

ACADEMIC BOARD – MEETING 7/04 (26 AUGUST 2004)

Revised proposal for approving and publishing Variations to the Academic Year

Introduction

Most semester- or year-long subjects at the University of Melbourne are delivered within published semester dates, but occasionally it is academically desirable to conduct workshops, field trips or other educational experiences outside of these times (e.g. prior to semester, in the case of a semester-long subject, or between semesters in the case of a year-long subject). In some Faculties, it is desirable to vary the semester dates for an entire course in order to accommodate appropriate off-campus experiences.

The fact that most of these variations to schedules have occurred either for an entire course, or for only a small number of subjects within a course, has meant that significant scheduling problems have generally been avoided. Nonetheless, it is conceivable that significant timetable clashes could arise if a number of variations to the academic year are made independently at a subject level. In addition, students' out-of-semester commitments could interfere with their capacity to participate fully in a subject if they are unaware that a subject and/or course will be delivered outside of the published semester dates. The same problems could arise for weekend field trips within semester.

The following recommendations concern the approval and publication of proposed variations to the academic year and are intended to:

- (a) ensure that variations enhance the quality of the student learning experience in the course or subject, and also (where relevant) make adequate provision for student enrolment and progress processes;
- (b) identify any significant scheduling problems involving departments delivering part of a subject or course outside of published semester dates; and
- (c) ensure that students have access to important information about subject and/or course delivery outside of the normal semester dates and times and understand their responsibilities in relation to enrolment in such subjects and courses.

It should be noted that these recommendations largely serve to formalise current practice.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. A proposed elective subject change that involves the introduction of a requirement for students to attend classes or field trips outside of published semester dates will require approval by the relevant Faculty Associate Dean (Academic Programs) under delegated authority from the Chair of the Academic Programs Committee. The application for approval should indicate the academic reasons for the proposed variation and what steps will be taken to inform students about the consequences of the variation for enrolment and assessment in other subjects, as well as their responsibilities in relation to such enrolments. They should also include the proposed Handbook Subject Entry. It is expected that approvals will be given without time restrictions, so that re-application for variations to the academic year for a course and/or subject will normally only be necessary where further changes to variations in the academic year are proposed. Approved variations should be reported to the Academic Programs Committee in a Quarterly Report.
2. A proposed variation involving one or more core subjects within a course or program will require approval by the Chair of the Academic Programs Committee. The application for approval should: (a) indicate the academic reasons for the proposed change; (b) indicate what provisions will be made to handle student enrolment and progress processes (where relevant); (c) identify any potential problems for prospective students incurred by the out-of-semester schedule; (d) indicate what steps will be taken to inform students about the consequences of the variation for enrolment and assessment in other subjects, as well as the commitments they entail; and (e) include the proposed Handbook Subject Entry. It is expected that approvals will be given without time restrictions, so that re-application for variations to the academic year for a course and/or subject will normally only be necessary where further changes to variations in the academic year are proposed. Guidelines for approval of variations to the academic year by APC are listed below.

3. In the case of subjects that require students to attend classes and/or field trips outside of published semester dates (e.g. workshops and/or field trips prior to the start of semester), the “Contact” field in the Handbook Subject Entry should briefly indicate the nature of the requirement. (Volume 1 of the Blue Book should provide explicit advice on this point.)
4. In the case where variations apply at the course level, details of the variations should appear in the general course material in the Handbook rather than for each individual subject.
5. Volume 1 of the Blue Book should also recommend that explicit mention of within-semester field trips be made in the “Contact” field for Subject Handbook Entries.

Proposed guidelines for approval variations to the academic year

Proposed variations to the academic year for a course or subject are likely to be approved by the Academic Programs Committee where the following can be demonstrated (where relevant):

- Additional time outside of semester dates is required in order to incorporate aspects of a course or subject that are important to learning and/or professional accreditation in the subject/course (e.g. because of the need for practica or field work);
- The variation is necessary to permit travel to one or more destinations of significance and for which a visit will enhance learning;
- An intensive component will enhance learning in a subject that is otherwise taught during semester (e.g. an intensive skills training component);
- Information will be provided to students about the consequences of the variation for enrolments in other courses and subjects (e.g. likely timetable clashes, and a clear statement of the period in which other subject or course enrolments are unlikely to be possible);
- Information will be provided to students about their responsibilities for determining the impact of their enrolment in a subject or course with a variation on their potential enrolment or completion of other subjects; and
- Where the variation for a subject overlaps with any portion of a University examination or supplementary examination period, information will be provided to students about the consequences of the variation for assessment in other subjects. In particular, students will be advised that enrolment in a subject with an approved variation will not be grounds for special assessment arrangements in other subjects.

2nd August, 2004