
PRESENT:
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training) (Professor Robyn Owens) as Chair
Graduate Education Officer (Dr Krystyna Haq)
Professor Craig Atkins (Deputy Chair)
Professor Ken Clements
Professor Kevin Croft
Professor Arun Dharmarajan
Professor Norman Etherington
Professor Matthew Knuiman
Associate Professor Ian McArthur
Dr Allan McKinley
Associate Professor Brett Nener
Associate Professor Robert Stuart
Professor Jim Whelan
Executive Officer (Mr Chester Cutinha)

BY INVITATION:
Director, Research Services (Dr Campbell Thomson)
Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships (Dr Sato Juniper)
Graduate Education Officer (Dr Michael Azariadis)

OBSERVERS:
Graduate Research Coordinator, School of Architecture, Landscape & Visual Arts (Mr Simon Anderson)

APOLOGIES:
Nominee of the Chair of the Academic Board (Associate Professor Annette George)
Postgraduate Students’ Association President (Ms Bronwyn Crowe)
Acting Postgraduate Students’ Association President (Mr Benjamin Jardine)
Associate Professor Susan Prescott

Mr Benjamin Jardine, who is acting Postgraduate Students’ Association President while Ms Bronwyn Crowe is away, although being an apology for the meeting, emailed his comments for Item 7 in Part 2 which were read out at the meeting by the Chair.

WELCOME
The Chair welcomed Mr Simon Anderson, Graduate Research Coordinator of the School of Architecture, Landscape & Visual Arts, to the meeting.

1. CALL FOR DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Members and invitees were requested to declare any conflicts of interest that they may have with respect to any items on the agenda.

Associate Professor Robert Stuart declared a perception for conflict of interest with respect to the candidates referred to in items 9(a)(i) and 9(a)(iii) and left the room during the discussion of these items.

Dr Krystyna Haq declared a conflict of interest with respect to the candidate referred to in item 9(a)(iv) and did not speak to this item.
2. MINUTES – REF: F36

RESOLVED – 1

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Graduate Research School held on Tuesday, 5 December 2006 be confirmed.

3. BOARD OF THE GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL MEETING DATES – REF: F35

Members and invitees were reminded of the meeting dates for the Board of the Graduate Research School in 2007 and were advised that except for the December 2007 Board meeting, all the other meetings were scheduled for 2.15 pm in the Old Senate Room, in the Irwin Street Building adjacent to James Oval. Members were also advised that details pertaining to the December 2007 meeting would be circulated at a later date.

February 13 February 2007
March 13 March 2007
April 10 April 2007
May 8 May 2007
June 12 June 2007
July 10 July 2007
August 14 August 2007
September 11 September 2007
October 9 October 2007
November 13 November 2007
December 11 December 2007

Noted

4. APPOINTMENT TO THE BOARD OF THE GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL BY ELECTION OF THE ACADEMIC BOARD – REF: F34

Members were provided with an extract from the Minutes of the 15 November 2006 meeting of the Academic Board informing them that Professor Craig Atkins, Professor Arun Dharmarajan and Dr Allan McKinley had all been appointed to another term on the Board of the Graduate Research School.

Members were advised that the minute extract contained an error in the period of the term of appointment of the Members which had been brought to the attention of the University Secretariat. The term of appointment is from 1 April 2007 to 31 December 2009 and not 31 March 2010 as indicated on the minute extract. This correction will be noted at the next meeting of the Academic Board on 21 March 2007.

Noted

5. DEADLINES FOR RULE CHANGES – REF: F10219, 10223

Members were informed that the University Secretariat had provided the Graduate Research and Scholarships Office with a schedule for updating the University General Rules for Academic Courses. The schedule provides deadlines for updates for submission to the Secretariat, Academic Council and Legislative Committee in time for inclusion in the 2008 Handbook.

Members were advised that the two categories of Rules of particular concern to the Board of the Graduate Research School were the University General Rules (covering PhD, Master by Research) and the Rules for Higher Degrees by Research with Special Admission or Course Requirements (generally, covered research Master and Doctoral degrees administered by the Graduate Research School that have special Rules in addition to the University General Rules).
Members were also advised that the April 2007 meeting is the last occasion at which the Board can recommend changes to either set of Rules that will meet the deadline for inclusion in the 2008 Handbook.

Although changes of Rules can be recommended by the Board at any time of the year, the Graduate Research and Scholarships Office requested that members consider in advance any changes that they might like to suggest to the Rules in 2007 so that they can be dealt with by the Board at or before the April meeting.

**Noted**

6. **PRINCIPLES FOR THE OPERATION OF COMMITTEES – REF: F12202**

Members had before them for discussion the following documents that had arisen out of the review conducted by the "Working Smarter Through Committees" working party commissioned by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Executive Director (Academic Services and Registrar) to investigate ways of streamlining and improving committee processes without compromising collegiality.

- Principles for the Operation of Committees
- Rules for the Operation of Committees
- University Committee Members’ Code of Conduct

The Chair of the Board, Professor Robyn Owens, addressed this item advising Members that all Members of the Board of the Graduate Research School and other Committees within the University were expected to operate under the principles, rules and code of conduct described in these documents.

Members were also advised that the documents listed above as well as the Working Party's report were also available on the Web at: http://www.secretariat.uwa.edu.au/home/policies/commconst

No issues were raised by Board members after the Chair had briefed the Board and invited questions.

**Noted.**
7. **PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE AN ANNUAL SUPERVISION SURVEY AT UWA – REF: F74**

Members had before them a proposal to introduce an annual online survey of all HDR students. The purpose of the survey would be to understand how currently enrolled research students perceive the quality and value of the supervision support they receive at this university. The name suggested is OSCAR (On Supervision, Candidature And Research).

The Board heard that OSCAR is not intended to replace the exit survey administered to all completing or terminating students. Rather, it is intended to sample research students’ perceptions during candidature and to provide useful feedback to Schools on their performance in research training. Anonymity would be preserved by aggregating data to school level in schools with 6 or more HDR students. Data for schools with fewer than 6 enrolled HDR students would be aggregated at a higher level.

Members were reminded that UWA currently surveys the quality of its HDR experiences, including supervision, through an Exit Survey that is sent to all terminating HDR students. In addition, through the process of School Reviews, data are collected on the quality of supervision at the Honours, Masters and Doctoral levels, providing Schools with feedback on a 7-year cycle. All completing HDR students are offered the opportunity to contribute to the national Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ), for which UWA records a 59.5% response rate. Apart from the School reviews, which are infrequent, the other surveys sample perceptions at the end of the experience, when views of the entire candidacy are likely to be most strongly influenced by perceptions of the completion and examination phases.

The Chair advised members that, unlike the Course Experience Questionnaire, the PREQ has not, until now, influenced funding flow to universities. However, with the advent of the Research Quality Framework it is likely that PREQ results will influence funding flow to universities in the future. It would be wise for the University to prepare itself for this by conducting its own research on the perceptions of HDR students while they are at the University.

It is intended for OSCAR to be similar to SURF (Students’ Unit Reflective Feedback) with some obvious differences arising from the differences between coursework and research programmes. It will be important not to jeopardise the important, long-term relationships between HDR students and their supervisors while at the same time obtaining as accurate a picture as possible of students’ perceptions of supervision.

It had not been possible for a student representative to attend the meeting. However, the Chair had received an email from Mr Benjamin Jardine, the acting Postgraduate Students’ Association President, with the following comments:

- The PSA is concerned that 6 enrolled students might not be enough to ensure anonymity in smaller schools where all the students may be working with the same supervisor or belong to the same research team. Where a supervisor was evaluated negatively in this instance there could be repercussions on the team as a whole.
- Perhaps the requirement for reporting at school level could be that the school has more than one active supervisor or more than one distinct research team?
- Will direction be provided to students if the survey helps them to identify concerns with their supervision? The survey may allow students to reflect on their supervision and the standard of their research experience.
- Will students or the PSA have access to the data at some level of aggregation? The data could be useful for comparing levels of resourcing between schools, for example.
- Will the survey be tied to the annual report? This would seem to be an easy way to ensure compliance.
- Overall the survey sounds like a good initiative and the PSA hopes to see it implemented.
In the subsequent discussion, the following main points were made:

- What action will be taken if, for example, the "strongly disagree" result is strong for a particular area, other than generating a poor score? It is possible that problems might be hidden if scores are averaged across schools, faculties or the whole university. If we survey we should be prepared to act on the feedback.

- In cases like this the Graduate Research School could work with the Head of School and/or Graduate Research Coordinator to address the concerns that have been raised by students.

- This would be very different to SURF, which does not focus on individual teachers but asks questions about the unit as a whole. SURF is about the unit, not how it is taught.

- Without the first section, the proposed OSCAR survey is generic, like SURF. Should the first section be removed?

- Should the first section be replaced by more specific questions relating to specific supervisory activities?

- This is a survey instrument and the questions are general, of necessity. It is important to ask general questions to get an overall picture of perceptions.

- Could we add: "Are you satisfied with the Graduate Research Coordinator in your school?" or "Are you satisfied with your interaction with the Graduate Research School?"

- School-based surveys developed in the last few years by CATL and the GRSO for the School of Computer Science and Software Engineering, the School of Plant Biology and the School of Social and Cultural Studies included detailed questions. If a school's OSCAR score was not good a more detailed survey like these could be used to drill down into the issues.

- It will be important to report the standard deviation, range and frequency distribution of responses as well as the mean score [NB: as for SPOT].

- All students in courses administered by the GRSO are asked to complete an Exit survey when they either complete or withdraw, and are invited to attend an Exit interview. The aggregated Survey Reports are compiled by the Institutional Research Unit. The survey includes specific questions about supervision.

- The Annual Progress Report has student to supervisor feedback but not the other way. A process to have two-way feedback is needed.

- Anonymity would be a problem in small schools. Also, there are small cohorts of students enrolled through faculty offices, for various reasons. Data from small schools and other small cohorts of students could be aggregated to faculty level.

- Some students are based in centres. Can we disaggregate the data to centre or discipline group level? This cannot be done automatically by enrolment. The survey could include a drop-down menu with a tree structure for which the top level is mandatory and the lower levels optional. Students could select the level of identification of their affiliation.

- How could we provide feedback on the survey results to students as well as schools?

- The survey should not be tied to the Annual Progress Report but done all at one time.

- Should there be a prize for the best school? No. This would introduce artefacts, and big schools would be disadvantaged.

- Could the Business School be split into smaller groups?

- There should not be a prize for the best school – poorly performing schools might benefit from assistance to improve.

Members agreed to proceed with the proposal to introduce an annual supervision survey at UWA with care being taken to maintain the anonymity of the respondents.