

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
Legislation Committee

Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005

Submission no: 21

Received: 14/06/2005

Submitter: Ms Chyloe Kurdas
Secretary

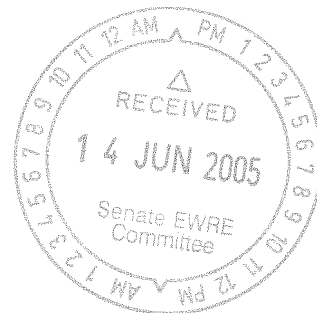
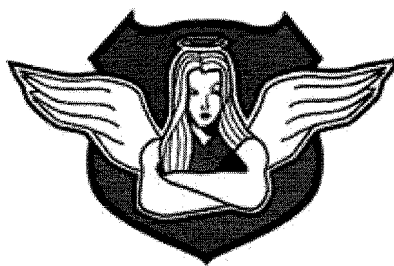
Organisation: Melbourne University Women's Football Club

Address: Melbourne University Women's Football Club
c/ Melbourne University Sports Association
Tin Alley
PARKVILLE VIC 30582

Phone: 03 9527 5737

Fax:

Email: senator@alphalink.com.au



Melbourne University Women's Football Club
Providing Opportunities for Girls & Women in Football Since 1997

Chyloe Kurdas
Melbourne University Women's Football Club
c/ Melbourne University Sports Association
Tin Alley
Parkville
VIC 3052
0408275737
senator@alphalink.com.au

May 10, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

The following submission outlines Melbourne University Women's Football Club's (MUWFC) concerns about the impact of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU). VSU will greatly impact upon our club. On the small chance that we are able to survive as a stand-alone all female club, we certainly will not function in the same capacity that we are now and our position as the biggest women's football club in Australia would be lost.

Whilst we understand the Federal Government's concerns about the appropriate use of student funds, we believe that there are many essential services currently provided for students through their fees to enable them to cope with the physical and psychological demands of student life. There are very few students who would say that they haven't enjoyed or needed the benefits that their student fees have provided for them on campus at some point. Health, information, employment and advocacy services are very important as are the opportunities provided to students to develop strong and positive social networks. The provision of a vast array of clubs and sporting organisations on campus is not only important in creating these opportunities, but also encourages young people to invest in their own physical health and wellbeing through exercise, simply through being accessible both geographically and financially.

We hope that the following submission displays not only the benefits provided to the student and local community, but the importance of a club like ours in providing a place for women and girls to remain active in a safe and supportive culture.

ABOUT THE CLUB

The Melbourne University Women's Football Club (MUWFC) was established in 1997 by Mary Cenacchi and is affectionately known as the MUGARS (Melbourne University Girls Aussie Rules Squad). Mary was a student at Melbourne University (MU) who didn't have much of an interest in playing Australian Rules football but wanted to provide a place where many of her football-mad student friends could play. The first two years at the club were developmental years, where losses of more than twenty goals were a regular occurrence. By 1999 however, the club had developed a core group of players and via the recruitment of a new coach in Victorian Women's Football League (VWFL) Life Member and former Stawell Gift winner, Bernadette Marantelli, and some enthusiastic new members, the club made its first finals' appearance. Numbers had grown so much in fact, that, in 2000, a second team was entered into the VWFL competition. In 2001 the

MUWFC made the first of four consecutive Division 1 grand finals, and in 2002 and 2003, succeeded in winning back-to-back Division 1 Premierships, a feat that many sceptics only a few years earlier had thought to be unachievable by such a young and under resourced club. The Division 2 team had also contributed to the club's successes, rising from near the ladder's end to win a Premiership in 2003 also. The success and friendliness of the club was contagious, and numbers continued to outgrow regular playing opportunities. By 2003 there was a need to enter a third team in the VWFL and the MUWFC officially became Australia's biggest women's football club. In 2005, the club joined forces with Football Victoria and entered a Youth Girls Under 17 team to participate in the Inaugural Western Bulldogs Forever Cup competition.

The club's on field success has produced a number of elite level athletes, including nearly twenty Victorian representatives and a number of All-Australian representatives. The club has produced the VWFL Division 1 Best and Fairest Runner Up five times, and three winners of the prestigious Best First Year Player award, two Victorian Vice Captains, the Best on Ground award winner at the 2000 National Championships, two Victoria Metro Captains and a Victoria Country Captain. The MUWFC was also the 2002 gold medallist in the inaugural Women's Australian Rules football Southern University Games (SUG), with captain Bronwyn McGorlick becoming the first woman in the history of Melbourne University to be awarded a Blues Award for her efforts playing Australian Rules football at Intervarsity competition.

The club is very active in its local community, volunteering their services for Active Australia, the Yarraville Rotary Club and the Wesley City Mission. The club provides free football clinics for girls in local schools and has also recently begun mentoring a thirteen year old indigenous girl from Alice Springs. In 2004 the MUWFC won the TXU Blood Bank Challenge, by donating more blood than any other club in Victoria, male or female, junior or senior. In the same year the MUWFC also had the privilege of winning the first women's game ever staged on the Melbourne Cricket Ground as part of the AFL's Women's Week celebrations. In 2005 the MUWFC is hosting a number of Northern Territory representatives following the National Championships in a sister-club arrangement. Finally, the MUWFC members has contributed an aggregate of around 10 years service on the VWFL Executive in its 8 years of operation.

EXPERIENCES OF CURRENT AND FORMER MEMBERS

JANE CLIFTON – MU STUDENT 1999-2002 – former Mansfield resident

The MUGARS...a strange name for a footy club who completely changed the path of my life. As a country kid moving to the city to study at Melb Uni, it was not the easiest transition. Being a sports lover, I looked to sport as my way to try and meet people and have fun at Melbourne Uni. Definitely the best times of my life so far have been those first years of footy. I met my closest friends at this club and ending up travelling the world with a fellow MUGAR.

A club like this is almost impossible to come by now - a group of girls passionate about their love for footy and fun who would do anything, unpaid, to keep it alive. I can't really describe the feeling of having fifty women always looking out for your back.

What an absolute disaster for a place like Melbourne Uni to allow these clubs to die. The culture of a uni is built on the clubs and groups available to us all, and I'm sure I would not have made it through my degree without my MUGARS pushing me along. I would never have met these amazing women who are my very dear friends.

WENDY MORROW – MU STUDENT 1997-2001

In 1997 I moved to Melbourne from a farm near Stawell, straight out of high school but eager to leave following many years of a tough family life leading to chronic depression, lowered self esteem and a two year battle with anorexia (yes you wouldn't think to look at me now). I had never really liked Melbourne as a kid but at the time anything was better than staying where I was, so I enrolled in a Bachelor of Computer Science at Melbourne Universtiy and was lucky to be excepted into St Hilda's college for the year.

I had no friends in Melbourne and didn't even know how to buy a ticket on the tram, however I knew I had to try and meet some people. Therefore O-Week came, and I sheepishly walked around surveying the many clubs from the "Simpsons" right through to the "Chocolate Lovers Society". Then something caught my eye, "Women's Football". I didn't even know women played aussie rules!! Behind the tressel table was "Mary

Cennachi", with a huge welcoming grin and I instantly signed up. Next thing you know I was attending my first Mugar training (spelt "Muggers" back then) and have never looked back.

There was no Executive in those days, just Mary. We trained in primitive conditions with only a few footballs we dug up from home . . . we fought the council for training grounds and were lucky if we had one light on the corner of an oval. We fought the uni for a home ground, while we continued to struggle to field a team. All the while Mary's phone bill continued to increase as she would do the weekly ring around. The VWFL (who only had one division at the time) didn't want a "uni team" as they believed we would never be competitive! The only team we could beat was Box Hill and even then we struggled.

As the old timers can account for, I wasn't much of a pub goer in the first year, still scarred from many years of emotional abuse. Slowly however I began to gain some self esteem due to the life long friend ships I began to develop at the MUWFC. They were and still are the best group of people I have ever met! During my now 8-9 years of involvement with the MUWFC, I have been privileged to hold many different roles including a player in all three teams at one point or another, 2nd division Captain, Treasurer and trainer.

I made an impromptu speech once where I said that the MUWFC was "my family"! And how true that was. It is a group of people that stick by you no matter what, will never leave someone behind and will make you believe that you can achieve what ever you want . . . without the MUGARS' support, I would probably not be here to relay this story today. I now have self confidence, I have quit the job I hate (IT) and am now enjoying the life of a Paramedic! For the first time in my life I can safely say I am HAPPY . . . and I owe a lot of that to my family the MUGARS! I will fight all the way to ensure that the MUGARS stay around to help someone else out in need!

BRIANNA LAUGHER - 4th year BA/BSc, Melbourne University

My family lives in rural NSW. I came to Melbourne University because they offered me a scholarship. I discovered the MUWFC table at the Clubs & Societies Day in first week and tentatively began training. Four years later I am still at university (I have a five-year degree) and still with the MUWFC. I doubt that I would still be here in Melbourne without knowing that my club was there for me, without the social ties and experiences I've had here that have shaped me and my life. I often look around the club and simply feel amazed at being in the company of so many extraordinary women at one time. It is clear to me that this club creates leaders and passion, inspires and SAVES people more than any other organisation or group I have ever come in contact with. It gives women a chance to exercise things they may never have had an opportunity to do so before (and I'm not talking about hamstrings): it gives them a chance to experience an active, diverse, body-positive, fully inclusive and supportive environment, which helps many individual women flourish in all facets of their life.

Each dollar invested in preventative healthcare saves itself many times over in treatment. Financing women's sport in general (and the MUWFC in particular) is an investment in women's emotional and physical wellbeing. Surely as a society we are obligated to look after our young women (and young men of course!), foster leaders, support talent and encourage each individual to achieve their best. This is not just a minority "women's interest" issue - we all have mothers, daughters, sisters, partners, friends, cousins. The MUGARS is the soundest investment I know of in this arena, sounder than any yoga class, gym pass, therapy, self-help book. To let the achievements and future possibilities of this club now fall away owing to our supposed "choice" is no choice at all. No sane person could possibly witness the things this club does and allow that to be lost.

AMANDA MCCAIN – MU INTERNATIONAL STUDENT – 2005

One of the main purposes of studying in a foreign country is to interact with the people and learn as much about the culture as possible. I came to Australia to do just that, but I found myself living with only other International Students and not meeting many Australians. Classes weren't the answer since I felt relatively small and shy amongst such large groups of Australians in my lectures. My solution was to join the MUGARS. The club was perfect for providing me with about 100 new Australian friends who were perfectly happy to share their culture not to mention some of them had never played the game before either. We would get to learn the rules and skills together. What more of a truly Australian experience could I ask for than playing footy with a group of "natives"? I know that joining the club has certainly enhanced my enjoyment of my short time here. Without it, I believe I would have spent the entire duration of my time here without every truly getting to know any Aussies and that would have been an incredible loss.

In conclusion, the Mugar is an irreplaceable club that must find a way to continue on and continue to provide International Students with a place to find new friends and a new sport to love.

YUMI RYDLUN – INTERNATIONAL STUDENT - 2005

I am only going to be in Melbourne through the end of June exams at Melbourne Uni... (then one or two more trips) and then back to the USA. It's definitely been a cool experience thus far and the next two months are going to fly but I'm going to make the most out of it.

Joining the MUGARS was a good move. I didn't even know Melbourne's footy is different from other variations within Australia, and I knew Aussie Rules is different from the USA's rugby, but I wanted to know how. I wanted to try it (and bring back stories to my friends in the States) I also simply wanted to be outside! So I went to the first few practices. Every time I do go to practice and games I feel like a kid again. Of course there is more responsibility, but it's that feeling that I really enjoy in being part of a sports team. And the MUGARS really ranks high in my book because it is just so FUN, so SUPPORTIVE, and a LEARNING experience! I would make every practice and game if I could. The MUGARS enthusiasm and encouragement really is appreciated.

CHYLOE KURDAS – MU STUDENT 2000

I played at Parkdale for 2 years back in 1997 & 1998. A good friend of mine suggested I come down and loved it. Unfortunately I didn't enjoy the culture of the club or it's poor support of it's members. At the end of 1998 I decided that I needed a change if I was going to continue playing. I remembered playing against MU and thought that even though they finished at the bottom of the ladder, they were the friendliest opposition I had played against. Around the time I met a MUGAR at a football game and told her of my interest in playing elsewhere. In true MUGAR style, she answered all of my questions in a friendly and supportive manner. True to form, she called me in February of 1999 to invite me to preseason training and along I went. Ten minutes into my first session and I knew that I was home. I knew from that moment that I would never play football for another club. I'm actually a very shy person around people I don't know, but everyone was just amazingly supportive and encouraging. On my second night of training our coach invited me to the pub. I told her that I didn't drink and didn't like going out to pubs. She simply replied, "I don't care what you drink. Have a raspberry lemonade if you want. What's important is that you get to know the team and we get to know who you are! It's about feeling a part of it all."

I had never felt so good about myself. Around the same time I was coming to terms with an eating disorder. I was beginning to manage my bulimia much better however, I found it difficult at times as I lacked a lot of self confidence and didn't like myself very much at all. To be accepted unconditionally and to watch others experience that also was unbelievably supportive and has done wonders for how I feel about myself. The space to figure myself out and just be who I am without constant judgement was critical in whom I have become. For that I will always be grateful.

The MUWFC has also given me an opportunity to be a pioneer. All of us who take the field are paving a pathway for our young girls who want to do something they've never been encouraged to do. This gives me a sense of purpose. It is comforting to know that when I die that I will have been able to contribute to many people's lives and that I have thrived on the many ways in which they have contributed to my life. If the MUWFC was to no longer exist, I would honestly feel that half of my family no longer existed. I love the fact that every preseason I gain another 30 new friends who all bring with them some amazing experiences, skills and knowledge to make this club even more wonderful.

KATE FRANCIS – MU STUDENT 2000-2002; Masters Candidate 2005

The MUWFC has given me the chance to:

- 1. Develop new friends across different levels of university life – post graduates, undergraduates and past students. This has allowed me to learn more about facilities on campus, higher level students have acted as mentors and given course advice.*
- 2. Be involved in organized, regular physical activity, something I had stopped doing since I was 17.*
- 3. Develop leadership skills, team work skills, self confidence, and problem solving skills.*

My time with the MUWFC has been very rewarding and I'm grateful to have the opportunity to be involved in this sporting club as part of my university undergraduate and postgraduate years.

LUCINDA PULS – MU STUDENT 1994 – 1999, 2005; Founding member

I was 20 when I found out that there was such a thing as a women's football league and my friend Mary said she was going to start a team. I was not a country girl lost in the big smoke. I already had a social life, I was imbibing plenty of vitamins, and I felt ok about myself, although I was pretty quiet. So I can't really say that the MUGARS saved me, but the black and blue bug bit me many years ago and the crazy crazy MUGAR fever still has me in its grip.

I was 21 when we ran out to play our first official VWFL match, and I made my maiden voyage to Casualty (the first of many) later that same day. My personal playing highlight remains the goal I kicked in the last game of that first season. I had to play at full forward because I had two broken hands, and I was ecstatic when I managed to soccer one through from waist height.

You could say it was a year of blood and broken bones, but the overriding memory of that first season is the feeling of being part of a group with overwhelming good spirit. Football united us so well (and it still does) because there is no greater show of dedication to your team-mate than throwing your body in the path of an oncoming monster to save your mate from a crushing tackle, or running hard, when your legs are already jelly, to get to a contest and help out. That's where the truest team spirit is bred and that is the best mark of success, regardless of the numbers on the scoreboard. What has made us the biggest club in the UNIVERSE has been dedication and enthusiasm, whether you're talking about team-mates on the field, workers on the committee or friends in the pub.

After many years and many injuries, I feel a great attachment to club MUGAR. I'm proud of the bruises I've taken for the team and I'm proud of the links the club's formed between people. Like old diggers who endured together the horrors of the trenches of WWI, I think some of us have forged bonds that will last well into senility.

The MUGARS means being part of a welcoming and awe-inspiring group while playing the best game ever invented. And to see your team-mate mown down can make you feel sick, but to give the last inch of your strength to stop that from happening again and to see them kick a goal instead can make you feel euphoric, even if it hurts. Bruises are black and blue after all...

BRONWYN MCGORLICK – MU STUDENT 1998-2003; Current MUWFC President

Like a lot of MUGARS I was a country girl that moved to Melbourne after completing my schooling in Shepparton. I was very excited to discover a Women's Footy team at Melbourne Uni during O'Week in '98 and I signed myself up. I was also living in college at the time and was spending a lot of time getting adjusted to uni and college life, so it wasn't until I received a phone call from then club captain Lucy Puls a few weeks later that I decided to go along to a training session. I was completely hooked from that day forward, and have been a part of the club ever since.

I was, and still am to an extent, a very shy person, so joining a completely new club at Uni and participating in a sport that I had only briefly experienced at school was a huge step for me. The thing that struck me the most was that everyone made an effort to learn my name instantly. It was and still is a very diverse group of people at the club. It has never really mattered much where people have come from or who they are, so long as they have an interest in playing footy and are supportive of others with the same interest. As a new Melbournian I struggled with transport and finding my way to places....but there was always a Mugar happy to give me a lift to a game, or walk home with me from the pub.

The Mugar has provided me with a large network of friends, some I've no doubt will be life-long, and a support base that I can always rely upon. It has allowed me to develop the confidence to take on new roles, such as being a part of the MUWFC Committee, and eventually become the club's President. The confidence I've found as a member of this club has also been important in defining who I am and assisting in areas such as gaining employment once I'd finished my degree.

I feel immensely lucky to have experienced what I have at Uni, and it was largely due to belonging to a club, the MUWFC in particular. I think that my time at Uni would have been far less rewarding had I not joined the footy club and I would not be half the person I am today. It's a difficult thing to quantify for funding and other purposes, but to take away opportunities like these at universities, if VSU is introduced, could have some serious implications in terms of developing future leaders and thinkers, as well as the more obvious sport-related consequences. My time at uni developed me into a clear and critical thinker and independent learner, but it has been my time with the Mugar whilst at uni that really developed me into a strong minded, capable and resilient person ready to survive and succeed in today's world.

THE IMPACT OF VSU ON THE MUWFC

Membership

MUWFC membership is currently nearing 90. We expect to gain another 10 senior members over the remaining months of the season and another 25-30 junior members. In 2004, we registered 104 players with the Victorian Women's Football League (VWFL).

VSU would certainly halve our membership. Without the financial support of MUSA to cover training grounds and subsidised equipment, our membership fees would need to rise dramatically. Many students would not be able to pay an increased membership fee. Current Melbourne University students make up approximately forty percent of our members with another fifteen percent made up of graduates of Melbourne University that have stayed with the club since their student years.

Existence

The MUWFC would find it very difficult to function in its current capacity under VSU. Although the Melbourne University Sports Association (MUSA) provides \$5000 in subsidy and \$6000 in training ground hire, extra costs would need to be met by club that include the hire of the Main Oval and Pavilion at Melbourne University and compulsory player insurance at a cost of approximately \$2000 for three teams. The club would need to find nearly \$15000 per year to cover all expenses. MUSA is the MUWFC's main supporter. Our only other financial supporter is the Victoria Hotel who contributes \$1000 funding to the club each year. This is the largest financial contribution the club has received from a sponsor since our establishment in 1997. Finding major sponsorship for mainstream women's sporting teams is incredibly difficult already. With so many teams at Melbourne University forced to seek financial sponsorship from local businesses under VSU, the task of securing sponsorship for our club would be made even more difficult simply due to this competition.

Fee Changes

MUWFC Current Fee Structure

FEE TYPE	MU Students	Eligible Non-Students
Membership/Insurance	\$50	\$110
Social Club Membership	\$25	\$25
Match Day Fees	\$5	\$5

Should we find a way to remain operating in our current capacity, we would need to find another \$15000. This could be covered by increasing our membership fees however, we would need to charge each member another \$150 in membership. Most students would find it incredibly difficult to pay a \$200 membership fee. This figure has been calculated on the proviso of maintaining our current numbers. With such an increase in fees we believe that our membership numbers will decrease dramatically, thereby reducing our overall income anyhow.

Currently match day fees are used to pay for umpires (\$60 per game), accredited sports trainers and strapping/medical supplies (\$100 per game) and our canteen manager (\$35 per home day). The MUWFC relies on players' match day fees to partially cover these costs and so, match fees would need to increase to meet these match day costs and any additional costs that we would need to pay for under VSU such as ground and pavilion hire.

Reduced Services

Currently, the MUWFC is the largest women's football club in Australia, with three senior teams and one youth girls (under 17) team. Many women and girls join our club because they can play at a level that matches their skill, fitness, enthusiasm and confidence. VSU would decrease our membership, thereby forcing us to drop a team or possibly two. The overall outcome would mean that women and girls would have less opportunity to play at a level where they feel comfortable, which would decrease their enjoyment and finally, increase the likelihood of them ceasing their involvement in football. With so much emphasis on obesity as a major health concern it would be

very detrimental to girls and women in our local community to discontinue their involvement in sport.

The MUWFC has provided coach and sports trainer education and training to senior and injured players to improve their skills and knowledge of the game. Many long term injured players take on assistant coaching roles or sports trainer positions to assist them psychologically with their rehabilitation and to enable them to continue their contribution to our on field performances. Under VSU these opportunities would no longer be provided.

The MUWFC has also been able to subsidise the cost of travel for our Victorian and Southern University Games representatives. Over the years we have had a number of players selected in the Victorian and All-Australian teams. Through conscientious fundraising the club has been able to direct some of these funds to those players to make their dream of playing at an elite level more achievable. In 2002 and 2004, the MUWFC has sent teams to the Southern University Games. Fundraising has made this possible also through subsidies provided to students representing the club. With VSU any fundraising profits would need to be directed into paying for training/playing venues, insurance and other general running expenses.

Currently we provide players with strapping and medical supplies at all games which are very costly, but valuable expenses. Under VSU we may not be able to continue with this service. University students may not be able to pay for their own supplies because of their lower incomes and could risk their own physical wellbeing as a consequence.

We may also find it difficult to run monthly social events because our members will already be paying a great deal more for the basic services that we provide. Many may not be able to afford the regular social functions that we hold. These social functions are a great opportunity for our members to get to know one another and are vital in maintaining our playing numbers not only throughout the year but between years. We may need to cancel events such as Jumper Presentation Night which has become our traditional welcome for all new members of the club and a celebration of the coming season. The MUWFC is well known amongst the VWFL as a wonderful social support network for all of our players.

Training and Playing Facilities

Melbourne University has twelve teams across three clubs (8 male and 4 female) and only one ground to play on. Currently we have to train on grounds external to Melbourne University because of the wear and tear on the Main Oval. We can not get access to this ground currently, and with VSU access would be even more limited. This means we may even have to search for a playing ground external to the Melbourne University.

Our annual cost of training venues is approximately \$6000 which is met by MUSA. We would find it difficult to cover this cost and consequently may have to halve the number of training sessions to one session per week. We would also have to pay for the use of the Main Oval and Pavilion under VSU which currently is provided by MUSA.

Other Impacts

The MUWFC has always been a safe space for young women and girls to try a sport that they would have been intimidated to try previously, especially in front of their male peers. In fact, this sense of a safe community culture has been explored in research conducted by La Trobe University's Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society and will be published in 2005.

This is not only relevant for local students but also for International Students. Each year the club is visited by in excess of ten International Students who want to try out Australian Rules football. Their male peers find it very difficult to find a place to play because there aren't too many places for men without any understanding of the game to learn to play. The benefit of having three senior teams at the MUWFC is that young women who are from overseas can learn to play in a competition that is not beyond their own understanding and they can learn the game at their own pace. Since the club's establishment, we've have had approximately sixty visitors from Iraq, USA,

Canada, England, Singapore, China, Japan, India and Germany. Many of them use this as an opportunity to meet Australian friends and learn more about the Australian culture. Many have said that without the club they would have found it hard to meet Australian people because they spend so much time living and studying with other International Students.

Many of our players have come to Melbourne University from the rural/regional areas of Australia. Country students often don't know too many other people and use their involvement in the MUWFC to develop some strong social and support networks. Country students use their relocation to Melbourne to try many new experiences, including playing a sport that they may never have had the opportunity to play in their regional/rural town.

Summary

In conclusion, the MUWFC urges the Federal Government to reconsider implementing VSU. As outlined in this submission there are many benefits provided to students and to the local and University communities by the various essential services that student fees cover. We invite members of your Government to visit a MUWFC home game and see for yourselves the wonderful organisation we have developed and are so very proud of. In doing so, you would also be able to learn of the great detriment that would be caused by VSU.

Yours truly,

Chyloe Kurdas
Secretary
Melbourne University Women's Football Club