

Student Union Advocacy Service Report

January - March 2013

Introduction

This quarter saw relatively fewer students present to the service relative to the same time last year. This is in part due to the consolidation of Unsatisfactory Progress meetings into the window prior to Christmas. Interestingly, the number of student contacts with the service through this period has remained constant. This suggests that while fewer unique cases have presented, those cases on foot in this period were relatively more complex and required more resources. This is consistent with the period covering 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 which accounts for the statistics this quarter.

Trends and Issues this Quarter

CUPC Appeals and the requirement to respond to the student's submission

Virtually all faculties and schools this quarter have continued the practice of submitting the Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee's report (from the original meeting) in satisfaction of s 3.2 of the *Appeals to the Academic Board Procedure (MPF1023)*.

Section 3.2 provides:

The Academic Secretary, or nominee, will collate all documents relevant to the appeal hearing and disseminate to all parties including the members of the appeal committee, the appellant and the responsible officer(s). The documentation will include:

- *the letter to the appellant advising the decision/outcome against which the appeal has been lodged*
- *the letter of appeal by the student and all attachments*
- ***the response to the allegation provided by the responsible officer(s)***
- *the appellant's record card (where the appellant is a student)*
- *the relevant statute/regulation/policy/procedure*
- *any further written evidence requested by the appeal committee*

The third dot point highlighted in bold suggests that the Faculty's responsible officers are required to provide a response to the grounds of appeal provided by the appellant, as opposed to relying solely upon the CUPC Report provided to the student prior to an appeal being lodged.

We think this is important. This student bears the burden of grounding their appeal and demonstrating evidence in support of those grounds. We believe that the Faculty's responsible officers should be required to address student submissions directly. Aside from the procedural requirement to do so, it is the submission of this service that such responses are integral to advising the student about their prospects of success and the approach they might take to maximise their chance of a positive outcome. In other words, the Faculty response to the allegation may either inform the student that it is prudent to withdraw the appeal or alternatively ensure that they have the best chance to obtain the outcome to which they are entitled.

Special Consideration update

The last quarterly service report discussed some problems with the implementation of special consideration. At the time of that report, there were four appeals from faculty decisions on foot to the Academic Board.

All four of these appeals have been subsequently upheld.

One of the fundamental issues identified in these appeals – the relationship between special consideration and the Student Equitable Adjustment Procedures - is now being reviewed by the SEAP Working group, at which the Advocacy Service is represented. The working group is discussing some very promising strategies for closing the current gap between the two procedures, making the process more streamlined and seamless thereby simplifying students' access to assistance or accommodations where circumstances require it for fairness and equity.

Programmes this Quarter

Staff and Student Surveys

The Advocacy Service conducts a survey of student users of the service annually and every two years we conduct a similar survey of key university staff who have direct dealings with the service.

This year the student survey will be conducted over the month of April. It was sent via email on Monday 25th March to 256 students. The following day the staff survey was sent to 42 staff in areas which have regular contact with the Advocacy Service. A full report back will be provided in a subsequent report once the data is analysed.

Service Charter

The service has developed a new service charter. This has been partly in response to the need to effectively manage students' expectations, especially during times of peak demand. A copy of the charter is attached to this report. A poster capturing the key points is now at reception and copies of the full charter are provided to students when they first access the service. We hope this will enhance everyone's experience.

Statistics

Comparative data

With the commencement of the SSAF funded Student Union Advocacy Service we moved to a new data collection and case management system. Consequently, while there are some areas where it is not possible to provide complete comparative data for the period, a table of general comparative data is provided below. From next quarter we will be able to present congruent data from the same data source.

January-March 2013

154 students were provided a service resulting in 472 contacts with the service.¹

January-March 2012

251 students were provided a service resulting in 292 appointments at the service.²

¹ A contact refers to face to face appointments, phone or email communication and attendance with students at meetings or formal hearings.

Additionally, the Advocacy website received 3119 page views this quarter. There were over 700 page views on the Progress Committee 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.

January-March 2013

Course Unsatisfactory Progress	90	54.55%
Admission - Selection Appeal	13	7.88%
Assessment Dispute	11	6.67%
Special Consideration	10	6.06%
Other	9	5.45%
Student Admin - Enrolment problems	8	4.85%
Incorrect Advice	4	2.42%
Supervision Problems	4	2.42%
Not Specified	3	1.82%
Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	3	1.82%
Equitable Accommodation (SEAD)	3	1.82%
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%

January-March 2012

Under the old data collection system, primary issues were not defined in any consistent way and this often obscured the real issue. For example the use of ‘Grievances’, ‘Administration’ and ‘Academic Board Appeal’ does not disclose the particular problem the student presented with or the process by which it might be resolved.

CUPC	164	65.34%
Grievance	35	13.94%
Administration	21	8.37%
Special Consideration	14	5.58%
Academic Misconduct	7	2.79%
Course	7	2.79%
General Misconduct	2	0.80%
Other	1	0.40%

² An appointment is effectively the same as a contact however we prefer the term contact in the new data collection system as appointment has a more limited connotation.

Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

January-March 2013

Graduate	65	42.21%
Undergraduate	89	57.79%

January-March 2012

Graduate	36	14.57%
Undergraduate	211	85.43%

Distribution by International/Domestic Status

January-March 2013

Domestic	113	73.38%
International	41	26.62%

January-March 2012

Domestic	178	72.06%
International	69	27.94%

Distribution of cases over all by Faculty/School – January-March 2013

In order to make the following data more meaningful the relative weighting of faculties by enrolment has been included. Currently this is based on approximate data sourced from University Careers and Employment. We are hoping to obtain more accurate and current data from the faculties each quarter in the future. 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. We will attempt to drill down into the data in subsequent reports to try to gain further meaning from this data.

	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	32	20.78%	10.74%	>>
Melbourne School of Engineering	30	19.48%	3.79%	>>>
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	22	14.29%	12.74%	=
Arts	18	11.69%	15.37%	=
Architecture Building & Planning	14	9.09%	5.68%	>
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	7	4.55%	5.26%	<
Melbourne School of Land and Environment	5	3.25%	2.06%	>
Business & Economics	5	3.25%	7.79%	<<
Veterinary Science	5	3.25%	Unavailable	/
Melbourne Graduate School of Science	4	2.60%	2.04%	==
Melbourne School of Design	4	2.60%	Unavailable	/
Graduate School of Business and Economics	3	1.95%	3.37%	<<
Melbourne Law School	2	1.30%	5.12%	<<<
Engineering (teach out)	1	0.65%	1.26%	<
VCA	1	0.65%	3.09%	<<<
Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (MCM)	1	0.65%	Unavailable	/

Commentary

The breakdown of graduate to undergraduate students was 65 to 89 (compared with 36 to 211 for the same period last year). It is a significant change from the same quarter in the previous year and represents a fundamental shift towards roughly equal service provision between the groups. Certainly it is well aligned with the per capita representation in the University at large.

There were 113 domestic students and 41 international students seen in this period (compared with 178 to 69 in the same period last year). This approximates the breakdown at the same time last year and is consistent with the number of international students as a proportion of the student population. According to the most recent AEI research snapshot, onshore international students constitute 25.2% of Melbourne University students.

The primary presenting issue this quarter remained course unsatisfactory progress. Selection appeals featured in significant numbers this quarter, potentially reflecting an increase in referral of these matters from 13MELB and greater numbers of existing students disputing graduate selection. 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 16 schools and faculties. Science was the most frequently represented faculty with narrowly more presenting cases than the Melbourne School of Engineering. Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences, Arts, and Architecture, Building and Planning were the next most represented faculties.

Unusually there were a significant number of selection appeals presenting this quarter. The service generally only receives a smattering of these cases each year when they are referred directly by the Academic Secretary's office. Pre-commencing students are generally unaware of this service or that we will assist with these matters. The majority of selection appeals came from the faculty of Arts followed closely by Science and MDHS. 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 may already be 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	24	26.67%
Melbourne School of Engineering	23	25.56%
Architecture Building & Planning	10	11.11%
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	8	8.89%
Arts	8	8.89%
Melbourne School of Land and Environment	4	4.44%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	4	4.44%
Veterinary Science	3	3.33%
Business & Economics	3	3.33%
Graduate School of Business and Economics	2	2.22%
Melbourne Graduate School of Science	1	1.11%

Course Unsatisfactory progress – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	62	68.89%
Graduate	28	31.11%

Course Unsatisfactory progress – by International/Domestic

Domestic	64	71.11%
International	26	28.89%

Selection Appeals - By Faculty/School

Arts	4	30.77%
Science	3	23.08%
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	3	23.08%
Veterinary Science	1	7.69%
Melbourne School of Design	1	7.69%
Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (MCM)	1	7.69%

Selection Appeals – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	8	61.54%
Undergraduate	5	38.46%

Selection Appeals – by International/Domestic

Domestic	13	100.00%
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Assessment Disputes - By Faculty/School

Melbourne Graduate School of Education	3	27.27%
Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences	3	27.27%
Melbourne School of Design	1	9.09%
Melbourne Law School	1	9.09%
Business & Economics	1	9.09%
Arts	1	9.09%
Architecture Building & Planning	1	9.09%

Assessment Disputes – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	7	63.64%
Undergraduate	4	36.36%

Assessment Disputes – by International/Domestic

Domestic	9	81.82%
International	2	18.18%

Special Consideration - By Faculty/School

Melbourne School of Engineering	6	60.00%
Arts	2	20.00%
Science	1	10.00%
Melbourne School of Land and Environment	1	10.00%

Special Consideration – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	8	80.00%
Graduate	2	20.00%

Special Consideration – by International/Domestic

Domestic	9	90.00%
International	1	10.00%

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:

14-Jan-13	Frank Tate - Spatial Lab	Training session for new Student Connect Staff.
27-Feb-13	VCAM - Southbank	VCA Orientation - Information for new students regarding the Advocacy service and tips for resolving issues before they become a problem.
01-Mar-13	The Spot	MSGR graduate orientation – regular attendance at orientation panel for new Higher Degree by Research students.
08-Mar-13	The Spot	Special Consideration Network - discussion on appeals.

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 2013 and will be available in early July 2013.

Encl:.../

Service Charter

ADVOCACY SERVICE CHARTER

We Can Provide

- Free and confidential advice and assistance with negotiating the following academic and administrative issues with the University:
 - Discipline and misconduct allegations.
 - Disputes about assessment.
 - Grievances and complaints grounded in policy.
 - Intellectual property disputes.
 - Refund or remission of fees.
 - Supervision.
 - Unsatisfactory progress.
 - Special consideration or equitable adjustments.
- Referral to other appropriate services.

We Do Not Provide

- We cannot assist you in the following matters:
 - anything **unrelated** to your study (or prospective study) at Melbourne University;
 - attendance at informal negotiations and meetings with lecturers or supervisors - although we can advise and support you with recommendations on how best to approach the matter;
 - our resources are limited and if we cannot meet the level of service you expect then we may cease to assist you;
 - in the event that a relationship of trust and confidence cannot be established between the service and you, the service has the discretion to cease to assist you;
 - where the University's internal decision making process has been exhausted;
 - where there may be a conflict of interest.
- Additionally we cannot assist you with the following issues which are governed by specific procedures:
 - Complaints about discrimination, sexual harassment or bullying.
 - Counselling or psychological help.
 - Visa advice and information for international students.
 - Legal Advice.
- We can refer you to the specialist services which can assist with these matters.

Information and Confidentiality

- When you contact the Advocacy Service, we need to ask you information about yourself and the issue you wish to discuss.
 - All information received is strictly private and confidential.
 - We adhere to Victorian privacy principles which are embodied in the *University of Melbourne Privacy Policy* (MPF1104) and privacy legislation.
 - We will not divulge any information provided by you without your consent (unless we are legally obliged to do so).

Your Rights

- To be treated with dignity, courtesy and respect.
- To be dealt with in a prompt and appropriate manner.
- To receive information in a clear and accurate format.
- To ask questions, make your own decisions and make informed choices.
- The right to privacy and confidentiality related to your issue.

How You Can Help Us.

- Work with us in good faith:
 - Give us accurate, honest and complete information so that we are fully aware of your circumstances.
 - You do not have to take our advice on a matter, however if you choose not to, we may be unable to assist you further.
- Bring all relevant documents to your appointment; including notices, letters and relevant correspondence with the University.
- Let us know if you can't keep an appointment.
- Treat our staff and volunteers with courtesy, respect and consideration.
- Be patient and please understand that we can be very busy at times.
- Understand that:
 - we will always endeavour to provide the best advice possible to assist you to resolve your problem favourably; however we cannot act in your place.
 - we have no coercive powers and cannot compel the University to act in a particular way.

How Can We Help You

- We offer independent information, advocacy and referral across a range of academic and administrative issues.
- Both undergraduate and graduate students are welcome to use this service.
- Individual support from an advocate is available by appointment.
- The Advocacy Service operates on an empowerment model - to this end we aim to provide you with:
 - expert advice on how to approach your problem in the context of the University's policies, procedures and statutory framework;
 - information and resources to help you to make informed decisions;
 - skills and resources to self-advocate and negotiate more positive outcomes.

Legal Advice, Information and Advocacy

The provision of advocacy and casework should not be confused with the provision of legal advice.

- Only a legal practitioner is entitled to provide legal advice.
- If we assess that you require legal advice we will refer you to the UMSU Legal Service or another legal service as appropriate.

Our Commitment to You

In order to provide you with a professional and accountable service, we aim to:

- Respond to your phone messages/emails within 24 hours
- Be honest and realistic with regard to the assistance we are able to provide.
- Let you know if we are unable to further assist you for any reason.

Making a Complaint

If you are unhappy with the service you are receiving:

- Let the advocate handling your case know and try to work the problem out with them;
- If you are unable to do this, you should speak to the Manager, Advocacy & Legal.
- If you are still unhappy, you are entitled to put a complaint in writing to the General Manager, UMSU.
- If you require assistance with a complaint, please speak with the Student Services Officer