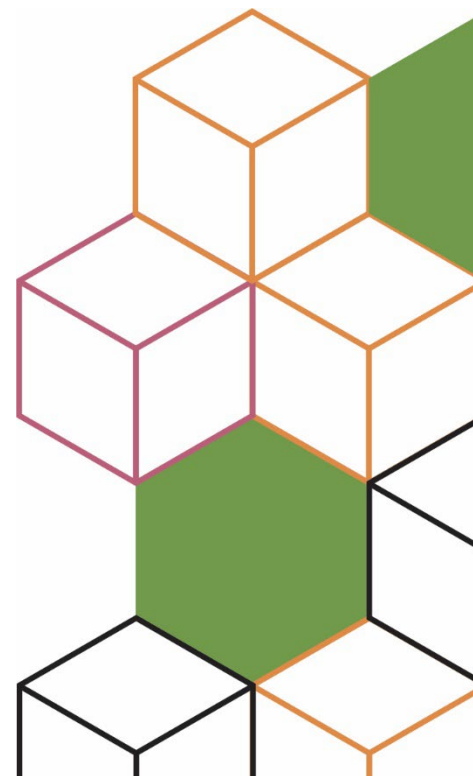


November

**2022**

Graduate Student Association

**Dual-delivery Learning  
Recommendations for the  
University of Melbourne**



## Introduction

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) is the independent representative organisation for all graduate coursework and research students at the University of Melbourne. We are led by 8 GSA Board members and 10 Representative Council members who are all elected University of Melbourne graduate students. On behalf of over 36,000 constituents, we represent graduate student interests to the University and wider community, provide student engagement events, activities, and information to the graduate student community, and support 150 affiliated graduate student groups.

GSA's vision is for a unified and supported community that actively empowers graduate student excellence and experience. Our objectives are to achieve and support representation, academic support, transition to work, engaged and healthy communities, and organisational sustainability.

GSA welcomes the University of Melbourne's commitment to providing dual-delivery for some graduate classes in 2023. The findings in this report outline the advantages of dual-delivery, including the increase in flexibility, accessibility and safety afforded to graduate students.

Drawing on student feedback, GSA recommends that the University considers additional measures to ensure dual-delivery is successful. These measures include expanding training initiatives for academic staff, and ensuring classrooms have suitable equipment for dual-delivery learning environments. Student feedback also identified the need for addressing the stigma around online learning as the 'lazy' option, as many students rely upon online learning to undertake a safe educational experience while the risk of Covid-19 remains.

## Background

In 2022, students were encouraged to return to campus for in-person classes. However, with many students still overseas or contending with Covid-19 restrictions, some classes operated under dual-delivery in 2022. Dual-delivery enables students to participate in a class either in-person or online. This is sometimes referred to as blended-synchronous learning, whereby students can utilise video-conferencing software, such as Zoom, to participate in seminars that are held on campus.

For 2023, the University of Melbourne has stated that graduate classes will primarily be delivered on campus, but with some subjects conducted via dual-delivery and online.<sup>1</sup> GSA invited student representatives to contribute feedback on dual-delivery as this mode of learning has great potential for providing inclusive educational experiences, but is also often associated with challenges. Qualitative analysis was performed using NVivo and Excel.

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<sup>1</sup> The University of Melbourne 2022, 'Course and subject delivery information', viewed 20 October 2022, <<https://students.unimelb.edu.au/your-course/manage-your-course/planning-your-course-and-subjects/subjects>>.

## Findings

The findings below present perspectives from graduate students in support of strengthening the dual-delivery mode of teaching for classes in 2023.

### **Dual-delivery promotes accessibility**

During the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the University was required to rapidly shift all classes to an online format. GSA identified many pain points with online learning, such as Internet and VPN difficulties, communication gaps between students and teaching staff, and social isolation between peers.

Despite these challenges, there were many benefits to online learning, including the rise of accessibility. Students reported to GSA that online learning enables anyone with a device to participate in their education. This was particularly pertinent to offshore international students who are unable to travel to Australia.

Furthermore, dual-delivery provides increased flexibility for graduate students who often have family and work responsibilities. For example, many students commented on the value of dual-delivery for graduate student parents and caretakers who might have dependents at home. Another key student group that benefits from dual-delivery are those undertaking placements in regional and remote areas. The option to video-conference into in-person classes provides flexibility for students who are otherwise required to travel long distances for short seminars. One student commented on the accessible nature of dual-delivery for graduate students:

***“I think it makes sense for graduates to have online classes, especially as we usually have other things going on that undergrads may not have.”***

-Domestic Coursework Student, Faculty of Arts

### **Dual-delivery creates safer and healthier learning environments**

In addition to increasing access for students, dual-delivery can mitigate health-related concerns. While there are preventative measures in place for Covid-19, such as classroom air purifiers and free masks, the risk of Covid-19 is still felt by many students. Some students reported to GSA that they feel more comfortable attending seminars online, as attending a large class with Covid-19 present in the community can be daunting. This is particularly important for students with ongoing medical conditions, as described by one student:

***“I’m a big fan of this dual delivery mode and I feel like as a chronically ill, neurodivergent student, the option of joining online when I need to has helped increase my attendance and participation.”***

-International Coursework Student, Faculty of MDHS

## Recommendations for improving dual-delivery

Dual-delivery has the potential to create better learning experiences for many graduate students. In addition to the feedback presented above, students provided anecdotes and suggestions for improving dual-delivery. These include:

### 1. Enhance training and professional development for academic staff

A key issue with dual-delivery programs was the lack of knowledge demonstrated by some teaching staff on how to prepare and operate blended synchronous learning equipment and classes. One student shared a challenging experience:

*“One of my tutorial groups faced issues when Zoom links were being organised by the subject coordinator but the updated links were not being provided to tutors, or the meetings were automatically set to end after a certain amount of time, and this required some proactivity from myself and other students to provide tutors with the proper Zoom links or alternative options.”*

-International Coursework Student, Faculty of MDHS

As a result of these limited technological skills, many students expressed the need for academic staff to undertake comprehensive training on dual-delivery. These training and development workshops should incorporate the following:

- How to operate and use dual-delivery equipment within classrooms.
- Strategies to engage and encourage collaboration between students on-campus and online (e.g., incentivising engagement through participation marks).
- How to translate content to a dual-delivery format.
- Additional resources on practicing dual-delivery (e.g., a FAQ page on problem-solving technological issues should be readily accessible for teaching staff to minimise disruptions within live sessions).

The University offers pre-semester workshops and lists information pages for academic staff,<sup>2</sup> but it is clear from students' experiences that academic staff require improved guidance and support in how to conduct dual-delivery sessions.

### 2. Provide technology support for academic staff during large classes

Without prior experience, it can be challenging to facilitate dual-delivery classes. GSA found that online participants often feel neglected and discouraged from speaking up in class due to their teacher's prioritisation of in-person students. In their feedback to GSA, many students outlined the benefit of a teaching assistant role to monitor online participation and provide support to online students.

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<sup>2</sup> The University of Melbourne 2022, 'Facilitating blended synchronous learning', viewed 25 October 2022, <<https://le.unimelb.edu.au/learning-teaching-assessment/dual-delivery-and-bsl/bsl-sessions/facilitating-bsl#support-and-training-for-teaching-staff>>.

### 3. Equip classrooms with high-quality technology

Many students shared experiences of attending classes in rooms or lecture theatres that were not designed for dual-delivery. In these cases, it was difficult for students on Zoom to hear class discussions, or see lecturers when content was being delivered. To ensure a high-standard learning experience, classrooms that hold dual-delivery programs should be equipped with the following:

- The standard University of Melbourne lectern.
- Projector.
- Document camera.
- Ceiling-mounted pan/tilt camera.
- Ceiling-mounted professional-grade microphone.
- Mobile microphones that can be switched on and connected via Bluetooth.
- iPads for academic staff to monitor the chat on Zoom.

### 4. Raise awareness about Student Equity and Disability support

GSA welcomes the University's focus on re-activating campus life in 2023. However, we are conscious that many students may not be able to attend campus due to accessibility or health requirements. To ensure that all students can equally and safely participate in their education, GSA recommends that the University increases student awareness of its Student Equity and Disability service (SEDS). For example, GSA found that only one-third of international students were aware of this service in a survey it conducted in 2020.<sup>3</sup> SEDS assists students who require ongoing aid and develops academic adjustment plans to increase flexibility.<sup>4</sup> Awareness of available flexible learning supports is vital for students who feel uncomfortable or unsafe returning to campus, particularly if the 2023 Subject Handbook advertises their class as on-campus.

### 5. Address the stigma around online participation

Some students reported that choosing to learn online is often perceived as 'lazy', or less valuable to an individual's learning experience. One student shared that they felt forced to return to campus despite facing accessibility challenges. GSA recommends that the University reframes its language around attending in-person classes. For example, the phrase "we **strongly encourage** you to take your classes on campus"<sup>5</sup> can polarise graduate students who require access to online learning options.

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<sup>3</sup> Graduate Student Association, 2021, *Strengthening International Students' Access to University Support Services*, <<https://gsa.unimelb.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Strengthening-International-Students-Access-to-University-Support-Services.pdf>>.

<sup>4</sup> The University of Melbourne 2022, 'Student Equity and Disability Support,' viewed 1 November 2022, <<https://students.unimelb.edu.au/student-support/student-equity-and-disability-support>>.

<sup>5</sup> The University of Melbourne 2022, 'Course and subject delivery information' viewed 1 November 2022, <<https://students.unimelb.edu.au/your-course/manage-your-course/planning-your-course-and-subjects/subjects>>.