

Student Union Advocacy Service Report January - March 2014

Introduction

This quarter typically sees a high volume of appeals to the Academic Board from both CUPC decisions and Special Consideration determinations. Typically assistance for students wishing to lodge Academic Board appeals is quite intensive and this is reflected in the volume of contacts this quarter.

Trends and Issues this Quarter

For one reason or another, Chinese international students were a focus this quarter. The issues below have highlighted the particular vulnerabilities of some of these students.

Communicating with Chinese Students over holidays – the Great Firewall of China

The Chinese Government routinely blocks access to certain internet domains and consequently some students have problems accessing their university emails in China as gmail is one of those sites targeted from time to time.

This has come up several times this quarter in student appeals from CUPC determinations made in their absence. The affected students were unable to access their University email while at home over the Christmas holidays and consequently they were unable to respond to notice of unsatisfactory progress.

As all formal notices are now sent to students via email – this issue has the potential to adversely affect students' interests.

Recommendation

The University should investigate the extent of this issue and - where appropriate - make allowances for affected students.

Follow up on desperate measures – foolishness, fraud and HPR form forgery

In the October – December 2013 report, we documented the very troubling trend of students falsifying Health Professional Report (HPR) forms to support special consideration applications. Specifically we documented the use of a website which the students usually accessed to buy second hand text books, find rental accommodation and other University related resources – which was advertising the HPR fabrication 'service'.

The website is a popular resource for Chinese students <<http://www.yeeyi.com/bbs/index.php>>. The advertisement for the falsified HPR documentation is in the "Forum" section which is a kind of online bulletin board.

Some of the students we have seen in relation to misconduct allegations have described posting on the forum site, asking for advice about how to handle the pressures of study. In reply they were directed to the person offering the fraudulent HPR forms. The students subsequently made contact with this person via online chat to conclude the deal. Apparently the person or people

selling the fraudulent documents claimed they were alumni of Melbourne University. The fee charged was \$200.00.

After the initial spate of students facing misconduct allegations in this regard, this Service posted warnings about this practice on our website and in our social media channels. We are also working in collaboration with University International Student Services and UMSU International to disseminate information about the dangers of this scam to vulnerable students via Chinese social media and a YouTube video. Watch this space for further updates.

While on the topic of the particular vulnerabilities of this group of students - we have recently been alerted to the existence of scam housing advertisements which have slipped through the Student Union's checking process because they are in Chinese. The scam involves advertisements for rooms to let. The ads are in Chinese and newly arrived Chinese students have been enticed to pay six months' rent in advance on trust with no lease and then left high and dry when it turns out that the "landlord" is actually no more than a scammer who has no right to let the room. The UMSU Advocacy and Legal Services will be working with the UMSU Information Desk and University Housing Service to manage this issue.

Statistics

January-March 2014

164 students were provided a service resulting in 440 contacts with the service.

January-March 2013

154 students were provided a service resulting in 472 appointments at the service.

Additionally, the Advocacy website received 1667 page views this quarter. There were over 400 page views on the Academic Progress page and other popular pages included information on grievances and complaints, special consideration, assessment disputes and volunteering opportunities.

Distribution by primary issue:

The primary issue is generally identified as the university process to which the student's main concern or problem relates. Data is classified in this way because it provides a standardised and more meaningful breakdown which may be useful for tracking policy trends amongst other things. Additionally this classification system aligns with the general methodology employed by the service in providing advice and problem solving support to students. Specifically while students may express their issues in a multitude of ways, the primary issue is identified according to the policy or procedure by which the University provides possible resolutions.

As the Graduate Student Association has now discontinued its Advocacy Service, we have provided further specific breakdowns of graduate coursework and research higher degree students. We hope this will support the GSA students' council and office bearers to access data which may assist in planning and evaluation. Further breakdowns or specific drill-down reports are available on request.

January-March 2014

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Unsatisfactory Progress	73	43.98%	General Misconduct	4	20.00%	Supervision Problems	11	44.00%
Special Consideration	12	7.23%	Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	4	20.00%	Progress - HDR	8	32.00%
Admission - Selection Appeal	12	7.23%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress	3	15.00%	Scholarship Issues	2	8.00%
Supervision Problems	11	6.63%	Assessment Dispute	3	15.00%	Admission - Selection Appeal	2	8.00%
Assessment Dispute	9	5.42%	Student Admin - Enrolment problems	2	10.00%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress	1	4.00%
Student Admin - Enrolment problems	8	4.82%	Vocational Placement Problems	1	5.00%	Assessment Dispute	1	4.00%
Progress - HDR	8	4.82%	Student complaint about uni staff	1	5.00%			
Other	8	4.82%	Advance Standing Credit/RPL	1	5.00%			
Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	5	3.01%	Admission - Selection Appeal	1	5.00%			
Not Specified	4	2.41%						
General Misconduct	4	2.41%						
Course structure/changes	2	1.20%						
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	2	1.20%						
Scholarship Issues	2	1.20%						
Student complaint about uni staff	2	1.20%						
Academic Misconduct - Falsified docs	2	1.20%						

January-March 2013

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Unsatisfactory Progress	90	54.55%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress	22	44.90%	Progress - HDR	4	40.00%
Admission - Selection Appeal	13	7.88%	Student Admin - Enrolment problems	6	12.24%	Other	4	40.00%
Assessment Dispute	11	6.67%	Assessment Dispute	5	10.20%	Supervision Problems	1	10.00%
Special Consideration	10	6.06%	Admission - Selection Appeal	5	10.20%	Student complaint about uni staff	1	10.00%
Other	9	5.45%	Special Consideration	3	6.12%			
Student Admin - Enrolment problems	8	4.85%	Supervision Problems	2	4.08%			
Incorrect Advice	4	2.42%	Other	2	4.08%			
Supervision Problems	4	2.42%	Vocational Placement Problems	1	2.04%			
Not Specified	3	1.82%	Progress - HDR	1	2.04%			
Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	3	1.82%	Equitable Accommodation (SEAD)	1	2.04%			
Equitable Accommodation (SEAD)	3	1.82%	Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	1	2.04%			
Vocational Placement Problems	2	1.21%						
Student Admin - Remission of Fees	2	1.21%						
Progress - HDR	1	0.61%						
Scholarship Issues	1	0.61%						
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	1	0.61%						

Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

January-March 2014

Graduate	48	29.27%
Undergraduate	116	70.73%

January-March 2013

Graduate	65	42.21%
Undergraduate	89	57.79%

Distribution by International/Domestic Status

January-March 2014

Domestic	137	83.54%
International	27	16.46%

January-March 2013

Domestic	113	73.38%
International	41	26.62%

Distribution of cases over all by Faculty/School – January-March 2014

In order to make the following data more meaningful the relative weighting of faculties by enrolment has been included. While this is useful in partially normalising the data - it is not possible to draw conclusions as to *why certain* faculties may be over or under represented in presentations to this service. For example, high representation may reflect an active referral policy within that faculty or it may disclose certain procedural issues in that area.

	Number of cases and as a proportion of all cases.		Enrolments in the faculty as a proportion of students enrolled at university	Indication of relative representation in Advocacy casework
Science (UG & HDCW & RHD)	42	28.38%	10.95%	>>>
Architecture Building & Planning (UG)	10	6.76%	2.61%	>
Melbourne School of Land and Environment (HDCW & RHD)	8	5.41%	1.34%	>>
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences (UG & HDCW & RHD)	19	12.84%	21.06%	<<
Melbourne Graduate School of Education (HDCW & RHD)	6	4.05%	6.58%	<
Melbourne Law School (CW & RHD)	4	2.70%	4.55%	<<
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HDCW & RHD)	4	2.70%	4.23%	<<
VCA (UG & HDCW & RHD)	3	2.03%	5.28%	<<
Engineering (teach out) (UG)	2	1.35%	4.61%	<<<
Veterinary Science (UG & HDCW & RHD)	1	0.68%	1.55%	<<
Melbourne School of Design	1	0.68%	2.08%	<<<
Graduate School of Business and Economics (CW & RHD)	1	0.68%	3.98%	<<<
Arts (UG)	19	12.84%	13.06%	=
Business & Economics (UG)	18	12.16%	11.61%	=
Melbourne School of Engineering (CW & RHD)	5	3.38%	4.18%	=
Not Yet Admitted	3	2.03%	/	/
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	2	1.35%	/	/

Commentary

Interestingly, the ratio of graduate to undergraduate students was lower this quarter than the equivalent quarter last year. This was despite the discontinuation of the Graduate Student Association Advocacy service at the beginning of March this year.

There were 137 domestic students and 27 international students seen in this period (compared with 113 to 41 in the same period last year). This is a 10% drop in the proportion of international students who normally present to this service. At this point there is no obvious explanation for this but we will monitor it to see if it becomes a trend.

Course unsatisfactory progress was the primary issue across all students. Among graduate coursework students, general and academic misconduct made up almost 80% of the presenting issues. For research higher degree students the majority of matters concerned supervision issues, with research progress a close second.

Selection appeals once again featured in significant numbers this quarter. Only two of these were from students not yet admitted to the university, indicating that selection into graduate degrees continues to be a major concern for existing students, including upgrading from Master by Research to PhD. Assessment disputes and special consideration related matters continued to feature in approximately equal numbers. As usual, the report concentrates on the top four issues for the

quarter; however, further breakdowns against other primary issues and against various demographics are available on request.

Presenting students came from 17 schools and faculties. Science (undergraduates (UG) as well as higher degree coursework and research students) was overwhelmingly the most frequently represented faculty. Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences (all), Arts (UG), and Business and Economics (UG) were the next most represented faculties.

The majority of selection appeals came from the faculty of Arts followed closely by Science. There were substantially more graduate selection appeals than undergraduate appeals which may account for the larger than usual number of these cases presenting this quarter. Students seeking selection into graduate courses are generally already students at the university and may have had previous dealings with the advocacy service or at least awareness of the service as undergraduates. All selection appeals were made by domestic students.

Course Unsatisfactory progress - By Faculty/School

Science	28	38.36%
Business & Economics	11	15.07%
Architecture Building & Planning	7	9.59%
Melbourne School of Engineering	7	9.59%
Arts	6	8.22%
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	5	6.85%
Melbourne Law School	2	2.74%
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences	2	2.74%
Engineering (teach out)	2	2.74%
Veterinary Science	1	1.37%
Melbourne School of Land and Environment	1	1.37%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	1	1.37%

Course Unsatisfactory progress – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	67	91.78%
Graduate	6	8.22%

Course Unsatisfactory progress – by International/Domestic

Domestic	58	79.45%
International	15	20.55%

Selection Appeals - By Faculty/School

Arts	3	25.00%
Science	2	16.67%
Not Yet Admitted	2	16.67%
VCA	1	8.33%
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	1	8.33%
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	1	8.33%
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences	1	8.33%
Graduate School of Business and Economics	1	8.33%

Selection Appeals – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	9	75.00%
Graduate	3	25.00%

Selection Appeals – by International/Domestic

Domestic	12	100.00%
----------	----	---------

Assessment Disputes - By Faculty/School

Melbourne Law School	2	22.22%
Architecture Building & Planning	2	22.22%
VCA	1	11.11%
Melbourne School of Land and Environment	1	11.11%
Melbourne School of Engineering	1	11.11%
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	1	11.11%
Business & Economics	1	11.11%

Assessment Disputes – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	5	55.56%
Graduate	4	44.44%

Assessment Disputes – by International/Domestic

Domestic	9	100.00%
----------	---	---------

Special Consideration - By Faculty/School

Science	3	25.00%
Melbourne School of Engineering	2	16.67%
Arts	2	16.67%
Melbourne School of Land and Environment	1	8.33%
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	1	8.33%
Business & Economics	1	8.33%
Architecture Building & Planning	1	8.33%
Melbourne Business School	1	8.33%

Special Consideration – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	11	91.67%
Graduate	1	8.33%

Special Consideration – by International/Domestic

Domestic	11	91.67%
International	1	8.33%

Liaisons and involvement with the University Community

The service is always keen for opportunities to speak to staff at the University to demystify our role and explain the services we provide and how we can work together to further student interests.

Staff in the Advocacy Service liaised with the University Community in the following ways over the period:

22-Feb-14	Advocacy & Legal presence for VCA Carnival Day	VCA Southbank
25-Feb-14	Advocacy & Legal photo booth for Carnival Day	South Lawn
07-Mar-14	Advocacy & Legal presence to speak at Women's Network Mentor Training (run by UMSU Wom*n's Department)	Training Room 1, Union House
26-Mar-14	Participated in a panel discussion about supervision for graduate research students coordinated by GSA Research Education Officer.	Gryphon Gallery, Graduate Centre
27-Mar-14	Ran a workshop as part of Education Week to discuss what to do when things go wrong. Coordinated by UMSU Education Officers.	Joe Nap B, Union House

If you would like to arrange a time for Advocacy staff to speak at your staff meeting or other liaison opportunity, please get in touch.

The next Advocacy Service report will cover the quarter April to June 2014 and will be available in early July 2014.