School of Psychology
Teaching & Learning Committee

Minutes of the meeting: 14 December 2010

Present    Hayley Hutchison
           Vance Locke
           Andrea Loftus
           Geoff Hammond (Chair)

Invitee    Raoul Oehmen

Apology    Shayne Loft

1 Chair’s report

There was nothing to report.

2 Casual teaching Staff

The Chair welcomed Raoul to the discussion of sessional teaching in the School. Raoul noted that the students he had consulted had not identified any major issues with the School’s management of its sessional teachers. The following points were made in discussion:

- it was easy to get sessional teaching and was often seen as a right
- some tutors questioned the value of the half-day ‘Foundations’ program offered by CATL and not all attended
- CATL would be willing to tailor part of their training to the School’s needs
- there was considerable unit-to-unit variability in the teaching materials provided for tutors; providing basic materials would help to limit variation between tutors
- the ‘super tutor’ position was seen as a positive but there was a need to identify the limits of the super tutors’ responsibility
- selection of super tutors should be formalised
- sessional staff with scholarships had to be aware of the limits placed by the GRS on the time devoted to face-to-face teaching
- tutors needed guidelines on dealing with students who become difficult when seeking more feedback on an assignment
- Turnitin simplified marking and encouraged more extensive feedback
- the automated application system for sessional teaching should encourage selection of the best-performing tutors
- the School should develop tutors’ teaching skills and experience systematically
- the School should solicit feedback from tutors for each unit

It was agreed that the Committee should develop a policy statement that made explicit:

- the School’s expectations of tutoring staff
- the rights and responsibilities of tutoring staff
- the opportunities for tutoring staff to develop their teaching careers during their employment
3 Teaching & Learning Operational Priorities Plan

The Committee considered the T&L OPP in view of the comments made at the December Staff Meeting. Two proposed strategies were reconsidered.

- formalize Senior Tutor position with appropriate compensation with clear responsibility (which should not include managing other tutors)

The Committee’s view remained that Senior Tutors (or ‘Super Tutors’) should have administrative duties in assisting with unit coordination but not managerial duties in the sense of managing other teaching staff on the unit, as they had neither the authority nor the experience to do so. The Committee’s view was that the duties of Super Tutors should be defined and made explicit in a policy document (see discussion of Item 1 above).

- academics mark a substantial proportion of examination questions on material taught

This strategy is based on two principles: first, that quality control of assessment is best served by having academics who teach a component of a unit mark the relevant examination answers, and second, that marking examination answers on material taught gives academics important feedback on their pedagogy and assessment. The Committee recognized that although in some units all examination answers can be marked by the lecturers this was not always practicable, hence the wording that a ‘substantial’ proportion be marked by the teacher. The Committee was unwilling to prescribe a minimum proportion of marking to be done by the teacher as it would be subject to the time available for exam marking and other workload, and so the responsibility for implementation was assigned to the Unit Coordinators and the Head of School.