

**Student Report to the Academic Board
Meeting 6/2021**

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1. Revisitation, and subsequent extension, of the Satisfied Faculty Requirements (SFR) component of the Academic Safety Net in light of changed circumstances

When the Academic Board met, discussed, and voted on the extension of the Academic Safety Net at Meeting 4 on 16 June some almost three months ago, Victoria was in markedly different, and better circumstances. On June 16, Victoria was six days out of Lockdown Four. Not even a month later, on July 15, Victoria found itself in Lockdown Five; another twelve days confined to home as the Delta variant spread throughout Victoria. This lockdown saw the first week of semester delivered online.

When lockdown lifted on July 27th, we all, staff and students alike, had a renewed sense of optimism for the semester ahead. Health authorities had traced and isolated cases, and on August 4th the state lodged zero cases; the same day that NSW notched 262 cases (where cases have since surged to well over 1,000 a day, with some hospitals unable to admit new patients, and ambulances responding to nearly 500 COVID call outs each day). Students had been on campus for Week 2, and there was hope of replicating an experience akin to the nearly 12 uninterrupted weeks of semester at the beginning of this year.

However, one day later, with the emergence of new mystery cases, the decision was made to once again put the state back into lockdown; a lockdown we still find ourselves in today. It's near impossible to accurately articulate the feeling of hopelessness many students are feeling during Lockdown Six, which has effectively been extended indefinitely until either COVID Zero is achieved, or more likely, when certain double dose vaccination targets are hit (80% of those aged 16 and over in Victoria is forecasted for some time in November).

Moreover, factors present in this semester specifically have made this lockdown particularly challenging. The continuing global pandemic is one thing, but this has been combined with the situation in Afghanistan, the recent IPCC report on climate change, the Earthquake in Haiti, the floods in Tokyo and military coup in Myanmar to name a few. For international students both offshore and at home, these circumstances have led students feeling a sense of helplessness and uncertainty, alongside additional concern for their families and friends. More than ever, international students both offshore and in Australia need support.

The cumulative effect of six lockdowns, totalling some 220+ days since March 2020, as well as a very real sense of burnout, 'Zoom fatigue,' anxiety, anger over the vaccine rollout, grief, and the feeling of missing out on another year of milestones and in person study combine to challenge even the most stoic, strong, and well off students; not to mention those who are now unemployed, can't work, can't study, or live in fragile circumstances. MSA has been conducting a petition on the SFR Component of the Academic Safety Net, and has received over 130 responses thus far. Many students have indicated that this "stopped them from deferring or dropping units".

The purpose of this paper is not to discredit lockdown; each of those signed on to this report understands the importance of curbing the spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19 until the population is vaccinated against it. The purpose of this paper is to ask the board to reconsider its position on Component A, the SFR provision, in light of the completely changed circumstances we now find ourselves in.

Whilst the continuation of Component B, the withdrawal of fail grades from the academic record, as well as aspects of Component C, allowing students to sit as many supplementary assessments as they qualify for, provides some form of protection for students, it's clear now that additional measures are needed to further support students at this extremely difficult time. Components B and C are effective in that they provide coverage for students who fail one or more subjects, or qualify for one or more supplementaries, but do not help students who see a uniform decrease across all of their subjects. The SFR Component, along with Components B and C, works in conjunction to provide the most comprehensive safety net possible.

Other universities around Australia, particularly NSW and of course Victoria, are also reconsidering and reimplementing academic support measures in light of the aforementioned changed extenuating circumstances. The University of Melbourne recently reimplemented their "WAMnesty" policy, and La Trobe university their "V Grade" policy.

For Monash's Malaysia campus, Component A **was** extended due to having been through many long-standing lockdowns; One from 10/05/21 till this day as well as many weeks of intermittent-lockdowns (more than 15) in 2020. The already bad and worsening infection rate also played an important role. Victoria and NSW now find themselves in a similar lockdown situation, thus shouldn't the same measures be extended across all campuses?

The elected student members of the Academic Board, as well as Presidents of the MSA, MONSU Peninsula, and MONSU Caulfield, are of the firm belief that-the reinstatement of the SFR provision of the ASN is imperative and vital to serve the Monash student community best as we find ourselves in the strictest lockdown conditions again, with no end in sight this semester. However, with the change in circumstances as outlined above, the compassionate grading policy that is the SFR provision cannot be justifiably removed until a genuine sense of normalcy is restored or a new policy is developed. The student representatives look forward to working closely with the University to innovate the ASN support policy for the future.

Students understand that Monash University, and the Academic Board, doesn't have a quick-fix for the pandemic. They do hope for compassion, and an understanding of the circumstances. The Academic Board, as Monash's body responsible for oversight of the University's academic affairs, must use its power for good in this instance.

This report is also cosigned by:

Marni O'Connell (President - MSA)

Anna Purtill (President - MONSU Caulfield)

Alice Peddle (President - MONSU Peninsula)