

2016 Report of the Dean of Students – Australian National University

Executive Summary

This report covers the period 1 January - 31 December 2016.

The core business of the office is to assist students with the resolution of complaints or difficulties. The essence is to apply an independent, impartial, confidential and fair approach to the resolution of such challenges. We try to empower individuals by showing them how to approach, manage or avoid similar problems in the future. Our office is committed to supporting the University to ensure a fair environment for students.

During the reporting period the Dean of Students office assisted 816 individuals seeking help with grievances, complaints or requests for assistance. 220 individuals (27%) required multiple visits – a little lower than in 2015. The total number of student contacts for the period was 1547 (excluding incidental emails etc.) as compared with 1303 contacts in 2015. Chart 1 shows the trend in the annual number of contacts over the period 2006 to 2016. A large component of this increase in contacts is due to substantially more undergraduate students seeking academic advice, struggling with aspects of academic progress and requesting grade appeals or seeking assistance with applications for late withdrawal from courses. In addition, mental health issues impacting on academic progress continue to be a major basis for students seeking assistance. 133 students (16%) presented with complex scenarios involving mental health issues in 2016, up from 93 students (14%) in 2015.

The total number of individuals contacting the office represents 39.7 students per 1000 students (significantly up from 30.7/1000 in 2015 and 24.4/1000 in 2014). This represents 4% of the total student population. The closest international comparison to the work of the ANU Dean of Students office is the work undertaken by Student Ombudspersons in Canadian Universities. The Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) reports an annual caseload of approximately 1% of the total student population in Canadian Universities. No comparable data are available for the Australian university sector.

Management of the increasing load at ANU has been greatly assisted by the full time appointment of Dr Peter Hendriks as Deputy Dean of Students, from July 2016. Dr Hendriks previously worked in the position for two days per week.

The Dean of Students Office is available 5 days per week for appointments with the Dean of Students (3 days per week) or Deputy Dean of Students (5 days per week).

The Dean and Deputy Dean of Students would welcome the opportunity to present detailed information relevant to individual Colleges so as to help inform actions to improve student outcomes and student experiences.

Opportunities for improvements:

- International students continue to disproportionately present with severe academic progress issues. Many of the students we see are clearly struggling with language issues, with both general competence with English and lack of competence in academic writing and referencing being evident. ANU has some local exemplar

support services, usually directed to postgraduate or higher degree research students but little focussed on undergraduate students. There is a need to significantly improve our support in this area, perhaps through a combination of formal and informal means involving both staff resourced initiatives and activities run and initiated by student leaders in residences and in other student organisations.

- HDR students who seek assistance from the Dean of Students office are often working in comparative isolation and exhibit significant self-doubt and anxiety. Some Schools or smaller groups have implemented mentoring arrangements between first year students and experienced later year students, or between HDR students and post-doctoral staff members. Such mentoring and the fostering of supportive student networks have shown very positive results and could form the basis of clusters across the University, to the benefit of all.
- It is recommended that College Associate Deans and student advisors review their capacity to provide academic advice, particularly in the period up to the Monday of week 2 of semester while students can still change their enrolment.

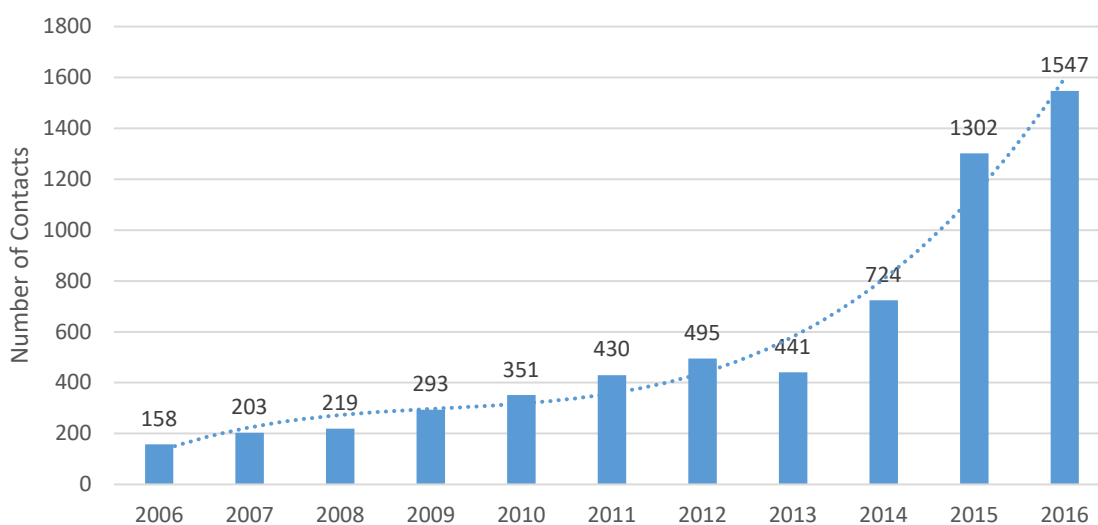
Overview

The Dean of Students office was established in 1965, commencing operation from 1 January 1966. The office provides independent, impartial, confidential advice and informal dispute resolution to students of the ANU. In addition, the office acts as a resource and source of advice to staff who encounter difficult student situations. The Dean of Students is a member of the Case Management Team, tasked with evaluating and determining action for critical incidents and cases of disruptive or dangerous behaviours involving students. The Office participated in 21 case management processes in 2016. The Office of the Dean of Students provides input to a range of senior governance committees of the University, making recommendations for amendments to policies and procedures as informed by issues raised by students and staff. The Dean of Students also holds Fellow status at the residential colleges, Bruce Hall and Toad Hall.

The chart below records the number of visits to the Dean of Students office from 2006 to 2016. Data in this table include repeat visits rather than simply head count of individual students. All subsequent charts in this report display contacts (head counts).

Chart 1

**Number of Visits to the Dean of Students Office
2006 - 2016**



Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
No. Visits	158	203	219	293	351	430	495	441	724	1303	1547

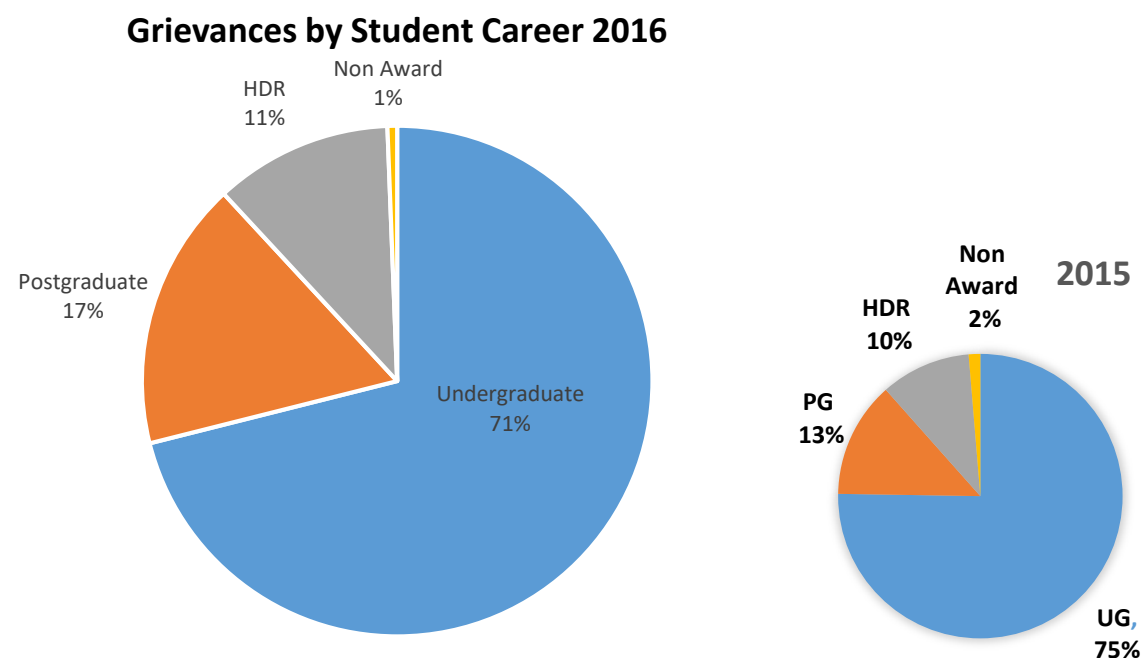
The 1547 visits to the Dean of Students office in 2016 represent 816 students. This cohort represents 4% of the total ANU student population (39.7 students per 1000 students). 220 students (27%) required multiple visits.

The closest international comparison to the work of the ANU Dean of Students office is the work undertaken by Student Ombudspersons in Canadian Universities. The Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) reports an annual caseload of approximately 1% of the total student population in Canadian Universities. There is no comparable data for the Australian university sector.

In addition to student visits, approximately 20 staff sought advice or assistance with enquiries relating to difficult situations involving students. Staff contact data were collected from mid-year 2016 and will be reported in subsequent annual reports.

Summary of contacts with the Dean of Students Office 2016

Chart 2



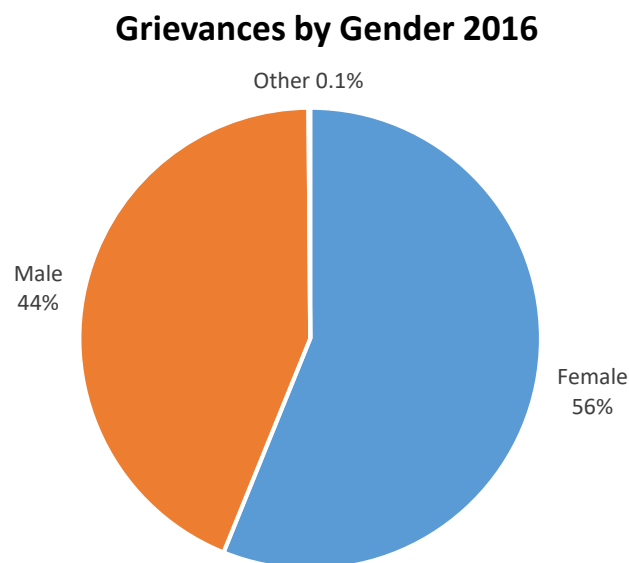
Student Career	No. Students 2016	No. Students 2015	% in grievance cohort 2016	% in ANU cohort 2016
Undergraduate	580	514	71	53
Postgraduate	138	90	17	33
HDR	93	70	11	13
Non Award	5	9	1	0.6
Total	816	683		

Not unexpectedly, undergraduate students are over-represented in contacts with the Dean of Students office. This again correlates with students presenting with issues across the grievance categories of: appeal, results, special consideration and late withdrawal; academic advice and progress. 2016 data show a greater prevalence of students seeking advice regarding changing a course outcome (grade appeal, special consideration or late withdrawal) than we have seen in previous years. The numbers of undergraduate students seeking advice in these areas suggests a refinement of advice available either from Colleges or from online material may be required – an observation we also reported in our 2015 Annual Report.

We previously reported that lack of timely access to or awareness of academic advice support during the first two weeks of semester when students are finalising their enrolment was an emerging issue that could lead to ongoing academic progress concerns. In 2016 significant work was undertaken by College advisors and staff from the Division of Student Life and the Division of Student Administration to refine the early intervention process for students deemed to be at academic risk. We applaud this work and the continuing efforts to make contact with such students to help ensure they receive timely and appropriate advice and support.

Postgraduate coursework students are significantly underrepresented in contacts with the Dean of Students office. However, the number of postgraduate students presenting with a difficulty has increased from 2015 and we believe this is linked to a greater awareness of the office and how we are able to assist them. The Dean of Students office is continuing discussions with PARSA and relevant College Associate Deans to ensure good communication with this cohort in 2017.

Chart 3

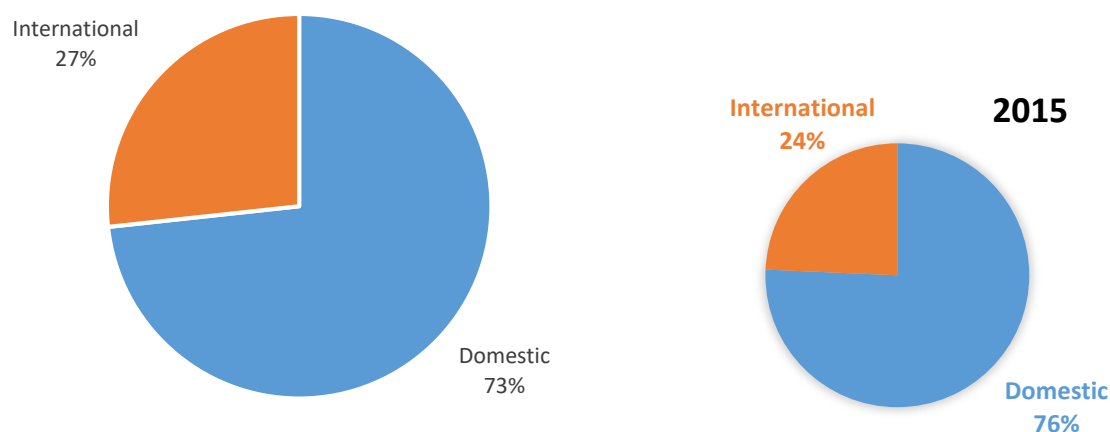


Gender	No. Students 2016	No. Students 2015	% in grievance cohort 2016	% in ANU cohort 2016
Female	458	350	56	52
Male	357	332	44	48
Other	1	1	0.1	0.03
Total	816	683		

In previous years gender has not appeared to be a factor influencing the overall reporting of issues to the Dean of Students office. 2016 data show a small over-representation of female students. As observed in previous years, differences continue to be apparent in some grievance categories, notably supervision issues for higher degree research students (strong over-representation of female students); interpersonal conduct issues with other students and staff for undergraduate students (over-representation of male students); mental health issues (strong under-representation of male international students).

Chart 4

Grievances by Residency Status 2016



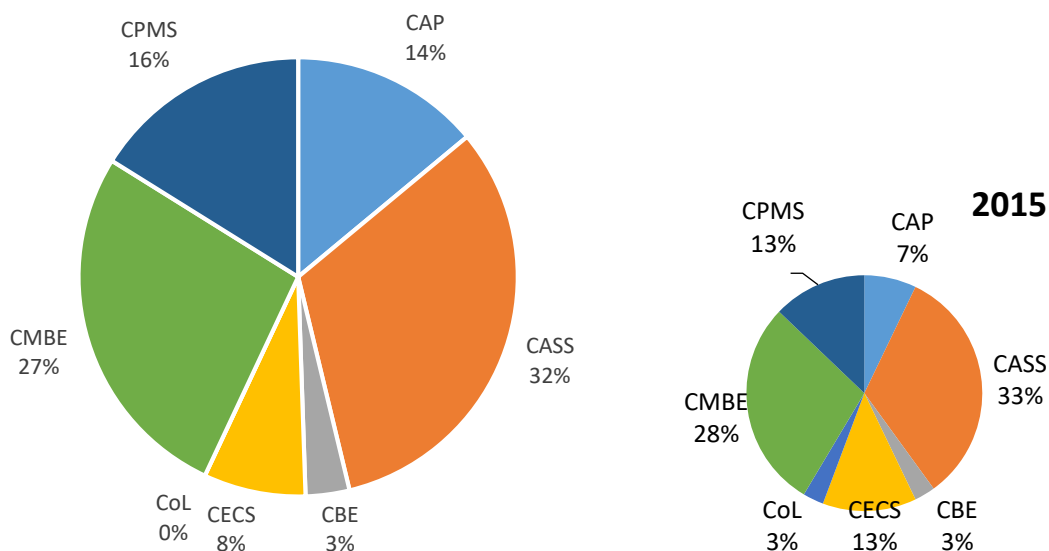
Residency Status	No. Students 2016	No. Students 2015	% in grievance cohort 2016	% in ANU cohort 2016
Domestic	598	522	73	71
International	218	161	27	29
Total	816	683		

2016 has seen an increase in the number of international students presenting to the Dean of Students. There is still a small underrepresentation when compared with the University student population breakdown and work is continuing on raising the profile of the office with student leaders to help address this.

International students continue to disproportionately present with severe academic progress issues. The most common presentation is as a result of exclusion following the invitation to show cause to the Academic Progress Committee. These students attend this office because they are advised that they should seek assistance from us if they are considering a procedural appeal of the decision to exclude. It is highly unlikely that we will find a basis for a procedural appeal and we can offer little assistance other than to investigate if there are grounds for a late withdrawal application. This observation has been glaringly evident since the first annual report (2014). As noted, significant progress has been made at University and College level to proactively contact students at risk of not making academic progress at an early intervention stage early (or prior) to semester 1 and semester 2. It is vital that this early intervention email goes out to students in time for them to meet with academic advisors while they are still able to amend their enrolment for the new semester. Given the past observation that international students appear less likely to seek or take up offers/opportunities of early intervention support, it will be helpful to review the effectiveness of this new initiative on engaging international students.

Chart 5

Higher Degree Research Grievances by College 2016



College	No. Students 2016	No. Students 2015	% in grievance cohort 2016	% in ANU cohort 2016
CAP	13	5	14	18
CASS	30	23	33	23
CBE	3	2	3	4
CECS	7	9	8	10
CoL	0	2	0	2
CMBE	25	20	26	22
CPMS	15	9	16	19
Other		0		
Total	93	70		

Note: Percentages have been rounded up. CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CBE: College of Business & Economics; CECS: College of Engineering & Computer Science; CoL: ANU College of Law; CMBE: College of Medicine, Biology & Environment; CPMS: College of Physical & Mathematical Sciences.

Grievances presented by higher degree research students primarily involve supervision issues and/or lack of academic progress. In previous years almost all presenting HDR students were in the latter stages of their degree timeline and presented with grievances that had been in place for a considerable time. By contrast, in 2016 a greater proportion of HDR students presented at earlier stages, including in the first year of their studies. This is a positive change, enabling opportunities to address the difficulties before they become entrenched and while there is still time to get the student's candidature back on track.

Significant contributions by College Associate Deans (HDR) and initiatives such as the Thesis Boot Camp were noted by a number of students as having a very positive impact on the HDR student experience and progress. Nonetheless very high levels of stress are evident in the cohort. In 2016 the uncertainty felt by HDR students in CAP over the long period of time before the restructuring of a School within the College was finalised led to a significant increase in the number of CAP HDR students attending this office compared with previous years. The stress experienced by both students and staff impacted severely on some students and markedly on a large number of others.

Nine HDR students claimed their supervisors bully them. In addition, and as reported in previous years, the large majority of the presenting HDR cohort do not have explicitly agreed expectations between themselves and their supervisor. Many students continue to be unsure about who to approach in the local area for academic or administrative support outside their supervisor. We encourage Schools to clarify this with their students.

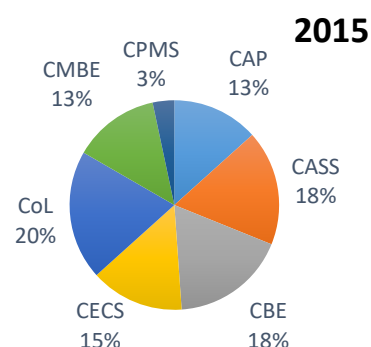
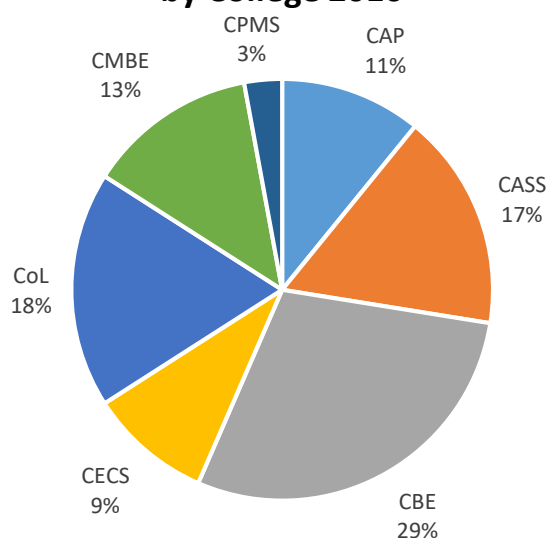
The prevalence of HDR student complaints is aligned with the numbers of HDR students in each College although clusters of grievances are apparent. We welcome opportunities to

provide more detail specific to individual Colleges to help inform their action to improve the experience of students.

We invite staff to consider the Dean of Students office as a resource and, as noted earlier in this report, increasing numbers of staff are contacting the office to seek advice on managing difficult supervision situations. The office works closely with Associate Deans (HDR) in Colleges to provide assistance for students encountering difficulties for those cases where the students agree to be identified. However the majority of HDR students are not prepared to be identified due to concerns they may suffer as a result of making a complaint. In such cases our focus is on listening, providing an independent and impartial perspective on their situation, recommendations and advice regarding options open to the student, and referring students to other support services as appropriate.

Chart 6

Postgraduate Coursework Grievances by College 2016



College	No. Students 2016	No. Students 2015	% in grievance cohort 2016	% in ANU cohort 2016
CAP	15	12	11	15
CASS	23	16	17	7
CBE	40	16	29	28
CECS	13	13	9	5
CoL	25	18	18	35
CMBE	18	12	13	8
CPMS	4	3	3	1
Total	138	90		

Note: Percentages have been rounded up. CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CBE: College of Business & Economics; CECS: College of Engineering & Computer Science; CoL: ANU College of Law; CMBE: College of Medicine, Biology & Environment; CPMS: College of Physical & Mathematical Sciences.

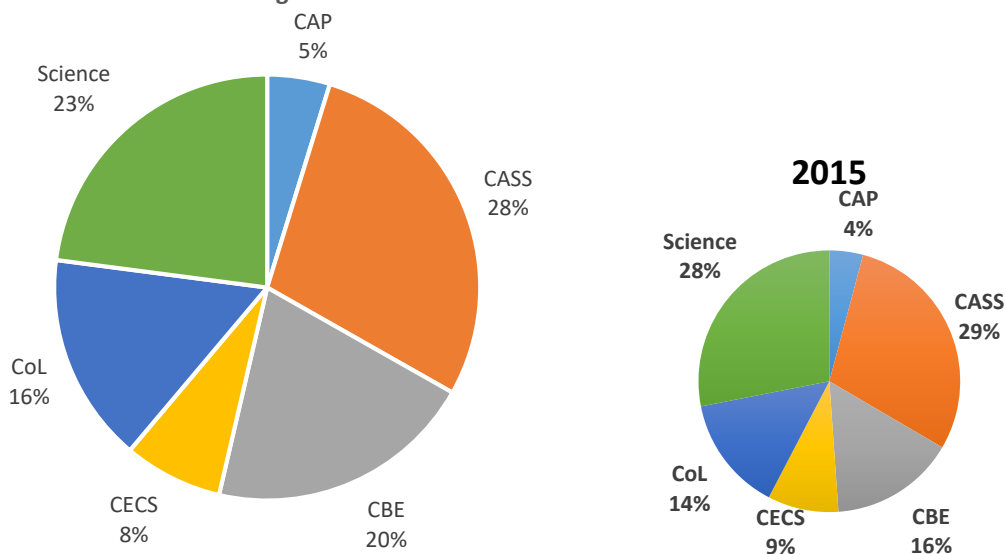
As noted earlier, postgraduate coursework students are under-represented in contacts with the Dean of Students office. The data indicate that a disproportionate number of students in some Colleges (CASS, CMBE and CECS) are encountering difficulties compared to students in other Colleges. A significant increase is evident in complaints from students studying CBE and CoL programs as compared with previous years.

Chart 7

Undergraduate Grievances by College

2016*

*double degree students counted toward both Colleges



College	No. Students*	% in grievance cohort	% in ANU cohort
CAP	38	5	5
CASS	227	28	31
CBE	163	20	21
CECS	60	8	10
CoL	127	16	13
Science	183	23	20

*Note: Double degree students are counted against both Colleges leading to double counting of some individuals. CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CBE: College of Business & Economics; CECS: College of Engineering & Computer Science; CoL: ANU College of Law; CMBE: College of Medicine, Biology & Environment; CPMS: College of Physical & Mathematical Sciences.

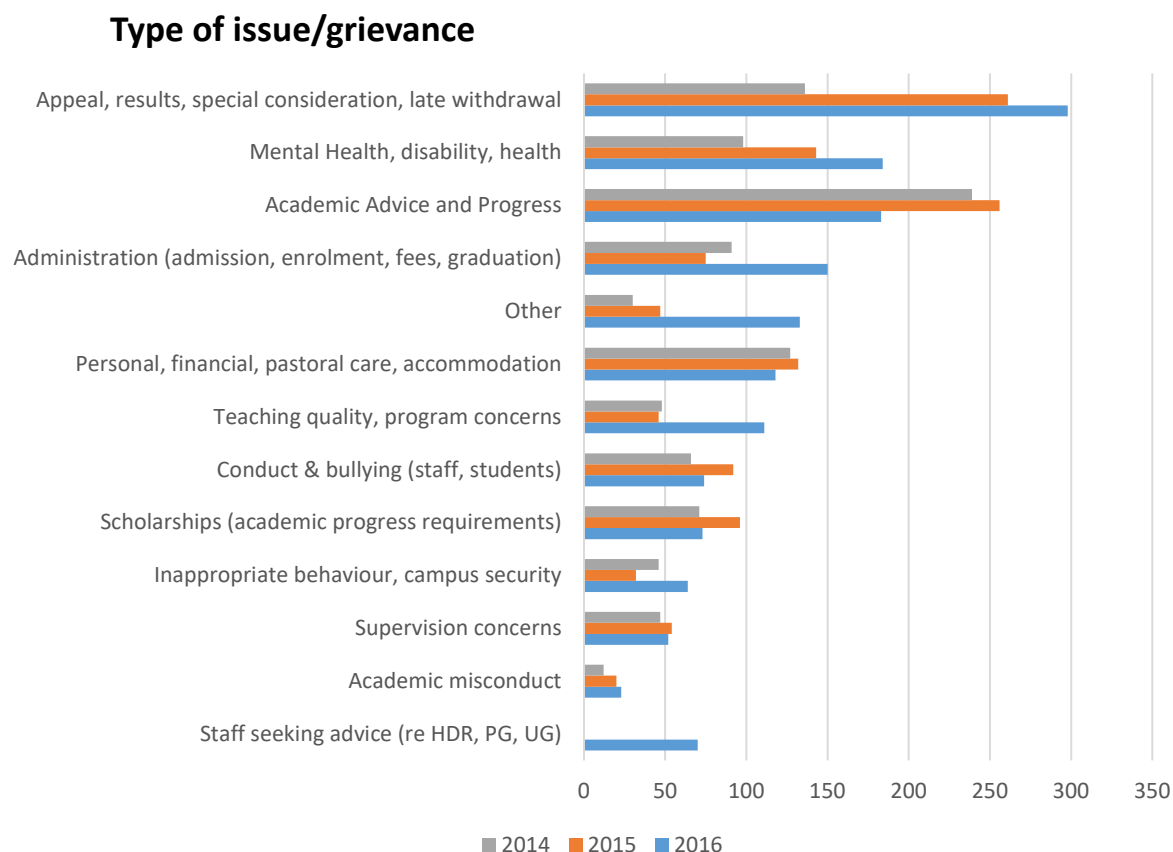
Contacts show a representative spread across the Colleges. 580 undergraduate students sought out academic advice from the Dean of Students office and these are roughly

representative of all Colleges. The Colleges are differentiated once the category of issue is taken into account and detail can be provided to individual Colleges.

More generally, many of these students had either not accessed College advisors, or had found the College advice unclear or insufficient – the same situation as observed in 2015.

Distribution of Grievances

Chart 8



Type of Issue/Grievance	2016	2015
Appeal, results, special consideration, late withdrawal	298	261
Mental health, disability, health	184	143
Academic advice and progress	183	256
Administration (administration, admission, enrolment, fees, program transfer, graduation)	150	75
Other	133	47

Personal, financial, pastoral care, accommodation	118	132
Teaching quality, program concerns, assessment requirements	111	46
Conduct and bullying (staff, students)	74	92
Scholarships (academic progress requirements)	73	96
Inappropriate behaviour, campus security	64	32
Supervision concerns	52	54
Academic misconduct	23	20
Staff seeking advice (HDR, PG, UG)	70	

The majority of grievances or issues brought to the Dean of Students office revolve around academic advice, academic progress, and contesting of grades or removal of fail grades (through late withdrawal). The categories of mental health/disability/health and personal/financial are frequently associated with issues of academic progress and grievances concerning grades. Mental illness in particular is a major factor in a range of grievances and situations. 16% of students (133 students) who contacted the Dean of Students office in 2016 were knowingly experiencing a mental illness to the point that their academic progress was significantly affected, up from 93 students in 2015 and 81 students in 2014. The Dean of Students office works closely with ANU Counselling Centre staff to support these students. As noted in previous annual reports, the nature of these conditions mean that many students do not have supporting documentation to cover a possibly extended period when they were clearly affected but had not yet recognised this or sought treatment. We expect the staff workload associated with supporting students who are experiencing such desperate situations also extends to academic advisors, lecturers, tutors, student administrators, staff in residences, staff assessing late withdrawal applications and potentially others.

The contacts listed under grievance category 10 (Inappropriate behaviour: unwelcome sexual attention, harassment, stalking, campus security) represent alleged perpetrators as well as reported victims; the overall frequency of reported incident is approximately 85% of the number shown in the chart. The category includes 23 incidents of reported unwelcome sexual attention, a substantial increase over the 7 reports received in 2015. This follows significant efforts by student associations and the University through the year to focus attention on reporting and preventing unwelcome sexual attention.¹

¹ Data consolidated from the Dean of Students Office, the Counselling Centre, ANU Security and Critical Incident notification indicate 55 incidents of unwelcome sexual attention reported in 2016.

Category Groups:

1. Academic Grievances

Appeal; Grade appeal; Results/Marks; Late withdrawal; Special Consideration/Supplementary Exams; Exams – academic; Exams – administrative.

2. Mental health, disability, health

3. Academic advice and Progress

Academic Advice; Academic Progress; Academic Progress – Probation; Academic Progress – Suspension; Academic Progress – Exclusion; Graduate studies advice; Overseas Exchange.

4. Administration (admission, enrolment, fees, graduation)

Administration issue; Admission; Enrolment; Fees; Graduation; Timetabling; Program transfer; University equipment.

5. Other

6. Personal, financial, pastoral care, accommodation

Accommodation; Career options; Financial; Pastoral Care; Personal; Time Management.

7. Teaching quality, program concerns

Program concerns; Teaching quality; Online course sites; Fieldwork; Feedback re assessment; Assessment requirements.

8. Conduct and bullying (staff, students)

Bullying - staff of student; Bullying - student of staff; Bullying - student of student; Conduct – Staff; Conduct – Student.

9. Scholarships (academic progress requirements)

Scholarship; Scholarship – Encouragement; Scholarship – Probation; Scholarship – Suspension; Scholarship – Termination.

10. Inappropriate behaviour, campus security

Unwelcome Sexual Attention; Stalking; Harassment; Campus Security; Social Media.

11. Supervisory concerns

Supervision – HDR; Supervision – Hons

12. Academic misconduct

13. Staff seeking advice

Undergraduate, postgraduate and higher degree research students

General Comments

Grievances or issues commonly fall into four types:

1. Grievances that relate to academic progress, grades, special consideration and late withdrawal that could be helped by greater access to College-based academic advisors as well as student administrators. Issues of perceived lack of fairness, often associated with rigid application of rules without consideration of context, are frequently reported.
2. Students struggling to make good academic progress and life choices as a result of significant mental illness or previously unrecognised disability.
3. Personal issues that consequently impact on academic progress. Parental expectations or requirements for some international students in particular can determine the focus of study rather than a student's aptitude and discipline interest. Financial difficulties experienced by both domestic and international students can lead to students undertaking substantial hours of paid employment which in turn can impact on academic progress. Academic advice, options for financial support, consideration of program leave and pastoral care are key components of advice and encouragement to this group of students.
4. HDR students commonly are extremely stressed and need someone just to listen to them in the first instance. Discussions about time management, project management and thesis structure and expectations frequently follow. These students are often working in comparative isolation and are frequently in need of substantial encouragement, positive feedback and practical approaches to enabling progress with their studies.
5. Critical incidents and follow-up evaluation and action. Can involve the Case Management Group.

Dean of Students
Associate Professor Paula Newitt

Deputy Dean of Students
Dr Peter Hendriks