



UWA ACADEMIC STAFF ASSOCIATION

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UWAASA President Raymond da Silva Rosa's Report to the AGM October 2008

My report last year identified the promotion of academic voice on campus as the Association's principal strategic objective. To this end, the Committee of Management organised a number of forums (see over) on subjects of academic interest. Attendance at some forums might suggest that members, regrettably, considered the issues canvassed at the forums "of academic interest" in the colloquial sense. My preferred interpretation is that the times and/or venues were inconvenient for many. This is not entirely wishful thinking; I have called many members in person (more or less at random) to alert them to forthcoming forums and, on these occasions, our colleagues usually express their strong endorsement of the Association's work but cite lectures and other unavoidable commitments as barriers to their attendance at a particular forum. (I add that I am grateful for the typically courteous reception I receive notwithstanding the telemarketing nature of my call.)

It's clear the Committee needs to consider more carefully when and where forums are held. A potential solution is to schedule them during the common lunch hours (Tuesday and Friday from 1 to 1:45 pm) and post the schedule several months in advance. Nevertheless, I think this is only part of the solution. There is an opportunity cost to attending forums. To be motivated to attend, members must believe that the forums are going to make a difference that repays their cost of attending. They need to be engaged with the Association's agenda.

"I propose that getting members to engage more actively with the Association's projects should be the Committee's aim in the coming year."

My view is that an effective way to do this is by providing members with opportunities to make small investments in engagement, showing how this pays off for them, and thereby draw them to make larger investments, confident that they will have a return.

The recently initiated Academic Perceptions of Teaching Environment (APOTE) project provides a natural vehicle for members to assess the Association's effectiveness and thereby calibrate their level of engagement. The project aims to develop a survey instrument to assess how supportive academics find UWA's institutional climate and systems in support of teaching. As noted in the flyer alerting members to the initial forum on APOTE (held on 16th October), systematic measures of how supportive academics find the teaching environment would be immensely useful to both individual academics and the university.

"For the individual academic, having on formal record their assessment of the strengths and deficits of their teaching circumstances each semester would facilitate fairer assessment of the quality of their teaching."

From the university's perspective, systematically surveying academics' views on teaching environment across disciplines and over time would provide clearer, more reliable indicators of the quality of its systems (including management practices) in support of teaching. One can envisage the APOTE instrument functioning as a professional development review (PDR) tool but with the university rather than academics as the focus of assessment with its own potential for development.

Developing an APOTE instrument that may be used across the university's diverse faculties and that is widely acknowledged as credible is a non-trivial challenge. The Association intends to invest considerable

resources in this project and it is expected to take the better part of the coming year to complete, with multiple stages and widespread input from members required. It is this process of development – including advising members on how the instrument will be useful to them and taking into account their views – that I hope will facilitate greater member engagement. Professor David Andrich, Dr Irene Styles and Dr Ida Marais, all of whom are eminently qualified for the project, are writing a formal proposal (including aims, method, costings and timelines) for the development of the APOTE instrument. The proposal is expected to be completed in December and details will be circulated to members shortly thereafter. A Steering Committee presently comprising Dr Debra Judge, A/Professor Victoria Burbank, Dr Brenton Knott, Ms Robyn Carroll and myself will oversee the project. It may be optimal to enlarge the Steering Committee further on.

APOTE is not, of course, the only project on the Association's books. UWA presently has no systematic approach or practices in place to accommodate peer review of teaching. This is unfortunate given that in other contexts (e.g., assessment of research) peer review is regarded as the most effective and fair basis of assessment. As first step towards addressing this situation, the Vice-President, Professor Stuart Bunt and Dr Karine Hamilton, are reviewing the literature on peer review and preparing a discussion paper. The paper is expected to be available for distribution by the end of November.

As I trust my preceding remarks indicate, it has been active year for UWAASA. I want to acknowledge and thank the excellent support the Committee has received from Ms Joanna Manvell, the Association's administrator. Joanna works just one day a week and gets through an amazing amount of work in that day whilst also finding time to be an effective counsellor when I dither over decisions. Dr Sandra Penrose, a long-time president of the Association who has taken the role of Executive Officer after retiring from UWA, provides invaluable continuity and starch when required. In many ways, UWAASA is Sandra's legacy.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the Committee. Stuart, in particular, was very kind in stepping in to act as President during the first half of the year when I was away on sabbatical. The other members of the Committee I wish to thank are Allan McKinley (Treasurer), Jamie O'Shea, Bill Ford, Mark Tibbett, Marnie O'Neill, Abu Siddique, Sue Broomhall, and Stephen Dobbs. It's not often that all Committee members are present at a meeting because of competing demands on their time but when we do get together the discussion provides an invigorating reminder of what we value about academic life.

UWA Academic Staff Association Forums (October 2007-08)

Public Forum on Academic Freedom (presented in association with the NTEU). *Introduction: Dr Carmen Lawrence. Key speaker: Dr John Buchanan, Director of Workplace Research Centre, Sydney University. Discussion Panel included Professor Alan Robson, Vice Chancellor UWA.* November 2007

“Implications of the Proposed New UWA Academic Classification Structure” (presented in association with the NTEU) November 2007

“UWA's Review of Courses: A Historical Perspective” by *Emeritus Professor Norman Hetherington, followed by an end-of-year celebration* December 2007

“Lectopia or Dystopia? – not forgetting webCT” . *Various speakers presented contrasting viewpoints on university policy with perspectives from academic users of the system* February 2008

The Operation of the Promotions and Tenure Committee *Speakers: Prof Sue Berners-Price, Chair of the Committee, and Prof Tom O'Donoghue, former UWAASA representative on the Committee* May 2008

“Top 50: Is it realistic? Conflicting directions from the University?” *Speaker: Prof Raymond da Silva Rosa, UWAASA President.* August 2008

“Academics' Perceptions of Teaching Environment (APOTE)” *Speaker: Prof Raymond da Silva Rosa UWAASA President* October 2008

“How can the academic respond to student feedback on teaching? (Facebook, blogs, SPOT etc) *Speaker: Prof Stuart Bunt, UWAASA Vice-President* October 2008