

The University of Melbourne Joint badging of coursework degrees

A. PURPOSE

This paper responds to the recent approval by the Academic Board of the jointly-badged civil engineering degree between the University of Melbourne and the National University of Singapore. It sets out the grounds on which the joint badging of coursework (undergraduate and postgraduate) degrees might occur at the University, promoting a consistent approach to joint badging across faculties in line with approval from the Academic Board in 2003 for the award, in principle, of research higher degrees (RHDs) offered jointly (through 'co-tutelle') by the University of Melbourne and appropriate overseas universities.

B. BACKGROUND

1. Internationalisation and the University of Melbourne

Joint badging addresses a number of the University's strategic aims, especially internationalisation. As the professional workforce becomes increasingly mobile, globally relevant knowledge and competencies will be important attributes for University graduates of the twenty-first century. Joint badging will expand the University's international agenda by ensuring that our students benefit from global curricula and learning environments, providing them with the skills which will enable them to work and to participate as citizens across cultures.

The award of joint degrees is becoming accepted practice in universities across North America, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. In Europe, for example, the Bologna Process and the Erasmus program have encouraged global recognition of courses and degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The Bologna Process, in particular, will lead to increased cooperation between universities due to more transparent academic structures. While this may translate into increased competition for Australian universities (overseas exchange students might opt for European universities), there are also likely to be more opportunities for collaboration between Australian universities and their European counterparts.

Australian Group of Eight universities continue to set up joint programs with overseas institutions, both as members of traditional alliances, such as the U21 network, and by establishing new bilateral and multilateral teaching and research partnerships.

2. Overseas study and University of Melbourne degrees

The University of Melbourne has not hitherto offered degree programs jointly with other universities. This position was based on the need to ensure the quality of the University's programs, and because it wished to differentiate shared and jointly-badged programs. In recent years, an increased market focus on graduates with globally-relevant knowledge and skills has resulted in a greater emphasis on components of overseas study in University of Melbourne degrees.

The following are some key developments:

Undergraduate programs

- In May 2005, the Academic Board approved the proposal for a joint civil engineering degree between the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Melbourne and the Department of Civil Engineering at the National University of Singapore.
- From Semester 2, 2005, the U21 Certificate in Global Issues will be offered at the University of Melbourne. The Certificate is a multi-disciplinary undergraduate program developed by the University of Melbourne in conjunction with four other members of the U21 network – the universities of Auckland, British Columbia, Hong Kong and Nottingham. Students enrolled in the program are expected to complete fifty per cent of the Certificate through at least one other partner university, whether online or by studying overseas for credit towards the qualification.

Undergraduate and postgraduate coursework programs

- The Faculty of Education offers several degree programs offshore: Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies; Bachelor of Training and Development; Master of Training and Development; Master of Early Childhood; and Master of Educational Management (School Review). These programs are all University of Melbourne courses, although they are offered in conjunction with the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) in Singapore and the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIE) in Hong Kong.
- The University of Melbourne is one of the partner universities involved in the U21 online Master of Business Administration (MBA). Established in May 2003, the MBA offers collaborative, instructor-led learning with globally recognised credentials.
- In 2002, the Academic Board approved the Master of Biostatistics by distance education. This is a shared program offered by the University of Melbourne in conjunction with the Biostatistics Collaboration of Australia (BCA), a consortium of academic statisticians in health and medical research. Graduates are awarded a University of Melbourne Masters degree.

Postgraduate research programs

- In 2003, the Academic Board approved the recommendation of the Research Higher Degrees Committee and the School of Graduate Studies that the University of Melbourne take part in the French government's Co-tutelle program for jointly-delivered and awarded PhDs.

The Academic Board has developed a series of protocols for academic programs involving elements of overseas study. These include:

- The Melbourne Abroad Outgoing Exchange Policy;
- Protocols for the Approval of Distance Education Courses; and
- APC working group reports and recommendations on shared programs and on fieldwork and placements.

C. ISSUES

1. Definitions

The University's academic programs involving the participation of partner universities are diverse and can involve components of online learning. The following definitions highlight the differences between some of these programs.

Distance education courses

In 1999, a PBC Working Group established to investigate distance education defined distance courses as those in which there is 'no expectation that the student will attend the campus'. Such courses may be of three kinds:

- a) 'Traditional' distance mode, in which packages of materials are posted out to students;
- b) Online delivery mode, in which the subject/course is delivered via the web; and
- c) Off-campus (including off-shore) delivery, where the subject is taught (usually in an intensive period) at an overseas or interstate site.

Distance education courses may be developed and administered by a single tertiary institution and by universities collaboratively.

Shared programs

The Working Group on Shared Programs, in its 2002 report, defined a shared program as a 'course taught by two or more tertiary institutions, including the University of Melbourne, leading to an award of a degree from one of the participant institutions'. The successful completion of a shared program may result in the conferral of a degree of the University of Melbourne.

Shared programs differ from exchange study or study abroad programs in the following ways:

- a) Responsibility for the delivery of shared programs rests with all institutions participating in the programs. Governance of the program is shared, although the shares may be unequal and the structure of the governance may vary.
- b) Students may be required to undertake subjects at more than one institution in order to complete the program successfully. Unlike exchange study, taking subjects at an institution other than the institution of enrolment is not an optional part of a shared degree program.

Jointly-badged degrees

A jointly-badged degree is a course taught by two or more tertiary institutions, including the University of Melbourne, leading to a joint degree which is recognised and accredited by the participating institutions as a single degree awarded jointly by the universities.

Jointly-badged degrees differ from exchange, study abroad and shared programs in the following ways:

- a) The academic programs of the two universities participating in the jointly-badged degree are integrated into a cohesive curriculum, and are based on common course objectives. Students are expected to undertake predetermined compulsory or elective subjects designed to enrich their understanding of a particular discipline and to foster a series of generic skills.
- b) The jointly-badged degree is awarded by all participating universities. The successful completion of a shared program, in contrast, results in the conferral of a degree from one institution.
- c) The time spent studying at a partner university will normally be half the duration of the degree, or at least one-third of the duration of the degree. This is longer than the 6-12 month duration period of study abroad programs.
- d) Individual subject grades obtained at each partner institution are used in the overall honours calculation for the joint degree. This is not the case for the exchange or study abroad programs.

2. Rationale for jointly-badged degrees

The following are some of the advantages of jointly awarded coursework degrees which will assist in enhancing the 'Melbourne Experience' for our graduates as well as advancing the strategic aims of the University:

- Jointly-badged degrees will strengthen the University's existing ties with partner institutions and foster new relationships with institutions to create valuable international and educational experiences for students and staff.
- They will bring University of Melbourne students geographically closer to leading, international scholars in their field, enriching students' knowledge in a particular discipline and providing the opportunity to develop language and other specialised skills.
- The longer duration of jointly-badged degrees will enable students to gain a greater understanding of another culture, and to foster meaningful relationships and networks with their international peers, enhancing their ability to study, live and work in an international environment.
- Recognition of jointly-awarded degrees will provide graduates with greater access to the employment market internationally.
- Jointly-awarded degrees can increase opportunities for joint recognition of degrees which meet professional accreditation requirements in the countries or regions of the participating universities, creating truly international degrees.
- They can provide exciting opportunities for students interested in pursuing jointly-supervised research degrees or other postgraduate programs overseas, promoting life-long learning on a global scale.
- Participation in jointly-badged degrees can encourage further cooperative projects among academics at partner universities, boosting the reputations of participating institutions.

3. Quality assurance

Despite these advantages, it is important that the participating universities have systems in place to ensure the quality of joint degrees. Loss of control over the quality of teaching programs at another institution could damage the University's reputation. To manage this risk, faculties proposing to

establish joint degrees should make a strong case for the excellent standing of the institution with which they intend to offer the degree. Faculties should consider a range of factors to ensure that high standards are maintained by participating universities. These include the expertise of qualified staff, first-rate academic programs, excellent student support and learning facilities, appropriate assessment procedures and transparent process.

4. Protocols for jointly-badged coursework degrees

In order to ensure the quality of programs and the effective management of jointly-awarded coursework degrees, a set of protocols are recommended for faculties proposing to establish joint degrees. Programs involving overseas or distance education at the University are diverse and are sometimes combined. A shared program, for example, can include fully online subjects. These protocols are consistent with existing principles developed for shared programs and distance education.

Faculties intending to offer jointly-badged degrees must address the following as part of the course proposal:

A. Collaboration Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding

A signed collaboration agreement between the University of Melbourne and any international partners, especially where the international partner is not a U21 institution, must be submitted with the course proposal for the joint degree. This agreement must set out the following details:

1. Obligations and responsibilities of each University, including the rights and responsibilities of universities to discontinue jointly-badged programs.
2. Course delivery mode(s), details of subject units, language(s) of instruction (if applicable), and selection criteria;
3. Fee arrangements (whether, for example, each student will enrol and pay fees at only one institution (the 'home' or 'lead' institution) and/or will also be formally registered at both institutions;
4. Staffing arrangements;
5. Administrative and technical costs (both teaching staff and services) for all activities associated with the jointly-badged degree;
6. A clear and transparent statement on assessment. Rules of assessment, such as those pertaining to special consideration, plagiarism and student appeals to assessment, shall be determined in accordance with the regulations of the institution administering the assessment for the relevant subject unit. The general progress of any student shall be reviewed by the institution at which the student originally enrolled in the joint degree. The components of assessment will be clearly articulated to students in all relevant documents;
7. Testamur and logo protocols (The current practice of Group of Eight universities presently taking part in the postgraduate Co-tutelle program is to award only one testamur with two logos printed on the degree);
8. Any proposed sharing or transfer of resources; and
9. The coordinating structures and processes for ensuring appropriate inter-institutional communication about major and minor course changes, academic content, student progress, and quality assurance measures.

B. Quality assurance and procedures for approving jointly-badged degrees

1. Approval for a jointly-badged degree must be obtained from the Academic Programs Committee and the Academic Board.
2. A sponsoring faculty or faculties must in its course proposal state the nature and extent of its involvement in the joint degree, including involvement other than teaching subjects offered by the faculty.
3. In applying for approval for a joint degree, the sponsoring faculty must specify the minimum points obtained in subjects taken at Melbourne and at participating universities which will entitle a student enrolled in the joint degree to take out the joint degree.
4. The Academic Programs Committee and the Academic Board must be satisfied that:
 - a) the sponsoring faculty or faculties has presented a strong case for the standing of the international university with which it intends to offer the joint degree;
 - b) the joint degree has been designed, and will be monitored, taught and examined in an integrated way by staff at the participating universities;
 - c) the program is intellectually coherent and its proposed structure is organised into a cohesive curriculum, based on common course objectives, and involving a selection of predetermined compulsory and/or elective subject units;
 - d) individual subject grades obtained by students at each participating institution will be translated into an agreed common grading structure and used in the overall honours calculation for the joint degree;
 - e) students enrolled in the joint degree will spend at least one-third of the duration of the degree at a university other than the institution at which the student originally enrolled in the joint degree;
 - f) the participating institutions have established transparent and comparable criteria for selection into the joint degree; and
 - g) each partner institution will apply established criteria for assessment, as well as procedures for reviewing, or appealing against, assessment outcomes, and that these procedures will be made clear and transparent to students.

C. Responsibilities to students enrolled in joint degrees

1. Proposals for establishing joint degrees must specify how participating institutions will address the following responsibilities to students enrolled in the joint degree.

The Academic Programs Committee and the Academic Board must be satisfied that:

- a) Legal responsibilities
 - the participating universities are compliant with all relevant legislation or with standards laid down by common law, and that students will be fully informed about their responsibilities in relation to specific compliance matters for relevant jurisdictions;
 - the joint degree is run in a safe and supportive manner taking into account the overall welfare of participating students and that joint responsibility is taken for same;
- b) Administrative responsibilities
 - the universities, faculties and departments have adopted effective and consistent procedures for delivery of courses and monitoring student progress;

- appropriate academic and administrative staff have been identified at the participating institution(s) with authority to resolve day-to-day operational issues;
- c) Welfare and advisory responsibilities
- appropriate provision has been made by each partner institution for course advice and academic support for students, including library and IT facilities; and
- the universities (including their welfare agencies such as student health and housing), faculties and departments will provide an appropriate level of support for students.

Faculties sponsoring joint degrees must ensure that all participating institutions have in place effective procedures for discharging their own obligations and, secondly, that responsibility as between the institutions for ensuring compliance is clearly identified in the documentation submitted to Academic Programs Committee and Academic Board.

2. Proposals for establishing joint degrees must also specify:
 - a) the institution which is to be recognised as the registered provider of the program for the purposes of the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (Cth); and
 - b) the arrangements which have been put in place for ensuring compliance with the Act by all participating institutions.
3. A Faculty sponsoring a joint degree must draw the attention of the Academic Programs Committee to any significant disparity between the University's principles and policies in relation to assessment, course advice and academic support and the principles and policies applied in these areas by institutions with which the Faculty is intending to enter into partnership.
4. Proposals for establishing joint degrees must, following consultation with Legal Services, confirm that the program complies with all relevant privacy legislation.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- the APC considers and approves the award of coursework degrees to be offered and conferred jointly by the University of Melbourne and other universities;
- the APC adopts the *Protocols for Jointly-Badged Coursework Degrees* set out in section C4 of this policy paper, which require faculties to present a strong case for the standing of international partners to the APC when submitting course proposals;
- the *Guidelines for the Submission of Course Proposals* (the Blue Book) and the course and subject proposal proformas be amended to include information and protocols for joint badging of coursework degrees; and
- the APC requests TALQAC to develop an instrument to measure student satisfaction with jointly-badged degrees.

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