

MPA submission recommending approach to students leaving exams early

The objects of Monash University¹ include a commitment that students will be treated fairly in an environment which is supportive and fosters learning, recognises student diversity and “provide(s) and maintain(s) a teaching and learning environment of excellent quality offering higher education at an international level”.² It is the aim of these submissions to reduce the number of postgraduate students coming before Faculty Discipline Panels.

Role of the MPA

As part of our representative role the MPA³ looks at various University processes and where an area of concern is identified, provides feedback to the relevant decision-making entity.

Examinations and Moodle access

In 2016 the MPA advocates assisted 45 postgraduate students accused of either general and/or academic misconduct during their examinations, all of which proceeded to hearings.

In 2016 the MPA also had some unusual examination cases, as set out below.

Student A

After completing an exam paper, student A was permitted to leave the examination venue 30-35 minutes before the official conclusion of the exam. The student was a high-achieving student who had previously received an award for academic excellence. Shortly after leaving the exam venue Student A accessed Moodle for legitimate purposes which were not exam related. Student A was charged with academic misconduct after the faculty accessed the student’s Moodle log and incorrectly concluded that the student had accessed Moodle while sitting the exam.

Repercussions for student A were immense:

- WH (withheld) mark was placed on the academic transcript until such time as the discipline hearing could be scheduled which in turn prevented the student from attending his/her graduation ceremony. The unit in question was the student’s last required unit for course completion.
- Student A was found not guilty at a hearing.
- Student A’s relatives had already purchased international flight tickets in order to attend the graduation and arrived in Australia not long after the examinations concluded.

¹ Monash University Charter

² *Monash University Act 2009* section 5(a)

³ MPA is an incorporated association, recognised by Monash University as the representative body for all postgraduate students at Monash Australia. See *Monash University (Council) Regulations section 66 and schedule I*

- The next available graduation round was scheduled six months from the original intended graduation date meaning Student A and family would have had to return home and come back to Australia. Student A has returned home and our understanding is the associated expenses in returning to graduate are prohibitive.

Student B

Student B was charged with accessing notes via Moodle during an examination. The allegation was that Student B visited the toilet during the examination and accessed Moodle at that time. Student B was charged with academic misconduct and attended a hearing.

While Student B accepted that unauthorised access to the account may have occurred, Student B denied that it was accessed by her. Student B explained the Moodle password was taped to the desk and someone may have used it. Evidence was given that Student B did not attend the toilet during the examination. The student was not charged with a contravention of the Monash IT policy.

There was no allegation that Student B used her mobile telephone during the exam. The mobile would have needed to be used in order to access Moodle during the exam. Student B gave evidence that the mobile phone had at all times been in her bag under the desk as permitted and was turned off.

The central issue during the faculty discipline hearing was whether or not the student had actually gone to the toilet. The panel found Student B guilty imposing a suspension.

MPA's investigations

These concerns were initially discussed with Mr Vern Garth, Associate Director, Examination Services.

Students can leave examinations after one hour into an exam and not during the last 10 minutes. If a student leaves the exam venue within the permitted time and accesses his/her Moodle account it appears the Chief Examiner in some faculties reports the matter to the faculty, without knowing whether or not that student is still sitting the exam. In other words, accessing Moodle per-se automatically triggers the disciplinary action even when the student has legitimately left the exam.

Examination Services provided the following clarification of the process:

- Toilet visits during exams are not recorded.
- Early departure times from exams are not recorded.
- The Faculty of Business and Economics appears to be the only faculty making Moodle account checks on students.
- Faculties receive the exam attendance sheet.

Examination Services further advised possible resolutions:

- Closing Moodle while the exam is in progress, or
- Providing Exam Services with 'live' Moodle access data so it would be possible to establish whether or not the student was present in the exam room at the time.

MPA Recommendation

The MPA recommends that no adverse action is taken against any students who accesses MOODLE at any time including during an examination. This approach should only be displaced once:

- the University has in place a process that identifies which student leaves early and when or once MOODLE access is unavailable for the duration of exams.