecturer's performance at any time during a semester; and*
- (iii) that the University report any outcomes achieved in this regard to the next Student Representative Forum.*

C11 Parking at UOW Campus

The Student Representative who submitted the agenda paper spoke to the item, suggesting that the measures taken by the University to decrease traffic, including raising parking fees, had not worked and he was therefore recommending that the University revert to previous parking fee levels for students.

The Director, Buildings and Grounds noted that the rise in parking fees was the first in five years and that the increased revenue was used to encourage more environmentally friendly methods of transport. He advised that the car-pooling initiative of providing free parking to three or more people in a vehicle had been highly successful with 350 vehicles (400 during peak hours) parking for free. The free shuttle bus between the University and North Wollongong Station was reporting a 70% increase in usage and a 14% increase in student train passengers. It was estimated that 10% of all students travelling to the University now used the free Gong Shuttle Bus.

The Student Representative suggested that parking fees were especially onerous on low income students. Another representative pointed out that low income students tended not to have private cars. While acknowledging that some students who drove to and from the University experienced parking problems, student representatives supported the wider goal of reducing car traffic on campus for a less congested and more environmentally friendly campus.

The proposed draft resolution regarding this item was not supported by Forum participants.

D Other Business

There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 12.00pm