

ACADEMIC YEAR REVIEW

Summary of Results of Staff and Student Surveys

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Method

Two on-line surveys were developed, one for students and another for staff. Each survey consisted of three parts. Questions were asked about respondents' background details as well as perceptions about, support for, and concerns about a trimester system. The majority of questions were multiple-choice where respondents could check a number of responses that had been developed based on themes and issues arising in the literature. There was also provision for respondents to provide qualitative, open-ended responses. Once designed, pilot tested, then modified, the surveys were built using a tool developed by the web survey development company, Survey Monkey, then linked to a page dedicated to the Academic Year Review on the UWS website. The surveys were 'live' for 22 days, running on-line from Mon 3 Sep 2012 to Mon 24 Sep 2012. Random sampling was used to collect data. Staff and students were notified about the survey using various communication strategies developed in collaboration with Internal Communications, UWS. This included a series of broadcast-emails, rolling banners and buttons on the UWS Website and Staff and Student landing pages, messages beamed via the UWS Connect digital screens, and through word of mouth during forum sessions and meetings with staff, student and union groups conducted by the AYR Team.

Description of Sample Group

The surveys were answered by a total of 4269 respondents. Of these, 3235 were students and 1034 were staff, representing approximately 8% and 41% of the respective populations as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1:

Description of sample group participating in survey			
	n	N	%
Students	3235	39,000	8.3
(Undergraduates)	(2807)		
(Postgraduates)	(413)		
(skipped q.)	(15)		
Staff	1034	2,500	41.4
(Academics)	(560)		
(Professional Staff)	(468)		
(skipped q.)	(6)		
TOTAL	4269		

Students Profile

The demographic profile of the student respondents is:

- 87% undergraduate;
- 13% postgraduate;
- 94% local/domestic;
- 6% international;
- 80% studying full time;
- 20% studying part time;
- 34% were 25 years old or older; and
- 63% were engaged in some form of employment.

The following represents the distribution of student responses by campuses:

- Parramatta (30%);
- Penrith (21%);
- Bankstown (20%);
- Campbelltown (19%);
- Hawkesbury (7%) campuses, and
- with some representation coming from Blacktown and Westmead.

Staff Profile

Of the staff sample, approximately

- 54.5% academic;
- 45.5% professional staff;
- 80% of respondents are employed full time.

The majority of staff respondents came from:

- The Division of Corporate Strategy and Services (20%);
- School of Business (13%);
- School of Humanities and Communications Arts (13%); and
- School of Science and Health (11%).

All the Schools and Divisions, as well as the different campuses, were represented in the survey.

Overarching Categories

The broad over-arching categories and sub-categories emerging from the qualitative data in response to the open-ended questions in the survey are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2:

Categories Emerging in the Data	
Broad Categories	Sub-Categories
Flexibility	Flexibility & Options / Scope, Sequence & Progression/Academic Calendar & Timetabling / Summer or Night School Option / Placements & Accreditation / Lesson Delivery & Design/Quality of Teaching & Learning / Student Welfare & Support
Efficiencies	Cultural Change & Implementation Issues / Workload & Demands / Employment & Staffing Issues / Policies & Procedures / Processes & Systems
Revenue	Revenue & Demand / Resources & Maintenance / Reputation & Standing / Research Profile / Marketing & Branding

Feedback from Students

When students were asked whether they would support the introduction of the trimester system in their school at UWs their responses were as follows:

Table 3:

Student support for a trimester system		
Response	n	%
No	712	23.3
Maybe	967	31.7
Yes	1374	45.0
(Maybe/Yes)	(2341)	(76.7)
TOTAL	3053	100.0

Table 4 provides an indication of how students might behave if trimesters are introduced. They were asked whether they thought that they would enrol in courses in the 3rd trimester. The following table depicts their preferences.

Table 4:

Students' intention to enrol in a 3 rd trimester		
Response	n	%
No	434	14.2
Maybe	988	32.4
Yes	1626	53.3
(Maybe/Yes)	(2614)	(85.7)
TOTAL	3048	99.9

When this is broken down further into discrete groups the data revealed that international and students aged 25 years old or older in particular favoured a trimester system and would enrol in a course in the third trimester if offered.

What appealed to students?

If some form of a trimester system was introduced in their School, the following appealed to students (3,037 students answered the question, 198 did not):

- Fast track my degree in order to finish more quickly (67% - 2,036);
- Greater choice and flexibility to plan my study around my work and life style (62.4% - 1,896);
- Opt for a lighter workload and spread units of study out more evenly across the year (50.9% - 1,546);
- Be able to begin or finish my degree at different times throughout the year (50.1% - 1,521);
- Be able to work and study all year round (46.1% - 1,399);
- Enter the workforce as soon as possible (45.6% - 1,385);
- Take extra units to lighten my workload the following year (41.8% - 1,268)

What was of concern to students?

When students were asked which of the following would be of concern to them if a trimester system was introduced in their school or across UWS, the following responses were most prominent (2,950 students answered the question, 285 did not).

- There may not be enough time to complete projects over a shortened trimester (52.1% - 1,536)
- The accelerated speed of the trimester will be stressful (51.2% - 1,510)
- Study periods might be reduced (37.9% - 1,170)
- There may be an increased need to travel to university more often throughout the year (38.1% - 1,125)
- I would find it difficult to cope with an increased workload (37.6% - 1,109)
- There could be a drop in academic standards (32.6% - 961)

Feedback from Staff

When staff were asked whether they would support the introduction of the trimester system in their school at UWS, their responses were as follows:

Table 5:

Response	Professional Staff		Academic Staff	
	n	%	n	%
No	88	21.5	326	62.8
Maybe	155	37.9	133	25.6
Yes	166	40.6	60	11.6
(Maybe/Yes)	(321)	(78.5)	(193)	(37.2)
TOTAL	409	100.0	519	100.0

Note: 3 respondents did not identify by staff class so are not included in the data above

When the above results for Academic Staff were stratified by School it would appear that academic staff from the Schools of Computing, Engineering and Mathematics (79%), Science and Health (75%), Law (70%), and Business (68%) are the most opposed to the introduction of a trimester system and Nursing and Midwifery (36%), Social Science and Psychology (42%), Medicine (50%), and Education (61%) are the least opposed, with Humanities and Communications Arts (64%) occupying the mid position. It should be noted that the data includes only 10 respondents from Medicine and 20 from Law. Also, academics identifying with an Office or Division rather than a School have not been included in the analysis. Results are illustrated in Table 6 below.

Table 6:

School	No			Yes		
	n	%	Rank	n	%	Rank
Business	74	68	4	9	8	6
Computing, Engineering & Mathematics	46	79	1	2	3	9
Education	17	61	6	6	21	3
Humanities & Communication Arts	61	64	5	5	5	8
Law	14	70	3	3	15	5
Medicine	5	50	7	3	30	1
Nursing & Midwifery	13	36	9	8	22	2
Science & Health	63	75	2	5	6	7
Social Science & Psychology	21	42	8	10	20	4

What appealed to Staff?

884 members of staff answered this question with 150 not responding to this question.

- None of the options offered (38.1% - 337)
- I will be functioning in an organization that remains competitive, viable and sustainable (29.4% - 260)
- Academic staff may have more flexibility in the distribution of their teaching load (24.3% - 215)
- My workload may be more evenly spread out during the year (23.3% - 206)
- Could lead to improvement in academic staff to student ratios (22.1% - 195)
- Accelerated programs will principally attract highly motivated, older students (21.5% - 190)

What concerned staff?

When Staff were asked which of the following might be of concern to them if a trimester system was introduced in their school the following responses were the most popular (927 staff answered – 107 did not):

- Lecturers and markers may be continually rushed to produce course material and marks (68.1% - 631)
- A tight turn around for the provision of exams results and enrolments between trimesters (68.1% - 631)
- A reduction in the time between trimesters may limit the opportunity for academics to reflect & redevelop material, in turn impacting on the quality of teaching and learning material - negatively impacting the quality of teaching (60.8% - 564)
- A trimester could impose an unacceptable workload & lead to reduced time available for research, publication and general academic updating (60.2% - 558)
- Might diminish teaching and learning time and place unnecessary pressure on academics & students (58.6% - 543)
- A reduction in the summer break could impact negatively on research, completing grant applications and taking leave as the break time is reduced (58% - 538)

Selected Qualitative Comments from Staff

Academic Staff

In support of the introduction of trimesters

The main reasons academic staff gave for supporting the introduction of trimesters categorised as issues around: flexibility and options for both staff and students; employment and staffing issues (in particular, greater employment for casual staff); workload and demands; and, the university remaining competitive. A few examples of such perceived benefits are stated below under discrete headings:

Comments on flexibility and options:

- *Increased flexibility for both staff and students*
- *More flexibility and more time to get more things done*
- *The trimester system provides greater flexibility and learning opportunities for students, particularly those who are in part time employment and mature age students*
- *I think it is a much more efficient use of the time - for example, Bond University has it and it is very productive*

Comments on employment and staffing issues:

- *As a casual it would allow for longer employment*
- *Increased teaching opportunity for casual academic staff such as myself*
- *More teaching equals more pay, at the moment I am out of work for up to five months every year*

Comments on workload and demands:

- *Workload would be spread throughout the year*
- *It is an established international system that spreads the load over three terms instead of two which reduces risk*

Comments on remaining competitive:

- *It's where the world is heading for better or for worse!*
- *It offers a better quality product for our client base, by increasing the flexibility with which they can undertake and complete their degree. In my experience, a majority of students would prefer to study right through summer, rather than having such a long and at times demotivating break. As so many other universities already offer this benefit, we will need to do so to remain competitive ... we need to do much, much more work on our e-learning capabilities. Smaller universities do it better. We should be able to do so as well. As we are*

well aware, our cohort is changing. Gone are the days when the majority of our student population comprised non-working school leavers. If we are to cater to the needs of the evolving cohort, we need the flexibility of a trimester system and innovative e-learning. We also need to do so proactively (now) as opposed to reactively when student numbers start to drop.

Against the introduction of trimesters

The main reasons academic staff gave for not supporting the introduction of trimesters have been captured under the following headings; research; the quality of teaching and learning; workload and demands; and, cultural change and implementation. Academics also cited, to a lesser extent, issues around the progression of students, student welfare and support, the reputation and standing of the university, employment and staffing issues, revenue and demand, and placements and accreditation.

Comments on research:

- *Already it is difficult enough to focus any time during semester on research*
- *A trimester system ... will reduce research, publication and grant submission capabilities of academic staff*
- *Teaching workloads will increase at the expense of quality research and scholarship*
- *It ... does not allow suitable time for academic research and academic excellence, conference paper preparation and attending academic conference to pursue academic excellence*
- *There won't be enough time for world-level research that informs and improves high-quality teaching. The standards in both areas will drop and that can't be something that anybody seriously wants.*

Comments on quality of teaching and learning:

- *A trimester system would appear to be driven chiefly by economic rationales such as those that demand industrial intensification, rather than the students' best pedagogical interests*
- *This is a thinly disguised manoeuvre to compromise the quality of teaching & learning in order to graduate more students of limited ability and motivation*
- *[Trimesters are] ... of no pedagogical, intellectual, and sociological benefit*
- *This is just one more unreasonable proposal that will further run down the quality of education, diminishing the value of higher education as a two year degree. Students just out of high school actually need a longer time period to become self motivated adults. This plan is not going to make that happen.*
- *A system devised to utilise university buildings more effectively at the cost of debasing student learning and increasing staff stress needs serious rethinking*

- *Decreased outcomes and quality if we try to cram 13 weeks into 10; it is unlikely to work, resulting in a further “dumbing down”.*
- *11 week trimesters would make it even more difficult to teach academically demanding material which requires at least 14 weeks of sustained reading, teaching and assessment to disseminate properly*
- *The quality of teaching would diminish because the amount of material, essential content, would need to be reduced to fit into shorter teaching periods. Graduates would be at a disadvantage relative to other universities.*
- *It would deprive students of the time required for deep, reflective, critical learning*
- *There is not enough time for students to understand complex concepts*

Comments on workload and demands:

- *Increased workload and stress for staff and students*
- *Many students currently find the amount of learning required in the current semester structure to be more than they can manage. To introduce a third semester will increase this workload. In addition the increased pressure of a tri semester will markedly increase academic workload by limiting the timeframe to prepare unit materials, and complete marking of assessments.*
- *A trimester system appears likely to greatly increase staff workload, reduce opportunities for research and engagement, and reduce flexibility*
- *I have academic colleagues who operate under this system and the substantial added and continuous stress they experience since the changeover is obvious. They have greatly reduced time for research, the pressure is constant. They are working ridiculously long hours trying to keep up. Their professional and family life suffers. They hate it, and would prefer to return to a semester system.*
- *This will inevitably lead to higher teaching workloads, reduced quality of teaching and learning, and will impact on the ability of individual academics to meet their expected research outputs*
- *Limited opportunities to plan, prepare and modify courses between trimesters ... Turnaround time for assignments too brief considering the very large numbers of students in classes.*
- *Pressure from marking final exams will be enormous*

Comments on cultural change and implementation:

- *The information provided is insufficient ... There are some suggestions of possibilities but no indication of what the reality might actually be*
- *There are too many unknowns*
- *I have not been provided with a working case. It is a bit like Julia Gillard - puts out the ideas but is lacking in the details.*
- *The lack of clarity of how this would be implemented leaves a trimester system open to abuse by leadership, requiring staff to work all without a break and little time for research ... Unless there were 'ironclad' undertakings of workload implications academics will struggle to trust or support this measure*
- *I don't trust the university's senior management - any change proposed by senior management would no doubt have an ulterior motive, designed to screw academics over*
- *I am in favour of the change, but I am not at all convinced that the executive have the ability to orchestrate, drive and maintain the change. This would likely result in frustrated and unhappy staff and students, and a drop in standards across the university. I also hold grave concerns about the academic staff workload and what will happen to it if this change occurs.*
- *The stress of workload and change: UWS is trying to make too many changes all at once*
- *Excessive changes in the past decade have not allowed for adequate 'settling in' periods*
- *The pros are minimal and the cons are appreciable. Essentially, though, it would mean another restructure with implications for resourcing in terms of funds, staff time and tolerance, which do not appear to be in surplus at this stage.*

Comments on progression of students:

- *Not enough time at present to develop course content and turnaround times for marking and grades is too tight - already unrealistic expectations placed on staff*
- *Too much pressure on staff and students in the area of assessment of learning; students will have to complete assessment tasks in less time; lecturers will be under enormous pressure to mark and return assessment tasks; there will not be enough time for actual learning to take place; formative feedback will be difficult to deliver in a timely manner; lecturers will be inclined to set assessment tasks that are fast to mark rather than effective measure of learning*

- *Three week break between trimester is not enough, given most of the units do have deferred and supplementary exams after the final*
- *Even under a semester basis we cannot offer as many units or repeats offerings as student would like.*

Comments on student welfare and support:

- *Being done to put additional backsides on seats and can lead to reduced entry levels and pressure to have students continue to higher levels when they are not highly enough prepared*
- *Students at UWS need more time to concentrate and develop their academic skills - a Trimester I feel will disadvantage UWS students*
- *Many students are already struggling given the lower quality of student intake. This will only add more stress on students and ensure that they learn less during shorter semesters. Essentially, each semester will be a 'cram session'. No real learning will take place.*
- *Students will have to do the same amount of work in significantly shorter time which will greatly affect their performance. This will result in increased stress for both academics and students and many students will have to drop-out because they will be no time for part-time employment.*
- *It will negatively impact on students who may fall behind, and who will be exposed to compressed units. This is NOT the direction UWS should be heading in, in order to be 'competitive'!*
- *As a non-school academic whose unit provides 3 day workshops and up to 3 week bridging courses in the breaks between semesters as well as many workshops during semester this system of three semesters will make it very difficult or impossible to provide these services between semesters. This will result in a significant loss of support to students in the area of literacy and maths.*

Comments on reputation and standing of the university:

- *There will be a significant decrease in the quality of learning and research at UWS, which is an institution that already has an unenviable reputation for low quality*
- *Far from making UWS more competitive, it will cement UWS's position as a second-rate university and only non-research-active second-rate academics will want to work here.*

- *This may well result in lower quality graduates with less knowledge, over time making our students less competitive in the workplace after graduation. Is this a result UWS wish for?*
- *It would significantly degrade the value of a UWS degree*

Comments on employment and staffing issues:

- *We are under resourced already, with the highest student-teacher ratios in the country, and workload agreements that maintain that--thereby giving less weight to research than at better funded universities. It is highly likely that this would be used to increase work intensity.*
- *It is a 1-way decision; very difficult to undo if there are problems. "Guarantees" may be given to staff which cannot subsequently be met.*
- *It looks too like the thin of a wedge of unilateral worsening of employment conditions by senior management*
- *I don't get the same holidays in June / July as my own children (who attend school)*

Comments on revenue and demand:

- *The benefits would be minimal, at best. To implement a trimester system properly would require every single course to be modified and a large number would need significant changes. This is a huge expense for very little or no gain.*
- *It might cost more to run such courses - more units required. This means that we may end up teaching more units with smaller number of enrolments.*
- *I can't see how it will increase the university's income enough to cover the cost of the extra teaching staff*
- *I do not believe that the benefits of making this change will be significant. It will not attract larger numbers of students over the long-term, and it will have a detrimental impact on the quality of teaching and learning. I do not think that many students will complete the degree in a shorter time period, and I think the end result will be more time and resources used for roughly the same result. The experience of Deakin University suggests that the trimester system imposes enormous costs across the organization, and benefits very few people.*
- *Where is the cost benefit analysis? What is the cost of the new system to the old system? These questions need to be answered and made public.*

Comments on placements and accreditation:

- *[For] the School of Education ...it would make placing students in schools for their professional experience increasingly difficult, both in terms of time and the numbers of students*
- *[For Nursing and Midwifery] ... the university would lose its ability to compete with other institutions for clinical placements in industry, disadvantaging UWS students, and leading to a significant reduction in enrolments*

Professional Staff

In support of the introduction of trimesters

The reasons professional staff gave for supporting the introduction of a trimester system were very similar to those given by the academic staff listed above. In particular, respondents focused on the benefits of providing flexibility and options for students. Other issues centred on the better utilisation of resources, creating a more even workload for staff, and ensuring UWS remains competitive. A few examples of some of the qualitative comments made by professional staff are given below:

Comments on flexibility and options:

- Students want flexibility when it comes to study. I believe a trimester will help make UWS more ... appealing to future students.
- I am a PG distance student in a trimester system at another uni. I find the trimester system very flexible, I can study (or not) according to lifestyle demands. Enrolment is extremely easy compared to my undergrad studies (at UWS) & I can do 3 subjects a year whilst doing only one subject each session.
- As a student and university staff member, it would provide the opportunity to complete my degree faster and allow me to integrate into the workforce full-time more quickly. It would also take stress off students who don't find it easy to combine studies with work during their degrees. Finishing earlier would mean they can easily catch up and surpass the experience of counterparts at other universities who have had to juggle studying and work in order to gain some experience by the time they graduate.

Comments on resources and maintenance:

- The current two semester system is very inefficient with the University being idle over the long summer break
- [It] will make the University more economically viable. Utilise resources and facilities that are currently only really used for 26 weeks a year
- The university has a large number of assets and resources that are currently under utilised for a considerable portion of the year and changing to a trimester system would spread the usage over more weeks leading to better use of time, equipment, staff and resources

- From a University perspective it could better utilise infrastructure and resources. From a Student perspective it provides opportunities for those who wish to complete a degree more quickly, and don't have the financial resources to support 4 or 5 years at University.
- [It] ... makes commercial and educational common sense. The world is moving at a faster pace and Universities have to lead not run along behind.

Comments on workload and demands:

- Much better workflow
- My team currently operates across six teaching periods (quarters and semesters) so a move to trimesters would smooth out our workload. It is very tiring and stressful managing processes across six overlapping teaching periods.

Comments on remaining competitive:

- [It is] ... both advantageous to students and UWS
- It has been introduced in other institutions with a great success rate for staff, academics and students
- Economic reality and customer service
- It is increasingly becoming the norm in Australian Universities. UWS must remain competitive and if potential students prefer a trimester system we must do everything to ensure we are offering the best option/s.
- UWS needs to stay competitive in the marketplace. Students make decisions based on their personal commitments with work and family and will choose a University that offers them greater flexibility than UWS does at the moment. Clearly our curriculum, teaching workloads, blended learning, timetables etc would need to be changed to adapt to the trimester teaching sessions - all of this can be done with clear direction, thought and resources.
- As an employee it is my duty to support the University's decision
- For the greater good of UWS in the future

Against the introduction of trimesters

The main reasons professional staff gave against the introduction of trimesters were the increased workload and demands placed on them. Other issues professional staff cited centred on the quality of teaching and learning, cultural change, resources and maintenance, and specific issues around processes and systems - in particular, the Callista system.

Comments of workload and demands:

- *The Trimester system would reduce our already short 'down' time and not provide us with enough time to prepare for the next semester*

- *[N]o consideration has been given to the impact on Professional staff workload. The introduction of trimesters would require extra tutorial registration, enrolments, admissions, exams, results and many other related activities ... when is the opportunity for admin staff to have down time to follow up on tasks. The above mentioned tasks are generally peak load times where staff cannot focus on normal activities until these peak times are over. There will be insufficient time between to catch up and to process regular tasks.*
- *The shortened time between sessions will mean increased workloads for academics, exams, graduations, timetabling, enrolments and other areas of ARO at peak times. There will be no 'down' time for anyone. Teaching quality and data integrity will suffer.*
- *I would be concerned at the impact this would have on professional staff who would be required to process results/graduations in a much tighter turn around than they already do. Without an increase in professional staffing levels, this will place additional enormous pressure on professional staff across schools and divisional units such as assessments and graduations*
- *I think it is a cost-cutting exercise disguised as something beneficial. It feels like a further erosion of the tertiary education sector, just like the recent UWS restructure. It asks for more with less or the same amount of resources. I am suspect and don't believe it is in the students' best interest. A further case of managerialism out of control.*
- *[There would be a] 50% increase in enrolment and finance work per student. Who does it? Admissions working on time frames that will be too short to effectively manage workload properly.*
- *Professional staff use semester break time to prepare the university for the next session. This is particularly relevant to some of the library services - especially reading lists.*
- *As a "Professional Staff Member" maintaining computer networks and systems, we rely on the downtime between semesters to perform critical updates and upgrades, and to work on new systems. If a trimester were introduced, a lot of this work would end up being shifted to weekends, which would mean paying overtime, which is great, however, I have a family, and working on weekends is very undesirable. I value my time with my family more than a few extra dollars in the pocket.*
- *Work life balance would be too hard to maintain for current staffing levels*

Comments on processes and systems:

- *I don't think processes are working efficiently with two semesters from a teaching perspective. When trying to provide support for units that are currently rushed with different coordinators changing content/resource requirements each semester and new staff who don't know processes, there is already a great burden on trying to support two semesters. Students are also saying that they would like more time to do assignments etc as they are all due at the same time, etc. Adding an extra semester will add extra stress to both staff and students.*
- *I actually fully support a trimester system and believe that it is inevitable for all Universities eventually. However, in my opinion, UWS is not in a position to realistically make this move*

until it makes significant improvements in the underlying systems and processes that govern its day to day operations. At this point in time UWS does not have the ability to conduct business with the efficiency and adaptability needed for this change. I will list several examples that I know of in my work but I am sure there are plenty of others.

What we would need first are significant improvements in systems such as;

- 1. A fully integrated and online OHS reporting and investigation system. Which includes a select pool of trained accident investigators across UWS to ensure proper route cause analysis is conducted on more serious incidents. Rather than using the 1990's paper based and knee jerk reaction approach.*
- 2. A fully integrated and vastly improved security access system that allows greater flexibility and control and is able to be centrally administered across all UWS rather than a campus by campus, limited panel system. This would also need to include much better integration with the schools as end users so they may work hand in hand with security and not against them.*
- 3. Complete online ordering and order approval system that allows orders to be raised online, automatically sent to relevant approvers who can approve online and then to finance so it can be processed online. This would allow fast dynamic ordering that is fully trackable rather than the paper based system that relies on tracking people down across campuses for signatures and copious amounts of scanning or photocopying for record retention and is highly susceptible to loss of information at any stage. Baseware is great but it only handles the bills when they arrive.*
- 4. Vastly improved staff online system with greater functionality*
- 5. Vastly improved CWF maintenance request system for tracking of jobs from end users perspective.*
- 6. Online timesheets for professional staff. Better and online control of CEA's and CEA details/timesheets.*
- 7. Complete revamp of travel, e-tan etc. These are just the main processes that are broken or incredibly inefficient at UWS.*