

One-Year Honours Courses Policy

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) This Policy replaces Chapter 1.50 of the Academic Policy (December 2010).

Section 2 - Definitions

(2) For the purpose of this Policy refer to the Academic Board's Definitions Policy.

Section 3 - Introduction

(3) Honours degrees at Southern Cross University are structured in a variety of ways. This Policy applies to one-year full-time equivalent Honours courses that follow a Bachelor degree. Where applicable, they apply to other forms of Honours courses.

(4) The University's Rules Relating to Awards provide the basis for Honours Awards Rules, where Honours is taken as a single year award, together with the specific Bachelor's Honours Awards Rules.

(5) The following should be considered in the light of the commitments and priorities espoused in the Southern Cross University Strategic Plan 2005-2010.

Section 4 - Objectives

(6) The primary goal of Honours courses is research training. Within this broader context of introducing students to research, Schools must formulate and explicitly state the aim and objectives of their Honours courses. The content of the courses and the assessment processes must clearly reflect the aim and objectives.

Section 5 - Content and Implementation

(7) Schools must identify the particular purposes and characters that distinguish their Honours courses from their other undergraduate and postgraduate coursework courses.

(8) Where feasible, collaboration between Schools in the University and across institutions should be encouraged so that the range of specialist courses and the pool of students for them can be increased.

Part A - Responsibilities and Expectations

(9) A Candidate-Supervisor Agreement form must be filled in by both the supervisor and student and passed on to the Honours Coordinator by no later than Week 4 of the teaching period in which the Honours candidate commenced.

(10) Supervisors must provide regular and systematic feedback to students on all elements of their performance in the Honours course as it proceeds. They should regularly refer to the agreed Candidate-Supervisor Agreement.

(11) Perceived breaches of the agreement expressed in the Supervisor/Candidate Agreement should be dealt with in the first instance by discussion between the supervisor and candidate. If the matter cannot be resolved satisfactorily, reference should then be made to the Honours Coordinator, then to the Head of School.

(12) Honours courses should contain a mix of advanced theory, professional training (where appropriate), research training, and a research project leading to a thesis (in some fields, for example the performing arts, an alternative form of presentation may be appropriate). No overall guidelines are appropriate, but each School should establish appropriate upper and lower boundaries for the proportion of the total assessment allocated to the thesis component. The thesis component of most current courses falls in the range 50 - 80% of total assessment load.

(13) The academic staff involved in supervising Honours candidates, and the Honours Coordinators, should be active researchers and will normally have a higher degree by research, or at least have a sound background in research. As normal practice, associate supervisors should be nominated to provide back-up if a supervisor becomes unable to act. The role of associate supervisor also provides potential staff development for junior staff. Where appropriate, substantial involvement in supervision by qualified non-academics, for example from industry, should be encouraged. In some instances it may be appropriate to appoint these external contributors as associate supervisors.

(14) Schools should ensure that the expectations and responsibilities of supervisors, associate supervisors and students are clearly understood by all parties. All supervisors should attend a supervisor's workshop. Guidelines must be provided to supervisors on best practice in supervision. Schools must also ensure all Honours courses have an induction course.

(15) Schools must provide students with written information, in a unit statement following standard Southern Cross University format, and a Handbook or other appropriate publication, on the following items:

- a. length of Honours course
- b. aims, nature and benefits of the Honours course
- c. details of staff interests
- d. the role of supervisors
- e. expectations about supervisors - student contact
- f. grievance procedures
- g. facilities available
- h. course requirements and assessment procedures
- i. thesis requirements (including style guide and word limit)
- j. information on the criteria used for decisions concerning the assessment Honours course
- k. weightings of the various components
- l. submission dates
- m. application dates for major scholarships
- n. guidelines for such activities as laboratory, field or studio work

(16) Schools involved in joint or cooperative Honours courses should give particular attention to determining assessment standards and the possible difficulties for students with travel and timetables. A systematic information and advice program should be provided to potential students at an appropriate time within their undergraduate course. As well as individual advice and encouragement, documents should be provided which set out entry requirements, expectations, the structure of the Honours course, and the facilities available to students. In particular, admission criteria must be carefully spelt out.

(17) Schools should provide a formal organisational and administrative structure for the Honours course (for example, Honours Coordinator or Course Committees), for such matters such as follow:

- a. scrutinising thesis proposals
- b. making recommendations on course proposals
- c. monitoring the structure and coherence of the Honours course offerings
- d. monitoring the effectiveness of the supervision provided
- e. monitoring assessment procedures

(18) Courses should include components involving the development of both written and oral communication skills. Normally students should be required to provide a seminar on their thesis or engage in an oral defence of their work.

(19) Schools should work to ensure comparability of Honours award grading and grading systems within comparable disciplines across institutions, by exchange of information and staff and, where appropriate, involvement of professional associations. The University should also seek to achieve comparability within the University. There should be regular reviews of all Honours courses to provide on-going monitoring of the conduct and standards of Honours courses. The use of external assessors or moderators appointed for an extended period (for example, 3 years) could assist in achieving greater comparability.

(20) Schools should regularly evaluate their Honours courses in terms of the suitability of its objectives, success in achieving its objectives, the comparability of its standards, and student equity.

Part B - Assessment

(21) The supervisor's role as a thesis examiner should be delineated, and a supervisor must not examine a student he or she has supervised. Each School should have a policy on the number of examiners and the use of external examiners. At least one thesis examiner must be external to the University.

(22) Schools should develop explicit criteria for the assessment of theses, including definitions of performance at the various grades of Honours. All examiners, particularly external examiners, must be provided with a clear statement of the criteria and standards.

(23) Examiners will normally have a higher degree by research.

(24) The assessment process should include written reports on the thesis incorporating a short statement of the reasons for the grade or mark awarded to the thesis. Students should be apprised of the result for each component of the classification of Honours award.

(25) Schools should maintain written records of the criteria used for grading Honours performance to facilitate comparability from year to year. Written records of the considerations entered into in reaching final grades for students must be maintained.

(26) Schools should endeavour to finalise Honours grades for students as early as possible to facilitate consideration of applications for Australian Postgraduate Awards etc. Final grades should preferably be released by 30 November each year.

(27) The following outlines the process to be used when discrepancies arise in Honours for internal assessments:

- a. The mark may be contested as inappropriate by the Supervisor or the student where there is a variation in grades of 10% or more;
- b. If a mark is contested, the Honours Coordinator, Supervisor, Head of School /Head of College and assessor will discuss the grading;
- c. The student will be invited to submit an explanation as to why they consider the mark to be inappropriate;
- d. If no consensus is reached, the matter will be forwarded to a special meeting of the School/College's Honours

Committee (or equivalent), who will vote on a final grading;

- e. If the student is still not satisfied after this course of action, an appeal may be made through the University appeals process.

(28) Guidelines for action when discrepancies arise in Honours assessments between thesis markers.

- a. The mark may be contested as inappropriate by the Supervisor, Honours Coordinator or the student where there is a variation of more than one band;
- b. If a mark is contested, the Honours Coordinator, Supervisor, Head of School /Head of College and/or Research Director will discuss the grading;
- c. Where appropriate the Honours Coordinator, Supervisor, Head of School /Head of College and/or Research Director may decide on a remark by a different examiner/s - usually external;
- d. If the student is not satisfied with the result of this course of action, an appeal may be made through the University appeals process.

Part C - Best Practice, Ethics, Privacy and Confidentiality

(29) Supervisors should be fully aware of, and adhere to, the SCU Policy on Quality in Research Practice.

(30) Schools must ensure that all Honours research adheres to the appropriate University procedures for research ethics clearance.

(31) Schools must ensure that the SCU Privacy Management Plan and Confidentiality of Personal Information Guidelines are followed in relation to access, storage, dissemination, disclosure and alteration of personal student information.

(32) Schools should ensure that, in cross-institutional supervisory or assessment arrangements or where non-academic staff members are associate supervisors, the person or agency is provided with the opportunity to sign an SCU Confidentiality Agreement.

Status and Details

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