Perceptions and Expectations of English Requirements and Support (PEERS) Project Implementation Working Party

Final Report

April 2009

The PEERS Project Implementation Working Party was created in mid-2008 by the Teaching and Learning Committee to develop a range of strategies for informing international students about educational norms at UWA.

Membership

Professor Denise Chalmers (Director, Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning) – Chair
Ms Siri Barrett-Lennard (Language and Learning Skills Adviser, Student Services)
Mr Dominic Rose (President, Guild of Undergraduates)
Mr Chris Massey (Principal, Currie Hall)
Ms Yola Szymakowski (Associate Dean (First Year), Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics)
Ms Clare Peter (2008) / Ms Jacqueline Flowers (2009) – Executive Officer

Scope

By Resolution 08/12 the Teaching and Learning Committee resolved:

i. That a group nominated by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) develop a range of strategies for informing international students about educational norms at UWA and to further consider the establishment and promotion of online wikis for discipline specific words and definitions

ii. That the group report back to the Teaching and Learning Committee in due course

In so resolving, members noted that, as requested in Recommendation 3 of the 2008 Perceptions and Expectations of English Requirements and Support (PEERS) Report, the University had given priority to initiating and extending programs that foster friendship between international and domestic students pre-departure and through students’ study and that a number of initiatives had been funded from the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund.

The working party was to consider the recommendations arising from the 2008 PEERS Report prepared by Siri Barrett-Lennard, English Language and Study Skills Advisor and Caroline Bulsara, Lecturer

Recommendation 1:
That a group nominated by the DVC (Education) and the PVC (Teaching and Learning) develop a range of strategies for informing international students about educational norms at UWA
**Recommendation 2:**
That the Teaching and Learning Committee support measures to establish and promote online wikis of discipline specific words and definitions to be hosted on *node.live*.

**Recommendation 3:**
That the university give high priority to initiating and extending programs that foster friendship between international and domestic students pre-departure and throughout students’ study.

A number of other projects and initiatives underway at the University have contributed to realising the objectives of the original PEERS project, and to implementing the recommendations arising from that project. Much of the work for Recommendation 3 has been carried out outside of the PEERS Working Party and is ongoing. The Implementation Working Party - Review of English Language Skills of UWA Graduates, has also been considering similar issues. Specifically, Recommendation 16(a) being addressed by this working party is to identify ‘activities that might be undertaken to increase the extent of interaction between Australian and international students’. As Dr Bruce Mackintosh was a member on the English Language skills working party and the PEERS working party it was agreed that these would be handled together.

At the first meeting of the PEERS working party on 20 August 2008, it was therefore resolved to refine the scope such that:

1. The working party would focus on Recommendation 1. Recommendation 2 would be considered after the decisions have been made on recommendation 1. Recommendation 3 would not be considered by this working party, as the Implementation Working Party - Review of English Language Skills of UWA Graduates was considering this item.

2. Within recommendation 1, the PEERS Working Party would focus initially on two categories:
   - English language expectations
     - Teachers expectations of students, eg
       - Critical thinking
       - Independent learning
       - Interactive classroom participation
     - Students of teachers

Following consideration, and given work being undertaken at Student Services through the English Language Corner and Cheryl Lange’s work in developing on-line writing modules with Faculties, that Recommendation 2 (online wikis) would not be further considered by the working party.

**Meetings**


The working party called for and reviewed materials and information currently provided to international and local students at UWA, reviewed resources provided in other Australian and international universities, and received reports from other initiatives underway across the university addressing these issues.
Related projects

In the course of the review of UWA practices and resources, a number of projects and initiatives at the University were identified as contributing to the achievement of the objectives of the original PEERS project, and to implementing the recommendations arising from that project. These were a significantly revised orientation program – a collaborative effort between Student Services, the International Centre and the Faculties; web resources developed by Language Learning and Research Skills (LL&RS) in Student Services – the English Language Corner; the introduction of the UniLinks program - also a Student Services initiative; and the Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Practice Toolkit project - initiated by the Implementation Working Party for the Review of English Language Skills of UWA Graduates.

Orientation

The PEERS Working Party were regularly informed on the significant planned changes made by the University’s Orientation Week in 2009 which were designed to engage new students and integrate international students into the orientation activities of the University. This significantly revised program was reported at the March PEERS working party meeting by Ms Narelle Palmer (Senior Project Officer, UniLink/UniStar/UniMentor). A formal evaluation of the program is now being conducted by Student Services (the Student Guild has also carried out an evaluation of their activities). The expanded program combined international students with local students into the orientation program and provided significantly more activities at the University and faculty levels. The full program will again be run in the second semester in recognition of the significant numbers of students who now join the university in the second semester. Large numbers of students were involved in the revised Orientation week, and the informal feedback to date has been very positive.

The PEERS Working Party considers that the work initiated by the Orientation Committee and its stakeholders, along with the Faculty’s local orientation activities, has made a significant impact in fostering friendships between local and international students, and providing an initial opportunity for international students to integrate into University life. Whilst there may be changes to the new Orientation week following the evaluations to be undertaken by Student Services and the Student Guild, these changes are likely to be modifications rather than significant changes. An area already identified as needing further attention is that of getting information to international students about the orientation program.

The PEERS Working Party congratulates the Orientation Week team and the Faculty teams on theses initiatives and their commitment to further enhancing the program.

English Language Corner

Siri Barrett-Lennard has commenced development of a new web resource for students for whom English is a second language. This is designed to assist students to improve their English language skills.

The English Language Corner initiative provides UWA students with resources relating to speaking, listening, reading, writing, and grammar and vocabulary development in English, in a variety of formats and medias, along with hotlinks to a wide-range of internal and external support already available. It also outlines student and staff responsibilities for English language development, and provides information on testing. Links to assist UWA staff are currently under construction and sections for students on learning in a new academic culture are to be added.
The English Language Corner is still in the fledgling stages of development and can be accessed at http://www.studentservices.uwa.edu.au/ss/learning/studying_smarter/English.

**UniLink**

An initiative by Student Services is the ‘UniLink” scheme, which links students who are new to Perth with current students – this includes both international and regional students. Students are linked pre-departure via email, and then have the opportunity to continue the relationship with their mentor when they arrive in Perth, including a regular ‘catch up club’ organised by the UniLink team. This program was offered for the first time in Semester 1, 2009. 127 international students took advantage of this program in Semester 1, 2009 – 65% of the total number of new students who participated. The program will run again in Semester 2, alongside the large UniMentor program which has run for over ten years. At mid-year all new international students are linked with a mentor as it has been found that this group in particular finds it very hard to break into groups who are already settled from Semester 1. The program will run year-round, and is expected to peak for undergraduate students at the beginning of each semester. Further development of the UniLink program for the future includes the development of enhanced training for mentors including cultural workshops in unison with UniMentor and also Youth Mental Health First Aid and Communication workshops for volunteers. The UniLink Project Officer Narelle Palmer is also currently developing a method of gathering "progress reports" from volunteer mentors.

The PEERS Working Party commends this initiative of the Diversity and Transition group in Student Services.

**Cultural diversity toolkit**

The Review of English Language Skills of UWA Graduates Working Party has been granted funding by the Teaching and Learning Committee for the purchase of a licence and the development of the Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Practice Toolkit that was originally developed by Flinders University, and has subsequently been developed for use in the University of Queensland. UWA will draw on the excellent materials that have already been developed and will situate these where appropriate in the UWA context as well as developing specific resources identified as relevant to the Western Australian and UWA staff and student body.

This toolkit is designed to equip staff with the necessary skills and understandings to enable them to teach more effectively, through taking account of the needs of students from low SES, rural and isolated areas, students with a disability and non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as supporting students in their interaction with other students from these diverse backgrounds. It is also designed to provide advice for administrative and research staff when interacting and advising these students, thereby providing an appropriate study and learning environment for all students.

The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning is coordinating this project which is due to be completed by the end of 2009.

**Outcomes of the PEERS Working Party**

**Student and Staff Expectations – the Academic Learning Experience**

The PEERS Working Party has concentrated its efforts on the development of a set of university-wide expectations for staff and students relating to educational norms at UWA.
The working party considered orientation and other student manuals from a range of sources across Australia and from within UWA, and noted that the information currently provided to students in handbooks and other faculty/school manuals at UWA mainly provides functional information for new students (‘how to’) rather than information about learning and teaching practices, norms and expectations.

From consideration of materials from a range of other universities, the working party saw merit in conveying the university/teacher expectations through the student and staff voice, and noted an opportunity to produce a central student resource which could be particularised by faculty/discipline if considered necessary, but would retain common terminology across disciplines and would describe the expectations for both staff and students within the UWA academic learning experience.

The resource should provide students with:

- University (general) statements of roles and expectations, e.g. the role of the unit coordinator/lecturer/tutor etc.
- Academic learning experiences students might encounter, e.g. lecture, tutorial, group work, Web/eLearning, Assessment and learning from feedback etc.

A draft document has been prepared by the working party which sets out the draft text such a resource might take, and provides text which can be further refined. (Appendix A).

It is suggested that short excerpts in the words of international students (text/oral) would be a useful inclusion to add authenticity to the text.

**Recommendations**

The PEERS Working Party recommends that:

1. the Teaching and Learning Committee refer the document “The UWA Experience: Educational Expectations and Practices” which is Appendix A of this final report, to the new Student Advising working party (Chaired by Mr Jon Stubbs) and Student Services, for further development and implementation as appropriate.
2. the resource be developed as a web based resource with downloadable print resources and circulated widely to all students but international students in particular post enrolment.
3. the resource to be developed and maintained as a central resource but have the facility to be linked to faculty specific resources and that Faculties be encouraged to use the resource in their advice and materials to students, particularised by discipline if deemed necessary.
APPENDIX A

The UWA experience: educational expectations and practices

1. Educational Principles

2. The active student-centred learning approach at UWA

3. Roles and expectations of UWA Teaching staff and students
   • Unit coordinators
   • Lecturers, tutors and demonstrators
   • Peer leaders and mentors

4. Learning experiences
   • Lectures, seminars, tutorials, laboratories and workshops
   • Field trips, work-based learning and practicums
   • Web based learning modules for ethical scholarship and research

5. Guidelines for study
   • Independent study and time spent on studying
   • Interactive and collaborative learning and group work
   • Assessment and learning from feedback

6. Academic study, English language and information literacy skills
   • Academic skills, critical thinking and STUDYSmarter
   • English language development and the English Language Corner
   • Library and online resources
1 Educational Principles, University of Western Australia*

Students at The University of Western Australia are encouraged and facilitated to develop the ability and desire:

- to master the subject matter, concepts and techniques of their chosen discipline(s) at internationally-recognised levels and standards;
- to acquire the skills required to learn, and to continue through life to learn, from a variety of sources and experiences;
- to adapt acquired knowledge to new situations;
- to communicate in English clearly, concisely and logically;
- to acquire the skills needed to embrace rapidly-changing technologies in a global environment;
- to think and reason logically and creatively;
- to undertake problem identification, analysis and solution;
- to question accepted wisdom and be open to new ideas and possibilities;
- to acquire mature judgement and responsibility in ethical, moral, social, and practical, as well as academic matters;
- to work independently and in a team;
- to acquire cross-cultural and other competencies to take a citizenship and leadership role in the local, national or international community.

*Extract from the University of Western Australia Strategic Plan (in accordance with Academic Council Resolution 73/02)

To assist you in attaining these educational principles throughout your time studying at the University, you will engage in a range of teaching and learning experiences. The more common experiences and roles you can expect to experience are outlined below. These are described in general terms to assist you in understanding the roles of the staff in the University and their expectations of you.

Please note: Not all units and people in these roles will be the same and expectations will vary. These are provided as a general guide only and are not binding in any way.

2 The active student-centred learning approach at UWA

The units and courses at the University of Western Australia are based on an active student-centred approach to teaching and learning. To be successful in your studies at UWA it is important to understand what this means. Essentially, this approach means that while your teachers will guide and facilitate your learning and provide you with tools to critically evaluate ideas and experiences, you, the student, are responsible for your own learning and that you need to take an active learning approach to your studies. UWA provides services and resources, but it is up to you to use these services and resources and to apply what you learn. The most important person in your UWA learning experience is not your teacher: it's you.

Active student-centred learning will equip you with the tools for becoming a life-long learner. Practically, it means things like:

- the lecturers and tutors will guide you, rather than tell you what to do
- you are expected to ask questions and contribute your own ideas, especially during tutorials
there will usually be several different kinds of assessments, not just final exams
you will often need to do your own research, e.g. in the library, and to complete projects
it is important to be able to support arguments, rather than just learn facts
you will sometimes be required to work on assignments in a group with other students

An important aspect of active student-centred learning is taking advantage of opportunities that are offered to you. For example, workshops and resources are offered regularly by Student Services and the Library. These are a great way to find out ways to learn and study more effectively. Keep your eyes open for workshops that you could benefit from. Check the UWA website regularly for on-campus workshops and on-line resources.

3 Roles and expectations of UWA teaching staff and students

Teaching staff at UWA may have a number of roles. It is helpful for you to understand these roles so that you might know where to go for the most appropriate help and support. These are the most common roles of your teachers and their expectations of you as a student. The roles below are described in general terms only, may vary across Faculties, and are not binding in any way.

Unit coordinators
Unit coordinators have the overall responsibility for the teaching and running of units. They organise the unit outline, timetable and assessment tasks. In addition, they coordinate the teaching by lecturers and tutors and the marking of your assessment tasks. Some units have several lectures and tutors, particularly if the unit has a large number of students enrolled in it. You may not have very much contact with the unit coordinator if this is the case. In many units, however, the unit coordinator is also your lecturer.

The unit coordinator expects you to:
- ensure you are correctly enrolled in the unit
- read your unit outline
- understand the university policies referred to in your unit outline
- attend the scheduled sessions
- advise the University and the unit coordinator if there are any changes in your circumstances that might affect your capacity to study the unit
- demonstrate academic integrity when you undertake your assessment tasks, that is, all the work you submit should be your own and you should acknowledge and use source material appropriately
- seek help if you need it

Lecturers, tutors and demonstrators
You can expect your lecturers, tutors and demonstrators to provide you with expertise in the discipline and guidance to your learning of the unit you are studying. Lecturers provide you with a unit outline and a timetable of teaching and learning activities that you will undertake over the period of study. They introduce you to the main themes of the unit and guide you in ways of thinking that are important in your area of study. They will
advise you of their availability and how you can contact them and will direct you to others who can provide you with assistance. Because lecturers generally cater for larger numbers of students than other classes, you will usually have less personal contact with your lecturer than you do with other teaching staff.

Other teaching staff include tutors and/or demonstrators who work under the guidance of the lecturer and/or the unit coordinator. Tutors explore themes of the unit in more depth and run seminars and discussion activities that provide you with opportunities to engage with other students in the unit. Demonstrators coordinate practical hands-on activities, e.g. in a laboratory or field setting, to assist your learning. Both tutors and demonstrators provide you with guidance on assessment tasks and will advise you who you can contact for further assistance. They may also mark your assessment tasks.

Lectures, tutors and demonstrators expect you to:

- regularly attend the scheduled sessions (on campus and on-line)
- manage your own time
- submit work when it is due
- participate actively in class discussions and other learning activities, including online
- study and work together with other students in and out of class
- seek and access help when it is needed from the relevant university services
- contact them when you need assistance

**Peer leaders and mentors**

Peer leaders and mentors are more senior students in your area of study who may assist you in your studies and who you can ask for advice. Peer leader and mentor arrangements vary. Some, like those involved in the UniMentor program organised by Student Services, are volunteers who can assist you in finding your way around the University and act as a general point of contact during the initial weeks of your study. Others, like UniSkills leaders, facilitate study groups specific to individual units. UniSkills is coordinated by Student Services for students from designated equity groups and for those from outside Perth who may require extra assistance with transition. Your own immediate study area may also have peer leaders who run unit-specific study groups.

Peer leaders and mentors expect you to:

- attend scheduled sessions
- participate actively in learning activities
- study and work together with other students
- seek and access help when it is needed from the relevant university services
4 Learning experiences

Learning experiences you may encounter during your time studying at the university include some of the following contexts. These will vary depending on the discipline, teachers, and unit of study and so should be considered as providing you with a general description only.

Lectures, seminars, tutorials, laboratories and workshops

Lectures, seminars, tutorials, labs and workshops represent different types of classes. General descriptors are given below, but it is worth noting that different modes of instruction and learning may be combined or overlap depending on your area of study.

Lectures usually take place in a lecture theatre and have a large number of students attending. Because of this there is limited opportunity to talk personally to the teacher. A number of lecturers use visuals, e.g. PowerPoint slides, and audio-visuals during the lecture, or they may make them available on-line for you to download prior to the lecture. This is worthwhile doing so you can add your own notes to the ones provided. Many of the lectures are recorded on Lectopia, the University’s online system for capturing lectures, so that you can revise and review the lecture later. You can access these recordings anytime by logging onto the WebCT at the University.

Seminars are presentation and discussion sessions run by students. These may be students in your own class, or more senior students in your Faculty. Seminars provide you with opportunities to demonstrate and test your own learning. When you are presenting a seminar, it is important to prepare well so that you have a clear structure for your talk and can deliver it in the time allowed. It is quite common to also be required to prepare a number of questions for discussion, and to lead the discussion that follows your talk. Seminars may occur during tutorials, or may be scheduled separately.

Tutorial classes are generally smaller than lectures and require your active participation. You will probably be required to complete set tasks to prepare for tutorials, such as completing required reading tasks and taking notes. It is a good idea to write down questions as they occur to you when you are reading, so that you can bring these into the discussion. The idea in tutorial classes is to learn from other students as well as the tutor, and for this reason, extended question-and-answer sessions, group work discussion activities, project work and/or problem-based learning are likely to be included. Deep learning occurs most when you are actively engage in and apply the knowledge you are learning. The more effort, therefore, you put into actively preparing for and participating in tutorial classes, the more you will learn from the unit.

Laboratory sessions are classes where you engage in direct research. They give you a chance to test the theories and ideas you are learning in class in controlled settings. Labs usually begin with an explanation and possibly a demonstration of what is required. These are especially important if you are using specialised equipment to conduct experiments. Most labs also require you to write reports on what happened and on your findings. The format of lab reports varies widely, so be sure to follow the specific instructions for your unit.

Workshops generally include both a component of instruction and active learning tasks. These tasks may require you to physically design, construct or do something. Active participation is required.
Field trips, work-based learning and practicums
Field trips, work-based learning and practicums allow you to put into practice what you are learning in the classroom in real-world settings. For this reason, they are considered valuable components of learning.

Field trips take you out of the classroom and into the field related to your area of study. In these field trips, you normally carry out a variety of tasks related to your profession. Afterwards, you are expected to report on what you have learned.

Work-based learning is a generic term used to describe learning that takes place in the workplace rather than in the classroom. Some units, especially professional units, require you to report on your experiences in the workplace and to compare these to the theories and ideas you are exposed to in class.

Practicum is the term used to describe a unit that is wholly work-based. In this unit, you complete work-based projects that provide credit points towards your studies. You will normally have both an academic and a workplace supervisor and will need to negotiate your project and to demonstrate that it meets the learning outcomes for the practicum. A report from both you and your workplace supervisor is required at the end of your practicum.

Web based learning modules for ethical scholarship and research
Some of the learning you do at UWA will be web-based. Academic Conduct Essentials (ACE) and Introductory Research and Information Skills (IRIS) are examples of modules that are offered entirely online. Both are available through your WebCT account (http://webct6.uwa.edu.au).

If you are a new student (undergraduate or postgraduate) in your first year of study at the University, you will be automatically enrolled in ACE. ACE introduces you to basic issues of ethical scholarship and the University’s expectations of correct academic conduct. You will need to complete ACE within the first 10 weeks of your study. More information on ACE can be found at http://www.ace.uwa.edu.au/.

IRIS is available to students enrolled in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and in Science Faculties and must be completed in the first semester of study. This module focuses on research skills and provides information on how to locate and use information and how to reference sources for academic study.

5 Guidelines for study
Successful students at UWA are those who are able to learn independently and to manage their time according to the demands of academic study. They also have skills in interactive and collaborative learning, and are able to participate as an effective member of a group. Finally, successful students are able to use assessment and feedback to continually improve their skills. Some guidelines on how to succeed in these areas are outlined below.

Independent study and time spent on studying
At UWA, you are expected to demonstrate skills in independent learning. To learn independently, you must be able to think and reason logically and creatively, solve
problems and learn from a variety of sources and experiences, adapt acquired knowledge to new situations, question accepted wisdom and be open to new ideas and possibilities, all skills enshrined in the University’s Educational Principles (see Section 1).

In practical terms, these skills mean that teaching staff and academic supervisors expect you to go beyond the resources and ideas introduced to you in class. They expect you to examine new ideas and theories from a critical perspective informed by your previous experience and knowledge. The critical perspective you adopt will assist you in identifying gaps in reasoning and evidence in existing knowledge and ideas, and ultimately to contribute new ideas and knowledge in your field of studies. In doing so, you will move from being a recipient of ideas to being an active participant in the construction of knowledge.

The active construction of knowledge requires time spent not only in class, but more importantly in independent study and research. As a general guideline, you can expect to spend roughly 150 hours of study time on each unit of study, including time spent both in and out of class.

**Interactive and collaborative learning and group work**

Interactive and collaborative learning and group work are also key components of academic study at UWA. They allow you to build knowledge through interaction with others and to both adjust and refine your thinking based on what others bring to the learning situation, and to contribute to the thinking of others through your own contributions. Being able to work well with others places you in a position to take a citizenship and leadership role in your local, national or international community, again a key feature encapsulated in the University’s Educational Principles.

**Assessment and learning from feedback**

There are many different modes of assessment at the University, ranging from tests and examinations to extended oral and written presentations performed individually and in groups. Whatever the form of assessment, some level of feedback is generally provided. To improve your learning, it is essential that you reflect on assessments and apply suggestions from the feedback given to future pieces of work. In doing so, you are able to construct your own learning from these experiences and your reflections on these experiences.

6 Academic study, English language and information literacy skills

As you progress through your studies, you will be expected to demonstrate increasing levels of English language, information literacy and study skills. These are fostered in your units of study. In addition, students are encouraged to use specialist resources available at Student Services (STUDY Smarter and the English Language Corner), in the Library and online.

**Academic skills, critical thinking and STUDY Smarter**

STUDY Smarter services offered through the Learning, Language and Research Skills unit at Student Services provide a variety of ways to improve academic skills, including
critical thinking, research skills and academic writing. Services provided by this unit are free to enrolled students and include:

- **Get Smart** – a free membership system that gives access to a weekly e-newsletter with study tips and advice, and dates for workshops and events
- **Workshops** – a range of workshops that assist students to improve the way they study, communicate and manage time
- **Podcasts** – recordings of STUDY Smarter workshops and handouts that students can download
- **Lunchtime drop-in sessions** – opportunities for students to come along and ask any question related to academic communication and study and get individualised advice
- **The UniSpeakers Club** that provides opportunities for regular practice and feedback on public speaking skills
- **Language and Cultural Exchange (LACE)**, an intercultural friendship program for domestic and international students and staff that offers regular free events
- **Student appointments** – consultations to guide students in ways of improving their own learning and academic communication skills
- **Resources** – a range of resources (Survival Guides, FAQs and Study Planners) for you to download and a Resource Area collection of study skills and academic communication resources for you to borrow from Student Services
- **Jump start** – a section of the STUDY Smarter website that provides quick tips and links
- **Digital resources** – digital student characters that provide an insight into studying at UWA

**English language development and the English Language Corner**

The English Language Corner is a section of the STUDY Smarter website dedicated to helping students improve English language skills. It includes sections on speaking, listening, reading, writing, and grammar and vocabulary development in English. These are presented in a variety of formats and media, and contain hotlinks to a wide-range of internal and external support and resources. The English Language Corner also outlines student and staff responsibilities for English language development, and provides information on testing and on learning in a new academic culture.

**Library and online resources**

The Library has a vast collection of resources available to students to borrow to assist with their studies, and a range of online courses (such as InfoPathways) and guides (such as Endnote) to assist students in finding information and managing resources. Library services are explained here [http://www.library.uwa.edu.au/library_services](http://www.library.uwa.edu.au/library_services) with a range of generic and Faculty-Specific Guides available from [http://www.library.uwa.edu.au/help/guides](http://www.library.uwa.edu.au/help/guides).