School of Social Sciences
School Executive Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, 29th October 2014 at 2.00pm
Seminar Room 1.10

Present:
Professor Alistair Paterson, Head of School (Chair)
Associate Professor Joanna Elfving-Hwang, Deputy Head of School
Ms Melissa Southcott, Manager
Associate Professor Rob Cover
Professor Marie-Eve Ritz
Professor Jeannette Taylor
Associate Professor Martin Porr
Assistant Professor David Mickler
Professor Loretta Baldassar
Assistant Professor Wang Yi
Professor Samina Yasmeen
Ms Jill Woodman (Secretary)

Apologies:
Associate Professor David Bourchier
Professor Jo McDonald

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting
The minutes of the 24th September 2014 meeting were passed without amendment.

2. Welcome
The Chair welcomed Wang Yi to the meeting who was representing David Bourchier.

3. Head of School Report
a) Reduced Cohort in 2015
Philippa Freegard had distributed spreadsheets detailing the anticipated enrolments in the Faculty in 2015 as a result of the half cohort. The predicted reduction is between 16-32%, with an average of 20%. The Faculty is not expecting a major decrease next year but there may be more of an impact in 2016 and 2017 as the half cohort moves through into second and third year.

b) Confucius Institute
Professor Hong Fan has resigned as Director of the Institute from March next year and the process is underway to replace her. The Directorship will be filled at the School, rather than faculty, level and it is anticipated the new Director will have a greater role in the School.

c) Head of School 2015
Professor Graham Brown, the incoming Professor in Political Science and International Relations, has agreed to take on the role of Head of School for at least 12 months from January next year. There will be support to make sure the teaching commitments of Political Science are not impacted.
4. Items for Discussion

a) Adequate Research Preparedness of HDR Applicants
The Graduate Research Coordinator distributed notes from a Graduate Research Coordinators’ workshop about the need for adequate research preparedness by prospective students. The situation that needs to be avoided is applications going to Graduate Research Office and then being rejected because of the lack of research readiness. If an applicant has not completed a thesis as an honours or masters student, they are not eligible to enrol in a postgraduate by research degree. Disciplines should seek advice from the GRC after reviewing applications, who will then advise HDR administrative staff to either assist the student through the application process, or to advise on alternative options (HDR Prelim Cycle 2).

If a prospective IPR Scholarship student contacts staff, refer the enquiry to the Graduate Research Coordinator who will be able to advise if the application is worth pursuing. The competition for IPR Scholarships is fierce and only the very best have any chance of success. Staff should also be advised that most successful IPRS applicants have worked closely with their prospective UWA supervisors to develop strong applications.

The two things which should be avoided are promising prospective students that they will be accepted by UWA and/or offered a scholarship.

b) & c) School-wide Graduate Research Committee and Monitoring HDR Candidates
The proposal was put to have a School Graduate Research Committee which would review students’ performance before their candidature is confirmed. This would only apply to students who are identified within discipline groups as borderline cases.

The setting up of a committee was suggested because it can be difficult for supervisors, who have been working with a student for 12 months, to make a recommendation not to confirm their candidature. However, if the recommendation is made by an independent Committee it removes that personal involvement and awkwardness. It is also an opportunity for students to raise concerns if they are having problems with their supervisor.

Another benefit is that it is a way of monitoring progress and maintaining quality assurance at the School level. In broader terms, it should also emphasise to students across the School that confirmation of candidature is something to be taken seriously, not a ‘nuisance’, as it is considered by some. There will need to be a standardised set of requirements and one of the requirements, especially for scholarship recipients, would be a substantial piece of writing.

It was agreed to trial the review and monitoring of HDR candidates for 12 months, commencing in 2015 but, rather than set up a new committee, the SEC would take on this task and it would be a standing item on the agenda. Straightforward confirmations would not need to be brought to the SEC but where the confirmation of candidature was problematic, and the Discipline Chair or supervisor had raised concerns, the Graduate Research Coordinator would refer it to the Committee for a decision.
d) Minimum Teaching Standards for Cycle 2 Units
During 2015 and 2016 the School and the Faculty will be responsible for a number of new Cycle 2 programs and new Level 5 units. Some of the units will be taught in ‘intensive’ modes, which is popular with students, but care has to be taken to ensure that the minimum teaching standard for all Level 5 units, especially the intensively-taught units, are met. After discussion, it was agreed that all Cycle 2 units need to have 150 hours of student learning, including contact hours.

The Head of School will take the recommendation to the Teaching & Learning Committee and ask in the next Dean’s Advisory Group meeting, where Cycle 2 degrees sit and who has responsibility for them. He will report back to the next meeting.

e) Research Statement
There is no research focus statement on the School’s webpage and it was agreed it was important to have such a statement. The Head of School will draft a statement and bring it to the next SEC meeting for approval.

5. Other Business
a) David Mickler asked if it would be possible for Level B staff to shadow the Associate Deans to gain an understanding what is involved in these positions. It was agreed that it was not possible to have such an arrangement at the present time.

b) The School end of year meeting and sundowner will be held at 3 pm on 9th December.

Next Meeting
The next meeting will be held on 26th November 2014 at 2 pm.

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm