



UWA ACADEMIC STAFF ASSOCIATION

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DIVERSITY AND COLLEGIALITY WITHIN UWA

Comment by Professor Ray da Silva Rosa

In some ways, UWA is disconcertingly narrow, as in its range of socio-economic background of students. However, in other attributes it is startlingly diverse, with the following being examples of what I personally think of as remarkable diversity in attitudes and practice:

(i) In some faculties, a course that enrolls perhaps 12 students is regarded as successful, whilst in others any course with enrolments in the low teens has a limited life expectancy.

(ii) Some disciplines are insistent on prospective post-graduate students having native-language levels of proficiency in English, whilst other disciplines have the view that fluency in English is of lesser concern than technical skills, for example

(iii) Some academics prefer to have an active role in advising students which courses to enroll in, others prefer to leave it to the professional staff.

(iv) In some disciplines it is not unusual to have over 10 co-authors credited with a research publication, whilst in others, having more than four co-authors is virtually unknown.

In March, former Senior Deputy-Chancellor, Professor Margaret Seares, drew attention in her address at the UWAASA Forum to an important consequence of such diversity - the effectiveness of university managerial policies and solutions is often quite narrowly local in scope. What works in one discipline is likely to be ineffective or counterproductive in another. For instance, from my experience as part of a publications audit team, I recall the intense (and understandable) frustration of people in one discipline that book reviews were deemed not to constitute "original research" and thus ineligible for points, despite a tradition in that discipline of considerable scholarship and research effort being expended in reviews of landmark books.

Some implications: One is that the notion of collegiality is not a musty relic of a bygone university era but reflects a set of values and outlook that is helpful to effective governance. Non-consultative processes will be prone to failure because they are less likely to take account of differences that can remain surprising even to old-timers in the system. An acknowledgement by all of us that "one size does not fit all" is also helpful insofar that it prevents reflexive criticism of different approaches.

I think the above points are consistent with what Margaret said at the Forum in March which, incidentally, was on Managerialism and Communication within UWA. At any rate, I and the others present were grateful for her insights into the operations of the Vice-Chancellor.

HOW CAN THE ACADEMIC RESPOND TO STUDENT FEEDBACK ON TEACHING? (Facebook, blogs, SPOT etc)

In Australia, students pay a larger proportion of their education costs than most OECD countries. Combined with increased managerialism and requests for "accountability" this has led to the view by both staff and management that the student is a "customer" to be served. In this climate student feedback is taken very seriously.

SPOTS, once intended to be used to ask the hard questions and improve teaching, are increasingly and inappropriately; used for promotion, performance review and teaching awards. Compulsory SURFs are scrutinised closely by management, and those educators scoring low are called to account. Social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and YouTube allow largely unmoderated spaces for students to discuss teachers' performances. Personal Blogs and web sites such as "ratemyteacher.com" provide other avenues for criticism. It is not difficult to imagine the student outrage were staff to use even a well regulated space to exchange views on individual student performances. Perhaps the student code of conduct could be used to indicate the appropriate and inappropriate use of such public sites.

In this UWAASA forum the rights of the teacher were discussed, and a number of high profile defamation cases examined. Historically, and largely in the US so far, the legal rights of the educator have been found to be limited and played off against the rights of the student to free speech, satire and valid criticism. In discussion it was proposed that the university regulations supporting the educator need to be made clear. UWAASA is also looking into the proposal that educators also need an instrument to measure the resources they have to teach - APOTE - the Academic Perception of The Teaching Environment.

Summary by Professor Stuart Bunt of the forum held in October 2008.

NEXT UWAASA FORUM
THURSDAY JULY 23 AT 1PM
PSYCHOLOGY LECTURE THEATRE
PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING

FUTURE UWAASA FORUM
THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 10 AT
1PM
PSYCHOLOGY LECTURE THEATRE
PLAGIARISM
WHAT IS/ OUGHT TO BE
UWA'S RESPONSE TO
STUDENT MISCONDUCT?

THE UWAASA COMMITTEE MEMBERS—A PROFILE

INTRODUCING Professor William Ford, Dean of the Law School

Bill commenced at UWA in 1963 and completed his B.A. majoring in history. This was followed by a Dip Ed. and then came employment in the Commonwealth Public Service in the National Library at Canberra. Bill returned to UWA about 1969 as Law Librarian and commenced a law degree part time, graduating in 1975. From 1977-79 Bill was employed at Melbourne University as Law Librarian and part-time lecturer in law. In 1980 he returned to UWA as a lecturer in the Law School. Bill was seconded to the High Court in 1989 as director of library and research services. He came back to UWA as senior lecturer in the law school about 1991. Bill became Dean of Law in 2001, at a very difficult period, and Professor in 2004.

Bill is the longest serving member of the Academic Staff Association committee and of the UWA committee of the NTEU, having first joined the committees about 1981. In that time Bill has been committee member, Vice President and President and at present he is serving us as Secretary of the UWAASA committee. On the national Union scene Bill chaired the FAUSA and then NTEU Industrial Relations Committee and he was the first national Vice-President (Academic) of the NTEU, of which he is a life member.

Bill's partner Marina also works at UWA as Faculty Manager in the Graduate School of Education and Bill is step-father of Joshua and father of Madeleine.

All members of UWAASA and NTEU owe this "boy from Belmont" a huge debt for the time and effort spent on their behalf.

*Please review the UWAASA website
www.uwaasa.uwa.edu.au for current issues.*

Administrative Officer and Executive Officer

Joanna Manvell is the part time administrative officer—contact details as above.

Sandra Penrose is the executive officer, working one day a week (generally Thursday). She can be reached on 6488 2487 on Thursdays.

THE PROBATIONARY PERIOD

All tenurable academics newly appointed to UWA undergo a period of probation which generally lasts for three years for levels B, C, D and E, and for five years for level A. Each academic is required to submit a portfolio including reports on their teaching, research and service at the end of each year of employment at UWA. As indicated in University official material, "failure to comply with this employment condition may lead to the annulment of your appointment".

The UWA Academic Staff Association has become aware of problems and confusion arising from this requirement, and together with persons from the UWA Human Resources area, held an information and advisory forum on probation in order to assist individual academics to obtain their tenure and to extract the maximum academic benefit from the preparation of their portfolios.

Sandra Penrose gave an overview of professional development and assessment at UWA, Kerry Evans conveyed the technicalities of the probationary period and Lucienne Tesens gave information concerning the preparation of the Academic Portfolio. Bill Ford gave a view on probation expectations from the perspective of a Head of School and Jeanette Taylor reported on her experience of probation. Thank you to all these speakers.

UWA will be placing even more importance on the probationary period and UWAASA will be putting in some suggestions to a working party that has been set up to consider the issue further. We also plan to have a session with Heads of School about the probationary process to ensure that maximum development is available to probationary academics. If you have any views on these matters please contact Sandra Penrose at UWAASA.

The current committee took office in July 2008.

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