ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND POLICY COMMITTEE

2:00 pm, Wednesday 9th March 2016
Senate Room, Quadrangle (A14)

Members Present: The Chair (Professor J Hanrahan), Mrs H Agus, Associate Professor T Allender, Professor A Bridgeman, Dr Frances Di Lauro, Associate Professor A Elias, Associate Professor G Frost, Associate Professor T Gerzina, Associate Professor P Gibbens, Associate Professor R Gibson, Professor M Graeber, Mr T Greenwell, Ms K Hartman-Warren, Ms K Henderson, Associate Professor G Hill, Dr P Knight, Associate Professor T Masters, Associate Professor P McCallum (for Professor P Pattison), Associate Professor M Peat, Associate Professor J Rowley, Dr D Shirley, Ms C Smith, Professor G Tolhurst and Ms S Vimalarajah.

Attendees: Ms A Hush (SRC), Associate Professor V Keyser and Associate Professor M Melatos

Apologies: Associate Professor T Bishop, Professor P Pattison (Associate Professor P McCallum attending in her stead).

MINUTES

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES
The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the year.

2 PROCEDURAL MATTERS
2.1 Minutes of Meeting 2015/8, 11 November 2015
Members confirmed the minutes of the last meeting held on 11 November 2015.

ASPC16/1-1
The Academic Standards and Policy Committee resolved that the minutes of meeting 2015/8, held on 11 November 2015, be confirmed as a true record.

2.2 Matters Arising
There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

3 STANDING ITEMS
3.1 Report of the Chair
The Chair advised members that she had chaired a small working party to develop integrity assurance procedures for units of study. The recommendations of this group are presented under item 4.2.

ASPC16/1-2
The Academic Standards and Policy Committee noted the report of the Chair.

3.2 Reports of the Academic Board meetings held 2 December 2015 and 24 February 2016
Associate Professor Masters referred to the reports in the agenda and congratulated Professor Hanrahan on her appointment as Chair of the committee. The Chair asked Professor Masters to update members on the Special Considerations Decisions Matrix as discussed at the February meeting of the Board. He advised a small working group, with representatives from the Student Administrative Services (SAS) program, the Faculty of Health Sciences, the Faculty of Science and the student representative groups has been continuing this discussion and that he will be sending a memo to Board members with the outcomes of these talks. The group agreed that the matrix itself is well understood but communication on the processes needs to be refined. The SAS program team indicated that they will be monitoring the new process and will deal with any issues that crop up, and have undertaken to add further information to the special considerations website and in communications with students.

ASPC16/1-3
The Academic Standards and Policy Committee noted the reports of the Academic Board meetings held on 2 December 2015 and 24 February 2016.
4 ITEMS FOR APPROVAL

4.1 Simple Extensions Working Group report

Mrs Agus advised members that this group had been established following discussions at the Academic Board’s meeting in December 2015. The Committee had recommended an amendment to the Assessment Procedures which was referred to this meeting of the Board, and further changes were put forward at the meeting regarding the proposed terminology and issues of equity and fairness, plus the duration of any agreed arrangement. The working group was formed to further discuss these changes with representatives from the Student Administrative Services Program (SAS), Disability Services, Student Support and student organisations, and she noted the meeting summary had been circulated with the agenda. The summary concludes that simple extensions:

- should be implemented across campus consistently and transparently by negotiation between the student and the relevant academic;
- would be awarded for cases explained to a relevant academic but not necessarily attested;
- would need to be tracked outside the Special Consideration system and the relevant academic must acknowledge the extension due date awarded via email to the student’s formal USYD email address with ‘Simple Extension’ in the subject line;
- would be up to two days from the assessment due date, determined by the relevant academic;
- would sit within, and not affect, the time frame for lodgement of a formal Special Consideration application of three working days from the assessment due date, leaving a minimum of one day thereafter for submission of a Special Consideration application, i.e. the granting of a simple extension does not change the assessment due date for purposes of Special Consideration; any gap in documentation from the due date would result in the Special Consideration application being refused unless a case is made for delay in submission; academic staff should assist students seeking simple extension to determine if special consideration is more appropriate to their circumstances and, where illness is the issue, academics would encourage students to use the Special Consideration process.

The working group also recommends that definitions and examples be developed to assist students to determine the process most appropriate for their circumstances (i.e. simple extension; Special Consideration; disability adjustment). Mrs Agus advised that Ms Henderson has developed a draft amendment to the Coursework Policy based on the working group’s discussions with Ms Henderson pointing out that the proposed amendments will invalidate any local provision that bans the use of simple extensions.

Members raised the following issues:

- Associate Professor Frost pointed out the potential increase in workload for some academic staff under this proposal, but Mrs Agus countered that each academic can decide whether or not to offer simple extensions; Professor Frost expressed concern that this would lead to a lack of consistency in student experience across faculties and the University; Ms Vimalarajah added that there is already a culture (as opposed to mandated policy) in some faculties of not providing simple extensions, while in others they have been available for some years and she did not see the proposed changes affecting these faculty positions; she added that the important issue is advising students of the current policy position;
- Associate Professor Gibbens pointed out that an academic looking after a unit of study with large student numbers could lose track of these arrangements and suggested they be captured in a system; Mrs Agus agreed, adding this was why the working group suggested using emails with the title “Simple Extension”; the Chair added that the email title could also use the unit of study code;
- Associate Professor Melatos suggested including the grounds on which an academic can refuse a request; Ms Henderson advised that the process is based on informal and individual discretion and cautioned against making the policy change too detailed as this will increase the potential for the arrangement to be viewed as an academic decision which would be subject to the University’s policy on student appeals; Associate Professor McCallum pointed out that Assessment Procedures refer to not disadvantaging students by modifying the assessment requirements for a unit of study which could be used as grounds for not providing a simple extension;
- Professor McCallum added that the amendment referred to the December meeting of the Academic Board referred to more than simple extensions, but also dealt with protecting disability
service arrangements;

- Professor Masters pointed out that the Academic Board agreed that simple extensions should be explicitly referenced in University policy and/or procedures at its December meeting and that the Committee’s role is to recommend a definition and how the process will operate so that there is some consistency across the institution in how these requests are handled; he agreed that information regarding these requests needs to be recorded and tracked, and the process also needs to ensure students will use special consideration if this is the more appropriate process for them;

- Mr Greenwell suggested amending clause 66A(1) to read “in circumstances deemed appropriate”, and Ms Henderson suggested this be “A member of academic staff who is satisfied that it is appropriate may..”;

- Members also discussed the term “relevant teacher” with some suggesting this be the unit of study co-ordinator; Ms Henderson suggested leaving the phrase as is but clarifying the definition in the related procedures; Ms Hartman-Warren suggested the procedures should also outline how the details of this person will be communicated to students;

- Ms Hartman-Warren expressed concern that some faculties are already advising students that simple extensions are no longer available; members discussed what should be communicated to faculties about this and the Chair undertook to discuss this further with Ms Henderson and Professor Masters;

- Members raised the issue of when students should ask for a simple extension, with some arguing that it should be before the due date and others arguing after the due date could be considered so long as the request falls within the three day period for applying for special consideration; there was some agreement that this should be left to individual academics discretion.

Members endorsed forwarding the working group recommendations and the proposed policy amendment to the Academic Board for approval. Ms Henderson undertook to revise the amendments to the Coursework Policy based on these discussions, adding that the Chair of the Academic Board has delegated authority to approve any changes to the related procedures. Professor McCallum pointed out that the proposal that went to the December meeting of the Academic Board will need to be reviewed and possibly amended. Professor Masters thanked Mrs Agus and the members of the working group for their efforts.

ASPC16/1-4
The Academic Standards and Policy Committee recommends the Academic Board accept the findings of the Simple Extensions Working Group outlined in the attached report.

4.2 Unit of Study Integrity Assurance procedures
The Chair advised members that this issue had been considered by a small working group in the last month, adding that the development of these procedures was one of the recommendations from the Taskforce on Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism. The suggested process will provide evidence that faculties have thought through the risk issues associated with specific types of assessment. She added that the information presented had incorporated as many types of assessment and risk as possible, but also was meant to be as simple as possible given the additional workload for unit of study co-ordinators created by recent policy and process changes.

Members discussed the proposed procedures and commented as follows:

- Professor Gibbens asked what would prevent academics from simply marking assessments as low risk; the Chair advised that the type of assessment would be recorded as well as other information on mitigation strategies, and this information would be used to determine whether the level of risk assessment was warranted or not; Professor McCallum added that if a report on cases of academic dishonesty shows a spike in cases for a unit of study where the assessment has been deemed low risk, the co-ordinator could be instructed to revisit the risk assessment and provide additional information;

- Professor Peat asked how this would intersect with the curriculum renewal strategy, and the Chair advised that this should form part of that work, adding that once the risk assessment has been done it only needs to be revisited if there are changes to the way the unit of study is assessed;

- The matrix was discussed, with members agreeing that the likelihood level “may occur” should
be reworded, with the alternative wording “unlikely but may occur” suggested, and another suggestion that the levels be simplified to High, Medium and Low;

- Professor Graeber asked that the word “risk” be rethought, adding that the terminology could lead academics to view students as a risk factor; the Chair advised that the term is not being applied to students but used in the context of institutional risk.

Members expressed general support for the procedures. Professor McCallum suggested they be presented to the Academic Board following the Committee’s next meeting in April so that the Academic Honesty Procedures could be presented at the same time. Members endorsed this suggestion.

ASPC16/1-5
The Academic Standards and Policy Committee recommends the Academic Board adopt the draft guidelines for assessment types risk evaluation.

Note: this item will be presented to the Academic Board’s meeting of 18th May 2016 to allow the Academic Honesty Procedures to be presented at the same time.

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 Anonymous Marking Policy at Sydney University (for discussion)
Ms Vimalarajah advised members the SRC had submitted this paper to the Student Consultative Committee last year after noting that the University has no policy on anonymous marking. She pointed out that it is a common practice at other universities, adding that Monash has the clearest policy on this. Research in the UK suggests anonymous marking can mitigate against unconscious bias in markers, and the SRC has received support from a number of academics at the University, particularly Dr Olivia Dixon in the Faculty of Law. Ms Hush added that Dr Graham Hendry from the Institute for Teaching and Learning is also in support, and has advised that anonymous marking assists with standards-based assessment and can improve student satisfaction with their courses. Ms Vimalarajah added that more consultation is needed with faculties and that the SRC’s proposal would be most easily applied to final examinations.

Associate Professor McCallum advised that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) has held a meeting on this issue and is supportive of the concept. There are some technical issues with examinations that would need to be worked out, and not all types of assessment would work with this process, so the current idea is that anonymous marking would be mandatory for examinations but discretionary for other types of assessment. Professor Bridgeman advised that anonymous marking can be used with Turnitin but that there are some issues e.g. if a student has been granted an extension they will be identifiable, and if academics print out the assignments from Turnitin it is difficult to link the assignment back to the correct student.

Members expressed general support for the idea but raised a number of issues, such as the need to identify students in practical examinations, and the potential for divisions between various faculties because of different approaches to this issue driven by the types of assessment each faculty uses. Ms Vimalarajah agreed that these and other issues need to be considered. The Chair advised that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Registrar) is presenting a paper to SEG on examination procedures and the issue of anonymous marking will be raised in that paper. She suggested the Committee advise the Academic Board that it supports the use of anonymous marking for examinations. Professor Masters thanked the SRC for raising the issue.

ASPC16/1-6
The Academic Standards and Policy Committee discussed the SRC report on anonymous marking at the University of Sydney and resolved to advise the Academic Board that it supports the use of anonymous marking for examinations.

5.2 Update on Academic Integrity Implementation Group
Professor McCallum advised that the information circulated with the agenda is not the latest update from this group, and offered to send the latest report made to the SEG Education Committee for circulation. The Academic Honesty modules have been rolled out and the online reporting module is live. He urged members to let him know of any issues or problems, adding that a test of the
system and review will be undertaken mid-year – the report of this review will also come to the committee.

ASPC16/1-7
The Academic Standards and Policy Committee noted the report on the Academic Integrity Implementation Group.

5.3 Learning and Teaching Policy implementation report
Professor McCallum advised that the draft Learning and Teaching Procedures will be submitted to the Committee’s next meeting. Professor Peat advised that during the recent Summer School session he had used some slides to outline the new system to students, and had repeated this information just before assessments were due. Professor McCallum agreed this was a useful process, adding some of the slides from his faculty roadshow could be used by lecturers.

ASPC16/1-8
The Academic Standards and Policy Committee noted the report on the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Policy 2015.

6 OTHER BUSINESS
6.1 Any Other Business
There was no other business raised.

6.2 Next meeting 20th April 2016

Remaining Meeting Dates for 2016
2:00 pm Wednesday, 20th April 2016
2:00 pm Wednesday, 8th June 2016
2:00 pm Wednesday, 20th July 2016
2:00 pm Wednesday, 24th August 2016
2:00 pm Wednesday, 12th October 2016
2:00 pm Wednesday, 9th November 2016

A full copy of the Academic Standards and Policy Committee papers is available at:
http://sydney.edu.au/ab/committees/ac_stands/ac_stands_agendas.shtml