

SMG OUTCOMES

LIMITED DISTRIBUTION

MEETING	SENIOR MANAGEMENT GROUP
MEETING DATE	19/08/2021
MEETING TIME	2.30pm – 5pm

ATTENDANCE

Attendees: VC (Chair), DVCA, DVCRI, DVCSUE, DVCIS/Dean COL, COO, CFO, VPA, VPFN, PVCED, Dean CASS, Dean CAP, Dean CBE, Dean CECS, Dean CoS, Dean CHM, Dean HDR, Dean AQ, Director OVC

Observers: Chair Academic Board, Secretary to Council, Executive Officer (OVC), Dom Haywood, Sasha Banjavcic-Booker, Hayley Torabi



- SMG did not agree:
 - To the 7 day teaching pause due to the impact of varying teaching break dates to staff and students with caring or employment responsibilities

From: [Vice-Chancellor](#)
To: [ANUSA President](#); [PARSA President](#)
Cc: [Director OVC](#); [Vice-Chancellor EO](#)
Subject: Re: Conversation re Teaching Pause before or after Academic Board
Date: Tuesday, 24 August 2021 8:31:26 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)

Dear Madhu-

Thank you for your letter. As you are aware, the Senior Management Group weighed up last week the option of a Teaching Break, We understand it is an extremely challenging time for students and staff alike. Reflecting on the benefits to some students, concerns about negative effects on others, as well as the impact on students located in lock-down out of Canberra, especially when the knock-on-effects of a study break in a time when we are likely to be in-and-out of lock-down for the remainder of the year. We also took into consideration the effect on the teaching staff, and there was essentially no appetite for a teaching break at present from any of the Colleges.

We will continue to monitor and evaluate the decision, and it maybe that a pause will be viewed by SMG as appropriate sometime in the near-term future. I encourage you to continue your conversations with the Director of University Experience, James Brann, as well as the DVC-A Grady Venville. I also encourage you to have conversations with the Colleges to understand their point of view (and for them to understand yours).

We are all trying to make the best of a bad situation. There are multiple trade-offs, and at this point the Senior Management Group is strongly of the view that the negatives of a study pause outweigh the positives. But SMG can and will rapidly act if we believe the trade-offs go the other way.

Brian

P.S. I have received a letter from PARSA which Eve (cc'd here) will receive a similar response. .

From: ANUSA President <sa.president@anu.edu.au>
Date: Monday, 23 August 2021 at 12:31 pm
To: Vice-Chancellor <vc@anu.edu.au>, PARSA President <parsa.president@anu.edu.au>
Subject: Conversation re Teaching Pause before or after Academic Board

Dear Brian,

I hope this email finds you well in what I know must be an incredibly difficult and stressful time for you. I'm reaching out today to request a short fifteen minute or so meeting sometime this week before Academic Board (noting the potential impossibility of that) or shortly after to discuss the decision made by SMG regarding the teaching pause.

I want to stress that I would like this to be a respectful and candid conversation. The student associations have stood firm in representing our constituencies as necessary many times in the past, but it is honestly quite an exhausting time as well for us with many of our representatives doing everything from packing food hampers and grocery delivery to assisting students in quarantine.

Where possible, we would really appreciate the opportunity to reach a mutual and shared understanding regarding the issue which I think would be best achieved if we felt genuinely heard and validated regarding the perspectives that we're trying to represent. I think it would be most productive to have this conversation in private with you one on one first as has been recommended to us - but please let me know what you think.

Warm regards,

**Madhumitha Janagaraja
President**

ANU Students' Association

T (02) 6125 2444

E sa.president@anu.edu.au

W <http://anusa.com.au>

T @ANUStudents



I am a member of the ANU Ally Network

I acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which ANUSA operates. I recognise the continuing connection to lands, waters, and communities of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I pay my respect to Elders, past and present, and commit to standing with our first nations people.

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From: [Vice-Chancellor](#)
To: [PARSA President](#)
Cc: [PARSA Vice President](#); [PARSA Equity](#); [Vice-Chancellor EO](#); [Director OVC](#)
Subject: Re: Meeting Request
Date: Tuesday, 24 August 2021 8:30:00 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Dear Eve-

Thank you for your letter. As you are aware, the Senior Management Group weighed up last week the option of a Teaching Break, We understand it is an extremely challenging time for students and staff alike. Reflecting on the benefits to some students, concerns about negative effects on others, as well as the impact on students located in lock-down out of Canberra, especially when the knock-on-effects of a study break in a time when we are likely to be in-and-out of lock-down for the remainder of the year. We also took into consideration the effect on the teaching staff, and there was essentially no appetite for a teaching break at present from any of the Colleges.

We will continue to monitor and evaluate the decision, and it maybe that a pause will be viewed by SMG as appropriate sometime in the near-term future. I encourage you to continue your conversations with the Director of University Experience, James Brann, as well as the DVC-A Grady Venville. I also encourage you to have conversations with the Colleges to understand their point of view (and for them to understand yours).

We are all trying to make the best of a bad situation. There are multiple trade-offs, and at this point the Senior Management Group is strongly of the view that the negatives of a study pause outweigh the positives. But SMG can and will rapidly act if we believe the trade-offs go the other way.

Brian

P.S. I have received a similar letter from ANUSA which I am responding to in a similar way.

From: PARSA President <parsa.president@anu.edu.au>
Date: Monday, 23 August 2021 at 9:32 am
To: Vice-Chancellor <vc@anu.edu.au>, Vice-Chancellor EO <eo.vc@anu.edu.au>
Cc: PARSA Vice President <parsa.vp@anu.edu.au>, PARSA Equity <parsa.equity@anu.edu.au>
Subject: Meeting Request

Dear Professor Schmidt,

I hope this email finds you well.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for the immense amount of effort that staff have put into supporting students through these challenging times. The university was obviously well-prepared to handle another health crisis.

One issue my team would like to raise, however, is the desire for a teaching break among students. As you could imagine, these past few weeks have been incredibly stressful for students, both on-campus and off.

I am aware that the Senior Management Team have advised that a teaching would not be beneficial to the majority of students, or indeed damaging to others. Yet, PARSA's consultation mechanisms would suggest

that people in vulnerable equity groups, such as those with caring responsibilities, believe that a teaching break is necessary for them to be able to catch up on their work. Similarly, students living in the residential halls (especially SRs) report not being able to support their own academic progress given the immense pastoral care load they have faced. Although these reports come from a wide array of sources, I have attached a letter from PARSA's Parents and Carers' Officer outlining some of these issues.

The request for a teaching break is not based on the presumption that students need 'time off' to relax. Instead, it would be an acknowledgement that students have not had the opportunity to focus on their studies. This would bring us in line with other Canberra based tertiary institutions, such as the University of Canberra and CIT.

Bringing back the CRS/CRN grading system helps alleviate this stress, but it does not provide an adequate remedy to the acute issue. A teaching break would allow some of your most vulnerable students to achieve the grades/milestones they are capable of.

Academic Board have noted that when overused the CRS/CRN grading system can negatively impact people's ability to enter into further postgraduate study. Ideally, we would want to give people the necessary bandwidth to focus on their studies so that they can successfully continue their academic pursuits.

I am aware of how much the university values consultation, so we would appreciate any opportunity we have to provide your office with further feedback. Given how close we are to the mid-semester exams, I was hoping you would be willing to attend a meeting to discuss these issues further?

Kind regards,

Eve Walker (*she/her*)

President

e. parsa.president@anu.edu.au

w. parsa.anu.edu.au

f. facebook.com/parsaanu



Postgraduate and Research Students' Association (PARSA)

The Australian National University

Level 2, Di Riddell Student Centre, Kambri

Australian National University
Canberra, ACT 2601

I acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which PARSA operates. I recognise the continuing connection to lands, waters, and communities of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I pay my respect to Elders, past and present, and commit to standing with our first nations people.

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From: [Derrick Appel](#)
To: [Grady Venville](#); [Brian Schmidt](#); [Vice-Chancellor](#); [EA DVC Academic](#)
Cc: [Joan Leach](#); [Edward O'Daly](#)
Subject: Re: ANU Teaching Break Petition
Date: Wednesday, 18 August 2021 9:33:41 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Good evening,

Thank you very much for your prompt response Professor Venville, especially so late at night. Thank you also for your hard work and dedication to the University.

Is it possible to get a timeline of when these challenges would be considered? I have already emailed the Chair of the Academic Board about timelines, and believe any later than this Friday would put even more students at a disadvantage. More and more students are getting placed into quarantine by the hour, students are having to sort out living and food arrangements in the middle of a pandemic and yet assessments continue. If the decision is any later than this week, we risk more students falling behind, and we risk more students unable to submit their best work due to severe academic disruptions. Therefore, I propose a meeting on Friday morning, for effect by Monday.

I'm sure that a teaching break would also allow the presidents of ANUSA and PARSA to draft more effective policies.

Warm regards,
Derrick Appel

From: Grady Venville <grady.venville@anu.edu.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 18 August 2021 9:27 PM
To: Derrick Appel <s47F@anu.edu.au>; Brian Schmidt <brian.schmidt@anu.edu.au>; Vice-Chancellor <vc@anu.edu.au>; EA DVC Academic <ea.dvca@anu.edu.au>
Cc: Joan Leach <joan.leach@anu.edu.au>; Edward O'Daly <edward.odaly@anu.edu.au>
Subject: Re: ANU Teaching Break Petition

Dear Derrick

Thank you for your email. As you have noted, there are many, complex challenges for students and staff in our community at this time. I already have a meeting scheduled with the presidents and vice-presidents of ANUSA and PARSA to plan strategies that are targeted and supportive. We will need to carefully consider the current challenges and those that may be around the corner so our strategies will support all students, including those on campus, interstate and overseas, as well as our staff for the remainder of the semester. As always, ANU will be as compassionate and as flexible as possible in difficult times. Take care.
Grady.

[Professor Grady Venville](#)
[Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic](#)
Office of the Vice-Chancellor | Chancelry 10 East Road | The Australian National University | Canberra ACT 2601

From: Derrick Appel s47F@anu.edu.au
Date: Wednesday, 18 August 2021 at 2:58 pm
To: Brian Schmidt <brian.schmidt@anu.edu.au>, Vice-Chancellor <vc@anu.edu.au>, EA DVC Academic <ea.dvca@anu.edu.au>, Grady Venville <Grady.Venville@anu.edu.au>
Subject: ANU Teaching Break Petition

Good afternoon Professor Schmidt and Professor Venville,

I am reaching out to you in response to the recent COVID-19 outbreak in Canberra. I recently started a petition for a one-week teaching break and university-wide assessment extension, which has already received over 3,700 signatures, linked here: <https://www.change.org/p/brian-schmidt-anu-to-have-a-teaching-break-in-response-to-delta-outbreak>. The petition has also been widely circulated.

As I'm sure you're aware, this outbreak has had a significant impact on every student and staff member of the ANU. As a Senior Resident, I have seen first-hand the impact it has had on students' mental and physical wellbeing. Several students have been identified as contacts and placed under quarantine, while others are at extreme medical risk, and the quickly evolving situation has caused the kind of stress not seen since last year March. One thing that many of my residents have mentioned is that the burden of classes is too much to bear on top of all these stresses. This inspired me to start the petition.

We have also been in consultation with some staff and realise that one potential hurdle to implementing this teaching break is having to get assessments back before Census Day. Therefore, we also include in this request the implicit assumption that Census Day will be moved forward by a timeframe acceptable to staff.

Our argument for an immediate teaching break rests on the following premises:

1. A large number of students have been severely impacted by lockdowns, quarantine, stress, and a reduced ability to work. This has led to significant academic disruptions.
2. Our consultation with staff has also revealed that there is a bulk of extension requests and students asking for support on top of teaching. Furthermore, staff with young children at home have to adapt to the sudden lockdown during a very busy time assessment-wise.
3. The situation right now (with a new strain of COVID-19 and several more close contacts on campus) is more dangerous than what was experienced in March 2020, and yet there has been no teaching break similar to the break we had then.
4. A student media article (linked here <https://www.woroni.com.au/news/anu-decides-against-study-break-2/>) has mentioned that the ANU will not

implement a teaching break because “all students are able to study remotely this semester”. However, we do not believe this addresses our concerns. The purpose behind our suggestion is not just about the transition to online learning. Rather, it is in recognition of the huge stress placed on every student and staff member during an outbreak worse than any Canberra has seen before, and about student wellbeing during a crisis. With this being said, we would like to see another reason why the ANU refuses to implement a teaching break.

There are several other reasons mentioned in our petition. Students, staff and parents alike have expressed their concern with ANU’s insistence on maintaining business as usual during this time.


Please let me know whether there is any prospect of implementing an immediate one-week teaching break, including a blanket assignment extension and census date postponement. I am happy to open further dialogue about any of the points I have addressed in this email.

Thank you for your hard work during this time, and I look forward to hearing back from you.

Kind regards,

Derrick Appel (he/him)
Student

I am a member of the ANU Ally Network

The logo consists of a horizontal bar divided into six colored segments: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple.