

Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU)



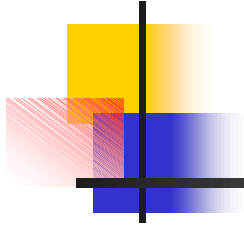
The triumph of ideology over good policy

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The Facts:

- VSU was passed through the Australian Parliament in December 2005, and was implemented a few days ago on July 1st 2006.
- Fundamentally alters the relationship between students, student organisations and universities - to the detriment of all.



- Prior to July 1st 2006, every student made a compulsory contribution to the student organisation on their campus.
- Deregulation meant the fee varied from campus to campus.
- Around \$160 million in student contributions paid annually across Australia.
- Student contributions funded student organisations who provided the following services to students:



Essentially everything on campus that is NOT class...

- Academic support
- Clubs and societies
- Sport
- Debating programs
- O-Weeks/orientation
- Subsidised childcare
- Welfare assistance
- Student publications
- Social events
- Cultural programs
- Subsidised food
- Representation
- Campaigns/activism
- Subsidised health/dental care
- Academic gown hire



Impact of VSU

- Making payment of the student contribution fee voluntary would have the same effect as making taxation or council rates voluntary-**significant** fall in income.
- VSU is a totally user-pays system.
- Most student organisations are not-for-profit associations who spend all revenue on services for their members.



Campaign against VSU

- Largest student demonstrations in many, many years.
- Coalitions of unlikely allies- sports associations, service providers, representative bodies, universities, academics.
- Almost total student and community opposition to the legislation.
- Govt Senator Barnaby Joyce crossed the floor.



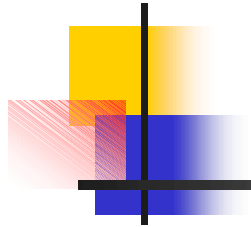
The WA Experience

- In Western Australia - VSU operated from 1996 until 2002.
- Edith Cowan University Student Guild went into liquidation...twice.
- Murdoch University Student Guild weeks away from liquidation when legislation repealed.
- Mass staff redundancies and services lost.
- Membership take-up between 5%-30%.
- Widely agreed to be total disaster.



Why Do It Then:

- VSU is ideological
- Student organisations and NUS seen as “lefty” organisations whose only role is “political” activity.
- The reality is less than 5% of our total budgets are spent on political activism, and even then it is in students interests- opposing fee increases, ect.
- Govt tried to introduce VSU before, but was defeated, used Senate majority to push it through this time.



**“VSU is designed in part to destroy
the National Union of Students, which
is not seen as a conservatives friend”**

Leaked Liberal Party Briefing Paper, 1999



Reasons Given For VSU

- Freedom of association - student organisations are closed shops.
- Student organisations are inefficient and poorly managed.
- Students will get better value from a user-pays system.
- If organisations are worth it, students will join them anyway.



Why this is untrue

- Like taxes and rates, students should contribute to their community, and there are opt-out clauses already.
- Student organisations have a very good history, which very few corrupt admins or poor management.
- User pays system will not work- services will close even for those students prepared to pay!
- New students do not know the benefits when they enroll, will not join until it is too late.



The Nightmare Begins!

- 450 jobs lost already
- Shops closed on many campuses.
- Sports subsidies gone- sports clubs closing.
- Clubs and Socs grants gone.
- Food vouchers gone.
- Dental services closed.
- Orientation programs scaled back.
- Price increases at campus outlets.
- Students newspapers shut down.
- Student theatres closed.
- Sport facilities shelved.



Where to from here?

- Consolidation around core activities.
- Try to ward-off mass bankruptcies.
- Continue to highlight negative impacts of VSU - maintain campaign.
- Pressure university administrations to support student organisations- name and shame those who do not/who allow student organisations to die.



The Australian Experience?

- VSU is a total disaster and a huge mistake.
- No other country expects student services to exist in a completely user-pays environment.
- VSU is “a victory for the red-necked philistines” Gavin Brown, Vice-Chancellor, University of Sydney.