

# MGA's recommended approach to discipline during the COVID-19 climate 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 represent 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 goal is to offer the same level of support across the board. MGA advocates will do the following for any students who has an academic misconduct discipline case:

- Zoom the student in advance of hearing
- Attend the hearing by Zoom
- Touch base with student after the hearing either by Zoom, phone or email

Sometimes students do not contact the MGA prior to the hearing. Unless a student is happy for an advocate to be there, and has prearranged this, advocates cannot simply show up to Zoom meetings.

## Recommendations

1. At this stage, we recommend the use of Zoom to conduct discipline meetings and hearings. Ensure the nominated advocate is sent an invite. Faculties and student associations will need to monitor and share experiences.
2. 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 breakout room, make sure 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).
3. Give the advocate 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).

4. Do not record Zoom meetings or hearings through Zoom. 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 occur during a face to face scenario.
5. Faculties must be clear if the student is required to have a support person with them and who that person can be, as some made mandatory during the APC seasons. Unlike the advocate, this support person did not support the student through the process but was physically with them in case the student received bad news. (Eg, there was an APC case years ago where a student was excluded and threatened suicide to the panel, there was no one physically in the same place as the student.)
6. Advocates rely on the faculty to encourage students to seek advocacy support or at least be made aware of our services. A suggestion would be to have us CC'd ([mga-advocacy@monash.edu](mailto:mga-advocacy@monash.edu)) when notice of allegations are sent to students? 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.
7. Post meeting/hearing support is crucial, especially in the event that these meetings do not go well for the student. It's important for the faculty to make sure students have access to after hours counselling service.