



UWA ACADEMIC STAFF ASSOCIATION

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STUDY LEAVE OR SABBATICAL - *Analysis by Dr Sandra Penrose*

The University is in the process of revisiting its policy on study leave, once again to be referred to as sabbatical. This is perhaps forgetting the nature of the *seventh year aspect*, a term that refers to release or leave from normal duties, and which the change is apparently designed to avoid.

Members will be aware that the University is trying to establish criteria for staff to be identified as “research active”. There are four reasons for this according to the discussion paper⁽ⁱ⁾ prepared on behalf of the Research Committee of UWA for the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Firstly, the number of research active staff is reported to the Commonwealth Government and is used to determine the overall research performance of a university. Secondly, to be “research active” is a condition for undertaking the role of primary supervisor for higher degree by research students, and thirdly, as UWA aspires to reach the top 100 status for research output, it is thought necessary to define “research active” for the purposes of performance management and promotion. The fourth reason relates to study leave and I quote “*UWA has a very attractive, but ultimately unsustainable, Study Leave arrangement. Currently, all Academic Staff are entitled to apply for, and are usually granted, periods of study leave (mostly for research purposes).*” There is no indication of any analysis or evidence to justify the assertion that the study leave arrangements are unsustainable. However, the clear implication is that in future the granting of study leave may become dependent upon whether the academic applicant is classified as “research active”. Under these circumstances, academics need to have further input into defining the characteristics. There is some recognition of differences between areas of the university under the present proposals, but also an attempt to achieve uniformity by using the revised Socrates system. Study leave in the past has also been an opportunity to research teaching methodology and administration, thus enhancing the future teaching experience.

The entitlement to study leave is *an entitlement to apply for study leave* but as a matter of custom and practice it has been extremely rare, if not non-existent, to deny study leave to academic staff members. The grounds upon which a denial to access study leave are to be based therefore need to be carefully determined and justified, and clearly understood by all academics. Another vital issue for academic staff will be the proportion of staff who may in future be denied access to Study Leave. These are issues that require

serious consideration and should not be decided by deans or heads of school on an ad hoc basis. **There are already areas of the university where members report being denied the opportunity to take study leave by such ad hoc decisions.**

Another aspect for members’ consideration is whether it is appropriate for research only staff to be included with teaching and research staff, as in table 3 of the discussion paper, and the inclusion of casuals with other staff in the second graph of table 3. Both of these arrangements distort the figures on which decisions are likely to be based, particularly in relation to study leave. It is also interesting to note that according to figures released by the university, the number of teaching and research academics has slightly decreased in the past year, while the number of casual staff has doubled. This does not seem likely to foster better research outcomes for the University. Over the last decade there has been a considerable increase in the number of research only staff while the number of teaching and research staff has been steady. This **may** result in increased research at the UWA (which was clearly the intention, although it is not evident in the analysis of the results), but it certainly has a detrimental effect on the teaching and research staff, whose teaching money is diverted to buoy up the inadequate funding of research, thus increasing teaching loads and leaving less time for their research.

We need to have a greatly improved and widely publicised analysis of the costs and benefits of research in this university, and of the contribution of study leave, in particular to the work of teaching and research academics **before** changes are made in this area, either in theory or in practice.

⁽ⁱ⁾ www.ecm.uwa.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/269086/Research_Active_at_UWA.pdf

NEXT UWAASA FORUM

THURSDAY SEPT 10 AT 1PM

PSYCHOLOGY LECTURE THEATRE

PLAGIARISM - What is/ought to be UWA’s response to student misconduct?

PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING

Professor Stuart Bunt gave a presentation on Peer Review of Teaching during the first week of semester, which resulted in some lively discussion. An important point is the distinction between formative and summative uses of Peer Review of Teaching. The difference is conveyed in the following (mildly) humorous analogy (obtained from the internet): "When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative; when the guests taste the soup, that's summative." The distinction is between evaluation to identify areas for improvement and evaluation to gain recognition of accomplishment.

The distinction matters because a wealth of research shows that formative peer-review-of-teaching (PRT) encourages self-reflection and collegial dialogue about teaching practices that, in turn, improves student learning. Research also shows that the summative form of review, which emphasizes the use of PRT for administrative checks, generates suspicion and mistrust. The handling of the tensions between the summative and formative functions of PRT determines whether peer reviews become 'institutionally marginal' or act as agents of genuine change and improvement. An important practical implication is that the two processes should be quite separate. If PRT is undertaken for summative purposes, this use of it will undermine its formative objectives as the subjects of peer review seek to manage the process to show them in the best possible light. It's a false economy to combine the two approaches. A member of the Centre for Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CATL) confirmed at the meeting that the Centre's view is that formative peer review should be the model at UWA.

Emeritus Professor Charles Oxnard, a former Dean of the College at the University of Chicago, recounted that he sat in on many of his colleagues' lectures. There was a summative element in his reviews; Milton Friedman, a Nobel laureate in Economics was a star performer in the class room, with his lectures attracting many people not enrolled in the course. On the other hand, Saul Bellow, a Nobel Laureate in Literature, had a lecturing style that seemed to fall short of the quality of his writing!

In the course of discussion, W/Professor Geoff Hammond observed that we often focus too much on classroom performance. There are other equally important elements of teaching that need to be recognized. This prompted another question/issue by others; in an age where there is an increasing expectation that lectures will be recorded, which audience should the lecturer be tailoring her presentation. Is it the potentially larger group of students who will view the lecture on-line or the students sitting in the lecture hall?

A member Centre for Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CATL) at UWA, present at the meeting, confirmed that their view that formative peer review should be the model at this university. We were reminded by one contributor that peer review should involve much more than simply attendance at lectures or formal sessions. In the words of Charles Fernandez and Jenny Yu (2007), a 'peer review of teaching program should be accomplished through a supportive and nonpunitive approach'. As the British experience highlights, the alternative, summative form of review which emphasizes the use of PRT for administrative checks, instead generates suspicion and mistrust (Blackwell and McLean 1996). Ultimately, the handling of the tensions between the summative and formative functions of PRT determines whether peer reviews become 'institutionally marginal' or act as agents of genuine change and improvement (Cavanagh 1996).

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

ACADEMIC WORKLOADS

Academic workloads became an issue for Enterprise Bargaining back in the late 1990s. The Unions were concerned at that time that academic workloads were steadily increasing. They wished to attain some cap on workloads to prevent their steady expansion and to establish equitable workload strategies across the university.

Unfortunately, during the subsequent decade the lack of adequate funding for the universities has meant a continual increase in workloads and subsequently, consequent stress. This stress arises from both trying to preserve the quality of teaching, despite increasing student numbers, and the necessity to improve research output, despite increased demands for revenue raising interaction with the community. There are also further demands for information and more procedures introduced from the Empire building bureaucrats of the University.

To judge from the reports and recommendations circulating in different areas of the university, the major focus of the workload exercise has not been well understood. For instance, it has been portrayed as aiming at transparency in the university in one area, while in another, it is assumed that its objective is to increase research output.

The question of transparency is one that arose from the 1990s period when the NTEU and the UWAASA were attempting to obtain greater transparency in university decision taking and in particular in the area of finance. We argued then, and the DVC of that period, now the VC, Alan Robson, agreed, that greater transparency was badly needed. Our combined efforts to obtain greater transparency have been reasonably successful though there are still areas of the university where this could be improved.

The failure to contain workloads has robbed the issue of much of its real significance up to this point, but the principle of equitable workloads remains and can only be ensured by transparency on the issue. The NTEU will again be addressing the issue of containment of workloads during the bargaining period and will need the support of members.

The current UWAASA Committee took office in July 2009.

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