

UNLOCK THE SECRETS TO UNIVERSITY SUCCESS



What
Australian
Universities
don't tell you
(but should)



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How To Use This Book

Universities in Australia are homogenous. Unlike the range of higher education providers in most other countries, all Australian universities are based on the same structures and processes of the first few universities started more than 150 years ago. The similarities of Australian universities is helpful for a book like this, because even though examples from many universities are used, the policies, processes and approaches (and the thinking of staff) are so similar that the problems at one university are highly likely to be experienced by students at a completely different university. And the solutions will also be the same.

So the best way to use the book is to read the chapter focussed on the particular issue you are interested in. This will provide you with the terminology used by universities, an overview of the types of barriers you are likely to encounter and the solutions that are most likely to work for you.

There are many footnotes provided that link to university web sites, policies and procedures, and while the actual documents will be different at each university, the way Australian universities work mean that these too will be similar. Have a look at the documents provided in the footnotes, and then see if you can find the same document at your university.

In the end, just reading the book won't solve all your problems and talking with your university is the best approach. But before you do that, read the book to learn about the way universities work and the language they use, so that when you do talk to a university staff member, you will have a much better chance of understanding what they are talking about, and a much better chance at success.



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What is an Australian university?

There are 41 universities in Australia: 38 public universities, two international universities, and one private university. All public universities receive funding from the Australian Federal Government in one way or another - meaning these are taxpayer funded. There are also outlets of overseas institutions offering degrees and most of these are considered private institutions. This book focusses on the 38 public universities.

The Structure of a University

Universities have been described as one of the most hierarchical industries in the world - coming third after the armed forces and nursing! All universities publish their organisational chart on their websites and for a relatively simple example see the one at Flinders¹. While there are some differences between each university, the organisational structure usually looks something like this. At the top, the person in charge is called the Vice Chancellor, often referred to as the VC, and sometimes called the President in an effort to be more like the USA. There is also a Chancellor but their role is usually honorary and they don't have much to do with the day to day running of the university except to be the chairperson of the University Council. The Chancellor is usually appointed from outside of the university and is either an ex-politician, successful business person or someone else with significant experience on Company Boards.

Australia's public universities

Australian Catholic University
Australian National University
Central Queensland University
Charles Darwin University
Charles Sturt University
Curtin University
Deakin University
Edith Cowan University
Federation University Australia
Flinders University
Griffith University
James Cook University
La Trobe University
Macquarie University
Monash University
Murdoch University
Queensland University of Technology
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
Southern Cross University
Swinburne University of Technology
The University of Canberra
The University of Newcastle
University of Adelaide
University of Melbourne
University of New England
University of New South Wales
University of Notre Dame Australia
University of Queensland
University of South Australia
University of Southern Queensland
University of Sydney
University of Tasmania
University of Technology, Sydney
University of the Sunshine Coast
University of Western Australia
University of Wollongong
Victoria University
Western Sydney University

¹ http://www.flinders.edu.au/about_flinders_files/Documents/Organisational_Structure.pdf



The Vice Chancellor is the one responsible for leading the overall strategy of the university and is generally the face of the university, especially when a university has a particular success or

Vice Chancellor Annual Pay rates (2015)

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| University of Sydney | \$1 299 000 |
| Australian Catholic University | \$1 190 000 |
| University of Melbourne | \$1 085 000 |
| Queensland University of Technology | \$1 059 000 |
| University of Queensland | \$1 049 000 |
| UTS | \$1 029 000 |
| Monash University | \$1 015 000 |
| University of NSW | \$994 000 |
| University of WA | \$959 000 |
| RMIT | \$945 000 |
| James Cook University | \$927 000 |
| University of Canberra | \$909 000 |
| University of Wollongong | \$899 000 |
| University of Adelaide | \$879 000 |
| Griffith University | \$879 000 |
| ANU | \$869 000 |
| Macquarie University | \$869 000 |
| Deakin University | \$865 000 |
| La Trobe University | \$835 000 |
| Swinburne University | \$825 000 |
| Western Sydney | \$789 000 |
| Flinders University | \$769 000 |
| Murdoch University | \$760 000 |
| Victoria University | \$755 000 |
| Southern Cross University | \$732 000 |
| University of Newcastle | \$709 000 |
| Federation University | \$695 000 |
| University of Sunshine Coast | \$660 000 |
| Curtin University | \$650 000 |
| UNE | \$639 000 |
| University of Tasmania | \$599 000 |
| University of Southern Queensland | \$594 000 |
| Central Queensland University | \$576 000 |
| University of South Australia | \$549 000 |
| Edith Cowan University | \$540 000 |
| Charles Sturt University | >\$300 000 |

Source: The Australian

needs to get a point across to government. Sometimes you may see the Vice Chancellor in media reports when things go wrong - but usually she or he will delegate to someone else for this job. Each year the salaries of the VCs are published and they certainly vary between the universities. There is no relationship between the amount a VC gets paid and the quality of the teaching at the university.

Beneath the Vice Chancellor are the Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVC) who usually have a particular portfolio of responsibility. In most universities there will be a Deputy Vice Chancellor for research activities of the university, and one for teaching and other academic related activities - sometimes called the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic. There may be other DVCs with other responsibilities such as administration, international relations or other areas depending on the university strategy at the time. There may also be people called Pro Vice Chancellors (PVC), who also have a particular area of responsibility, but are not quite so important. The VC is the boss of the DVCs, and also sometimes the PVCs, but DVCs can sometimes be in charge of the PVCs - it all gets quite complicated, especially when some universities also use the term Pro Vice Chancellor to mean Deputy Vice Chancellor. The salaries for DVCs are not made quite so public as those of VCs but in 2010 the University of Newcastle reported



the salaries of staff at this level ranging from \$380,000 to \$490,000². The not quite so important Pro Vice Chancellor role would usually earn much less than this.

Beneath this lot are the Deans of Faculties, sometimes called Executive Deans. Usually the DVC Academic, or something similar, is the boss of the Deans, but it will depend on the actual structure of the university. The Deans of Faculties are responsible for the overarching management of each broad area of teaching within the university. Some universities, such as LaTrobe, don't use the term faculty but instead may call them colleges, but essentially they are the same thing. So there may be a Dean of Education, Dean of Arts, Dean of Business, Dean of Science etc. Then there are usually Deputy Deans, Associate Deans, Pro Deans and sometimes Sub Deans. The Deputy Dean is usually the Executive Dean's offsider - or sometimes this is called the Associate or Pro Dean. But then there may be Associate or Sub Deans that don't have any management responsibility but are usually ordinary teaching staff appointed to lead a particular area of focus across the schools or departments of the faculty. So there may be an Associate Dean for research, one for teaching, one for international relations, one for graduate studies etc. The Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Sydney (which is actually a School) has 7 Associate Deans and 14 Sub Deans, in addition to their Dean and a Pro Dean³. Curiously some universities appoint Deans with no management responsibilities but instead are responsible for a particular portfolio. Charles Sturt University, for example, has a Dean of Students⁴.

The Dean of the Faculty will usually earn less than the Deputy Vice Chancellors above him or her. The actual salary of Deans at different universities is not widely publicised but Curtin University publishes their pay scales which shows that the loading given to Deans is an extra \$17,735 on top of their usual salary. Their usual salary would be at the Professor level (see below for section on Tutors, Lecturers, Professors and Academic staff) so this would take their salary to about \$195,000⁵. This is probably at the low end of salaries for Deans at Australian universities, with most probably earning around \$250,000. The other positions such as Associate and Sub Deans don't usually attract any additional salary above the salary they would get if they weren't in these positions, although there may be a small allowance attached.

Beneath the Deans are the Heads of Schools. These people are the ones that have the responsibility of managing the actual teaching activity that goes on in universities. Each Faculty of a university will be made up of a collection of Schools (sometimes called departments) which

² <http://www.theherald.com.au/story/470778/3m-for-newcastle-uni-executives/>

³ http://sydney.edu.au/vetscience/about/sub_deans.shtml

⁴ <https://www.csu.edu.au/office-for-students/office>

⁵ https://hr.curtin.edu.au/salary_scales.cfm



are responsible for the subjects and courses in a particular discipline area. So there may be a Head of History, or Geography, or Nursing, or Engineering, or Accounting etc. The number of Schools within a university will differ depending on the size of the university but there may be as many as 30 Schools.

Heads of Schools will have the responsibility of ensuring that the teaching staff are doing their job properly, managing the day to day budget, solving problems, dealing with complaints from students and just about everything else that happens around teaching. They are generally responsible for ensuring that what goes on in the classroom meets the expectations of students, while at the same time ensuring staff have a manageable workload and operate within budget. Heads of School are usually the ones that appoint teaching staff, manage their performance and decide what can and can't be funded. Heads of School are also responsible for investigating students when they cheat in assignments and other issues related to misconduct. See Chapter 6 on what to do if this happens to you.

Depending on how they are appointed, Heads of Schools may receive an additional loading for doing the job, or they may receive a Head of School salary. Usually the Head of School salary would be between \$150,000 and \$220,000. Each School or Department would also have a Deputy Head of School, sometimes called the Associate Head of School, who assists the Head of School to run the department and act in the position when the Head of School is on holiday. There may be a small allowance attached to these positions but often not.

All the positions may also have additional benefits, such as cars, included as part of their salaries. In most cases cars would only apply to Deans and above, however mobile phones, tablets and computers are commonly provided to all people in these roles which can be used for personal use too. Some universities also allow these staff to travel business class when travelling for work, again usually Deans and above, and provide access to airline lounge clubs - which could be used whether travelling for work or not.

Also, the names given to these roles can differ between universities. The most common variation that seems to be happening a bit these days is the elevation of a role to a fancier name. So for example the University of NSW calls all their Heads of Schools Deans⁶. Some universities have dispensed with Schools altogether and just have Faculties, while other universities have dispensed with Faculties and just have Schools. And the structure of a university can change

⁶ <https://www.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/UNSW%20Organisational%20Chart%2015%20June%202015.pdf>



over time - it all depends on who's managing the university at the top and the particular flavour of management style.

Up to this point, none of these people do any teaching - although some Heads of Schools might do a bit if they want to, and Associate and Sub Deans may do some teaching too depending on their responsibilities and how important their job is viewed by the university. The people that do the teaching are your lecturers, also called academic staff, and they come at the bottom of this food chain. However even within this group of people there is an incredibly strong hierarchy.

Tutors, lecturers, professors and academics

Teaching staff at universities will usually be called lecturers or academics. Sometimes teaching staff will have the title of Tutor if their main job is running tutorials (see Chapter 4 on Courses, Subjects and Classes) or they mainly just mark assignments. These titles are not formal - unlike the titles described below.

Full time teaching staff will be appointed at one of 5 different levels usually on the basis of experience. The lowest level is the Associate Lecturer termed a Level A Academic. Usually these staff will not have a PhD (see the Box for more on what a PhD is) but sometimes they will. Salary scales for academic staff vary between universities but generally not by much. We'll use Macquarie University as an example⁷. At Macquarie an Associate Lecturer earns between \$68,324 and \$92,000 a year. There are 8 steps or increments within this range, and an academic's salary increases each year until they reach the top of their level's pay scale.

The next level is just called Lecturer, or Level B. Most full time teaching staff at universities are at this level. Their salary at Macquarie ranges from \$96,970 to \$114,732 with 6 annual increments. Next are the Senior Lecturers (Level C) earning between \$118,401 and \$136,161 with 6 increments and then come the Associate Professors, or Level D, earning between \$142,197 and \$156,406 usually with 4 increments. And at the top are Professors or Level E academics, often curiously termed "full" Professors, earning between \$174,326 and \$182,566. Macquarie has two increments but some universities just have the one. There is generally a decrease in the number of staff from Lecturer to Professor at most universities.

The range from Associate Lecturer to Professor reinforces the incredibly hierarchical nature of universities. While teaching staff who have completed a PhD are allowed to be called Doctor, titles such as Professor carry with them an aura of special importance, certainly within universities at least, when in reality they are nothing more than self-appointed names given to

⁷ <http://staff.mq.edu.au/public/download.jsp?id=206521>



staff at a particular pay level. This is further reinforced because staff are “allowed” to be referred to as Professor so-and-so once they receive this level as opposed to just being called Mr, Mrs or Doctor – although most lecturers are ok with you calling them by their first name. And while each of these levels indeed attracts a very different salary, from the perspective of a student, there is almost no difference in the job actually conducted.

What is a PhD?

Most full time teaching staff will be required to have a PhD. A PhD, which stands for Doctor of Philosophy, is a fancy term given to people who complete the highest level degree that a university can award. A PhD differs from other types of degrees in that you don't study subjects and sit exams but instead spend at least three years (sometimes many more) studying and researching a particular question in any field taught by a university. A PhD usually has nothing to do with philosophy, although you can do a PhD in philosophy! All PhDs need to be original work so usually the aim of a PhD is to explore a topic that has not been explored before. Sometimes it is aimed at answering a particular question, while other times it is to do exploratory research. So people can do a PhD in microbiology trying to work out an answer to some medical issue, or a PhD in history exploring a little known historical event. The different topics you can study as part of a PhD are endless and sometimes the point of the study can seem quite esoteric. People who undertake a PhD usually receive a government funded scholarship of around \$25,000 a year (although this is tax free) and don't usually have to pay any fees. The project is undertaken in conjunction with two or more supervisors who are usually employees of the same university. At the end of the study, a thesis of around 100,000 words is produced consisting of the results of the research. This is examined, usually by three examiners from outside of the university in which it was conducted - and often from experts around the world - and if passed, the person is allowed to call themselves Doctor. At graduation time, they are also usually allowed to wear a rather ridiculous looking floppy hat, whereas everyone else wears the rather ridiculous looking mortar boards.

Academic staff progress through the levels by promotion. Once appointed at a particular level, staff can apply for promotion when they think they are doing the things that are required at the next level. Each university will define what this means but usually it revolves around the profile of the staff member in terms of national and international recognition for the work they do. Sometimes staff can be recognised internationally for the teaching they do and are promoted based on this, although this is rarely the case, and most of the time staff are promoted based



on the research they do (see Box on Research). Promotion is very closely tied to the number of publications they have produced and the number of research grants they have been successful in attracting.

There is one other group of staff that are so common at universities these days, universities have become dependent upon them to survive. Casual staff, sometimes called sessional staff, are those staff that are employed only to teach and are paid on an hourly basis. While the rates of pay can sometimes seem quite high - ranging from \$50 an hour to mark assignments, up to \$300 an hour to present a lecture, in reality the job security of these staff is quite low with a lot of uncertainty about when and if they will have a contract for the coming teaching session. There is also often significant pressure to work many more hours than they get paid for. And there is no promotion scheme for casual staff.

All the teaching staff described above account for about half of the staff employed by universities. The other half are employed to actually run the university and include a vast array of jobs such as running student administration, admissions, finance, the library, student services, support, the equity office, transport, some food outlets, graduations, educational designers, human resources, IT, laboratories and technicians, buildings and grounds maintenance, and many, many other jobs. Depending on the university, these staff can be called professional, general or support staff and most earn much less than the academic staff. The pay scales of these staff are arranged into Levels usually ranging from Level 1 to Level 10. Most staff in these jobs are at Levels 4 or 5 and earn between \$62,000 and \$76,000, although some maintenance staff might be earning around \$50,000⁸.

Most of the time you won't have much to do with these staff, although if you go into the library or need to sort out some paperwork or other administrative issue you may meet a few. Despite some universities beginning to centralise these services using what might be called a "call centre" approach, there are still many universities where one or more of these types of people are located within the Schools where your lecturers will be located. Sometimes they are called something like a School Admin Officer. These people are very important people to get to know because they can often solve a problem, direct you to the right person, deal with student admin on your behalf and a whole range of other issues directly relating to your studies. Because they work in the Schools, they usually have a better understanding of your particular issues than the staff in the bigger departments of student admin. And the other good thing about these staff is that you can usually find them at their desks, unlike the academic staff!

⁸ <http://www.hr.uwa.edu.au/policies/policies/pay/scales/general>



What does a lecturer do?

You may think that the main focus of the person at the front of your classroom is to teach. In most cases if the person is employed full time, as opposed to casual, they are required to do both teaching and research. Because of the pressure to do research, in particular the role it plays in promotion, most lecturers spend much more time on their research activities than on teaching. And because to get a job at a university, research experience is often more important than teaching experience (see what they don't tell you below) most lecturers are really researchers first and teachers second. This means that many lecturers don't enjoy teaching and would rather be doing research - although the good ones enjoy doing both.

Working as a lecturer at a university is a highly competitive occupation. Again the competition is usually around research and the pressure to publish research findings in international journals. This all takes time, and while some of that time is taken from teaching activities, some academic staff spend a lot more time at work than they get paid for. The average time a lecturer spends working is 50 hours a week⁹ but they get paid for around 35.

There is also a misconception about the number of weeks of holiday university staff receive. Because school teachers receive many weeks of holidays, and because university students get lots of holidays, especially over summer when there can be up to four months between classes, you would be forgiven for thinking that university staff get the same amount of time off. However staff at universities receive four weeks holiday like most other people. When the students are on holidays, staff mainly spend the time on research activities such as conducting experiments, writing books or other material for publication, preparing research grants or attending research conferences. Some of the time could be spent on developing new teaching materials but this is usually minor compared to research activities.

Lecturers may also have other jobs in addition to teaching and research. There are so many committees in a university (see section below on Council, Senate, Boards and Committees) that most lecturers will be on at least one and sometimes multiple committees, and some may have a role managing a particular course or program. Lecturers with these roles are usually called Course Coordinators, Program Directors or something similar and are often responsible for deciding on who gets accepted into university in the first place. The course director is also the person that provides advice to students about their choice of subjects and can approve transfer between courses or even allow students to change the subjects within a course (for more about courses and subjects see Chapter 4). Sometimes staff in these roles get some "relief" from

⁹ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/university-staff-donating-17bn-in-unpaid-work/news-story/592e2eb4dde2bb2fb0cfcb62d32b7ddf>



University Research

The difference between a university and other types of post high school study such as TAFEs and most private tertiary colleges is that universities are required to do research. The questions each university researches will depend on the expertise of the staff. While universities have some staff that are employed to do research only, almost all full time teaching staff will also be required to undertake research and publish the results of their research in journals focussed on their specific area. There are thousands of types of journals that people can publish the results of their research in. While some journals will publish research results from a broad range of topics such as the curiously named PLOS One or PNAS (yes, it's colloquially known as penis), most cover a very specialised area of interest. While some staff do their research without any additional funding, many spend huge amounts of time applying for grants to allow them to buy equipment, pay research assistants and to travel to conferences and field sites. Most universities are heavily focussed on conducting research, partly because some of the funding universities receive from government is based on the amount of research they do, but mostly because universities believe that the more research that is done, the more prestigious the university is. This is reinforced by the way universities are ranked by organisations such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings which use research as a major criteria for determining the international rank of a university. There is, however, no link between the teaching quality of a university and its ranking. For example, Charles Sturt University never ranks highly in the Times Higher Education rankings, but recently received the highest rating in the Good University Guide for learner engagement, full time employment and starting salary¹⁰ – you choose.

What this means for students is not very much. Most universities will argue that research is imperative to good teaching, and will go on endlessly about the “teaching research nexus”. There is little evidence that good teaching is strongly dependent on good research. Also, while external funding for research is a big focus of many universities and the staff involved, universities themselves spend many millions of their own dollars on research activities. While this could be in the form of grants to staff (usually quite small amounts) most of the money is spent on support staff, laboratories, equipment and the salary of the DVC Research and their staff. So this means a large proportion of the money you pay, that you may have thought was meant to be for your education, is redirected from the classroom to pay for university research.

¹⁰ <http://ratings.gooduniversitiesguide.com.au/>



teaching so they can do the job, and other times they have to do the job in addition to all their teaching and research responsibilities. Either way, it's another reason your lecturer can seem somewhat distracted from their teaching duties.

What they don't tell you

To get a job as lecturer you don't need any qualifications in teaching. This means that very few, and in some departments none, of the teaching staff will have undertaken any study to learn how to teach. This means that your lecturers will have had no formal training in the skills of teaching - unlike the requirement for high school teachers. While there are some "in-house" qualifications offered by universities now, often called a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching and Learning such as the one at UTS¹¹ they are usually limited in scope, can be completed in half a year or less, and are "reflective" which means there are few actual assignments and no exams - and almost everyone passes.

While these courses may give lecturers a few tips about good teaching, there is usually no requirement to complete one of these before getting a lecturing job. Even if new staff are required to undertake these courses as part of a probation period after being appointed, your new lecturer is likely to have been "thrown in the deep end" and will begin teaching with only their experience as a student to guide them on how to teach.

Universities are trying to get their staff to complete these in-house qualifications because there is the possibility that some funding from government may be dependent on the proportion of staff with teaching "qualifications". This however now seems unlikely and in most cases was never going to be a very big stick anyway. The other thing that universities don't tell you about their lecturing staff is that some don't do any lecturing - or any teaching at all. This situation arises because of the focus on research where staff are encouraged to apply for grants that give them money to "buy out" their teaching. Sometimes universities may also relieve their staff from teaching to focus on their research. The way universities use the term "relief" to refer to doing less teaching says a lot about how universities view teaching versus research. The amount of "buy-out" a lecturer receives can range from as little as the time required to mark your assignments, to a whole subject or many subjects. Staff can receive this for just part of a year or for many years. The people that fill the gap are usually casual staff. This can mean you may never see that world famous scientist you thought was going to teach you in the classroom - and because of the ad hoc nature of research grants, there may be a different person (usually a casual) teaching a subject every year. This also does nothing to keep a subject up to date, as casual staff usually are employed just to teach rather than update subjects.

¹¹ <http://handbook.uts.edu.au/courses/c11228.html>



Also, most academic staff are eligible for what is termed sabbatical. This is an old fashioned term but it means time off to focus on (mainly) research activities - these days called something like Study Leave or Special Studies Program like at UNSW¹². Usually this is for half a year, but sometimes it can be for a whole year. Not many staff get these each year but it is another reason the person you thought was going to teach you is not the person at the front of the room.

Council, Senate, Boards and Committees

Just like the hierarchy that is evident in the pay scales of university staff, there is a strong hierarchy in the way universities are managed - and in most cases this involves a committee. There are dozens of committees, boards and working parties in every university and the committee at the top of all universities is the University Council, created by an Act of Parliament. University Councils are like a Board of Directors in a public company.

In effect, the University Council is responsible for approving the big decisions such as the appointment of the Vice Chancellor, major capital expenditure (e.g. new buildings), university restructures, and is responsible for reporting to government. Most of the work is not actually done by members of the Council but they will receive reports from other groups and make the final decision. The Chair of the University Council is the Chancellor (this is usually the only real job the Chancellor does for the university), and its members are the other top employees of the university and usually some “important” members of the community such as the odd politician.

Beneath the University Council is the Academic Senate, or sometimes called the Academic Board or something similar. Members of Senate are a mix of official members (usually the VC, all DVCs, Deans etc.) and a number of elected members which usually come from the academic staff of the university. The description of the Academic Senate from Flinders University is a good example:

“The Academic Senate is responsible for assisting Council to oversee and monitor the academic activities of the University and ensuring the academic quality and integrity of the University’s academic operations.”¹³

Beneath Academic Senate are usually the Faculty Boards. Each Faculty will have its own Board, usually chaired by the Dean of the Faculty, and will be responsible for all the academic matters relevant to the particular Faculty. Members of Faculty Boards may include all the Professors in

¹² <https://www.hr.unsw.edu.au/employee/acad/ssp.html>

¹³ <https://www.flinders.edu.au/about/governance/university-council/academic-senate>



the Faculty, although they usually don't turn up to meetings, Heads of Schools, Sub or Associate Deans and some ordinary lecturers elected by the academic staff. The role of the Faculty Board, according to the University of Canberra, is supposedly to "play a vital role in the development of a coherent philosophy of education within the Faculty and facilitate its translation into academic programs which reflect the broadest possible base of consultation and the principles and policies (sic) established by Council and Academic Board governing the University as a whole. Faculty Boards also play a vital role in strategic as well as operational planning of the Faculty"¹⁴ - and yes the spelling error is on their website¹⁵. However there are usually so many people on a Faculty Board, and meetings get bogged down in the minutiae of university life, that little discussion ever really occurs.

None of these groups actually do very much work. Instead they usually receive reports and information from other sub committees or working parties for discussion at the meetings. The role is then to approve the work of the sub committees, or request further work. While the decisions made at Council, Senate and even Faculty Boards may not be readily apparent to most students, there are two committees that have a direct impact on students and what they learn. The first is usually termed something like the Course Standards Committee, and the other is the Assessment Committee.

At the Faculty level, the Course Standards Committee is responsible for reviewing new courses and subjects, reviewing changes to existing courses and even recommending the closure of courses. The people on these committees will be similar to Faculty Boards but may have extra members such as the Course or Program Coordinators. The Faculty Assessment Committee has a similar membership and is responsible for receiving and approving all the grades for every student at the end of each teaching semester.

However, neither of these committees do much work either. The role of both committees is to receive reports or proposals from other parts of the university that have actually done the work to prepare the documents that the Faculty committees will review. While these committees have the right to make changes to the proposals and even change a student's grade, most of the time they act as rubber stamps and if any changes are made they are usually very minor - unless something has gone very wrong somewhere. Most of the work is done by staff in the

¹⁴ <http://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/governance/academic-board/committees/other/faculty-boards>

¹⁵ The book author is not trying to take a cheap shot at UC – every university website contains errors. However, the editors decided to leave it in, partly, because it is a direct quote, but also to make the point that because lecturers often deduct marks for spelling mistakes in assignments, a common complaint from students, understandably, is "how can a lecturer mark me down for spelling errors when the subject materials re full of spelling mistakes". Unfortunately spelling errors are not confined to university websites but sometimes appear in subject and lecture materials too.



Schools themselves. Proposals for new courses and subjects usually are developed by academic staff and the course director, and then presented to the School Courses Committee to review, discuss and recommend changes. The School Assessment Committees will receive the grades of every student in every subject that the School has responsibility for and check that all proper procedures have been followed. If everything is in order then these get sent up the line to be rubber stamped by the higher committees.

All of these committees mean that university life is very busy for staff. The extra time that your lecturer is required to spend attending endless meetings, reading meeting minutes and occasionally doing some work for a committee or working party, will mean less time for teaching and research. And because research is viewed as often more important, it can mean less time for teaching.



02 Getting into University

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There is no doubt that getting into university can seem like one of the most daunting exercises any person can undertake. It often feels like the entire school system is aimed at educating people to a level sufficient to be admitted into university. For hundreds of years universities have been revered as centres for the privileged, available to those few that have achieved great success in their schooling life. This image is perpetuated by universities, particularly the ones with longer histories, with pictures of rolling lawns, sandstone buildings, teachers dressed in academic gowns and “medieval” headwear, staff with self-appointed titles such as professor and vice chancellor, and a hierarchical system of colleges, schools and faculties that to the uninitiated can seem like a foreign, or even mystical, world. However, while this may have been the case a hundred or so years ago, very little of it remains the truth today, and a

little scratching of the surface will reveal a system that is indeed accessible to most people - it's just that sometimes universities don't want you to know that.

Secrets about the ATAR

Getting admitted, as universities call it, to an undergraduate course of study requires the applicant to demonstrate that they are capable of being successful at university. In most cases, especially for recent school leavers, universities still begin the assessment of applicants by looking at their final year school results as presented in their ATAR - or Australian Tertiary Admission Rank, or in Queensland the OP or Overall Position score. Some courses have additional requirements such as interviews or auditions, but for most courses the ATAR is deemed to be king – although this is changing (see below).

The ATAR is also often perceived to be the measure of quality of a course (for more about Courses and what is involved see Chapter 4 – Courses, Subjects and Classes), and those



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About the Book

Australian universities want their students to succeed – it's just that they are really bad at telling students how to do that. In most cases, it is caused by a lack of understanding of the student's perspective, and an assumption that it is the student's fault when things go wrong. The main reason many students struggle at university is that information about how to succeed is hidden from students, not deliberately, but because university processes are often complex and difficult to understand. Many students just don't know that there is help available, or even if they do, they give up trying when it just becomes too hard. This book reveals those secrets and makes life a little easier for students.

About the Author

Dr Andrew Smith has over 30 years' experience in Universities in Australia in roles ranging from student, lecturer, course director, Head of School and Associate Dean. He has advised hundreds of students in the art of navigating the intricacies of university processes, how to achieve the best from the system and how to avoid the common problems many students face that affect their ability to succeed.