

## Briefs...

### SMS alert

Monash University is one of the first universities in Australia to implement an SMS campus alert system, allowing the university to quickly provide urgent information to participating staff and students on Australian campuses via bulk automated SMS messages to pre-nominated mobile phones.

Alert messages will be sent when essential services are disrupted, campus access becomes restricted or in other cases of disruption or emergency. Short messages can be sent to thousands of mobile phones in a matter of seconds.

Vice president (administration) Peter Marshall said, "We hope the Monash safety text alert system will give increased peace of mind to those staff and students who elect to participate in the system."

He said to be part of the alert service staff and students must register their mobile phone number via a secure and confidential on-line site.

### Muslim guide

Victoria University has launched a guide for Muslim students, acknowledging their specific cultural, religious and social needs.

The 80 page Muslim Student Guide to Living in Melbourne contains detailed maps, colored photos, addresses, and contact details about a range of services to help Melbourne's Muslim students.

The guide covers Melbourne mosques and prayer centres, Muslim student societies, Halal restaurants and food suppliers, Halal food on campus, Islamic bookstores and clothing shops, Female doctors and dentists, Islamic media, Islamic women's groups and Islamic celebrations and prayer times.

### New pharmacy name

The Victorian College of Pharmacy, a faculty of Monash, has changed its name to the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences.

Faculty dean Professor Bill Charman said the name change, along with the Parkville campus's \$45 million redevelopment and new research building, represented an exciting and bold step forward.

"The new name clearly articulates our vision as an eminent Australian faculty with a breadth of expertise that enables us to deliver on all aspects of pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences."

# Refugees on campus



Refugee reality hit La Trobe. Bundoora campus last month with a mock refugee camp set up on the lawns. Organised by the student group, Community for AlterNative Development the event – based on an original Oxfam project – aimed to highlight the experiences of displaced people around the world.

# TAFE fee slug

TAFE students will be slugged with massive fee increases from next year, under a plan the Victorian Government hopes to make more palatable by introducing university-style loans.

Under the plan, TAFE fees for diploma and advanced diploma courses will progressively go up over the next four years from \$877 to \$2500 by 2012, while the cost of lower qualifications – Certificates 3 and 4 – will increase by 50 per cent in the next two years.

The plan will be in effect for TAFE students enrolling from July next year.

The university-style loan system will allow students to defer paying for their TAFE courses until their income reaches \$41,000.

However students seeking a government loan will need to apply and there are restrictions. Students who already have a higher education qualification, such as a degree, who want to enrol in Certificate 3 or 4 courses to enhance their employability with some more practical skills and knowledge are not entitled to a loan.

"These students won't be paying \$2500 a year. Indeed they may be paying more like what international

students who study at TAFE currently pay and that is in some instances, as much as \$9000 a semester," Australian Education Union branch vice-president Gillian Robertson told Utimes.

"Obviously the government does understand that the average person will not now be able to afford to come to TAFE, so they are putting in place a HECS-style loan system, which after all is nothing more than a debt," Robertson said.

"People who go to TAFE are often debt avert. We have many students who choose TAFE over universities because they want to avoid the debt

that HECS enforces on them."

Robertson also said the new plan offered no guarantee beyond the next two years that fees for apprentices would not increase.

National Union of Students Victorian president Sarah Cole said high fees were "putting people off studying".

"The Victorian Government needs to really watch the fees and make sure that they are not increasing to a point where it is stopping people from getting an education.

"They want to encourage people to take up TAFE places, and I don't think increasing the fee will encourage them."

Coco Ho

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