

## STUDENT-STAFF LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Meeting #2, 2021

26 May 2021

For general publication

**Present:** Rhian Powell (Chair), Phiet Le (Secretary), Prof. Daniel Zizzo, Dr. Carl Sherwood, Prof. Alicia Rambaldi, Mr. Joe Symons, Brendan Fugate, Jennifer Min, Erin Allport, Abigail Smith, Lydia Ho, Megha Thakkar, Emma Grady and Nhu Tran

**1. Apologies:** A/Prof. Marco Faravelli, Phuong Linh Tran, Dakota Titmus, Jennifer Zhang, Arita Puriso, Guangyu Lyu, Nikhil Dugar and Jarrod Richards

**2. Confirmation of the minutes from the previous meeting:**

Yes

**3. Business arising from the previous meeting:**

N/A

**4. Business arising from this meeting:**

- i. The Student-Staff Liaison Committee (i.e., SSLC/Committee) has recently received 4 anonymous feedbacks from students who are all currently pursuing a degree in Economics at UQ. 2 out of the 4 feedbacks were about their overall experience, and they expressed their disappointment in the School of Economics (i.e., the School) when they first arrived to UQ (during the COVID-19 pandemic). To use their exact words, they said that they “felt isolated and neglected where previously they were excited and full of hope... The school did not communicate well regarding COVID changes and made no effort to make them feel welcome”. Regarding this issue, the School of Economics responded back that it “will look at sending out emails to students more frequently through the e-Currency newsletter (which is a broadcasting email tool that the School uses to communicate to all the Economics students about all the general events/announcements that it thinks might be important/helpful for the students to know)”. Furthermore, the School said that “lecturers, course coordinators/administrators and tutors are expected to make all the announcements that are specific to their courses on Blackboard, and that students should check their Blackboard sites regularly so that they do not miss any important information/updates from their courses”.
- ii. The School of Economics puts a lot of emphasis for students to have a global experience (whether it is through travelling or studying abroad, or international placements, or through the Borderless Competition) even during the pandemic.
  - a. As a Committee, our challenge is how we can help promoting that global experience, and the network between international and domestic students so that everyone can have greater opportunities.
  - b. Some SSLC members noted that students tend to hang out within their own group of friends (e.g., Chinese students tend to hang out with other

Chinese students, and Australian students tend to hang out with other Australian students).

- c. According to Prof. Daniel Zizzo and Dr. Carl Sherwood, for postgraduate cohort, 85-90% of the students are international students (and 2/3 of them are China). And for undergraduate cohort, 50-50.
  - d. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in one or two engagements/activities that promote activities between international and domestic students to be stopped. However, according to Prof. Daniel Zizzo, UQ is in a healthy financial position (compared to most universities in Australia).
  - e. The University forecasts that for semester 2, 2021, there will be some competitions amongst Australian universities in welcoming international students back to the campus. This is because most states in Australia have already begun their vaccination process. Therefore, whichever states control the COVID-19 pandemic better, then those states will be able to attract more international students (as they want to attend their classes in person rather than online so that they can have some interactions with their peers/tutors/lecturers, and they will choose to go to whichever states/universities that allow them to do so).
  - f. For now, regardless of whatever the decision(s) UQ makes for next semester, the School of Economics' long-term plan is still to engage students (even when classes are not fully in-person yet).
- iii. In regard to studying online, and how lecturers/course coordinators and tutors can communicate with their students, Erin Allport suggested the School to use Slack – a communication platform that can be downloaded/installed on smartphones, tablets and computers - for all of its ECON courses (both at an undergraduate and at a postgraduate levels). Rhian Powell backed up this suggestion. She said that she has seen it being used by UQ Ventures, and the implementation of Slack was very successful there.
- a. Megha Thakkar also suggested the School to use Microsoft Teams instead of Zoom when teaching its students (as it is more approachable for tutors). However, according to Prof. Daniel Zizzo and Dr. Carl Sherwood, UQ (not specifically to the School of Economics) is quite reluctant to move away from the old system into a new system that is not being supported by the ITS. The standard expectation of the IT system at UQ is that it must be accessible for everyone. In order to do this, it takes a lot of time to test and roll out a completely new system. Therefore, for now, Blackboard and Zoom are the best 2 options to teach and engage with students. Prof. Daniel Zizzo has asked Mr. Joe Symons to note down these 2 suggestions for future recommendations to UQ.
  - b. Phiet Le suggested the School to use EdX for all of its courses (as he saw the School has successfully implemented/used it for ECON1020). However, according to Dr. Carl Sherwood, this is a long-term goal for the School of Economics (as there are a lot of investments that are required for this initiative). At the moment, there are currently 6 undergraduate ECON courses use EdX. The School is planning to include some postgraduate courses into EdX in the future.

- c. Prof. Alicia Rambaldi suggested Padlet to complement with Blackboard. She saw that the Faculty of Science here at UQ has successfully implemented it, and thought that the School of Economics might benefit from it too (as it has been approved by the ITS before, and therefore, it will take less time for them to approve it again for the School to use). Again, Prof. Daniel Zizzo has asked Mr. Joe Symons to note down this suggestion for future recommendation to UQ.
- iv. Nhu Tran asked why doesn't the School gather contact details of the students and share them with everyone in the course so that they can get to know each other better. She said even before the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., when in-person lectures and tutorials were still running as normal), students came to class and they did not even know what was the person's name who sat next to them.
  - a. In responding to this suggestion from Nhu Tran, both Prof. Daniel Zizzo and Dr. Carl Sherwood said that there would be some privacy issues relating to this.
  - b. Dr. Carl Sherwood mentioned about 'Study Bubbles' – a student led program that is designed to provide an easy way for students affected by travel restrictions to meet up with other individuals studying in the same location. It is a great initiative, and was developed here at UQ. However, it has not gained much attention from students. The specific reason to why this is the case is unknown.
- v. Rhian Powell suggested that the School of Economics should host a mixer event at the beginning of each semester (either through Zoom or in-person) for every ECON courses/programs so that students, lecturers and tutors can get to know each other better before the semester starts.
  - a. None of the academic staff on the Committee has any issues with this suggestion. However, Prof. Daniel Zizzo suggested to trial this out for some of the courses/programs first (and if it is successful, then the School can roll out for all the courses/programs).
  - b. In addition to Prof. Daniel Zizzo's suggestion, Dr. Carl Sherwood suggested to contact Bec Wood to organise this (as O-Week for semester 2 is approaching soon).
- vi. As mentioned earlier in this meeting minutes, the SSLC has received 4 anonymous feedbacks from students who are all currently pursuing a degree in Economics at UQ. The other 2 feedbacks were specifically about 2 postgraduate courses that the School of Economics offers; they are ECON7430 and ECON7560.
  - a. For ECON7340, the student commented that "all lectures and tutorials are pre-recorded. The lectures are recordings from in person lectures (presumably from 2019). This makes the quality of the lecture worse, and when there are multiple equations on the PowerPoint slide, there is no indication which equation he is talking about". He/she "found this unengaging and slack considering the lengths other have gone to provide a quality learning experience".
  - b. For ECON7560, the student is "finding this course quite difficult to follow there is no set textbook and reading the list on ECP does not match the recommended readings being uploaded to Blackboard each week". When he/she "had a quiz and some of the questions referenced books not in the

recommended reading list on ECP (for example the quiz asked the students to say what Jared Diamond's argument was in *Guns, Germs and Steel* but this book is not on recommended/required on ECP or Blackboard). Looking through the lecture slides there was only one reference to the book and the note next to the authors' names on the slide did not match options given on quiz to respond to. If slides could be made more detailed/reference the specific things we are going to be assessed on this would be much better for revision". Rhian Powell backed this comment as she is currently taking this course this semester.

- c. In responding to both comments, Dr. Carl Sherwood has reached out to lecturers from both courses. Both of them replied back to him that they will look further into the issues, and will make the necessary adjustments.
- vii. Brendan Fugate suggested to the academic staff on the SSLC that the School of Economics should make ECON7950 to be optional instead of compulsory. This is because not many students will go into research and become an academic (and the research methods might be of little help to most postgraduate students).
- a. Both Prof. Daniel Zizzo and Dr. Carl Sherwood replied back that according to the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF), for level 7 (i.e., Masters) students, they must have 4 units relating to research (even if they do not want to go down the research/academic pathway). Therefore, ECON7950 is compulsory because it offers 2 of the 4 units that are required by the AQF (the other 2 units are spread out amongst postgraduate courses, and therefore, they can have the choice of which course they want to do to get that 2 units).
  - b. Furthermore, the School of Economics is currently reviewing when ECON7950 can be offered for students to take (as the course offers a lot of useful skills that will help the students to become more employable once they graduate from UQ).
- viii. Brendan Fugate also raised a question why some special elective courses are only being offered in certain year/semester (and some have been disappeared/removed completely).
- a. In answering this question, both Prof. Daniel Zizzo and Dr. Carl Sherwood commented that the factor that determines if a course should be offered in one or both semester (or should it continue to be offered or be discontinued) is the numbers of enrolment. If the numbers are low for several semesters, then School of Economics will review the course. If the School sees the course is not useful, then it will be discontinued.
  - b. The School does the reviewing process for all courses at the beginning of each semester.
- ix. Rhian Powell raised the question why casual researchers cannot supervise students. Furthermore, she suggested to create a section on the School of Economics' website to indicate all the staff that can (and are allowed to) supervise students to do research at the beginning of each semester.
- a. Prof. Zizzo commented that the 'Currency' e-newsletter lists all the academic staff that are not casual ones to let the students know that they are available (and allowed) to supervise students. It can further do this by

- indicating the program leader(s) so that the students know who they can go to talk to.
- b. Casual academic staff cannot supervise students mainly due to quality control (as the students who are being supervised have the potential to be an academic staff in the future).
- x. From the Academic Postgraduate Review that was conducted in the last SSLC meeting, Dr. Carl Sherwood commented that:
- a. Choice is a big factor that lets the students choose whether or not they should do a Master's degree here at UQ. The School of Economics has noted down this point.
  - b. For Cost-Benefit Analysis (for both undergraduate and postgraduate levels), the School has made it compulsory for the students to take.

**5. Actions to do before the next meeting**

N/A

**6. Next meeting**

Semester 2, 2021 (the exact date is TBA)