

OMBUD'S NEWS

July-September 2015

Recent academic appeals

In the three months July-September the Student Ombudsman dealt with 11 academic complaints (from 3 HDR students and 8 coursework students).

Complaints related to issues including:

- Students not being able to review their marked exam paper;
- Students appealing termination of their candidature;
- Students appealing fail grades in coursework subjects;
- Students appealing decisions not to grant them supplementary / deferred assessment;
- Students requesting a remark of assessment;
- Students appealing rejection of their applications for tuition awards;
- Students seeking late withdrawal without penalty and/or fee refunds for coursework subjects.



Marion Allen, Complaints and Appeals Administrator

Marion Allen is the UOW Complaints and Appeals Administrator and works closely with the Student Ombudsman in managing academic complaints and coursework exclusion appeals.

Marion is often the person who has first contact with students who are making an appeal to the Student Ombudsman, and also liaises with students to arrange their interviews if they are appealing an exclusion decision by their Faculty.

Marion is also in regular contact with Faculty staff, particularly Heads of Students and Student Support Advisers, as well as Student Advocates, Student Services and Student Support staff.

Marion recently celebrated 40 years of employment at UOW, and we are lucky to have her vast institutional knowledge to support the work of the Student Ombudsman. Marion seems to know everyone and everything that goes on here at UOW, and if we need an answer to an unusual question, she will know who to ask!

Recent training

On 27 July the Student Ombudsman conducted a half-day Conflict Resolution Workshop for Graduate Research School staff and mentors.

Staff consultation

The Student Ombudsman has recently provided support for a number of UOW staff members from different Faculties and divisions to assist them to proactively manage challenging student issues. The Student Ombudsman is available to provide support including coaching through a situation and various options for managing it; assisting staff to identify relevant policies and procedures to follow; and acting as an independent 'critical friend' with whom to bounce around ideas. Email or call to make an appointment.

The Student Ombudsman also continues to work closely with the new Complaints Management Centre and the Student Advocates.

Exclusion appeals

In August/September 2015, the Student Ombudsman (and some acting Chairs in the SO's absence) dealt with 21 Stage 2 Coursework Exclusion Appeals, interviewing students and reviewing the Faculties' decisions.

Where to find the SO:

Room 19.G003 (Building 19, Ground Floor, north-east wing).

Office hours are Monday to Friday
8.30am - 4.00pm

Phone: 4221 4355

Email: student-ombudsman@uow.edu.au

Managing students with challenging behaviours

When staff are faced with students demonstrating challenging behaviours, there are two typical responses: (1) try to avoid having to engage with the student at all; or (2) try to find "work arounds" to keep the student happy. While both of these responses may have some short term benefits, there are longer term risks with both these choices.

Students who feel that they are being ignored or avoided will tend to escalate their behaviours and broaden the number of people involved. This can lead to time consuming and challenging complaints and appeals.

Conversely, students who are successful in convincing staff to 'bend the rules' for them often develop an expectation that this will always be possible. This can create problems for staff later on, who try to enforce a rule or a boundary.

When students are displaying difficult behaviours, it is important to spend some time really listening to their concerns and trying to understand what is driving their behaviour. While this might seem time consuming, it will undoubtedly save time later on. Also, with these students, it is important that boundaries are clearly set and explained early on (and ideally reinforced in writing so there is a record of this).

The importance of listening

The Student Ombudsman has recently received emails from a number of students who have had their appeals rejected. Interestingly, these students have not written to complain about the outcome, but rather have written to express their thanks at the time and effort spent by the Student Ombudsman listening to their concerns and taking them seriously, even though the end result was not what the student wanted. This highlights the importance of listening to students, treating them with respect, and putting in the effort to understand their concerns. When a staff member does this, a student will often be more willing to accept a decision that does not go their way. This can, counter-intuitively, enhance student engagement in a situation in which one might expect the student to become less engaged.