

Student Representative Forum (SRF) – 30 April 2010 MINUTES

Minutes of the Student Representative Forum held at 9:00am on Friday, 30 April 2010 in the University Council Room, Building 36.

PRESENT: Mr Chris Whittaker, University Council
Mr William Nemesh, Academic Senate
Mr Warren Hudson, Academic Senate
Ms Elizabeth Limn, WUPA
Mr Paul Stuckey, WUPA
Mr Chris Monnox, WUSA
Mr Justin Ayre, UniCentre Board of Directors
Mr Robert Estherby, Faculty of Informatics
Mr James Ly, Faculty of Law

IN ATTENDANCE: Professor Joe Chicharo, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International)
Professor Rob Castle, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
Mr Chris Grange, Vice-Principal (Administration)
Associate Professor Di Kelly, Chair Academic Senate
Dr David Christie, Academic Registrar
Mr Bruce Flint, Director, Buildings and Grounds Division
Mr Nigel Pennington, General Manager Accommodation Services
Mr Joe McIver, Chief Technology Officer
Ms Fran Walder, Senior Manager, Strategy
Ms Lynn Woodley, Executive Manager, Strategic Planning and Quality
Ms Jan Sullivan, Senior Quality Officer, Strategic Planning and Quality
Mr Dominic Riordan, Senior Manager Policy and Governance
Miss Emma Purdy, Management Cadet

APOLOGIES: Tim Roach, Graduate School of Medicine
Gemma Bach, Faculty of Science
Liangke Chen, Faculty of Commerce

PART A - OFFICIAL BUSINESS

A1 Welcome and Appointment of Chair

The Academic Registrar, Dr David Christie, welcomed the Student Representatives to the Forum and spoke of the valuable feedback the Forum provides to the University. He thanked participants for taking the time to attend and also thanked those who had prepared agenda items.

University Council representative Chris Whittaker was elected Chair.

A2 Arrangement of Agenda

The items were discussed in agenda order.

A3 Business Arising from the Minutes

A3.1 International Student Safety

A student representative noted that in the minutes of the previous meeting a resolution was passed that requested 'that the University report back to the next Student

Representative Forum on the viability of putting the suggestions raised at the forum into practice'.

The VPA provided an update on the initiatives that have been taken in this area. He spoke about the increased expenditure on CCTV, particularly near the Kooloobong residences, Madoline Street and the pedestrian entry to the University near Robsons Road and Northfields Avenue. The University is also working with the RTA and Wollongong City Council to install additional lighting and CCTV Surveillance over the pedestrian bridge that crosses the freeway. He recognised that one of the major issues raised at the previous forum was a lack of safety awareness and that the Be Safe website and a number of other printed documents which have since been developed to help overcome this. It was also noted that the Free Shuttle buses have been established (and were being widely used) and that the University regularly liaises with police.

A student representative questioned the quality of the cameras used and the ability of the cameras to pick-up the detail required for prosecution purposes.

The VPA responded that last year the University completed a review of this technology and standardised this across campus. He stated that lighting had recently been increased to improve the quality of surveillance.

A3.2 Completion Rates of HDR Students at UOW

A student representative also noted that at the previous meeting that the agenda item Completion Rates of HDR Students at UOW also required a report back to the SRF.

The Academic Registrar stated that the Director of Student Research Centre (RSC) had advised that a meeting was held on 24 February 2010 with RSC Director, Dean of Research, a HDR supervisor representative, Head of WUPA and WUPA Student Representatives. The meeting discussed policies and arrangements around the HDR Seminar Series, HDR supervision, HDR Annual Progress Reports and School fees for Children of international Students. Comments have been taken on board and RSC will run training sessions for annual progress reports and investigate the possibility of running more HDR seminars on various topics.

A3.3 Student Study Spaces

The forum asked that if there was any progress in this area. The Academic Registrar advised that the demand for study spaces in the library was constantly monitored and that there did not appear to be significant demand for establishing a 24-hour Study Centre at the Wollongong Campus. The VPA noted that the UniCentre refurbishment would increase the number of informal study spaces available. The DVC(A) added that more space had been made available in the Hope Theatre Foyer and that this would be increased further in the new teaching building (Building 23). He also stated that there were going to be some changes to the library layout that would increase student study spaces.

A student representative noted that many international students commune in the library and that this could be avoided if the more informal study spaces in the refurbished UniCentre were available to students on the weekend. The VPA stated that this was helpful feedback and would take this into consideration.

A3.4 Lecturer Evaluation Proposal

The DVC(A) advised that an online subject evaluation had been trialled at the University, however, a very low response rate (of approximately 8%) meant that the University decided to go to a paper based survey. He noted that this method was quite expensive and as such it was not feasible to survey every subject in each session.

A student representative explained that he would still like to see the questions proposed at the last meeting added to the survey so students could provide feedback on their lecturer's communication skills. He suggested that if a student provided feedback to the Subject Coordinator or Head of School about a lecturer's poor communication skills then the appropriate person could run a survey to determine if there really is an issue. The DVC(A) responded that his comments were more related to Subject Evaluation Surveys, but that he would look into the issue raised.

A4 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED 2010/01

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 September 2009 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

PART B – COMMITTEE BUSINESS

B1 Foreign Campus Operations

The Chair invited the DVC(I) to first speak to this item. The DVC(I) stated that he believed it was important to be able to maintain equivalent academic standards and the academic integrity of the courses offered. The DVC(I) noted that campuses in different regions/countries will use different information as examples or case studies and that this allows the course to maintain its relevance in these areas. It was also noted that local infrastructure and partnerships are often more difficult obstacles in maintaining the academic integrity of courses than local regulations. He also stated that an annual review of foreign campuses was undertaken and that this was going to be a focus of the upcoming AUQA audit. UOW Dubai was noted as an example where the University had been working in this area for a long time and the international reputation of the University of Wollongong has been improved as a result. He added that he felt that if the academic integrity of a course on an international campus was maintained then there was no need to differentiate between testamurs issued in the different countries. In terms of the exchanging of testamurs he noted that this was only done when the relevant Australian learning and teaching criteria had been met. The DVC(I) said that the first element of the proposed resolution on this issue should be strengthened, but that the remaining elements of the proposed resolution were not well founded.

The student representative who submitted the agenda item responded by highlighting that his concern was UOW Dubai and that students in Wollongong felt 'out-of-the-loop' about the operations of foreign campuses and as such were keen to make sure that adequate protection measures were in place to avoid the potential of UOW degrees to be devalued.

Another student representative opposed this point, adding that international campuses actually increased the value of a UOW degree and that differentiating them could cause the isolation of different student groups and a dilution of the degree.

A further student representative enquired about the operations of other large universities. It was noted that many universities operated as international enterprises

and that at these institutions, distinctions between campuses of the same university were not made.

Another student representative expressed concerns over how the changes to the American higher education market, in particular the potential for opening of borders to greater numbers of international students, would affect UOW. The DVC(I) responded that this would undoubtedly increase competition and this was another significant reason why it was important for the University to increase its international reputation and compete globally on the quality of the degree that UOW offers.

After further discussion, the student representative who proposed the resolution requested to amend the resolution, which was put and passed in its amended form.

RESOLVED 2010/02:

that the Student Representative Forum recommends to the University Council that all foreign campuses operated by the University of Wollongong currently or in the future must have equivalent academic standards and integrity, course content and student conduct rules as campuses operated by UOW within Australia, and that if laws, regulations or the local infrastructure of a potential foreign host country do not permit this, that UOW should not pursue foreign campus opportunities in that country.

B2 AUQA / Strategic Planning

The DVC(A) was invited to speak to this item. The DVC(A) advised that the University had undergone an AUQA Audit six years ago and from this a quality improvement plan was developed. It was noted that the two AUQA (soon to be know as TEQSA) themes for the coming audit are International Activity and Enabling Undergraduate Learning. Faculties and Units have completed self-reviews and these will be compiled into a portfolio. The audit will take place in March 2011 and it is expected that approximately 250 people will be interviewed over 4 days in Wollongong and another 5 days will be spent looking at other UOW campuses.

A student representative asked how the university performed during the last audit and whether any problems highlighted have been resolved. The DVC(A) responded that the quality improvement plan was developed in response to the last audit and that the University has done more than what was recommended by the last audit.

The DVC(A) then referred the student representatives to the hand-out provided on the 2011-13 Strategic Plan. It was explained that strategic planning is a three year cycle and that the University was a significant way through the current cycle. It was noted that a list of draft priority outcomes was provided in the hand-out and that if students have any feedback or suggestions on the development of the plan, that they should contact the Strategic Planning and Quality Unit.

The student representatives asked that the draft strategic plan be included in the agenda of the next Student Representative Forum.

RESOLVED 2010/03:

that the Student Representative Forum notes the information on the AUQA preparations and the development of the 2011-2013 UOW Strategic Plan.

B3 Provision of Appropriate Student Internet Services (Quota)

Mr Joe McIver addressed the concerns in the agenda papers and presented on a number of initiatives being undertaken in the field of IT, including improvements to internet access, student printing facilities, online file storage, email services and e-learning.

In terms of the concerns about student internet quotas he stated that by the end of 2010 the University would be moving to an alternative model for internet quotas, which would mean that when students exceed their allocated quota their internet access speed will decrease instead of being cut-off. It was also noted that the proposed model would allow students non-quota high speed access between 8pm and 8am and that 'on-net' (peered sites) are not deducted from the quota.

Student representatives present were pleased with this outcome. The remaining concern was that Informatics students may be required to download (for educational purposes) large files, which would then result in their access being 'throttled back'.

Mr McIver responded that the new system would allocate student quotas on a monthly basis and that an overuse of a quota in one month would not impact a student in subsequent months. It was also noted that if there were still concerns in particular areas where higher levels of access were needed for legitimate academic purposes, then students should use the existing process of speaking to the academic staff member of the relevant subject, who then can authorise special arrangements for students.

RESOLVED 2010/04:

that the Student Representative Forum:

- (i) notes and applauds the proposed improvements to student internet services (quota); and*
- (ii) strongly recommends that ITS implements the improvements immediately, and sends out to the student community, for example via a SOLS mail message, information to provide students with a general overview of the proposed model for student internet usage and provide an avenue for them to provide feedback.*

B4 Provision of Appropriate Student Email Services

Mr McIver agreed with the comments in the agenda paper and advised that the University will be moving to a hosted email system. A total of 28 other universities already use a hosted system and now UOW is satisfied with the privacy and safety of these systems and will be making the move towards this system at the end of this year.

The student representatives raised no further concerns and were pleased with this outcome.

RESOLVED 2010/05:

that the Student Representative Forum

- (i) notes the information on Student IT Resources as provided in the agenda papers; and*
- (ii) recommends that the University introduce a new email service, before the start of the 2011 academic year.*

B5 Student Computer Lab Access

The Chair asked Mr Mclver to speak to this item. Mr Mclver advised that in regards to computer lab usage, ITS reviews hourly statistics and that computer lab allocations (made annually) are based on these statistics.

A student representative emphasised that his particular concern was the increased number of classes held in the Building 3 Mega Lab and the impact that this was having on Informatics students who require the specialist software only available on those computers. The student representative felt that the changes were resulting from the space utilisation survey. Another student added that he too had noticed the decrease in access to computer labs experienced by Informatics students and suggested that this space would always be under-utilised and that students require blocks of access, not just one hour timeslots.

The VPA advised that the space utilisation survey was a tool used by faculties to show areas which are being underutilised and did not directly impact timetabling arrangements.

The student representative agreed to raise these concerns at his respective Faculty's meeting. Mr Mclver agreed to assist, where possible, should the faculty require ITS support to improve access to the software in the Informatics labs.

RESOLVED 2010/06:

that the Student Representative Forum

- (i) notes the information on Student IT Resources as provided in the agenda papers; and*
- (ii) strongly recommends that the University take into consideration the need for students to access specialist software in labs during the day and make allowances for that in the timetabling of labs.*

B6 Student Accommodation Services

The Chair asked Mr Pennington to speak to this item.

Mr Pennington advised that while the cost of student accommodation have increased, it does however reflect increased costs of labour, food and other services associated with the style of accommodation offered by the University. Increases over the past 5 years are marginally higher than inflation, but significantly less than private rental cost increases. He noted that the cost of rooms at the University were on par with that of private accommodation, and that any additional cost associated with University accommodation can be attributed to the additional services provided (including that the rooms are fully furnished, grounds are maintained, there is added security and support staff, events are organised for residents and there are no up-front costs or utility charges). Mr Pennington presented statistics which demonstrated that the University of Wollongong is comparable to other Australian Universities, and advised that there has been additional expenditure on student accommodation including the re-painting and re-carpeting of rooms and the updating of kitchens. The choice and timing of renovation projects is led by student feedback. It was also noted that the University Council sets budgets including fees for student accommodation and that Accommodation Services Division is audited regularly.

A student representative asked if this information could be made available to concerned students. Mr Pennington responded that if the students contact him, he would be happy to send them some additional information.

The VPA added that the major problem with student accommodation is that there are simply not enough rooms to meet the demand from students and that the University is addressing this issue.

RESOLVED 2010/07:

that the Student Representative Forum notes the report provided by General Manager Accommodation Services.

B7 Parking

Mr Flint emphasised that the University is trying to encourage both students and staff to use public transport and to utilise car-pooling, where possible. He noted that car-pooling was being highly utilised as the spaces allocated for car-poolers were full by 9:30am. The Free Shuttle Buses are another initiative which has helped to reduce the number of people who would otherwise have driven to the University. He appreciated the feedback on the 2 hour spaces (after 4pm) in the Northern Carpark and would speak to the VPA about the possibility of changing these to 2.5 hour timeslots.

Mr Flint recognised that the issue of increased parking spaces has also been noted by the University Council, however, road congestion, the impact on the road network and the need for prior planning and approval from Wollongong City Council and the RTA makes this a complex issue. Traffic congestion has been reduced by the opening of the new Robsons Road entrance, however, there are still major issues to consider and a long approval process before any additional parking can be built.

A student representative highlighted that the changes to parking since the start of this year have meant that spaces are now set aside specifically for car-poolers and that the system was abused by students who are not actually transporting 2 or more passengers for a substantial distance.

The VPA noted that the University has plans to begin construction on a multi-storey carpark in 2012, which would provide an additional 400-500 car spaces. However, this matter still requires development consent and the local road network may first have to be improved before consent is granted.

Another student representative asked that the reference to the abolition of staff permit parking be removed from the resolution, reasoning that the University would not be able to operate if staff were unable to park and therefore unable to attend work. The student representatives agreed to remove this from the resolution. Another student representative noted that parking at the University of Wollongong was far superior to that of the Sydney campuses he had visited.

RESOLVED 2010/08:

that the Student Representative Forum

- (i) notes the serious problems with the lack of car park spaces for students at the UOW Wollongong Campus; and*
- (ii) requests that the University Council take the following action:*
 - notes that with the changes to parking made in 2010 that parking lots are filling up earlier in the morning than in previous years.*

- *notes that students who drive have expressed that the changes made to the Western Carpark have removed too many spaces from general use in favour of car pooling spaces, and that students are driving around looking for general parking spots earlier than 8:30 AM, while 200 spaces have been observed as being available in the car pool section.*
- *increases the number of parking spaces that are available to students by investing in the construction of a second multi-storey car park.*
- *increases car parking spaces that are available for general use by students by the commencement of the Spring 2010 session through changes to existing carparks.*
- *notes that many classes at UOW are of 2 hour duration and that because of this, the 2 hour duration spaces in the Northern Carpark available from 4:00 PM fall short of being useful for many students, and further provide an inconvenient 30 minute gap where parking expires before it converts to free parking, which increases the likelihood of the unfair issuance of parking fines.*
- *increases all 2 hour parking spaces in the Northern Carpark to 2.5 hour parking spaces.*
- *notes that with the construction of more buildings at UOW and with increasing student numbers at UOW, that parking will become even more difficult if parking capacity is not increased.*

B8 Pedestrian Safety on Northfields Avenue

Mr Flint responded to the concerns outlined in the agenda papers stating that the University had previously submitted a request for a pedestrian crossing to the RTA and Wollongong City Council. However, this request was rejected. It had been suggested that a pedestrian crossing could in fact increase the likelihood of accidents as pedestrians would then believe that cars will always stop for them, which might not be the case. The University, in conjunction with the RTA and Wollongong City Council, had undertaken a Pedestrian Mobility Plan. The Plan highlighted that there is not a single point of crossing and included a number of initiatives which make crossing safer by formalising crossing points such as the construction of the median strip to provide a mid traffic hold point and additional fencing to guide pedestrians.

A student representative then spoke strongly about his concerns regarding pedestrian safety. He noted that not all accidents are reported and that there are concerns with poor lighting in this area. The other student representatives supported these concerns.

RESOLVED 2010/09:

that the Student Representative Forum notes the issues raised and recommends that the University urgently look into this matter and liaise with the RTA about increased safety, such as increased lighting and signage.

B9 Student Experience Questionnaire Results

The Chair invited Ms Walder to present to the forum. Ms Walder advised that the Student Experience Questionnaire completed in August 2009 had achieved the best response rate to date (at 28%). Ms Walder advised that in the last survey seven questions had been averaged to establish a new 'Sense of Belonging' Index Score. Other questions were also introduced to explore student perceptions of plagiarism, safety and the learning-teaching-research nexus.

It was noted that generally, scores were high, with positive results for satisfaction with the overall student experience, teaching and course quality, and students recommending the University to others. Results were slightly lower for International and Postgraduate Coursework students. A summary report outlining a number of trends and key statistics was tabled at the forum.

A student representative suggested that students should be made aware of the results of the SEQ. Ms Walder responded that the campaign to promote this information is yet to begin and that a summary will be made available on the UOW website, on a new page called UOW Responds.

RESOLVED 2010/10:

that the Student Representative Forum notes the presentation on the Student Experience Questionnaire Results and congratulates ARD on achieving the highest response rate ever.

B10 Student Feedback Responses

The VPA informed the forum that one of the most important issues faced by the University is capturing ad-hoc feedback and the aim is to achieve the same standard as the one set by the University Library across campus.

A student representative expressed that there is still a perception in the wider student community that no action is taken as a result of student feedback. The student representative noted that this may not always be the case and recognised the fruition of a number of initiatives that have been implemented since the last Student Representative Forum in response to concerns raised.

The VPA suggested that additional communication channels (or a clarification of those already existing) might help to alleviate this perception and raise awareness of the achieved outcomes.

A student representative stated that increasing the number of Student Representative Forums per year would not be beneficial considering the low number of student representatives in attendance. The alternative, which was considered more feasible, was that an interim report (issued within two to three months of the meeting and detailing the progress on items raised at the last meeting) should be provided to all student representatives that attended the last meeting.

RESOLVED 2010/11:

that the Student Representative Forum

- (i) requests that an interim report on the progress of items discussed at the previous Student Representative Forum be provided to forum attendees within two to three months of the meeting; and*
- (ii) that the University Council examines ways in which additional feedback can be given to students and particularly student-representatives on issues raised in the SEQ and the SRF.*

PART C – GENERAL BUSINESS

C1 Other Business

Student Representative Forum Minutes – 30 April 2010

The Chair requested that an actions arising table be added to subsequent agendas under Business Arising from the Minutes and that every effort be made to include handouts with the agenda instead of tabling them at the meeting.

The meeting was closed at 12:10pm.