

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on **9th June 2009** at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer (Chair)
Senior Lecturer, Dr Aileen Douglas
Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate)
Dr Claire Laudet, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Dr Irene Walsh, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Dr Jacco Thijssen, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Dr Zuleika Rodgers, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Ms Ruth Torode, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Dr Jim Quinn, School of Business
Dr Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Dr Damian Murchan, School of Education
Dr Jeremy Jones, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Dr Ian Sanders, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Ignatius McGovern, School of Physics
Dr Daniela Zisterer, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Dr Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science
Dr Anne Marie Healy, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Johnnie Gratton, Director of TSM
Professor Alan Matthews, Director of BESS
Professor Pete Coxon, Director of Science (TR071)
Mr Hugh Sullivan, Education Officer, Students' Union
Dr Brian Foley, Director of CAPSL
Dr Jacqueline Potter, Academic Development Manager

Apologies: Dr Simon Trezise, School of Drama, Film and Music
Dr Paul Delaney, School of English
Professor Ciaran Brady, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Ivana Bacik, School of Law
Dr Kevin O'Kelly, School of Engineering
Dr Michael Lyons, School of Chemistry
Professor Shaun McCann, School of Medicine
Dr Fiona Timmins, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Mr Ashley Cooke, Students' Union representative

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Mr Trevor Peare and Ms Michelle Garvey (for UGS/08-09/049)

UGS/08-09/046 Minutes of the meeting of the 28th April 2009 were approved.

UGS/08-09/047 Matters arising

(i) *UGS/08-09/038* The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that the proposal for the new course in Deaf Studies was approved by Council at its meeting of 6th May 2009.

UGS/08-09/048 Draft report of the Planning Group Taskforce on Student Retention: a draft of the *Report on Retention*, dated June 2009, from the Retention Taskforce, was circulated. A response document from the Students' Union was tabled.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that the Planning Group, a sub-group of Executive Officers' Group recommended, at its meetings of the 2nd and 16th April 2009, that a taskforce be set up to examine issues surrounding retention and income lost to College through undergraduate and postgraduate students not completing their courses of

study. He invited the Academic Secretary to speak to the document, noting that she had been the primary drafter of the circulated report.

The Academic Secretary outlined the most salient aspects of the report. She explained that it was necessary to define what is meant by retention and non-completion. She noted that there are four main exit points from a student's course of study, these are:

- *Transfer to another course*: students transferring to another Trinity course are in fact retained by the College.
- *Off-books*: students may be granted a period off the books of the College either to re-sit examinations or for personal/academic reasons. Such students are retained within College unless they withdraw or are made withdrawn by the College.
- *Withdrawn*: where the student has not completed his/her course and has left College. It includes students who leave and do not inform College, students who leave and have informed College (often for reasons constituting student cases), students who are excluded due to examination failures and students who withdraw but are re-admitted to another Trinity course at a later stage.
- *Deceased*

Therefore, retention refers to all students who are retained within College and includes students who transfer to another Trinity course and those students who are off-books. Those who withdraw or are 'made withdrawn', that is to say those who do not complete their studies within the institution, are generally referred to as 'non-completion' in the literature on retention.

She explained that four separate cohorts of students have been analysed from a non-completion perspective, these are the new entrant cohorts of 2001/02, 2002/03, 2003/04 and 2004/05. The analysis shows that approximately 15.4% of the total number of students over the four cohorts did not complete their studies in Trinity. This figure has been broken down by the standing of students when they exited. The majority of these at 10.5%, did not complete their first year, 3.6% did not complete their second year, 1.2% did not complete their third year and 0.1% did not complete their fourth year.

The incidence of students exiting College during a period off-books was examined and it was found that a significant proportion of these students did not return. Of those who were coded as off-books, taking examinations, 30% did not complete. Of those students going off the books, and not taking examinations, 28% did not complete.

In looking at gender comparisons over the four cohorts it was found that proportionately more females complete their studies than males. The average percentage of female students not completing their studies was 14% compared with 17.5% of males.

Geographically, those students registered with home addresses in Leinster have the highest non-completion rate. However, this is not surprising as the majority of Trinity students come from this region.

Referring to data concerning non-completions in the 2007/08 cohort of new entrants she pointed out that the rate of withdrawal is fairly evenly spread across the different CAO points ranges. It was cautioned that four years of data has not been gathered in relation to this cohort. Approximately 75% of those who have withdrawn from the 2007/08 cohort received their first choice course preference. She referred to *An Inquiry into Withdrawal from College: A study conducted at Trinity College Dublin*, a study conducted in 2000 and published in 2002 by the Student Counselling Service, which found that many students withdrawing in the Junior Freshman year attributed their non-completion to their having made the wrong course choice.

She commented that retention figures for postgraduate taught courses appear to be very good, but further analysis to establish trends would be necessary. Analysis of the numbers of students registered in the 2005/06 cohort shows that an average of 93% are retained. Further data concerning students taking research postgraduate degrees shows that there has been a significant decrease in the number of students exceeding their research deadline.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Academic Secretary for speaking to the data and findings of the draft report. He invited the attention of the meeting to *Appendix 4* of the draft report which shows the extrapolated financial position of the College up to 2014 when considered in the context of current retention figures and when considered against retention figures set at 85%, 90% and 95%, respectively. It is seen that improving Trinity's rate of retention would help to significantly decrease Trinity's year-on-year deficit.

He briefly summarised the draft recommendations, highlighting the following:

- A significant proportion of non-completing students cite wrong course choice as their main reason for withdrawing. Course information contained in the prospectus and course handbooks should be updated to better reflect the reality of programme content and that this information should be easily accessible on the College website.
- In relation to the first year experience greater effort must be taken to track students. More should be done to try to identify students at risk of leaving College.
- Where courses experience a high level of non-completion the relevant schools should consider implementing a year long course specific orientation programme for Junior Freshman students.

The Director of the Two Subject Moderatorship (TSM) thanked the Academic Secretary for including information from a study of retention conducted by the TSM Office, which had been considered by the TSM Management Committee. However, he explained that the views of that committee and some aspects of the data were not clearly represented in the draft report. In this regard it was suggested that the TSM specific section be removed from the final version of the report.

The document was discussed in detail and the following comments and queries were raised:

- More should be done to liaise with career guidance counsellors at second level as they are often the first point of contact for prospective students.
- Further supports must be put in to place for students experiencing difficulties and the implementation of mechanisms to detect struggling students early is essential.
- It was queried if analysis had been carried out specifically in relation to those students transferring to other Trinity courses.
- It was suggested that students withdrawing due to failing the year should be distinguished from those who withdraw for other reasons.
- It was commented, in relation to one course, that the delivery of good quality tutorials and small group teaching along with increased personal contact with senior members of staff, in the Freshman years, has proven to be very beneficial.
- It was suggested that the re-introduction of third-level fees, as proposed, would cause retention figures to naturally improve.
- The importance of orientation programmes for Freshman students was emphasised. The current spend per head on student orientation is quite small. The orientation programme should go beyond Freshers Week and last for at least the first full term.
- The draft recommendations in the report do not take account of the existing demands on the Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) and Tutors.
- The tutorial service is not currently used to its full capacity.
- Students could be provided with self-assessment checklists to allow them to assess their own difficulties. The checklist document could provide information on relevant support services.

The Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) recommended the draft *Report on Retention* to the University Council subject to consideration of comments made when the final version is drafted.

UGS/08-09/049 **Trinity Inclusive Curriculum:** The *Summary Report on the Trinity Inclusive Curriculum Audits and Student Survey*, dated May 2009, was circulated. Ms Michelle Garvey, the Inclusive Curriculum Development Officer attended the meeting to speak to the item.

She informed the meeting that the Trinity Inclusive Curriculum project is funded through the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF). The main objective of the project is to meet the needs of Trinity's increasingly diverse student population by incorporating inclusive principles into mainstream curricula rather than specific adjustments being made on a student-by-student basis. It aims to achieve this through raising awareness of inclusivity amongst College staff, through the introduction of online guidelines and resources to help staff create a more inclusive learning environment and the introduction of an inclusive curriculum evaluation tool.

There are three main principles of the Inclusive Curriculum:

- Students should be viewed holistically, taking account of social and cultural backgrounds.
- Multiple approaches to teaching methodology, teaching materials, and assessment are necessary to meet the needs of a diverse student body.
- The curriculum should be designed to be student centred and proactive in dismantling barriers to learning.

She informed the meeting that during the first phase of the project she gathered a wide range of statistical data on Trinity's students which are categorised as from under-represented groups in society. Trinity's student population (undergraduate and postgraduate) contains 4% of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, 4% of students with a disability, 6% of mature students and 16% of students from outside the state. She referred the meeting to the statistics derived from a teaching and learning survey, conducted through this project, and highlighted that 74% of respondents were generally happy with their academic experiences, and 69% stated that there were good academic supports in TCD. However, respondents also indicated areas for improvements. A significant proportion of the respondents stated that they wanted timely and accurate information and the opportunity to provide feedback on their course. In terms of available facilities, 60% of respondents stated that they were not aware of the group work facilities in College.

In addition to the teaching and learning survey the Inclusive Curriculum Development Officer also conducted an audit of student handbooks and reading lists across College through which 61 programme handbooks were examined. She stated that there were many examples of good practice found and these were used to help develop the handbook template found at the back of the circulated document. She advised the committee that there is no consistency in the location of handbooks on the College web pages and as a result students may have difficulties in locating these.

She explained that the next phase of the project is starting through which it is planned that inclusive principles will start to be imbedded across the various College programme curricula. A dedicated website is being developed which will contain tips and tools for incorporating inclusiveness within the mainstream curriculum. She stated that the project requires a number of academic programmes for a pilot involving the use of a curriculum evaluation tool and asked that representatives of interested schools contact her for more information.

The following comments and queries were raised:

- It is thought that many students do not read their course handbooks and if further details are added there would be an even a smaller likelihood.
- In some courses one handbook is sufficient to cover all years, in others, such as Science (TR071), it was explained that a hierarchy of handbooks is in place. This is necessary as students take two general years followed by two discipline specific years. It would not be possible to draft one handbook document to cover all four years of TR071.
- There was general agreement that handbooks should be located in accessible places on the College website.
- It was thought that the insertion of full reading lists would make the handbook too cumbersome. In response, the Inclusive Curriculum Development Officer stated that full lists do not have to be included but the titles of key texts should be provided for students who wish to read ahead over the summer months.

The Senior Lecturer affirmed the importance of course handbooks and stated that necessary information should be included. However, she cautioned against rigidity in the content, explaining that there should be a degree of flexibility to allow freedom for the pedagogic process. The meeting also cautioned against including general regulations in course handbooks that are published in the Calendar to avoid error and misinterpretation.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Ms Garvey for attending the meeting to speak to this item.

UGS/08-09/050 Undergraduate teaching: Draft data relating to the *Distribution of Staff Grades that Taught Undergraduate Students in 2007/2008*, *Undergraduate Teaching Workload Analysis* and *Average Undergraduate Teaching Hours in 2007/2008*, dated 5th June 2009, was circulated. A memorandum, *Undergraduate teaching analysis*, from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, dated 9th June 2009, was tabled.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, introducing this item, noted that there was growing public sentiment that undergraduate teaching is being displaced by research activities in third-level institutions. At a meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science in 2008, TDs (Teachta Dála) and Senators expressed this concern and the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that this matter was discussed previously at Council on the 3rd December 2008 and USC on 10th December 2008.

In compiling the circulated data, he explained that data had been extracted from CMIS (centralised timetabling system) and sent to Schools for verification and correction.

He referred the Committee to the table *Distribution of Staff Grades that Taught Undergraduate Students in 2007/2008* and stated that it could be seen that the vast majority of the academic staff of the College teach on undergraduate courses. There existed a number of temporary situations where academic staff did not teach in 2007/08 and these have been clarified by way of footnotes. These cover situations such as sabbaticals and members of staff taking up College and University officerships. He informed the committee that the second table, *Undergraduate Teaching Workload Analysis*, provided information concerning the division of hours taught across grades in the context of different categories of teaching, such as lectures, seminars, tutorials, laboratory work and placements. He further explained that data in the last table, *Average Undergraduate Teaching Hours in 2007/08*, was derived by dividing the number of hours presented in the second table by the number of staff identified in the first table to work out the average teaching loads of professors, associate professors, senior lecturers and lecturers in each school. In some cases this average is skewed due to leaves of absence.

He posed a number of questions to the meeting and explained that it was intended that policy recommendations in this area would emanate from the USC to be considered by Council. He asked the meeting to consider whether:

- College should adopt a policy that all professors teach undergraduate students.
- College should adopt a policy that, in so far as possible, professors teach courses to Junior Freshman and Senior Freshman students to impart their enthusiasm and expertise in their areas of study.
- College should adopt a policy, in so far as possible, that new lecturers be given a reduced teaching load to enable them to progress their research in the first three to five years.
- The USC has a view on the teaching of undergraduates by non-academic (non-faculty) staff.

In response there was general consensus that senior members of staff, such as professors, should provide some teaching in the Freshman years as this should help to inspire students. Professors are often the most confident and most able to deliver lectures to large class numbers. It was advised that any policy recommendation in this area should not be too rigidly drafted as the ability to assign a professor to Freshman lectures will depend on whether that professor's area of expertise coincides with Freshman modules, the staffing situations in specific schools and the particular strengths of specific professors.

It was considered that professors, who are not research active, should take up much fuller teaching loads.

It was recognised that larger Freshman lectures were a major draw on the time of new staff members and it was agreed that such staff members should not be overburdened whilst they assimilate to their new role and responsibilities. However, it was commented that providing a reduced teaching load for a three to five year period was too extensive and could establish an unrealistic teaching load expectation in their future careers. In this regard, the proposed time period, in which new members of staff should receive a lesser teaching load, should be reduced.

In response to the question regarding the appropriateness of using a significant amount of teaching in the 'other' category a number of members involved in professional courses explained that the use of staff in this category is absolutely necessary, especially in the facilitation of professional placements. These may be staff members of other institutions like hospitals and schools. It was widely accepted that it is appropriate to use postgraduate teaching assistants for tutorials and seminars and it was commented that they often relate very well to undergraduate students in these teaching situations. However, in relation to the delivery of lectures it was considered that these should only be delivered by teaching assistants in exceptional circumstances.

The Academic Secretary commented that the data was still in draft format and that if further corrections were required by Schools that she should be contacted ahead of the next Council circulation. She further commented that the exercise had proved to be very onerous and, given the information returned from individual schools, it is clear that CMIS is not being used to its full capacity across College

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Academic Secretary and members of her staff for their work in collating the data presented.

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The Undergraduate Studies Committee made the following recommendations for Council's consideration:

1. To counter the perception that teaching of undergraduates has been displaced by other activities, the University Council should affirm, as a policy of the University, that all Professors teach undergraduate students. This policy would also apply on a reduced contact hours basis for those Professors who are employed primarily for research.
2. Professors should teach Junior Freshman and Senior Freshman courses, if possible. This would ensure that Freshman students engage with leaders in the discipline at the beginning of their university careers.
3. New Lecturers should be given a reduced teaching load in their first year of employment to enable them to develop high quality teaching materials and to develop their research.
4. Postgraduate teaching assistants should only be permitted to give lectures in exceptional circumstances.
5. An assessment of teaching distribution across staff grades should be conducted annually and reviewed by Council.

UGS/08-09/051 Learning Outside the Classroom: Due to time constraints, this item was deferred.

UGS/08-09/052 Broad Curriculum: A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, *Broad Curriculum 2009/10*, dated 3rd June 2009, with an attached Broad Curriculum module proposal in *Science, Technology and Society*, was circulated.

a) Discontinuation of awarding marks based on attendance

The Committee agreed that the practice of awarding marks based on attendance in Broad Curriculum modules should be discontinued as it can lead to anomalously high marks.

b) Broad Curriculum module proposal

The module proposal was recommended by USC subject to:

- The assessment criteria for the placement element being clearly laid out for students. The document should specify the skills, abilities, and knowledge to be demonstrated by students on these placements and the method(s) for assessing these.
- It was noted that the proposal has yet to be updated to the new academic year structure. Timetabling concerns were raised and given its ECTS value of five credits it was strongly suggested that the module should take place within one teaching semester rather than spanning two.
- It was noted that the document circulated contained no module outcomes. These should be developed before the module is delivered.
- The number of places available on this module should be specified.

UGS/08-09/053 Any other business: There was no other business.

UGS/08-09/054 Items for noting: The USC noted the following document circulated for information:

- (i) *Report on a Non-satisfactory Student*, revised form and procedure. Further minor amendments were noted.
- (ii) Revised Calendar entry for the new course in Political Science and Geography.

signature

date