UWA EDUCATION FUTURES VISION STATEMENT

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UWA Education Futures Vision Statement

Background

In 2012 the UWA Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Johnson, released a paper UWA Futures which was intended to promote discussion and debate within the University about what our goals should be across certain areas of the University’s activities and how we should endeavour to achieve them. Professor Johnson outlined the rapidly changing world of higher education including the new standards regime for Australian higher education, commercialization in the higher education market and new models of online higher education. Professor Johnson presented a number of proposals about UWA’s educational, research and community activities and how we might further develop and strengthen them. The first proposal was that the University conduct a full review of pedagogic purpose and practice with the aim of introducing new pedagogies from the beginning of 2015.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), Winthrop Professor Alec Cameron, subsequently announced the UWA Education Futures Project as a strategy to address the first proposal of UWA Futures.

This vision statement is the first stage of the UWA Education Futures Project. The purpose is to provide a vision of the nature of educational activities at UWA for 2018 and beyond, that we can work toward from 2015. The vision is intended to be ambitious but conceivable and flexible to admit future developments that are not currently envisioned. The intention also is to determine an effective approach for achieving the vision without being limited by current models of resourcing and practice.

The University of Western Australia succeeded in achieving its goal of becoming one of the world’s top 100 research universities by the time of its centenary in 2013. Now, UWA has turned to the more challenging goal of becoming recognized as a top 50 university by 2050. This goal relates not just to research, but also to UWA’s educational programs and activities. The University recently modified its educational principles and embarked on a process of curriculum renewal to gather momentum to achieve the top 50 goal and both these activities provide important contexts for the Education Futures project.

New Courses 2012

One strategy employed to contribute to the top 50 goal was to restructure the entire University curriculum with a focus on key features for the global market including educational breadth as well as disciplinary depth of study, research skills, communication skills, formal learning of Indigenous issues and ethical scholarship, and integration of community engagement by way of service learning. Through these new courses, introduced in 2012, the University adopted a model of a broad undergraduate degree which, in many cases, can be followed by a postgraduate professional qualification. In the new framework, students major in at least one area of study, but also undertake some units outside the knowledge paradigm of their main area of study as a ‘broadening’ component of their degree. As part of this broadening component, all students take special units that require them to think about the globalised nature of our world and to consider the multiplicities and complexities of different cultural perspectives. Every undergraduate major also has communication and research skills embedded within the disciplinary knowledge, all of which are
developed in increasing levels of conceptual complexity as students progress through the three years of their bachelor degree.

**Educational Principles**

The University of Western Australia is committed to the educational values which imbue students learning at all levels, summarised within its Educational Principles. The University seeks to nurture excellence, facilitate creativity and intellectual exploration, and promote effective citizenship among its students and graduates in the Australian community and beyond. In pursuit of these values, and to support a distinctive UWA education, the University promotes among its students the ability and desire:

1. to develop disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge and skills through study and research-based enquiry, at internationally recognised levels of excellence
   - to think, reason and analyse logically and creatively
   - to question accepted wisdom and be open to innovation
   - to acquire the skills needed to embrace rapidly changing technologies.
2. to further develop the skills required to learn, and to continue through life to learn, from a variety of sources and experiences.
   - to develop attitudes which value learning
   - to acquire skills in information literacy.
3. to develop personal, social and ethical awareness in an international context
   - to acquire cultural literacy
   - to respect Indigenous knowledge, values and culture
   - to develop ethical approaches and mature judgment in practical and academic matters
   - to develop the capacity for effective citizenship, leadership and teamwork.
4. to communicate clearly, effectively and appropriately in a range of contexts.
   - to develop spoken and written English communication skills at high levels
   - to acquire skills in critical literacy and interpersonal communication.

**Aspects of UWA’s Education Futures Vision**

In the following paragraphs we outline seven aspects of the UWA Education Futures Vision. The seven aspects of this vision are consistent with UWA’s educational principles and new courses but focus more clearly on the practices of teaching and learning. Each of the aspects begins with a vision statement and outlines what the vision statement means from the perspective of both teachers and students and concludes with relevant issues.

**Engaging, Challenging and Transformative Teaching and Learning**

**Vision:** Teaching practices at UWA are designed to engage, challenge and transform students in their learning.

**Teachers** at UWA design teaching and learning activities (including assessments) that facilitate proactive student engagement in their learning and a capacity to think and learn at high conceptual levels. This includes comparing and contrasting, analysing, applying, debating, critiquing,
transforming and creating. Teaching and learning activities challenge students to develop skills, abilities, knowledge and values, with the goal of inspiring them to seek wisdom throughout their lives. Academic staff are passionate about their discipline and their teaching and encourage their students to actively engage in critical and creative thinking and develop the personal skills and capabilities to be future leaders in their chosen field.

Students at UWA engage proactively in their learning. They understand that they are responsible co-developers of their understanding, skills and conceptual development with their teachers, fellow students and the wider community. They understand that they will be challenged to develop their skills, abilities, knowledge and values and that they will be required to demonstrate their learning progressively and in a range of contexts and at different levels.

Issues

1. Many students come to university well entrenched in a ‘surface learning’ culture and find it difficult to adjust to a ‘deep learning’ culture.
2. The first year experience, transition from school to university and an adult learning environment.
3. Many disciplines require a significant amount of learning and memorization of facts prior to students being able to participate in higher order activities such as problem solving and critically analyzing.
4. When teaching slightly out-of-field or in cross-disciplinary units, academic staff are often less enthusiastic about the subject matter and may lack confidence to include students in critical and creative learning activities.

Integrated Research Experiences

Vision: Learning and teaching experiences at UWA are integrated with and informed by research.

Teachers at UWA are well qualified and experienced researchers and/or scholars in their disciplinary field. They bring contemporary research experiences to their teaching and when possible, provide students with opportunities to be participants in and producers of research. Academic staff at UWA are passionate about their research and/or scholarship and ensure that students develop research skills and research literacy.

Students at UWA are aware that research informs their learning activities and the content they are learning. They participate in research, learn the skills of research and produce research. Students are required to demonstrate research literacy as a key graduate attribute.

Issues

1. There is a growing trend for UWA’s research objectives to divide teaching and research activities (e.g. increasing necessity to have Research Centres and Institutes so that research remains competitive);
2. The ongoing decline in student funding undermines the capacity of Schools to provide ‘genuine’ research experiences for undergraduate students;
3. There is a possible need to trade-off breadth of undergraduate research experience to ensure depth of experience is maintained;
Quality Teaching

Vision: UWA staff are committed to providing evidence-informed, quality teaching and learning experiences for students.

Teachers at UWA ensure their teaching practices are informed by evidence from scholarly and systematic inquiry into effective student learning and teaching. Pedagogies used by UWA staff are crafted specifically in relation to the discipline, content and level of study in order to promote engaged student learning and the achievement of the planned learning outcomes. UWA teachers conduct systematic inquiry into the learning of their students and their own teaching practices, seeking feedback from students, colleagues and the wider community. UWA teachers strive to improve their pedagogy through systematically engaging in self-reflection and structured professional learning.

Students at UWA participate actively in the planned learning activities and demonstrate respect for the role and expertise of their teachers and staff who contribute to and support their learning. Students are open to new teaching methods and approaches and recognise that they learn from many people and multiple sources. Students are encouraged to provide feedback on the quality of teaching and their learning experiences throughout their study.

Issues

1. Lack of resources to provide additional support, central or faculty-based, for scholarship of teaching.
2. Participating in scholarship of teaching takes time away from discipline-based research.
3. Scholarship of teaching activities are not always as highly regarded as discipline-based research for purposes of appointment, promotion and advancement.
4. Learning/teaching analytics

Optimised Resources, Facilities and Technologies

Vision: UWA teaching and learning activities are supported with an extended range of world class resources, facilities and technologies.

Teachers at UWA provide their students with a wide range of learning experiences through the use of various learning technologies and access to relevant resources and facilities (e.g. laboratories and field- and work-based experiences). Learning technologies are used in innovative, engaging and informed ways to enhance students’ learning. To ensure UWA’s courses are of world class standard, its teachers use and draw upon the very best teaching and learning material and course content available, accessing multiple sources.

Students’ learning at UWA is supported by technologies, resources and facilities that are seamlessly integrated into their planned learning experiences. Students are able to utilise the technologies and resources so that they have access at times and locations that maximise the flexibility and depth of their learning opportunities. Students use the technologies provided to extend their learning through self-directed research and study.
Issues

1. Technology changes at a rapid pace.
2. There is considerable variability in UWA teachers’ skills and desire to utilise learning technologies and the level of support/training varies.
3. Appropriate safeguards for any intellectual property that may be required.
4. Adequate access on campus and remotely.
5. Students may participate in a unit that is largely prepared and delivered by world experts that are not part of UWA.
6. The impact of social isolation associated with technology use on the total student experience, especially their learning.

Global Leaders and Citizens

Vision: UWA prepares its students to be leaders and contributing members of local, national and global communities.

Teachers at UWA demonstrate and promote ethical practices and values in all aspects of their professional work and engagement with students. Teachers recognise the rights of students to learn in an environment that is inclusive, culturally sensitive and respectful of them and the qualities they bring to the University. UWA teachers provide students with opportunities to develop leadership skills and capacity and develop a deeper understanding of the communities in which they live. Teachers require that students demonstrate respectful, ethical and appropriate behaviours in their study, research and interactions with others.

Students at UWA understand the importance of ethical values and practices and demonstrate these in their study, professional practices and engagement with others. They understand themselves as members and future leaders of local, national and global communities and seek opportunities to contribute to these in a professional and personal capacity. Students are required to demonstrate respectful, ethical and appropriate behaviours in their study, research and interactions with others.

Issues

1. There is a trend for students to view their university experience as a purchased commodity (i.e. see themselves as a paying customer) rather than an active educational experience.
2. There is also a trend for university staff to view students as an income source to support other activities including research.
3. There is potential for a responsibility shift away from teaching support to student self-sufficiency (due to funding shortfalls).
4. Rates of plagiarism, collusion and cheating.

Vibrant Campus Environment

Vision: UWA values its attractive campus and world class facilities for the opportunities it provides its students to engage with other students, UWA staff and members of the local, national and global communities.

Teachers at UWA recognise the importance of providing students with opportunities to meet and work with other students when studying and more informally drawing on a vibrant range of sporting,
social and cultural activities. Teachers utilise the formal and informal facilities, services and activities and encourage students to engage in the full range of opportunities, recognising the value of forming lifelong friendships and further enhancing personal, employability, professional, interpersonal and team work skills.

**Students** are encouraged to develop social, cultural, personal and professional networks. Students actively participate in a range of extra-curricular opportunities provided at UWA, developing personal attributes including interpersonal skills. Students value the UWA campus and facilities including the student accommodation. Students demonstrate community citizenship through participation in a range of volunteering and service learning activities.

**Issues**

1. There needs to be space to allow for students to meet and work in groups.
2. There needs to be access to volunteering and service learning opportunities.

**Experiential and Supported Learning**

**Vision:** UWA provides students with a rich variety of learning experiences that are supported throughout their study and connects them to the University, professional, local and global communities.

**Teachers** ensure that the learning experiences provided for students are relevant to the discipline, experienced and observed in different environments (e.g. natural, constructed, virtual, professional), and engage them in complex issues and problems facing the human and natural worlds. Teachers ensure that experiential learning is well-structured and well-integrated with other learning activities, providing students opportunities to practice, develop and demonstrate their personal qualities (e.g. communication and interpersonal skills), knowledge and skills in supported and enhanced learning and physical environments (e.g. internships, practicums, placements, and participation in community programs through volunteering and service learning). These experiences may take place locally, nationally and/or internationally and contribute to students being well prepared for employment when they graduate.

**Students** readily embrace the opportunities to engage in formal and informal learning experiences. They understand that expertise and wisdom can be found in many people and in many places and so work respectfully in the field, laboratory, workplace and community to develop and demonstrate practical, applied, and skilful capacity and perspectives. Students seek opportunities to apply and test their learning in many different contexts, understanding that deep learning requires many experiences and applications in a range of different contexts and at different levels of study.

**Issues**

1. It is time consuming and difficult to timetable experiential learning experiences that require students to go off campus and difficult to ensure a similar standard of learning experiences for all students.
2. Assessment and moderation of experiential learning is challenging and needs to be linked to professional/work-based behaviours.