



CHARLES STURT

U N I V E R S I T Y

Unified Session Model Project (USM)

USM Steering Committee Report to Academic Senate and Senior Executive Committee

September 5th 2008

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1. Introduction and Background

The Unified Session Model Project commenced in 2007 with the establishment of a Project Steering Committee and the commissioning of consultants PhillipsKPA to investigate and develop recommendations in relation to the University's current and future academic calendar arrangements. The PhillipsKPA project work was conducted over three stages.

Stage 1 commenced in August 2007 and identified the nature and dimensions of the various factors that required careful analysis and attention if the University was to successfully change its academic calendar arrangements.

Stage 2 of the project was conducted between October and December 2007 and focused on the work of three taskforces: Taskforce 1 examined partnership and offshore academic calendar arrangements; Taskforce 2 was primarily concerned with course and subject availability listing; Taskforce 3 was charged with examining issues concerned with compressed inter-session breaks.

Stage 3 of the USM project was conducted between February and June 2008 and involved two taskforces: Taskforce 4 investigated potential opportunities for reframing course design and delivery presented by the USM; Taskforce 5 was focused on residential schools, practicums, and laboratory-based teaching.

Reports on the outcomes of each stage and a summary report were produced and made available on the project website at: <http://www.csu.edu.au/special/usm/news.htm>. The PhillipsKPA reports are:

- Charles Sturt University Unified Session Model Project, *Project Summary Report*, June 2008.
- Charles Sturt University Unified Session Model Project, *Stage 3 Report*, June 2008.
- Charles Sturt University Unified Session Model Project, *Stage 2 Report*, January 2008.
- Charles Sturt University Unified Session Model Project, *Stage 1 Report*, August 2007.

At the completion of the PhillipsKPA project on 30 June 2008, two matters were still outstanding. These were:

- responses from the Faculties to a request to consider some outstanding issues plus undertake some additional modelling on how they would operate under the USM proposal and;
- a survey on student attitudes to the current and proposed changes to the calendar

Responsibility for dealing with the outstanding matters was delegated to Prof Greg Walker (CSU support to the USM Project) and Lachlan Mackinnon (Manager Project Service Centre) who prepared a report to the Steering Committee at its meeting on 1 September 2008.

- Charles Sturt University Unified Session Model Project, *Report to USM Steering Committee*, September 1st 2008

This submission contains the final recommendations of The USM Project Steering Committee as agreed at their meeting of 1 September 2008. This report is available on the project website at: <http://www.csu.edu.au/special/usm/news.htm>.

2. Summary of Report to Steering Committee

The Walker Mackinnon report to the Steering Committee included, in addition to a report on the outcomes of the Faculty responses and the student survey, an evaluation of options for the management of outstanding logistical constraints, risks and strategic issues associated with the introduction of a USM calendar was undertaken.

This paper reported that the University still had a number of critical unresolved issues associated with the introduction of the USM Proposal 4 as recommended in the PhillipsKPA USM Project Summary Report of June 2008. The preconditions identified in the Summary Report for introduction of Proposal 4 were not all resolved.

The responses from the Faculties to the modelling requests sent out in late June tended to reinforce rather than resolve most of the identified constraints and issues that had to be overcome for successful introduction of the USM proposal contained in the Summary Report. These unresolved issues were focused primarily on the provision of infrastructure and accommodation for compressed residential schools and practicum placements.

In summary the Faculties indicated the following anticipated plans for USM adoption.

The Faculty of Arts reported that it has no major faculty wide plans to change course delivery models in the immediate future under a USM. The focus will be on transferring their existing 2 semester (Autumn & Spring) course delivery model to a 2/3 session (S1 & S2) model for the bulk of their courses. Exceptions include the School of Policing (negotiating to transfer from trimesters to USM) and the School of Social Sciences and Liberal Studies (continuation of existing 2/3 plus). Issues associated with residential schools and practicum placements for select groups of students are identified.

The Faculty of Business provided a faculty wide response involving the immediate transfer of its current trimester based programs to a 3/3 USM followed by an expected transfer of its UG programs in the medium term at least with respect to its distance mode subjects. The Faculty reports no significant issues with respect to residential schools. Critical for the Faculty's plans to transfer its trimester calendar and its semester calendar to a USM calendar is the provision of a viable summer session. The proposed S3 does have two limiting features: it is only 12 weeks in length compared to 14 weeks for S1 and S2; the 12 weeks includes Xmas and the New Year.

The Faculty of Education has modelled a satisfactory practicum delivery timetable under the USM. No insurmountable problems have been reported. The Faculty will transfer its courses from the current 2 semester (Autumn & Spring) course delivery model to the comparable 2/3 (S1 & S2) model under the USM.

The Faculty of Science reported the greatest challenges in shifting to a USM and consequently has undertaken the most detailed modelling of all faculties. The basic model identified for the bulk of the Faculty's courses involves: compression of the current 3 week residential school to 1 week for its large 1st year subjects together with blended distance and internal teaching models for later year subjects. Significant logistical challenges are apparent with this model and it has explored contingency modelling based on 2 week residential school period. Challenges associated with rescheduling practicum placements are also identified. Nursing reports significant problems associated with change to a USM. These issues are discussed in detail in the Report.

Preliminary analysis of the student survey revealed a mixed position on the prospect of calendar change. Internal and distance semester students were evenly divided on whether they see the proposed change as an advantage or disadvantage to them. A majority of distance trimester students see it as a disadvantage. A majority of internal and distance semester students expressed

an interest in studying subjects in a summer session. Trimester students were evenly divided on their interest in summer subjects.

As the deadline for final decision approaches, the remaining non resolution of some of the issues and constraints pose risks that need to be addressed in the decision process.

To assist in weighing the benefits and risks of USM adoption the report has explored possible options that might be available to the university.

To this end the report suggested the decision process be broken into its following components.

Basically the University needs to decide whether to:

- Accept or Reject a change to a USM calendar

If the decision is to accept a change to a USM calendar, then the University needs to decide whether to:

- Proceed as recommended with the introduction of the USM Proposal (4) in 2010 (as per USM Project Summary Report June 2008)
- Modify the timeline for introduction of the USM to address identified issues and constraints and / or
- Modify the proposed USM to address identified issues and constraints

With respect to these particular aspects of the USM proposal, the report to the steering committee provided the following comment.

- There is an expectation within the University community that the calendar will be changed. The momentum for change has been established. There are strong strategic and operational benefits to be derived from changing the calendar that have been clearly identified and reported on during the extensive evaluation process involved in the USM Project. The external environment is changing rapidly. Competitor universities are adopting USM style calendars. The report therefore recommended that the University proceed to adopt a new USM calendar.
- The major risk element with Proposal 4 is the compression of the mid-session break to 1 week for those courses (principally science) that have residential school and practicum placement to reorganise). Contingency options were identified and discussed. It was suggested that the most realistic approach for an initial introduction of a USM calendar was the adoption of a 2 week fixed time residential school period at least for the Wagga campus where the demands for residential schools were unlikely to be met with the available infrastructure for laboratories and student accommodation. Other constraints included the risk that a lack of experience with alternative proposed approaches to subject delivery such as blended or integrated internal and distance teaching would render this a dangerous approach to adopt at least in the initial term. This implies the necessary compression of internal class timetables from 13 to 12 weeks to create a 12 + 2 (internal + distance) teaching session timetable.
- Issues associated with both deferring the introduction date and / or adopting a staged introduction of the USM were considered. It was recommended that a 2010 start date be adhered to for the implementation date. A staged or phase-in approach was considered a second best option to pursue that should only be considered as a contingency option should significant unforeseen constraints be identified by the Implementation Project team within a

timeline sufficient to reset implementation actions. It was considered advantageous to move as quickly as possible to the preferred calendar model required one change over period only.

- A minor modification to Proposal 4 was provided for Steering Committee consideration. This proposal (4A) involved cutting 1 more week from the intersession break between S1 and S2 and extending the S3 session by one more week.
- Other issues raised for Steering Committee consideration included the need for retention of either the existing trimester calendar for quarantined offshore operations in the northern hemisphere or subject to the Policing course being able to transfer to the USM, the creation of a dedicated northern hemisphere calendar quarantined to offshore programs. A further suggestion provided for the Steering Committee consideration was the provision of a special 6 monthly calendar for research students. This was in response to questions from faculties on possible adverse impacts from the shorter USM sessions on such students.

3. Steering Committee Recommendations

The Steering Committee recommends that the University:

- 1. *Adopt a USM calendar;***
- 2. *The year for introduction be 2010;***
- 3. *The specific USM calendar for adoption be Proposal 4;***
- 4. *A dedicated offshore calendar be created for Offshore Programs delivered in the northern hemisphere;***
 - 4.1. *This calendar be quarantined to Offshore Programs ;***
 - 4.2. *Subject to consultation with Offshore Program directors, the existing trimester calendar be considered as a base for development of this calendar;***
- 5. *Student Administration and CRGT further investigate whether the adoption of a dedicated research student calendar based on 6 month sessions would provide student and or administrative benefits;***
- 6. *The existing trimester calendar be phased out for domestic students in Policing and Business;***
- 7. *An implementation project team be established as quickly as possible to commence the required operational stage of the project.***

The scenario implicit in these recommendations is that, at least in the short run and at least for the Wagga campus, the common teaching mix in S1 and S2 will be 12 weeks of internal classes combined with a fixed time 2 week mid-session / residential school break in sessions of 14 weeks plus 2 weeks exams. For S3 the 12 week session will comprise 11 weeks of scheduled study with a 1 week holiday break and a 1 week exam period. The timing of the residential school break is open to discussion. An obvious option would be to adopt a timing that overlaps with the existing break period to ensure minimum disruption to existing residential school and practicum arrangements. For the break in S1, serious consideration should be given to breaking the link with Easter to avoid the current fluctuation in timing for this break each year.

A comparative description of the USM and current calendars is provided below. A specific 2008 calendar comparison is provided in Appendix 2.

Proposal 4: S1-S2 inter session break of 3 weeks and S3 of 12 weeks

S3: 12 WEEKS			S1: 14 WEEKS				S2: 14 WEEKS				S3: 12 WEEKS							
5	1	1	1	14				2	3	14				2	2	5	1	1
	E X A M	B R E A K	O W E E K	12 WEEKS CLASSES PLUS 2 WEEK MID-SESSION BREAK				E X A M	B R E A K	12 WEEKS CLASSES PLUS 2 WEEK MID-SESSION BREAK				E X A M	B R E A K	11 WEEKS CLASSES		B R E A K

Current Calendar: Autumn/Spring/Summer & Trimesters

			Autumn: 16 WEEKS				Spring: 16 WEEKS				Summer: 8 WEEKS						
3	2	1	16				2	4	16				2	1	3	2	
	E X A M	O W E E K	13 WEEKS CLASSES PLUS 3 WEEK MID-SESSION BREAK				E X A M	B R E A K	13 WEEKS CLASSES PLUS 3 WEEK MID-SESSION BREAK				E X A M	B R E A K	6 WEEKS CLASSES		B R E A K
			Trimester 1: 12 WEEKS			Trimester 2 : 12 WEEKS			Trimester 3 : 12 WEEKS								
2	12			1	3	12			1	3	12			1	5		
B R E A K	12 WEEKS CLASSES			E X A M	B R E A K	12 WEEKS CLASSES			E X A M	B R E A K	12 WEEKS CLASSES			E X A M	B R E A K		

The extent to which flexibility in scheduling for internal class timetabling is possible will depend on the impact on accommodation for residential school students. Preliminary planning for the transfer of the current trimester based policing course to the USM has identified a need to extend classes into the exam period for non exam subjects. Modelling of teacher education practicum timing under the USM produced a model that included classes during the traditional mid-session break to allow for practicums to commence in the latter part of the session prior to and including the exam period for some courses (again facilitated by the presence of non-exam subjects). The scope for such flexible timing of internal classes and the residential school break will be limited on the Wagga campus. It is considered a fixed break period will need to be imposed for all courses on this campus initially.

The Steering Committee weighed the relative benefits of Proposals 4 and 4A (longer S3 for Faculty of Business, SGA and Policing against compressed midyear intersession break) and decided to recommend Proposal 4 on the grounds that a shorter midyear break could result in problems with end of session processing, at least in the early years of adaption to the USM calendar. However the Committee considers that further modifications may be feasible in future years following a period of experience with the USM calendar.

In making its recommendations, the Committee was mindful of the need to proceed in a pragmatic and feasible manner. A number of critical limiting factors that must be accepted for the commencement of the USM in 2010 are expected to be removed in the medium term. The provision of resources such as an electronic grade book, expanded residential accommodation and laboratories together with acquired expertise in alternative blended teaching methods will take some time to acquire but in time will provide greater scope for more calendar options. The Committee thus envisages a future trend towards increased flexibility and modification as teaching practices and technology evolve.

APPENDIX 1: Project Steering Committee

Andrew Callander	Executive Director, Student Services
Ross Chambers	DVC (Academic)
Toni Downes	Dean, Faculty of Education
Nick Drengenberg	Academic Secretary, Office of Academic Governance
Lyn Gorman	DVC (Administration)
Tracey Green	Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts
Terry Heazlewood	Associate Dean, Faculty of Business
Geoff Honey	Executive Director, Student Administration
Nic Klomp	Dean, Faculty of Science
Kevin Robards	Presiding Officer, Academic Senate
Ross Wilson	HOS, Accounting and Computer Science
Karen Wood-Meyer	Manager, Research Services, Centre for Research and Graduate Training
Project Centre Support	
Lachlan Mackinnon	Manager, Project Service Centre
Greg Walker	Adjunct, Faculty of Business

APPENDIX 2: Existing and proposed USM Calendars

Week Beginning	Existing 2008 Calendar		Proposal 4
	Autumn / Spring /Summer Sessions 2008	CSU Trimester 2008	S1,S2=14, S3=12, S1-S2 break=3
7-Jan	Summer Wk 4	Break	Session 3 Wk 7
14-Jan	Summer Wk 5	Break	Session 3 Wk 8
21-Jan	Summer Wk 6	Trimester 1 Wk 1	Session 3 Wk 9
28-Jan	Exams	Trimester 1 Wk 2	Session 3 Wk 10
4-Feb	Exams - Supps	Trimester 1 Wk 3	Session 3 Wk 11
11-Feb	O Week	Trimester 1 Wk 4	Exams
18-Feb	Autumn Wk 1	Trimester 1 Wk 5	Break
25-Feb	Autumn Wk 2	Trimester 1 Wk 6	O Week
3-Mar	Autumn Wk 3	Trimester 1 Wk 7	Session 1 Wk 1
10-Mar	Autumn Wk 4	Trimester 1 Wk 8	Session 1 Wk 2
17-Mar	Autumn Wk 5	Trimester 1 Wk 9	Session 1 Wk 3
24-Mar	Break / Res Sch	Trimester 1 Wk 10	Session 1 Wk 4
31-Mar	Break / Res Sch	Trimester 1 Wk 11	Session 1 Wk 5
7-Apr	Break / Res Sch	Trimester 1 Wk 12	Session 1 Wk 6
14-Apr	Autumn Wk 6	Exams	Session 1 Wk 7
21-Apr	Autumn Wk 7	Break	Session 1 Wk 8
28-Apr	Autumn Wk 8	Break	Session 1 Wk 9
5-May	Autumn Wk 9	Break	Session 1 Wk 10
12-May	Autumn Wk 10	Trimester 2 Wk 1	Session 1 Wk 11
19-May	Autumn Wk 11	Trimester 2 Wk 2	Session 1 Wk 12
26-May	Autumn Wk 12	Trimester 2 Wk 3	Session 1 Wk 13
2-Jun	Autumn Wk 13	Trimester 2 Wk 4	Session 1 Wk 14
9-Jun	Exams	Trimester 2 Wk 5	Exams
16-Jun	Exams	Trimester 2 Wk 6	Exams
23-Jun	Break	Trimester 2 Wk 7	Break
30-Jun	Break	Trimester 2 Wk 8	Break
7-Jul	Break	Trimester 2 Wk 9	Break
14-Jul	Break	Trimester 2 Wk 10	Session 2 Wk 1
21-Jul	Spring Wk 1	Trimester 2 Wk 11	Session 2 Wk 2
28-Jul	Spring Wk 2	Trimester 2 Wk 12	Session 2 Wk 3
4-Aug	Spring Wk 3	Exams	Session 2 Wk 4
11-Aug	Spring Wk 4	Break	Session 2 Wk 5
18-Aug	Spring Wk 5	Break	Session 2 Wk 6
25-Aug	Spring Wk 6	Break	Session 2 Wk 7
1-Sep	Spring Wk 7	Trimester 3 Wk 1	Session 2 Wk 8
8-Sep	Spring Wk 8	Trimester 3 Wk 2	Session 2 Wk 9
15-Sep	Break / Res Sch	Trimester 3 Wk 3	Session 2 Wk 10
22-Sep	Break / Res Sch	Trimester 3 Wk 4	Session 2 Wk 11
29-Sep	Break / Res Sch	Trimester 3 Wk 5	Session 2 Wk 12
6-Oct	Spring Wk 9	Trimester 3 Wk 6	Session 2 Wk 13
13-Oct	Spring Wk 10	Trimester 3 Wk 7	Session 2 Wk 14
20-Oct	Spring Wk 11	Trimester 3 Wk 8	Exams
27-Oct	Spring Wk 12	Trimester 3 Wk 9	Exams
3-Nov	Spring Wk 13	Trimester 3 Wk 10	Break
10-Nov	Exams	Trimester 3 Wk 11	Break
17-Nov	Exams	Trimester 3 Wk 12	Session 3 Wk 1
24-Nov	Break	Exams	Session 3 Wk 2
1-Dec	Summer Wk 1	Break	Session 3 Wk 3
8-Dec	Summer Wk 2	Break	Session 3 Wk 4
15-Dec	Summer Wk 3	Break	Session 3 Wk 5
22-Dec	Break	Break	Break
29-Dec	Break	Break	Session 3 Wk 6