

Wodonga Student Association Inc.

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Senate submission

Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee

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

15.6.05

Assessment of the likely effect of the legislation on the provision of student services, and related consequences

Wodonga Student Association (WSA)

This submission refers to the impact of this Bill on Wodonga Student Association. WSA is the joint student organisation of La Trobe University (Albury-Wodonga), and Wodonga Institute of TAFE.

The most accurate way to determine the likely effect of the legislation on Wodonga Student Association (WSA) is to assess the effect of the legislation on:

1. The level of funding for WSA
2. The provision of student services (which is reliant on funding)

2005 General Service Fee

La Trobe University Albury/Wodonga

Full-time	\$190
Part-time 1	\$95
Part-time 2	\$45

In 2005, this funding structure will deliver an income of \$170,000 in GSF fees. WSA also receives income from a Student Amenities Fee (SAF) collected by Wodonga TAFE, charged per contact hour, with the maximum fee being \$130. The SAF provides \$100,000 funding for WSA and \$40,000 which subsidises Campus Support Services.

The W.A experience and the likely impact of VSU on funding and services

The model of VSU in this Federal Bill is similar to the VSU legislation passed in Western Australia. Membership rates and fee payments in W.A. were between 6% and 35%¹, with the level of fee approximately halved. Universities had to contribute financially to student services in order for them to survive.

Impact of VSU on fee income

It is difficult to accurately predict the level of funding available under this Bill; we can only be guided by the experience in WA. Using the above figures, three likely outcomes for WSA are as follows.

1. The worst situation in WA was 6% of fees collected at half the current fee charged. This would equate to approximately \$5,000 GSF received for WSA.
2. If WSA was closer to the middle ground of the WA experience, we may collect around 15% at half the current fee equalling \$12,500.
3. If we were at the higher end of the WA experience and collected 35% at half the current fee this would equate to \$30,000.

¹ Graham Hastings (2004) *VSU Legislation Experiences in WA, Vic and Federally*

The SAF collected by the TAFE is not affected at this stage, but these funds will need to be spent for the benefit of TAFE students, not to subsidise university students' access to services.

Funding of services under VSU

The assumption that the reduced level of funds received under VSU will be spent on student services ignores the requirement that infrastructure, staffing and facilities exist in order for any services to be provided. Under VSU, on a small regional campus, infrastructure costs could not be reduced in line with the significant reduction of income. Infrastructure costs will make up a greater proportion of total costs, leaving little available funding for service provision.

Under the Federal model of VSU the funding of student services for students of La Trobe University Albury/Wodonga is a difficult proposition. Using the information from the W.A. experience to gauge the level of funding that can be expected, La Trobe University students can expect a severe drop in services.

Funding of between \$5,000 and \$30,000 would provide limited contribution to infrastructure costs essential for an organisation to offer any services. For example, some of the WSA annual expenses are as follows:

Insurance –	Public Liability, etc	\$9,000
	Building Insurance	\$4,000
Cleaning of the Hangar		\$17,500
Hangar Utilities (Gas, etc)		\$3,300
Staff	- Student Liaison Officer	\$42,500
	- Finance and Admin	\$37,500
	- Food and Beverage	\$39,500

Funds collected under VSU, assuming income will be consistent with the W.A. experience, will only contribute to a small proportion of these expenses. An adequate level of services for students cannot be maintained with this level of funding.

Services currently offered

Below is a list all services offered. Also see [Attachment 1](#) - which provides a short description of the listed services.

Student Amenities Building (“The Hangar”)

- This includes Midway Café, Hangar Bar, pool tables, table tennis, T.V., couches, microwave, showers, toilets, washing machine, dryer, meeting room and offices. The Hangar is the only non-academic space on campus for university students and is open from 8am until late Monday to Friday.
- The Hangar was constructed in 1994 at a cost of approximately \$800,000.

- This building was funded entirely by compulsory student fees; all current operations in the Hangar are funded by GSF and SAF.
- Wodonga Student Association required a bank loan to build The Hangar. This would not be possible under VSU, as WSA would no longer have a guaranteed income if GSF payment was no longer compulsory .
- WSA does not carry any capital debt. The loan on The Hangar was paid out approximately four years ago.
- The most recent capital development by WSA was \$100,000 for a Student Lounge in Building W at Wodonga TAFE.
- As a young regional campus future non-academic capital developments are essential. Prior to this VSU Bill, WSA master-planning and future capital developments were being considered, including sporting facilities.
- Wodonga Student Association is currently involved in a planning project for basketball facilities jointly funded by WSA, La Trobe University, Wodonga TAFE, Wodonga Basketball Association and Wodonga Council. If VSU legislation is passed in its current form this will no longer be possible.

Staffing structure

WSA employs three full time staff to provide services to students: a Student Liaison Officer, a Finance and Administration Officer, and a Food and Beverage Manager. WSA also employs 6 casual staff in the Midway Café. A Student Committee of ten representatives is elected annually.

Services

The existence of a universal student fee enables WSA to offer a broad range of services to students. Income from student fees permits the funding of infrastructure and staff, allowing WSA to be responsive to students needs and to provide continued change and improvements to facilities, services and activities. On a small, regional campus any reduction in income will result in a reduction in the required infrastructure and a disproportionate reduction in services.

Currently WSA offers the following to all students:

- Publications – student diary, wall planner, student discount guide, student magazine (Overdue)
- Student loan fund
- Loan of equipment including BBQ, chairs, tables, jumper leads, air compressor
- Student discounts organised within the local community
- Discount movie tickets
- Second-hand books
- Assistance for students with academic rights and appeals
- Advocacy
- Student representation
- Student accident insurance cover
- Information displays and events
- Workshops such as self-protection courses, salsa dancing etc.

- Student placements
- Student employment
- Orientation activities, information and services – TAFE, University, student residents, international students, first-year orientation, general orientation
- Student Welfare – individual and study body issues, including transport, accommodation, health, poverty, etc
- Clubs and societies – support when setting up clubs and providing activities
- Sporting activities
- Loan of sporting equipment
- Course and department activities
- Mentor Programme
- Lunchtime activities e.g. BBQs, bands and information stalls
- Student functions
- Support for special needs groups such mature age students, school leavers, etc.
- Assistance for post graduate students
- Support for international students
- La Trobe University Graduation Ball

Midway Café

The Midway Café is located within the Hangar. It provides competitively priced food and a space for a meal break. It also provides adequate space for group study while you eat. Opening times are 9am to 4pm (Monday to Thursday) and 9am to 2pm Fridays during semester.

Campus Support Services

Compulsory Student Fees are also used to subsidise Campus Support Services. This department provides services to students from both La Trobe University (Albury/Wodonga) and Wodonga TAFE. Services include careers and personal counselling, welfare services, disability liaison, accommodation, youth services, equity, VTAC information and course information.

What services will be lost?

Small regional campuses charge a small amount of money and must operate efficiently to ensure service provision. Any decrease in income will result in a disproportionate loss of services because the associated loss of infrastructure will reduce WSA's ability to offer any of the services it currently offers. WSA operates efficiently with a small number of staff to maximise the services important to students on a tertiary campus.

Wodonga Student Association already achieves significant cost-savings by running one student organisation for the two separate tertiary education providers that share adjoining campuses. This increases our economy of scale and currently allows all students to receive more value for their student fees than would otherwise be possible.

Services most likely to be lost include:

- Food on campus – the Midway Café, like other food outlets on small secondary and tertiary campuses, requires a subsidy in order to operate. All services provided to students will need to be run on a cost-recovery model as fee income will be spent entirely on the infrastructure required to provide services.
- Closure of the Midway Café will also mean loss of student employment on campus.
- General orientation programme including mentoring, international students and residents on campus
- General graduation programme
- Services that do not run on a cost-recovery basis are unlikely to exist. These include campus publications, loan of equipment, sporting activities and equipment, mentor programme, course and department activities, lunchtime activities, financial support for special needs groups, international students, post-graduate students etc.
- It is probable that decreased funding will make it impossible to maintain current staffing levels. If this is the case, services that require staff time are likely to be severely reduced, particularly those services that do not support themselves financially. These include student representation, student advocacy, support for academic appeals, information and workshop provision, student placements, student welfare, support for clubs and societies, and support for international students, student residents, post-graduate students and other groups.

Under this model it is the services which can recover costs and contribute to infrastructure funding that are most likely to continue. These are not always going to be the services most required by students. Advocacy and welfare for example cannot recover costs, but are no less essential for the student community than other services.

Further issues with loss of services

Divisions will exist between students and between institutions as services and activities will be available to only some students in a group as some may have paid and some may not. So to provide services to groups or course on a whole will be impossible, such as students on campus, international students, student groups, class groups, clubs and societies, students of both institutions.

Wodonga TAFE students will no longer receive the same services they were once offered despite contributing the same funding to WSA. The joint campus currently provides the advantage to all students of increasing the economy-of-scale, allowing a greater range of services and activities than exist on campuses of equivalent size and student numbers; this legislation will remove this advantage.

Within the University Student Administration, Campus Support Services and Academic departments are identifying that they do not have the resources to meet the needs of students that currently access services from the Student Association.

There will be a need for services to be picked up by universities, community services, government services and non government organisations. Often there an inability of these services to cope with increased usage during to restricted funding. In a regional area there

may not be the accessibility (with lack of public transport) or the availability of relevant services, plus many community services are feeling the strain drought, etc.

The impact of VSU on our students

Some current students at the Wodonga campus have expressed disappointment that many MP have had the opportunity to experience a vibrant university life as a student, yet are now prepared to deny current and future students that benefit of an interesting university experience.

By allowing this Bill to pass unchanged, MPs are **choosing** to deny our current students the **freedom** to enjoy their University experience. This is the **choice and freedom** that should be focused on.

Instead of the government is focusing on the ideological argument of “freedom of association” and the government’s value of this belief. The focus should be on our current and future University students and the impact on them individually in being denied a university experience that politician themselves have had the luxury of experiencing.

There are no government cost savings from this Bill. The impact is entirely felt by students. See **Attachment 2** - some individual letters from student from our regional campus.

Consideration of the experience of universities and students where legislation has been adopted to regulate student unions, such as Victoria and Western Australia

The model of VSU within this Bill is similar to that introduced in W.A. in 1995. This resulted in the virtual destruction of campus life and student organisations. Student organisations employ approximately 5000 staff nationally, 1300 in Victoria; many of these positions will become redundant under this legislation. The previous Victorian Government's VSU legislation targeted "Freedom of Association" without destroying facilities, services and activities on campus; this was far more informed and regionally aware than the current Federal Bill.

Universal student fees are essential

These fees are crucial, enabling student organisations to provide essential facilities, services and activities to enhance campus life and provide support and assistance to students undertaking university degrees. Under the Victorian model of VSU service provision was possible.

The WA figures of 6% to 35% of students paying student fees refute the presumption that if services are good or needed, then students will choose to pay for them. This was not demonstrated by the financial impact of VSU in Western Australia. Universities had to provide funding to allow services it saw as essential to continue. Universities would not shift funding from important academic areas if the services offered were unnecessary or poorly provided. It also indicates that although many students do not pay voluntary student fees, their need for services is not reduced. The current model of compulsory fee payments is one that exists elsewhere in the community for the benefit of all. Should voluntary payment be introduced many services would no longer exist, despite obvious need within the community.

Uncertain funding

The WA experience highlights the lack of certainty of funding levels experienced by student organisations. In order to advertise services to students, to remain responsive to changing student needs, and to plan for future services and development, student organisations need to have a predictable level of funding. Long-term improvements and capital development will not be possible under this Bill and will lead to student organisations that are less relevant to students.

Erosion of regional campuses

Regional campuses will be most acutely affected by a significant reduction in funding. With a small campus population, and the extra cost and logistics of implementing of a non-universal student fee, this loss of funding will severely limit the facilities, services and activities that can be offered to fee-paying students. Regional students do not have access to the same services off-campus as their metropolitan counterparts, making funding of these on-campus services even more vital in a regional area.

Regional campuses with fewer students can offer less than a metropolitan campus; under this bill the gap between metropolitan and regional will widen.

Services that can no longer be provided by the student organisation will need to be offered by organisations, including universities, non-for-profit organisations, and other support services within the community.

Implementation of a non-universal student fee

It is difficult and expensive to ensure that only students who have paid student fees receive the benefits of their student organisation, for example, entry to the student building. The logistics of regulating student access requires staff and infrastructure that does not exist on a regional campus and cannot be implemented with limited funding; any income used for this purpose will greatly reduce funds available to provide services. This system will also cause great divisions on campus and damage what should be a beneficial and enjoyable University experience. Alternatively, if access to the student building and the services provided by WSA are not regulated there will be little incentive for students to pay student fees, and those who have paid will be subsidising those who have not.

This legislation will significantly reduce the services and activities provided to students who pay student fees. Students can not choose to pay for services that may no longer exist; their freedom of choice will be greatly limited by this legislation and by the fee levels paid by their fellow students. A well-rounded and enjoyable experience at University should not be denied to students by passing this legislation in its current form.

Legislation should ensure that services can still be provided to students through a compulsory student fee, while making sure that student organisations use this money appropriately and responsibly for the benefit of the entire student community.

For further information contact:

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Attachment 1

Wodonga

Student

Association

Services

currently offered

Services currently offered

Student Amenities Building (“The Hangar”)

- This includes Midway Café, Hangar Bar, pool tables, table tennis, T.V., couches, microwave, showers, toilets, washing machine, dryer, meeting room and offices. The Hangar is the only non-academic space on campus for university students and is open from 8am until late Monday to Friday.
- This is the only non-academic space on campus for university students
- Student uses of the building range from having lunch with classmates, group study and assessment groups exam study, table tennis and pool between classes, somewhere to hang out at the beginning of the year to make friends, includes the student bar and student functions. The venue is often booked by course groups, clubs and societies etc from within the student population.
- For on-campus students it provides the only large, indoor, relaxation and recreation space, apart from their lounge room shared with five others.

Staffing structure

WSA employs three full time staff to provide services to students: a Student Liaison Officer, a Finance and Administration Officer, and a Food and Beverage Manager. WSA also employs 6 casual staff in the Midway Café. A Student Committee of ten representatives is elected annually.

Three-full time staff specialise in different areas such as finance, student liaison, and food and beverage. There is a vast overlap in the teamwork aspect of working together to jointly provide services. Any one of the staff employed are capable of undertaking the requirements of the following services. This multi-tasking is essential in a small organisation to allow the most functional and efficient methods possible for organising and providing services.

Committee members are as follows:

- President
- Vice-president
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Entertainment
- La Trobe rep
- TAFE rep
- Humanities
- Publications
- Sports and Rec

Students perform a required 65 hours per quarter and receive a small honorarium (\$350 per quarter) conditional on this work being undertaken. If less hours are completed students receive a reduced payment.

The student executive committee performs a very hands on role; not only overseeing operations, but also participating in the provision of day to day services and activities such as cooking BBQs selling movie tickets, working at student functions etc.

The other important asset of the student executive committee is their invaluable ideas and experiences as students which provide for the continuing improvement and implementation of new services and activities on an ongoing basis.

Although this is a small staffing base, it provides a broad range of services due to the multi-skilled nature required of a small organisation.

Services

Currently WSA offers the following to all students:

- Publications –wall planner, student discount guide, student magazine (Overdue)
 - Diary - This is an essential tool for students as it provides the essential local community and campus information including:
 - Services on campus
 - Facilities
 - Semester dates including exams
 - The university and the TAFE provide comprehensive information sections to be included in the diary to ensure that students are informed of all university and TAFE requirements. By having this information in the diary it means that it is at students' fingertips at any time of the year.
 - Wall planner – provides a summary of important services on campus and contact numbers, important dates and space for students to plan their class and assessment requirements. Helps students to be organised and to complete academic requirements.
 - Student discount guide – WSA compiles this information to provide students with discounts and cost-savings from within the community and on campus.
 - Student magazine – in 2005 for the first time in recent years we have a very active editorial committee with “Overdue” currently being produced. It provides students who are involved a range of employment skills, and also informs and updates students about changes and events on campus, as well as other information that may be required during the year.
 - Survival guide – An orientation publication that ensures students are informed of many of the orientation activities and information available to them.
 - Accommodation and welfare guide – this publication is provided to students as part of their enrolment to equip them with finding accommodation and undertaking other requirements prior to the commencement of their studies.
 - Self-protection booklet – booklet that supports self-protection courses that are run on campus, free of charge.

- All of these publications require a great deal of time to update annually and ensure that all information is correct, and to outlay for printing.
- Student loan fund
 - The student association finances a fund which enables university and TAFE students to borrow up to \$300 for student or living-related expenses. This interest free loan needs to be paid back within the academic year.
- Loan of equipment including BBQ, chairs, tables, jumper leads, air compressor
 - This service supports students for both course-related and off-campus activities. It is provided free of charge.
- Student discounts organised within the local community
 - As well as the published guide, other discounts or special offers are arranged throughout the year.
- Discount movie tickets
 - At \$9.00 for an adult ticket, this is a highly used service, saving students up to \$3.00 to see a movie. To get this special price WSA purchases 500 tickets at a time and annually would sell approximately 3000 movie tickets. Considering we have approximately \$1000 university students, this is a lot of movie tickets!
- Second-hand books
 - WSA displays books for sale from our students. Any books sold incur a small administration charge with the sales of the book going to the owner. Students can buy and sell books through this service. This provides both income and cost-savings for our students on campus.
- Assistance for students with academic rights and appeals
 - The University operates an academic progress committee which determines the future of students that have displayed less than satisfactory results in more than one subject. When the university informs the student that they need to provide a submission to the APC, the student is advised that assistance can be obtained from the student association. This would normally involve numerous one-on-one interviews with the student, assistance in preparing a written submission, research of any course structure or placement issues and sometimes accompany them the student to a hearing. The APC has the power to refuse a student the opportunity to reenrol in their studies, so this is a process that is very serious and stressful for the students involved.
- Advocacy
 - This could range from an individual concern to a subject, course, or student body related issue. These may involve placements, flexible delivery modes, student welfare issues, course related concerns etc. The type of process would involve consulting with the students concern, researching issues, consulting with the University or the broader community and taking a process to negotiate change and improvements
- Student representation

- WSA represents students on a number of TAFE and University committees. At the TAFE this includes TAFE council, Board of Studies, Access and Equity, Economic, OH&S, Financial and Resources committee, student accommodation, student loans. For the University students may be elected to University Council, which oversees all campuses with only one post-graduate and one under-graduate student position. Currently a student from Wodonga fills the post-graduate position and the student association supports her in this role. Other committees include Academic Board, library advisory committee, equity and access, campus development committee, OH&S, personal safety committee
- Student representation also involves representing students' concerns either as an individual or a group in various other forums
- Student accident insurance cover
 - WSA pays approximately \$6000 to insure all university and TAFE students, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, on or off campus, for student related activities.
- Information displays and events
 - This varies annually and is sometimes organised by the student association or by other interested student groups. Issues may involve health, safe sex, careers, days recognised within the community (Harmony Day etc.)
- Workshops such as self-protection courses, salsa dancing etc.
 - These may be course related or access and equity issues, post-graduate, community seminars, campus support services, class related information etc.
- Student placements
 - WSA often provides opportunities for student placements for both university and TAFE students. Courses involved include social work, welfare, work education unit, sports and recreation etc. This is an experience which provides mutual benefit for the individual student as well as the organisation. Projects that have been undertaken by students on placement include setting up of a food bank which existed under the name of Midway Mart, and the poverty needs of students addressed are now picked up in the local community. Personal safety on campus
- Student employment
 - WSA employs students to work in the café at award wages providing employment on campus
 - WSA also advertises and liaises to find employment opportunities for students within the community
- Orientation activities, information and services
 - WSA organises orientation activities over the first month commencing with orientation for TAFE students. This involves activities as well as dissemination of information.
 - Post-graduate orientation programme is set up to address their unique academic and non-academic needs.
 - The next program is for student residents and International students,

- providing specialised activities, some of which are joining or separate, and covers the separate information needs of these two groups of students
- First-year orientation programme is run simultaneously with the university's academic orientation. WSA provides non-academic support and activities enabling students to meet people within their course and across the university and TAFE generally. This includes a mentoring programme. WSA provides financial and in-kind support to the university's academic orientation as well as WSA activities. An important part of these first few weeks of orientation is the empathy, understanding and information that new students require as well as the social networking required to meet people and settle in to the academic year.
 - The orientation programme culminates in the first week of classes where O-Week activities are provided for all students across the university and TAFE. As a small campus students have the luxury of being able to meet people and make friends with students across a number of courses.
 - Student Welfare – individual and study body issues, including transport, accommodation, health, poverty, etc WSA undertakes a number of actions to address these issues on an individual or broader student body need. For example, the student association is currently organising an accommodation forum with real estate agents in the local community to improve students ability to successfully secure adequate accommodation in the local area. This information sharing exercise is aimed to improve our knowledge of the real estate industry's requirements and expectations of students and to address any issues of discrimination or misinformation.
 - Clubs and societies – support when setting up clubs and providing activities
 - The existence and activity level of clubs and societies varies on an annual basis according to students' interests and needs. Current clubs include Christian Club, Psych club, hospitality association (HIMSA), Biological societies, netball club, social work cooperative, multicultural club, on-campus activities. Other clubs that have existed include GAS and mature age student club.
 - WSA provides in-kind support to clubs and assists with establishment and ongoing operation, as well as ongoing activities.
 - Clubs and societies provide the student association with a tool for encouraging student involvement, use of students' skills and knowledge, and provision of activities for the student body.
 - Sporting activities
 - WSA students have the opportunity to participate in the Eastern Conference Games, local sporting events are organised between LTU, WIOT and Charles Sturt University. Social activities are also organised such as volleyball, basketball, soccer etc.
 - Wodonga TAFE has a sports and recreation course; these students also organise activities in conjunction with the student association.
 - Loan of sporting equipment
 - Student residents and other students on campus borrow equipment such as volleyball net and ball, cricket, football etc.

- Course and department activities
 - Being a small campus WSA can be responsive to department and course non-academic activities. This may range from social activities, sporting activities, or course related activities. The difficulty posed under VSU is how the student association can continue to be responsive to the needs or requests of an entire course group when only some will have paid student fees that contribute to the student association
- Mentor Programme
 - AS part of orientation WSA organises second and third year students to provide support roles to first-year students. This is done on a department basis. We have had an overwhelming response from both mentors and first-year students as to the value of this programme. This is particularly encouraging as there is a time-consuming administrative process of advertising, making follow-up contacts, consultation in developing the programme and activities, training, and review.
- Lunchtime activities e.g. BBQs, bands and information stalls
 - Daytime activities enable students to escape from the day to day stresses of student life and may provide a free or inexpensive activity providing relevant information to students.
- Student functions
 - Many students provide glowing compliments to the student functions held during orientation in being able to meet students within their course that they will study with over the next few years and also engage in friendships with students from other courses.
 - An ongoing structure of monthly functions during the academic year results in approximately another four or five functions during the academic year following orientation. These activities also provide a launching pad for the student association to promote other services to students and engage student volunteers for other services and activities such as the mentor programme.
 - Enabling student association staff to engage with students on a social level as organisers of these events encourages students that otherwise may have been too shy to raise concerns, to feel confident in approaching them in the future.
- Support for special needs groups such mature age students, school leavers, etc.
 - Using the example of the orientation programme, a mature lounge is set up enabling mature age students across all courses to meet and set up support networks. Likewise for school leavers, particularly those still under 18, special activities and support is arranged.
- Assistance for post graduate students
 - This includes: post-graduate orientation, research of student needs, liaison with post-graduate representatives, post-graduate activities and seminars.
- Support for international students
 - Support for International student begins with a specialised orientation programme conducted in conjunction with the university and continues through WSA supported groups such as the multicultural club. WSA and

the multi-cultural club organise special social and information sharing events for international and multicultural students

- La Trobe University Graduation Ball
 - WSA provides catering funded by the University for the afternoon tea following the graduation ceremony. This is one of our biggest events for the year with approximately 1200 people in attendance. Immediately following the ceremony the afternoon tea also involves student association providing bar services.
 - In the evening following the ceremony a graduation ball is organised. Planning for this event starts in October of the previous year with invitations set out at the end of December and replies and ticket sales administered in the new year with the graduation held in April. Planning of the Ball is based-on a cost-recovery or profit model and with at times a ball of up to 500 people for a sit-down meal, this is a major undertaking of the student association.
 - Under VSU graduation would be a vastly reduced event. WSA would probably not be in a position to do the catering and organising a large Ball would also be beyond the resources available under VSU.

Midway Café

The Midway Café is located within the Hangar. It provides competitively priced food and a space for a meal break. It also provides adequate space for group study while you eat. Opening times are 9am to 4pm (Monday to Thursday) and 9am to 2pm Fridays during semester.

On a small, regional campus comparisons with like services at other institutions has provided supporting evidence that running such an enterprise at a profit is impossible. Classes are scheduled during a 26-week academic year as well as exams, providing for many weeks when there are less than the average number of students on campus. This does not diminish the need for a food service on campus, despite having less than average numbers some weeks. Another difficulty in cost-efficiency is non-casual staffing which provides essential support to the student association food and beverage areas other than the café (orientation, student functions, student activities etc.). The full-time staff member manages food and beverage activities, and importantly, also ensures our compliance with all relevant food safety legislation and enables the student association to cater for activities at non-academic times of the year such as conferences, seminars, and graduation which also falls during academic holidays.

Attachment 2

Letters

from

students and staff



Photo of the Hangar

LETTER 1

Dear Senate Committee,

I am a postgraduate student at La Trobe University Albury-Wodonga Campus. I have been attending this University for seven years.

When I was initially informed of VSU I thought that in my seven years on campus that I not only didn't use the support services that are provided by the General Services Fee (GSF), I didn't actually need them. Since then I have realised the extent to which I have used these student services throughout both my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees without realising how these services were funded, including;

- Use of sporting equipment
- Discounts for books and movie tickets
- Use of the general amenities building
- Subsidised food
- Orientation Week (when I began my degree, and every year since where I have been involved in the activities through my department)
- Support in running activities for postgraduates on campus
- Support with being elected to University Council
- Financial support to attend postgraduate seminars in Bundoora (the main campus of La Trobe University).

The implications if this Bill is accepted will be dire, I believe, to this and other campuses- especially regional campuses. I believe that every student requires the support that payment of the GSF provides and that the introduction of VSU in its current form will be detrimental to the student body and have a severe impact on those students who are studying in regional areas.

This Bill will ensure that Universities become stale institutions where students are only on campus for lectures and can no longer be involved in a unique community. I also believe that those members of Parliament that are in support of this Bill would not be in the prominent positions they currently hold today without the experiences, outside of classes, they engaged in whilst at University.

Thank you for your time,

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LETTER 2

To whom it may concern;

My name is Caterina Puntoriero, I am a third year student at La Trobe Albury/ Wodonga. I am currently studying a Bachelor of Business (Hospitality Management). Rather than I tell you my story of how I am a rural student from a small town in NSW and all the problems and hard times I encountered on my transition from secondary studies to University. I would like to share with you a unique story about my university and its student association which I am so proud of.

Currently the Wodonga Student Association (WSA), in agreement with La Trobe University and Wodonga Institute of TAFE, strives to make life here for all their students the most stress free experience of their studying lives. WSA currently owns its own building, which we like to call the Hanger. This on our quite small university campus is the only non-academic space.

Our Student Association runs on very strict terms with the university and the TAFE. Funds from the GSF are only spent on particular things that these bodies see to be a fit purpose. Political Activism is not one of these regular events. I'm a believer in that a student does not need a 'Union' to voice his or her opinion, if they want to be heard they will find a way.

Our Student Association provides us with shelter, subsidised food and services, non-academic activities, orientation activities, mentoring programs, counselling, access to community necessities; such as help with Renting, bulk billing Doctors and all of those student needs.

These and many more other services are only provided by our general service fee. It is believed by some that if the services are good enough the students will pay for them. But it is not as simple as that. If we don't receive funds to begin with or aren't guaranteed that students will pay for the services, how can they be offered.

I only understand all of this because I have been at University for my third year now and have experienced what WSA has offered. But how do you explain all of this to a first year student.

That they can pay their money and have less services than offered before. Or if they don't pay it will cost them more throughout the year when they need the service that will no longer be subsidised.

Thankyou for your time.

Caterina Puntoriero.
4 Clifford Crt
West Wodonga 3690

LETTER 3

Dear Senate Committee,

On the commencement of this year I felt apprehensive of what was to come as I had left the safety and comfort of my family, friends and familiar surroundings. Having only been to Wodonga for a day to find my accommodation I had no idea where anything was and I was also scared because I didn't know anyone.

In the first week of being in Wodonga I had to continuously go into Uni to gather different information before uni started. During one of my trips to Uni I came across Liz, a friendly face that worked at the Student Association office. Each time that I came to Uni Liz was willing to help me with any problems that arose and if she did not know the answer then she would find out for me. I was able to get a list of place that offered discounts to students, doctors that bulk billed and of course student travel discounts.

I also applied for a position at Midway Café, which is run by the Student Association, which is in the Hangar. I was very lucky to get the job and I started in the Midway Café the week before orientation.

During orientation the Student Association ran a number of activities for first years and for all students. The week previous they also ran activities for the TAFE. The activities included BBQs, hotdog days, the beach party, family night and the 'famous' pub crawl. The activities were great and gave us a chance to meet others, which made the idea of starting Uni less daunting.

I am currently still studying at La Trobe Uni, working at the Midway Café and I still wander over to the Student Association building to talk to Liz, who also now helps me with my homework.

I was honoured when Jo asked me to write this letter explaining what the Student Association has done for me since I have moved down here. The continuous support and friendship that I have received has provided me with the ability to feel at home.

From

Joy Naley
West Wodonga

LETTER 4

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Cathy Perrott, I'm a third year social work student at La Trobe University Albury Wodonga. When I completed high school I left home and came to Wodonga to attend University. I was from a small town and no one I knew in Wodonga was from the same town so I did not know any one. Through orientation week and the activities offered through out the years, such as the night functions and barbeques, I have been able to meet people and form friendships that I hope to have for years. Along with helping me meet new people and helping me feel like I fitted in, the services offered by Wodonga Student Association helped me find my way around Wodonga. Wodonga Student Association offers services that I found vital to me moving to Wodonga from a place which was five hours away, such as a student diary and wall planner, these both have information sections about services offered to students by the university and TAFE as our campus is a co-operative between the two, and other things such as information on discounts offered to students in the surrounding area. With out the services and information made available to me by the Wodonga Student Association I do not feel that I would have been so comfortable moving from Araluen to Wodonga and I am not sure that I would be in my third year of university with the friends I have today.

Along with the services that I have utilised there are also a number of services that help form a safety network for students that find themselves in need of one, many of these services students do realise are there until they are in need of them, such as academic advocacy if a student fails a subject. With the introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) these services will no longer be made available on a campus such as Wodonga as it is a regional campus and does not have the student numbers to support the services offered now if VSU is implemented. It is major concern of mine that if VSU is passed then it will have detrimental effects on regional campuses such as ours by us not being able to offer the variety of services available to students now and this will deter people from wanting to pay the fee in the future.

At La Trobe Albury Wodonga we pay a general service fee to the university and the university determines how that money is spent. The money that is allocated to the Wodonga Student Association is used for a variety of services none of which is political. Along with the services mentioned already it subsidises food on campus and pays to run the student building which with out the general service fee will most likely be shut down and students will no longer have anywhere to go between class except the library and empty class rooms or to get food on campus. La Trobe Albury Wodonga is a growing campus with a master plan to grow and offer more services. If VSU is implemented this master plan will no longer be able to continue. If VSU is implemented it is my concern that La Trobe Albury Wodonga will not only lose its services it will lose its future.

Thank you for your time

Cathy Perrott
4 Clifford Crt, West Wodonga 3690

LETTER 5

Kate Fiedler
Student Residences
Unit M12, Room 1
Wodonga Institute of TAFE
PO BOX 963
Wodonga
VIC 3689

8 June 2005

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madame,

My name is Kate Fiedler and I currently attend La Trobe University in Wodonga. I am writing with regard to the abolishment of the General Service Fee and the consequences that many of the students will have to face and especially on a regional campus.

Currently the GSF helps to raise funds to run activities for the students such as Orientation Week for 1st year students and other functions such as cocktail nights and BBQ lunches among others. The GSF also helps to keep the 'Hangar' running. The Hangar lets students come somewhere for lunch and relax between classes. The food is a reasonable price. This is also a place where students can have a quiet game of pool, play table tennis or just hang out with friends.

If the Hangar was shut down it would mean that students would not have a place to get lunch while they are at university or they would have to take the long walk over to the TAFE to get lunch. The functions such as theme nights and BBQ lunches would not be provided and therefore students would not have the social outlet that they need to keep them happy.

The Student Association are the people that work to run the Hangar. The association provide other services such as student discounts, cheaper movie tickets, second hand books, diaries and wall planners, student employment, student advocacy and ATM and EFTPOS. If these services were unavailable to the students then students would have to pay full price for these services. Students are usually relying on their parents or Centrelink which means that they are under constant financial restraints and every little saving helps.

The GSF also helps to provide student services such as careers and personal counselling, welfare and accommodation advice, disability services, academic support and course information among others. These are all services that are heavily utilised by students which can also be an incentive for students to enrol to a regional campus rather than a metropolitan campus. If these services are either completely abolished or diminished students will not have a wide choice and they may choose to enrol elsewhere.

As a student with a disability, I am concerned that the disability services and funding that is currently available will not be available to the same degree and therefore I will not be able to successfully complete and cope with university life. Although I understand that the disability services will not be completely abolished the funding cuts will have to come from somewhere and therefore all the current services will not be able to be available to the same extent.

Yours truly,

Kate Fiedler

Dear Senate Committee,

Re: Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU)

I am a student at in my second year at La Trobe University. I am writing to you because I do not support the proposed legislation currently being proposed by the Federal Government aimed to make membership voluntary for its associations. Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) would be a severe disadvantage to the student body as a whole at my university.

At La Trobe University (Albury/Wodonga) we have a Student Association which provides many services to approximately 1000 University students, and another 1500 TAFE students. I believe these services would disappear or be severely curtailed if the proposed changes were to go ahead. Currently the Wodonga Student Association (WSA) provides:

The Hangar – an area that is the only non-academic place on campus for students to go to
Cheap Food

Advocacy

Loans

Counselling and welfare

Access and Equity

Student Hardship loans

Accommodation

And many other vital services

Level of the services that can be provided by the WSA will diminish if the membership numbers decline. The services will need to be assessed on a needs basis to determine if they are viable. Unfortunately this is an impossible option. Level of need is unable to be determined at the beginning of the year. Many services that are provided are not required until mid-year. These services though are not of a nature that students believe that will need or require when they opt in to the association. With this fact in mind the demand needed to assess the viability is not on an accurate level.

Speaking from a personal point of view, the Student Association provided me with a large amount of support when I entered university in my first year in 2004. I grew up in a small town in the New South Wales Snowy Mountains and moving away from this close-knit community was a harsh reality to me, and my sense of identity. I was able to manage this transition to university life with the help of the WSA. With the guidance this association provided, I was better able to make new friends in an environment that was new to me. The WSA takes a lot of time during the summer holidays to prepare for orientation week for two institutions. Orientation happens over a period of three weeks. During this time many new students, like I was, meet new and lasting friends. Activities happen all week and are free.

I speak for many students currently enrolled in universities across Australia when I ask that you withdraw the proposed legislation. This is because it will take away vital services that are vital to our university community and education. I have been told that if the needed then the demand will be there for them to still run. The demand for these services will not come forward until after they have gone and the realisation has set.

This is more than an issue of sausage rolls and sporting clubs. Many disadvantaged students will be placed in a position that can be detrimental to their education. The services that the General Service Fee enable students to continue studying. An infrastructure is in place to do this but without funds it will be lost.

Thank you for reading my letter. I hope you understand my concerns

Yours sincerely,

Lucy McCluggage
Student Residence, 87 Mc Koy St, West Wodonga 3690.

LETTER 7

Dear Senate Committee,

My name is Megan Jeffs, I'm a second year social work student at La Trobe University Albury/Wodonga Campus. I have moved from the small rural town of Finley NSW to come here to study and live on campus. The accommodation is affordable for a rural student and makes the transition to study easier. On campus accommodation houses 68 students.

Next year with the possible introduction of VSU our rent is likely to go up as the University is forced to find other funding for services that will otherwise be lost. The first year orientation program organised by the Student Association is essential to assist student to adjust to living in Wodonga and studying at La Trobe meeting many people that I would not have been able to meet without such activities.

The GSF that all University students currently pay allows the Student Association to run these activities at an affordable price for students. The Student Association provides other services and runs other activities through out the year which general provide a well timed break from they stress of study.

The introduction of VSU is likely to make running such activities and providing services difficult. Students take these for granted and what will be lost will be quite damaging for students on a rural university campus.

Regards,

Megan Jeffs
Student Residents, 87 Mc Koy St, West Wodonga.

LETTER 8

Dear Senate Committee,

My name is Huang Hao, I come from China, I'm second year business student. I came to Australia three years ago.

When I finished my high school, I choose to come to Latrobe University Albury-Wodonga campus. Although this is a small campus, there are lots of facilities to supplement students' study.

Students can do the research on internet in the computer lab, find the book they want from library, the Hangar which is the student amenities building where they cook the delicious food for students, also students can play table tennis and pool at there.

Such is a nice place for all of the students.

Regards

Huang Hao
West Wodonga

LETTER 9

Dear Senate Committee,

The introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism is an absolute travesty on behalf of the government and will only case to adversely affect student life, especially at the Albury/Wodonga campus.

The fact that our campus is already so small and there are limited facilities available to our country university will only mean that this campus will be more strongly affected from VSU.

Firstly, there would be a lack of social activities available to all students. These events such as O-Week are essential in introducing and meeting new people and without such activities I feel that the moral of students at this Uni and form out of town will be greatly affected. Secondly, the services such as counselling and other support services are vital for those having difficulty in adjusting and coping with university life.

The fact that the government is saying that the user should pay is the most ridiculous concept I have heard. Students who need counselling or other services will not be using these services as they will cost additional money, which the majority of students simply do not have, particularly at short notice.

Therefore, those students who need help and assistance will not be receiving this, which will lead to problems so far reaching that one would probably not be able to comprehend, especially the narrow-minded Liberal government who is implementing such a ridiculous and un-manageable policy.

Regards,

JasminWildman
9 Universal Crt,
Wodonga 3690

LETTER 10

Dear Senate committee,

I am a mature age University student at La Trobe Wodonga, I am writing to inform you of the grave concerns that I have if the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005.

As a mature age student I value the notion of having to pay fees for services, however in saying that, the current General Service Fee (GSF) paid by student is providing for services offered by the Wodonga Student Association. Therefore students are already committed to a user pays service. It is unfortunate that this GSF is confused with the notion of student unionism.

In the four years that I have been a student at La Trobe I witness one political protest and that was in relation to the Government's 25% HECS increase. Whilst this type of protest can be considered political activism, I would consider this to be democracy. Whilst I may have witness one political protest which I am sure did not cost thousands of dollars, I have also witness and participated in many wonderful programs and services that have been established by our Students Association. All of which has been paid for by our GSF.

The importance of the GSF in regional areas is imperative when you look at the types of services that are provided. For instance, Orientation week is particularly vital for all first year students, as it provides all the necessary information for the settling in to university life in a regional area. It is my understanding that Orientation week takes about five months to prepare for. As a mature age student, Orientation week provided me with insight into all the service offered by the University and the Wodonga Student Association. Furthermore Orientation week enables students to become aware of the support services offered by the Student Association, whilst they may not use them all; these support services are there if they are needed by students. For example, student's currently have access to student hardship loans through the Wodonga Student Association. Whilst we may like to think that we wont be affected by unforeseen circumstances, there is always a possibility that anything could happen and having access to a student hardship loan if you cant afford to pay for your books is better then dropping out of uni because of restricted finances. As a result of the implementation of this Bill these students' hardship loans will no longer be available as the funding will not be there to support them. Currently the Wodonga Student Association offers 33 support services either directly or indirectly, some of these services vary on a needs basis, however all of which are vital in supporting students through their academic years.

I could bore you with the intrinsic details of our Student Association, but I am not sure that it will achieve anything. However I fell that it is necessary to point out that if the funds from the GSF were no longer available, then these 33 support services will no longer be available. The process of running any business relies upon the certainty of an income to ensure that you can meet the needs of supply and demand. The uncertainty of a voluntary GSF will make it impossible to plan programs or provide services. The current

Victorian Model allows for student to opt out of their student union without sacrificing the financial commitments made by students to ensure these 33 support services are offered. Whilst this attitude may appear slightly pessimistic, it is difficult to offer services to students if you do not have the income to support the services. Therefore there will be nothing to entice students to pay their voluntary GSF due to the uncertainty of incoming funds.

Over the past few months I have watched the debate about student unionism very closely. I have heard the arguments presented in particular the one about 'why should students pay for services they don't use'; my response to this is simple. How do you know if you use them or not, because if you sit on the outdoor chairs at our campuses or use the eftpos or you eat lunch in the 'Hanger' (Student Building) then you are using the student services. These things outlined are simply things, but they are paid for by GSF. Moreover they are a response to students' needs on our campus. I am not sure that the argument presented as to 'why should students pay for services they don't use' has much credibility, as Tax's payers are often paying for things they don't use for instance, I will never spend a night in Baxter detention centre or nor will I ever spend a night in jail (I hope) and yet my tax goes towards maintaining both of these services. Yes this may be a simplistic way of looking at the issues and yes it can be argued that these services are for the good of the community, but the same principles apply, Tax payers are still paying for things that they do not use. In the case of student support services, the question is not whether the students are using the services but rather whether they are aware of using the services? For example our regional campuses in the past have been subjected to various delivery methods of some subjects, like tape recorded lectures sent down from Bundoora. This type of delivery method has caused anguish for many students, especially when tapes do not arrive or they do arrive but the lecturer has forgot to turn the tape over and you only get half a lecture. As a result of many disturbing lectures the Wodonga Student Association was able to negotiate in conjunction with the Access and Equity officer to establish a flexible delivery mode, thus enabling lecture access through the internet, DVD or live internet links with Bundoora. This process is of benefit to all students and was partially funded by the GSF.

A further example of the services offered by the Student Association can be seen through the use of the 'Hanger', this being the only non-academic space on campus. The 'Hanger' provides students with access to a canteen, pool tables, table tennis, showers, washing machine and dryers, just to name a few. It also gives students the opportunity to get to know their fellow students, by having a non-academic building where students can socialize. As a mature age student you may wonder why I would think the 'Hanger' is an important part of academic life and how relevant it would be to mature age students. The answer to this is simply every Wednesday a group of mature age students meet at the 'Hanger' for study sessions, we have lunch and discuss essays or lecture materials. The 'Hanger' was completely paid for by the GSF and the cost of running the 'Hanger' is also funded by GSF; this included the payments of staff to run the canteen, insurance and utilities. Once again the uncertainty of funding will make it difficult to ensure that these services remain. Perhaps even more concerning, is that the money is collected by the

Voluntary GSF will have to go towards insurance and running cost of the building thus restricting the amount of money available to run vital support services.

The relevance of student unionism is very much debateable on regional campuses, yes the Student Association does provided students with a voice and they most certainly provide students the support that is need throughout their Academic years. However all of these services are indispensible, particularly in regional areas. As a mature age student if I did not have access to a regional university I would not have the opportunity to further my education and if I did not have access to some of the support services offered by the GSF funding then my education would be much more difficulty. I am not concern with the political activism nor have I been exposed to it on our regional campus; however I am concern with maintaining the current standards offered by the Student Association. I can not see this being possibly if this Bill is passed in its current state; it is unfortunate that all universities are made suffer due to the selected few who participate in over zealous political activity. If the current Government wishes to abolish compulsory student unionism across Australia then perhaps they should be investigating other alternative solutions such as the Victorian model. As it will be less detrimental on regional university by allowing an amenities fees that would ensure the continuation of support services, whilst at the same time ensuring that students are not forced to be member of a students union.

Your Sincerely,
Karina Kerr

12 Ritter Road,
West Wodonga
3690

Linda Ayton
5 Hales Crt
Wodonga Vic 3690

14.6.05

To whom it may concern

My name is Linda Ayton, and I am a 3rd year arts students at Wodonga Campus of La Trobe University, majoring in sociology and politics. I am originally from the small town of Tottenham, which is located 160 kms west of Dubbo with a population of about 400 people. When applying to different universities during my final year at school, I settled in this campus as my 1st choice for several reasons. Most importantly it offered the subjects I wanted to study, but with also as much weight was the fact that it was a small campus, so I knew I'd get the one-on-one attention I'd be used to attending a small school, along with a healthy range of services vital for a first year student who has moved interstate to a city where she know knows no one, and needs to make friends. If the VSU bill is passed, then all the services I enjoyed when new to the area will not be available to next years first year students.

In first year the most obviously important social events provided by the student association are the O-Week activities, such as the Pub Crawl or the on campus parties where you can meet and talk to fellow students outside of a classroom setting. These days I make most use of the Midway Café in the Hangar, especially around exams times and when assignments are due because sometimes I do not have time to go to the supermarket and it's nice to know that I don't go hungry just because there is no food in the house.

If the services couldn't have been guaranteed when I was in year 12, I would have instead attended Charles Sturt University in Bathurst with my friends from school, as well as going home for long weekends an option that is not available to me here. I do not regret the choice I made back then, I still strongly believe I did the right thing, however with funding at this campus already stretched to the limit, I cannot see how the current level of services can be maintained. I would not recommend it to anyone next year as without support services the distinction between university and school would be blurred if the non-academic aspects of the campus could no longer be guaranteed.

Yours sincerely

Linda Ayton.

Dear Senate Committee,

I had a dream.....

I came to work one day at the Student Administration Office on a regional campus of La Trobe University.

There were many students waiting to talk to me about some problems.

The first student was having problems buying her text books.

I would have sent her to Campus Support Services to ask about an interest free loan to help – which used to be funded by the Campus Student Association which can no longer fund it as not enough people chose to pay their GSF. Try borrowing the copy from the Library. I know you can only have it for two days but they are much in demand these days.

I could have sent her to the Second Hand book shop but that was funded and run by the Campus Student Association so isn't there anymore.

The next student had personal and financial problems and I would have referred him to Campus Support Services but that's funded by the TAFE section of our Student Association and isn't available to University students except on alternate Thursdays. Not enough people chose to pay their GSF. I sent him to Health Services in town to see if they could help. I've had to learn a lot about alternative avenues of support for students. It's not in my job description but students need the help.

Several students were looking for somewhere warm and dry to study and the Library was full to overflowing. The Student Association Building (The Hangar) is only open for a few hours a day now. I suggested they go to the Library in town if they could get to the bus stop in time. Don't know how the local library will feel about this. We seem to be sending students there a lot lately.

Yet another student wanted to know where they could use a microwave to heat their meal and make a cup of tea but The Hangar is only open a few hours a day now. The only place to go now is the staff room or maybe one of the community houses. Pity they're so far away and the buses don't run too often. The timetable used to be in the Student Diary but we don't have that anymore so I photocopy the timetable again.

Yet another student needs some support to prepare their case for the Academic Progress Committee but they can't get to see the Campus Support staff until the alternate Thursday which will be too late. There isn't anyone in the Student Association free to meet her until next week either. I spent some time guiding her through the University processes and told her to talk to her course co-ordinator as well. Not in my PD but the student needs some help.

Another student was having a dispute with the University and wanted some legal advice. I had to refer him to Legal Aid or a local solicitor who sometimes provides free advice to students. This student would like to travel to our Melbourne campus to see the Ombudsman and asked about childcare there. The Student Association used to subsidize the Child Care centre but now they've had to cut back on providing occasional care so she may not be able to go. Not in my PD but the student needs some help.

I remembered the old days when I could just say "The Student Association can help you with that".

I had a dream..... but this dream is a nightmare.

Ann Kerin
Manager, Student Administration (Albury-Wodonga)
La Trobe University.

In closing, the final paragraph is from the Head of Campus for La Trobe University Albury/Wodonga Campus, Pro-Vice Chancellor Professor John Hill.

It is clear that VSU will have a devastating impact on the provision of student amenities across the University sector but an even greater devastating impact on small regional campuses such as the AW campus of La Trobe University. The mission of regional campuses is simply to provide high quality tertiary education to regional Australia at a level equal to that offered at metropolitan campuses. However, regional students are always disadvantaged relative to metropolitan students in not having the same level of facilities and services available at metropolitan campuses and, in particular, a proportional decrease in student amenities. VSU therefore will widen the disadvantage gap of regional students since most student amenities currently available will disappear. Such facilities are not available elsewhere in the region which students can access even if a fee is paid. The introduction of VSU will therefore make it even more difficult to attract students to a regional campus since without a compulsory student amenities fee, such facilities will not be available to give students the support they need throughout their course of study. VSU will effectively mean an even greater struggle for survival of regional campuses.