



Ombud's News

AUTUMN SESSION 2016

Amended Terms of Reference for Student Ombudsman

The recently amended ToR emphasise the Student Ombudsman's work on **student academic complaints**. This is distinct from the work of other units within UOW where the management of student behavioural matters and issues associated with staff members are the focus.

Student conduct matters

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Other complaint matters

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POLICY MATTERS

Policies with particular relevance to student academic matters are constantly under review. A recent review of the Code of Practice – Teaching and Assessment (COPTA) has resulted in a new Teaching and Assessment Policy Suite that complies with changes to current Higher Education standards:

- Teaching and Assessment – Code of Practice – Teaching
- Teaching and Assessment – Subject Delivery Policy
- Teaching and Assessment – Assessment and Feedback Policy

The policy suite will be presented to the University Council for approval and will operate as recommended practice for Spring Session 2016 before becoming fully operational from Autumn Session 2017.

W www.uow.edu.au/about/policy/UOW058666

INTRODUCING MACKENZIE JANE LAWSON!



A/Prof Samantha Hardy took maternity leave in February 2016 and Mackenzie Jane was born later that month on 16 February. Now at 5 months of age, Mackenzie is a well-travelled baby, with her own passport and frequent flyer membership! She loves reading and is fluent in her own special baby language.

A/Prof Pauline Lysaght is acting in the position of Student Ombudsman until September 2016. Unfortunately, Sam will not be returning to the role as her partner, Prof Romy Lawson, has been appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education at Murdoch University in WA where the family will be relocating.

NSW OMBUDSMAN WORKSHOP – COMPLAINTS HANDLING AT UNIVERSITIES

A positive approach to understanding complaints and their management was promoted at the workshop held in February 2016 with representatives from all universities in NSW. Changes to the Australian and New Zealand Standard applying to complaint management systems were reviewed, followed by a discussion of HDR issues across the sector.

We all receive feedback, requests for information or support, and sometimes complaints but what exactly are 'complaints'?

According to the revised Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations (2014), complaints are

... 'expressions of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation related to its products, services, staff or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required'.

An **effective complaint management system** is made up of five essential components:

1. **Commitment** to develop a culture that values complaints at all levels of the organisation;
2. **Facilitation** via access and support to systems that are safe and readily understandable for those voicing concerns;
3. **Resourcing** staff to manage complaints by providing effective and ongoing training;
4. **Learning** how to improve policies and procedures by recording, analysing and reviewing concerns and outcomes; and,
5. **Guidance** for staff in complaints management through the development of appropriate policies and procedures.

With regard to **HDR matters**, recognition was given to the potential for complaints to be complex, hotly contested and to include a personal aspect, requiring significant resources in their resolution. Key points raised included:

- the importance of recording complaints and their resolution, with students and supervisors being required to document supervisory arrangements;
- providing information and advice for students regarding practical procedures for pursuing disputes and complaints;
- ensuring support for supervisors through training in the skills of supervision, especially in having 'difficult conversations' with students; and,
- ensuring experienced mentors are available to students and staff as part of the supervisory relationship.

W www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

STUDENT OMBUDSMAN REPORT – 2015

The Report was presented to the Vice Chancellor's Advisory Group (VCAG) before going to Senate and Council. It includes a summary of academic complaints lodged by coursework and HDR students, and outcomes of the coursework exclusion appeals process in 2015.

Key themes arising from student academic complaints included:

- assessment design and practice with inadequate feedback provided, particularly early in a subject;
- communication breakdown between staff, faculties and students; and,
- lack of clarity and process in cases where Reasonable Adjustment and/or Academic Consideration was requested.

Other issues that were noted included:

- lack of due process regarding advice given to students by staff;
- staff not meeting timeframes required by the complaints process; and,
- a lack of understanding of the functions of the Student Ombudsman and other UOW units dealing with complaints.

RECENT ACADEMIC APPEALS

Between February and June the Student Ombudsman dealt with fourteen academic complaints (from two HDR students and twelve coursework students).

Complaints related to issues including:

- Coursework and HDR students appealing termination of their candidature;
- Students appealing decisions not to grant supplementary / deferred assessment; and
- Students seeking late withdrawal without penalty for coursework subjects.

EXCLUSION APPEALS

From February to July 2016, the Student Ombudsman assessed eleven Stage 2 Coursework Exclusion Appeals. These appeals now involve students from all UOW campuses, with the exception of Dubai.

At Stage 1 of the process, a faculty panel reviews written appeals from students who have not met course progress requirements. Students who wish to appeal the faculty decision proceed to Stage 2, an interview with the Coursework Exclusion Appeals Committee; this cross-faculty panel is chaired by the Student Ombudsman.

WHERE TO FIND THE SO

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