

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
Legislation Committee

## **Inquiry into the provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005**

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As staff of UNSW College of Fine Arts Students' Association (COFA SA), and as former and current students of various tertiary institutions, we are writing to express our concern with the Federal Governments plan to abolish compulsory student union fees. We believe that the proposed

legislation will have dire consequences on both individual students and university communities generally. It would also result in the likely eventual loss of all of our jobs and the jobs of hundreds, if not thousands of student association employees across the country.

COFA has over 2200 students. COFA SA is governed by students for the benefit of all of those students. Income is derived from the 'student activity fee' paid by all COFA students annually. This fee is used to fund 14 staff and too many services to list here (you can see the COFA SA submission or website [www.cofasa.unsw.edu.au](http://www.cofasa.unsw.edu.au) for greater detail).

Student governance via the SA committee and the Kudos Gallery Management committee ensures that student needs are directly served in all endeavors. Facilities such as Kudos Gallery, Campus Art Store, SA office, student common rooms and kitchen operate as services for students and not as revenue raisers.

Kudos Gallery employs one part-time gallery supervisor who ensures that students observe occupational health and safety standards, guides students through curating and hanging shows (many are doing so for the first time so the tricks of the trade need to be learnt) and helps them survive the pressures of opening night. The COFA SA publicity coordinator assists students with writing press releases, putting together invitations and marketing their show. Both of these staff members are former COFA students.

The Campus Art Store (CAS) employs seven part-time and casual staff to ensure that students are able to readily access affordable stationery and art materials for their courses- CAS stock is subsidised with a 15% discount. CAS staff members are there to provide extensive assistance to students when they are deciding which materials are required to bring their projects and ideas to life. CAS staff consist of five current students and two former students. Two staff have been employed by CAS for their entire working lives. All are practicing artists.

The SA office is the first port of call for many students when they have any concerns, problems, invitations, ideas or news to share. It is also the source of our website, e-newsletter, general information, publications, activities, events, advocacy, and representation. It is from here that students can borrow for free the van, ute, data projector, video, TV, camera and DVD players and much more.

Activities ranging from yoga to sketch club, o-week to a fortnightly lunch are all free for COFA students and provide fantastic opportunities to meet other students and participate in activities that may otherwise be unaffordable as a student. Events range from a regular monthly DJ gig to band nights and live performances to films nights. These events are instigated and coordinated by students with support from staff, providing vital industry experience in marketing, logistics, design, negotiation, interview preparation and presentation for participating students.

Based on handing out free diaries, wall-planners and bags to all students from o-week until week two, we estimate that we had more than 2000 visits from students- that doesn't include the countless times students came to us to find out where to find their supervisor, administration, lecture, tutorial, bus route, timetables etc. Nor does it include the flood of students that come into the Campus Arts Store or Kudos Gallery. SA office staff see hundreds of students per week, some in tears, some lost, some joyous, some come in to say hi, others just pop in when the free tea, coffee, milk or ping-pong balls have run out. We ensure that all feel welcome. The SA staff are made up of two current COFA students, one current UTS student (also a former COFA student) and two former students.

COFA SA staff provide a stable and nurturing environment for both committee members and the general student population, one where students can feel secure and able to develop both academically and personally. Many students are, for the first time, taking full responsibility for their own lives. International and rural students in particular are cut off from their normal support systems. SA staff support a community in which students can find non-judgmental, friendly advice.

The SA provides a 'non-authoritarian', independent service that the University cannot.

Like SA committee members, SA staff are here due to their commitment to student representation, advocacy, service provision and community development. Staff members believe that it is vital that university students govern their own affairs, staff provide vital continuity, experience and assistance in doing so. Many staff once were, or still are, committee, club or society position holders at various campuses around the world.

COFA SA staff are highly qualified and experienced, and could command far higher salaries in the 'outside' world. Despite this, staff retention is extremely high with COFA SA staff having a combined service to student organisations of over 100 years.

We see first hand the benefits that students derive from student organisations and we can envisage the void that this legislation will create within universities and within our own lives. We suggest that the proposed Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005 be abandoned.

*Signed*

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*Supported by*

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