AGENDA: PARTS I – III

The next meeting of the Board of the Graduate Research School will be held in Senate Room on Tuesday, 14 July 2009 at 2.15 p.m.

Parts I and II of the agenda are to be dealt with en bloc by motion of the Chair. Parts III and IV are for discussion. A member may request the removal of an item from Parts I or II to Part III.

Amanda Edmonston-Fearn / Cheryl Wenninger
Executive Officers
Board of the Graduate Research School
1. CALL FOR DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST – REF: F34

The Chair will invite members to declare potential for conflict or perceived conflicts of interest, if applicable, with regard to items on the agenda.

2. MINUTES – REF: F36

Confirmation of the Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Graduate Research School held on Tuesday, 9 June 2009.

3. ITEMS/BUSINESS IN PROGRESS FOR NOTING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

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<tr>
<th>ITEM/BUSINESS IN PROGRESS</th>
<th>ACTION BY:</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in format of printed thesis</td>
<td>GRSO</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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PART I – ITEMS FOR COMMUNICATION TO BE DEALT WITH EN BLOC

No items.

PART II – ITEMS FOR DECISION TO BE DEALT WITH EN BLOC

3. MANAGEMENT OF MILESTONES OF HIGHER DEGREE BY RESEARCH (HDR) STUDENTS

The Graduate Research and Scholarships Office (GRSO) seeks the support of the Board to manage the milestones of HDR students more strictly in the 2010 re-enrolment exercise than has been the case in recent years.

Background

As members will be aware, candidature of HDR students is punctuated by milestones that the student is required to meet at particular times in order for candidature to continue. These are: submission and approval of a Research Proposal; formal Confirmation of Candidature after the first year (FTE) of PhD enrolment; submission of satisfactory Annual Progress Reports on the anniversary of commencement each year of enrolment; and submission of satisfactory Interim Reports by those students from whom they have been requested as part of an intervention when problems have been identified with the student’s progress or wellbeing.

Members may also recall that the re-enrolment of HDR students each year is undertaken administratively without students being required to enrol themselves as all other students are required to do. This concession is made because: (1) it is relatively simple to re-enrol HDR students en masse as long as certain requirements have been met; (2) in many ways it is at least as much in the University’s as in students’ interests to ensure that all students who should be re-enrolled each year are re-enrolled; (3) HDR students have much less incentive to re-enrol themselves appropriately each year than other students do; (4) automatic re-enrolment assists the University to align scholarship payments with students’ enrolment status; and (5) the process allows the GRSO to ensure that all international students remain enrolled in accordance with the terms of their Student Visas. The introduction of automatic re-enrolment for HDR students some years ago removed many problems with respect to all these points.
Automatic re-enrolment is blocked for students who have outstanding debts to the University and also for those who have not submitted Annual Progress Reports for the previous year. Automatic re-enrolment occurs in mid-December, and the timing of the exclusion filter is set each year. For example, for the 2008/2009 re-enrolment, students were re-enrolled automatically as long as they did not have an outstanding debt or an 2008 Annual Report that was due before the end of August 2008. In other years the filter has been set for reports due by deadlines later in the year. There are special arrangements for students on suspension.

Students who have not been automatically re-enrolled are followed up by the GRSO in January to request that they clear the outstanding debts and/or submit the outstanding reports, and to determine the appropriate status of the student. Those on scholarships are followed up extensively before their scholarships are stopped as a last resort if they do not clear the debts or submit their reports after repeated requests. All students who have not been automatically re-enrolled are followed up by the GRSO both directly and in batches via their Graduate Research Coordinators, and special arrangements are made for international students, who face possible deportation if they do not remain enrolled.

In 2009, the follow-up exercise continued intensively for several months, at the same time that GRSO staff (and Graduate Research Coordinators) needed to deal with the enrolment and induction of new students. In addition, significant numbers of students were re-enrolled for 2009 automatically despite that they had outstanding Annual Progress Reports, because their reports had been due in the second half of 2008. Many of these students still have not submitted their outstanding reports despite repeated requests, directly by GRSO staff and through their Graduate Research Coordinators.

In addition to the problem of outstanding Annual Progress Reports, significant numbers of students have other milestones well overdue, despite concerted efforts of the GRSO and Graduate Research Coordinators. These milestones include Research Proposals and Confirmations of Candidature. Failure to achieve these milestones is more problematic than failure to achieve Annual Progress Reports, as it usually indicates that there are serious problems with the candidature. Further, the GRSO has noted an apparently increasing tendency for students to fail to submit Travel Reports, which are required after students have received Travel Awards from the Board.

Members will be aware that the requirement for HDR students to meet milestones is set by the Academic Council on the recommendation of the Board. The milestones are important not only for academic reasons but also in order for the University to manage HDR candidature and Research Training Scheme (RTS) funding effectively in accordance with national guidelines and to ensure compliance with the Educational Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act, which governs the provision of services to, and management of, international students, and requires, among other things, that the University monitors the progress of international students closely and intervenes when indicated. Travel Reports are required in order to satisfy auditing requirements to show that University funds are spent in the manner for which they were provided.

GRSO staff take particular pride in the philosophy and practice of managing the candidature of HDR students with compassion, flexibility and a high regard for the individual needs of each student and their supervisors. There is no intention to change this. However, the current situation with respect to the management of overdue milestones, particularly the large expenditure of resources on repeated follow-up of the same students: (1) is administratively very expensive; (2) reduces the capacity of the GRSO to undertake more pro-active activities; (3) appears to be leading in some areas to a culture where the milestones are seen as optional; (4) is not consistent with accepted national Best Practice or the practice in other Go8 universities; and (5) is not sustainable, particularly in the context of a focus on growth of numbers of HDR students.

Proposal
Since early 2009 the GRSO has been engaged in a thorough audit of and blitz on outstanding milestones. This will continue. The GRSO requests the support of the Board for the following arrangements for the 2010 automatic re-enrolment:

1. Automatic re-enrolment for 2010 will be done only for students who have met or submitted all milestone reports due, as of 1st December 2009. The only exceptions to this will be as follows: students on suspension; and students for whom formal approval has been sought and given for extensions of milestone due dates. Students who submit overdue milestone reports on or after 1st December 2009 will normally* be subject to late fees for re-enrolment. * there are sometimes extenuating circumstances that need to be taken into account, and this will continue to be the case.
2. Students on scholarships will have their scholarships terminated if they have not been re-enrolled for 2010 by 15th January 2010.
3. The GRSO will publicise the requirements for the 2010 re-enrolment widely during the remainder of 2009 so that students and supervisors have ample warning of the tightened arrangements.

For approval

PART III – ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND DECISION

4. RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENSURING THE ACCURACY OF APPLICATIONS FOR ETHICS APPROVAL AND FOR NEGOTIATING WITH ETHICS COMMITTEES

The InfoEd system represents a comprehensive suite of research management modules, covering grants, ethics and environmental safety, clinical trials, and expertise management. The University has selected InfoEd to provide a corporate solution for the provision of accurate information on research conducted at UWA, and reporting on regulatory compliance.

As part of the implementation process of the ethics modules in InfoEd, and in collaboration with ethics committees at school level, the following issue has been identified and forwarded from the InfoEd implementation team:

The issue of supervisors refusing to take responsibility for ethics submissions from Phd students has arisen at two schools. The chairs of the committees noted that some supervisors were adamant that the responsibility of the accuracy and completeness of the submission rested with the student and that the committee should negotiate with the student rather than the supervisor. I feel that this really is a school management issue and the head of school should [advise supervisors that they are accountable for this process].

UWA has two policies that set out the responsibilities of supervisors (Code of Good Practice for Graduate Research Supervision and Guidelines for Supervisors). Neither of these policies mentions specifically the issue of whose responsibility it is to oversee the process of students applying for and obtaining ethics approval.

The Code of Good Practice for Graduate Research Supervision states that Heads of School are responsible for ensuring that each student is provided with written guidelines concerning ethical and safety procedures appropriate to the discipline. The Code also states that students must acquire the necessary health and safety skills by attending health and safety training courses as required, adopting safe working practices relevant to the field of research, and adhering to the ethical practices appropriate to the discipline, including Human Research and/or Animal Experimentation Ethics requirements, at all times.

The University's Guidelines on Research Ethics and Research Conduct states the following:

5. Supervision of Students/Research Trainees

Reference should be made to The University of Western Australia Code of Good Practice for Postgraduate Student Research and Supervision.
5.1 The Head of Department or academic unit should ensure that supervision of each research student/trainee (including Honours, Masters and Doctoral students, and junior postdoctoral staff) is assigned to specific, responsible and appropriately qualified senior research worker(s), and that the ratio of research students/trainees to supervisors is low enough to assure effective intellectual interaction and effective oversight of the research at all times.

5.2 Supervisors or Heads of Departments or academic units should provide each research student/trainee with written material on applicable government and institutional guidelines for the conduct of research, including those covering ethical requirements for studies on human and animal studies, requirements for confidentiality, and occupational health and safety matters.

5.3 Supervisors should be obliged to provide guidance in all matters of good research practice. This includes discussing with the student, at the outset, relevant issues of research conduct and ethics, and intellectual property, and referring any problems/queries to the Head of Department for consideration.

5.4 Supervisors must ensure, as far as possible, the validity of research data obtained by a student under his/her supervision.

The InfoEd implementation team has suggested that it may be helpful to clarify in the relevant policies whose responsibility it is to ensure that students' applications for ethics approval are accurate and with whom the ethics committees should be negotiating. It was further suggested that if the research project deviated from the proposed research, the supervisor could be held accountable.

In light of these comments, the Chair has suggested the Board consider the following points for discussion:

- Some projects involve students working on supervisors’ projects (ARC grants, NH&MRC, pre-existing IP, pre-existing data etc). In these cases supervisors are obviously involved in the Ethics approval process;
- Students otherwise own their own intellectual property, so arguably they should take responsibility for obtaining ethics approvals;
- Learning about ethics is part of research training, so supervisors should take responsibility for teaching this;
- Who would be accountable if something went wrong? Arguably the Head of School;
- What would be best practice internationally?

For Discussion.