



ACU National Student Association

Melbourne Campus Student Association
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The Committee Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations
and Education Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

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

On behalf of the students of ACU National, I wish to make a submission to the current inquiry being undertaken by the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee into the provisions of the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005*.

Australian Catholic University (ACU National) is a truly national university with six small, friendly campuses located across the east seaboard of Australia. ACU National is dedicated to the rigours of intellectual scholarship; students receive individual attention enabling them to fulfil their potential and to really enjoy the learning that they do. ACU National has an ethos which is richly based on genuine Christian values and we are open to all students regardless of their faith and practice.

ACU National has leadership in health sciences, education, and is highly respected in the fields of business, information technology, the liberal arts and social sciences. ACU National graduates enjoy excellent employment rates; they are well rounded persons who have the freedom to learn to be themselves.

At ACU National, students make life long friends, they have a very good understanding of the world about them and they are placed to make a significant contribution to the community with a world class degree.

The Student Associations of ACU National, who receive funding via the compulsory Student Services Fees currently in place, provide a wealth of services for all students enrolled at ACU National.

The following outlines the current structure of the ACU National Student Associations:

- ACU National has six student associations and a national association. The six represent the students of the local campus and the seventh, the national association, is a joint meeting of the six presidents and the student who has been elected to the University Senate.
- The recognized student body is an association, not a union nor a council. This has the effect of students not being aligned to any particular platform.
- The associations are official only when recognized by the Vice-Chancellor. This has the effect of a balance between student's expression of their views and the University ensuring that the views do not conflict with the University Mission.
- The associations have a common constitution that has been accepted by the University Senate. Amongst other things, the associations agree to uphold the Mission of the University in its activities.
- No association has agreed to recognize a political group and no finances have been made available to any political group.
- The AUQA (Australian Universities Quality Agency) Report of an Audit of Australian Catholic University, December 2002 recommended that the University consider how to enhance the students' understanding of the nature and value of the national character of ACU, and formally engage the student body in the life of the University as a whole.
- As a result, the University, in collaboration with the students, has given considerable attention to the national character of the student association(s). This has resulted in additional expenses, given that the University campuses are in three states and the Capital Territory.

The following outlines the effect that VSU is likely to have on the Student Associations of ACU National:

- A likely effect of VSU is that there will be a significant loss of income to the student associations. The student body does not come from the high SES groups of society and many students work long hours to maintain themselves.
- Evidence of the number of students who apply for student loans and bursaries and are eligible for Commonwealth Learning Scholarships and Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships indicates that students do not have spare finances. Thus the University assumes that very few will be able or willing to provide significant money to a voluntary student association.
- This will decrease under VSU of available finances to achieve the national character of the student associations.
- VSU will severely impact on the University's ability to engage with the students to ensure that the Mission is achieved. This will be catastrophic for this University, especially in a context where the government is making it loud and clear that Universities are to achieve their distinctive Mission.
- VSU will greatly hinder and threaten the advances made to achieve the recommendation of AUQA. The presidents and student Senator meet regularly to ensure that there is a degree of commonality and cooperation between the associations and their activities.
- The cost of maintaining seven association offices and travel is currently and will remain a significant budget item. This factor alone will restrict the effectiveness of the associations from achieving their goals as laid out in their constitutions.
- The cost of holding national events will be severely curtailed. In 2004 the students held a Big Event to bring students from each campus together to

address one of their association goals. An event planned for September 2005 and another for 2006, both aimed at fulfilling reasonable student association goals, will suffer were VSU to be implemented as foreshadowed in the draft legislation.

- Spin off events from these national events will, in all likelihood, cease. These are vital for the student body and the fulfilment of the University Mission.
- Each campus has a history of events and activities for students that will certainly cease in their current form. Student orientation camps, leadership camps, orientation week activities, end of year exit activities: all these will suffer as a result of VSU and the dramatic loss of association revenue.
- Associations require seed funding to make deposits on function centres and equipment for their social and sporting activities. This will suffer from the lack of finances to enable this to happen.
- Associations have always contributed heavily to charities, often as one-off events and often as a result of their social events. The focus will become modified as students will be less likely to attend if the costs of attendance at events have to increase considerably for the functions to be held. The community, as well as the students, will suffer as a result.
- Associations have contributed significantly to campus facilities, arrangements that have assisted students in their studies and general leisure. This will cease altogether.
- Associations have used some of their finances to make bursaries available to fellow students. This will cease.
- Currently fees are used to support students to attend events of significance which reflect the University Mission, such as World Youth Day in Cologne, elite athletes to compete internationally, student to attend international conferences. This will cease.

On behalf of the students located at all six campuses of ACU National, we ask that you take this submission into consideration when making a decision in regards to The Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005.

Yours faithfully,

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ACUNSA Representative

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