

The introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) will have a major impact on my life as a part time student. In my time at the University of Sydney since March 2003, the student organisations on the campus have been a major part of my life.

Let me start with the Union. Last year I sat on the Activities and Student media committee. In this committee, we were the committee responsible for all the student publications that the Union published. From the monthly magazine, Union Recorder (UR), to the Environment handbook, the weekly bulletin, and the womens hanbook, these publications had a large print run and are a fantastic source of free information available to all students. Read by students, written by students, edited by students and directed by a student committee, each of these publications, and more, provide a sense of community and belonging to the University culture on campus. Personally I wrote an article for the environment handbook. This was an extra curriculum activity that I took part in. I wrote an article about the Murray River. I am studying Arts and Education. Nowhere in my degree structure, like many other students, do I have the elective to learn about the environment. It is because of the Union that I did research and learnt about the Murray River. The article and the handbook were subsequently published for others to read and learn from. I do not believe that the Union does not play an educational role on campus. Other things we achieved in this committee were running the main parties held by the Union. Beach Ball in the summer semester and Snow Ball in the winter semester. These parties were free and accessible to all members of the union, currently all students. If VSU were to be introduced then not only would the union have limited funds to throw such community building events but not all students would be able to attend.

Last year I was also the environment convenor for the union. My role here was to organise the Union's Environment week. We ran a free cooking workshop and a forum on Climate Change, where we invited speakers from the three major political parties to speak about their policy on climate change and reusable energy sources. An informative discussion, which happened just before the federal election, gave politicians a chance to talk to students about environment policy. We also had a massive free vegetarian BBQ where up to 500 students had free lunch. Other small forums and free workshops, including yoga, meditation, and sustainable use of the environment. It is just not true to say that student organisations do not provide further opportunities for students. At schools all over the country, clubs and societies, debating groups, sport and extra curricular activities exist, at university, these services are provided by the Union, please let them stay and be accessible to all students.

One issue that may sound a little strange, but is very important, is rain. When it rains on Sydney University the only undercover area for students to sit under on the entire campus is either the library (where you cant have food or drinks) or in one of the three Union buildings. My question to the government is this: When it rains, where do you expect students go between classes if there is no Union? Not only does the union provide shelter from the rain, fun events and publications, but also essential services like a budget meal. If I have to walk to Newtown to get a sausage roll then I am going to get wet. If I catch a bus, then I must pay full fare (as a part time student). Not only will the Union give me a massive sausage roll that *The Australian* referred to as "The Rolls Royce of pastry", the Union will give me free tomato sauce, shelter to eat it under, a free publication to read when I'm eating lunch, an interesting forum that

afternoon and a party to go to that night. As for other food the Union provides, a \$4 budget meal, is quick, easy, cheap and tastes good.

When I called the Ministers office at the end of April to ask some question about VSU, I was told that the idea of VSU has come from part-time and external students. I am a part time student and I certainly don't want VSU. As a part time student it has been very difficult for me to restructure my degree. The Students Representative Council (SRC) helped me do this. I worked with one of the case workers in the SRC, to help me restructure my degree. The case worker told me what my rights were. Told me a lot of information the faculty office would not. Whenever I tried ringing the faculty, I was changed over to several different people and departments, each giving me different stories about what I should do. Down in the SRC the case worker gave me a clear answer, told me the rules and told me what I needed to do. I feel safe knowing that there is an independent body looking out for the needs and rights of students when the university administration is causing grief. The university administration is incredibly difficult to deal with, especially for a part-time student like myself. The SRC case workers help a lot.

I was the O-week convenor for the SRC in 2003. O-week was a huge week of fun and information about groups on campus and university courses. To see the end of O-week would mean to see the end community on campus. The SRC and NUS have also run some important campaigns in my time at university. The HECS increases of December 2003 were reduced from 30% to 25%. In my opinion this was an important victory. The most important victory to me however, is the life long learning entitlements. Five years to complete a degree, as proposed is not long enough. Seven is still too short. As a part time student of a five-year degree, if the SRC and NUS had not won those concessions then I would not be able to go part time. I am a part time student because I work in a restaurant up to 55 hours a week. I contribute to the work force and to the economic growth of Australia, while studying. Why shouldn't I be able to do both? Only because of the SRC and NUS am I able to do both.

I will conclude now by asking the Senate to please NOT introduce VSU. I will not repeat my points but rather hope that this personal incite will help Senators understand what is like to be a student and how my life would be so much harder should VSU be introduced. If the minister is truly concerned with up front payments restricting access to higher education, why then has the Howard government increased HECS by 80% in 9 years? Why were DUFFS introduced and then allowed to take up 35% of university places? I think that if the government is truly concerned about the welfare of students and their ability to pay a fee to student organisations who help students so much, then the response should be to improve the rates available under Austudy, not to cut the life blood of our campuses.