



ADVOCACY

Service Report July-September 2019

UMSU
UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
STUDENT UNION

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Data and ‘Anecdotal’	3
Programmes and Events this Quarter	3
Trends and Issues	3
Policy Network Consultation	4
Advocacy Service Statistics	4
Commentary.....	7
Assessment Disputes – by Graduate/Undergraduate.....	10
Assessment Disputes – by International/Domestic	10
Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism – by Graduate/Undergraduate	11
Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism – by International/Domestic	11
Appendix 1.....	12
Appendix 2.....	22

Introduction

Between 2012 and 2017 the Advocacy Service was funded by the University subject to a service contract. As part of the contractual reporting requirements, the Service produced a quarterly report to the University's Advocacy Service Reference Group (ASRG). Subsequent to the discontinuation of the separate Advocacy service contract with the University, after funding for the service was subsumed into the UMSU whole of organisation funding under the 2017 SSAF funding model, the ASRG was formally disbanded on 17 April 2018 at its final meeting.

Nevertheless, although the Quarterly Service Report was originally commissioned by the ASRG as an accountability measure, it has also served to ventilate student experiences of processes within the relevant parts of the University. Over time, the circulation of the Report grew to encompass a good 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 'Anecdota'

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.

Programmes and Events this Quarter

Annual User and Uni Staff Experience Surveys

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

This year the annual service user survey was conducted during the month of September. An invitation to complete the online survey was sent via email to just over 401 students who had indicated they were happy to be contacted for this purpose.

The reports on the findings are attached at **Appendices 1 & 2** to this report.

Trends and Issues

The main noteworthy issue this quarter concerns the Academic Board Appeal procedure. Historically we have mostly found decisions of the Academic Secretary's Office to be consistent and well-reasoned; however, in the last quarter we have seen some decisions which have left us puzzled. As the Academic Board is the last internal avenue for appeal, students who remain aggrieved with an appeal outcome can only seek a review externally through the Ombudsman Victoria (OV). The Advocacy Service has assisted students with this process only infrequently in the past, as the OV's purview is strictly procedural and we have generally been satisfied that the Academic Board's decisions did not disclose any procedural issues upon which to ground an OV review. However, this quarter there have been several decisions which will likely proceed to the OV for review on the basis of procedural errors.

We have also seen an increase in inconsistent decision-making in relation to determinations regarding which matters should be heard at appeal. This quarter a number of students have presented to the Service in relation to appeals which were dismissed despite disclosing grounds with sufficient merit for the matter to be heard at appeal. At the same time there have been a number of appeals which were granted a hearing despite the fact they did not appear to reveal proper grounds. This leads to a sort of "Appeal Roulette", which is most undesirable when students are appealing termination of their enrolment or other high stakes matters, which we believe should have the opportunity to be properly ventilated at a hearing.

Additionally, it undermines the capacity of the Service to provide meaningful and accurate advice to students about the preparation of appeals and the matters which are likely to be of significance to the Academic Secretary in determining whether or not an appeal should be heard by the Board.

Hard of Hearing on the Papers

A "hearing on the papers" is one where a decision is made on the basis of written evidence alone. While technically still a hearing, consideration of a student appeal on the written submission alone should only be considered where there is sufficiently comprehensive written information to make a decision without meeting and discussing the case with the student in person. When decisions are made on a written submission alone, there will be no opportunity for the Committee to interrogate the issues in order to make a final determination based on all relevant evidence. Consequently, there is a real risk that, as the final stage of review, an appeal on the papers will fail to adequately comply with the rules of procedural fairness.

One example of misconceived decision-making concerned a student who lodged a formal grievance regarding the decision of their subject coordinator to deny an application for a short extension, despite having medical documentation which evidenced an illness lasting four days. While there is reasonable latitude for subject coordinators to decide on the appropriate length of a short extension, there was sufficiently compelling evidence to make the student's case arguable.

The student lodged a formal grievance, arguing that the original decision was reached on the basis of an incorrect interpretation of the relevant policy, and without sufficient regard to the medical evidence.

The Principal Advisor, Student Grievances and Complaints subsequently made a determination that the subject coordinator's original decision was based on a correct interpretation of the relevant policy, and therefore the grievance could not be upheld. However, the Principal Advisor, Student Grievances and Complaints based their decision to dismiss the complaint on reasoning which did not address itself to the substantive arguments in the original grievance and appeared predicated on reasons irrelevant to the case argued by the student. On this basis, the student decided to lodge an appeal in relation to the Principal Advisor's decision to dismiss the grievance, on the grounds it was manifestly wrong.

However, the Academic Secretary summarily dismissed the appeal without a hearing on the basis that it did not possess sufficient merit to proceed to a hearing. The reasoning in the outcome notice indicated both that the decisions that were the subject of the appeal were available to the decision makers, and that these decisions were made in conformity with the procedures for such decision making. However, in summarily dismissing the appeal the Academic Secretary did not address the grounds upon which the appeal was lodged, in the same way as the grievance determination failed to address the substantive arguments against the original decision. Although the appeal outcome stated that the Academic Secretary found that the grounds that the determination of the Principal Advisor was manifestly wrong were not made out, it did not address any of the evidence which related to those arguments. In order to determine whether a decision is manifestly wrong – or substantively correct – all relevant issues of fact, policy and discretion must be considered. Failure to do so leaves the University in breach of its own policies, and potentially open to action under Administrative Law. It is also failing in its duty of care to students, and obligation act fairly.

Recommendation

Administrative decision makers need to have a proper understanding of the meaning of the grounds “manifestly wrong”. Determinations at both levels – formal grievance and appeal – must be made having regard to the grounds actually argued. It is not appropriate to substitute grounds other than those specifically argued in order to dismiss a grievance or appeal without a hearing in which the matter can be properly interrogated.

In these cases, procedural grounds were cited as the basis for dismissal of the appeals (i.e the decision was available and made in accordance with process) when the grounds argued were that the original and subsequent decisions were manifestly wrong. The grounds ‘manifestly wrong’ necessarily requires a merit-based review of the substantive reasoning for decision appealed from.

Accordingly, we recommend that any decision to dismiss an appeal on the papers be subject to an opportunity for internal review to check that it has been made in conformity with the rules of procedural fairness and on a sound basis with respect to the established grounds.

Policy Network Consultation

The Service had the opportunity in September to contribute to UMSU's comprehensive submission to the Policy Network consultation on proposed changes to the Special Consideration provisions in the current *Assessment and Results Policy*.

UMSU undertook a survey of students, receiving an overwhelming response of over 2000 replies and over 800 comments on the potential impacts of the changes.

The full submission is available here: <https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Special-Consideration-Report-2019-.pdf>

We understand the proposed changes will be considered at the Academic Board meeting in early December and hope the Board will have regard to the important issues raised in UMSU's feedback.

Advocacy Service Statistics

Comparative data – July - September 2019

Casework in this quarter relates primarily to CAPC decisions and disputes around Special Consideration determinations. This quarter 744 students were provided a service resulting in 2026 contacts. In the same quarter last year, the service coincidentally also assisted 744 students resulting in 1766 contacts with the service. A large volume of these matters concerned assessment and course academic progress matters as will be seen below.

The Advocacy website received almost 14000 page views this quarter. Almost 2500 were directly to our contact page, almost as many of these were on the CAPC page and just over 1000 were on the page featuring special consideration information. Other popular pages included information on academic misconduct and assessment disputes.

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.

July - September 2019

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Academic Progress Committee	417	52.39%	Course Academic Progress Committee	197	52.96%	Supervision Problems	7	41.18%
Special Consideration	99	12.44%	Special Consideration	40	10.75%	Progress- HDR	3	17.65%
Assessment Dispute	74	9.30%	Assessment Dispute	36	9.68%	Student complaint about uni staff	2	11.76%
Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	32	4.02%	Student complaint about uni staff	11	2.96%	Scholarship Issues	2	11.76%
Student complaint about uni staff	22	2.76%	Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	11	2.96%	Not Specified	2	11.76%
Academic Misconduct- Collusion	18	2.26%	Supervision Problems	9	2.42%	Special Consideration	1	5.88%
Academic Misconduct- Exam	16	2.01%	Student Admin- Remission of Fees	7	1.88%			
Not Specified	15	1.88%	Academic Misconduct- Exam	7	1.88%			
Student Admin- Remission of Fees	14	1.76%	Academic Misconduct- Falsified docs	7	1.88%			
Academic Misconduct- Falsified docs	14	1.76%	Not Specified	7	1.88%			
Student Admin- Enrolment problems	11	1.38%	Academic Misconduct- Collusion	6	1.61%			
Other	10	1.26%	Incorrect Advice	4	1.08%			
Supervision Problems	9	1.13%	Student Admin- Enrolment problems	4	1.08%			
Incorrect Advice	9	1.13%	Progress- HDR	4	1.08%			
Selection Appeal	8	1.01%	Other	3	0.81%			
Quality Teaching	5	0.63%	Quality Teaching	3	0.81%			
Progress- HDR	4	0.50%	Selection Appeal	3	0.81%			
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	3	0.38%	Equitable Accommodation (SC Rego)	2	0.54%			
General Misconduct	3	0.38%	Course structure/changes	2	0.54%			
Scholarship Issues	3	0.38%	Scholarship Issues	2	0.54%			
Equitable Accommodation (SC Rego)	3	0.38%	Student complaint about another student	2	0.54%			
Course structure/changes	2	0.25%	General Misconduct	2	0.54%			
Student complaint about another student	2	0.25%	Bullying	1	0.27%			
Bullying	1	0.13%	Vocational Placement Problems	1	0.27%			
Discrimination	1	0.13%	Advance Standing Credit/RPL	1	0.27%			
Vocational Placement Problems	1	0.13%						

July - September 2018

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	407	54.78%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	165	56.90%	Progress- HDR	7	33.33%
Special Consideration	87	11.71%	Special Consideration	30	10.34%	Supervision Problems	4	19.05%
Assessment Dispute	52	7.00%	Assessment Dispute	19	6.55%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	3	14.29%
Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	35	4.71%	Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	13	4.48%	Student complaint about uni staff	1	4.76%
Academic Misconduct- Exam	28	3.77%	Student complaint about uni staff	9	3.10%	Other	1	4.76%
Student complaint about uni staff	22	2.96%	Academic Misconduct- Exam	9	3.10%	Discrimination	1	4.76%
Student Admin- Enrolment problems	15	2.02%	Academic Misconduct- Falsified docs	8	2.76%	Course structure/changes	1	4.76%
Academic Misconduct- Falsified docs	14	1.88%	Student Admin- Enrolment problems	5	1.72%	Bullying	1	4.76%
Selection Appeal	11	1.48%	Student Admin- Remission of Fees	4	1.38%	Academic Misconduct- Exam	1	4.76%
Not Specified	10	1.35%	Vocational Placement Problems	4	1.38%	Not Specified	1	4.76%
Incorrect Advice	8	1.08%	Selection Appeal	3	1.03%			
Progress- HDR	7	0.94%	Incorrect Advice	3	1.03%			
General Misconduct	6	0.81%	General Misconduct	2	0.69%			
Vocational Placement Problems	5	0.67%	Academic Misconduct- Collusion	2	0.69%			
Other	5	0.67%	Bullying	2	0.69%			
Course structure/changes	5	0.67%	Course structure/changes	2	0.69%			
Student Admin- Remission of Fees	5	0.67%	Not Specified	2	0.69%			
Supervision Problems	4	0.54%	Equitable Accommodation (SC Rego)	2	0.69%			
Bullying	3	0.40%	Advance Standing Credit/RPL	1	0.34%			
Academic Misconduct- Collusion	3	0.40%	Other	1	0.34%			
Scholarship Issues	2	0.27%	Scholarship Issues	1	0.34%			
Discrimination	2	0.27%	Sexual Harassment	1	0.34%			
Equitable Accommodation (SC Rego)	2	0.27%	Student Admin- Graduation	1	0.34%			
Sexual Harassment	1	0.13%	Discrimination	1	0.34%			
Student Admin- Exchange	1	0.13%						
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	1	0.13%						
Academic Misconduct- Research	1	0.13%						
Student Admin- Graduation	1	0.13%						

Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

July- September 2019

Graduate	338	45.43%
Undergraduate	406	54.57%

July- September 2018

Graduate	326	43.82%
Undergraduate	418	56.18%

Distribution by International/Domestic Status

July- September 2019

Domestic	373	50.13%
International	371	49.87%

July- September 2018

Domestic	399	53.63%
International	345	46.37%

Commentary

The proportion of graduate to undergraduate students was 45.43% to 54.57% (compared with 43.82% to 56.18% for the same period last year). This figure continues to reflect the increasing proportion of graduate students enrolled at the University.

This quarter there was almost an even distribution of domestic and international students – with 50.13% domestic and 49.87% international students presenting to the service. This suggests a slight over-representation of international students, who are currently about 40% of enrolled students – and specifically, international students were over-represented in both CAPC matters, and in allegations of plagiarism. The number of international students was almost double the number of domestic students facing plagiarism allegations.

The primary presenting issue this quarter was, as usual for this period, course academic progress (CAPC). Our data includes all processes related to CAPC, from briefing students at risk to Academic Board Appeals. After CAPC matters, Special Consideration, assessment disputes, and plagiarism were the next most common issues. Special Consideration issues were concentrated in the Faculties of Arts, Science, and Business and Economics and centred on assistance with applications, internal reviews, grievances and Academic Board appeals, for reasons including both physical and mental health problems, and where the applications had been denied due to lateness or that the student was deemed to have provided insufficient evidence.

Assessment Disputes were most frequent in the Melbourne School of Design (AB&P) and faculty of Arts. In AB&P, the Studio subjects were most contentious – with a large volume of complaints pertaining to lack of formative feedback. Assessment disputes spanned informal reviews with the examiner to formal grievances, and centred on issues with conduct of assessment, allegations of bias, and administrative error. Plagiarism matters spanned from educative responses to Academic Board Appeals and all of them involved situations where the student instructed that they had inadvertently failed to reference or cite sources correctly. 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.

Course Academic Progress Assistance - By Stage of process

STAGE	REASON	Total
First Attendance	Mental Health	47
	Cultural Adjustment	46
	Course/Program Choice	30
	Physical Health	27
	Language Difficulties	21
	Employment Commitments	19
	Course Duration Reached	12
	Poor Study Skills	12
	Family Responsibilities	10
	Financial Problems	10
	Failed same subject >=2	4
	Transition to Uni	2
	Practical/Rounds/Placement	2
	242	
Second Attendance	Physical Health	34
	Employment Commitments	32
	Mental Health	24
	Course/Program Choice	2
	Family Responsibilities	2
	Failed same subject >=2	1
	Course Duration Reached	1
	Poor Study Skills	1
	97	
Third Attendance	Family Responsibilities	1
	Financial Problems	1
	Mental Health	1
	3	
Fourth+ Attendance	Mental Health	2
Appeal	Termination of enrolment	36
	Restriction on enrolment	20
	Suspension of enrolment	16
	72	
Total CUPC related matters		417

Course Academic Progress – by Faculty

Faculty of Science	160	38.37%
Melbourne School of Engineering	67	16.07%
Faculty of Business and Economics	46	11.03%
Faculty of Arts	28	6.71%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	28	6.71%
Melbourne School of Design (AB&P)	28	6.71%
Faculty of MDHS	21	5.04%
Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences	16	3.84%
VCA & Music	10	2.40%
Unspecified	6	1.44%
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	5	1.20%
Melbourne Law School	2	0.48%

Course Academic Progress – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	219	52.64%
Graduate	197	47.36%

Course Academic Progress – by International/Domestic

Domestic	172	41.35%
International	244	58.65%

Special Consideration – By Stage of process

STAGE	REASON	Total
Application	Late Application	24
	Unhappy with Outcome*	8
		32
Internal Review	Deemed Insufficient Grounds	3
	Late Application	3
	Unhappy with Outcome	3
		9
Formal Grievance**	Late Application	20
	Deemed Insufficient Grounds	18
	Unhappy with Outcome	12
	Deemed No Appropriate Action	1
		51
Appeal	Late application	2
	Deemed Insufficient Grounds	1
	Deemed No Appropriate Action	1
	Unhappy with Outcome	1
		5
Total Special Consideration Matters		99

*This describes a situation where students are assessed as eligible for special consideration, but they consider the outcome offered does not adequately address their circumstances.

** Not all grievances proceed to lodgement – this is the point at which the issue presents to the Service.

Special Consideration – by Faculty

Faculty of Science	24	24.24%
Faculty of Arts	19	19.19%
Faculty of Business and Economics	17	17.17%
Faculty of MDHS	11	11.11%
Melbourne School of Design (AB&P)	6	6.06%
Melbourne School of Engineering	5	5.05%
Melbourne Law School	5	5.05%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	4	4.04%
VCA & Music	3	3.03%
Unspecified	3	3.03%
Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences	2	2.02%

Special Consideration – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	59	59.60%
Graduate	40	40.40%

Special Consideration – by International/Domestic

Domestic	67	67.68%
International	32	32.32%

Assessment Disputes - By Stage of Process

STAGE	REASON	Total
Informal/assessment review with examiner	Conduct of Assessment	21
	Administrative Error	8
	Allegation of Examiner Bias	5
	Practical/Rounds/Placement	2
	Procedural Issue	1
		37
Formal request for remark	Conduct of Assessment	18
	Administrative Error	8
	Procedural Issue	1
		27
Formal Grievance	Conduct of Assessment	6
	Procedural Issue	2
	Administrative Error	2
		10
Total Assessment Dispute Related Matters		74

Assessment Disputes – by Faculty

Melbourne School of Design (AB&P)	18	24.32%
Faculty of Arts	17	22.97%
Faculty of Science	10	13.51%
Faculty of Business and Economics	9	12.16%
Melbourne School of Engineering	5	6.76%
Faculty of MDHS	5	6.76%
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	3	4.05%
Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences	3	4.05%
VCA & Music	2	2.70%
Melbourne Law School	1	1.35%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	1	1.35%

Assessment Disputes – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	36	48.65%
Undergraduate	38	51.35%

Assessment Disputes – by International/Domestic

Domestic	48	64.86%
International	26	35.14%

Academic Misconduct – Plagiarism - By Stage of Process

STAGE	REASON	Total
Informal/Educative Meeting	Inadvertent	3
Committee Meeting	Inadvertent	26
Appeal	Inadvertent	3
Total Plagiarism Matters		32

Academic Misconduct – Plagiarism – by Faculty

Faculty of Arts	8	25.00%
Faculty of Science	5	15.63%
Faculty of Business and Economics	4	12.50%
Unspecified	4	12.50%
Melbourne School of Engineering	2	6.25%
Melbourne School of Design (AB&P)	2	6.25%
Melbourne Law School	2	6.25%
VCA & Music	1	3.13%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	1	3.13%
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	1	3.13%
Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences	1	3.13%
Faculty of MDHS	1	3.13%

Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	11	34.38%
Undergraduate	21	65.63%

Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism – by International/Domestic

Domestic	11	34.38%
International	21	65.63%

The next Advocacy Service report will cover the quarter October to December 2019 and will be available in January 2020.

Encl:../

Appendix 1- UMSU Advocacy Service User Survey 2019

Appendix 2- UMSU Advocacy Staff Interaction Survey 2019

Phoebe Churches

Manager, Advocacy & Legal

October 2019

UMSU Advocacy Service User Survey 2019

Background

The UMSU Advocacy Service has surveyed its service users annually since 2009. The survey allows respondents to grade our services on a 5-point scale. Our service benchmarks derived from our previous funding contract with the University, have historically been set at a minimum aggregate score of 3.5, and not less than 3 for any specific question. The Service has consistently achieved well-over these benchmarks since 2012.

The survey is distributed as an online questionnaire to service users who have had contact with the service within the previous 12 months. The invitations are sent only to students who have indicated as an opt-in on their initial contact form that they are happy to be contacted for this purpose. To encourage responses, the Service offers the chance to win one of four \$50 Officeworks vouchers or one of 4 double student movie passes for completing the survey.

Executive Summary

The Survey was open for four weeks between 27th August and 30th September 2019. There were 88 responses received of 401 invitations – a 22% return rate. Historically the Service has exceeded established benchmarks, and this year was no exception with an overall aggregate score of 4.25 and the lowest score for a specific question was 3.86.

Around a third of respondents could not remember specifically who they had dealt with, however 22% of respondents reported contact with Paul Hornsby, 17% with Donna Markwell, 16% with Alanna Smith, 14% with Phoebe Churches, and 10% with both Michelle Almiron and Nadia Streistermanis; indicating a representative spread of feedback on the experience of each member of staff. Given we survey students up to 12 months from their contact with the service, it is usual to find a proportion do not recall who they dealt with.

For 82% of respondents, a main form of contact with the Service was via our webform or email, and almost a quarter mainly had contact through our drop-in clinic, an increase of almost 15% over the previous year. Around 12% indicated direct in person contact, which is consistent with our general statistics for service use pattern,

These figures exemplify our continuing efforts to efficiently triage our contacts with students, providing advice primarily via email for high volumes of students who only want feedback on their written submissions for the course academic progress committee, and offering specific drop-in times for those who prefer face to face contact. Based upon our initial assessment through electronic contact or at drop-in service, some students will continue to be assisted over email, and others will be allocated through our intake process to a caseworker.

Overall satisfaction with the service was at 83% in this survey which is down slightly from 87% in 2018.

The lowest aggregate score was in response to the question ‘the advocate made persuasive arguments in meetings or hearings on my behalf.’ Over the life of the survey this has consistently been one of the lowest scoring questions. The agreement rate for this question was also low at only 64%, however almost 60% of respondents indicated this question did not apply to them, and of the remaining respondents, 10% were neutral. Only 5% of respondents actually indicated they thought the advocate had failed to make persuasive arguments in meetings or hearings.

This year, as last year, just over half of all referrals to the Service derived from the university, and just under half were self-referrals. With respect to the demographics of the respondents, the majority – almost three-quarters were graduate students, 93% studied on the Parkville campus, and over half of respondents were

international students.

Commentary

Lowest Scores

The question with the lowest aggregate score was ‘the advocate made persuasive arguments in meetings or hearings on my behalf’ (Table 4). In the absence of qualitative commentary addressing this issue, it is very difficult to interpret the reason for dissatisfaction. No qualitative feedback specifically indicated that the quality of an advocate’s arguments was poor. We must nevertheless acknowledge the possibility that some respondents may have legitimately experienced the advocate as unpersuasive. Additionally, responses to this question may disclose misapprehensions about the Service’s capacity to influence university decisions or mount successful arguments in the absence of rights under policy.

Some of the more negative commentary reflects disappointment regarding the outcome of a contested matter. It is conceivable that dissatisfaction lies in the undesired outcome, rather than being reflective of an advocate’s efforts at persuasiveness. That is, where an advocate has failed to secure the respondent’s desired outcome, the view may be that this was poor advocacy. However, as the Service has no coercive powers over University decisions, and we are largely bound by the limits of a student’s rights under policy, this is misconceived. In this context, the results may point to a need to better manage service user expectations on the extent to which we can argue for certain outcomes.

Qualitative Feedback

In terms of the qualitative data (Appendix A), consistent with the overall satisfaction data (82% satisfaction), the majority of respondents who chose to indicate why they had been satisfied or dissatisfied with the service expressed gratitude for the efficient and responsive service, noted the efficacy of the advice or representation, and frequently noted the compassionate and patient approach of individual staff. Many comments highlighted the clarity and accuracy of the advice provided and the expertise and knowledge of the staff member who assisted them.

Some respondents who had noted they had to wait for assistance noted that the Service could do with more staff or offer more drop-in times. Overall however, respondents commented positively on the speed at which their enquiries were responded to, and the accessibility of the Service, and the satisfaction rate for the question on timeliness of assistance was 89%.

On the negative side, there were only two critical comments, but these were both very disparaging. One respondent indicated that the “advocate I spoke with was abrupt, blunt and rude. They disregarded my query without explaining why”. The survey is anonymous, to ensure respondents feel able to express their experiences candidly. Unfortunately, this means we are unable to follow up with those students who express dissatisfaction, and we have no specific information to help us understand what happened in this situation.

The other critical feedback indicated that the respondent felt that “the advice was not targeted enough to my particular case”. This respondent went on to say that their dissatisfaction centred on the advocate’s reluctance to attend a meeting or go against a process the student considered to be in place “to protect the School”. This is a difficult issue, as notwithstanding the independence of the Service, we are subject to the relevant University policies and procedures. These policies give standing to the advocate to attend certain meetings, and no jurisdiction to accompany students in others. There is no authority for an advocate to assert their presence in a meeting where there is no standing for them to attend under policy. On this basis, students are sometimes disappointed that staff cannot attend informal or academic meetings with the student, unless invited.

Finally, some students appeared to misunderstand the purpose of drop-in sessions. For example, one respondent noted that they found it hard to absorb a lot of information through drop-in clinic sessions, but email had worked well for them to get across more complex information. In fact, this is by design. The drop-in

clinic aims to provide an access point for students to receive brief advice on next steps in a 10-15 minute window. The more complex information is followed up through email or telephone calls, or in some cases via allocation to a caseworker who will see the student in appointments as necessary. The fact that several respondents indicated they had felt time pressured during drop-in is indicative that we may need to do more to help students understand the function of the drop-in service. It has been a challenge to clearly explain the specific purposes of the different access modes since to assist students to interact with the service in the mode most appropriate to their needs. Drop-in clinic offers a very responsive service, but it is not intended to be a replacement for a full appointment.

In this context we are sensitive to the impacts of changes to our service model over time. The ever-increasing demand on the Service without any additional resources, has required some significant flexibility and tweaks, and we need to be vigilant in our efforts to balance meeting demand, with the quality of interaction our service users experience.

Regardless of the reasons for negative feedback, the we remain mindful that we can always improve elements of service delivery, and that we are meeting our service users at what is often one of the most stressful and challenging points of their life so far. We need to remember that first impression can be lasting, and that everyone wants to feel supported and listened to. These annual survey's offer an invaluable opportunity to better understand our service users' needs and preferences. As we re constantly striving to improve responsiveness and accessibility in the face of increasing demand and complexity of issues,

FINDINGS

OUR STAFF

Staff Member	Count	Percentage
Can't remember	31	35.63%
Paul Hornsby	19	21.84%
Donna Markwell	15	17.24%
Alanna Smith	14	16.09%
Phoebe Churches	12	13.79%
Nadia Streistermanis	9	10.34%
Michelle Almiron	9	10.34%

*Respondents could choose more than one staff member.

Issue	Count	Percentage
"Show Cause" / Course Academic Progress (CAPC) / RHD Progress	27	31.03%
Special Consideration	19	21.84%
Academic Misconduct	16	18.39%
Assessment Dispute	13	14.94%
Other (please specify)*	10	11.49%
General Misconduct	5	5.75%
Selection Appeal	4	4.60%
Supervision Problems	3	3.45%
Incorrect Advice	1	1.15%

*Other

Capstone requirements
 Prerequisite subject help
 Admission Dispute
 Course & enrolment issue
 Release Letter Appeal
 myki issues
 CAPC Appeal
 Concern over aspect of campus safety
 Final mark dispute on Master's thesis
 Special Consideration Grievance

Method	Count	Percentage
E-mail/Webform	71	81.61%
Drop-in Service	20	22.99%
Telephone calls	14	16.09%
Appointments	6	6.90%
Face-to-face in a hearing or appeal	5	5.75%
Other (please specify)	0	0.00%

*Respondents could choose more than one.

Table 4. Based on your experience dealing with our staff, please tell us your agreement with the statements below:										
Answer Options	Strongly disagree		Neutral		Strongly agree	N/A	Aggregate	Agreement % 2019/ 18 / 17		
Assistance was provided in a reasonable time.	3	5	2	18	59	0	4.44	89	92	97
The advocate was present at the designated time of our appointments.	3	2	2	10	29	41	4.30	85	92	100
The advocate clearly described university processes relating to my issue.	3	0	2	29	52	1	4.48	94	89	89
The advocate took my wishes into account, and guided me on the best strategy to achieve my desired outcome.	4	0	7	25	48	3	4.35	87	89	93
The advocate followed through with what s/he said they would do to assist.	3	2	6	20	45	11	4.34	86	87	89
I was kept informed of any action the advocate took in relation to my circumstance.	2	2	4	20	34	25	4.32	87	86	100
The advocate made or helped make persuasive written submissions in relation to my circumstances.	1	3	8	18	34	23	4.23	81	88	92
The advocate made persuasive arguments in meetings or hearings on my behalf.	2	2	9	9	14	51	3.86	64	76	80
Outcome of my case was clearly explained by the advocate.	3	3	7	21	26	27	4.07	78	80	53
The advocate made appropriate referrals to other service providers.	1	5	9	19	21	32	3.98	73	89	75
I am satisfied overall with the assistance given by the advocate.	2	4	10	30	41	0	4.24	82	81	91

THE ADVOCACY SERVICE

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
UMSU Website	48.28%	42
Referral from Stop 1	26.44%	23
A University Notice or letter	25.29%	22
Referral from Academic staff	10.34%	9
Referral from someone who has used the service	9.20%	8
Other (please specify)**	6.90%	6
Referral from another UMSU department	2.30%	2
UMSU Social Media	1.15%	1
UMSU Brochure	1.15%	1

*Respondents could choose more than one.

**Referral from GSA x 2
 Referral from a friend x 2
 UMSU emails (EDMs) x 2

Answer Options	Strongly disagree		Neither		Strongly agree	N/A	Aggregate	Agreement % 2019 / 18 / 17		
The Advocacy Service staff were helpful when I made my initial enquiry.	2	2	2	29	52	0	4.46	93	90	96
I found information on the Advocacy Service website useful.	2	4	6	34	36	5	4.20	85	88	95
I found the Drop in Clinic run by the Advocacy Service useful.	1	1	9	10	22	44	4.19	74	-	-*

*New question this year

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF

Table 7. Please indicate the type of degree you were undertaking when the above issue occurred:

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Graduate coursework	56.98%	49
Undergraduate	33.72%	29
PHD	5.81%	5
Graduate research	2.33%	2
Other (please specify)*	1.16%	1

*Left last year

Table 8. Which campus were you mostly studying in when the above issue occurred?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Parkville	93.02%	80
Other (please specify)*	4.65%	4
Southbank	2.33%	2

*Melbourne Law School
 Melbourne Graduate School of Education
 Parkville and CERA
 William Angliss Institute of TAFE
2018: Parkville 97% Burnley 2% Werribee 1% | 2017: Parkville 100%

Table 9. Were you enrolled as an international student when the above issue occurred?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	53.49%	46
No	46.51%	40

2018: International 38% | Domestic: 62% 2017: International 40% | Domestic: 60%

Appendix A

Please tell us the reason why you are satisfied/not satisfied with the assistance you received:

- Only went to a drop-in session, still deciding on whether to take action based on advice. Advice was very clear and helpful.
- Because the staff members have helped me with my personal statement and achieve a favourable outcome in the CAPC hearing. Also, the student volunteer who accompanied me at the hearing had done an excellent job in giving me all the important information which I may happen during the hearing in the lead to the interview and supported me during the interview session.
- I feel myself being able and supported.
- Phoebe provided good and prompt assistance within a short time frame. She had a good balance of professionalism and empathy.
- She supported me in all possible ways, helped me to learn the rules and taught me how to use them.
- I was able to resume the last subject in my course, despite exceeding the permitted duration and had graduated recently.
- I had good support and even though I didn't need further help it was great to know they could help.
- I was provided with necessary information and concerns I raised were timely processed including advice after the Committee ruled.
- Nothing changed the outcome.
- Couldn't have asked for anything more and was extremely grateful for the help I received from Donna.
- They were clear and explained the situation and some questions I had really well, making me more relaxed about the situation.
- Prompt and helpful response; feeling supported.
- I remembered it is so efficient that I received the reply on the next working day and the reply is very related to my circumstance.
- The assistance was exactly what I required at the time and delivered in a way that was not dismissive of the seriousness of the situation but allowed me to feel much less hopeless than I was feeling at the time.
- I feel extremely satisfied with the assistance provided to me as it brought me ease and clarification in the most stressful time of my education at Unimelb. Paul was super supportive, and always responded to my emails in a timely manner. He made clear of the expectations in regards to special consideration and aided me in having my application approved.
- They understood my issue and helped me navigate my problem.
- I felt that the advice was not targeted enough to my particular case. Although the staff member offered to help and keep in touch, right from the beginning they advised that they do not normally accompany people in the informal meetings I had. They offered general advice to help me self-advocate. They relied too much on the internal processes of my School, which in the end worked out, but was a horrendous, and non-standard process. The reason I contacted the service was for advice on how to handle the situation, including how to interact with the School - not to rely on the process that was there to protect the School. Additionally, I know it was a very busy time for the service, but the help was not very timely.
- Because the assistant has helped me to solve my problem, she (he) has polished my 'show cause' writing.
- The advice she gave was good however there was quite a delay in getting to speak to her due to the high demand on the service, so it was almost too late to do much about the issue. I think they need more staff.
- I was contacted almost immediately about my issue and clearly explained all the university guidelines etc concerning my case. I felt like I was treated with care and respect and this helped me in what was a stressful time.
- Paul was very informative and understanding of my circumstances. He was very helpful and encouraging.
- Very clear and swift communication, and all my questions were answered without me having to repeat them in my emails. Instructions were very concise on how I was to proceed with my situation as well.
- My case is not over but Michelle has been there every step of the way providing advocacy on my behalf. I am extremely grateful for her help in the process.
- The service was amazing.
- The advocate was compassionate, clear, knowledgeable, realistic, student-centred and pro-equality/ student rights as well as fair. I found a way through a difficult situation because of her and feel very grateful. She enabled me to continue with my studies.
- All good!

- The reply was very clear and pointed straight to the heart of the issue. The explanation given was much more detailed than that given by a particular service which shall remain unnamed.
- Very informative and non-judgmental.
- Sometimes the result is most satisfied with all I want, however, sometimes not.
- Because all the staff are very friendly to me and they provided me with some useful suggestions.
- I don't often need assistance to my problem, so I feel neutral.
- Help was immediate and replies were quick, I feel that the matter was resolved as quick as it could have been.
- By giving out the right advice to me, it really makes me feel more relax and know what to do.
- She can help me with my case and very responsible.
- I felt that I was provided with enough help + assistance to attend the hearing with an understanding of the system + my requirements.
- I was unable to achieve what I wanted to. It was regarding a dispute for my final exam results. In the end, it turned out my grades were marked incorrectly, meaning I was given a fail grade when I had actually passed. But this was only discovered AFTER my peers had all had their graduation ceremony, which I was unable to attend despite my whole family flying over from overseas to celebrate. It was quite a frustrating period of time. I am still quite upset about the whole experience.
- I am very satisfied with the promptness and clarity of the assistance and communication given by the advocates, particularly through the email discourse. Given the high demand you receive, there are sometimes a couple days delay between responses, but it is absolutely fine.
- Clearly understood of my grievances and provided guidance.
- Staff were friendly and very helpful and provided great service by explaining the process and options. This made me decide what was best for me and then got a higher mark after discussing with UMSU.
- The entire process was quiet overwhelming and Donna listed everything smoothly out for me and was a great source of information and guidance.
- She gave good advice, but it was a bit too late by the time she was able to get in touch as the service didn't have enough advocates available to meet the demand.
- The advocate I spoke with was abrupt, blunt and rude. They disregarded my query without explaining why.
- The suggestion is very useful, and my appeal succeeded.
- I'm very happy with the clear and thorough information given to me because it enabled me to make informed decisions.
- I appreciate the guidance provided by the team and they were very efficient with the emails and effective replies.
- I received no feedback and no follow-up. The total lack of any assistance was at times condescending and rude.
- They helped me successfully settle a four-month dispute with the university
- No matter the outcome of my situation, the UMSU has given me the support that I needed. Not only to go through all the process but also the support that motivates me to keep going. In a really tough situation like I am in, the UMSU gave me a light of hope and the feeling of safety in their care. I feel so thankful to everyone who has assisted me as they are all so passionate about what they do. I truly admire these people and I give them my most sincere gratitude. I don't know what I would do if they weren't here doing what they do. :)
- The information provided gave me confidence in my position with regard to my course dispute. Thankfully no further action was required as I resolved it with the staff member.
- For the number of cases they received, the turnaround time was pretty impressive.
- My issue couldn't be resolved. This might have to do with the official protocols and procedures. It left me feel powerless though.
- There was no follow up from my response.
- Paul gave me the information I needed, however no further actions or replies were received.
- The staff are nice, patient, and helpful.
- I did not expect that I could receive your email at that time because it was only few days before my CAPC meeting and I sent my email on weekends. But Alanna replied me so fast, I appreciate it so much.
- Clear explanations on my situation and options.
- Advocate was thorough with the rules and was good at making me understand.

If you have any general comments about or suggestions for the advocate, please write them here:

- Thank you very much for all your help, I really appreciate it! Keep up the good work.
- She gave me the printed version of rules I needed. I heard later on not all advocates to that. I think that print was and still is the main source of my self confidence in any problem. I suggest you prepare them and ask all advocates to give them to the students need them.
- Just very grateful! Thank you!
- Keep up the good work!
- Paul was great and I'm very grateful for his assistance.
- Thank you a lot for your help!
- Keep on doing a great job! Thank you!
- It would have been nice if you didn't misspell my preferred name twice in the emails.
- Thank you for your support.
- I understand the end of exam season is a busy time for the team and appreciate the help they provided, even though there was not much they could do in the circumstances at the time.
- Thank you so much for helping!
- Thanks so much for your support.
- ...don't be abrupt, blunt and rude?!
- I only wish they were available on more days like on the weekend.
- All good!
- I believe that for the number of cases, the staff is very less. Hence, they are unable to give individual support.
- There are no suggestions cuz you have done a great job in my view.
- Let all student know that this service is available on campus, so they can use this service in tough situations.

If you have any general comments or suggestions for the Advocacy Service, please write them below.

- Excellent service, very helpful. I would highly recommend students to seek help from UMSU, particularly those who had been invited to a CAPC meeting.
- More information about what to do when it is the staff behaving incorrectly, not the student.
- I'm sure you already know this, but it would be great if you had more funding for more advocates to reduce the wait time.
- Great service.
- More fast, weekend drop in.
- I feel there were more information that I am able to receive in detail through email discourse, whereas I felt a lot of pressure to remember and write down the content of our drop-in appointment. I'm not saying the drop in wasn't helpful- it was exceptionally helpful! However, there was a lot of information and content to get through in such a short amount of time, thus why I prefer the email discourse.
- Not really but just in case this will be seen by the powers that be I'd suggest the service could be improved if it had funding for more advocates?
- When I was being treated unfairly by the university, the advice from your service was invaluable. I think I would have had a much more negative experience without it.
- Student specific support is not available which is integral especially for international students.
- It would be better to provide more drop-in hours in a week.

UMSU Advocacy Service Staff Interaction Survey 2019

Background

This survey of university staff is conducted by the Service every two years by way of an online invitation-based instrument. Key stakeholders in the University Community are identified by their position and their contact or likely contact with the Advocacy Service. The survey provides a snapshot of the way the Service at large and its staff individually, are perceived by staff at the University.

This year we were very pleased to have such a strong response to our survey with a 61% response rate.

Results disclose several areas which may require further relationship building or clarification; however overall the results are evidence that the collegial, procedure-centric focus adopted by the Advocacy Service is operating effectively within the University community.

Executive Summary

The Survey was open for one month between 27th August and 30th September 2019 and there were 19 responses of 31 invitations.

There was a relatively even spread of contact with staff, although one respondent nominated an UMSU staff member who does not work in the Advocacy Service.

Respondents had contact with the Service in the context of formal hearings, the administration of student facing faculty processes, and in the resolution of complaints or disputes.

Respondents worked across the University, in student services or administrative roles, in Academic Board appeals, faculty committees, and complaints handling.

The responses to this survey were overwhelmingly positive.

94% of respondents strongly agreed that the advocate displayed a good grasp of statutes and regulations or policies and procedures in their arguments on behalf of a student. Recommendations made by the advocate were regarded as accurate by 93% of the respondents to whom it applied, and 92% of respondents agreed that e-mails and phone messages were promptly returned by the advocate they had dealings with – with only one respondent clearly disappointed in this area.

In answer to the question ‘overall, I am assured by the Advocacy Service’s ability to provide effective advocacy to students’, 21% of respondents agreed and 68% strongly agreed – with an aggregate score of 4.51 of a possible 5.

Commentary

The overall aggregate score was 4.61, which is very pleasing. The overall approval was 93%, which is a great endorsement of staff confidence in the Service.

By and large, the qualitative feedback speaks for itself. As with the quantitative data the comments were overwhelmingly positive. However, two comments need to be addressed specifically.

The first comment appears to imply that staff may somehow inadvertently (or wilfully) be coaching students to claim they are suicidal when facing University processes. This is an extraordinary proposition, and we reject outright any inference that the service might be ‘coaching’ students in such an unethical way. We would instead strongly suggest that if students are presenting to the University in increasing numbers with suicidal feelings, then this should be taken extremely seriously and investigated, and responded to thoroughly according to the University’s duty of care to its students.

It is the experience of the Advocacy service that many staff at the University appear ignorant about how stressful and bewildering University processes can be for students. Particularly the isolation and vulnerability experienced by many international students; who are homesick and without familial support when facing allegations that they have done something wrong. They are often deeply anxious about causing problems, or a loss of face which may impact on their whole family. If anything, we regard this staff member’s comment as evidence that University staff need urgent education about the reality of students’ lived experiences, and how staff contact with students can help or hinder students when they are most vulnerable.

Another comment needs a specific response because it is misdirected. The feedback is in relation to the pool of students available to attend as members of faculty misconduct committees, a function which is not part of the Advocacy Service. There is a deliberate demarcation between the department of UMSU which coordinates this process and the Advocacy Service, as there is a clear conflict of interest between the service whose function is to advise and represent students facing committees, and student office bearers who

are members of those committees charged with determining an allegation and issuing a penalty where relevant. Nevertheless, this feedback has been provided to the relevant staff member in UMSU, and the identified issues have been addressed.

FINDINGS- OUR STAFF

1. Which staff of the Advocacy service have you dealt with?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Donna Markwell	47.37%	9
Paul Lewis-Hornsby	36.84%	7
Alanna Smith	31.58%	6
Phoebe Churches	31.58%	6
Don't remember	31.58%	6
Michelle Almiron	21.05%	4
Nadia Streistermanis	21.05%	4
Other**	10.53%	2

*Respondents could select more than one staff member.

** Student referrals made to Advocacy- No direct contact with staff

A staff member outside the Service.

2. In which circumstance(s) have you worked with our staff?

Answer Options*	Response Percent	Response Count
Directly opposite in a case (e.g. advocate accompanied and made arguments on behalf of a student and I was on the committee)	52.63%	10
Indirectly in a case (e.g. advocate communicated with me in relation to a case but did not accompany the student at the hearing)	31.58%	6
In the context of a Faculty or School based misconduct committee hearing	31.58%	6
I supplied administrative information about a case to the advocate	26.32%	5
I referred a case to the advocate (or vice versa) and liaised with them on its progress	21.05%	4
In the context of a Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee meeting	21.05%	4
In the course of informally resolving a grievance or dispute	10.53%	2
Other (please specify)**	10.53%	2

*Respondents could select more than one option.

** At Special Consideration Practice Leaders' Group meetings

In the context of Students At Risk and other student cases requiring independent advice

3. Based on your experience dealing with our advocate(s), please tell us your agreement with the statements below:

Answer Options	Strongly disagree		Neither		Strongly agree	N/A	Aggregate	Response Count
The advocate(s) displayed a good grasp of statutes and regulations or policies and procedures in their arguments on behalf of a student.	0	0	1	2	15	1	4.78	19
Recommendations given by the advocate(s) to me or students I deal with have been accurate.	0	0	1	5	9	4	4.53	19
My e-mails and phone messages were promptly returned by the advocate(s).	0	1	0	2	10	6	4.62	19
The advocate(s) appropriately referred cases to me or my service.	0	1	0	3	9	6	4.54	19
The advocate(s) can be relied on to follow through with whatever action they said they would do to assist.	0	1	0	2	12	4	4.67	19
Overall, I am assured by the Advocacy Service's ability to provide effective advocacy to students.	0	1	1	4	13	0	4.53	19

4. Please provide any general comment or suggestion you have for the advocate(s) and/or the Advocacy Service

- Over the past year, there has been a disproportionate amount of students either intimating or threatening suicide (even during minor plagiarism misconduct allegations) if they do not receive a favourable outcome. Care is needed when discussing mental health with students who attend appointments to ensure that messages are not being misconstrued. Otherwise, the service is fantastic.
- I have been very impressed by the advocacy service.
- It would be beneficial to have regular meetings with Advocacy staff to ensure we are aligned and working well together.
- Student referrals made via 1-1 At Risk and Student Connect appointments often: More than once a week at peak times ranging in advocacy type - Assessment disputes are common. (Peak in December and June/July). Referrals to online form and drop ins only. No contact with staff.
- Really appreciate your Service. Thank you.
- I have found the advocates to be good liaison points who communicate well with students and staff and know the boundaries of their role.
- Always professional, helpful and friendly with the student and/or University's best interest in mind.
- On the whole I have had positive experiences when dealing with Advocacy staff members. They are generally knowledgeable about policies and process etc, and while there to support the students have also given good advice on when to back down and accept an outcome and when it is worth providing more information and appealing a decision. Occasionally I have felt they come down to strong on the students' side (understandable, it is their job), but this is generally when they only have the students' side of the situation.

My only word of advice to them would be to ask/follow up for further information from the faculty or academic services division before assuming that the student's version includes all of the information. This comment is more in regards to the manner/ tone of follow up, university staff are trying to do the right thing and support students, please don't assume the worst of us.
- Needs to have a bigger pool of students to attend misconduct cases. There have been 2 instances now in Faculty where students' cases have had to be rescheduled due to having no one attend within the time frame as per policy.
- The excellent advice and support provided to students by the Advocacy Service plays a very important role in relation to my responsibilities to effectively and efficiently manage and lead students through the University's complaint, grievance and general misconduct processes.

5. Which of these best describes your work area in the University?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Academic / Student services	52.63%	10
Academic Board appeals	26.32%	5
Faculty hearing committees or panels	26.32%	5
Faculty management or administration	21.05%	4
Grievance and complaint handling	15.79%	3
Training, informal discussions about appeals etc	15.79%	3
General Information	10.53%	2
Other (please specify)*	10.53%	2

*Student support services (Counselling and Psychological Services)
student conduct and risk management