



# **ADVOCACY**

Service Report January - April 2020 – COVID-19 Edition



## Strange Times

You might have wondered if there would be a Quarterly report from the Advocacy Service this quarter (come on – of course you wondered!) – a month later than usual but here we are nonetheless. After a rapid transition to remote working, we determined that it was worth allowing an extra month to more comprehensively capture the service activities during a critical period for most students. Accordingly, the usual quarterly comparators have been adjusted to reflect the first four months of the year.

## Introduction

The Advocacy Quarterly Service Report was originally commissioned by the University’s Advocacy Service Reference Group (ASRG) – a group set up to oversee the service contract via which the Service was funded between 2012 and 2017. The Quarterly Report was originally an accountability measure under the funding contract, but it also served to ventilate student experiences of various processes within the relevant parts of the University. Over time, the circulation of the Report grew to encompass a cross section of the University Community, establishing strong communication channels for feedback and issues management between relevant stakeholders. We hope to continue to expand and consolidate these channels and invite interested University staff to contact the Service directly to collaborate on responses to the issues identified in the Report.

## Data and ‘Anecdotal’

The data presented in this report is drawn from the statistics recorded in the Advocacy Service Case management database. It is not drawn from, nor is it correlated with University collected service data, to which we have no access. For this reason, it is important to interpret the data and analysis as pertaining solely to activities of the Advocacy Service. The Report statistics cannot be extrapolated to provide commentary on the performance of Faculties or Schools, unless specifically indicated in the commentary.

The ‘Trends and Issues’ identified in the report are based on both service statistics, and anecdotal observations and case studies. They are provided as insights into the student experience of University processes, or as potential indicators of systemic problems with administrative decision making and procedural fairness. These issues are not intended to reflect the totality of student experience, but rather those areas where the University needs to address potentially serious issues and risks.

The Service can generate drill down or other statistics on its activities, where these may be of interest to the University community, however due to relatively few resources, such requests need to be made with due notice.

## Projects

An important aspect of our empowerment-based service model is the development of a suite of accessible and informative self-help materials. Accordingly, the Service has to date produced several short “video explainers”. This semester we have been working on a new video to demystify the often perplexing process of lodging an appeal to the Academic Board for a final review of eligible decisions. The script is currently in development. Watch this space for the final product.

If you are interested in our other videos, the first of these was created in 2015 to demystify Course Academic Progress (CAPC) Committees and shows a typical walk through of a CAPC Meeting. The video has been regularly updated to incorporate changes to the process. If you have never seen it, you can view it here:

<https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/support/advocacy/unsatisfactory-progress/>

The second video explains consumer guarantees in Educational Service, and you can see it at the bottom of this page:

<https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/support/advocacy/grievances/>

The next video we developed was an animated explainer on the tricky issue of Assessment Disputes. We chose this issue as a topic for an explainer, as the volume of assessment related disputes has been a steady area of growth in presentations to the Service over a number of years now. Assessment disputes are notoriously difficult to explain to students as they involve an appreciation of distinctions which often appear very arcane. This short, animated video explaining the context and process has been a great help in assisting students to understand their options when they are unhappy with a grade. You can watch it here:

<https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/support/advocacy/assessment-disputes/>.

## Trends and Issues

How often have I begun this section with the words “during this quarter our casework was focused on the usual matters”? Oh for some *usual matters!* Typically, we would expect our casework this quarter predominantly to involve appeals to the Academic Board from CAPC decisions, Assessment Disputes, and appeals regarding Special Consideration determinations.

We’re not in Kansas anymore Toto – as the statistics make abundantly clear – this quarter we have a whole swathe of new categories to characterise our casework. Enter the COVID-19 Issue type. These categories appear in the Service Statistics below.

## A brief Wrap Up of Advocacy Casework Informed Actions this Quarter

Overall, for the Advocacy Service and the students contacting us, so far this semester has been characterised by major upheaval in several distinct phases:

- Commencement of teaching activities on campus;
- The transition to online learning;
- The implementation of fully online teaching and assessment; and
- The non-academic impacts on students – especially financially.

Having moved all lectures online from Tuesday 17 March, the University then took the larger and more complex step of shifting all teaching and learning online from Monday 30 March.

These major initiatives, and the attendant disruption to teaching and learning, as well as the financial implications of the COVID-19 restrictions brought many challenges for students from the outset. One of the first matters we raised with the University was the need to establish relevant escalation points for student-facing issues so that we could continue to support students and assist in early interventions to resolve issues as they arise.

### Direct Communications with the University

After a few delays and false starts, UMSU was able to put in place mechanisms to communicate and escalate directly to responsible areas of the University. This has included the Academic Registrar and Student and Scholarly Services (SaSS), and the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Student Life who sits in Chancellery and acts as a liaison with the Academic Board and the Vice Chancellor. This has enabled the Service to raise systemic issues for students for more urgent attention and to inform policy changes where relevant.

From 25 March, the Advocacy Service commenced remote service delivery. Over the next few weeks to the end of April, the service observed various issues arising through casework and raised them as appropriately with Chancellery.

This has worked very effectively in this difficult time and we hope that the spirit and practice of this collaboration will continue beyond the present unusual circumstances.

Some of the systemic issues we raised and resolved with the University during this time include:

- Relaxation of the normally strict evidentiary requirements for special consideration. It became abundantly clear quite early on that it was going to be increasingly hazardous and/or difficult for students to access their GP or other health services to complete an HPR form. Accordingly, this was an important measure to ensure students were not disadvantaged this semester. The University subsequently allowed students to
- Automatic eligibility for fee remission for students withdrawing after census date or the delay of census date to allow subjects to be fully online first. We argued that, given the often substantial changes to subject delivery required in some subjects, some students may want to wait until their subjects are fully online before deciding whether they wish to continue. The University subsequently addressed this issue by delaying census date until the end of April.
- The major changes to course offerings, the availability of subjects online, and the general stress of the situation all suggested that allowing International students leeway in the usual requirement to study a full load of at least three subjects was waived in late March, when the Government resolved to relax visa requirements for international students.

### When is an Emergency, not an Emergency?

At the end of March, the University announced its Emergency Support Fund (ESF) which was meant to provide relief and support to coursework students experiencing financial hardship as a result of COVID-19. The promise of the initiative was that students who needed assistance to live and study throughout the semester would be eligible for financial grants of up to \$7500. We welcomed this initiative and began directing the many anxious and financially stressed students to the application process.

Despite our optimism that the grants would provide immediate relief for students needing urgent support, we raised a number of potential concerns about the application process and the overall adequacy of the scheme. For example, we recommended that requirements for supporting documentation should be easy for students to comply with, that emergency funding needed to flow to students quickly so that immediate problems can be addressed, and pointed out that the combined cap for both the COVID support fund and ESF grants would unfairly impact international students and could exacerbate financial hardship. Obviously just because a student had received the travel ban grant would not mean that they wouldn't experience significant financial hardship between April and the beginning of July. The original scheme also limited the grant for equipment to reimbursement of costs already expended. However, we expressed the concern that students who are experiencing financial hardship won't be able to spend money in order to be reimbursed later. After all, that is the nature of financial hardship. Therefore, we asked the University to ensure that students who are struggling to meet the ordinary costs of living or are unable to purchase upgraded computer equipment can access funding quickly and in advance.

The majority of these issues were addressed positively and relatively promptly by SaSS, so we remained cautiously optimistic about the initiative, and its capacity to cushion the blow for many students, especially international student who had access to no other support.

By the end of April, we were growing increasingly concerned that the ESF scheme had not been properly resourced as the Service began receiving mounting requests for assistance to find out what had happened to their applications. Students who had applied within the first few days of the grant becoming available in the first week of April were still waiting for outcomes almost a month later. Many of these students were down to their last few dollars and had been struggling through their online studies without access to the technology required. By May we had begun to contact SaSS on students' behalf to request applications still unassessed after more than a month be addressed urgently. We wondered why the scheme was called an "Emergency" support at all.

### **Standard and Non-standard Semester Subject Census Dates**

After the delay of the census date for standard semester long subjects to 30 April was announced, we began to see students who had been enrolled in non-standard semester subjects who were growing increasingly concerned about whether they had been granted an equivalent extension of time as their peers in standard semester subjects. Most were advised they had to wait until April 17 to find out whether their respective subjects would also enjoy the delayed census or not. An uncomfortable and tense wait for many who still remained unsure whether to commit to the semester online or not. This reached a crisis as the putative extended census dates approached. Fortunately, after a number of interactions with Chancellery, the majority of these were confirmed before the new census date passed.

Students also raised concerns about the impact of delayed census dates on their scholarship payments which are typically paid after census date. Again, when raised with the University the situation was reviewed, and the University confirmed that the scholarships would be paid on their original date.

### **Special Consideration**

As the University rolled out its COVID-19 communications to students, the Service was relieved to hear that the University's approach suggested that Special Consideration would be available for students affected by the impact of Covid-19.

However, shortly after the original communications about special consideration as a mechanism of support for students affected by COVID disruptions, the University posted the following advice in relation to Special Consideration:

*Special Consideration will not normally be considered in relation to the University's transition to a Virtual Campus for teaching, learning and assessment, and that self-isolation without having contracted COVID-19 would not normally be grounds for special consideration. However, where there are special circumstances these will be considered on a case by case basis.*

*The University will assist students to make their cases against the usual criteria.*

It seemed incredible to invoke the idea of "usual criteria" when no one could have claimed there is anything usual about the situation under the COVID-19 restrictions.

UMSU raised its concern with University that students who are currently stressed and anxious had been contacting us expressing their perception that the above advice represented a shift away from the concept of special consideration as a response to the impacts of the broader COVID crisis. We reiterated that Special Consideration should be made available based on the nature and degree of the impact on the student not on a *class of events* that lead to that impact.

In the meantime, we were also being contacted by students who had been refused extensions by their subject coordinators when they had requested more time for assessment to account for the extra shifts as healthcare staff they had been required to commit to under COVID-19.

Ultimately the University added an additional and specific criterion for special consideration to accommodate healthcare workers, and we received an undertaking that Special Consideration applications indicating COVID related impacts would be considered, with student declarations accepted as sufficient evidence providing the impact met the threshold for special consideration.

We also continued to argue that much of the prospective burden on the Special Consideration regime would be relieved if the University would consider an appropriate academic amnesty in response to COVID-19 conditions.

### **WAM, BAM ... the Fight for Academic Amnesty**

As April progressed, with time to think through options under the delayed census date, the trend in issues presenting to UMSU and the Advocacy Service shifted increasingly to a focus on how the massive disruptions to teaching and learning might affect students' grades – and particularly their future options as determined by their Weighted Average Mark (WAM), which is something UMSU began to raise with the University in March.

As students continued to worry that special consideration would not be available for COVID related impacts, UMSU continued to emphasise that much of the anxiety for students could be reduced if the University would make a decision about how it was going to address questions about WAM and results.

Students raised a range of opinions with the Service on how an academic amnesty might work. Accordingly, we put forward options that accounted for the range of student opinion for the University to consider. During this time, other Group of Eight Universities started to announce various forms of Academic Amnesty, notably the Universities of Adelaide and South Australia, announced arrangements which were consistent with the kinds of actions that UMSU had earlier recommended to the University.

Finally, informed by the ongoing case work presenting to the Service, on 7<sup>th</sup> April UMSU set up a petition asking students concerned about the impact of the situation on their WAM to sign. The petition garnered 13,645 signatures in just two weeks. The results were presented to the University, which finally changed its position on academic amnesty on 20 April, effectively creating a safety net for students which means their current WAM cannot decrease as a result of students' grades in semester 1 2020.

### **RHD Candidatures**

Subsequent to the University's announcement of WAM adjustments for coursework students, we welcomed the decision to offer an automatic 6-month extension for both submission and scholarship payments for PhD candidates who are near the end of their candidature. The Service remained concerned about the potential inequity of requiring all other Graduate researchers to make individual requests for extensions under the policy. In the same vein as the rationale for the WAM adjustment, we were of the view that the collective experience of an unprecedented global crisis logically meant that any extensions to research candidature should be equally applied, and in addition to those already allowed under the *Graduate Research Training Policy* where necessary.

It appeared that the unstated approach of the University would be to provide limited universal adjustments to students and to add to these with individualised adjustments that students need approval for. From the casework presenting to the Service, there was no doubt that this approach was misconceived, underestimating the impact of the shared experience that students have of living through this crisis. The University needed to engage with the notion that the fact of living through the collective and shared experience of the crisis is sufficient justification in itself for a presumption towards extended universal flexibility for students.

### **Attendance Requirements for Online Classes**

The Service received many enquiries from students who were confused about attendance requirements for online classes. While we understood that this determination is appropriately devolved to subject coordinators, we requested that action be taken to encourage subject coordinators to clarify and, where necessary, to reinforce these requirements with students.

### **IELTS Tests**

We had international students who had elected to defer starting their courses being advised they would need to retake their IELTS tests even though they had been accepted the first time. Upon raising this with the University, a uniform waiver for retesting under these circumstances was brokered.

### **Online Subject Quality**

Just as the WAM issue was resolved for students in mid-late April, the volume of students who had already been contacting in their hundreds increased dramatically asking for some kind of recognition that the quality and value of their coursework had diminished this semester.

To gauge the degree and extent of this issue, UMSU invited students to complete a survey asking what they expected from their subjects based on the relevant course prospectus and the specific handbook entries, versus what was being delivered this semester. Unsurprisingly what emerged was that one of the most obviously impacted areas was the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, but there are also a number of clinical and other courses which continued to offer subjects that did not meet students' expectations. Generally, students reported that subjects with significant practical components were not being delivered at the standard they would have expected under normal conditions. UMSU's survey collected more than 640 responses where students provided consistent accounts of poor subject quality compared to the expected standards and offerings, and most troublingly, where students anticipated finishing their degree and going into the workforce without their expected practical experience.

From the extensive responses we were able to compile a report setting out the findings and recommendations of this survey, which UMSU presented to the University on 29 April. An abridged version of the Report presented to the University is available here- <https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UMSU-Quality-of-Education-Survey-2020-Web.pdf>. The report identified a number of "subject hotspots" – 11 in total, which collectively accounted for than a quarter of all subjects respondents indicated were problematic. The version of the report provided to the University identified these subjects with a recommendation they be reviewed in light of the evidence of poor subject quality and value in the online context.

The following week on 5 May the University responded to the report, stating its unwillingness to investigate these subject quality reports or change its position on fee relief for effected students. At this point, the strategy for responding to the issue, which many students continue to raise with the Service has shifted to providing advice on how students might pursue individual Grievances with the University on the basis of diminished quality and value of their online subjects.

### **Other Casework Issues**

There were several other issues worth noting this quarter – one in the context of the rapid changes to students' study environments, and the other- in a breath of fresh air – the hoary old chestnut of historical special consideration saw a welcome piece of decision making.

### **Campus Closedown confusion**

On 29 March, just before 6 pm – a student who had no computer and a problematic home environment was studying in the Doug McDonnell building. The student had been previously 24-hour access to the building on medical grounds and was registered with SEDS for ongoing support for chronic severe mental health problems.

The student was approached by a University security guard who had been given directions from the security control room to move-

out anyone found in the building. The student explained their situation to the guard, and then over the phone to the security supervisor in the control room.

The security supervisor advised the student that the Government had issued the community a directive to stay at home unless there is a valid reason. The student indicated they did have a valid reason, because they could not study at home, but the security staff member insisted they leave, and they complied.

Concerned about how they would study subsequent to this, the student contacted SEDS and booked an appointment to organise written permission to do study on campus, however this was to take more than a week. The student then called Stop 1 and explained the situation. However, the staff at Stop 1 could not contact SEDS and advised the student to keep trying.

In the meantime, the student grew increasingly stressed and anxious as they could not study at home and their projects deadlines were looming. The student also determined that the Government's restrictions at that time were that "Victorians may only go out of their home to buy essentials, exercise or to go work or study if they cannot do it from home". Encouraged by the exemption for study, the student called their local police station and asked if it was acceptable to conduct their studies on campus. They were advised that to attend the campus for study was acceptable if they could not study at home, but that they should also check with the campus security regarding the availability of suitable spaces. The student subsequently called the security control room and enquired if they could return to campus to study given their circumstances. The student instructed that the security staff member confirmed that given the valid reason and existing 24-hour building access, they could and study in the building while observing appropriate social distancing. The student was also advised that the University "did not want students to be sitting in the building and playing video games".

Subsequent to this – the student returned to campus to study on 1 April, and when approached by a security staff member, they were able to explain they had sought permission from both the Victoria Police and the control room while maintaining social distancing and only performing essential study.

Then, a week later on 7 April the student was approached by a plain clothes staff member with a radio who asked him to leave. The student explained the situation and requested the staff member check with the control room to confirm that they were entitled to use the space for study. The student reported that the call was made, and at that point the student was advised by staff at the security control room to email [essential-access@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:essential-access@unimelb.edu.au) for formal permission, information which was not provided previously to the student despite his multiple interactions with University staff over several weeks. The staff member subsequently left, and the student assumed the matter resolved. However approximately 10 minutes later they returned with a uniformed security officer. Things went downhill from there, with the security staff first leaving, then returning and again asking the student to leave. When the student refused, the police were called. The student waited until the police arrived, explained the situation to them, but were advised to heed the directions of campus security and take the matter up with the University the next day. The student then followed the directive to leave.

The following day, the student emailed essential access requesting permission to attend campus to study, and the basis upon which this was essential. Nine days passed without a response to this email, and during which time the student could not complete any study. The student continued to call the control room seeking permission to study on campus and was advised each time to wait for a response to the email.

Although the student never received a response to that email, the student did receive an allegation of general misconduct on 8 April on the basis they had refused to comply with a reasonable direction or request of a security officer employed by the University. Fortunately, the allegation was dismissed after the student presented their account to the misconduct committee.

The student never heard back from Essential Access. They have since made other arrangements from community supported options.

### **Recommendation**

There needs to be clear communication to students and staff alike regarding use of space on campus, particularly as restrictions are incrementally eased.

### **Welcome Decision Making on Late Withdrawals**

The Service receives a number of requests for late (historical) special consideration for semesters and even years passed. This is generally due to a recent diagnosis of a condition which has impacted prior academic performance. Unfortunately, these applications are usually not resolved until they are heard at an Academic Board Appeal – a lengthy and often stressful experience for students who are often still unwell.

However, we were very pleased to see an early exercise of sound administrative decision making in one of these cases. The student had lodged an application seeking late withdrawal from a range of subjects from 2011-2017. The student lodged the application after receiving a diagnosis of ADHD in 2017 with effective treatment only starting last year. This meant they had only come to understand the significance of the impact the condition had had on their studies and capacity at the time.

After initially being referred by the SEDS team to apply for Fee Remission in October 2019, the student argued and eventually was able to have their case considered under Special Consideration as it related to academic adjustments, not fee remission. Despite providing extensive relevant supporting documentation, in February 2020 they were advised that their reason for the out of time application had not been accepted and the application was deemed ineligible. Despite the student's psychiatrist specifically stating

in his supporting letter that the student's condition and its symptoms 'impacted on their capacity to apply for late withdrawals in a timely manner', the outcome provided by SEDS on review stated that the application failed to 'evidence that a timely submission for late withdrawal of these subjects was not possible'.

However, subsequent to lodging a formal grievance, the student's application for special consideration was accepted late and deemed to be eligible for consideration. Consequently, the student was granted late withdrawals for all 18 subjects they had failed between 2011 and 2017 when the condition was finally diagnosed and treated.

## Advocacy Service Statistics

### Comparative data – January - April 2020

During this period 646 students were provided a service resulting in 1602 contacts. In the same period last year, the service saw 355 students which resulted in 1242 contacts with the service. This indicates how intensively the service has been accessed during the COVID-19 restrictions and ensuing disruption to university life, with an increase in individual students seeking assistance of over 45% on the same period last year.

Additionally, the Advocacy website received almost 12000-page views this period (almost twice the volume of the same time last year), with the most popular pages being our contact page, our specific COVID-19 resources, misconduct information and special consideration.

Given the rapid transition to remote service delivery, we are really pleased with our capacity to meet the dramatic increase in demand from students, and I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Advocacy staff, working long hours under often quite challenging conditions to realise this achievement.

### 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. This time we have introduced a new classification of COVID-19 to indicate any type of issue which would not have presented but for the changes associated with COVID-19 disruptions. These are further segregated into the particular issues to do with the COVID-19 state of affairs at the University. For this reason, the usual longitudinal comparators are not available, and I have broken the data down in slightly different ways this time, to drill down into more detail about how COVID-19 has impacted on presentations to the service.

### A final note on our data collection for this period.

Typically, the majority of our contacts come through either our contact form or our drop-in service. However due to the change to 100% remote service delivery, contacts have found us through a variety of other sources, many of which are not optimised to collect the usual base data our contact form or drop-in service collects as routine. This include data on students' faculty, award level (including graduate or undergraduate status) and whether they are a domestic or International student. We have done our best to collect these demographics wherever possible, however the sheer volume and urgency of many contacts has meant that our data is in many cases not as rich as usual. This makes reporting along on graduate/undergraduate and domestic/international lines problematic in this report.

January - April 2020

All Students			Graduate Coursework students*			RHD students*		
COVID-19	260	40.25%	COVID-19	68	34.69%	Supervision Problems	6	30.00%
Course Academic Progress Committee	124	19.20%	Course Academic Progress Committee	50	25.51%	Progress - HDR	6	30.00%
Special Consideration	58	8.98%	Special Consideration	14	7.14%	COVID-19	3	15.00%
Assessment Dispute	35	5.42%	Assessment Dispute	14	7.14%	Scholarship Issues	1	5.00%
Other	17	2.63%	Student Admin - Enrolment problems	7	3.57%	General Misconduct	1	5.00%
Student Admin - Enrolment problems	16	2.48%	Other	6	3.06%	Bullying	1	5.00%
Student Admin - Remission of Fees	15	2.32%	Selection Appeal	6	3.06%	Assessment Dispute	1	5.00%
Academic Misconduct - Collusion	14	2.17%	Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	6	3.06%	Not Specified	1	5.00%
Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	13	2.01%	Student complaint about uni staff	4	2.04%			
Selection Appeal	13	2.01%	Vocational Placement Problems	3	1.53%			
Not Specified	10	1.55%	Academic Misconduct - Collusion	3	1.53%			
Incorrect Advice	9	1.39%	Student Admin - Remission of Fees	3	1.53%			
Student complaint about uni staff	7	1.08%	Incorrect Advice	2	1.02%			
Academic Misconduct - Falsified docs	7	1.08%	Not Specified	2	1.02%			
General Misconduct	6	0.93%	Course structure/changes	2	1.02%			
Progress - HDR	6	0.93%	Academic Misconduct - Falsified docs	1	0.51%			
Supervision Problems	6	0.93%	Advance Standing Credit/RPL	1	0.51%			
Academic Misconduct - Exam	5	0.77%	General Misconduct	1	0.51%			
Course structure/changes	4	0.62%	Scholarship Issues	1	0.51%			
Vocational Placement Problems	3	0.46%	Student Admin - Exchange	1	0.51%			
Discrimination	3	0.46%	Discrimination	1	0.51%			
Scholarship Issues	3	0.46%						
Student Admin - Exchange	3	0.46%						
Student Admin - Graduation	2	0.31%						
Student complaint about another student	2	0.31%						
Sexual Harassment	1	0.15%						
Bullying	1	0.15%						
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	1	0.15%						
Academic Misconduct - Other	1	0.15%						
Special Consideration (Ongoing)	1	0.15%						

January – April 2019

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Academic Progress Committee	130	33.85%	Course Academic Progress Committee	58	36.48%	Progress - HDR	14	46.67%
Special Consideration	53	13.80%	Assessment Dispute	18	11.32%	Supervision Problems	5	16.67%
Assessment Dispute	41	10.68%	Special Consideration	17	10.69%	Assessment Dispute	3	10.00%
Student Admin - Enrolment problems	22	5.73%	Student Admin - Enrolment problems	9	5.66%	Student complaint about uni staff	2	6.67%
Other	19	4.95%	Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	7	4.40%	Not Specified	2	6.67%
Progress - HDR	14	3.65%	Other	7	4.40%	Student Admin - Enrolment problems	1	3.33%
Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	12	3.13%	Not Specified	6	3.77%	Selection Appeal	1	3.33%
Selection Appeal	12	3.13%	Incorrect Advice	4	2.52%	Scholarship Issues	1	3.33%
Incorrect Advice	11	2.86%	Advance Standing Credit/RPL	4	2.52%	Course Academic Progress Committee	1	3.33%
Student Admin - Remission of Fees	11	2.86%	General Misconduct	4	2.52%			
Not Specified	10	2.60%	Selection Appeal	4	2.52%			
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	7	1.82%	Student Admin - Remission of Fees	4	2.52%			
General Misconduct	6	1.56%	Vocational Placement Problems	3	1.89%			
Student complaint about uni staff	6	1.56%	Scholarship Issues	3	1.89%			
Scholarship Issues	5	1.30%	Student complaint about uni staff	3	1.89%			
Equitable Accommodation (SC Rego)	5	1.30%	Discrimination	2	1.26%			
Supervision Problems	5	1.30%	Equitable Accommodation (SC Rego)	2	1.26%			
Vocational Placement Problems	3	0.78%	Quality Teaching	1	0.63%			
Academic Misconduct - Exam	3	0.78%	Course structure/changes	1	0.63%			
Academic Misconduct - Falsified docs	2	0.52%	Academic Misconduct - Falsified docs	1	0.63%			
Bullying	2	0.52%	Academic Misconduct - Exam	1	0.63%			
Discrimination	2	0.52%						
Quality Teaching	1	0.26%						
Student Admin - Exchange	1	0.26%						
Course structure/changes	1	0.26%						

### Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

January – April 2020\*

Graduate	241	37.36%	50.31%
Undergraduate	238	36.90%	49.69%
Not specified	166	25.74%	

\*This data is missing over a quarter of the data – however adjusted for this, the proportion of graduates to undergraduates recorded is 30.31% to 49.69%. The final column shows the breakdown of students where the data was available.

January – April 2019

Graduate	205	53.39%	
Undergraduate	179	46.61%	

### Distribution by International/Domestic Status

January – April 2020\*

Domestic	200	31.01%	41.15%
International	286	44.34%	58.85%
Not specified	159	24.65%	

\*As above with respect to missing data.

January – April 2019

Domestic	199	51.82%	
International	185	48.18%	

### Commentary

The caveat here of course, is that these have been unprecedented times.

The proportion of graduate to undergraduate students was 50.31% to 49.69% (compared with 53.61% to 46.39% the same period last year). This represents steady pattern in the proportion of graduate students this quarter, with the majority of presentations being graduate students as usual.

During this period 41.15% domestic and 58.85% international students presented to the service, a significant over-representation of international students, who make up 40% of enrolled students. International students were significantly overrepresented in the COVID-19 related matters, which is unsurprising given the massive impacts of travel restrictions and the financial burden on international students caused by the crisis. International students were otherwise on or under proportion in all other areas.

The primary presenting issue overall this period- representing over 40% of all matters- were issues related to the changes due to COVID-19. More than a quarter of the COVID-19 related matters concerned requests for fee relief this semester, usually accompanied by complaints relating to a diminution of subject quality in the online offerings. The next most common issue related to students concerned about the impact of the disruptions on their grades – and particularly their WAM. This was closely followed by requests for assistance with accessing the Emergency Support Fund (ESF). It should be noted that special consideration for COVID-19 related reasons has been distinguished from the general types of special consideration applications. These related to matters which would not normally arise but for the COVID-19 crisis.

After COVID related matters, CAPC, Special Consideration, and Assessment Disputes were the next most common issues.

The proportion of students with special consideration issues remained relatively steady compared to last year, although we note a significant relaxation of the strict evidentiary requirements meant that the nature of these matters was somewhat different – with more historical cases than usual.

Around two thirds of the assessment disputes involved informal assessment reviews with the examiner for reasons including alleged administrative errors, problems with the conduct of assessment, and allegations of bias. There were also a number of presentations related to formal requests to the Head of Department for effectively the same types of reasons.

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.

## COVID-19 related matters by Reason

Fee relief/Online course quality	67	25.77%
WAM concerns	38	14.62%
Emergency Support Fund	35	13.46%
LOA/Student Visa	24	9.23%
Tenancy / Legal referral	18	6.92%
Special Consideration	17	6.54%
Centrelink Stimulus Payments	14	5.38%
Classes in non-teaching period/MSB	12	4.62%
Enrolment Problem	8	3.08%
Materials Required	8	3.08%
Online examination issues	6	2.31%
Request delay of census date	4	1.54%
Non-standard census dates	3	1.15%
Graduation delay	2	0.77%
Zoom or Internet problems	2	0.77%
Exchange/study abroad Interrupted	2	0.77%

## Course Academic Progress Assistance - By Stage of process

STAGE	REASON	Total
First Attendance	Mental Health	14
	Employment Commitments	6
	Physical Health	5
	Cultural adjustment	5
	Family Responsibilities	5
	Study Skills	4
	Transition to University	2
	Practical/Rounds/Placement	1
	<b>37</b>	
Second Attendance	Mental Health	15
	Physical Health	2
	Employment Commitments	1
	<b>18</b>	
Third Attendance	Physical Health	1
Appeal	Termination of enrolment	21
	Restriction on enrolment	20
	Suspension of enrolment	17
	Duration	9
	Practical/Rounds/Placement	1
	<b>68</b>	
	<b>124</b>	

Course Academic Progress – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	68	54.84%
Graduate	56	45.16%

Course Academic Progress – by International/Domestic

Domestic	42	33.87%
International	82	66.13%

**Special Consideration - By Stage of Process**

STAGE	REASON	Total
Application	Late Application	7
Internal Review	Late Application	5
	Unhappy with particular outcome	2
	Deemed no appropriate outcome	1
	Deemed insufficient grounds	1
		<b>9</b>
Formal Grievance	Unhappy with particular outcome	9
	Late Application	7
	Deemed insufficient grounds	5
	Deemed no appropriate outcome	1
	<b>23</b>	
Appeal	Late Application	3
	Unhappy with particular outcome	2
	<b>5</b>	
Ombudsman	Unhappy with particular outcome	1
Total Special Consideration Matters		<b>58</b>

Special Consideration – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	41	70.69%
Graduate	17	29.31%

Special Consideration – by International/Domestic

Domestic	45	77.59%
International	13	22.41%

### Assessment Disputes- By Stage of Process

STAGE	REASON	Total
Informal/assessment review with examiner	Academic Judgement	10
	Conduct of Assessment	8
	Administrative Error	3
		<b>21</b>
Formal request for remark	Academic Judgement	8
	Conduct of Assessment	5
		<b>13</b>
Formal Grievance	Conduct of Assessment	1
Total Assessment Dispute Related Matters		<b>35</b>

### Assessment Disputes – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	15	42.86%
Undergraduate	20	57.14%

### Assessment Disputes – by International/Domestic

Domestic	24	68.57%
International	11	31.43%

The next Advocacy Service report will cover the quarter May to July 2020 and will be available in mid-August 2020.

Phoebe Churches

**Manager, Advocacy & Legal**

**June 2020**