



Standardisation of Credit Points for Undergraduate Units of Study

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Background

1. Establishment of Working Party

At its meeting of 13 November 2002, the Academic Board identified issues for consideration in 2003. One such issue was the standardisation of credit points for undergraduate units of study.

The Board's Undergraduate Studies Committee established a Working Party to research this issue, and meetings were held in May and August of 2003.

At these meetings, and subsequent meetings of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, points were raised for and against the standardisation of credit points to six credit points for a unit of study. Issues of concern were also raised regarding the impact of standardisation on those degrees requiring external accreditation. The arguments and points raised can be summarised as follows:

Arguments for

- Will assist in intra and inter-institutional transfers
- In some cases will make students' transcripts more competitive
- Will assist unit of study co-ordination within and between faculties
- Will assist faculties in developing partnerships with other Universities (both in Australia and overseas)

Arguments against

- May limit initiatives in developing new units of study
- Potential impact on both staff and student work loads
- In some cases will make students' transcripts less competitive
- Could make co-ordination of combined degrees more difficult

2. Process of development and consultation

The members of the Working Party initially considered information relating to how the various faculties defined a credit point with regard to staff and student workloads, contact hours, assessment and examination, etc. The members also researched and provided information on the use of standardisation in their discipline amongst other Australian universities (this information can be found in the memorandum to faculties included in the appendices).

The Working Party's discussions of these matters led to the drafting of a number of proposals, which was submitted to the Undergraduate Studies Committee at its meeting of 16 September 2003. Following further discussion, the Committee endorsed the distribution of these proposals, with suitable background information, to the faculties for comment.

Faculty responses were considered by the Committee at its meeting of 18 November 2003. During discussion of the proposal and faculty responses, members of the Committee raised the following points:

- the Faculty of Arts argued that standardisation would not benefit its students, as it would lead to reduced flexibility in unit of study choice, and would necessitate redefining, and reducing, the number of units required for a major;
- the Faculty also argued that reducing units of study from 8 to 6 credit points would reduce the depth of teaching possible in each unit, and would marginalise the current differentiation between junior and senior units of study;
- the Faculty of Arts again highlighted the potential impact on both student and staff workloads if the Faculty was forced to standardise to 6 credit points per unit of study;

- the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources expressed support for standardisation and noted that it would assist the Faculty in strengthening cross-faculty study options for its students;
- the Director, Student Centre stressed that this proposal was not driven by administration or FlexSIS requirements, and noted that transitional arrangements for any units standardised to 6 credit points would have implications for the development of FlexSIS;
- the Faculty of Science argued that perceived short-term difficulties should be balanced with the long-term, positive outcomes for students, and advised that the Faculty was committed to standardising its units of study to 6 credit points where possible;
- the Faculty of Economics and Business expressed support for the proposal and reiterated its argument that the current model at the University of Sydney was not competitive when compared with Australian and international universities;
- the Faculty also noted that, despite arguments against the move, the University had successfully introduced 6 credit points as the standard for postgraduate coursework units of study;
- the Faculty of Engineering advised that it would be standardising its units of study to 6 credit points;
- the Faculty of Health Sciences noted that the majority of its units of study were not available for cross-faculty enrolment and would not be standardised;
- the Faculty of Education expressed concern that the professional faculties would find it difficult to meet professional requirements and maintain the current level of cross-faculty study opportunities for their students; and
- members agreed that the major problems in implementing the proposal would be with re-arranging current combined degrees.

The Chair reminded members that the proposal did not advocate the standardisation of all units of study, but would require faculties to review those units of study available for cross-faculty enrolment and justify why such units should not be standardised to 6 credit points. He also emphasised that the original suggestion had been raised by academics, and was not being driven by administrative requirements.

The recommendations contained in the proposal were discussed and the Committee agreed to submit the amended proposal to the Academic Board with an outline of the arguments for and against, as well as copies of all faculty submissions received. Nine members voted in favour of the amended proposal, one member voted against and three members abstained.

Proposals

Following are the original proposals as communicated to Deans and Faculties. The amendments shown by strikethrough (deletions) and underlining (additions) were made by the Undergraduate Studies Committee at its meeting of 18 November 2003.

1. Faculties shall use credit points to monitor student work-load on the basis that 24 credit points equates to the effort expected of a full-time student, studying 36-48 hours per week. A credit point should therefore equate notionally to a minimum expectation of 1.5 – 2 hours of student effort.
2. Where units of study are available to students of more than one faculty, faculties shall design units of study to maximise compatibility and availability to students of the university.
3. The normal credit point load for a unit of study shall be six credit points. Such standardisation exists in an attempt to maximise student choice and flexibility.
4. Faculties introducing new units of study with a credit point value other than six shall inform the Academic Board, noting the rationale for the deviation from the standardised model and addressing issues of compatibility. ~~New units of study with a credit point value of other than six shall not normally be available to students outside the host faculty.~~
5. During 2004 faculties shall review existing units of study and report to the Academic Board on their intentions regarding standardisation to six credit points. At the end of 2004, the Academic Board shall consider whether units of study with a value other than six credit points will be available to students outside the host faculty beyond 2006. ~~From 2006, in cases where faculties wish to continue to offer units of study with a credit point value of other than six, such units of study will not normally be available to students outside the host faculty except with special permission of the Deans of the student's faculty and the host faculty of the unit of study. Where such units of study are available to students outside the host faculty, the host faculty shall consult with faculties in which the unit of study shall be available to ensure compatibility with other programs and report the results of the consultation to the Board.~~
6. It is recommended that the Academic Board convene a Working Party to look at the resource implications relating to the implementation of this proposal. It is suggested that the Working Party comprise the Chair of the Academic Board, the Registrar and the three Pro Vice-Chancellors (Colleges) or their representatives.

Amendment of the Academic Board Resolutions: *Creation, Variation and Deletion of Award Courses and Units of Study*

Amendments are shown by strikethrough (deletions) and underlining (additions).

Part 2 – Nomenclature

5. Credit points

(1) Principles

- (a) The building blocks of all award courses are units of study. A course generally comprises many units of study, selected according to the regulations of the faculty or board which controls the course. However, different units of study do not always have equal academic demands or content. Moreover, many of the units of study offered by the University may be taken as part of more than one course, including courses not controlled by the faculty which controls the unit of study.
- (b) The absence of a tight mapping between courses and units of study is an important aspect of academic flexibility and efficiency in the University. However, it does require that the University establish a measure of the relative quantitative contribution of a unit of study to a course. The consistency of the relativities of units of study across the University is determined by the Academic Board policy relating to credit points.

(2) Policy

- (a) Credit points indicate the relative quantitative contribution of a unit of study to an award course.
- (b) Units of study shared across courses are required to have the same credit point value in every course. This policy applies when units of study are shared between faculties or between undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Where units of study are available to students of more than one faculty, faculties shall design units of study to maximise compatibility and availability to students of the university.
- (c) The relationship between the level of student effort in a unit of study and the credit point value of that unit is articulated and defined within the context of all of the courses sharing that unit of study. Faculties shall use credit points to monitor student work-load on the basis that 24 credit points equates to the effort expected of a full-time student, studying 36-48 hours per week. A credit point should therefore equate notionally to a minimum expectation of 1.5 – 2 hours of student effort.
- (d) The normal full-time load for all undergraduate and postgraduate coursework award courses is 24 credit points per semester (or 12 points for the Summer Session).
- (e) The normal credit point load for an undergraduate unit of study shall be six credit points. Such standardisation exists in an attempt to maximise student choice and flexibility.
- (f) In all cases (both undergraduate and postgraduate) the credit point value of a unit of study will be an integer, normally lying between 3 and 24. In assigning the level of student effort and hence the credit point value of a unit of study, faculties should be mindful of the advantages to students when credit points in preferred academic pathways add naturally to a sum of 24 per semester. This is best achieved by using credit point values that are divisors of 24 (i.e., 3, 4, 6, 8, 12).
- (g) Faculties introducing new undergraduate units of study with a credit point value other than six shall inform the Academic Board, noting the rationale for the deviation from the standardised model and addressing issues of compatibility.

- (h) A faculty may, on academic grounds, propose to the Undergraduate or Graduate Studies Committees units of study with 1 or 2 credit points. Although such units of study are discouraged, they will normally be approved if the unit of study is available only within courses controlled by the proposing faculty.

(3) **Notes**

- (a) Student transcripts and student record files will record a single result and a single credit point value for each unit of study attempted by a student. In those cases where the textual description of a unit of study includes reference to options within that unit, the transcript will not include a result or a credit point value for any specific option. Any option for which a result and credit point value is required must be identified as a stand-alone unit of study, with a distinct descriptor.
- (b) The requirement that each unit of study have a single unique credit point value, even if it is available in a range of courses (e.g. a mathematics unit in the BSc, the BE and the Combined Arts/Law degrees), may lead in principle to different minimum total credit point values for different degrees, or to different full-time study requirements per semester according to the award course chosen. In general, faculties are expected to construct undergraduate degree programs on the basis that a normal full-time load is 24 credit points per semester and, if necessary, to use this as a minimum credit point value for the construction of academic programs for entire award courses.
- (c) The credit point terminology refers to the value of a unit of study towards meeting award course completion requirements. While it may be expected to relate in a reasonably direct way to the amount of work in a unit of study, or to the load generated by a unit of study, these are matters to be determined by the faculty or faculties involved. There is no underlying necessity that “equal credit points” imply “equal amounts of work” or “equal load” across different courses of study offered by the University. However, faculties are encouraged to develop clear and consistent guidelines regarding how they define a credit point in terms of the student workload, contact hours, assessment and examination requirements applying to their own discipline and courses.

Memorandum to Deans



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Undergraduate Studies Committee,
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MEMORANDUM TO: Deans of Faculties

FILE: 2003/3406

DATE: 9 October 2003

SUBJECT: **Standardisation of Credit Points****Background**

At its meeting of 18 March 2003, the Undergraduate Studies convened a working party to consider and report back on issues surrounding the possible standardisation of units of study across the university to a credit point weighting of six, resulting in a full-time load of four units of study per semester. This followed on from an Academic Forum devoted to the same issue on 23 September 2002 which had identified sufficient benefits in standardisation to warrant further investigation. Among these were:

- alignment with emerging common practice among Go8 and overseas universities
- greater flexibility and breadth of student choice across the whole university, with a capacity for students to take more majors in some areas
- facilitation of interdisciplinary study through mixed majors and double degrees
- increased competitiveness of student transcripts in some faculties where existing 8 credit point senior units created a perception among employers that University of Sydney degrees were light-on.

Notes from the Academic Forum of 23 September 2002 are attached.

The working party surveyed current practice relating to credit point definitions and credit point values within the University. Members of the working party benchmarked their own disciplines against Go8 universities. Finally the working party sampled current attitudes to standardisation within the University and debated the merits and disadvantages of standardisation. In summary standardisation was supported by the Faculties of Science, Engineering and Economics and Business, and not supported by Arts and Law. The Faculties of Education and Social Work, Architecture and Health Sciences did not support complete standardisation but did not oppose standardisation if limited to units of study taken outside the host faculty. Other faculties represented on the working party were equivocal. It was noted that in some cases the views of accrediting bodies influenced the way degree content was packaged into individual units of study. It was also noted that standardisation could have significant resource implications in some faculties which needed to be addressed. It was agreed that a proposal to standardise units of study offered to students outside the host faculty be sent to faculties for comment with the intention of testing opinion, weighing benefits and addressing difficulties more widely.

Current practice

Credit Point Definitions: Faculties use credit point weightings for units of study for a number of purposes, chief among them being the monitoring of student workload, the allocation of class time, and the attaching of resources to educational programs. Some faculties have developed specific

definitions of a credit point in terms of class hours, student work and assessment loads, while others have left workload issues to individual departments.

Among those faculties that have adopted specific definitions or broad notional understandings, there is broad consensus within the following range:

One credit point equals (as appropriate for the discipline concerned) :

- 1.5 – 2 hours of student effort per week consisting of:
 - ◊ 0.5 – 1 hours of class time
 - ◊ 1 hour of work outside class
- 750 – 1000 words in a major assessment task OR 1 hours of examination (with upper limit as defined by Board Policy) OR twenty minute seminar presentation.

Weighting of units of study.

Faculties currently make use of almost the entire range of possibilities from 0 to 24 in assigning credit point weightings to units of study, making use of all the prime numbers between 0 and 24 except 23. It was noted that many of the more interesting numerical combinations arose from the initial difficulty of combining six and eight credit point units and that in some cases credit point weightings were assigned on the basis of a 'leftover' algorithm without regard to maintaining a relationship between credit point value and student workload.

Benchmarking.

A summary of practice in other Go8 universities is attached.

Proposal

Faculties shall use credit points to monitor student work-load on the basis that 24 credit points equates to the effort expected of a full-time student, studying 36-48 hours per week. A credit point should therefore equate notionally to a minimum expectation of 1.5 – 2 hours of student effort.

Where units of study are available to students of more than one faculty, faculties shall design units of study to maximise compatibility and availability to students of the university.

The normal credit point load for a unit of study shall be six credit points. Such standardisation exists to maximise student choice and flexibility.

Faculties introducing new units of study with a credit point value other than six shall inform the board, noting the rationale for the deviation from the standardised model. New units of study with a credit point value of other than six shall not normally be available to students outside the host faculty.

During 2004 faculties shall review existing units of study and report to the Board on their intentions regarding standardisation to six credit points. From 2006, in cases where faculties wish to continue to offer units of study with a credit point value of other than six, such units of study will not normally be available to students outside the host faculty except with special permission of the Deans of the student's faculty and the host faculty of the unit of study. Where such units of study are available to students outside the host faculty, the host faculty shall consult with faculties in which the unit of study shall be available to ensure compatibility with other programs and report the results of the consultation to the Board.

Comment is sought on the above issues, and should be sent to the Committee Secretary (Ms Megan Kemmis), Secretariat, Main Quadrangle (A14) by 31 October 2003 (comments may be e-mailed to: M.Kemmis@secretariat.usyd.edu.au).

Peter McCallum
Chair, Undergraduate Studies Committee

Attachments

1. Report of Academic Forum, 23 September 2002.

At its meeting of 23 September 2002, the Academic Forum held a discussion session on the standardisation of credit points. Some of the issues raised in discussion included:

- the need to understand the possible impact on class sizes, student work loads, unit of study outlines and Austudy benefits;
- consideration of the Faculty of Education's definition of a credit point;
- a comparison with other Group of 8 universities showed that the majority use a standard system of 24 credit points per full-time semester, with 6 credit points per unit – only the University of Adelaide used a system similar to that used by the University of Sydney;
- there were some advantages to retaining the current system, such as the use of 8 credit point units in senior years flagging a more serious and in-depth study of such subjects to students and employers, and parity with senior subjects offered by other faculties within the University;
- disadvantages of the current system included students studying fewer units of study with fewer majors and therefore obtaining a transcript that may appear “lightweight” in comparison with other institutions, and less flexibility for students who wanted to study a broader range of subjects;
- the adoption of a standard four unit semester, with 6 credit points per unit, would make it easier for students to transfer to and from the University of Sydney, and would align the University with a growing trend in international institutions towards such standardisation;
- the growing student demand for combined and double degrees would be better met by a standard four unit (each worth 6 credit points) semester;
- there was a need to increase students' access to the breadth of units of study available at the University;
- while acknowledging that curriculum evolution was an ongoing process (mainly driven by factors of necessity such as budget constraints), the introduction of a standardised semester system would force all the faculties to re-evaluate current curricula;
- standardisation would need to be compatible across the faculties;
- the standardisation of current units of study should be approached in a methodical and rigorous manner to ensure that issues such as unit content, delivery, student workload, funding, etc were all considered;
- the development of standardised units of study would be an opportunity to introduce a cross-departmental co-ordinated approach to teaching, with the possibility of introducing common junior level subjects within a faculty which would lead to specialised senior units of study, and even the introduction of units focussing on generic (assessable) skills;
- the development of such standardised units of study should be assisted by a one-off subsidy to the faculties, which would be justified by long-term savings in areas such as IT;
- professionally accredited courses have had to introduce a range of 2, 3 and 4 credit point units of study to meet accreditation requirements;
- it was suggested that standardisation should be focussed on those areas and units of study where the highest rates of student interchange and transfer occurred;
- while the flexibility of small credit point units (i.e. 2, 3 and 4 credit points) was discussed, it was argued that the proliferation of such courses displayed an inability to fully integrate such subjects into study programs, and resulted in resource-hungry units of study;
- it was pointed out that the key issue to be resolved would be defining one credit point across the University in terms of resources, student workload, contact hours, etc;
- student members of the Forum pointed out that any standardisation project would only be effective if it involved the input of students, particularly in the area of determining student work loads.

2. Summary of Benchmarking Information

Architecture

There was very little similarity amongst the various institutions offering Architecture degrees. The faculty at Sydney has identified the issue of defining one credit point as being critical to reviewing the credit point structure in the faculty, including how credit points translate in terms of cost to both students and the faculty. The issue of credit transfer was also raised.

Arts

There appeared to be no standard program structure across Australian institutions. Many institutions required more subjects per semester than Sydney, but their credit point structures and totals were also different. The main issue for Arts would be the impact on both staff and student workloads if the faculty moved from three to four subjects per semester, particularly as different schools had identified different student workload requirements (e.g. some languages required a greater workload than the “standard” Arts degree).

Economics and Business

Most other institutions require students to complete four subjects per semester, compared to three subjects at Sydney. This pattern of four subjects is also the norm for most Asia-Pacific institutions, and comparable North American institutions. The faculty is keen to move to a similar model, but feels constrained to only move in that direction with the participation of other faculties such as Arts, as such a move has implications for students’ choice of subjects and combined degrees. The major issue for the faculty is the competitiveness of its degrees, and the comparatively smaller number of subjects listed on student transcripts.

Education and Social Work

There was no standard pattern amongst Group of Eight Universities. UNSW has standardised its units to 6 and 3 credit points with many of the 3 credit point units covering professional requirements. Monash restricts students to studying within the Education faculty, while Wollongong and UNSW restrict options related to Key Learning Areas. Macquarie offers a range of units worth 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 24 credit points. It was stressed that the Faculty at Sydney was moving towards units worth 4, 6 or 8 credit points. While it would not be difficult to standardise units of study currently offered across more than one faculty, the specialised units (particularly the practicum) would be difficult to standardise. UNSW currently bundles practicum requirements into other units, but this prevents it appearing as a discrete item on the student’s transcript.

Engineering

Engineering degrees were very compartmentalised, with many institutions requiring six or seven units per semester (which raises workload issues for students). The University of Melbourne is the first Australian university to standardise to four subjects per semester, but it will be a number of years before it is clear whether or not this move has been successful. Practical work (i.e. placements) are treated as external, non-academic requirements at Sydney and do not receive credit points. Engineering at Sydney is moving towards a 6 credit point standard, and the faculty’s main concern is ensuring that such standardisation is synchronised with similar moves in other faculties, such as Science. Another concern for the faculty is reducing the student workload per semester.

Health Sciences

Very little uniformity is apparent in Health Science degree structures at other institutions (noted that comparisons were made between equivalent degrees, such as Physiotherapy, rather than faculty as a whole). Generally, most institutions offer fewer or, at most, as many units within the degree as does Sydney. It was noted that a move to 6 credit point units would reduce the number of subjects listed on Health Sciences transcripts, and that the faculty needed to weight practical units offered at different stages to indicate the depth of work involved.

Law

Most institutions in Australia define full-time study as four subjects per semester, however there are some that require either three (as does the University of Sydney) or five subjects per semester. Credit points per subject or unit vary with some institutions giving different values to compulsory subjects in comparison to elective subjects.

Science

The importance of the interface between Engineering and Science was stressed, and it was noted that many of the units offered by the Faculty were already standardised to either 3 or 6 credit points. This move was in agreement with the structures already in place in most other Australian institutions. It was noted that Science has defined one credit point as being equivalent to 1 hour face-to-face and the standard student workload as 48 hours per week (c.f. Arts and Economics and Business, where 8 credit points contains 3 hours face-to-face).

Conservatorium of Music

There are only a few other institutions offering similar courses in Australia, and there is very little in common amongst them with regard to degree structure and credit point values. The Royal College in London has a program structure based on three or four subjects per semester (c.f. the Conservatorium's structure currently require seven subjects). Issues for the Conservatorium include how rehearsal and practice should be weighted, and the cost of one-to-one teaching.

Members agreed that there was a broad acceptance across the University for a move towards standardisation of credit points with some flexibility, and with a focus on standardising cross-faculty units. It was noted that those faculties which had worked on defining a credit point had formulated a faculty-specific definition, and it was agreed that it would be very difficult to develop a definition which could apply across the University. It was agreed that members would provide a credit point definition from their faculty, if one existed. It was also agreed that the Chair of the Academic Board would be asked to raise this issue at a meeting of the Chairs of Academic Boards.

Responses from Faculties

Faculty of Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources

No reply received

Faculty of Architecture

In response to your memo of 9 October 2003 regarding standardisation of credit points, I have discussed the issue with my Associate Dean (Undergraduate Studies), whom I believe at one time was not entirely in favour of the proposal. I understand she is now firmly in favour, both inside and outside the host faculty.

I also raised the issue today at my Policy and Management Advisory Committee, comprised of all Associate Deans, Head of School, and disciplinary heads (professors), stating my complete personal support for the proposal. There was not an objection raised.

I therefore wish to say that we are firmly in support of the standardisation of all credit points across the entire University to six credit points and whole multiples of six credit points. I would like to see this implemented University-wide during 2004 for 2005.

As we are reviewing all of our undergraduate courses in 2004, I expect we will standardise all credit points at that time in preparation for 2005. I would therefore hope that by 2005, all Faculty of Architecture units of study (undergraduate and postgraduate) will be six credit points and whole multiples of six credit points.

Faculty of Arts

The Faculty of Arts is responding to your memo of 9 October 2003 seeking comment on issues raised by the Academic Board Working Party Report on 'Standardisation of Credit Points'.

As a result of the Academic Board Report the Faculty formed a working party of its Policy and Review Committee to develop a detailed response. This response went to Faculty on 20 October where it was endorsed by a very substantial majority of staff. This document is attached for your consideration.

In summary it could be said that the Faculty of Arts accepts that there are some virtues in moving to a standard system of credit points across the University. It would certainly increase simplification and ease some administrative burdens. But overall the Faculty of Arts believes that the shortcomings of the proposal outweigh the advantages, and that many of the supposed benefits of standardisation to other Faculties already exist in the Faculty of Arts, or are either unproven or erroneous.

For instance as the Board Working Party Report itself notes there is no common structure across Arts Faculties in Australia so the claim of common practice does not withstand detailed scrutiny. As the Arts response makes clear the consequence of standardisation will force a reconsideration of what constitutes a major and will more than likely lead to less not more flexibility. The Faculty has found no obstacles to date to interdisciplinary study through double degrees. Finally no evidence is provided that the Sydney Arts degree is viewed as light. Our graduate outcomes are excellent and the reputation of the degree, evident in student demand, better than any other in NSW.

Moreover we believe standardisation will create a number of serious problems:

- The hallmark of Arts at Sydney is its Honours program, far larger than any other in NSW. The foundation for this is our focus on research based teaching, evident in particular in our emphasis on essay writing. Fisher Library is our 'laboratory' and we expect our students to spend considerable time researching essays. Standardisation will make essays shorter and reduce the high quality research training that 8cp units can provide.
- There will be a significant increase in workload pressures on staff and students that may have industrial implications.

- A large number of departments and programs would no longer be able to offer a major if under standardisation we redefined a major as 5 units (30cp, fewer cp than at present) or 6 units (36 cp, slightly more cp than at present). The only possibility for maintaining these programs is to define a major as 4 units or 24 cp (at present 4 units is a major of 32cp) which we believe is insufficient to maintain the credibility of a major in Arts.
- The standardisation proposal has a very significant infrastructure cost in the need to provide many more teaching hours per year at a time when the University's teaching infrastructure is already stretched. Jim Ward is horrified at the prospect.
- Finally there would be a very significant additional administrative burden arising from the need to administer two different student populations (old and new resolutions) for a number of years.

For these and related reasons the Faculty of Arts does not support the Working Party recommendations concerning standardisation.

Moreover we feel that the Working Party's proposals for implementation are particularly onerous. In effect the requirement for Faculties to provide a rationale for units of study other than 6cp and the condition that units other than 6cp not be available to students outside the host Faculty except with special permission will have major consequences for the Faculty and the University. At present a significant part of the load in Arts comes from students enrolled in other Faculties, although Arts students also take a large number of units outside the Faculty. The effect of this proposal would be to enable Arts students to enrol in other Faculties but prevent students from others coming to Arts, if we retain our current structure. This would effectively cripple the Arts budget and force Arts, against its will, to move into line with standardisation.

While Arts accepts that it needs to undertake is more rationalisation of the curriculum, it would prefer to work slowly within its existing framework than be forced to bow to a policy framework that we do not believe is in the best interests of quality teaching in the Faculty.

The Faculty's Policy and Review Committee, at its meeting on 29 August 2003, appointed a working party, consisting of Udo Borgert (chair), Christine Crowe, Nerida Jarkey and Terry Heath to investigate the possible implications arising from the proposal by the Undergraduate Studies Committee of the Academic Board to standardise credit point values across all faculties in the University. The working party met on 12 September, 1 October and 13 October 2003; it also sought the views from a wide cross-section of the Faculty of Arts. The chair of the working party presented the proposal and some of the implications arising from it to Policy and Review (26 September), the Undergraduate Matters Committee of the Faculty of Arts (1 October) and the Chairs Forum (10 October). The points raised in discussion by these fora have been incorporated in this report.

Background

At its meeting of 18 March 2003, the Undergraduate Studies Committee of the Academic Board convened a working party to consider the standardisation of units of study across the University to a credit point weighting of six, resulting in a full-time load of four units of study (24 cp) per semester. This followed on from a meeting of the Academic Forum on 23 September 2002 which had identified the following benefits of standardisation:

- alignment with emerging common practice among Go8 and overseas universities
- greater flexibility and breadth of student choice across the whole university, with a capacity for students to take more majors in some areas
- facilitation of interdisciplinary study through mixed majors and double degrees
- increased competitiveness of student transcripts in some faculties where existing 8 credit point senior units created a perception among employers that University of Sydney degrees were light-on.

Proposal

At its meeting of 16 September 2003 the Undergraduate Studies Committee of the Academic Board adopted the following proposal developed by its working party:

- faculties shall use credit points to monitor student work-load on the basis that 24 credit points equates to the effort expected of a full-time student, studying 36-48 hours per week. A credit point should therefore equate notionally to a minimum expectation of 1.5 – 2 hours of student effort.
- where units of study are available to students of more than one faculty, faculties shall design units of study to maximise compatibility and availability to students of the University.
- the normal credit point load for a unit of study shall be six credit points. Such standardisation exists to maximise student choice and flexibility.
- faculties introducing new units of study with a credit point value other than six shall inform the Board, noting the rationale for the deviation from the standardised model. New units of study with a credit point value of other than six shall not normally be available to students outside the host faculty.
- during 2004 faculties shall review existing units of study and report to the Board on their intentions regarding standardisation to six credit points. From 2006, in cases where faculties wish to continue to offer units of study with a credit point value of other than six, such units of study will not normally be available to students outside the host faculty except with special permission of the Deans of the student's faculty and the host faculty of the unit of study. Where such units of study are available to students outside the host faculty, the host faculty shall consult with faculties in which the unit of study shall be available to ensure compatibility with other programs and report the results of the consultation to the Board.

This proposal was then sent to all faculties for comment.

Pedagogical, structural and resource implications of change

The benefits identified by the Academic Forum (September 2002) as flowing from standardisation are of little relevance or application to students undertaking degrees in the Faculty of Arts, or to students taking Arts subjects towards degrees in other faculties.

Specifically:

- the claim for 'greater flexibility and breadth of student choice' is unlikely to apply to students in the Faculty of Arts. In many discipline areas, students intending to major will actually have less flexibility and breadth in their unit of study choices within their discipline
- depending on how the Faculty of Arts chooses to define a major, the claim for a 'capacity for students to take more majors' may well prove incorrect – students choice may be reduced from 3 to 2 majors
- the Faculty of Arts is already a key player in the University in terms of the 'facilitation of interdisciplinary study through mixed majors and combined degrees'. Interdisciplinary study is extremely well-developed within the Faculty of Arts, and between Arts and the faculties of Science and Economics & Business. Students already choose freely across the offerings of the three faculties, this choice being facilitated by degree regulations rather than by standard credit point structures.
- The claim that some employers regard University of Sydney degrees as "light-on" lacks substantiation.

No evidence has been produced to show how standardisation will provide the above benefits to students in the Faculty of Arts or improve their situation in any way.

Although the proposal purports to allow faculties some choice in standardisation, it is clear that, should Arts wish to continue with senior units of 4cp and 8cp, 'such units will not normally be available to students outside (Arts) except with special permission of the Deans of (both) faculties' – a quite impractical situation.

The Faculty's choices are therefore:

- (i) no change, with probable significant load cuts as students in other faculties do not seek, or are refused the above 'special permission'
- (ii) part-standardisation, with some senior units changing to 6cp (thereby making them available to students in other faculties) and others remaining at 8cp (for Arts students only, except for 'special permission'). This is not really an option, as it would make the overall structuring of the Arts degree far too complicated for students.
- (iii) full standardisation.

If full standardisation is chosen/imposed, what are the implications?

1. Requirements for all Arts degrees will require revision.

Key points in such a revision would be:

- the definition of a major
- whether a limit should be imposed on the number of credit points that could be completed from other faculties
- related structure (and ongoing viability) of combined and joint degrees

Definition of a major

At present, the '32 senior credit point' major allows students to take up to 3 majors in the degree (32cp x 3 = 96cp).

With the present definition no longer possible, arguments have already been informally advanced for both '30 senior credit points' and '36 senior credit points' as the new definition. Assuming a continuing requirement for a minimum of '96 senior credit points' in the degree, the '30 senior credit points' major would still allow for up to 3 majors (30cp x 3 = 90cp; 6cp remaining). However, a '36 senior credit points' major would reduce the number of majors a student could take to a maximum of 2 (36cp x 2 = 72cp; 24cp remaining)

A 36 credit point major (based on 6 x 6 credit point units of study and a full-time student load of 24 credit points per semester) would have something like the following structure:

	Subject area A Credit points	Subject area B Credit points	Subject area C Credit points	Subject area D Credit points
1 st Year	12	12	12	12
2 nd Year Semester 1	6	6 + 6	6	
2 nd Year Semester 2	6 + 6	6	6	
3 rd Year Semester 1	6	6 + 6	6	
3 rd Year Semester 2	6 + 6	6	6	
	= 36 Major A	= 36 Major B		

Limiting credit points from other faculties

At present, Science and Economics & Business limit the number of credit points that can be taken from other faculties:

- BSc allows a maximum of 48cp outside Science
- BEc and BCom, a maximum of 44cp outside Economics & Business

Rather than placing a numerical limit on credit points from other faculties, Arts simply requires a '32 senior credit point' Arts major for the BA. Assuming, in most cases, another 12 junior credit points in the major subject area, it is entirely possible for a BA to be completed with 100 of the 144 credit points from faculties other than Arts. The Faculty could take the opportunity presented by standardisation to also limit the number of credit points that can be taken outside the faculty. This could be achieved in a variety of ways, but would most likely be either through a 'maximum from other faculties' limitation or through a requirement for 2 Arts majors. Such an action could be supported on three major grounds:

- a more academically coherent, cohesive Arts degree
- better control of student load, particularly important when funding could be reduced through the loss of quota places

- the precedent set by the other generalist faculties

Combined and joint degrees

With many faculties likely to take the opportunity to revise their ‘core’ degrees’- , each combined and joint degree will require a unit-by-unit examination to ensure that their structures remain viable.

2. All Arts units of study will require revision

This would centre on

- aims and outcomes
- learning activities and assessment
- contact hours

Aims and Outcomes

Most senior Arts units are at present worth 8cp, with a standard semester load of 24cp (8cp x 3 = 24cp). Reducing the value to 6 cp would mean reducing the depths at which topics can be studied within each of these units of study. Depth of understanding will be sacrificed to breadth of coverage, as students are required to undertake a greater number of units of study, with each one offering more superficial exposure to the content dealt with.

Learning Activities and Assessment

If overall student workload is to remain unchanged in a move from three to four units of study per semester, the learning activities and the assessment tasks in each 8 credit point senior unit will, of course, need to be reduced from current levels. This is of particular concern in many Arts disciplines in which students need to develop the ability to propose and defend complex arguments in extended pieces of written work. Many staff consider a reduction in the amount that a student would be required to write in a senior unit as likely to compromise the development of this ability, and consequently the academic quality of the unit. Another area of concern is the future of the ‘Special/Honours Entry’ units in many subject areas, considered a key research training element in the Faculty’s well-developed Honours program.

Contact hours and assessment requirements for a six credit point unit of study

The allocation of class time, the assessment requirements and the monitoring of student workload are generally determined by the credit point weighting. The new policy on assessment adopted by the Faculty of Arts earlier this year is based on a credit point definition which is widely used by faculties in this University. The broad consensus (as reported by the Academic Board) is as follows:

One credit point equals

- 1.5 – 2 hours of student effort per week consisting of:
 - 0.5 – 1 hours of class time
 - 1 hour of work outside class time
- 750 – 1,000 words in a major assessment task

The Faculty’s current assessment guidelines for 6 and 8 credit point units of study state:

Units of Study	Usual contact hrs/wk	Usual semester total contact hrs	Semester total contact hrs should not exceed	Expected private study hrs/wk	Total hrs/wk (i.e., contact hrs plus private study) should not exceed	Assessment
8 credit points	3	39	65	9	12	6,000 words in assignments/ essays and no exams or 4,000 words and 2hrs of formal exams (1,000 words = 1 hr exam)
6 credit points	3	39	65	6	9	4,500 words in assignments/ essays and no exams or 2,500 words and 2 hrs of formal exams (1,000 words = 1 hr exam)

If Faculty were to standardise all units to 6 credit points then the guidelines for a 6 credit point unit as outlined above would become the norm.

3. Exacerbation of students' negative perceptions of workload

Students' perceptions of heavy workload, which are already a matter of considerable concern, are likely to be exacerbated, to the detriment of high quality learning experiences¹. In the current structure, a student usually completes 12 senior units of study (12 x 8 cp = 96 cp) after the 8 junior units (8 x 6 cp = 48 cp). In the new model, this would become 16 senior units of study (16 x 6 cp) after the 8 junior units. Even if contact hours, learning activities and/or assessment tasks are reduced per unit of study, students will have their workload spread over a wider range of smaller tasks. This situation is very likely to result in less focus, the adoption of more surface approaches to learning, and poorer student learning outcomes².

4. Flexibility and choice within the major will be limited in most departments.

All but the 2 or 3 largest departments will have to become much less flexible in their offerings to students.

Consider the following example:

Department X offers 6 senior units of study, taught

Year 1 Sem 1 Unit A Unit E

Year 1 Sem 2 Unit B

Year 2 Sem 1 Unit C Unit F

Year 2 Sem 2 Unit D

Currently, a major is 4 of these units in any one of many various patterns. The student has some choice regarding the components of the major, as does the department in deciding what is taught, and in which semester. There is room for some variation without jeopardising the potential for the major. However, both student and departmental choice becomes more limited if the number of units of study required for the major increases. In the 30 cp (5 units x 6cp = 30 cp) major, both the student and the department are restricted to some extent; in the 36 cp (6 units x 6cp = 36cp) major, the student has no choice at all, and the department is totally locked in to offering all 6 units (now 6 cp each) in a set pattern; any variation is likely to mean that a student's potential to complete a major within the two senior years of a three year degree is removed.

5. Some departments do not currently offer enough units for a major in a standardised structure, in which the major involves either five or six senior units of study (30 or 36 credit points).

Department	Senior 'Pass' units	Credit point value	Senior 'Special Entry' units	Credit point value
Aboriginal Studies	4	32		
Ancient History	4	32	13	52
Arab World	4*	32		
Arabic Language	7**	56		
Classical Archaeology	2	16	2	16
NE Archaeology	2	16	2	16
Australian Studies	3	24		
Biblical Studies	4*	32		
Classical Civilisation	2***	8		
Greek & Roman Literature	4*	32		
Heritage Studies	4	32		
Hindi/Urdu	4	32		

¹ 36% of undergraduate respondents to the 2003 Student Course Experience Questionnaire either disagreed or strongly disagreed to questions concerning the appropriateness of their workload across their degree programs in the Faculty of Arts. These responses are consistent with those of Arts students in every year since the Questionnaire was first administered in 1999 (<http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/SCEQ/secure/RRRstatic.cfm>).

² Ramsden, P. (1992). *Learning to teach in higher education*. London: Routledge, pp. 78 - 81; Prosser, M. & Trigwell, K. (1999). *Understanding learning and teaching: The experience of higher education*. Buckingham UK: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, pp. 3 - 5.

Jewish Civilisation	4	32		
Sanskrit	4	32	4	16
Thai	4	32		
Russian & Spanish****				

- one unit each semester in a two-year cycle
- ** because of different language levels, not all units could be converted to be made available in any one individual major in the new structure. Some other languages (Ancient Greek, Classical Hebrew, Modern Hebrew, Indonesian, Latin, Sanskrit) may have problems offering 6x6 credit point units for each of the language levels without converting some existing 'Special Entry' units to 'Pass'
- *** one unit each year
- **** potential problems with units originating from other universities

If such departments wish to continue to offer a major, they will need to choose between three options:

- create new units (with the resultant resource demands)
- convert existing 'Special Entry/Honours' units to 'Pass' thereby sacrificing the Honours program
- find units of study in other departments that can be cross-listed to their majors. Cross-listing of units that genuinely complement the offerings within departments is already quite a common practice in the Faculty. However, cross-listing simply for the sake of facilitating the offering of a major would clearly be inappropriate. Furthermore, having too many majors that involve cross-listed units could compromise the coherence of a student's degree program.

6. Staff workloads will increase

The introduction of a 30 or a 36 credit point major would inevitably lead to a significant increase in staff workload. The actual increase would depend on how many new units of study a department would need to create or on how many units of study each department would be able to convert. Given below are the increases to be expected in the worst case scenario for either a 30 or 36 cp major.

The current situation (the Arts major is 32 senior credit points = 4 x 8 cp)

= 4 units of study x 3 hrs/wk = 12 hrs/wk
Per semester = 12 x 13 = 156 hrs

Option 1 (the Arts major is 30 credit points = 5 x 6 cp)

= 5 units of study x 3 hrs/wk = 15 hrs/wk
Per semester = 15 x 13 = 195 hrs
Increase in hours = 39 hrs = 25% increase

Option 2 (the Arts major is 36 senior credit points = 6 x 6 cp)

= 6 units of study x 3 hrs/wk = 18 hrs/wk
Per semester = 18 x 13 = 234 hrs
Increase in hours = 78 hrs = 50% increase

Furthermore, although more difficult to quantify, there will be an increase in workload due to

- the need to revise and redesign all senior units of study in the Faculty of Arts (there are at present no 6 senior credit point units in the Faculty of Arts)
- more coordination duties in departments in which new units are created and/or more tutorial groups are needed to cater for larger cohorts
- the additional teaching may well lead to an even greater use of casual staff and therefore involve extra supervisory duties on the part of full-time staff
- the need to offer both 6 and 8 cp units of study during the transition period. The Undergraduate Studies Committee of the Academic Board does not permit students enrolled in a 6 cp unit of study and those enrolled in an 8 cp unit of study to be in the same unit of study. There certainly would have to be distinct course codes, different aims and outcomes, as well as assessment requirements.

Staff already overwhelmed by their workloads may have little choice but to return to modes of delivery involving less small group teaching, less individual feedback to students, and to the use of more summative rather than formative assessment tasks. Once again, the quality of our students' learning experience will be compromised.

7. Industrial considerations

It also been pointed out that there may well be industrial requirements that need to be satisfied before such a change in workload can take place, including staff consultation and the submission of a managing change proposal.

8. Space requirements

The increase in the number of units to be offered will result in a greater demand for teaching space. This will become particularly problematic where departments have specific space requirements such as language and computer laboratories which are already in short supply.

Faculty of Dentistry

No reply received

Faculty of Economics & Business

The Faculty of Economics and Business strongly supports a move to a standard of six credit points for units of study. It wishes to move in the direction of six credit points per unit of study **and** to increase the number of units of study in the three year pass award course from twenty to twenty-four. It wishes to move in this direction in concert with the faculties with which it has combined award courses, namely Arts, Engineering, Law, and Science.

The Faculty of Economics and Business welcomes this move for a variety of reason. Some are matters of internal consistency, some relate to our claim to be an international university, and others relate to quality education. Members of the Faculty of Economics and Business, are aware of the implications of change, yet we know that we must continue to engage with a changing world.

I. A Quality Education

1. In a world of change and growth the opportunity for students to do more varied study is valuable.
2. Graduates from other major Australian universities (except the University of Adelaide) have twenty-four units of study rather than the twenty ours have. This discrepancy is, perhaps, more significant in generalist degrees like Economics, Arts, Science, Economic and Social Science.
3. Other Australian universities teach a 24 unit three year standard degree course in which students do four units of study a semester each semester for three years. They operate under the same financial regulatory and resource constraints that we do.
4. If there is an increase in student workload it makes it comparable to that at other Australian universities.
5. Until 1975 units of study at The University of Sydney required three lecture hours a week plus a tutorial or equivalent. That requirement was reduced to two lecture hours plus the tutorial or equivalent.

II. An International University

1. As our graduates establish global careers, they compete with graduates of American, Asian, Canadian, and European universities who have thirty-six units of study or more. Notably, students from these universities compete in the Australian education and careers market, too.
2. In Arts and Social Sciences most units of study in most universities around the world involve three hours of class contact a week, which is our standard.
3. The full load for a senior student of three units per semester and nine hours of class contact a week presents a barrier to Study Abroad and Exchange students going both ways because the standard in most of our partner universities is more units of study and more class contact.
4. The small number of units of study on the transcripts of our graduates is also a factor in admission to graduate courses outside Australia. A graduate from a four year Bachelor of Commerce (Liberal Studies) degree at Sydney has only twenty-six units of study. If we claim to equip students for the world we have to match the world.

III. Internal Consistency

1. The distinction between six point 1000 level units of study and eight point 2000 and 3000 level units of study has long seemed arbitrary.
2. In many faculties efforts have been made to reduce variation in credit points by eliminating half-units, something the Faculty of Economics and Business did in 2002.
3. Greater consistency among faculties makes student choices and options easier.

The Faculty of Economics and Business wishes to see its graduates better equipped for the challenges of new worlds coming. It wants to ensure that the quality of the education it delivers is, and is seen to be, second to none. The Faculty of Economics and Business recognises that careful consideration needs to be given to how to shift to the twenty-four units regime, but it wishes to begin that process of deliberation sooner rather than later. It has no wish to see standardisation for the sake of standardisation or to extend it to professional faculties where it may be inappropriate.

To paraphrase William Charles Wentworth, the Faculty of Economics and Business wishes to possess its graduates with the intellectual, moral and technical heritage of society to equip them to refine and elevate our kind in the future. Standardising credit points is one way of supporting this ideal.

Faculty of Education & Social Work

The Faculty of Education and Social Work is in broad agreement with draft recommendations of the Working Party on Standardization of Credit points. In particular the concept of student workload being monitored via the credit point weightings of units of study has been implemented in our undergraduate courses. We support the notion that units of study offered across faculties should represent a high degree of compatibility with regard to their credit point weighting. However it must be stressed that professional faculties must have the facility to vary from this norm because of legitimate requirements from employing institutions. By way of example: the NSW Department of Education and Training has recently announced six areas of mandatory pre-service teacher education studies:

- ... Behaviour Management
- ... Teaching Students From Non-English Backgrounds
- ... Special Education
- ... Information and Communication Technologies
- ... Literacy Education
- ... Aboriginal Education

If all of these required a six credit point single unit of study we would be obliged to allocate thirty six credit points from our degrees. This would seriously reduce our capacity to address other areas of scholarship in our courses. Further the process of creation and implementation of units of study offered across faculties with a high degree of compatibility with regard to their credit point weighting has resource implications and will need to be managed with great skill, especially in the case of combined degrees.

Faculty of Engineering

Engineering degrees are very compartmentalised with many institutions requiring 6 or 7 units per semester (which raises workload issues for students). The University of Melbourne is the first Australian university to standardise to four subjects per semester and it will be a number of years before it is clear what the benefits of this move will be. It is clear however that in terms of student workload management, 4 moderate sized units per semester is preferable to 7 small sized ones. There are also issues of practical experience requirements (external, non-academic placements) which at present are given a 0 credit value.

The Faculty of Engineering has evaluated the likely benefits of standardisation and will introduce in 2005 a structure which has all 6 credit point value units of study in the first three years. In fourth year a combination of 3,6,12 (and 0) will be used to accommodate research thesis components, advanced elective components and practical experience components. Our current efforts are to ensure there will be a relatively smooth transition between old and new systems, particularly in the area of combined degrees.

Faculty of Health Sciences

The position of the Faculty of Health Sciences regarding 6 CP standardisation is accurately reflected in your memo. The Faculty has no in principle objection to those units of study which are likely to be shared between Faculties becoming standardized at 6 Credit points.

However, I must emphasise again our serious objections to any suggestion that **all** units of study should be standardized to any arbitrary credit point value.

Our Faculty is one of those that makes use of a range of credit point valuations of units of study. This is done for a variety of reasons, including professional accreditation requirements (some accrediting bodies have a preference for discrete units of study in certain topic areas), cross- disciplinary studies (academic units that are taken by all schools in the Faculty must be appropriately weighted against 'professional' units taken only in certain schools), and to indicate the duration or level of responsibility and autonomy required by students on clinical placement (an intensive, six week placement where a senior student has effective sole practitioner responsibility must be differently weighted from a five day workplace familiarization exercise). In all cases, the CP value of a unit of study has been the subject of detailed discussion within the Faculty and with relevant external agencies, and is intended to convey very specific signals to our students and to the professional and employing bodies. We believe it would be contrary to the interests of our students, the Faculty, the University and the wider health sector to lightly and arbitrarily adjust these signals.

Thus while we are 'agnostic' about standardization of credit point valuations among those Faculties with large numbers of interwoven combined degrees, we strongly oppose any suggestion that 6CP should become the standard for the University of Sydney, and the corollary of this that there is some onus on Faculties to 'justify' future departures from this standard. We would like the eventual document to include a clear and unequivocal statement that these recommendations apply only to units of study which are likely to be shared across Faculties, and that those units of study unlikely to be taken by students enrolled in other Faculties are not the subject of any part of these recommendations.

The Faculty of Health Sciences has recently undertaken a lengthy and complex Undergraduate Reform Process in which all undergraduate courses were comprehensively reviewed and , where appropriate, repositioned. One part of this process was to maximize compliance with existing Academic Board guidelines such elimination of small units of study and full semesterisation. We believe there is no value in immediately repackaging units of study without any compelling professional or didactic rationale.

Faculty of Law

The arguments adduced in favour of standardising all units of study to six credit points are powerful and make overall sense within this large University where student choice and flexibility should be paramount. However, the Faculty of Law utilises eight credit points for its units, and in large part this format is dictated by the requirements of accrediting bodies such as the Legal Practitioners Admission Board of NSW. The Faculty will review its units of study in 2004 and will report to the Academic Board on how best this Faculty may proceed with respect to standardisation.

Faculty of Medicine

No reply received

Faculty of Nursing

The Faculty of Nursing supports, in principle, the standardisation of credit points across the University. All postgraduate units within the Faculty meet the suggested six credit point requirement as do a number of undergraduate units.

The Faculty is concerned, however, about the time frame for amending existing units to conform with the proposal. In the case of the Faculty of Nursing our degree requires external accreditation, which only occurs every 5-7 years. This time frame does not allow us to meet the University's suggested deadline for amendments.

The curriculum introduced in 2003 included the development of 12 credit point units specifically to integrate more fully the clinical and theoretical components of the units of study. The variation in credit points may not be of significance as it is extremely unlikely that an undergraduate student from another Faculty would wish to take one of our units of study.

Faculty of Pharmacy

No reply received

Faculty of Rural Management

The Faculty of Rural Management strongly supports the proposal on standardisation of credit points. As you are aware, all units in the Faculty are six credit points.

Faculty of Science

No reply received

Faculty of Veterinary Science

No reply received

College of the Arts

No reply received

Conservatorium of Music

The Conservatorium is currently reviewing all undergraduate courses and the implications and benefits of a 6 credit point standardisation are being assessed. The faculty sees benefits for inter-faculty student choice and efficiency and also disadvantages for some internal student choice. Overall, The Conservatorium currently operates on a 3 credit point standard (with 6 credit points for Majors in instrumental areas). Conversion to a 6 credit point standard would involve reviewing all units in the faculty, and this would take at least 12 months.