



To: Whom it May Concern

I am a postgraduate Journalism student at James Cook University, Townsville. I believe that the government's higher education reform package is illogical and will compromise the quality of education, devalue the nation's international reputation and further erode the egalitarianism this nation was founded on. I wish to express my vehement opposition of this Bill through this personal submission to the Senate Inquiry.

I believe that JCU Student Association's mandate of supporting the government's legislation has had a terrible impact on the transmission of information regarding how VSU will affect our university.

The JCUSA posed the argument as choice NOT to belong as opposed to the more tolerant freedom TO belong. The SA's complete support of the VSU legislation was also apparent in the way they targeted their message. Firstly, money was the bottom line, taking advantage of student's lack of financial security. They also criticised the political ideology of other associations who had chosen to oppose the bill and failed to deliver on their promise of promoting the benefits of belonging to the association.

Some factors for your consideration include:

The time lag and poor promotion of what services and facilities the Student Association provides as differentiated from the University proper.

The employment of a Market Research strategy initiated in the last weeks before the end of semester, coupled with the lack of transparency shown on decisions made by student councillors.

The Townsville campus has also faced criticism from the other campuses who feel they are under-represented on student issues and stand to lose much more than the Douglas campus after the legislation comes into effect.

Student Association employees were directed not to speak publicly about the legislation regardless of whether they supported VSU or opposed it.

As part of my journalism studies, I conducted informal interviews with staff merely for a class exercise, (not for publication ) but was met with "no comments" from a host of employees. One of whom even declined to give her name. Clearly, this shows the climate of fear and influence wielded by the student association.

On a personal level, JCU has dramatically improved my state of mind, confidence and future prospects. Last year I was living in Cairns with my parents as I had completed my Bachelor of Arts degree at Melbourne University and was suffering depression which then became complicated by family problems and an eating disorder.

My first go at university in Melbourne was negative. I found it hard to fit in and didn't feel like I mattered. I don't want to devalue the quality of education I received, but in terms of "student life" I missed out.

As I began to turn my life around I realised that I wanted to go back to study and decided to stay in North Queensland. The postgraduate diploma in Journalism was only available to me in Townsville so I had to move four hours away, find somewhere to live and begin study.

Initially, I was scared that I would not be able to cope with the demands of full-time study and was concerned that I would be out of my depth. On my first day I went to the Postgraduate Students Association Room and met Bronwyn, the Pgrad Research officer and some fellow postgraduates. I immediately felt welcomed and was reassured not only by staff, but by the friendly attitude of students.

Within one week, I had met and talked to more people than I ever had in my four years at Melbourne University. Further, I began to get involved in student life and have since become a regular contributor of the student newspaper, am member of a number of clubs and one committee and hold a position on the Postgraduate Students Association as CAPA liaison officer.

JCU fosters communication between students and with staff, it encourages outside activities and has community links so vital to the prosperity of North Queensland which is typically overlooked as a rural backwater with little in common with the Southern parts of Qld, much less the rest of the country!

I am so thankful that I decided to return to study at JCU. I feel lucky to have had the chance to get involved in student life. At Melbourne University, individualism, elitism and self-preservation is rife. I got a second chance and I feel for students who may not even have a chance at all to experience the opportunity of gaining a holistic university education.

Sincerely,

Jessica Donnellan