Student Union Advocacy Service Report
October - December 2014

Introduction

The October-December Quarter is always very busy. In line with the University's cycles, demand on the service typically peaks in this quarter as it takes in an assessment period and the beginning of the Course Unsatisfactory Progress season.

Trends and Issues this Quarter

Educative Responses to Plagiarism – awareness raising or fishing expedition?

There were several cases once again this quarter where allegations of plagiarism led to an informal educative process as an alternative to a formal misconduct hearing under statute 13.1. While this Service welcomes the educative rather than punitive approach to academic honesty, there have been a number of cases where the so called educative meeting became a de facto investigation and culminated in a formal allegation being issued.

Of particular note this quarter was a matter where the student was advised that an educative response would be taken on the condition that information about a potential breach was volunteered. The student then entered into email correspondence with the course coordinator in what amounted to an investigation of the allegation. The allegation was then formalised and preceded to a hearing. This raises several significant procedural issues. Firstly, an educative response should not be predicated on any action by the student. While the process was undoubtedly undertaken in good faith, it had the effect of coercing and entrapping the student. It also put the faculty into a situation where it was unable to honour its original commitment to proceed informally. For this reason it is important that decisions made on whether to proceed with an educative response or a formal process should be made only *after* the alleged conduct has been thoroughly investigated and there is a prima facie case to either deal educatively or formally. There was however, no opportunity to test the validity of such a process on appeal as the allegation was then dismissed at the faculty hearing.

It is our view that there may be a number of irregular processes undertaken at faculty level. No doubt most of these are conducted in good faith, however it must not be forgotten that the University context is covered by administrative law and students do have substantive rights in this area. Anecdotally, UMSU student office bearers who have sat on faculty based discipline committees have reported on occasions that the staff members constituting these committees – including the chair from time to time – appear to lack confidence in and basic familiarity with the norms and best practice of determining misconduct allegations.

Recommendation

In this context it may be time to review the training and resourcing of these local discipline committees and the staff who are charged with investigating such matters at first instance. We would welcome an opportunity to contribute to such an initiative.

Programmes this Quarter

Exam Support Stall at Royal Exhibition Building

The stall sells water, assorted stationary, tissues and lollies for a nominal fee. Additionally students may borrow approved calculators and clear plastic bags for their pens etc. Signs are displayed reminding students not to inadvertently take their study notes or any unauthorised materials into the venue with them. The stall also has information about the Advocacy Service; an exam tips information card and information on other University services.

Volunteers do two hour shifts, answering a range of questions, providing directions on the location of facilities, and referral to discuss issues such as special consideration and academic misconduct.

This quarter 3915 students accessed the services provided at the stall.
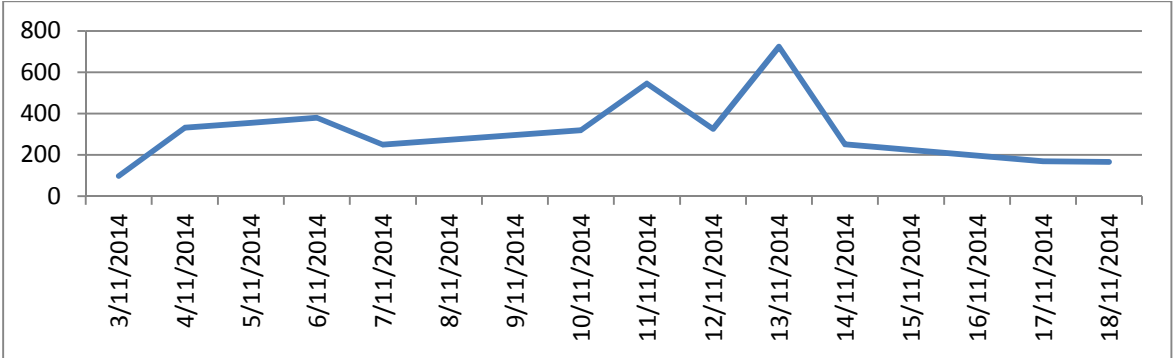
The Advocacy Service is grateful for the continued support of student administration and the staff at the Royal Exhibition Building who make this initiative possible. Above is a graph showing the pattern of access over the period.

Peer Support Programme at Course Unsatisfactory Progress Meetings

This quarter 176 students were assisted by 20 peer support volunteers in nine faculties and schools.

The PSP attracts volunteers via an advertising campaign using the Student Portal, posters, the Student Union web site and word of mouth. We train a cohort of between 20 and 40 volunteer students every semester. Only students in their second year or beyond are eligible. Training is compulsory and is conducted over a full day. The training provides the volunteers with a solid overview and context for the academic progress review procedures conducted across the University, including the requirements of procedural fairness and the statutory role of the support person in this process. Additionally the training informs the volunteers about the university's support services and provides practical experience and development of skills required to approach, support and interact with students who are very stressed or even distressed.

The PSP is coordinated by the Student Services Officer who manages the day-to-day rostering and support of volunteers. Generally peer volunteers do not work in faculties or schools in which

they are enrolled. This semester over half of the volunteers were graduate students including two PhD candidates.

Statistics

Comparative data

This quarter 240 students were provided a service resulting in 758 contacts. In the same quarter last year, the service saw 392 students which resulted in 789 contacts with the service. The primary focus of casework at this time of year is coursework assessment and course unsatisfactory progress. The lower number of students presenting this quarter compared to the same quarter last year can be accounted for in the changes to s 2. of the *Academic Progress Review Procedure* (MPF1025) which has relaxed the categories of unsatisfactory progress for the majority of graduate students, significantly reducing the number of students meeting with the faculty Course Unsatisfactory progress Committee.

Additionally, the Advocacy website received 4500 unique page views this quarter. There were around 1200 unique views on CUPC and over 350 unique page views on study tips. Other popular pages included information on assessment disputes and special consideration.

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 generally identified according to the policy or procedure by which the University provides possible resolutions.

Graduate coursework students comprised nearly half of the CUPC related presentations this quarter. For Higher Degree Research students, progress was also the primary issue, closely followed by supervision issues.

October–December 2014

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Unsatisfactory Progress	107	42.29%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress	50	46.30%	Progress - HDR	5	31.25%
Special Consideration	34	13.44%	Special Consideration	14	12.96%	Scholarship Issues	3	18.75%
Assessment Dispute	28	11.07%	Assessment Dispute	13	12.04%	Supervision Problems	2	12.50%
Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	26	10.28%	Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	11	10.19%	Student complaint about uni staff	1	6.25%
Academic Misconduct - Collusion	12	4.74%	Academic Misconduct - Collusion	9	8.33%	Other	1	6.25%
Academic Misconduct - Exam	7	2.77%	Vocational Placement Problems	3	2.78%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress	1	6.25%
Scholarship Issues	5	1.98%	General Misconduct	2	1.85%	Academic Misconduct - Research	1	6.25%
Progress - HDR	5	1.98%	Course structure/changes	2	1.85%	Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	1	6.25%
General Misconduct	4	1.58%	Student complaint about uni staff	1	0.93%	Academic Misconduct - Collusion	1	6.25%
Student complaint about uni staff	4	1.58%	Student Admin - Graduation	1	0.93%			
Course structure/changes	3	1.19%	Equitable Accommodation (SEAP)	1	0.93%			
Equitable Accommodation (SEAP)	3	1.19%	Academic Misconduct - Exam	1	0.93%			
Vocational Placement Problems	3	1.19%						
Student Admin - Enrolment problems	3	1.19%						
Supervision Problems	2	0.79%						
Other	2	0.79%						
Cross-institutional enrolment denied	1	0.40%						
Student Admin - Remission of Fees	1	0.40%						
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	1	0.40%						
Academic Misconduct - Research	1	0.40%						
Student Admin - Graduation	1	0.40%						

October–December 2013

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Unsatisfactory Progress	270	65.53%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress	88	58.28%	Progress - HDR	6	66.67%
Assessment Dispute	31	7.52%	Assessment Dispute	18	11.92%	Supervision Problems	2	22.22%
Special Consideration	27	6.55%	Special Consideration	12	7.95%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress	1	11.11%
Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	24	5.83%	Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	11	7.28%			
Academic Misconduct - Collusion	11	2.67%	Academic Misconduct - Exam	4	2.65%			
Not Specified	9	2.18%	Academic Misconduct - Collusion	4	2.65%			
Academic Misconduct - Exam	7	1.70%	Admission - Selection Appeal	3	1.99%			
Progress - HDR	6	1.46%	Not Specified	3	1.99%			
Admission - Selection Appeal	6	1.46%	Vocational Placement Problems	2	1.32%			
Other	4	0.97%	Other	2	1.32%			
Academic Misconduct - Falsified docs	3	0.73%	Student Admin - Graduation	1	0.66%			
General Misconduct	3	0.73%	General Misconduct	1	0.66%			
Vocational Placement Problems	3	0.73%	Course structure/changes	1	0.66%			
Course structure/changes	2	0.49%	Advance Standing Credit/RPL	1	0.66%			
Student Admin - Enrolment problems	2	0.49%						
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	1	0.24%						
Student Admin - Graduation	1	0.24%						
Supervision Problems	1	0.24%						
Equitable Accommodation (SEAP)	1	0.24%						

Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

October–December 2014

Graduate	121	50.42%
Undergraduate	119	49.58%

October–December 2013

Graduate	155	39.54%
Undergraduate	237	60.46%

University load status – Graduate 39.24% & Undergraduate – 60.76%

Distribution by International/Domestic Status

October–December 2014

Domestic	138	57.50%
International	102	42.50%

October–December 2013

Domestic	265	67.60%
International	127	32.40%

Distribution of cases over all by Faculty/School – October - December 2014

In order to make the following data more meaningful the relative weighting of faculties by enrolment has been included. This allows a more accurate comparison of how faculties are represented by issues presenting to the service. It is also relevant to note that it is not possible to draw from this data *why* faculties may be over or under represented. For example, high representation may reflect an active referral policy within that faculty or it may disclose certain procedural issues.

	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 represent ation in Advocacy casework
Faculty of Science (UG)	40	17.39%	8.65%	>>>
Graduate School of Engineering (HDCW & HDR)	36	15.65%	4.18%	>>>
Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning (UG)	29	12.61%	2.61%	>>>
School of Design (HDCW & HDR)	8	3.48%	2.48%	>
School of Land and Environment (HDCW & HDR)	6	2.61%	1.34%	>
Graduate School of Education (HDCW)	19	8.26%	6.58%	>
Faculty of Veterinary Science (HDCW & HDR)	3	1.30%	0.66%	>
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HDCW & HDR)	2	0.87%	4.23%	<<<
Engineering (UG)	1	0.26%	4.61%	<<<
Faculty of Business and Economics (UG)	15	6.52%	11.61%	<<
VCA & Music (UG)	5	2.17%	4.20%	<<
Law School (HDCW & HDR)	3	1.30%	3.05%	<<
Graduate School of Science (HDCW & HDR)	2	0.87%	2.30%	<<
Faculty of Arts (UG)	22	9.57%	13.60%	<
Graduate School of Business and Economics (HDCW)	4	1.74%	3.98%	<
Faculty of MDHS (HDCW & HDR)	24	10.43%	9.46%	=
Melbourne School of Information (IT)	2	0.53%	-	-
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	12	5.22%	-	-

Commentary

The breakdown of graduate to undergraduate students was 121 to 119 (compared with 155 to 237 for the same period last year). This reflects slightly over 50% of those presenting being graduate students – which means graduate students were over represented in relation to the load status of around 40% of enrolled students.

There were 138 domestic students and 102 international students seen in this period (compared with 265 to 127 in the same period last year). Further breakdowns against presenting issues are detailed below.

The primary presenting issues overwhelmingly related to course unsatisfactory progress which represented over 42% of the case work. Special consideration, assessment disputes and plagiarism were the next most common issues. It is worthy of note that plagiarism case work has doubled this quarter compared to the same quarter last year. This indicates that a proactive educational strategy, similar to the one initiated for the falsified documentation issue last year should be planned.

Presenting students came from 18 schools and faculties with undergraduate students from the Faculty of Science the most frequently represented. Graduate students from the Melbourne School of Engineering were the next most frequent users of the service. Course Unsatisfactory Progress matters were primarily responsible for the large numbers of students from Science. Undergraduate students from the faculties of Arts and Architecture and Business and Economics and graduate students from the Faculty of MDHS were also well represented this quarter.

Special consideration matters centred on the School of Engineering and faculty of Science, followed closely by students from Architecture Building and Planning.

Assessment disputes were concentrated in the faculties of Architecture, Building and Planning and Arts, with the remainder relatively evenly spread across faculties and schools with a minor concentration in the faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences. Graduate and undergraduate students were equally represented.

As noted above, Plagiarism matters doubled this quarter compared to the same quarter last year. This is worthy of further investigation as there are no obvious reasons for this by dint of policy change of approach. The majority of plagiarism allegations came from the Melbourne School of Engineering and the faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning.

Course Unsatisfactory progress - By Faculty/School

Science	29	27.10%
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	15	14.02%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	11	10.28%
Melbourne School of Engineering	10	9.35%
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	9	8.41%
Architecture Building & Planning	8	7.48%
Business & Economics	5	4.67%
Arts	5	4.67
Graduate School of Business and Economics	3	2.80%
Melbourne Law School	2	1.87%
Melbourne Graduate School of Science	2	1.87%
VCA	1	0.93%
Melbourne School of Design	1	0.93%
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences	1	0.93%
Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (MCM)	1	0.93%

Course Unsatisfactory progress – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	55	51.40%
Graduate	52	48.60%

Course Unsatisfactory progress – by International/Domestic

Domestic	56	52.34%
International	51	47.66%

Special Consideration - By Faculty/School

Melbourne School of Engineering	8	23.53%
Science	8	23.53%
Architecture Building & Planning	5	14.71%
Business & Economics	4	11.76%
Melbourne School of Design	3	8.82%
Arts	3	8.82%
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	2	5.88%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	1	2.94%

Special Consideration – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	21	60.00%
Graduate	14	40.00%

Special Consideration – by International/Domestic

Domestic	19	54.29%
International	16	45.71%

Assessment Disputes - By Faculty/School

Architecture Building & Planning	9	32.14%
Arts	5	17.86%
Melbourne School of Design	3	10.71%
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	3	10.71%
Melbourne School of Land and Environment	2	7.14%
Science	2	7.14%
Melbourne School of Engineering	1	3.57%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	1	3.57%
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences	1	3.57%
Business & Economics	1	3.57%

Assessment Disputes – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	14	50.00%
Undergraduate	14	50.00%

Assessment Disputes – by International/Domestic

Domestic	21	75.00%
International	7	25.00%

Plagiarism Allegations - By Faculty/School

Melbourne School of Engineering	6	23.08%
Architecture Building & Planning	6	23.08%
Science	3	11.54%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	2	7.69%
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	2	7.69%
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	2	7.69%
Arts	2	7.69%
Melbourne School of Design	1	3.85%
Melbourne Law School	1	3.85%
Business & Economics	1	3.85%

Plagiarism Allegations – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	13	50.00%
Undergraduate	13	50.00%

Plagiarism Allegations – by International/Domestic

Domestic	12	46.15%
International	14	53.85%

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:

21-Oct-13	CUPC coordinators network meeting	Level 1 Conference Room, Raymond Priestley
11-Nov-13	Meeting with Kylie Gould at University Legal services regarding misconduct penalties	University Legal Services
19-Nov-13	Visit from staff from Flinders Uni Advocacy and Financial Aid service.	Advocacy Service
20-Nov-13	Meeting with new advocacy staff from Flinders University	Advocacy Service

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 January to March 2015 and will be available in early April 2015.

Phoebe Churches
Manager, Advocacy & Legal
January 2015