STUDENT RESILIENCE PROJECT

A research report from the Graduate Student Association of the University of Melbourne

gsa

graduate student association

Executive summary

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 an elected Council of 15 graduate students and, on behalf of over 30,000 constituents, we represent graduate student interests to the University and wider community. We provide facilities and services, deliver events and activities to promote graduate student community and academic excellence, and support 149 affiliated graduate student groups (Grad Groups).

As part of its 25-year celebrations in 2019, GSA developed a strategic plan for 2020–25. GSA's vision is for inclusive, empowered graduate student communities that achieve meaningful and holistic university experiences. Our objectives are to achieve and support representation, academic support, transition to work, engaged and healthy communities, and organisational sustainability.

To support graduate students' health and wellbeing, and ensure student input in developing our programs, the 2019 GSA Council committed to undertake the Student Resilience Project. This was an action research project to gauge the wellbeing and resilience of graduate students at the University of Melbourne and to recommend actions to support students in managing the challenges of graduate life. The recommendations will also inform our engagement with the University's Student Life initiative.

During this project, the Covid-19 pandemic occurred and teaching activities moved from on-campus to online delivery. We extended the scope of this project to investigate the impact of Covid-19 on graduate students.

Summary of main findings

GSA undertook the Student Resilience Project to better understand graduate students' emotional, physical and social wellbeing at the University of Melbourne.

Main findings:

Being able to access support services is an important aspect of resilience, however, students reported difficulties with waiting lists, navigating bureaucracy and suitability of services.

Students were impacted by difficulties in accessing mental health support and insufficiency of services to meet their needs.

Some students do not feel valued as members of the University community and do not feel connected to the University. This negatively impacts their student experience.

Most students had their studies impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, including through changes to their study mode, stress, financial difficulties, health issues and housing instability.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing issues around accessing support, communication and campus connectedness.

Recommendations

Recommendations for GSA

GSA should work with students, including international students, to increase awareness and accessibility of counselling.

GSA should continue to host events to provide opportunities for graduate students to form social connections.

GSA should continue to facilitate student-led opportunities to form social connections through Grad Groups.

GSA should support students' employability by offering leadership training, leadership opportunities and volunteering opportunities.

Recommendations for University of Melbourne

The University should introduce a whole-of-institution approach to student mental health by:

Participating in the National University Mental Health Framework

Improving training for all student-facing staff to identify and assist students who indicate poor mental health

Improving mental health awareness and literacy among students

Improving access to support services across the University, including reducing counselling waiting lists

Investigating options for long-term psychological support for students

Undertaking a student evaluation of Student Equity and Disability Support to ensure students' needs are met

Deliver extension and special consideration processes that are student-centred, rather than punitive. This should include ongoing special consideration for student parents.

Addressing institutional structural issues that can affect student wellbeing.

The University should make improvements to students' social wellbeing by:

Providing spaces for informal socialisation across the University

Supporting student associations to deliver student-led social and extracurricular opportunities

Providing occasional childcare on campus to support students with young children to get involved in the University community

Applying a holistic approach to graduate student life.

About the Student Resilience Project

The objective of the Student Resilience Project was to develop a better understanding of factors that impact graduate student wellbeing and support students to succeed in their studies and their transition to work. As an action research project, it aimed to gauge the wellbeing and resilience of graduate students at the University of Melbourne and to recommend actions to support students in managing the challenges of graduate life.

This project was spearheaded by GSA Council and overseen by the Student Resilience Project Steering Committee. The steering committee provided strategic advice and support to meet project outcomes. We acknowledge the contributions of past and current steering committee members: Fia Hamid-Walker, Vinu Geesara Gunetilleke, Hiruni Walimunige, Mia Zentari, Ruby Gardner-Russell and Catherine Allingham. We also thank GSA CEO Rachna Muddagouni for ongoing guidance and support.

Literature review

Mental health and wellbeing of graduate students

There has been increasing awareness in the last decade that university students face unique mental health risks. Stallman (2011; 2016) found that 84 per cent of Australian university students report experiencing elevated psychological distress levels, with 60 per cent rising to a clinical level.

A survey by the University of Melbourne (2020) highlighted student health and wellbeing concerns. The survey, conducted prior to the 2020 pandemic, found that one in three students experienced stressors at university and that poor mental health is associated with reduced academic results. Almost half reported symptoms of depression within a two-week period and approximately one-quarter reported symptoms of anxiety. They also found that two-thirds of domestic students and less than half of international students knew of the University's counselling service.

Graduate research students face specific challenges as a direct result of their studies. A recent Australian study of PhD students, found that this population experiences higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety compared to the general population from their age groups (Barry, Woods, Warnecke, Stirling & Martin 2018). Environmental challenges encountered by doctoral students are like those of other research and higher education workers, according to a comprehensive literature review from the United Kingdom (Guthrie, Lichten, van Belle, Ball, Knack & Hofman 2017). A high expectation of work output, competing home-life obligations, a lack of autonomy, poor supervision and exclusion from institutional decision making were associated with common mental health issues experienced by doctoral students. There is a gap in the literature in exploring graduate coursework students incidences of mental health issues.

Concerningly, the counselling capacity and per-student allowances of Victorian universities, including the University of Melbourne, is insufficient to accommodate students' needs (CAPA 2019). As more people than ever access higher education, there is an increased need to provide support for students, and identify and address factors that detract from wellbeing.

Defining resilience

Developing personal resilience is a key intervention to prevent and manage students' mental health challenges. Personal resilience is thought to insulate against the impact of mental health risk factors caused by being a student.

Resilience is a personality characteristic, referring to a person's ability to overcome difficulties and adapt to their environment (Pidgeon, Rowe, Stapleton, Magyar & Lo 2014). Recent studies on resilience among higher education students conceptualise resilience as an attribute that may be developed over time, rather than a fixed trait (ATN 2018). Furthermore, developing personal resilience may be considered an outcome of a university education (Holdsworth, Turner & Scott-Young 2018). Resilience is predicted by self-esteem and previous exposure to stressful events and inversely predicted by avoidance and anxiety in parental relationships (Robbins, Kaye & Catling 2018).

While emphasising the importance of resilience, it must be acknowledged that students need to be supported by services and resources. Resilience building exercises and interventions cannot be used to supplant insufficient resourcing. As such, resilience may also involve being capable of utilising available resources (ATN 2018).

Resilience in university student populations

Developing personal resilience scaffolds students' completion and success in their studies. For many students, self-directed learning is a challenging experience. Students may also manage responsibilities outside of university. This presents an additional challenge during adverse circumstances such as the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Mindfulness is often cited as an intervention to foster greater resilience. Mindfulness is the act of feeling present in the current moment, and may be practiced using meditation exercises. In largely undergraduate populations, it has been found that resilience correlates with level of mindfulness (McGillivray & Pidgeon 2015; Pidgeon & Pickett 2017). Some institutions have delivered interventions, including mindfulness training, meditation and yoga, to improve graduate students' wellbeing. However, few interventions have been evaluated for effectiveness in the graduate student population (Barry, Woods, Warnecke, Stirling & Martin 2018; Mackie & Bates 2019) and they tend to be poorly aligned to addressing known risk factors (Mackie & Bates 2019). A recent randomised controlled trial at the University of Tasmania addressed this gap in the literature by evaluating the impact of mindfulness practice for doctoral students (Barry, Woods, Martin, Stirling & Warnecke 2019). The authors found reduced depression scores in the group of graduate researchers assigned to mindfulness practice, though they noted that policy and cultural change are needed to improve outcomes in this cohort. Mindfulness training may be one tool available to institutions to support their students but this must occur with actions to address environmental factors that detract from students' wellbeing.

Several studies indicate the importance of social connection in fostering resilience in university student populations. The first significant study into university student resilience was conducted in 2014 (Pidgeon, Rowe, Stapleton, Magyar & Lo 2014). The authors assert that to successfully transition to university an individual not only requires resilience but also perceived social support from friends and family, feeling connected to the university and peer connectedness. They surveyed students from three universities: Bond University (an Australian private university), the University of Florida and the University of Hong King. They found that resilience is correlated positively to students' social support and campus connectedness, and inversely to psychological distress. They did not find significant differences across the three universities in the study. The correlations to social support and campus connectedness are of interest to GSA as we provide regular social engagement and a sense of belonging to the University's sizeable graduate student cohort.

An exploratory study of university student resilience was conducted by the Australian Technology Network of Universities (2018). They developed a program for university staff to create a shared concept of resilience and action plans to embed strategies to enhance student resilience. This resulted in changes to the curriculum and co-curricular programs. For example, staff in the School of Occupational Therapy at Curtin University implemented scaffolding within their curriculum, including resubmission of failed assignments for first year students and the introduction of verbal examinations based on clinical work for final year students (ATN 2018).

Social resources are a significant source of support for student wellbeing, with a UK study showing that loneliness is the strongest predictor of distress in undergraduate students (McIntyre, Worsley, Corcoran, Harrison Woods & Bentall 2018). The social development opportunities offered by university clubs and societies may contribute to students' resilience and wellbeing (Holdsworth, Turner & Scott-Young 2018). Structured social interaction is particularly important for graduate research students. A study of PhD student wellbeing in Finland found that the sense of belonging in a community of scholars is a key component of wellbeing (Stubb, Pyhältö & Lonka 2011). The authors noted the importance of peer groups, particularly from within disciplinary bounds, as a support system and source of skill building. Student organisations such as GSA and its affiliated Grad Groups, have an important role in providing services and activities that support students' wellbeing.

Method

Survey design

We conducted a survey through Qualtrics to understand graduate student wellbeing and access to support services. The survey questions were split into five topics: demographics, University services, campus connectedness, impacts of Covid-19 and open comment. The survey was designed to take 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Several questions were adapted from existing research on student resilience, particularly from the survey used by Pidgeon, Rowe, Stapleton, Magyar and Lo (2014) who correlated campus connectedness to student resilience. A question on stress level was included, as a study by Eckberg, Pidgeon and Magyar (2017) found that perceived stress levels are the most significant indicator of depression symptoms. These questions allowed us to understand student resilience without asking overly invasive questions.

Recruitment

The survey was open from 30 June until 17 August 2020. It was advertised to graduate students at the University of Melbourne through GSA newsletters and social media channels, University newsletters and the University online noticeboard. Fifty randomly selected participants won a $20 supermarket voucher as a prize for taking part. We received 636 complete survey responses.

Qualitative and quantitative methods

Survey responses were managed and analysed using the software SPSS (for quantitative analysis), NVivo and Excel.

Findings

Demographics

While we have noted the number of domestic and international students below, the statistics listed are for all graduate survey participants unless otherwise specified.
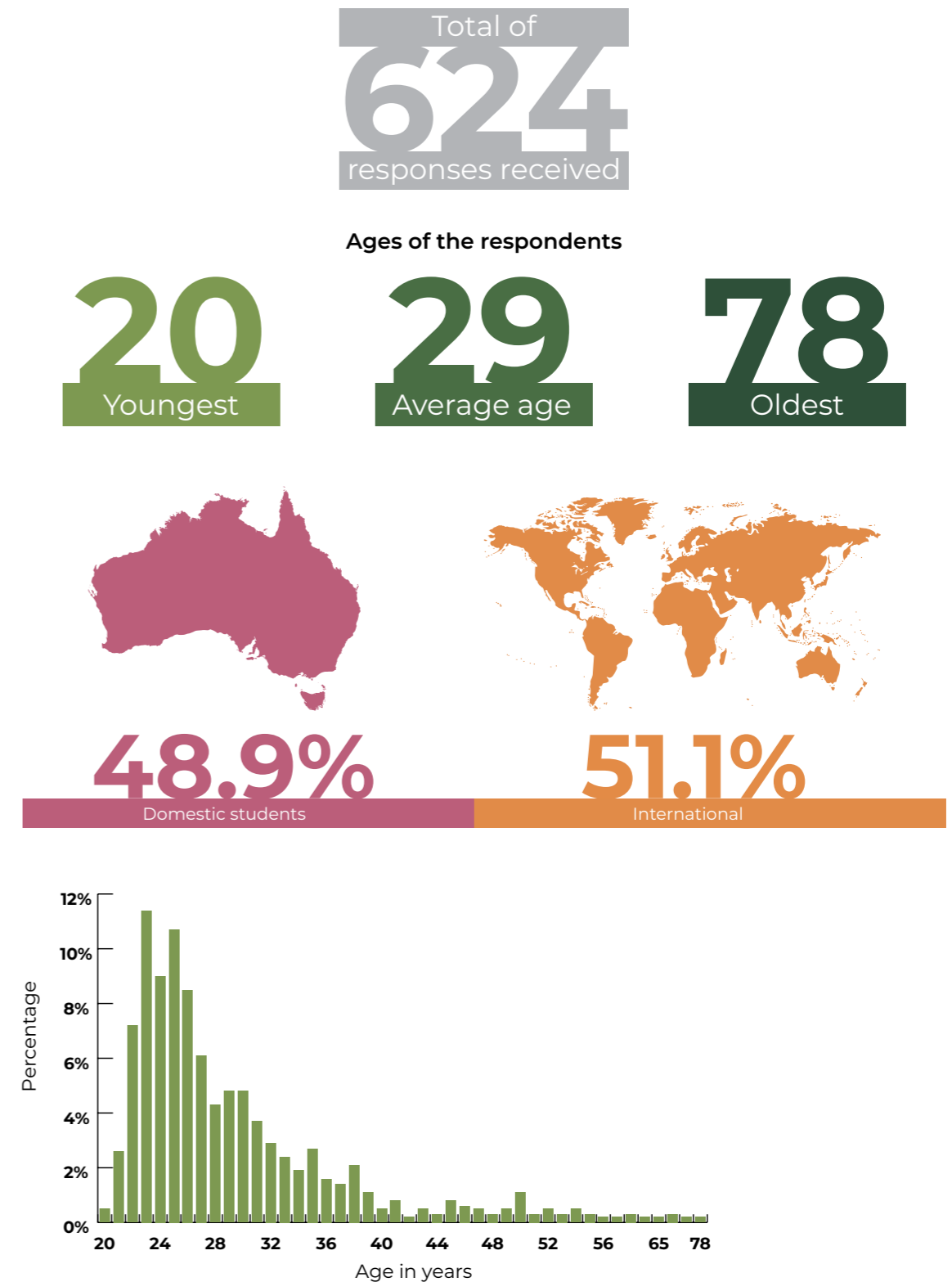
Total of
624
responses received

Ages of the respondents

20 Youngest

29 Average age

78 Oldest

48.9% Domestic students

51.1% International

Figure 1.
Age profile of survey respondents.
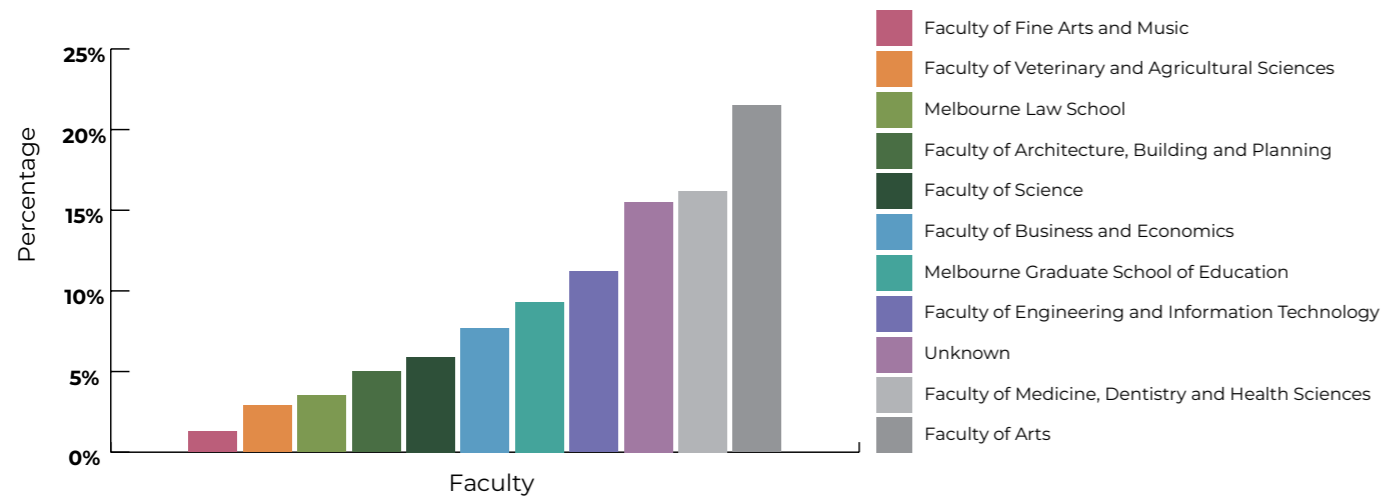
Respondents by faculty

Figure 2.
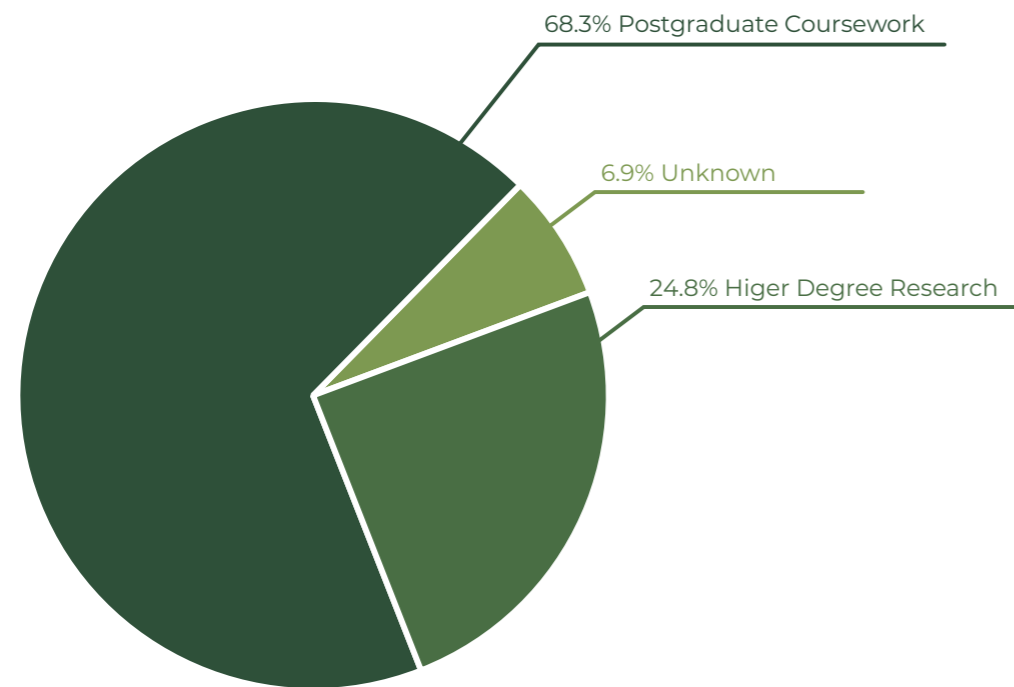*Faculties of survey respondents.*

Course type

Figure 3.
Course type of survey respondents.

Emotional wellbeing

Mental health

Mental health is a concern for the graduate student cohort. Nearly 90 per cent of respondents stated their studies were affected by stress levels this year. Mental health is an important aspect of engaged and healthy communities and more can be done to offer support preventatively and proactively. Wellbeing services and mental health support should address the entire University population, rather than approaching mental health difficulties as an isolated issue that places the responsibility on the student to access help.

Many students expressed a desire for adequate, sustainable and proactive support services. Several respondents commented on the need for improved accessibility of counselling, particularly for international students and high-risk students. Other suggestions included:

· Access to bulk-billing psychologists

· Additional counselling appointments

· More mental health and wellbeing webinars and workshops

· Wellbeing services

· Support groups

· Regular mental health check-ins for all students

· Holistic health assessments.

Some students commented that the University has a responsibility to ensure their wellbeing and provide sufficientsupport:

"The University's failure to provide adequate, clear and timely support has directly contributed to the deterioration of my mental health."

"There needs to be more rigorous mental health services provided through the University. Counselling and Psychological Services are a short-term service only and offer no real support for students struggling with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, which can often be lifelong conditions requiring mental health support and are further extremely exacerbated by the PhD experience at UniMelb."

There is a need for preventative wellbeing strategies to support students, as this student indicates:

"Support is available when you need it but there aren't enough preventive wellbeing services that the University provides before issues get to the severer stages requiring counselling or campus security."

A lack of clarity on how to access services is also an issue:

"Sometimes, the expectation is that we, as students, are solely responsible for seeking out help – and therefore, may be blamed for not being aware of the best way, or knowing -a- way to do so."

The need for preventative and adequate support could be better addressed through a University-wide approach. It's vital to improve access to services and refer students to external services as well as to wellbeing and resilience initiatives. As part of a University-wide strategy, there could be mandatory training for student-facing staff to recognise students who need support and to refer them to services.

The recent Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health argues that university counselling services are well-positioned to act as triage for students who need long-term support (Productivity Commission 2020a). The University of Melbourne Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS), while continuing to offer counselling, could support pathways to appropriate mental healthcare outside the University. This would improve access for groups such as international students, who may need assistance navigating Overseas Student Health Cover and the Australian healthcare system (Productivity Commission 2020a).

Preventative support, and the normalisation of mental health support, could improve the accessibility of services. Several students commented that anxiety is a barrier to accessing support services. Our findings align with the Productivity Commission's statements that some students do not access mental health services due to perceived stigma, while others are unaware of support services on campus (Productivity Commission 2020a).

Some students suggested the ability to anonymously chat with psychologists as a service improvement. Support services must be able to reach students who struggle to ask for help. Online or chat-based counselling options could improve access and anonymity for these groups. This is a cost-effective option for the University to improve support for students.

Better access to mental health services promotes student wellbeing, consequentially improving student life and academic excellence (Clark, Kusevskis-Hayes and Wilkinson 2019 in Productivity Commission 2020a). The need for substantial, long-term and well-resourced support is clear.

Access to services

Support services are a significant aspect of student resilience and wellbeing, enabling engaged and healthy communities. One barrier to accessing services raised by students is awareness of services available. Many students commented on the need for clearer information and marketing of services.

Several responses to a question on additional services the University should offer included services already in place, such as IT help and software, legal services, various health services and library support. This indicates a poor awareness of available services. Students could benefit from improved advertising of these services.

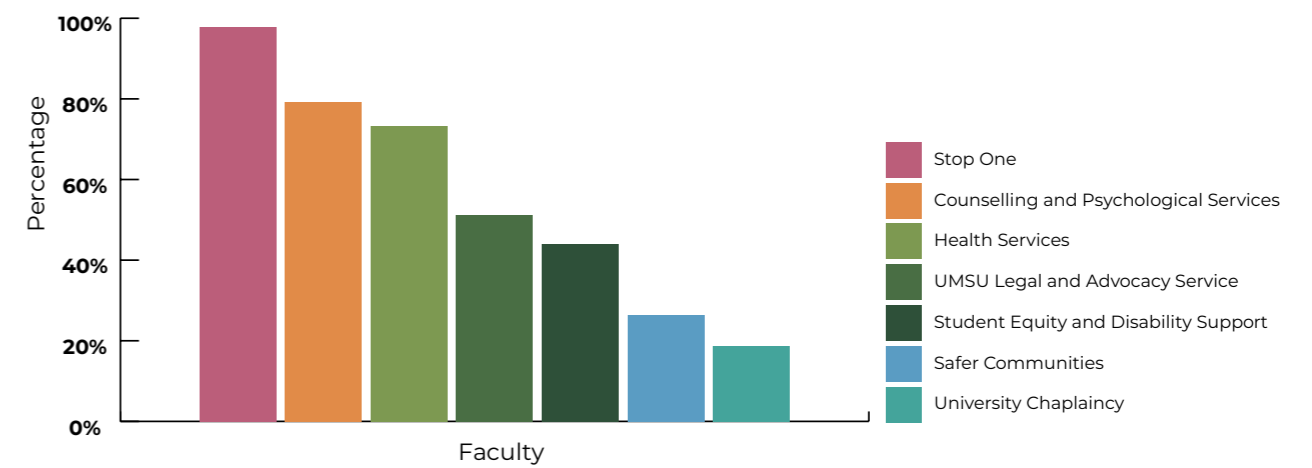**Which of the following University services are you aware of?**

Figure 4.
Respondents' awareness of services.

Wait times were another barrier to service accessibility. In improvements to services, two-thirds of students indicated the need for shorter waiting times.

Some students noted the difficulties in booking appointments for CAPS and Student Equity and Disability Support Disability Services:

"I would definitely love to see additional counselling services too – I have never booked in for an appointment personally but have had so many friends struggle from getting a counselling appointment that I have been deterred from trying to book one myself."

"I am registered with disability services and have an AAP in place. At times it can be really difficult booking an appointment – it can take weeks or even months during busy times, but I try to always plan ahead and book in advance."

Long waiting times can act as a deterrent for accessing counselling and other support services. Better resourcing of these services and reduced waiting times would support students to access the services they require.
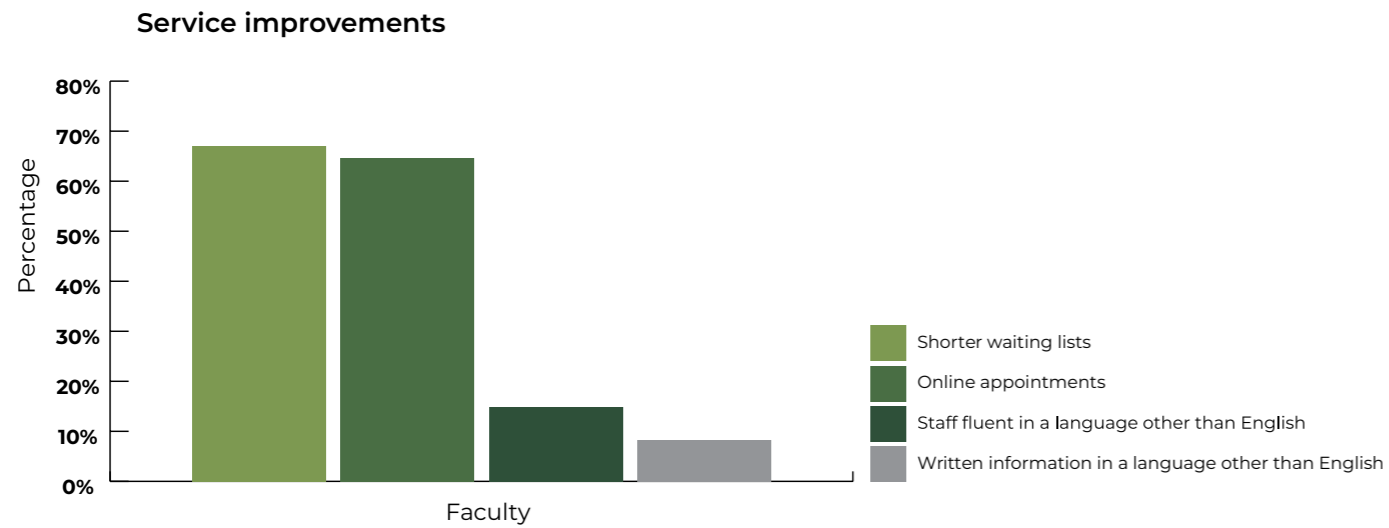
Service improvements

Figure 5.
Suggestions for University service improvements .

Service quality

Service quality across University services was raised repeatedly in the survey. Respondents commented on the need for specific advice, improved staff training and greater empathy from staff. These responses were in relation to Stop 1, CAPS and Student Equity and Disability Support. Students indicated a need for improved course advice, proactive faculty support and improved communication between Stop 1 and faculties. Students experienced difficulties accessing information about their studies through the centralised Stop 1 service. Concerns around the quality of support services are evident in these student responses:

"I registered with disability services as I have in the past as a carer and an autistic person. I had an appointment and was asked quizzically why I was even there and then told there was nothing they could do to help. She argued the point for an hour and then I left. That was most unsatisfying."

"I think it's a moral obligation for the University to inform prospective international students on the lack of support there is from the University."

Respondents raised the need to support the diverse student population. One student asked for University staff to be trained to work with marginalised groups. Others raised the need for improved services for student parents, international students and students with disabilities. Improvements for student parents include affordable and accessible childcare and occasional childcare. For international students, respondents suggested immigration advice, Australian culture classes and improved support for international students settling in. Respondents called for disability support and case workers for graduate students at the University.

All students need broad-ranging support to participate in the University community. Improving quality and access of support services would promote the University as an inclusive and equitable environment.

Social wellbeing

Feeling valued

Feeling like a valued member of the University community is important for a positive student experience. Unfortunately, a sizeable cohort of students reported that they did not feel valued. Over one-quarter of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "I feel valued as a student at the University of Melbourne". Social inclusion and cohesion are a significant part of engaged and healthy communities.

Some students, including full-fee paying international students, commented that they felt that they were merely a source of revenue for the University. Students felt like they were treated as a number, not as an individual:

"I do not feel valued by the University. I feel like a number. A source of profit."

"Make international students feel like more than just a bank account for the University."

University is a formative experience for many students and should provide opportunities for students to get involved and feel a part of the community.

For some students, the lack of practical support provided during Covid-19 compounded their feeling of not being valued by the University:

"The University of Melbourne has been a really difficult place to be for me over the past few years, and this pandemic really confirms how little they care about students. How disconnected and inhuman the place is." (Domestic coursework student)

There is an opportunity to improve how valued students feel at the University through co-curricular enrichment (non-academic university activities) and accessible, empathetic support services.

Campus connectedness

A sense of community is important to promote engaged and healthy communities. Students who feel a sense of belonging to their institution are more resilient when faced with challenges during their studies (Stubb, Pyhältö & Lonka 2011; Holdsworth, Turner & Scott-Young 2018). Fostering connections to campus has been a challenge at the University of Melbourne, as discussed in the University's Student Life White Paper (Chancellery Academic 2019).

In our survey, 40 per cent of graduate students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel like I belong at the University of Melbourne". One-quarter of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

While students may make rewarding connections on a local level, the size and siloed nature of the University does not contribute to a sense of belonging at the University as a whole. As one graduate research student expressed:

"The University itself is indifferent to me – if it wasn't me they gave this scholarship to, it'd be someone else. The people I know at university value me but the University as an abstract concept is built so it doesn't need to know who I am."

If a student does not develop relationships within their department or cohort, they may feel disconnected throughout their University journey. Attending a prestigious institution should provide students with the opportunity to learn from, and engage with, experts in their field. Unfortunately, many students do not have this sense of belonging to a community:

"I've always wanted to do my masters and imagined that I would love it. Not the panic and fear of being an undergrad, it would be lovely, happily learning more about my profession, along with a cohort of other like-minded professionals. Instead it's the opposite, I feel lost and alone and intimidated in all this."

"The PhD at UniMelb is designed to isolate students, there has to be actual change in the structure of the PhD for a community feeling to actually happen."

The comment that isolation is structurally embedded in the PhD program raises concerns. Doctoral students have little recourse or motivation when experiencing isolation if they view it as an intrinsic aspect of the course. Unfortunately, the Student Life White Paper fails to address the graduate student experience or student connectedness in a meaningful way.

This feeling of disconnection was exacerbated by campus closure during Covid-19, with the loss of face-to-face teaching, shared study spaces and in-person events. Students with caring responsibilities, international students and students with disabilities may have experienced additional isolation.

A sense of community and connectedness is an important aspect of the student experience and this must be fostered. Further work must be done to address the sense of community for graduate students. This would improve the inclusive atmosphere at the University.

Employability

Many students experience financial insecurity, which affects overall wellbeing and creates barriers to pursuing academic excellence.

Youth unemployment is a key issue and it is predicted young people will be the most affected by the Covid-19 recession (Productivity Commission 2020b; Borland & Charlton 2020). Students graduating into a recession often experience poor labour market outcomes, which can affect their job quality and income for up to ten years (Productivity Commission 2020b).

In our survey, 59% of respondents who completed their undergraduate degree at the University of Melbourne waited less than a year before starting their graduate course. The most common age of a graduate student at the University is 24. While the goal of the Melbourne Model is for students to seamlessly transition from undergraduate to graduate degrees, for some students this may indicate difficulty entering the workforce.

Graduate students raised their fears around future financial security and their transition to work. Many students had concerns about finding work after completing study:

"This [loss of casual work], along with uncertainty about the possibility of any future work, has made my financial situation extremely precarious and I am unsure if I will be able to continue paying rent/utilities when my scholarship runs out."

"I was also a bit sad that when my PhD finished, and I'd been told to expect a job in my department, it didn't happen because of Covid. Nobody seemed to recognise that as equivalent to a redundancy."

"A lot of the stress I am experiencing stems from the uncertainty in my future after the degree has finished."

"I'm deeply weighing whether my degree is worth it and how it will affect my employability as I graduate."

Graduating into a poor job market is a concern for many graduate students. Research students are in difficult positions with diminishing academic opportunities. Alongside declining Federal Government research funding, the casualisation of labour in higher education has contributed to poor job security and career prospects.

Many students called for employability services including careers counselling, employment opportunities for international students, assistance finding jobs and more internship and networking opportunities. The University must effectively address transition to work to improve employability outcomes.

Impacts of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly changed education and students' lives in 2020. In Semester 1, all teaching was rapidly moved online and campus was closed to most students. Students reported other changes to their courses including cancellation or postponement of conferences, internships, practical classes and data collection.
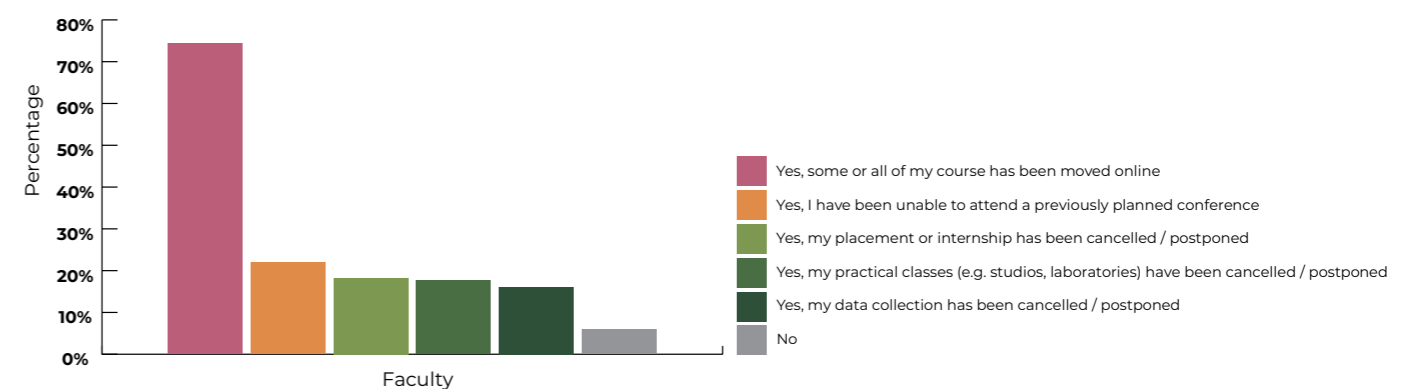
Service improvements

Figure 6.
Changes to study delivery due to Covid-19.

Outside of the University, students have contended with restrictions on movement, difficult economic conditions, and social isolation. These conditions have altered how students engage with their communities and have heightened concerns around transitioning to work. Some students have found online learning difficult and are concerned about their ability to achieve academic excellence. Almost all students reported their studies have been impacted by stress levels. Financial issues, health issues, and housing instability were also common barriers to students' engagement with their studies.
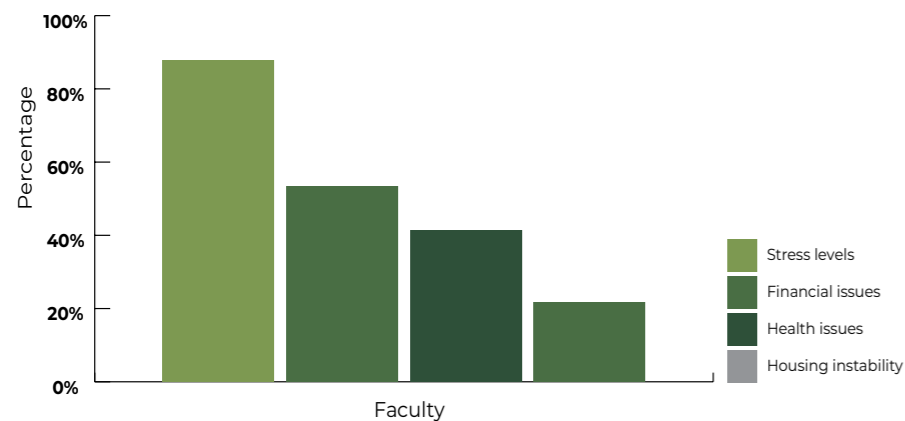
Studies impacted by

Figure 7.
Impacts of Covid-19 on studies.

Graduate researchers

Graduate researchers highlighted that they received insufficient support in maintaining their candidature during Covid-19. Moreover, many commented on the lack of clarity on what support would be provided. Graduate researchers expressed a desire for extensions, paid leave and flexibility to support their studies.

Some felt their struggles were not even being acknowledged owing to a 'business as usual' approach.

"We are routinely told to remain productive, and yet are not provided nearly enough (or any) information regarding our future candidatures or funding situations. Our struggles and needs continue to be unaddressed."

"The lack of knowledge about the kind of ongoing support we are going to get and without proper acknowledgement from the University regarding how badly we've all been impacted by COVID, it doesn't feel like the University values us or has any invested interest in us beyond how our research may one day benefit them."

Graduate researchers reported feeling unsupported and undervalued because their struggles weren't acknowledged by the University. The University could improve communication with graduate researchers by expressing empathy and acknowledgement of the difficulties faced during this period.

Stress around university were exacerbated for some students due to caring responsibilities.

"There has been little acknowledgement of graduate students with caring responsibilities. An automatic extension for PhD students who have children at home due to lockdowns in Melbourne should be granted."

Balancing providing care with academic responsibilities is difficult for many students and this has only been exacerbated by the 2020 lockdowns. More work must be done to assist students with caring responsibilities to succeed at university.

Coursework students

Coursework students have experienced significant disruptions to their studies due to Covid-19. Key issues that have impacted graduate coursework students include the move to online learning, online exams and changes to placements or internships.

Students have also articulated concerns about the value and quality of online courses. Issues expressed in our survey include poor translation of course content into online learning and the inability to effectively communicate with other students. Reusing old content, such as previous years' recorded lectures, has also been a concern.

Some students commented that teaching staff have been inadequately prepared for the transition to online learning, impacting the value of their courses. For example:

"My studies got impacted by overwhelmingness of the situation and transition of in-campus study to a fully online mode. It was, and it is, a bit hard to cope with it! One of the reasons is that staff do not know much about this new scheme and are sometimes confused and transfer this confusion to students."

While the move to online learning was sudden and unexpected, students were not adequately supported through the process. This has affected academic outcomes and wellbeing.

Students experienced loneliness, financial hardship and uncertainty about the future during Covid-19. To enable students to transition back to campus in 2021, the University must ensure that appropriate support services are in place.

Recommendations

Recommendations for GSA

- GSA should work with students, including international students, to increase awareness and accessibility of counselling.

- GSA should continue to host events to provide opportunities for graduate students to form social connections.

- GSA should continue to facilitate student-led opportunities to form social connections through Grad Groups.

- GSA should support students' employability by offering leadership training, leadership opportunities and volunteering opportunities.

Recommendations for University of Melbourne

- The University should support students' emotional wellbeing using a whole-of-institution approach to mental health. This includes:

- Participating in the National University Mental Health Framework

- Improving training for all student-facing staff to identify and assist students who indicate poor mental health

- Improving mental health awareness and literacy among students

- Improving access to support services across the University, including reducing counselling waiting lists

- Investigating options for long-term psychological support for students

- Undertaking a student evaluation of Student Equity and Disability Support to ensure students' needs are met

- Deliver extension and special consideration processes that are student-centred, rather than punitive. This should include ongoing special consideration for student parents.

- Addressing institutional structural issues that can affect student wellbeing.

The University should make improvements to students' social wellbeing by:

- Providing spaces for informal socialisation across the University

- Supporting student associations to deliver student-led social and extracurricular opportunities

- Providing occasional childcare on campus to support students with young children to get involved in the University community

- Applying a holistic approach to graduate student life.

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