



ADVOCACY

Service Report September - December 2020



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.

Trends and Issues

Typically, we would expect our casework this quarter predominantly to involve course academic progress (CAPC), special consideration, assessment disputes, and plagiarism related academic misconduct. However, as with the two previous COVID Editions of the Service Report, we have continued to see COVID related matters outstripping the usual types of advocacy issues.

More broadly – we have observed with growing alarm and disbelief – two jarring issues emerging in the dying light of 2020. That is both the University's oddly uncoordinated and incoherent approach to the serious challenges faced by students living with disabilities and poor mental health outcomes, and its insistence on a position that the pandemic has now finished. Many of the specific issues arising during this time riff on either or both of these two themes.

In the context of the [Productivity Commission's Final Report on Mental Health](#) which unequivocally indicates that tertiary students require support in the form of "arrangements that prevent the development of mental ill-health and helping those who have mental ill-health to remain engaged with their studies",¹ the University's approach seems to be facing in completely the wrong direction. The Productivity Commission Report points to a higher prevalence of mental health issues among tertiary students in general, and higher rates particularly among international students. Notably, the Report highlights a number of factors which worsen mental health outcomes, including study-specific stress (for which a compassionate special consideration policy would go a long way), separation from familiar support networks, financial stress, balancing work and study. Significantly, the *administrative processes of tertiary education providers* is identified as a key factor in exacerbating poor mental health. That seems the perfect segue:

¹ Productivity Commission, *Final Report on Mental Health*, p. 259 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report/mental-health-volume2.pdf>.

Academic Misconduct Notices sent on 23 December – oh and have a relaxing break!

The Productivity Commission Report on student mental health specifically identifies that the

way certain processes are implemented by a tertiary education provider can also have impacts on the mental health of students. For example, the Productivity Commission was told that a university that had previously released the semester's academic results on a Friday afternoon although the university counselling services were closed over the weekend addressed this potential risk to students' wellbeing by simply changing the release date of results to a Monday morning. A simple awareness of the potential mental health implications of various administrative processes could avoid adding additional stressors to student mental health.²

Perhaps the University had not yet reached page 266 of the Report, as on 23rd December 2020, just as the University closed for the end of year close down, some faculties elected to send students notices of an allegation of academic misconduct. This left affected students with a very difficult 12 day wait to get support and assistance to understand and respond to the allegations.

On discovering this, UMSU wrote immediately to the *Director, Student Services* indicating our view that, given the University and associated support services, including UMSU's Advocacy Service, were closing later that day and will not reopen until January 4 the timing for students to receive such correspondence seemed to be ill-advised.

Unfortunately, at the time of this report, our email had received no response or acknowledgement. In early 2021, we received an acknowledgement that this was not appropriate, but no follow up on the actions taken to ensure it is not repeated in future.

The Service is very familiar with how stressful this experience is at the best of times. Students who received these notices just before shutdown universally reported they had suffered a high degree of stress and anxiety, some expressed that they had been feeling suicidal and completely cut off from support during that time.

Recommendation:

Communication to students about any administrative or academic matters should direct students to available supports and take place when supports are available.

Special Inconsideration

Another area where the University appears determined to act in contradiction to its articulated commitment to improving mental health outcomes for its students is in its special consideration regime. You can read more below about our contribution to the UMSU submission opposing further retrograde changes to this policy, but in the meantime, there is a (sort of) good news story about a student who eventually received the special consideration outcome she was entitled to – but only after enduring an exhausting and anxiety inducing formal grievance process.

The issue concerned a student who had applied for special consideration outside the required timelines due to severe, ongoing and well documented illness which precluded a timely application.

Despite unequivocal documentary evidence supporting the acceptance of a late application, and notwithstanding the clear eligibility on the substantive basis for the application – her special consideration for three affected subjects was denied at review and had to be escalated to a formal grievance.

The grievance was eventually upheld, and special consideration was granted for all three subjects.

It is both frustrating and dispiriting to see these sorts of matters end up at formal grievance stage over and over again, with no apparent record of previous similar fact determinations being kept, or at least no impact of these determinations on the original decision maker's decision making. The University needs to move past a Groundhog Day approach to important decisions which have a significant impact on students' health and wellbeing. Failure to learn from these complaints represents poor service delivery and lack of commitment to continuous improvement. Disappointingly, this is something UMSU has pursued over many years, and is yet to see some material change.

Recommendation:

Principles established in grievances and appeals should be promulgated to decision makers and referenced in their decision-making to ensure quality improvement as a result of upheld student complaints.

² Ibid, p. 266.

Prematurely Post Pandemic

In the context of a year where the effects of the global pandemic were still fully emerging, we were stunned at the Academic Board's decision to revert to pre-COVID Course Academic Progress (CAPC) "Show Cause" processes and outcomes. While onshore students battled with state border closures, separation from loved ones, and uncertainty about when they may travel to see them, Melbourne based students were enduring one of the lengthiest hard lockdowns in the world. No one who had lost their livelihoods had any chance to improve that situation, so many endured deepening financial stress. Offshore, thousands of international students remained shut out of Australia due to border restrictions – and left trying to study online while battling their own difficult local circumstances, including poor internet connectivity, social unrest and dire economic impacts on their families.

Mark Twain is famously quoted as saying, "reports of my death are greatly exaggerated". So too I would venture, is the University's belief that the pandemic is over.

The WAMnesty was discontinued towards the end of 2020,³ despite no evidence that any of the reasons for its introduction had materially changed. The Commonwealth Government took a similar approach, winding back the waivers and flexibility introduced in the first part of the year to international student visa conditions (under the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) legislative framework) which made it much easier for international students to apply for and be granted leave of absence and reduced study load. That is, during the best part of 2020 the University was able to accept applications for Leave of Absence and Reduced Study Load from international students on the basis that the impacts of COVID-19 were, in and of themselves, considered to meet the threshold of "exceptional circumstances". Not only was this practice abandoned on the view that to do otherwise would not be compliant with its ESOS obligations, but the University also upped the ante by discontinuing the use of student declarations as an acceptable form of evidence of exceptional and compelling circumstances for Leave of Absence and Reduced Study Load applications.

To muddy the waters further for international students, upon the Government's reversion to pre-COVID conditions for student visa holders, the University began advising students that "COVID-19 on its own is not considered a valid compassionate/compelling reason for leave of absence in 2021." Students were advised that they will need to provide documentation of "additional extenuating circumstances". The term "additional extenuating circumstances" we believe, is misleading and effectively incorrect. In fact, we understand that students simply need to document and explain *how* the impacts of COVID-19 have resulted in situations which would otherwise meet the definition of exceptional extenuating circumstances". They do not need to demonstrate "additional circumstances". When providing advice – words matter.

UMSU subsequently contacted the University to confirm whether this is an accurate statement of the University's position, and if so, why, and on what basis will decisions be made to determine whether circumstances are exceptional.

At the time of writing, we had been advised the issue was being assessed, and we would be advised on the position – but that position has not been communicated. Students affected by this continue to contact the Service, and we are assisting them to reapply addressing the COVID related impacts in more detail.

Many of the University's offshore students are potentially living through the pandemic in conditions which are equally difficult or worse than onshore students. Accordingly, even as things begin to improve in Melbourne, it is difficult not to perceive the University's refusal to consider extending COVID related support in 2021 as discriminatory.

Recommendation:

The University needs to urgently reconsider its position that in the latter part of 2020, students were no longer impacted in the same (or worse) ways as they were in the early part of the pandemic. In the absence of evidence that things improved for students, and an abundance of evidence they did not – the University should maintain appropriate flexibility and extra supports as much as possible until both the pandemic itself, and all of its lingering impacts are actually over.

Show Cause – sprint edition

In the whirlwind of stress that is Course Academic Progress Committee (CAPC) hearings ("Show Cause"), we were contacted by a student who is deaf, blind, and living with psychosocial disabilities. The honours student had completed all of their fourth-year subjects successfully, but had been unable to submit their thesis, and consequently had been called to Show Cause as to why they should be permitted to continue their studies.

³ You can catch up on the WAMnesty in the last two Service Report here: <https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Student-Union-Advocacy-Service-Quarterly-Report-Jan-April-2020-COVID-19-Edition.pdf> and here: https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Student-Union-Advocacy-Service-Report-May-August_2020-1.pdf

The student had managed to complete their subjects, despite a global pandemic and a range of personal challenges. They had not been able to complete their thesis on time because they had required leave during the year, because their mother had died by suicide mid-year after suffering decades of severe domestic violence and abuse. It is difficult to imagine a more devastating and arduous year in which to attempt an honours thesis.

Amplifying these issues were the challenges faced by the student in communicating with the University. The student could communicate via email and/or through booked remote live captions to allow Zoom meetings, however those options required two to three days to organise due to a shortage of stenographers, made significantly worse by the pandemic. In this context, the student noted that the University's CAPC process requiring a response to the Show Cause notice in only four working days- including provision of relevant documents or other evidence had the effect of discriminating against students with disabilities. The Service echoes this view that the University's lack of flexibility in this process places many students living with disabilities at significant academic disadvantage.

The student was only able to contact the Service two days before the matter was due to be heard (in their absence because they were unable to arrange the measures required for a zoom meeting). The student had been able to complete the online *Show Cause* form only partially because it was not compatible with their screen reader. They could not upload any of the documentation for the same reason. At that point, the student (who suffers anxiety and PTSD) was highly distressed that their case would be considered on the strength only of a partially completed form. We immediately wrote to the Academic Progress Team requesting an extension to submit a response to the *Show Cause* notice after the University reopened in the new year. We explained the was because the student requires alternative communication methods involving some time to organise. We further advised that the student had asked their psychologist to provide a letter of support and this would also take a few days to organise. The letter of support is crucial as it explains the reasons why the student was unable to submit their honours thesis.

We received a reply from the Academic Progress Team the following day. They had sought advice on whether the hearing could be postponed to the second round in the new year but advised that they had not received any response to their request. As the hearing was to be held that day, they indicated that unless they heard back very soon from the Academic Governance Team, the hearing would proceed as scheduled.

Notwithstanding, we understand there is a formal process with many dependencies necessitating at times a fast turnaround between notice and hearing, it is shocking that a student in these circumstances would not be offered *any* reasonable adjustments in the process. It is astonishing that given the student's case was slated to be heard on the first day of the first round of CAPC hearings, and that the student faces potentially very onerous consequences as a result of that intervention, that there would be absolutely no scope to accommodate them in a second or subsequent round, especially when their disability places them at such a profound disadvantage due to the poor accessibility of the technology and the timelines.

The University's Access and Inclusion Plan is being updated, and we hope these sorts of discriminatory practices will be finally addressed in that process.

Recommendation

To borrow from Healey's first law of politics, *when you are in a hole - stop digging*. We think it is well overdue for the University to take a break from digging a deep, dark trench to hide from its obligations towards students living with disabilities. The University needs to not only desist from actions (inaction?) such as this which clearly damages its students' mental health – but also to urgently put its resources into a coherent strategy to improve Disability Access and Inclusion and proactively address mental health outcomes for its students.

Do our job?! Oh ohhkaay, if you *insist*...

In another matter requiring protracted escalation in order to obtain the outcome to which the student was entitled in the first instance, the Service assisted a student who was simply asking for the support offered in their Academic Adjustment plan to be implemented. We assisted the student, who is deaf, to lodge an appeal requesting:

An undertaking that service provision will occur in future as required, including provisions by SEDS of interpreter voice-overs of recorded material and captions of recorded materials for the duration of our studies. Specifically, that interpreting, voice-over interpreting and captioning access services be provided, whether the materials are live or pre-recorded, and supported by SEDS and the University of Melbourne and that ethical procedures and accountabilities are put in place regarding SEDS provision of services for [the student's] full involvement in University life, including academic and extra-curricular activities, to ensure equitable access.

The outcome of the appeal was to confirm that SEDS "will continue" to provide support that ensures the student's

equitable access to teaching and learning material, and [the faculty] will provide support as it relates to the student's academic work.

Additionally, the outcome commits that SEDS staff would undertake a range of training, including content on deaf cultural awareness.

Recommendation:

While we welcome the decision, it is disappointing this took a convoluted process to achieve an undertaking that the University would ultimately do its job (in accordance with the law). We recommend that this finding is referenced in lower levels of decision making in similar fact cases in future to ensure no further students need to go through a protracted and stressful process to achieve this sort of outcome.

Programmes and Initiatives

Annual Service User Survey

The Advocacy Service conducts an annual survey of student users of the service.

This year the annual service user survey was conducted during the months of September and October and we received 196 responses – with a return rate of 33%.

The full analysis of and commentary on the findings are attached at **Appendix 1** to this report.

Submissions to the University

This was another busy time for submissions to both University policy consultations and Commonwealth Government Senate Inquiries.

During this period the Service contributed to the UMSU Submission for the **University Disability Access and Inclusion Policy**- endorsing the general approach of the policy but noting its disjunction with other university policies containing overlapping subject matter. Specifically, UMSU noted a lack of consistency in the University's approach to the issue evidenced by conflicts with current and proposed policies, including the *Assessment and Results Policy* (MPF1326), the *Student Fitness to Practice Policy* (MPF1345) and the proposed *Student Participation in Study Policy*. The full submission can be read here: [UMSU Feedback Uni Disability Access and Inclusion Policy](#).

In October the Service contributed to feedback on the proposed *Student Participation in Study Policy*. We understand the motivation behind the policy is to divert students with mental health concerns from the General Misconduct process, which UMSU endorses. However, we regarded the draft provided for feedback as poorly conceived, ineffective in balancing the interests of the University against the rights of a student and lacking a coherent and proactive approach to student mental health outcomes. The full submission can be read here: [UMSU submission on Consultation on Proposed Student Participation in Study Policy](#).

The Senate Inquiry into the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020* was held in September, and the Service contributed to the UMSU submission which vigorously opposed the proposed Bill. The full submission can be read here: [UMSU Submission for the Inquiry into the Higher Education Support Amendment \(Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students\) Bill 2020](#).

Finally, just as we did at the same time last year, the Advocacy Service provided its feedback to the UMSU submission on consultation on proposed amendments to the special Consideration provisions in the *Assessment and Results Policy*. Our submission noted this was a continuation of the University's approach in this area, which features a lack of any evidence base, and a focus on measures which is detrimental to students facing the greatest hardship, just when they need support. The full submission can be read here: [UMSU submission on Consultation on Proposed amendments to the Special Consideration provisions in the Assessment and Results Policy](#)

Comparative data – 2019 and 2020

2019

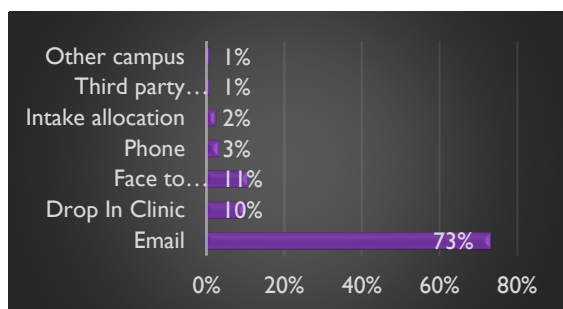
Total students assisted: 2222

Total contacts with students: 6307

Graduates to undergraduates: 47% | 53%

Domestic to international: 53% | 47%

By type of contact (may be more than one type)



In 2019, electronic contact and appointments accounted for slightly less than the previous year, with a corresponding increase in students presenting to our drop-in service.

2020

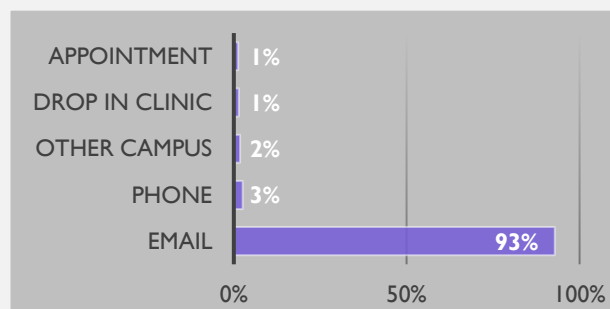
Total students assisted: 2748

Total contacts with students: 6502

Graduates to undergraduates: 59% | 41%

Domestic to international: 56% | 44%

By type of contact (may be more than one type)



In 2020, with the service being delivered remotely from the last week of March, it is unsurprising that over 90% of assistance was provided electronically over email, with 3% by phone and only 1% conducted in appointments.

Month by month number of discrete student presentations 2018-2020

2018	2019	% increase	2020	% increase
January	211	January	182	-14%
February	119	February	126	6%
March	103	March	104	1%
April	84	April	69	-18%
May	109	May	135	24%
June	140	June	135	-4%
July	475	July	507	7%
August	229	August	247	8%
September	105	September	125	19%
October	119	October	119	0%
November	216	November	153	-29%
December	493	December	320	-35%
2403	2222		2748	
	Increase 2018-2019	8%	Increase 2019-2020	19%

It was no surprise to staff that there had been an overall annual increase of 19% in individual student presentations this year. 2020 presented many challenges, we had to rapidly transition the service model to remote service delivery amid a rapid increase in demand on the service between March and June, peaking in April where there was a whopping 249% increase over the same month of 2019 – or two and a half times the usual contacts at that time of year.

In our previous Service Report, we noted that because there was no “Show Cause” process for the first half year 2020, the Service did not run its usual Peer Support program. Accordingly, we would have expected our data to show a decrease during the normally busy CAPC period. However, when we normalised the data for the lack of the usual peak involving the Peer Support Programme, we saw a 59% increase in casework presentations. That is, in that period May to August in 2019 there were 991 presentations to the service but there were 1580 in 2020.

The dramatic difference in the profiles of casework between last year and this year, is clearly evidenced by the comparison between CAPC matters. In the second half year 2019, the Service had 580 CAPC related presentations – comprising 43% of all casework in that period. In the same period of 2020, the Service saw only 50 students with CAPC related matters – just over 3.5% of casework! This illustrates the dramatic increase in other matters presenting to the service during that period and accordingly the magnitude of additional casework.

Month by month in number of contacts with students 2018-2020

2018		2019		% increase	2020		% increase
January	438	January	996	127%	January	1006	1%
February	285	February	356	25%	February	385	8%
March	346	March	368	6%	March	369	0%
April	254	April	259	2%	April	446	72%
May	357	May	375	5%	May	559	49%
June	342	June	349	2%	June	680	95%
July	907	July	1062	17%	July	980	-8%
August	580	August	620	7%	August	555	-10%
September	280	September	346	24%	September	316	-9%
October	376	October	381	1%	October	281	-26%
November	624	November	626	0%	November	300	-52%
December	562	December	569	1%	December	625	10%
	5351		6307			6502	
		Increase 2018-2019		15%	Increase 2019-2020		3%

Despite the overall increase in student presentations in 2020, the demand was not evenly spread, nor in conformity with the usual peaks and troughs. For example, usually peak demand occurs around the mid-year CAPC process. However, the first half year CAPC process was a significantly lighter touch with far fewer students being called to meet with committees, and less onerous outcomes. Additionally, despite an overall growth in demand of almost 20%, the number of contacts with students seeking assistance only grew by 3%. This is undoubtedly a product of remote service delivery to some extent, but also reflects efforts to triage cases efficiently and turn around our support and advice with fewer interactions wherever possible to maximise capacity and ensure timely responses.

Month to Month

There was a much smaller than usual increase in the month by month over the previous year’s contacts with students, particularly evident in the second half year where there were significant decreases. where contacts tripled over the previous January and also in February with a 25% increase in services provided to students, July with a 17% increase and September with a 24% upswing.

For the first time since data was recorded in this way in 2012 the top four issues for the year have changed. Whereas in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019 – the top four most represented issues were CAPC, special consideration, assessment disputes, and plagiarism allegations, in 2020 the top issue were matters arising from COVID-19 – with a third of all matters for the year. After that, academic misconduct, special consideration and assessment disputes collectively made up another third with around 10% of the case load each.

In terms of the COVID-19 related issues – almost a third were in respect of the Emergency Support Fund, another 30% comprised WAM concerns, Fee discounting and online teaching quality matters with about 10% each. Issues with online exams, leave of absence and referral to the Legal service for tenancy matters made up the bulk of the remaining issues.

Advocacy Service Statistics

Comparative data – September - December 2020

This period 611 students were provided a service resulting in 1522 contacts. In the same period last year, the service saw 661 students resulting in 1733 contacts. Given our exponential increases in demand over the first two thirds of the year, this decrease was somewhat unexpected – but also rather welcome in several respects. Obviously had increases been sustained, we were staring down the prospect that at some point we could be unable to meet capacity. However, the reduction in demand in the final four months of the year has ultimately alleviated both staff fatigue and any concerns about service capacity. Moreover, we cautiously hope that the slight reduction in demand may also reflect improvements in student’s experience of the University, and a lessening of some of the most pressing issues generated by the hard lockdown. It is safe to assume that students had by this semester, become more familiar with online open book examinations and were feeling the benefit of some of the concessions made by the University – such as the WAMnesty.

Additionally, despite a return to the pre-pandemic policy for CAPC, we saw far fewer presentations from affected students than usual. This is in part due to the functional impossibility of running our Peer Support Program in zoom based meetings, but we also suspect reduced numbers of students seeking assistance with CAPC responses may be a result of the manner in which students were required to engage with the CAPC process.

It is only speculation, however as students were required to simply fill out an online form, rather than write a letter to the CAPC, this may have meant fewer students sought advice in respect of their submission. For example, where a student responds to the Show Cause Notice and is presented with an online form to fill out on the spot, then they are far likely to stop, jump out of that process and contact the Advocacy Service for advice on their response before going back to complete the online form.

It may be telling as students being to present with enquiries about CAPC appeals to understand better how the process worked and whether there were impacts on procedural fairness involved in the methodology.

Finally, the Advocacy website received over 17 000 page views this period, quite significantly down from the peak in the previous period, but still up from the 15 000 in the same period last year.

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.

Previously, the majority of our casework presented via either our contact form or through our drop-in service. However due to the shift to remote service delivery, students have found us through a variety of other sources, many of which are not optimised to collect the usual base data which is routinely collected via our contact form or drop-in service. This includes 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 demographic data is in many cases not as detailed as usual. We have also taken advantage of the reach of our social media channels to provide advice and these contacts may also be lacking in the usual detail. This makes reporting along on graduate/undergraduate and domestic/international lines problematic in this report.

September – December 2020

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
COVID-19	96	15.95%	Assessment Dispute	38	18.45%	Supervision	3	15.00%
Assessment Dispute	86	14.29%	Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	32	15.53%	Progress - HDR	3	15.00%
Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	82	13.62%	Special Consideration	28	13.59%	COVID-19	3	15.00%
Special Consideration	77	12.79%	COVID-19	20	9.71%	Assessment Dispute	2	10.00%
Academic Misconduct - Collusion	55	9.14%	Academic Misconduct - Collusion	16	7.77%	Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	2	10.00%
Academic Misconduct - Exam	44	7.31%	Course Academic Progress Committee	16	7.77%	Remission of Fees	1	5.00%
Course Academic Progress Committee	37	6.15%	Remission of Fees	8	3.88%	Enrolment	1	5.00%
Remission of Fees	18	2.99%	Other	7	3.40%	Scholarship Issues	1	5.00%
Enrolment	16	2.66%	Academic Misconduct - Exam	7	3.40%	Intellectual Property Dispute	1	5.00%
Other	16	2.66%	Vocational Placement	5	2.43%	Incorrect Advice	1	5.00%
Student complaint about uni staff	12	1.99%	General Misconduct	4	1.94%	Academic Misconduct - Collusion	1	5.00%
General Misconduct	7	1.16%	Enrolment	4	1.94%	Not Specified	1	5.00%
Selection Appeal	7	1.16%	Student complaint about uni staff	4	1.94%			
Vocational Placement Problems	6	1.00%	Selection Appeal	3	1.46%			
Special Consideration (ongoing)	5	0.83%	Advance Standing Credit/RPL	2	0.97%			
Incorrect Advice	5	0.83%	Quality Teaching	2	0.97%			
Quality Teaching	4	0.66%	Not Specified	2	0.97%			
Academic Misconduct - Other	4	0.66%	Incorrect Advice	2	0.97%			
Progress - HDR	3	0.50%	Academic Misconduct - Falsified docs	1	0.49%			
Course structure/changes	3	0.50%	Bullying	1	0.49%			
Exchange	3	0.50%	Course structure/changes	1	0.49%			
Bullying	3	0.50%	Special Consideration (ongoing)	1	0.49%			
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	3	0.50%	Graduation	1	0.49%			
Supervision Problems	3	0.50%	Cross-institutional enrolment	1	0.49%			
Student complaint about another student	2	0.33%						
Cross-institutional enrolment	1	0.17%						
Scholarship Issues	1	0.17%						
Graduation	1	0.17%						
Academic Misconduct - Falsified docs	1	0.17%						
Intellectual Property Dispute	1	0.17%						

September- December 2019

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Academic Progress Committee	219	34.49%	Course Academic Progress Committee	183	47.16%	Supervision Problems	6	33.33%
Special Consideration	94	14.80%	Special Consideration	47	12.11%	Progress - HDR	9	22.22%
Assessment Dispute	78	12.28%	Assessment Dispute	43	11.08%	Special Consideration	3	11.11%
Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	55	8.66%	Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism	27	6.96%	Scholarship Issues	3	11.11%
Student complaint about uni staff	21	3.31%	Academic Misconduct - Collusion	15	3.87%	Student complaint about uni staff	2	7.41%
Academic Misconduct - Exam	18	2.83%	Academic Misconduct - Exam	9	2.32%	Incorrect Advice	2	7.41%
Student Admin - Remission of Fees	16	2.52%	Academic Misconduct - Falsified docs	8	2.06%	Assessment Dispute	1	3.70%
Academic Misconduct - Collusion	15	2.36%	Remission of Fees	7	1.80%	Not Specified	1	3.70%
Other	15	2.36%	Student complaint about uni staff	6	1.55%			
Selection Appeal	14	2.20%	Enrolment problems	6	1.55%			
Progress - HDR	12	1.89%	Not Specified	6	1.55%			
Incorrect Advice	9	1.42%	General Misconduct	5	1.29%			
Student Admin - Enrolment problems	9	1.42%	Vocational Placement Problems	5	1.29%			
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	8	1.26%	Incorrect Advice	4	1.03%			
Academic Misconduct - Falsified docs	7	1.10%	Other	4	1.03%			
Student Admin - Graduation	6	0.94%	Advance Standing	2	0.52%			
Supervision Problems	6	0.94%	Selection Appeal	2	0.52%			
General Misconduct	5	0.79%	Student complaint about another student	2	0.52%			
Quality Teaching	5	0.79%	Special Consideration - ongoing	2	0.52%			
Academic Misconduct - Other	4	0.63%	Course structure/changes	1	0.26%			
Student complaint about another student	4	0.63%	Bullying	1	0.26%			
Course structure/changes	3	0.47%	Quality Teaching	1	0.26%			
Intellectual Property Dispute	3	0.47%	Sexual Harassment	1	0.26%			
Equitable Accommodation (SC Rego)	2	0.31%	Graduation	1	0.26%			
Student Admin - Exchange	2	0.31%						
Discrimination	1	0.16%						
Bullying	1	0.16%						
Vocational Placement Problems	1	0.16%						
Academic Misconduct - Research	1	0.16%						
Sexual Harassment	1	0.16%						

Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

September- December 2020*

Graduate	240	39.28%	54.55%
Undergraduate	200	32.73%	45.45%
Not specified	171	27.99%	

*This report is missing over a quarter of the data – however the final column shows the adjusted statistics based on information recorded.

September- December 2019

Graduate	285	43.18%	
Undergraduate	375	56.82%	

Distribution by International/Domestic Status

September- December 2020*

Domestic	264	43.21%	49.44%
International	270	44.19%	50.56%
Not specified	77	12.60%	

*As above with respect to missing data.

September- December 2019

Domestic	377	57.12%	
International	283	42.88%	

Commentary

The adjusted proportion of graduate to undergraduate students was 54.55% to 45.45% (compared with 43.18% to 56.82% for the same period last year). This continues to be a stable reflection of enrolment load, with a steady increase in graduate students accessing the service this year. In respect of the proportions of international to domestic students during this period, international students are over-represented with 49.44% domestic and 50.56% international students presenting to the service. Last year in the equivalent quarter we saw 57.12% domestic students to 42.88% international students.

The primary presenting issue overall this period- representing just under 16% of all matters- were issues related to the impacts of COVID-19. This is a significant decrease from the 40% of matters related to impacts of COVID-19 in the last reporting period.

The most commonly presenting issue in this period involved students' problems accessing outcomes for the Emergency Support Fund Grant applications. These enquiries made up almost 20% of COVID related matters, with many students continuing to wait lengthy periods for assistance or confused about what they could claim for in a second-round application.

The next most common issue related to students affected by technical issues in their online assessment. This was closely followed by enquiries from students concerned about the impact of the disruptions on their grades – and particularly their WAM.

After COVID related matters, the most highly represented matters were assessment disputes, plagiarism allegations, and special consideration.

Conduct of assessment comprised the main issues driving assessment disputes. This generally relates to the way in which assessment has been carried out, including the information provided to students before and after assessment tasks.

Distribution by Faculty September - December 2020

Faculty of Science	144	23.57%
Faculty of Business and Economics	100	16.37%
Faculty of Arts	93	15.22%
Melbourne School of Engineering	64	10.47%
Faculty of MDHS	52	8.51%
Unknown	45	7.36%
Melbourne School of Design (AB&P)	40	6.55%
Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences	21	3.44%
VCA & Music	15	2.45%
Melbourne Law School	15	2.45%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	15	2.45%
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	5	0.82%
Not Yet Admitted	2	0.33%

Distribution of COVID matters by graduate/undergraduate status:

September- December 2020*

Graduate	33	34.38%
Undergraduate	62	64.58%
Not specified	1	1.04%

Distribution COVID matters by International/Domestic Status:

September- December 2020*

Domestic	39	40.63%
International	50	52.08%
Not specified	7	7.29%

COVID-19 related matters by Reason

Emergency Support Fund	19	19.79%
Technical Consideration	17	17.71%
WAM concerns	15	15.63%
Online teaching quality	10	10.42%
Online examination issues	8	8.33%
Return to Campus	6	6.25%
Travel Restrictions	5	5.21%
Enrolment Problem	4	4.17%
LOA/Student Visa	3	3.13%
Fee discounting	3	3.13%
Semester 2 impacts	2	2.08%
Zoom or Internet problems	1	1.04%
Special Consideration	1	1.04%
Graduation delay	1	1.04%
Materials Required	1	1.04%

Assessment Disputes – Contacts by Stage of Process

STAGE	REASON	Total
Informal/assessment review with examiner	Conduct of Assessment	25
	Procedural Issue/policy breach	14
	Admin Error	8
	Allegation of Examiner Bias	4
		51
Formal request for remark	Conduct of Assessment	24
	Procedural Issue/policy breach	3
	Allegation of Examiner Bias	2
		29
Formal Grievance	Procedural Issue/policy breach	2
	Conduct of Assessment	2
		4
Academic Board Appeal	Procedural Issue/policy breach	2
Total Assessment Dispute Related Matters		86

Assessment Disputes – by Faculty

Faculty of Science	18	20.93%
Melbourne School of Engineering	15	17.44%
Faculty of Arts	14	16.28%
Melbourne School of Design (AB&P)	10	11.63%
Faculty of Business and Economics	10	11.63%
Faculty of MDHS	6	6.98%
Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences	5	5.81%
VCA & Music	3	3.49%
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	3	3.49%
Melbourne Law School	2	2.33%

Assessment Disputes – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	45	52.33%
Graduate	41	47.67%

Assessment Disputes – by International/Domestic

Domestic	44	51.16%
International	42	48.84%

Plagiarism – Contacts by Stage of process

STAGE	REASON	Total
Formal/Committee Hearing	Wilful/admitted	40
	Inadvertent	11
		51
Informal/Educative	Inadvertent	18
Academic Board Appeal	Excessive Penalty	10
	Inadvertent	3
		13
Total Plagiarism Related Matters		82

Plagiarism – by Faculty

Faculty of Science	19	23.17%
Faculty of Arts	18	21.95%
Melbourne School of Engineering	16	19.51%
Faculty of Business and Economics	13	15.85%
Faculty of MDHS	8	9.76%
Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences	3	3.66%
Melbourne School of Design (AB&P)	2	2.44%
Melbourne Law School	2	2.44%
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	1	1.22%

Plagiarism – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	48	51.61%
Undergraduate	45	48.39%

Plagiarism – by International/Domestic

Domestic	22	23.66%
International	71	72.04%

Special Consideration – Contacts by Stage of Process

STAGE	REASON	Total
Application	Late Application	13
Internal Review	Late Application	16
	Unhappy with outcome provided	14
	Deemed No Appropriate Outcome	4
	Deemed Insufficient Grounds	2
		36
Formal Grievance	Late Application	11
	Unhappy with outcome provided	7
	Deemed Insufficient Grounds	2
		21
Appeal	Unhappy with outcome provided	5
	Late Application	2
		7
Total Special Consideration Matters		77

Special Consideration – by Faculty

Faculty of Science	19	24.68%
Faculty of Business and Economics	17	22.08%
Faculty of Arts	11	14.29%
Melbourne School of Design (AB&P)	9	11.69%
Melbourne School of Engineering	6	7.79%
Faculty of MDHS	5	6.49%
Melbourne Law School	4	5.19%
VCA & Music	3	3.90%
Melbourne Graduate School of Education	2	2.60%
Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences	1	1.30%

Special Consideration – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	47	61.04%
Graduate	30	38.96%

Special Consideration – by International/Domestic

Domestic	41	53.25%
International	36	46.75%

The next Advocacy Service report will cover the period January to April 2021 and will be available in mid May 2021.

Phoebe Churches

Manager, Advocacy & Legal

January 2021

Encl:.../

2020 Service User Survey Report

UMSU Advocacy

Service User Survey 2020

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, and also provide qualitative feedback on their experience. 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 scores well beyond these benchmarks for over a decade.

The survey is distributed as an online questionnaire to service users who have had contact with the service within the previous 12 months. Usually, 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. This year however, the number of students who presented to the service by means other than the Service's contact form (via the main UMSU contact form, or other UMSU departments) has meant that we did not regard the opt-in method as a reliable source of respondents. Accordingly, the invitation was sent to all students who had at least one contact with the service in the 12-month period. To encourage responses, the Service offered the chance to win one of four \$50 Officeworks vouchers for completing the survey.

This year, given the extraordinary circumstances we have all shared, we added some specific questions about COVID-19 impacts which we hope will assist us with post-pandemic service planning under "COVID normal".

Executive Summary

The Survey was open for six weeks between 17th September and 30th October 2020. There were 196 responses received of 590 invitations – a 33% return rate. Notwithstanding a 66% increase in demand on the Service in the last year, this response was almost three times our usual response rate as a proportion of invitations.

The service has once again exceeded the established benchmarks. The overall aggregate score was 4.40 and the lowest score for a specific question was 4.14. These are the highest aggregate scores the Service has received since the survey's inception in 2009.

Respondents' contact with staff was well distributed across the service: 19% of respondents reported contact with Phoebe Churches, 13% with Paul Hornsby, 9% with Michelle Almiron, 7% with Nadia Streistermanis, 7% with Maria Tandoc (backfilling for staff absence for three months), 6% with Alanna Smith, and 5% with Donna Markwell (away for three months); indicating a representative spread of feedback on the experience of each member of staff. Just under a third of all respondents indicated that they could not recall who had assisted them, which is significantly fewer than the usual 50% of respondents who could not recall who had assisted them. This is likely to be due to assistance provided predominantly via email over the lockdown period this year.

The issues respondents presented with were also diverse and included a number of matters peculiar to a period of the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. Around half of the matters about which respondents approached the service comprised academic misconduct, emergency support fund, special and technical consideration, and concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on their Weighted Average Mark (WAM).

Given the impact of the global pandemic on students and the service delivery offered for more than half of the period surveyed, the survey also asked whether the impact of COVID-19 on their studies was the primary reason for respondents' contact with the service. More than half of respondents indicated they would have contacted the service regardless of COVID, and more than three-quarters would have used the same contact method with the Service regardless of the COVID related changes to remote service delivery.

With the Service operating remotely for two thirds of the surveyed period, it was not surprising that more than three-quarters of the respondents had had electronic contact with the Service. Around 10% of respondents had telephone appointments. The drop-in service did not run for two thirds of the surveyed period; hence it is under-represented in comparison to previous years.

Overall satisfaction with the service was at 91% in this survey which is well up from last year's average of 83% and also an improvement on 2018 average of 87%. Often a handful of very unhappy respondents can make a significant difference in the overall aggregates where there is a smaller number of responses overall, however this year the number of dissatisfied service users has remained constant with previous years, while the total number of responses is almost three times greater than last year. This gives credibility to the notion that there will always be service users who are disappointed with the service, but they are consistently represented in raw numbers, regardless of the return rate of responses.

The lowest aggregate score was in response to the question 'I found information on the Advocacy Service website useful'. The overall agreement rate for this question was good at 82%, however the question scored a lower than usual aggregate due to eight respondents disagreeing (three strongly) and a larger proportion than usual of non-committal responses. This may indicate a lack of interest in the issue, or that we are doing OK, but could still do more with our on-line self-help resources. The qualitative information which correlated with these responses appeared to target navigation of the website – something over which the Service unfortunately has no control. However, there is a major UMSU-wide website overhaul underway which promises to address navigation issues with the current site, so that may resolve some of the dissatisfaction. There is further discussion in the commentary below.

The majority of respondents found their way to the Service via the UMSU website, which given the reliance on digital communications for the majority of the surveyed period, is not surprising.

With respect to the demographics of the respondents, the majority – over 54%- were graduate students, 92% studied on the Parkville campus, and there were equal proportions of international and domestic respondents.

Commentary

Lowest Scores

After the lowest aggregate score for the question 'I found information on the Advocacy Service website useful' discussed above, then next lowest aggregate score was in response to 'the advocate made persuasive arguments in meetings or hearings on my behalf'. This is almost always among our lowest scoring questions, year in and year out. In the past we have noted that responses to this question are problematic to interpret in the absence of qualitative feedback. Additionally, responses to this question may disclose misapprehensions about the Service's capacity to influence university decisions.

There were nine respondents who disagreed that their advocate made persuasive arguments on their behalf, five strongly disagreed. The qualitative feedback for these respondents indicated in one case the student felt that the advocate thought their case was "hopeless".

Unfortunately, this is sometimes objectively true, but we would take from this the need to ensure that we communicate our views on the merits of a dispute diplomatically and objectively, and with sensitivity to the importance it may hold for the student. Another student who was very dissatisfied with this aspect of the Service stated it was because their problem was not resolved in the way they wanted. Again, unfortunately this may have more to do with the merit of the dispute than the quality of advocacy, however we should be reminded at how we explain this to students, and how that may improve their experience overall.

More concerningly, two of the dissatisfied respondents felt that their advocate was on the "University's side". states 'the Advocate did not take me seriously. Instead, sided with the person who was being abusive on the bases that he "sounded appropriate" in his email'. Another disappointed respondent notes 'I feel the advocate was clearly on the side of the university and not mine'.

This sort of direct and unequivocal feedback maybe painful to accept, however we must not forget the distress and even trauma many students experience in their disputes with the University, and we need to be mindful of how we respond and communicate with these students to ensure they feel supported, and that we are independent of the University and not compromised in our advice and assistance.

We have previously noted there may be other issues at play in relation to this question. For example, rather than always being reflective of an advocate's efforts at persuasiveness, it may be that the response was influenced by a failure to secure the respondents desired outcome. However, as the Service has no coercive powers over University decisions, this is a largely misconceived view. In the past, we have taken poor scores on this question as a sign that we need to be clearer with service users about our powers, and to manage expectations accordingly.

Several other respondents who indicated dissatisfaction on this question, provided no qualitative information, but indicated they were extremely satisfied with the Service they received overall. This type of anomaly may suggest the

negative response was in error, or perhaps a misunderstanding of the question. Another respondent with negative responses, indicated that the Service had not responded to them at all. However, this is difficult to understand. Students will only be recorded in our database when some advice and assistance is provided. Given students are only contacted to complete the survey when they are selected from our database – it is difficult to see how we could have surveyed someone to whom we had never responded.

A number of the less satisfied respondents had contacted us for help getting fee discounts on their tuition fees due to the rapid change to online teaching and learning. The Service approached this issue in two ways. In so far as the issue was a systemic and collective concern, it was passed to the student representation and campaign part of the organisation, and was vigorously pursued by UMSU, including by means of a largescale survey which was reported back to the University (link). Unfortunately, UMSDU was unable to persuade the University that there were any issues to address. On an individual advocacy footing, the Service approached the issue with students as one of subject quality, and the need to establish a nexus between the educational experience delivered, and that which was promised.

Generally, regardless of the individual student’s reasons for dissatisfaction, it is an important reminder that we must be clear about our powers, fully explain our empowerment-based service model, and generally ensure our service users understand our role and assistance from start of our contact until the end.

Other negative feedback

It is always troubling to read that service users had an adverse experience of the Service. However, the Service reviews these responses carefully and they form an important topic of discussion at our annual end of year planning and review day. In cases where specific staff have been identified in the negative survey responses, those staff will consider what might have happened, and we all look together as a team at ways we can handle such situations better in future. It can be easy to dismiss negative feedback as simply a product of a service user who did not get what they wanted. In reality however, where a respondent has taken the time to articulate why they are unhappy with the service they received it will almost always disclose something we could have done better. The qualitative responses are included in full at the end of this report, however some of the themes warrant specific discussion in this commentary.

The broad themes of dissatisfaction are addressed below.

Lack of responsiveness or sensitivity to the respondents’ issues

One piece of feedback described an impression that the staff the student had dealt with “were just doing their job and not that interested in the problem”. The student felt that they received “just a bare minimum” of attention, and this was difficult because they were very emotional and distressed about the issue. Other comments in relation to responsiveness of the service indicated that after the first response, there was no further reply, or that the response seemed formulaic and not directly relevant to the student’s specific situation. These are disappointing experiences of our service, for which we all strive to deliver with all of the compassion and care reasonably possible in the situation. We have been overwhelmed with demand this year, and this may be a reminder that, no matter how busy we are, we must not allow compassion fatigue or burnout to impact on our service to students.

Another student felt judged by the staff member, who they believed thought they were guilty of misconduct when they believed they were not. This is fundamentally a communication issue. A critical role of advocates is to provide accurate advice to students in relation to the interpretation and interaction with University regulations and procedures. Unfortunately, the strict liability character of academic misconduct under the University’s regulations is often not understood by students. However, it would be a grave disservice for staff to neglect to explain that intention to commit academic misconduct may not be given as much weight in a finding as they expect, and they need to address their response to an allegation accordingly. The takeaway from this feedback is a reminder to ensure we always frame our advice with sensitivity to the student’s perspective on their own actions.

Not being available when the respondent needed us

Every survey one or two students indicate they feel there should be a 24-hour seven day a week crisis response available to them. Given the gravity of the issues students may be experiencing it is understandable this may seem indicated, however unless the University also offered 24/7 availability, there is little we could do even if we offered out of hours assistance. The Service does indicate in its automated responses to emails and contact forms that we are only available during business hours and offers suggestions for actions that students can take in the meantime, and crisis service contacts for emotional support – so it is difficult to know how we can improve on this.

Not being on the students' side

Several respondents did not feel they had been taken seriously, or that the advocate had sided with the University. This evidences a need to ensure we make clear in our communication with students, that our role is to work in their best interests. This is not so much “being on their side” as ensuring they have the best quality, expert advice and information about how to protect their interest and get the best outcome they are entitled to in any situation.

Generally, we see these sorts of feelings expressed around misconduct matters. Some students may expect us to “take their side” no matter what, and in some cases to literally “defend the indefensible”. However, our role is to ensure students understand and are afforded the proper process, and that allegations are responded to appropriately, and put to the proof to ensure fair outcomes. Accordingly, it is our role to explain to students the policies and procedures involved in misconduct matters, which in some cases may include pointing out that, while they believe they have done nothing wrong, they nevertheless have breached policy. We try to assist students to come to grips with the university’s expectations and the academic conventions required, and impress upon them they need to show insight, and in some cases appropriate responsibility for their actions. This is obviously a sensitive area, and we must constantly strive to deliver critical information such as this with understanding and compassion for their experience, so they do not see us as judging them or “siding with the University”.

Unfortunately, in some cases respondents are just really angry with the Service but have not specified exactly why.

Not taking up complaints on students' behalf

An allied but slightly different issue to the one above is a belief that the advocate’s role is to take up matters wholly on students’ behalf and resolve them without a need for the student’s involvement. This runs counter to the Service’s empowerment model which seeks to equip students with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to self-advocate wherever possible. Students are adult learners, and we regard their time at university to provide opportunities to develop critical skills in problem solving and conflict resolution which they will take with them into the rest of their lives.

Additionally, many lower-level university processes do not provide standing for a third party to make representations in the place of a student. Where processes formally recognise a representative standing for the advocate, we take this role very seriously and take every opportunity to practice vigorous advocacy in the interests of the student.

Positive responses

While there was a proportionally small (nine of 196 or 5% respondents) but not insignificant, degree of dissatisfaction with the Service discussed above, it is worth noting that the two questions with the highest aggregate scores, and 96% and 93% agreement respectively were in relation to whether advocate followed through with what they said they would do to assist, and whether the advocate made or helped the respondent to make persuasive written submissions in relation to their circumstances. This is very heartening as it appears to indicate that, despite the massive increase in demand on the Service over the surveyed period, with no corresponding increase in staff, our innovations in service delivery appear to be achieving the desired results.

It is also notable that in many cases the positive responses suggest the opposite experience to the respondents who were very dissatisfied. We hope this indicates that the less satisfactory experience is the outlier rather than the norm.

The high aggregate score in relation to whether the advocate made or helped make persuasive written submissions in relation to the respondent’s circumstances was also positively reflected in several of the qualitative comments. The Service will generally provide a template with self-help guides in the first instance and ask the student to populate it to the best of their ability, and then return it via email to the Service for feedback and editing. Other students who are particularly vulnerable due to illness or other special needs, may be offered our service to draft the entire document for them, which we then return to for the student’s review and final sign off before it is lodged. The survey points to a high level of satisfaction with this aspect of service delivery.

Qualitatively, positive comments highlighted the clarity and confidence regarding university policy and procedure some respondents acquired through contact with the Service, as well as the Advocates’ expertise provided in drafting formal submissions and complaints. Others noted the thoroughness of the Service’s advice, and appreciated the detailed assistance provided, sometimes over protracted periods.

Ultimately, we are mindful that there is always room for improvement, and we must deal patiently and sensitively with people who may be vulnerable and very stressed by their situation. We appreciate the opportunity to better understand our service users’ needs and preferences.

FINDINGS

- OUR STAFF

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

Can't remember	76	31.15%
Phoebe Churches	47	19.26%
Paul Hornsby	33	13.52%
Michelle Almiron	22	9.02%
Nadia Streistermanis	19	7.79%
Maria Tandoc (March 2020 – October 2020)	18	7.38%
Alanna Smith	15	6.15%
Donna Markwell (Oct 2019 – March 2020)	14	5.74%

*Respondents could choose more than one staff member.

2. Please write briefly the issue for which you sought assistance:

Academic Misconduct	46	16%
Emergency Support Fund	44	15%
Special Consideration/Technical Consideration	34	12%
Other++	23	8%
WAM concerns	22	7%
Assessment Dispute	21	7%
Request for fee discounts due to COVID-19 changes	20	7%
COVID-19 impacts on course progression	20	7%
COVID-19 impacts- not otherwise specified here	19	6%
"Show Cause" / Course Academic Progress (CAPC) / RHD Progress	18	6%
Incorrect Advice	10	3%
General Misconduct	8	3%
Selection Appeal	6	2%
Supervision Problems	4	1%

++"Other" responses included:

Privacy issues in 3rd party assessment services during COVID-19
 Pre-Admission Info
 Extensions for Honours students (particularly re closure of library)
 At risk appointment

- Tenancy Issues
- Poor advice issued by STOP 1
- Emergency accommodation and student accommodation discount
- Hypothetical liability question
- Exam clash
- MLS incorrect wording on exam and changing it mid way through
- Enrolment reinstatement
- Communication issues from University to students.
- Housing lease related to COVID
- Student who had exhibited threatening/destructive behaviours
- Advanced standing dispute
- Lecturer’s misinterpretation of Academic Adjustment Plan

*Respondents could choose more than one option.

3. Was the impact of COVID-19 on your studies the primary reason for your contact with the service?

No	105	53.57%
Yes	87	44.39%
Did not answer	4	2.04%

4. What was your main method of consultation with the advocate?

E-mail/Webform	185	76.76%
Telephone appointment	23	9.54%
Drop-in Service (pre-lockdown)	12	4.98%
Appointments (pre-lockdown)	11	4.56%
In a hearing or appeal	6	2.49%

*Respondents could choose more than one option.

5. Would you have used the same method of contact with the service regardless of COVID restrictions?

Yes	148	75.51%
No	45	22.96%
Did not answer	3	1.53%

Advocacy Service User Survey 2020

6. 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 %		
									2020 /	19 /	18
Once I made contact with an Advocate, they assisted me in a fast and efficient manner	3	4	7	53	127	2	4.53	93	89	97	
The advocate clearly described university processes relating to my issue.	6	1	8	51	125	5	4.51	92	85	89	
The advocate took my wishes into account. and guided me on the best strategy to achieve my desired outcome.	6	6	8	46	122	8	4.45	89	89	93	
The advocate followed through with what s/he said they would do to assist.	3	3	0	53	114	5	4.57	97	87	89	
I was kept informed of any action the advocate took in relation to my circumstance.	4	2	0	56	103	31	4.53	96	86	100	
The advocate made or helped make persuasive written submissions in relation to my circumstances.	3	5	0	38	106	44	4.57	95	87	92	
The advocate made persuasive arguments in meetings or hearings on my behalf.	5	4	0	22	35	130	4.18	86	64	80	
Outcome of my case was clearly explained by the advocate.	5	2	0	43	60	86	4.37	94	78	53	
The advocate made appropriate referrals to other service providers.	5	6	0	37	48	100	4.22	89	73	75	
I am satisfied overall with the assistance given by the advocate.	6	4	16	64	106	0	4.33	87	82	91	

- THE ADVOCACY SERVICE

7. How did you first hear about the Advocacy service?		
UMSU Website	107	37.94%
UMSU Social Media	34	12.06%
A University Notice or letter	30	10.64%
Referral from Stop 1	28	9.93%
Referral from Academic staff	24	8.51%
Referral from someone who has used the service	24	8.51%
Other (please specify)	21	7.45%
UMSU Brochure	10	3.55%
Referral from another UMSU department	4	1.42%
++“Other” responses included:		
Melb Uni Website Search		
Farrago		
Referral from the Academic Secretary		
At open day		
Host program		
Spam mails		
I knew there had to be some sort of student advocacy group at the university		
Referral from the University counsellor		
Uni Melb website		
Instagram		
Counselling Service		
Reddit		
*Respondents could choose more than one.		

8. Were you aware of the service prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?		
Yes	129	65.82%
No	60	30.61%
Did not answer	7	3.57%

Advocacy Service User Survey 2020

9. 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	Agreement %		
									2020 / 19 / 18		
The Advocacy Service staff were helpful when I made my initial enquiry.	3	3	7	57	118	8	4.51	93	90	93	
I found information on the Advocacy Service website useful.	3	5	24	76	68	15	4.14	82	88	92	

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

Answer Options	Strongly disagree		Neither		Strongly agree		N/A	Aggregate	Agreement %		
									2020 / 19 / 18		
I found the drop in clinic run by the Advocacy Service helpful (pre-lockdown).	2	2	0	25	29	133	4.33	93	90	93	

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF

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

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Graduate coursework	50.51%	99
Undergraduate	42.86%	84
Graduate research/PHD	4.08%	8
No response	2.55%	5

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

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Parkville	91.84%	180
Southbank	4.08%	8
Werribee	3.06%	6
Burnley	0.51%	1
Potential Student	0.51%	1

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

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	48.98%	96
No	48.47%	95
No response	2.55%	5

Appendix A

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

- Really effective help, strong support.
- If I could direct all my Student Service issues to UMSU Advocacy I would! The University could learn something from the Advocacy Service on how to communicate and support students.
- Just being satisfied with the result and service what I got from the UMSU Advocacy.
- Good and helpful!
- The approach and guidance was very comforting and helpful. Helped me reduce my stress and guided me well during my hardship.
- Fast and helpful.
- Phoebe helped me a lot, without the help I might be repeating the unit and result in a delay in graduation.
- We need an efficient informed point of service to obtain guidance and receive information so that we can navigate through very complicated systems and procedures that we are generally unaware of until we are adversely affected. We cannot protect our education system or (student) rights without excellent UMSU Advocacy.
- My persuasive writing is a bit weak so I was afraid that the poor writing techniques would not appeal successfully, but Phoebe rephrased my writing and strengthen my arguments which is very helpful and I appreciated that. She provided so much assistance to guide me on what to do next and explain clearly when I don't know what to progress. When I was anxious about the delayed reply from the Grievance, she explained clearly that it might be the end of the year shutdown. Thank you so much!
- My problem was solved quickly and all my questions were answered.
- I felt they were just doing their job and not that interested in the problem. It was a very emotional time for me but even though I got support it was just a bare minimum.
- The advocate never got back to me after I provided the documentation they requested. As my situation was time sensitive, I missed out on getting any advocacy help at all because of this. It was really disheartening.
- They provided significant support in understanding the process which I found quite complicated and never made me feel like I was asking silly questions. They were also great emotional support in this time which I appreciated.
- Phoebe gave me plenty very thorough information regarding my case, however I did not pursue it further as it entails a lot of work and time which I do not have at the moment.
- They helped me in getting my help fund money.
- They were able to address the issues raised really thoroughly and quickly.
- The advocate not only helped me with communicating with the other party, but also give me a lot of support, encouragement, and confidence in pursuing lawful rights.
- I felt heard and assisted during the difficult times.
- My issue was given care from the advocate and not rushed. Could not have done it myself.
- They answered my query within the same day of me submitting it.
- When I had to go through the difficult times, I received help from the Advocacy services. I was very much grateful when I received the Emergency Support Fund.
- Customer satisfaction exceeded and beyond!
- Because my problem has been solved in a proper way.
- The advocates helped me to prepare a written application and cleared up the confusion I had regarding the process. I'm still waiting to hear back on the outcome of my application, so I chose Satisfied over Extremely satisfied at this point in time. I suppose really I am extremely satisfied with the help.
- I was really scared at that time and Donna helped me through the process very clearly which made me feel secured.
- Was just told that nothing could be done to assist in circumstance where I relied on incorrect advice from course coordinator, resulting in me having to change my schedule and re-arrange work and child-care days, almost having to defer the course for another 6 months. Without your help I would have been really screwed.

- They followed up for me with Chancellery (the DVC Student Life). When they did, I saw how hopeless the Uni really is – a terrible response from the uni, but I am so grateful to see what is really happening – students don't usually get this chance.
- Paul gave me support by providing relevant information and accord with my ideas.
- The email replies were prompt and informative. Good advice was given with regards to the issue.
- The staff had responded promptly after I've submitted the form and the matter was settled in just a few hours so I am overall really satisfied with the efficiency.
- I didn't really get the outcome I was looking for. They gave me important information though, and I was really grateful for their communication.
- For a long time I've always thought that institutions are always in the right, and I had no power to question their actions. However, the advocate made me believe that I was able to undertake the action that I took and that I did not have to be discouraged or scared if I needed to do what I did. It worked!
- The assistance was with kindness. Everything was explained and it was quick.
- There was nothing to be done. A no win situation. I was happy with the help anyway.
- I advocate provided me detailed feedback and assisted me in knowing consequences as well. It was really informative.
- Faster response would reduce anxiety! I had a problem on Friday but had to wait until almost the end of the next Monday. All weekend I was too stress.
- I contacted & found whatever I was after.
- My issues or covid impacts were not directly related to university, so the advocate suggested other ways to look for help
- I received a reply very quickly even though I was not able to give much notice. Even though it was a 'wait and see' response it was very detailed and I felt like I could get more help if the issue persisted.
- Nadia helped me many things. Let me have more confidence in my study.
- Very helpful and communicative service, provided clarity about some confusions I had.
- I was unaware of the University processes for my case and the advocate helped me understand things very clearly.
- The advocate took keen interest and showed care and support along with the technicalities involved and explained all the process and also the different outcomes possible. This gave me ample time to think and prepare myself for all the outcomes possible.
- Maria helped me a lot regarding my COVID emergency fund appeal, she replied super quick as well!
- Problem keep unsolved – so I am happy about help but sad it didn't work.
- Dispute with another student in Tenancy matter. Advocate couldn't help due to conflict of interest. Guided me to legal service.
- I received the Emergency Fund after the support of Maria.
- Even though my case was not successful, the advocates helped me every step of the way and always very promptly, even over extended periods of time.
- The Advocate did not take me seriously. Instead, sided with the person who was being abusive on the basis that he 'sounded appropriate' in his email.
- At very stage during my dealings with the advocacy service, I felt valued and that my issue was being attended to with the utmost seriousness and care. Responses were prompt, informative, and exhaustive, and I was no left in no doubt as to my possible options and claims.
- I was very glad that there was one student body which was able to appeal and rectify issues.
- Helped me very much.
- Very friendly response and helpful during a stressing time.
- I felt someone is hearing me and trying to help me when I was helpless and stressed...
- They don't represent our voice. They stopped talking about fee discount issue for the first and second semester. WE DIDN'T SAY THEY CAN GIVE UP ON THAT!!!
- The communication was efficient and response was thorough.
- Phoebe went out of her way to try and help me overcome a decision which was seemingly based on age discrimination. While it was unsuccessful she advocated strongly for me, and I was never in doubt that she knows what she is doing. An expert.

- They were very helpful and overall very supportive and this made me feel very very secure and safe and well.
- Paul was able to explain clearly what the relevant university policy was and how that was relevant in the current situation.
- Their services were very fast and efficient.
- I never got any responses after my feedback through the webform?
- She was very helpful & explained the bureaucratic-side of the application.
- I was ill advised and my enrolment terminated. I feel the advocate was clearly on the side of the university and not mine. The advocate advised me not to go to the hearing, did not explain the consequences of this and now I can never go to university again. When I spoke to her about it, she said 'well, if you don't like my advice go elsewhere' and hung up on me. I am now taking the university to court for bullying and discrimination.
- Excellent, speedy, and helpful advice.
- Paul comprehensively addressed the questions I asked and provided quality advice on next steps- It was also really helpful to get an immediate response from him, given the urgent deadlines I was under.
- The assistance provided was very clear and concise. Additionally, it helped to relieve all my stress and calmed me down a lot.
- Very supportive and detailed information to guide me to the next step. The written email is very professional to help me to send it to the head of the department. Many thanks!
- I believe that Alanna Smith is an expert advocate.
- My case had been referred back and forth between the Subject Coordinators at the ABP faculty, then Stop 1, then Special Considerations and it was very frustrating to have to compile all the evidence for my case every single time. In the end the recommendation to approach the Academic Registrar with a formal grievance finally resolved the issue. It involved a fairly lengthy compilation of documentation but the advice I received and the counsel of having someone look over the case resulted in a successful fee remission and withdrawal of the disputed subject and failed grade. Could not ask for more.
- Paul was quick and gave a clear and detailed answer.
- They read over my letter and said it was good to send off, which I appreciated. They also responded very quickly! When I sent my initial request for assistance. I did allude to the fact that the situation I was in was unjust and I wish I could have had assistance to fight for what was the true cause behind the situation I was in. At the time I think I discussed with the possibility of appealing but I didn't want to risk digging a deeper hole for myself. But at the same time, it is not right a professor was able to use his power to "ruin my life" as that time was extremely stressful and he did it not just to me, but 2 other students as well. Just to note, I used this service in December 2019 so it was before COVID.
- They do solve my issues.
- Good advice provided.
- Even though I did not get the outcome of my appeal to the Uni, the advocate willingly assisted me throughout the entire process. I am very grateful for that. They're the best university body I've ever sought assistance from, especially compared to that against which I had to make a complaint.
- Information was provided in a succinct and well-written manner, especially for an open-and-close situation.
- Helpful and friendly advice.
- No resolution, I felt that the consultant was on the uni's side more that advocating for me.
- The matter was quickly resolved, and I achieved a good outcome.
- Paul helped by trying to understand the unique situation I was in and guided me in a better direction.
- The staff were helpful, quick and understanding when I needed someone to be.
- Prompt and supportive.
- Paul and Nadia were super awesome in helping me with my situation and explaining all possibilities and outcomes related to it. They were quick in replying to my queries and were very knowledgeable about the information that they shared.
- They've provided an outcome whereby my financial needs were met sufficiently, so much so that I can continue studying without the uncomfortable future ahead. The Emergency Fund was granted on my

behalf which made my study at home situation better, albeit temporarily, which I'm still eternally grateful for. Thank you once again!

- Helpful!
- Paul was really helpful and nice and took his time to send me a long thorough kind message when I was stressed about a wrongful academic misconduct allegation.
- Fast and helpful response.
- I think the email was comforting and useful. The tone used made me felt that I was heard and then the issue was resolved.
- I think Paul helped me pretty well and kept me updated.
- In my hard times, UMSU helped and stood by me throughout.
- They are patient and helpful. Respond quickly, which make me feel supported whiles I was scared.
- The email reply is prompt even though their workloads increased a lot during the COVID-19 period. Besides, the suggestions are useful. The outcome is satisfying.
- I've received the emergency fund immediately.
- The process and outcome was explained really well to me and she reviewed my writing of the response.
- They were quick to respond and provided reassurance that I was doing the right thing.
- Extremely fast replies even though they were overwhelmed during this period. it felt like they were one of us helping us!
- I had a question and it was answered.
- Easy to get hold of, and explained what I needed to do after getting money from the fund.
- My issue was not sorted even though it was an urgent one. I don't think the uni listens to them.
- Resolved issue fast and well.
- Clear advice was given and helpful to the process of my complaint to the staff.
- Nothing happened still know nothing, hardly any information that us Hagel from the university.
- Contacted the advocacy service to discuss my refund for flights, they helped me get to the right service for help.
- I got a quick and clear reply to my question and they were really reassuring.
- What i wanted was directed a well thought manner and everything was sorted.
- Big shout out to Donna and Nadia. You've helped me through a tough situation and been the only ones in my corner. I will forever be grateful. I didn't feel adequately supported and guided with regards to another matter however. Student Advocacy absolutely needs to get tougher on racial discrimination. Universities have an important role to play in regulating society in that regard and that almost invariably entails Student Advocacy. In my view Paul was a little too quick to dispense with a matter I brought up earlier this year. If other students are treated the same way, I'm inclined to believe there's an underreporting of these matters and that's a huge bummer because some students will continue to suffer discrimination.
- The circumstances made it quite irrelevant to follow gather evidence to make a case as it was a time sensitive matter- once the dates passed it felt more or less irrelevant due to the work needed whilst completing assignments – they should do our complaints for us like this.
- I was wrongly accused of academic misconduct during an exam in 2019, which was subsequently resolved and I was cleared of any wrongdoing after a meeting with a staff member within my faculty. I approached the advocacy service straight away after my exam seeking advice. They told me that it's "basically impossible to disprove intent to cheat" and both acted and made me feel like I was guilty. There was no empathy or understanding and I felt really judged. The advice they gave me was distressing and false as they basically told me I had no chance. I think it's great that this service exists but the advice they gave to me was incorrect and their general attitude towards me and my circumstances caused extreme and unnecessary distress.
- Being in a situation of academic misconduct was very overwhelming in a negative way. But Alanna was very helpful and that helped me a lot.
- They were super helpful; they convinced me that I should, indeed, make a claim when I wasn't sure of the right way to do so.
- Swift response and an immediate outcome from the University as a result.

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- They responded quickly, which is awesome when you really need someone who is knowledgeable to talk to.
- The advocate provided clear and helpful advice. The advocate didn't have a strong knowledge of the structure of my degree, therefore she wasn't able to advise me specifically on my issue, however she was able to provide some helpful guidelines in better constructing my grievance. She also attached helpful documentation (i.e. a template) in our correspondence.
- The UMSU helped me in every possible way through the entire process.
- Their response was entirely irrelevant to the points I raised in web form submission. It seems as if they did not read it or the draft of my letter to the academic misconduct committee at all, but simply spewed out a generic email response telling me to take more responsibility. I also asked a number of questions which were not answered properly – they said it didn't matter if I meant to plagiarise or not – which cannot be true. So they insisted that I had committed academic misconduct. This made me feel a lot more anxious about the situation, even though in retrospect I had nothing to worry about. The allegation of academic misconduct was not upheld by the committee.
- I just needed some clarification with the WAM amnesty system and how it would affect me as someone graduating this semester and I received a prompt and helpful reply :)
- I had my queries answered and knew the next steps to take.
- My advocates helped me through every step of the way. My confused soul was very much blessed.
- Phoebe has been fantastic, i couldn't have asked for more!!!
- Phoebe and the team has been extremely helpful and wrote a lengthy email to explain to me the way scaling was done. Was very satisfied of their preparedness to serve us, the students. Thanks very much.
- Because of the advice I came to terms with the reality.
- Fast, efficient, and expert advice for free! These services would be worth a lot in the paid market!! I probably wouldn't get, or think to get, access to these services so nice the University funds this.
- The advice was specific and relevant.
- it was good and useful advice.
- Assistance was great- clear and easy to understand the steps required for pathways to outcomes.
- You didn't do anything- you didn't even get back to me about my need for fee discount after I told you I wanted you to argue more with university.
- Very helpful, helped me all possible way.
- My problem was solved the Phoebe was there at all times guiding and helping me.
- They advised me on what i should do to give myself the best chance of a positive outcome and i took their advice and that resulted in an outcome i was pleased with.
- I was in depression UMSU advocacy supported me a lot right from mentally as well as professionally, Naida was my advocate for my Academic misconduct and she explained me very well in every details , she help me to add some points into my appeal after that I have been appointed to Michelle she guided me every policy of the University of Melbourne and she helped me a lot for writing an appeal for re-appeal of Academic misconduct. Phoebe used to interact with me on the behalf of Naida and Michele all advocates from the UMSU are appreciable.
- I am very grateful that I could get an opportunity to understand university culture under their guidance.

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

- So grateful.
- Just keep going on with the same thing. Nothing to change about the thing.
- Thank you so much Pheobe!!! They have replied to me in late JAN saying that I have appealed successfully, but at that time COVID-19 has started and the oversea travelling restriction has frustrated me so much, so I didn't have time to write an email to you. The Advocacy Service is a really great platform to help students who are not sure what to do when they are so disappointed with the result given by the faculty, I really appreciate your help!!!
- So far UMSU Advocacy has helped me. There is nothing I would change.
- I guess if you're closing a case or have deemed it to be hopeless, which is what I presume happened in my situation??- maybe let the student know, rather than just abandoning the case altogether. It's an

- acceptable answer to tell the student you don't believe their case has merit but just leaving me hanging was awful.
- I think it did take a little bit of time to hear back after initially making contact which could be improved upon however this changed after being provided my advocate and directly communicating with them. I understood how small this service is – it seems like it is much bigger.
 - I really would like to thank Donna for all the support she provided, and I couldn't make it without her. I would also thank Phoebe and Nadia, who gave me advice during Donna's absence. Also, Isabelle, who is still supporting me through legal services from the group. Your work means a lot, and your kind assistance is much appreciated!
 - Thank you so much for your assistance. It really meant a lot.
 - Decision affecting me was an exercise of academic discretion. Union member made no offer to advocate on my behalf, simply told me that there was nothing to be done because academic decisions are not to be challenged!
 - Thanks!!!!
 - Hope they just have a good day and stuff.
 - I'm really happy that the advocate was able to believe in me and the process that it enhanced my confidence. Keep it up. It's the little things you do that can keep us going.
 - Thanking you for your assistance.
 - It is great to talk to them to clarify our questions but it would be helpful if we can talk over the phone faster instead of waiting until next day.
 - You did a great job. I appreciate it.
 - The main help that I required was writing a persuasive letter with which Michelle was extremely helpful and thorough.
 - Time is a big factor and responses should be made in quick time even at weekend because the uni is writing us emails on weekend.
 - The advocate could be better at strategizing and helping to articulate the complaint even if they don't think there are grounds.
 - Thank you!
 - The advocacy itself is abusive and unnecessary.
 - Phoebe Churches was a great help, and in particular I valued her patience and attention to detail. Even though my assessment dispute ended in a personally unsatisfactory manner, I felt extremely satisfied with my experience utilising the advocacy service, and do not feel I nor Phoebe could have done anything differently. I commend the advocates for the great work that they do!
 - Something seems to be corrupted. They don't keep reply me when they don't like to discuss this issue. I can't even complain face-to-face due to this COVID-19. Something should be changed. It's not transparent at all. They think I should not get a fee discount BUT THEY SHOULD FIGHT FOR ME!
 - Great!
 - I didn't end up appealing as lockdown got the best of me. I may contact UMSU again for further help.
 - Compassion and kindness and listening to students would go a long way.
 - Thank you so much Paul and Maria!
 - Thanks for providing an invaluable service
 - Thank you so much! you relived by stress and helped me achieve the best possible outcome
 - You need to introduce UMSU to more students around uni. I believe my fellows do not know they can seek assistance from you. You are so important in Unimelb! Very supportive organization.
 - Zoom meeting can also be helpful for easy communication – I had a phone appointment but I would like to do zoom with hem when I need.
 - Paul was great help.
 - It would have been nice to appeal for academic integrity and have student advocacy represent me in this way to fight for the truth of what really happened. This situation occurred due to the professor's carelessness as he refused to mark the last quarter of my exam, knowing it would result in failure when our cohort repeatedly told him it was a hurdle, but he believed it wasn't (even though it was explicit written in the handbook) and on top of that he didn't want to provide a supplementary since he was going to vacation in Vietnam. In the end I was severely stressed in that time and I had no ability to unveil the

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truth. I thought student advocacy fights for students' rights and I feel they could have helped my cause. In result my grade for that course was not returned to the original grade decreasing my WAM and causing a lot of stress & angst during that time.

- Thanks to both Michelle and Phoebe!
- Thanks for your help, Paul. The advice that I was provided with enabled me to advocate for myself and get a suitable outcome that I was happy with.
- Thank you for your assistance and helping me during a really stressful time!
- You were absolutely awesome in helping and guiding me. Please keep doing the good work and I wish you a huge success in the future.
- Thank you for all your hard work during this season and hopefully we'll encounter a better outcome on fees for this semester during Covid-19!
- thank you!
- I think Nadia helped me really well. Her email was professional and useful.
- I suggest them to make one person handle the entire case instead of multiple people replying us.
- Thank you so much for your help. Your kind words did support me to some extent.
- thank you very much for all your help.
- Try to be a bit more helpful and understanding.
- Simply put. Get tougher and a lot more proactive with cases regarding racial discrimination because if you turn students away or don't take them seriously it never gets fixed.
- I am grateful for the advocacy service, but due to the amount of extra work required to fight for rights, it definitely would be nicer if someone from advocacy could gather sufficient information and then proceed with the contact on behalf of students. Why can't advocacy complain for us? With an assessment heavy coursework masters (no exams) and placement for some of my cohort- there is no extra headspace to advocate.
- I can't remember who I spoke to but I spoke to someone there and they need to seriously work on treating students with respect, compassion, understanding and having a basis of innocent until proven guilty. I was innocent and I was made to feel small and judged and as if I was guilty. I understand that some students who come in will have actually done the wrong thing. But even despite that, have some empathy- they are coming for help in a desperate and immensely stressful situation so don't be so horrible.
- I want to thank Alanna for her quick responses and proper guidance for my case
- None! They were wonderful.
- First time I've used advocacy and I was super impressed.
- Thank you and appreciate the time taken to explain my queries to me.
- Good job guys!
- The team could have linked me up direct with the academic board to keep them informed about the concerns students (not just me but potentially other students too) have.
- Thank you for your assistance. I very much appreciate it.
- I am really thankful to Phoebe who review my CAPC show cause and the guy helped me in my CAPC meeting. I am extremely thankful to you'll for helping me during my difficult time

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

- I didn't know about the drop-in clinic service run by UMSU Advocacy – but now everything is shutdown. I think it's a great idea though.
- The website needs to be improved – there is great information and help but it is hard to navigate and find! The dropin is wonderful – so good to go and just see someone to talk it through.
- Thank you.
- I think the advocacy service was helpful in terms of helping students individually. Emails were a convenient method and made information easy to understand via written text, but I hope that in future you can go and visit in person.
- Please don't stop helping and assisting students without prejudice. I'm one of many students that didn't believe that I was qualified for seeking help but going to the advocacy service really did help.

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- Cover a wider range of issues, broader than just advocating inside the university. Like other legal issues instead of referring to lawyer service.
- Great service! Thanks!
- The drop-in appointment was very helpful and reassuring as my enquiry was regarding academic misconduct when I was very overwhelmed.
- I think they are wasting too much time on virtual yoga classes and festivals. No one really cares about it. We need something more practical. Take our side.
- Just want to thank everyone who helped me in what was a very distressing time for me. Thank goodness for the student union providing such a service for students during what can be a very stressful experience. Hopefully you can help lots of other students when they come into contact with the bureaucracy of the university.
- I don't know if Zoom drop in session are being run in the context of COVID but that might be very helpful as a service. I found the dropin and initial chat with Paul to be very helpful and Michelle's advice and promptness in follow-up was also really appreciated and I feel made a critical difference in the overall positive outcome.
- You were so helpful- thank you!
- The information on the website could be easier to find. And UMSU should let more people know your service.
- Advocacy services are really helpful for students and its a one stop place where student can rely.
- Keep doing the good work, try and reply a bit faster if possible. I had such a bad weekend.