The University of Western Australia

26 March 2012

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF STUDIES (BACHELOR OF PHILOSOPHY (HONS))
MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY, 23RD MARCH 2012 AT 10.00AM
IN MEETING ROOM 1237, 1ST FLOOR STUDENT SERVICES

PRESENT
Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor’s Nominee as Chair (Winthrop Professor Krishna Sen)
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) (Professor Robyn Owens)
Dean, Graduate Research School (Winthrop Professor Alan Dench)
Member with expertise in honours education (Winthrop Professor Ian McArthur)
Member with expertise in honours education (Associate Professor Fiona Pixley)
Guild President or nominee (Ms Naomi Elford)
Executive Officer (Dr Kabilan Krishnasamy)
Executive Officer (Ms Kaye Macpherson-Smith)

STANDING INVITEE
Associate Professor Jenna Mead, Academic Coordinator for Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons)

IN-ATTENDANCE
Senior Academic Reviewer (Winthrop Professor Ian Reid)

BY INVITATION FOR ITEM 6
Mr Wayne Betts, Associate Director, Student Services, Admissions Centre
Ms Fiona Birt, Manager, International Postgraduate Students Admissions, International Centre

APOLOGIES
Registrar or Nominee (Dr Sato Juniper)
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) (Winthrop Professor Jane Long)
Member with expertise in honours education (Winthrop Professor Philippa Maddern)
Member with expertise in honours education (Professor Trish Todd)

WELCOME
The Chair welcomed members to the meeting of the Boards of Studies for the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons), including Ms Kaye Macpherson-Smith as the incoming Executive Officer.

The Chair advised that Assistant Professor Vance Locke had resigned from the University and expressed her appreciation and good wishes to him on behalf of the Committee.

Mr Wayne Betts and Ms Fiona Birt were welcomed for the discussion of item 6.

DECLARATIONS OF POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT OR PERCEIVED CONFLICTS OF INTEREST
No conflict of interest was declared.

1. MINUTES – REF: F27161

RESOLVED – 1/12
that the minutes of the Board of Studies (Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons)) meeting held on 3rd November 2011 be confirmed.

2. NOTING OF DECISIONS TAKEN BY WAY OF CIRCULAR

RESOLVED – 2/12
that the decisions taken on 14th February 2012 be confirmed.
3. ITEMS FOR COMMUNICATION TO BE DEALT WITH EN BLOC

Members noted the following items as outlined in Part 1 of the agenda:

(i) Change in venue for meetings of the Board of Studies for the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons) in 2012 – Ref: F27161
(ii) Constitution of the Board of Studies for the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons) – Ref: F28650
(iii) University policy on undergraduate degree course rules for the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons) – Refs: F35860, F36453

4. ADMISSION TO THE BACHELOR OF PHILOSOPHY (HONS): PROCEDURES FOR SELECTION PROCESS – AMENDMENT TO TERMS OF REFERENCE – Ref: F37849

Members noted that consideration of applications from students who wished to transfer into the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons) was fundamentally an admissions issue. It was noted that the only possible transfer application for 2012 would be from a small number of students in the Bachelor of Science Advanced Science course. The Chair suggested that the following be included as an additional clause in the Terms of Reference of the Admissions Sub-Committee:

To consider, rank and select applications, where relevant, for transfer to the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons) degree course

As background information, members were provided with copies of the Admission to the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons): Procedures for Selection Process paper and the minutes of the meeting of the Interim Board of Studies for the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons) held on 1st September 2011.

RESOLVED – 3/12
to approve the inclusion of an additional clause, as set out above, in the Terms of Reference of the Admissions Sub-Committee.

5. ADMISSIONS SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT: 2012 ADMISSIONS TO THE BACHELOR OF PHILOSOPHY (HONS) – Ref: F38749

Members considered a report entitled Bachelor of Philosophy (Honours) Admissions Sub-Committee Report 2012 which outlined the recent admissions exercise for the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons). It was noted that 36 first round offers (30 offers for the Standard quota, of which 20 offers were accepted; and six offers for the Equity quota) and 17 second round offers (15 offers for the Standard quota and two offers for the Equity quota) were made for the course.

The Associate Director, Admissions Centre described the BPhil offer process as conservative in the main round due to uncertainty regarding the acceptance of offers. A relatively low take up of first round offers surprised sub-committee members and would guide offers for subsequent years; main round offers would be increased in future to capture top students (suggested 35 Standard quota offers).

Members’ comments included:
1. It was suggested that an appropriate cut-off date be established for receiving applications from international student applications.
2. It was argued that potentially there was a need for some form of generic testing (such as the ISAT used for selection of students for admission to Medicine/Dentistry courses) for international applicants, as international qualifications were varied and cannot be broken down with the exactitude applied in ATAR scoring.
3. Use of ATAR alone for ranking of students was potentially a problem if it was not possible to take all of the students with a given ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) into the course. The selection process for the 2012 Admissions exercise for the BPhil was an exception this year, as the bottom place in the quota fell at a clean break between an ATAR of 99.85 and 99.80. It was pointed out that this might not be the case in the future and therefore, the possibility of using both the ATAR and the TEA (Tertiary Entrance Aggregate) for ranking applicants for admission to the BPhil was suggested. This might help to differentiate students with the same ATAR.
4. It was observed that there were only a small number of applications for the indigenous, low SES and rural quota places, which was an indication that the University needed to do more to publicise the existence of these places. The question arose as to whether extra weighting should be applied to students who were both SED and rural.

5. The current definition of “rural” was “outside Perth” (based on a distance from the city centre). The rural quota is in place partly in recognition that students in some rural high schools are disadvantaged by lack of access to high quality facilities or all WACE subject areas. Some schools in bigger rural centres such as Bunbury and Albany do not fall into this category. Alternative definitions of “rural” apply to some other UWA schemes and the Committee had suggested that some of these be considered instead of the current definition.

6. The need to contextualise and recognise that UWA has marketed itself as a top ranked University. This might in turn cause some students to re-evaluate their choice of university and it is inevitable that some top students will elect to study at higher ranked universities, such as Oxford and Melbourne Universities.

7. It was pointed out that as this was the first year of BPhil operations a ripple effect of course popularity was to be expected in future years and administrators should remain cautious with the number of first round offers made.

8. The data for the breakdown by category (including the BPhil student demographics) was noted to be aligned with the general trend for the overall student population (eg. an increased number of male students). It was also noted that the data showed an unexpected bias towards the Engineering Science major.

9. In light of a noted gender imbalance in the BPhil cohort the Associate Director, Admissions Centre agreed to provide gender breakdown data for the BPhil applicants.

In light of the foregoing discussion, it was agreed that the Admissions Sub-Committee be requested to undertake a review of the entry requirements and selection process for the BPhil (Hons) and address any relevant issues.

The Chair thanked the members of the Admissions Sub-Committee for their valuable contributions, in particular Mr Betts and Professor McArthur for their work and feedback.

RESOLVED – 4/12

to commission a review of the selection process and entry requirements for the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons) to be undertaken by the Admissions Sub-Committee.

6. PRIZES FOR THE NEW UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES: BACHELOR OF PHILOSOPHY (HONS) - Refs: F3347 & F28852

Members considered a request from the Office of Development and Alumni Relations for the establishment of a prize for the most outstanding graduand in the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons). It had been suggested that the proposed BPhil (Hons) prize would be the most prestigious undergraduate prize in perpetuity under the new course structure.

Members had before them a discussion paper entitled Prizes for the New Undergraduate Degrees: Bachelor of Philosophy (Honours) that identified a number of issues for members’ consideration:

- Criteria for selecting an outstanding graduand in the BPhil (Hons)
- Eligibility of students who transfer into the BPhil (Hons)
- Prizes in perpetuity
- Appropriate platform for awarding non-faculty specific prizes
- Prize money

The following points were noted in the subsequent discussion:

- It was agreed a policy that incorporated key principles should be developed to guide the establishment of future prizes.

[Executive Officer’s Note: A University Policy on Establishment of Prizes is currently being formulated by Academic Policy Services and will be referred to the Academic Council for approval in due course. Appropriate consultation with key stakeholders will be undertaken as part of the formulation process.]
While recognising that the University’s processes for prizes and scholarships were different, it was noted that the BPhil scholarships should aim to attract eastern states applicants. The value of a Melbourne University scholarship was quoted as $10,000 per year plus a fee waiver.

Traditionally, prizes normally involved the award of a certificate and prize money. However, it was suggested that the prize in the BPhil could be made more visible by way of also awarding a medal.

The concept of labelling the proposed BPhil prize referred by the Office of Development and Alumni Relations as the ‘most prestigious award’ was discussed. It was noted that the University had already established the J. A. Wood Memorial prize which is also a prestigious prize awarded to the most outstanding graduand completing an honours in any disciplinary area. Therefore, it was agreed that it would not be possible, or desirable, for the proposed prize to be tagged as the most prestigious award.

Members briefly discussed the possibility of establishing a prize for the GCRL1000 unit and awarding it to a student who would achieve the highest grade in the unit.

Since research would be the capstone of the BPhil degree, members agreed with the suggestion that the proposed Dr Harry Cooper Memorial Prize could be awarded to a student who achieves the top score in the dissertation component of the four-year BPhil course. Members noted that if such a prize were to be established it would be necessary to establish a benchmark for dissertation grades that accounted for disparate grades across disciplines, and to establish other related requirements of the prize. It was therefore agreed that the Board of Studies for the Bachelor of Philosophy (Hons) should be responsible for the establishment of prizes at the course level for the BPhil and consequent selection processes.

Further, it was agreed that the proposed allocation of $50,000 in perpetuity and the stated annual prize value of $2,500, although a generous amount for a prize, would need to be revisited for a prize at the BPhil course level. It was noted that the Vice-Chancellor had commissioned a working party to consider third party agreements (convened by the Registrar) and that this Working Party was considering appropriate values of gifts, donations and prizes, including prizes at the course level within the context of new courses.

It was agreed that the minuted discussion be referred to the Board of Coursework Studies for its information and that a University Policy on Establishment of Prizes would need to take account of these issues, together with outcomes from the Working Party on Third Party Agreements.

7. REPORT FROM THE ACCADEMIC COORDINATOR FOR THE BACHELOR OF PHILOSOPHY (HONS) – Ref: F28852

Members were reminded that the BPhil (Hons) degree commenced in January 2012 with the six day summer residence which was held at St Catherine’s College. As part of the BPhil (Hons) Academic Coordinator’s report for this meeting, a draft report outlined how the residential component was conducted.

The Academic Coordinator’s PowerPoint presentation to members highlighted the demographics and skill mix of the BPhil student cohort, and the course content, presentations and mentor support provided. The speed with which the group became a cohort was emphasised.

The following points were noted in the ensuing discussion:

- Although most students in the BPhil cohort were assumed to be multilingual it was pointed out that all students, in accordance with rule 7 of the University approved operational rules for the BPhil, would be required to enrol in a language unit. Some members advocated that there should be exceptions to this requirement (for example, a student who already has a substantial capacity in a language other than English). As a way forward it was suggested it may be preferable to say that at the end of four years BPhil students should have met the language requirement.

- It was agreed the Academic Coordinator would determine the enrolment status of the BPhil students in a language unit, as a guide to a discussion of this topic at the next meeting.

- Information regarding the ongoing development of the cohort experience was requested; for example, information on future seminars or presentations that would be convened for
this purpose. The Academic Coordinator agreed to provide details of the Semester 2 cohort events to the Board.

- Funding for the BPhil degree has been linked to cross subsidisation and a systematic approach was required to develop a financial model for future funding.
- A structured and proactive approach to the allocation of student research mentors needed to be established to ensure students received timely and accurate advice from a mentor who was widely connected in each student's area of special interest. It was agreed the Academic Coordinator would develop a schedule for each student to meet with the DVC(R) who has agreed to put them in contact with suitable research mentors.
- The Student's Unit Reflective Feedback (SURF) would be the instrument currently available to evaluate the GCRL1000 unit at the end of semester. The Centre for Advanced Teaching and Learning (CATL) has been developing a specialised tool for the evaluation of the GCRL1000. The Academic Coordinator would provide feedback on this at a future meeting.