

11 September 2015

Professor John Loughran
Dean
Faculty of Education
Monash University

Dear Professor Loughran,

The Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) has received a number of complaints from Education Faculty coursework postgraduates about the faculty practice of issuing a zero mark for assignments that are submitted after the stipulated due date and time.

We acknowledge that the faculty procedures provide for students to apply for an extension prior to the deadline, see Attachment A. However the procedure fails to take into consideration that sometimes the delay in submitting an assignment cannot be predicted in time to apply for an extension beforehand, and some reasons for submitting assignments after the deadline will not be considered acceptable by the faculty.

We believe the faculty assessment procedure to be inconsistent with the Monash Assessment Vision and the Assessment in Coursework Units policy. We believe this procedure is inequitable for all students but especially punitive for international students. In addition, we understand that the procedure was not adequately advertised to students before implementation. Each of these points are addressed in detail in the following pages.

The MPA requests that the Education Faculty review this procedure and bring their assessment practices back into line with the majority of Monash University faculties, by applying the widely accepted procedure of imposing a “percentage reduction per day” penalty¹.

I appreciate your consideration of this request and would be happy to provide further information if required.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Hurley
MPA President

¹ The “percentage reduction per day” penalty varies slightly across faculties but sits between 5% to 10% reduction per day to the assignment mark, for every day the assignment is submitted after the due date.

1. Inconsistency with the Monash Assessment Vision

The Monash Assessment Vision published on the university website promotes the message that “Effective assessment must provide meaningful feedback to students in order to facilitate and enhance learning.”

*“What can students expect from the Monash approach to assessment?
Monash wants to provide an effective learning experience for all our students and recognises that assessment sits at the heart of the learning journey. We want to make sure students can use assessment to prepare for their learning, engage with their learning and where appropriate demonstrate their learning... Emphasis will be made on providing students with meaningful feedback to facilitate their subsequent approach to learning and enable them to reach their learning goals.”²*

It is difficult to understand how providing a student with a score of zero for submitting an assignment a few minutes late is providing ‘meaningful feedback’ or ‘facilitating and enhancing learning’. The student receives no feedback for their academic work but instead receives a score based solely on an assessment of their time management skills. Presumably the imparting of time management skills is not the primary objective of every unit in the Masters Coursework degree in the Faculty of Education. The application of this procedure sends the message to students that Monash University is inflexible, homiletic and punitive.

2. Inconsistency with the Assessment in Coursework Units policy

The Faculty of Education assessment procedures are inconsistent with the Monash University Assessment in Coursework Units policy.

The Monash University policy states that “An appropriate assessment regime should demonstrate an articulation of knowledge and understanding, skills and competencies, and attributes”³. A zero mark for a submitted assignment does not allow a student to demonstrate their skills, competencies or knowledge and is therefore not an “appropriate assessment regime”.

The university policy also requires that assessment must be “*Aligned and credible: Assessment must serve the unit and course objectives.*”⁴ Punishing tardy students with a zero score is not an assessment that serves any of the stated unit or course objectives.

“Assessment must be purposeful and the purposes of each assessment must be made clear to students.”⁵ The faculty has failed to make the purposes of such an assessment clear to students. Not one postgraduate complainant who approached the MPA understood why such an assessment regime would be in place. This practice does not serve any sensible or logical purpose that couldn’t be served by replacing it with a “percentage reduction per day” penalty.

² Extract from the Monash University website at:
<http://intranet.monash.edu.au/learningandteaching/enhancingteaching/assessmentstrategies/assessment-vision.html>

³ Section 4, Monash University Assessment in Coursework Units policy

⁴ Section 5, Monash University Assessment in Coursework Units policy

⁵ Section 7, Monash University Assessment in Coursework Units policy

3. Inequitable to all students

As the Education Faculty assessment procedures stand, all students are adversely affected but the negative ramifications on international students are disproportionate. Consider the following case:

Sanaa is an international student completing a Masters by coursework degree in the Faculty of Education. She is undertaking her final semester, and in one of the units a single assignment represents 60% of the grade. Sanaa attempts to submit her assignment twenty minutes after the advertised closing time, but the system will not allow the assignment to be submitted. She has not been ill, nor does she have a compelling reason for being late. Sanaa receives a zero grade for the assignment, thereby assuring a fail for the unit. As a result, Sanaa must repeat the unit the following semester. This involves paying the unit fees for a second time, paying to extend her visa, extending the lease on her accommodation, and funding an additional six months of general living expenses, a total of over \$9000⁶.

Even for local students who may not have the added costs of accommodation and visa fees, this is an unnecessarily harsh punishment for a relatively minor infringement.

How many work colleagues have arrived ten minutes late for a meeting or submitted feedback on a document the day after the advertised closing date? In our working lives we acknowledge that life happens and not everything is always going to run exactly to schedule. Postgraduate students should not be treated with any less courtesy or respect. They are not high-school students but adult professionals who are managers, teachers, parents, partners and aged-parent carers as well as students.

4. Failure to advertise the assessment implications

Information provided to the MPA by postgraduates suggests that the faculty did not adequately advertise their assessment procedures to students before implementation. Given the unusual nature of such an assessment regime, it would be unfair to expect students to intuitively know about the procedures. On the contrary, students who had been enrolled in an undergraduate degree at Monash University or who had other postgraduate degrees from Australian universities would have reasonably assumed that the common practice “percentage reduction per day” penalty would apply. It is therefore incumbent on the faculty to be very clear to students about the serious ramifications of failing to submit their assignments on time.

The following points are noted:

- Postgraduates who attended Education Faculty-run orientation sessions in 2015 reported that the late submission penalty was not mentioned.
- The late submission penalty is not mentioned in the unit guides. The unit guides link to the central university assessment policy which does not mention the late submission penalty.

⁶ Calculated as follows: \$2300 unit fee in Masters coursework degree in Faculty of Education, \$5000 for six months accommodation in halls of residence, \$80 per week for food.

- One postgraduate wrote to the Education Faculty about the application of the late submission penalty to his assignment in a particular unit, claiming that the faculty had not clearly communicated this information to the students. Within a few days of the faculty having received his letter, the unit coordinator provided his class with explicit information about the penalty.
- The Education Faculty Assessment procedures' single reference to this matter is at the end of the section entitled "Extension to assessment deadlines" where it is stated that "*Students must have been granted either an extension or special consideration in order to submit work after the published due date.*" Nowhere in the procedures is it made clear that assignments submitted after the due date will receive a mark of zero.

The Monash University Assessment in Coursework Units policy states that "The requirements of assessment tasks and the means by which students' work will be judged and overall grades determined must be clearly communicated to students."⁷ The MPA contends that the Faculty of Education breached university policy by failing to clearly communicate to postgraduates the ramifications of submitting assignments after the due date.

⁷ Section 8, Monash University Assessment in Coursework Units policy

1.5 Extension to assessment deadlines

Students may be provided with an extension of up to and including five calendar days. Students seeking an extension due to exceptional circumstances and for extensions beyond five calendar days must use the University Special Consideration Policy and Procedures (See Section 1.6).

Students wishing to apply for an extension must submit a request via email to the unit coordinator (or equivalent) prior to the assessment deadline.

Accepted circumstances for applying for an extension include (but are not limited to):

- *Short-term illness*
- *Unforeseen employment obligations*
- *Family circumstances*

If an extension is granted, students must attach a copy of the email approving the extension when submitting their assessment. Approval for an extension and the duration of extension is granted by the unit coordinator (or equivalent). In exceptional circumstances, an application for an extension may be considered by the unit coordinator (or equivalent) after the assessment due date has lapsed.

Students must have been granted either an extension or special consideration in order to submit work after the published due date.