

Student services suffer loss

“Students need services but can’t always afford them.”

Student services on campus have decreased dramatically since the introduction of voluntary student unionism, according to submissions for a review being undertaken by the Federal Government.

The submissions into *The Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students* were published last month online.

According to the submissions millions of dollars of income previously used to provide student services have been lost. Monash said it had lost \$2.4 million, Swinburne estimates a loss of \$2.8 million and Deakin lost an estimated \$5 million. RMIT and Melbourne University were the biggest hit with approximately \$10 million and \$11.5 million.

Much of this income went to student unions to provide services and in many cases student services have had to be axed, unless university administrations find alternate sources of funding to give to student unions.

This though creates tension when it comes to student advocacy and in some cases universities are providing the funding for cases against themselves.

Monash Student Association said in its submission that it had been forced to drop some services this year and to greatly reduce others.

The Indigenous Office – that once advocated, and researched Indigenous issues in the higher education sector – is now closed and any work in this area only done if a specific grant is received.

Student radio at the Clayton campus is barely surviving, under constant threat of being cut altogether.

The Association still has a functioning transport office but its services are now restricted to bus timetables and volunteer bike programs. Previously it provided car-pooling co-ordination and transport advocacy to the university.

Research and policy work undertaken by the Association has been greatly reduced, affecting the support given to students in advocacy work. The income previously paid to office-bearers to represent students has also been reduced.

“It’s difficult to maintain the presence we once enjoyed. (Office Bearers) need second jobs in order to support themselves, pay is very poor and it is difficult to live on,” the MSA submission said.

Monash student Dash Jayasuriya said the main impact of VSU has been the threat to aspects of university life that he considers essential.

“I see a growing amount of student apathy when it comes to involvement in university activities, a problem which is exacerbated by the lack of resources and finances needed by many of the providers of these activities.”

“Considering this is supposed to be the most exciting and engaging period of my life, I believe that the threat to university culture caused by VSU will have a lasting impact on university students of my generation should it continue.”

Deakin University Student Association (DUSA) has been forced to discontinue many of its multicultural days or cultural events, as well as printing and binding services, free or subsidized sporting equipment, legal advice and funding for elite athletes. It also no longer provides regular free drinks and barbecues to all students, restricting it to DUSA members or user pays.

DUSA president Cayla Edwards told *Utimes* that students need services and the student association is part of university life.

“Students need services but they can’t always afford them.”

She said the introduction of VSU had made DUSA realize the value of the organization, but despite this, services were being lost.

“Two highly trained athletes (for instance) can no longer get funding from the university because of VSU”.

Melbourne University Student Union in its submission said there had been a drop of up to 25 per cent in sporting club membership with many clubs relying on alumni donations for survival. Service facilities and equipment provided by clubs has diminished, which has resulted in less members and some clubs even discontinuing.

The Union said it had also been forced to reduce the range of student representative services it offered.

The RMIT Student Union submission said students would have to pay dearly for services based on a user pay service and some services would be abolished if other funding wasn’t found.

The Union also said resources had been lost already especially affecting the women’s and queer’s rooms, where space has been lost to two thirds its original capacity. A meeting room utilized by various clubs and societies had also been lost, reassigned back to the university.

Social activities such as live bands, free food, winter soup evenings, lunchtime concerts, BBQs and film festivals are all now running less frequently, the submission said.


RMIT Student Union president Robert Harding told *Utimes* that while the VSU had been a negative

thing, it had also made the organisation more accountable, and more relevant to students.

Swinburne Student Union said in its submission that social activities had been negatively influenced. Activities such as free drinks and sausage sizzles are now severely regulated, as the once student union funded cafes have been privatized, and don’t want interference

with their profits, the Union’s submission said.

Speaking to *Utimes*, the Union’s president Casper Cumming said, “The (university) culture is diminished with less clubs and societies and is less student centred.”

“Funding is controlled by staff, and is less oriented for the student,” he said. 

Arabel Lim



Baroni giveaway winner

Monash Caulfield student Xina Xia has won the Baroni Scooter Giveaway. Xina is studying Design (Visual Communications) and plans to head off to Europe when she finishes study to work in a design studio there.

Her first journey on her new Baroni Scooter – unless her mum gets on board first – will be a shopping trip to Highpoint.

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