

2015 Report of the Dean of Students – Australian National University

Executive Summary

This report covers the period 1 January - 31 December 2015.

The core business of the office is to assist students with the resolution of complaints or difficulties. The essence is to apply an independent, impartial, confidential and fair approach to the resolution of such challenges. We try to empower individuals by showing them how to approach, manage or avoid similar problems in the future.

During the reporting period the Dean of Students office assisted 683 individuals seeking help with grievances, complaints or requests for assistance. 281 individuals (41%) required multiple visits. The total number of contacts for the period was 1303 (excluding incidental emails etc.). This represents an 80% increase on contacts in 2014, which in turn represented a 64% increase on visits in 2013. A large component of this increase in contacts is due to substantially more undergraduate students seeking academic advice or struggling with aspects of academic progress as compared to all previous years. Mental health issues impacting on academic progress continue to be a major basis for students seeking assistance. 93 students (14%) presented with complex scenarios involving mental health issues in 2015.

The total number of individuals contacting the office represents 30.7 contacts per 1000 students, an increase over the 24.4 contacts per 1000 students in 2014.

Management of this increasing load is a continuing challenge. The impact is being felt in diminishing time available for proactive initiatives such as the collaboration with senior staff from the Division of Student Life and the ANU Legal Office in the development of policy and procedure documents and web pages relating to allegations of sexual assault or domestic violence. Further development in these areas is continuing in 2016.

The Dean of Students Office is available 5 days per week for appointments with the Dean of Students (3 days per week) or Deputy Dean of Students (2 days per week).

Opportunities for improvements:

- The 2014 Dean of Students Annual Report raised concerns about the observation that international students disproportionately present with severe academic progress issues. This observation was again evident in 2015. One suggestion in the 2014 Annual Report was that the PVC (Student Experience), in combination with College Associate Deans (Education) and representatives from ANUSA and PARSA, explore support arrangements for international undergraduate students and identify any impediments for this cohort accessing services. Limited collaborative action was undertaken in 2015 and we encourage further consideration of this suggestion in 2016.
- Increasingly staff are seeking advice from the Dean of Students office particularly with respect to managing difficult supervision situations. HDR students are also seeking assistance and while the numbers of students have not increased over 2014, the complexity of cases and the need for multiple appointments to help get students

back on track is increasing. We suggest that the office of the PVC(Research and Research Training), in combination with Associate Deans (HDR), Dean of Students, CHELT and a PARSA representative, instigate the development of a professional development module targeting how areas and supervisors can respond to difficult supervision situations and assist students to regain focus and academic progress.

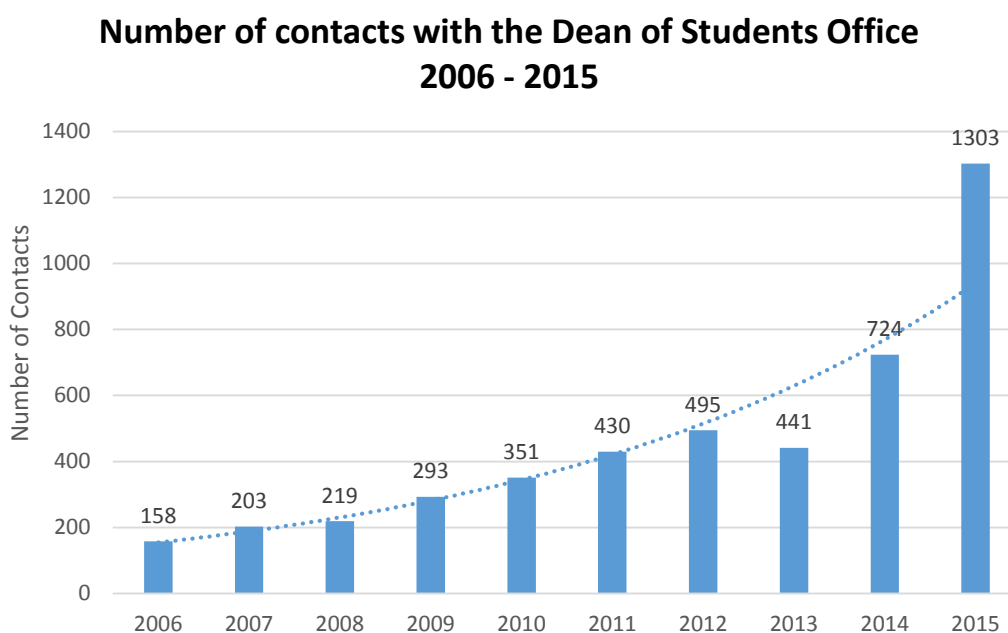
- The major increase in the number of undergraduate students seeking academic advice (and associated grade appeals, special consideration and late withdrawal) was the main component of the 80% increase in contacts in 2015 compared with student visits in 2014. It is recommended that College Associate Deans and student advisors review their capacity to provide academic advice, particularly in the first two weeks of semester. Further, to implement processes (if not already in place) to contact and encourage students at academic risk to seek advice.

Overview

The Dean of Students office was established in 1965, commencing operation from 1 January 1966. The office provides independent, impartial, confidential advice and informal dispute resolution to students of the ANU. In addition, the office acts as a resource and source of advice to staff who encounter difficult student situations. The Dean of Students is a member of the Case Management Team, tasked with evaluating and determining action for critical incidents and other cases of disruptive or dangerous behaviours by students. The Office participated in 17 case management processes in 2015. The Office of the Dean of Students provides input to a range of senior governance committees of the University, making recommendations for amendments to policies and procedures as informed by issues raised by students and staff. The Dean of Students also holds Fellow status at the residential colleges, Bruce Hall and Toad Hall.

The chart below records the number of visits to the Dean of Students office from the decade 2006 to 2015. Data in this table include repeat visits rather than simply head count of individual students. All subsequent charts in this report display contacts (head counts).

Chart 1



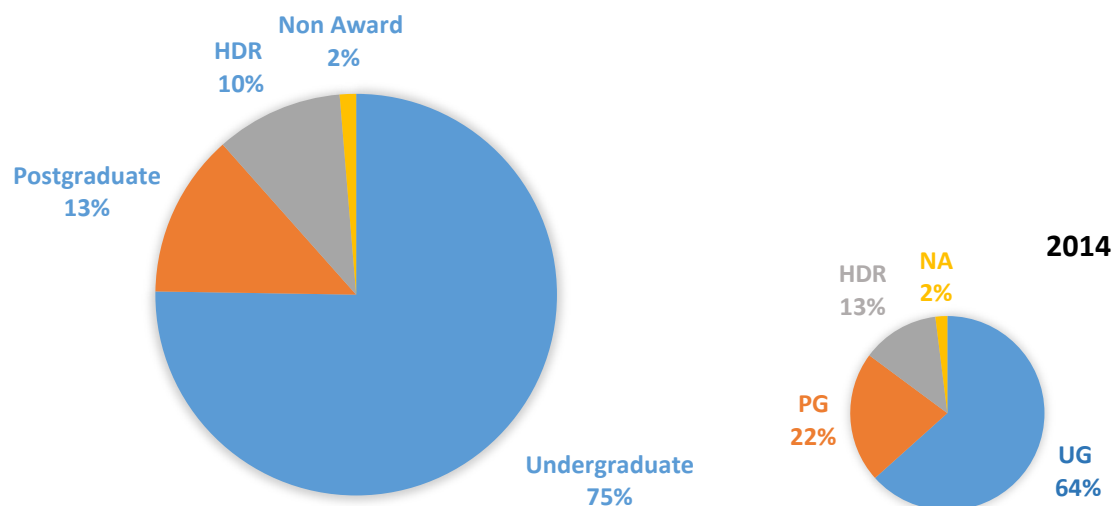
Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
No. Visits	158	203	219	293	351	430	495	441	724	1303

Student visits (or contacts) with the Dean of Students office increased by 80% on the level of contacts in 2014, and this in turn was an increase of 64% on contacts in 2013. The student population has increased by a little over 7% for the two year period.

Summary of contacts with the Dean of Students Office 2015

Chart 2

Grievances by Student Career 2015



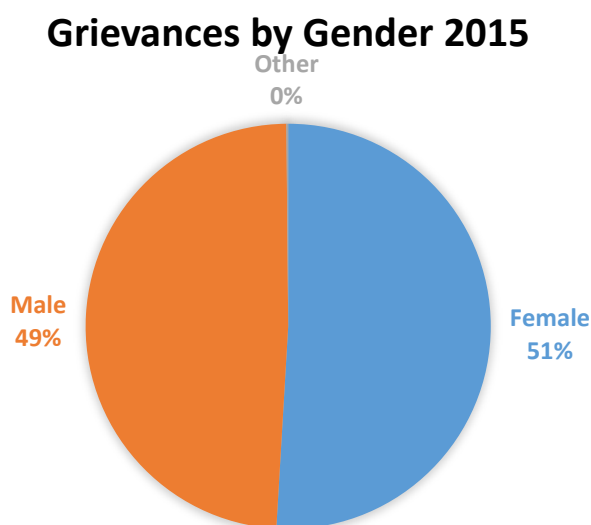
Student Career	No. Students 2015	No. Students 2014	% in grievance cohort 2015	% in ANU cohort 2015
Undergraduate	514	352	75	47
Postgraduate	90	119	13	39
HDR	70	72	10	13
Non Award	9	9	1	0.6
Total	683	552		

Not unexpectedly, undergraduate students are over-represented in contacts with the Dean of Students office. This has become even more apparent in 2015 compared with 2014. This again correlates with students presenting with issues across the grievance categories of: academic advice and progress; appeal, results, special consideration and late withdrawal. The major increase in numbers of undergraduate students seeking advice in these areas suggests a refinement of advice available either from Colleges or from online material may be required. Lack of timely access to or awareness of academic advice support during the first two weeks of semester when students are finalising their enrolment is an emerging issue that can lead to ongoing academic progress concerns. We encourage Colleges to

prioritise addressing this need, particularly for those students who have been identified as at risk of not making good academic progress.

Postgraduate coursework students are significantly underrepresented in contacts with the Dean of Students office. The number of postgraduate students presenting with a difficulty has reduced from 2014. While this may indicate that the University is interacting well with this cohort, it may also indicate that these students are relatively disengaged with, or unaware of, support structures within the University. The Dean of Students office is in continuing discussion with PARSAs and relevant College Associate Deans to ensure good communication with this cohort in 2016.

Chart 3

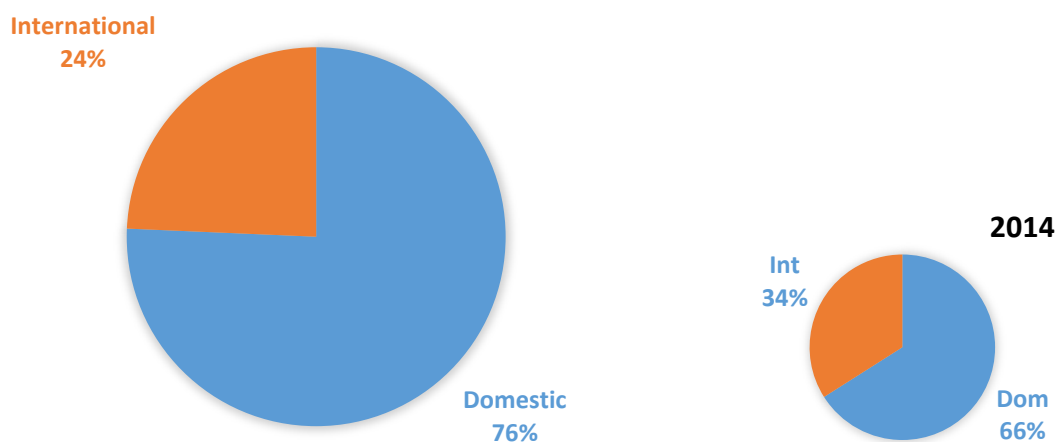


Gender	No. Students 2015	No. Students 2014	% in grievance cohort 2015	% in ANU cohort 2015
Female	350	257	51	52
Male	332	294	49	48
Other	1	1	0.1	0.05
Total	683	552		

Gender does not appear to influence the overall reporting of issues to the Dean of Students office but differences are apparent in some grievance categories, notably supervision issues for higher degree research students (strong over-representation of female students); interpersonal conduct issues with other students and staff for undergraduate students (over-representation of male students); mental health issues (strong under-representation of male international students).

Chart 4

Grievances by Residency Status



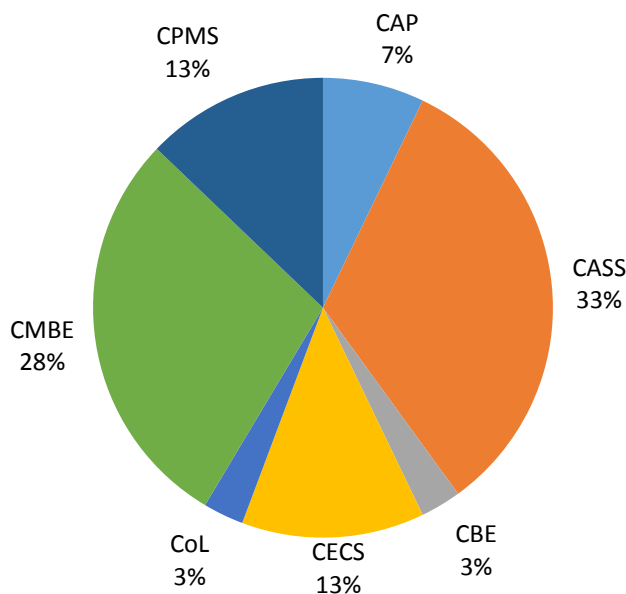
Residency Status	No. Students 2015	No. Students 2014	% in grievance cohort 2015	% in ANU cohort 2015
Domestic	522	367	76	72
International	161	185	24	28
Total	683	552		

There has been a drop in the number of international students presenting to the Dean of Students, leading to a slight underrepresentation when compared with the University student population breakdown. The data show that international undergraduate students are more likely to attend on the basis of academic progress (probation, suspension or exclusion) than domestic undergraduate students. This observation was also apparent in 2014. Overall, international undergraduate students present with more serious academic progress issues than domestic undergraduate students – that is, they seek assistance when the stakes are high and they have been notified that they are excluded from their degree program. Unfortunately, in the overwhelming number of cases that is too late for successful intervention.

It appears that international undergraduate students are less likely to seek or take up offers/opportunities of early intervention support, or they find the support to be insufficient for their needs. Support targeted at international students to address academic language proficiency would assist a significant number of students presenting to the Dean of Students office with academic progress issues. This support is available through the excellent guidance provided by staff of the Academic Skills and Learning Centre (ASLC). We encourage the integration of information about the services of the ASLC in College or School tutor training programs in order to help bring this resource to the attention of students.

Chart 5

Higher Degree Research Grievances by College 2015



College	No. Students 2015	No. Students 2014	% in grievance cohort 2015	% in ANU cohort 2015
CAP	5	12	7	18
CASS	23	20	33	24
CBE	2	3	3	4
CECS	9	10	13	10
CoL	2	0	3	2
CMBE	20	15	29	22
CPMS	9	10	13	19
Other	0	2	0	1
Total	70	72		

Note: Percentages have been rounded up. CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CBE: College of Business & Economics; CECS: College of Engineering & Computer Science; CoL: ANU College of Law; CMBE: College of Medicine, Biology & Environment; CPMS: College of Physical & Mathematical Sciences.

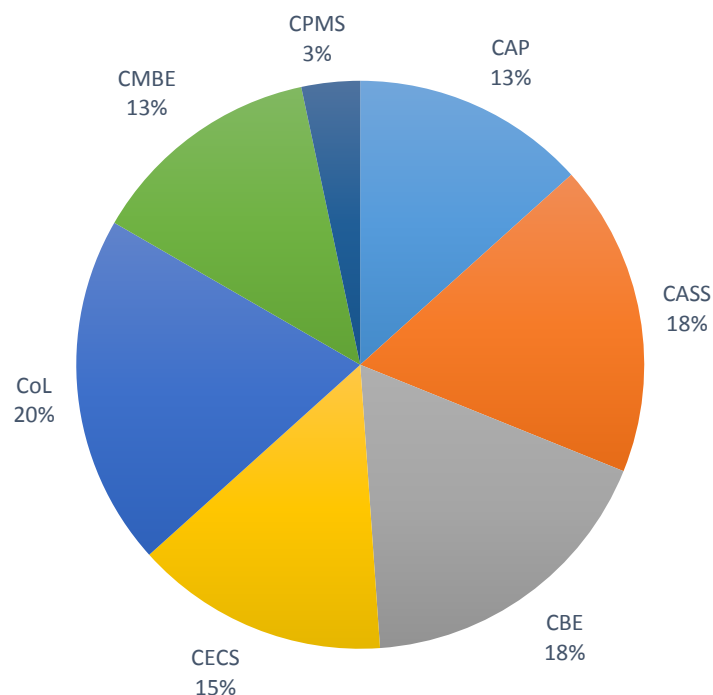
Grievances presented by higher degree research students primarily involve supervision issues and/or lack of academic progress. As in previous years, almost all presenting HDR students are in the latter stages of their degree timeline and present with grievances that have been in place for a considerable time. Very high degrees of stress are evident in the cohort. 7 HDR students claim their supervisors bully them. Approximately 85% of the presenting cohort do not have explicitly agreed expectations between themselves and their supervisor. Many students also lack an understanding of who to approach in the local area for academic or administrative support outside their supervisor. College Associate Deans (HDR) provide highly valued advice to the Dean of Students office and directly support many students who come to the Dean of Students office as their first point of contact.

The prevalence of HDR student complaints is aligned with the numbers of HDR students in each College although clusters of grievances are apparent.

We encourage staff to consider the Dean of Students office as a resource and increasingly staff are contacting the office to seek advice on managing difficult supervision situations. We are very pleased to note that due to the dedicated professionalism of staff and responsive effort by students the outcomes are overwhelmingly positive. However these situations take a toll on both students and staff and we suggest that a professional development module targeting how to respond to difficult supervision situations may be of assistance across all areas supervising HDR students.

Chart 6

Postgraduate Coursework Grievances by College



College	No. Students	% in grievance cohort	% in ANU cohort
CAP	12	13	15
CASS	16	18	8
CBE	16	18	25
CECS	13	14	3
CoL	18	20	42
CMBE	12	13	6
CPMS	3	3	1
Total	90		

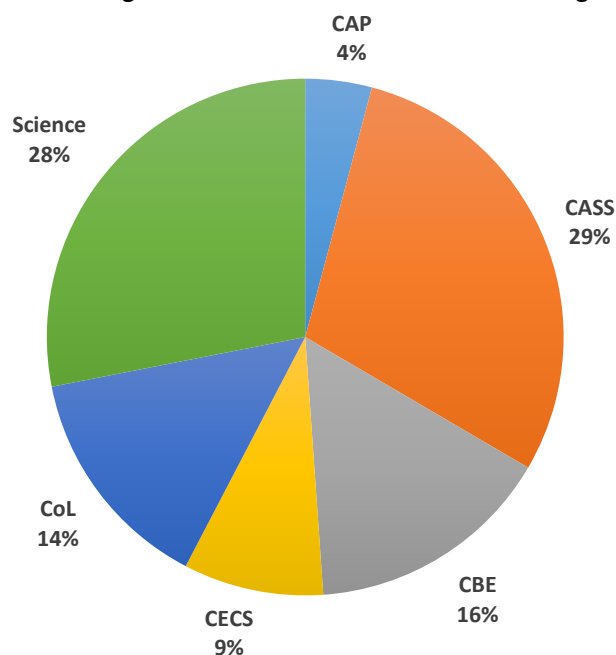
Note: Percentages have been rounded up. CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CBE: College of Business & Economics; CECS: College of Engineering & Computer Science; CoL: ANU College of Law; CMBE: College of Medicine, Biology & Environment; CPMS: College of Physical & Mathematical Sciences.

As noted earlier, postgraduate coursework students are under-represented in contacts with the Dean of Students office. The data indicate that a disproportionate number of students in some Colleges (CASS, CECS and CMBE) are encountering difficulties compared to students in other Colleges. The academic advice and support systems operating in the CoL and CBE appear to be operating particularly well.

Chart 7

Undergraduate Grievances by College 2015*

*double degree students counted toward both Colleges



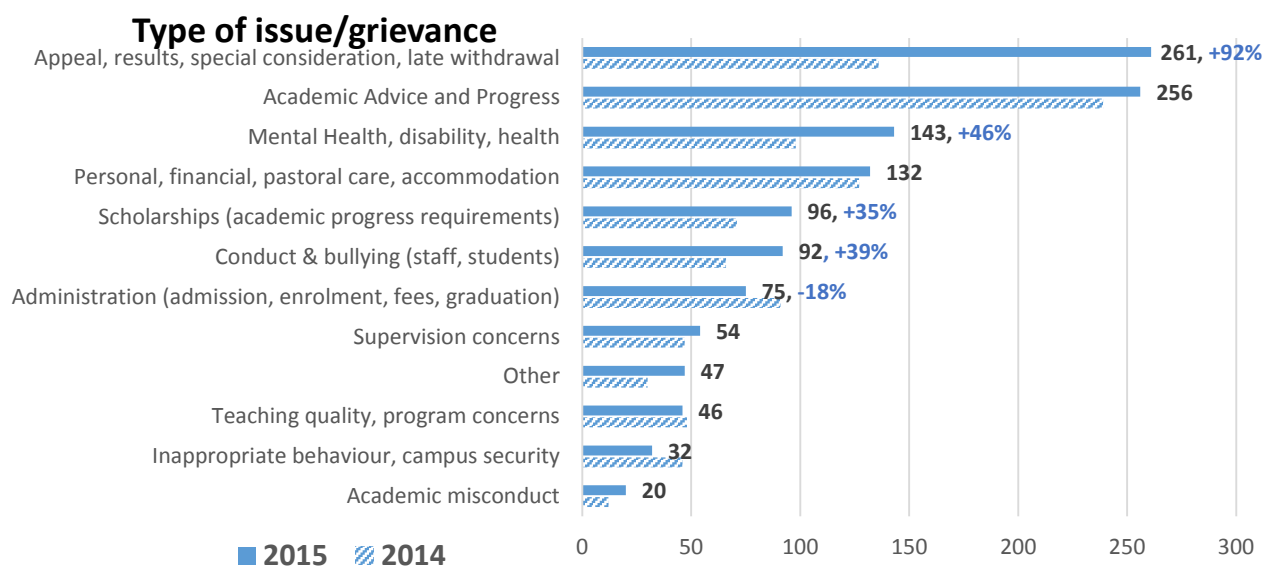
College	No. Students*	% in grievance cohort	% in ANU cohort
CAP	28	4	5
CASS	197	29	31
CBE	104	16	21
CECS	59	9	10
CoL	96	14	13
Science	189	28	21

*Note: Double degree students are counted against both Colleges leading to double counting of some individuals. CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CBE: College of Business & Economics; CECS: College of Engineering & Computer Science; CoL: ANU College of Law; CMBE: College of Medicine, Biology & Environment; CPMS: College of Physical & Mathematical Sciences.

Contacts show a representative spread across the Colleges. 514 undergraduate students sought out academic advice from the Dean of Students office and these are roughly representative of all Colleges. Many of these students had either not accessed College advisors, or had found the College advice unclear or insufficient.

Distribution of Grievances

Chart 8



Type of Issue/Grievance	2014	2015
Appeal, results, special consideration, late withdrawal	136	261
Academic advice and progress	239	256
Mental health, disability, health	98	143
Personal, financial, pastoral care, accommodation	127	132
Scholarships (academic progress requirements)	71	96
Conduct and bullying (staff, students)	66	92
Administration (admission, enrolment, fees, graduation)	91	75
Supervision concerns	47	54
Other	30	47
Teaching quality, program concerns	48	46
Inappropriate behaviour, campus security	46	32
Academic misconduct	12	20

The majority of grievances or issues brought to the Dean of Students office revolve around academic advice and academic progress issues. Note that the contacts listed under grievance category 11 (Inappropriate behaviour: unwelcome sexual attention, harassment, stalking, campus security) represent alleged perpetrators as well as alleged victims – the overall frequency of reported incident is approximately 70% of the number shown in the chart. The category includes 7 allegations of unwelcome sexual attention.¹

Mental illness is a major factor in a range of grievances and situations. 14% of students (93 students) who contacted the Dean of Students office in 2015 were knowingly experiencing a mental illness to the point that their academic progress was significantly affected. By comparison, 81 students (12% of the cohort) presented similarly in 2014. Such cases frequently involve action and coordination between a range of staff to support the student and, where necessary, the students' friends and affected staff. Increasingly, students diagnosed with significant depressive illness or an anxiety disorder are seeking late withdrawal from failed courses. The nature of these conditions mean that many students do not have supporting documentation to cover a possibly extended period when they were clearly affected but had not yet recognised this or sought treatment. Early intervention by lecturers, tutors, or College identification of students at risk of not making academic progress, may help identify such students and help prevent progression to consideration by the University Academic Progress Committee.

We note that information available online for application for late withdrawal is clearly presented and described in plain English. Nonetheless, we observe increasing numbers of students seeking guidance on how to structure their statement following advice on what information to include. It is clear that many students see a need to work through this stressful process face to face with someone who is both supportive and experienced.

¹ Data consolidated from the Dean of Students Office, the Counselling Centre, ANU Security and Critical Incident notification indicate 25 incidents of unwelcome sexual attention reported in 2015, 18 of which occurred on campus (15 at ANU or affiliate accommodation; 3 on campus grounds). 7 incidents occurred off campus. All these grievances were lodged by female students.

Category Groups:

1. Academic advice and Progress

Academic Advice; Academic Progress; Academic Progress – Probation; Academic Progress – Suspension; Academic Progress – Exclusion; Graduate studies advice; Overseas Exchange.

2. Academic Grievances

Appeal; Results/Marks; Late withdrawal; Special Consideration/Special Exams; Exams – academic; Exams – administrative.

3. Personal, financial, pastoral care, accommodation

Accommodation; Career options; Financial; Pastoral Care; Personal; Time Management.

4. Mental health, disability, health

5. Administration (admission, enrolment, fees, graduation)

Administration issue; Admission; Deferment; Enrolment; Fees; Graduation; Timetabling; University equipment.

6. Scholarships (academic progress requirements)

Scholarship; Scholarship – Encouragement; Scholarship – Probation; Scholarship – Suspension; Scholarship – Termination.

7. Conduct and bullying (staff, students)

Bullying - staff of student; Bullying - student of staff; Bullying - student of student; Conduct – Staff; Conduct – Student.

8. Teaching quality, program concerns

Program concerns; Teaching quality; Online course sites; Fieldwork; Feedback re assessment; Assessment requirements.

9. Supervisory concerns

Supervision – HDR; Supervision – Hons

10. Inappropriate behaviour, campus security

Unwelcome Sexual Attention; Stalking; Harassment; Campus Security; Social Media.

11. Other

12. Academic misconduct

General Comments

Grievances or issues commonly fall into four types:

1. Grievances that relate to academic progress, grades, special consideration and late withdrawal that could be helped by College-based student advisors. The Dean of Students website is still to be upgraded but this is planned for 2016 upon application of the ANU template. The website will include more detailed FAQs to help guide students to avenues for assistance.
2. Personal issues that consequently impact on academic progress. These include financial difficulties and the impact of substantial hours of paid employment on the ability to make academic progress. Pastoral care is a key component of advice and reassurance to this group of students. Time management and project management advice is a surprisingly common need for HDR students. This is often tied up with the complexity of working with a supervisor with whom they have a poor working relationship.
3. Students struggling to make good academic progress and life choices as a result of significant mental illness or previously unrecognised disability.
4. Critical incidents and follow-up evaluation and action. Can involve the Case Management Group.

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