

MGA's recommended approach to discipline during the COVID-19 climate April 2020

Background

MGA understands that to protect its students, staff, and members of the community, many staff members are working remotely and students are discouraged from spending time on campus unless they need to. Most classes have moved to online delivery. In line with this, many faculties are looking to move other programs and processes online. This includes their academic integrity investigation and discipline processes.

In the past, MGA advocates have attended discipline hearings and meetings with chief examiners and/or responsible officers to provide support for the student. The advocate does not present the student's case, but rather makes sure they feel supported and understand the process they have to go through. Advocates often counsel students after these meetings as well, and have in the past ensured students had access to any necessary support services.

MGA's role in the current situation

Our role is to offer the same level of support across the board. MGA advocates will do the following for any student(s) who has an academic misconduct discipline case:

- Speak with the student in advance of hearing
- Attend the hearing
- Touch base with student after the hearing

Sometimes students do not contact the MGA prior to the hearing. Advocates can only attend with the students' consent.

Recommendations

1. Considering the challenging circumstances presented by Covid-19, we recommend the use of Zoom to conduct discipline meetings and hearings.
2. We request that all documentation is forwarded to us once a student consents and as soon as practicable so that we have enough time to make contact with the student in advance of the hearing.
3. We request the advocate is sent a calendar invite with details of how the meeting will occur (eg, via Zoom with an appropriate link included)
4. We recommend faculties make use of breakout rooms in Zoom during deliberations. Either the panel, or student and advocate, can be moved to a breakout room. If it is the student and advocate being moved to a break out room, it will be necessary to ensure the Chair or Responsible Officer clearly explains to the student they are not permitted to click the "return to main room" button until a staff member comes to collect them (alternatively, make sure the Zoom meeting is set up so that the student cannot leave the breakout room voluntarily).

5. We recommend that advocates are provided with an alternative means of contacting the secretary or Chair during deliberation times, to be used in the unlikely event they need to contact the panel because something is wrong while the student is waiting for an outcome (eg, if a student became inconsolable and the meeting needed to be paused or if there was a technical error).
6. We recommend that Zoom meetings or hearings through Zoom are not recorded. There is a risk of breach of privacy. Hearings and meetings are not to be recorded when conducted face to face, and we recommend this continue. A secretary will need to take their own minutes, as would be the case in physical hearings.
7. Advocates rely on the faculty to encourage students to seek advocacy support from the MGA and to make students aware of our services. We request to be CC'd (mga-advocacy@monash.edu) when notice of allegations are sent to students, with the students' permission. We understand there would be some consent issues but it's something to consider as we explore the best way to manage the risk of an entirely online environment.
8. Post meeting/hearing support is crucial, especially in the event that these meetings do not go well for the student. We recommend all faculties to make sure students have access to after-hours and remote counselling service(s), and that these are immediately communicated to the student.
9. The APC process earlier this year also had to adapt to being conducted through Zoom due to COVID-19. At that time, some faculties made it mandatory that students using Zoom had to have an additional support person with them (physically in the same room or house – the requirement varied between faculties). Unlike the advocate, this support person (who was often a family member or friend with no knowledge of the process) was physically with the student in case the student received bad news and responded poorly. The advocate also attended the meeting to provide support in terms of process and experience. We do not object to faculties implementing this same rule or option for discipline cases, however, we ask they make any requirements for such an additional support person very clear to the student.

For clarification of any aspect please contact Sarah Murphy, MGA advocate, at sarah.murphy@monash.edu.