

Report on the visit to the University of Queensland regarding Online Enrolments held 24 June 2008

For reference:

- For the purposes of this report, the terms 'online enrolments system' and 'online enrolments' refer to a system whereby new students need not make contact with a staff member in order to enrol.
- UQ currently uses Peoplesoft version 8.9
- The enrolment process at UQ is decentralised
- UQ has a first year intake of approximately 8,000

Purpose:

Representatives from the Division of Registrar and Student Services and six ANU Colleges discussed the possibility of having new students enrol entirely online, thereby removing the need to run the Melville Hall new enrolments event in its current form. A number of potential issues were raised at a stakeholders meeting held 10 June 2008 and as a result I agreed to visit the University of Queensland (who currently have an online enrolments system) to gauge how they have overcome these issues and what other problems they may have encountered.

The Meeting:

I visited the University of Queensland on 24 June 2008 in an attempt to understand the UQ model for enrolling new students and how a similar model may be implemented at ANU.

Present at the meeting were:

Paul Bissett, *Manager, Enrolments and Student Records, ANU*;
Karen Wheeler – *Senior Manager, Student Administration, UQ*;
Andrew Jell – *Manager, SI-net Functional Group (student systems), UQ*;
Ken Aberdeen – *Manager, Student Centre, UQ*;
Sherrie Hoang – *SI-net Functional Group, UQ*.

The list of questions (attached as appendix A) was used as a guide for discussion.

The discussion was based around four key areas:

- 1) Academic advice
- 2) Enrolment issues
- 3) Identity and HESA
- 4) Other

Academic Advice:

Upon receiving an offer all domestic students are sent a booklet with course options and encouraged to enrol online. The booklet contains information on degree structure and general academic advice such as to try a variety of disciplines in first year as majors don't need to be declared until second year.

Despite offering a fully online enrolment option for new students, UQ also offers non-compulsory academic advice sessions. These come in a variety of formats such as:

- Course selection days (run similarly to PEA day)
- One-on-one drop in sessions with a course advisor
- One-on-one half hour appointments with a course advisor
- Half hour information sessions (a half hour talk is given regarding basic degree rules and structure)
- Phone enquiries

A large number of new students take up one or more of the session options above (specific percentages not known). There are 3 or 4 Bachelor of Arts course selection days run each semester so as to ensure that all cohorts of students are captured (ie those who are local, plus those who may only arrive in Brisbane during O Week). Course advisors are fully booked for a number of weeks leading up to the start of semester with one-on-one sessions and the resulting administration work (applications for credit, program transfers etc.) Although the workload is considerable, UQ believes that this is a more efficient method for enrolling students as it reduces the need for 8,000 one-on-one sessions.

The talks and course selection days that are provided relate only to the generic degrees and do not offer advice for more specific programs (such as named degrees). Advice for named degrees is offered by the relevant School.

Those students starting a degree with a set first year program are often mass enrolled into the set courses. Students are then able to vary that enrolment by a specified deadline.

Students seeking advice for combined degrees will most likely need to attend a session provided by each of the relevant Faculties.

Students who do not seek specific academic advice rely solely on the booklet that has been issued to them regarding course choice plus any other published materials (UQ websites, Facebook etc.).

Enrolment Issues:

As with ANU, many UQ courses have prerequisites, however, those prerequisites are not built into the UQ student system removing the need for permission numbers or overrides. UQ had discovered that of all the students requesting a prerequisite waiver, 90% were being approved. As a result, the decision was made to remove prerequisite information from the student system leaving students able to enrol themselves into classes that they don't have the specific prerequisites for. To avoid negative repercussions, students are advised that they are responsible for their own enrolment, and there is no recourse if they do not perform to an acceptable standard.

By removing prerequisites, many of the problems relating to first year enrolment are eliminated such as the enrolment into any later year courses (if status is to be granted or RPL), exchange student enrolment or language level placement. In fact, language placement tests are not compulsory. A student is able to self assess (based on set criteria) and enrol in the level they believe to be appropriate. There is then the option to change levels if the wrong level has been initially chosen. Optional informal placement tests are offered on a drop-in basis to those who want one.

Regarding program transfers: new students can apply to transfer from the point of accepting their offer. Upon accepting their offer, new students are issued with a username and password which they can use to access Si-net (ISIS equivalent). They apply for a transfer online, which is then assessed by the appropriate Faculty and is either approved or denied. This can occur prior to the student's initial enrolment.

The Advisement capabilities of PeopleSoft are currently being developed at UQ. At least one other university (Auckland) has introduced Advisement but has ceased using it as it was too cumbersome and resource heavy to maintain.

Identity and HESA:

All international students must present themselves prior to enrolment to have their credentials verified. They then go through a process similar to the Melville Hall new enrolments event. Thus there is no advantage to the UQ model for Internationals over the ANU process.

Like all Australian Universities, there is currently no verification of Australian Citizenship at UQ. As ANU will be introducing mandatory checks of Australian Citizenship for all Commonwealth Supported Places (to be HESA compliant), it is difficult to conceptualise how these checks might occur without every CSP student presenting their credentials prior to enrolment (in the same way as Internationals). Consequently, it may prove impossible to remove the need for all students to present themselves to ANU staff prior to enrolment.

Student cards are issued by UQ anytime after an offer of a place is accepted. Students identify their own expected graduation date and this date becomes the validity end date of the student card. Students also identify their own study intensity (Full-Time/Part-Time) and the identified intensity is printed on the card (ie it is not drawn from the student's enrolment as it is at ANU). The UQ system is obviously open to misuse, but once again, responsibility is put on the student to be honest, rather than the university to verify.

Before being issued with a student card, all students must present another form of formal photographic ID. Enrolments will be implementing a similar process in 2009.

Other:

UQ believes that the switch to an online enrolment system has reduced their workload. Despite the back-end administration and various advice sessions that occur, it is believed that it is still a more efficient method of enrolling students than the Melville Hall model. It was specifically said by the UQ representatives, however, that because of ANU's smaller intake, it may not prove as beneficial, or beneficial at all for ANU to adopt a similar model, as there may be no time/workload advantage.

UQ has run an 'Enrolment Experience Survey' which has returned positive results.

Summary and Conclusion:

It is worth noting here that UQ is only one model of an online enrolment system, however, it is seen as a largely successful one.

The potential problems that were identified seem to be dealt with by UQ in one of two ways:

- 1) in the same way that ANU currently does (such as International Student enrolments etc.)
or

- 2) by placing additional responsibility on the student (prerequisites, reading booklets, student cards etc.)

It is questionable, however, whether or not the introduction of an online enrolment system at ANU would benefit students. It certainly has the potential to disadvantage students as a lot more onus and responsibility is placed on new students are mostly school leavers with no real concept of university. In fact, it was mentioned at the meeting that each semester a lot of UQ students believe they are due to graduate only to be informed that they have not met the requirements of their degree. Initial and ongoing academic advice would prevent many such occurrences.

Furthermore, despite an online enrolments system, UQ still need to provide many students with face-to-face advice, be it individually, or to groups. UQ see this as a benefit as their current system is more time efficient than approximately 8,000 face-to-face sessions, however, as ANU's intake is considerably smaller, the benefit would be less significant or possibly non-existent. Therefore, as an exercise in increasing efficiency, or easing resources, the opposite would be the most likely outcome.

ANU is an outstanding university, and the one-to-one advice that the Colleges offer is part of what makes the student experience itself outstanding. There may be occasional complaints from students (though none made formally) who have had to wait in queues, but this needs to be put in perspective. The average time that it takes a student to go through the Melville Hall process is less than two hours. As a component of a 3, 4 or 5 year degree, it is insignificant. The opportunity to talk through course selections and discover previously unknown possibilities and opportunities is priceless at this the earliest stage of a student's university career. Anecdotally, the majority of students appreciate the academic advice they receive, particularly at undergraduate level. This opinion will be tested by means of a student survey to be conducted in Semester 2, 2008.

Key Recommendation:

- That online enrolments be pursued for Graduate Coursework Students and not for Undergraduate Students with a desired implementation of Semester 1 2009.

Other Recommendations to improve efficiency or current process:

- That prerequisites be removed from Student21 to reduce the workload for Administrators and Academics in the Schools, Colleges and SAS
- That a student's username and password be issued at point of acceptance to allow access to online forms and other web-based information (such as applications for program transfers and status)
- That an automatic enrolment process be investigated for programs with set courses.
- That photo ID must be presented before a new student is issued with a student card

Report Prepared by Paul Bissett
July 2008

General questions for discussion

For the meeting to be held between Paul Bissett (ANU Enrolments Manager) and representatives from The University of Queensland Student Administration

Academic Advice:

- How does UQ offer person to person academic advice to its students?
- Is person to person advice available to all students or just new students?
- Is different information provided to those students enrolling in a highly flexible degree such as a BA or BSc?
- What percentage of students take up the offer of person to person academic advice? Does UQ provide any hardcopy information at this point?
- What percentage of students seek academic advice through a faculty after they have enrolled?
- Do students make appointments or turn up to an open session?
- How does the system work for combined degree students (eg BSc/LLB)?
- What sort of information is provided at the half hour 'information sessions'?
- How are students encouraged to broaden the scope of their first year studies? eg encourage keen first years not to do all English courses or all Politics courses...

Enrolment issues:

- How do new students apply for credit for their previous studies?
- How do students enrol into courses they may not have the formal prerequisites for?
- How does UQ run language placement tests prior to students' enrolment in higher level language classes?
- Does UQ use the advisement capabilities of PeopleSoft software? If yes, how well does it work?
- Does UQ check on students' enrolment in any way (such as random sampling) to ensure students have enrolled correctly?
- How do new students change programs/degrees prior to enrolment?
- What is the process for Non-Award/Exchange enrolments?

Identity verification/HESA compliance:

- How does UQ verify identity – Visa checking/Aust Citizenship checking?
- How does UQ issue student cards?
- How does UQ verify that the student being issued with a student card is who they say they are?

Other:

- Do you have any program guides that ANU could have access to such as those sent to Arts students?
- What are the pros and cons of the online system? Are there any common problems that occur? How might these be resolved?
- How has online enrolments been received by students – undergraduate, Graduate and Research? Do they prefer it to the old days of queues and signatures?