

EXECUTIVE HALF YEAR REPORT

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NAME	Genevieve Fowler
POSITION	Queer Officer
REPORT PERIOD	1 January – 1 June 2012
TOTAL WEEKS WORKED	11
HOURS WORKED	236.5
BONUS APPLICATION	N/A

Reporting on Priority Goals:

1. **Goal 1. Education:** *Student Support: To secure and maintain adequate state income, welfare and employment support for students. (I primarily deal with the 'welfare' aspect of this Goal.)*

- a) **Queer Mentoring** – As Queer Officer, I help to maintain the welfare of LGBT students by providing a Queer Mentoring service. The first initiative of mine to be operational, this programme sets up Victoria University Students with 'buddies' who specialise in gay, lesbian, trans*, bi, coming out and relationship issues. The mentors, currently a group of a dozen older UniQ members, are experienced, accepting, confidential and non-judgmental and aim to make queer students' experience of university as positive as possible. The Queer Mentoring Program fosters the welfare of students emotionally and academically and to provide students with helpful resources to support them as they explore issues of identity. So far, feedback on the program has been excellent.
- b) **Queering Our Campuses** – This original project serves to advance the welfare of LGBT students by extending the influence, visibility and sense of community to campuses other than Kelburn, thus decreasing the sense of isolation reported by queer students on Karori, Te Aro and Pipitea. This will be achieved through the establishment of Campus Delegates for each of these campuses. These individuals will be honorary members of the UniQ Executive and organize social outings for the UniQ members on their campus, manage a mailing list and Facebook page for their constituency and advertise UniQ events through these in

addition to poster. These delegates will be advertised for in Wk3 and elected at the AGM in Wk4 of Tri2.

- c) **Advocacy and Representation** – This year, I have acted as a representative and advocate for queer welfare on campus in many ways.
- For example, I respond to the concerns and requests of the LGBT constituency at Victoria University on roughly a fortnightly basis. For instance, earlier this year I, alongside Matthew Ellison, formally brought concerns of queer students regarding a Salient column to the editors which partially resulted in the disestablishment of the column.
 - I also represent VUWSA, UniQ and queer students at events regarding their welfare in the wider community. I make an effort to attend meetings and discussions (whether online or IRL) of groups such as The Queer Avengers, Tranzform and other activist organizations in order to both represent the interests of students and to coordinate efforts regarding student welfare with the wider community.
 - I bring issues critical to the effective functioning of UniQ to VUWSA in informal and executive contexts. Mostly this regards funding, permissions and advice. There have also been instances of mediation and public relations in which VUWSA has acted as a supportive organization.
- d) **VUWSA Contributions** – The Queer officer participates in regular activities organized by VUWSA regarding the welfare of students at large, not just LGBT, that are organized by VUWSA. For instance, I have acted as support staff at events such as Flu Shots, Orientation Week, collecting Free Bread, the Budget Day March, the AGM, and others.
2. **Goal 5. Activities:** *To provide or assist sporting, social and cultural activities, for and by members; primarily through clubs.*
- a. **UniQ** – The Queer Officer assumes a primary or assisting role in the organisation of UniQ’s social and planning events as an honorary member of the executive. Thanks to the consistent and thorough leadership of Matthew Ellison in collaboration with myself, the membership of UniQ and attendance at events has at least tripled since last year. Events are now regular and of a consistent and diverse nature and executive and constituent members continue to be engaged via. regular online and offline activity. I believe that LGBT students are well catered for both socially and politically by the increasingly professional efforts of the UniQ Executive.
- b. **The Girls’ Group** – As a founding member of this group, I fulfil a similar role on The Girls’ Group Executive – coordinating their efforts with those of UniQ and ensuring that their events are to an exceptional standard. The Girls’ Group fulfils a primarily social role, holding fortnightly cocktail evenings which, in my experience, have been high energy, positive and inclusive events for all involved.

- c. **The Gender Club** – I serve as a supporting Executive member to this club which, despite several informal planning meetings and encouragement from the leadership team, is yet to officially form in 2012. However, this continues to be a work in progress.
 - d. **Legalise Love** – This marriage-equality advocacy group is just re-establishing on campus. I have served as a consultant – giving advice of effective organisational structures for the executive and event organisation.
 - e. **Pride Week** – This week is the culmination of UniQ’s social and cultural events for LGBT students. About 40% of my hours in recent weeks have been put towards overseeing the planning process. I am also on the subcommittees for two of the events.
 - f. **US Embassy** – In recent months, the US Embassy in NZ has informally begun LGBT outreach efforts in Wellington in which UniQ has been privileged to be involved. I am lucky enough to be the primary contact for the University in these efforts, which have resulted in the establishment of three excellent sponsored events, two of which will be featuring predominantly in our Pride Week. I also hope this relationship may be able to extend further into the year, providing support for other UniQ events such as the National Conference and my own activist projects.
 - g. **Website** – The efficacy of these events will be increased by the pending establishment of a UniQ website, a forum for the advertising of UniQ events among other things. This is currently under construction.
3. **Goal 2. Education:** *University: To ensure the university provides equity and quality in assessment, teaching, conditions and course access supported by sufficient resources.*
- a. **Safer Spaces** – The VUW Safer Spaces Programme is scheduled to be launched in Wk1, Tri2 and is an LGBT education and awareness programme for staff, students and affiliates of Victoria University. Having nearly completed a full revision of the program subsequent to researching similar projects, this project hopes to provide an insight into the concerns of LGBT students that staff might not otherwise be aware of – thus making the campus a safer place through education. Safer Spaces encourages its participants to become active ‘queer allies’ and to reflect their acceptance and support of queer students by displaying a safer space sticker.

Reporting on Other Goals:

- 1. **Goal 3. Education:** *Equity To promote equity for disadvantaged members in access to and within the university.*
 - a. The Queer Officer can provide advocacy on behalf of LGBT students who believe they are being discriminated against by the education structure. With the exception of giving some brief advice about Study Link and their

approach to trans* issues, I have not needed to fulfil this role. However, this will be advertised on the pending UniQ website.

2. **Goal 6. Public Issues:** To promote discussion and action as appropriate, on issues concerning students as citizens.
 - a. **Political Involvement:** I support LGBT students as citizens in my political activities as Queer Officer. For instance, I am on the subcommittees for two Pride Week events which aim to place marriage equality in the public sphere and media. I am an active consulting member of the Legalise Love Executive.
 - b. **Bent** – I subedit and coordinate the weekly Salient queer column which promotes discussion and visibility of queer issues throughout campus. Both the Communications Officer, Jonathan Goode and myself, are dedicated to inclusivity, diversity, accuracy and eloquence in these column. In addition, we are also coordinating the content in the Queer Edition of Salient – the spaces for which have already been filled by keen writers. We are also in the process of establishing a blog on the pending UniQ website which will both display Bent content and other original content of a similar theme.
 - c. **Radio Show** – I am in the process of establishing a weekly radio segment for UniQ, serving the same informative purpose.
 - d. **Social Media** – As an administrator of the UniQ and Girls' Group Facebook pages, I also promote political discussion of issues relating to LGBT students online and their attendance at relevant community events.

General Tasks and Initiatives - *While many of these have been mentioned above, please find a) the official promotional blurb and b) a current progress update for each project below.*

1. **Queer Mentoring**

- a. “Welcome to the Queer Mentoring Programme at Victoria University. Are you new to uni? Maybe questioning your sexuality or gender? Having issues with parents, partner or friends? Or just need someone friendly to chat to? Then this is the place for you! A VUWSA Queer Officer Initiative, this programme sets up Victoria University Students with 'buddies' who specialise in gay, lesbian, trans*, bi, coming out and relationship issues. Our mentors are experienced, accepting, confidential and non-judgemental and aim to make your experience of university as positive as possible. Queer Mentoring at Vic is flexible and able to adapt to whatever your counselling needs might be. Fortnightly coffee dates? Someone to confidentially email? A few sporadic Skype sessions? We can even escort you if you're nervous about attending a queer event alone.

The Queer Mentoring Programme aims to:

- foster mentoring relationships that offer support and guidance to queer students at Victoria
- provide support for students who are just coming out - at university, at home or to their friends, and to provide support for those students who don't yet feel able to come out.
- provide helpful resources to students as they explore issues of identity
- build self-esteem, good habits and motivation

Interested? Email queer.mentoring@gmail.com. We can't wait to hear from you!"

- b. Queer Mentoring is currently functional. Excluding my ongoing role to oversee the performances of the Head Mentors (who organize ongoing mentor training, update the manual and resource list), this project is complete.

2. Queering Our Campuses

- a. "Queering Our Campuses' is a VUWSA Queer Officer Initiative dedicated to extending UniQ's influence, visibility and sense of community to campuses other than Kelburn - namely, Te Aro, Pipitea and Karori. It was recently brought to my attention that the queer community at Victoria University has become isolated and generally solely visible to Kelburn students. Thus, this program involves electing three 'campus delegates' whose job it is to raise awareness of the university queer community and include and engage students on other campuses. These individuals are honorary members of the UniQ Executive and their duties include the following:

1. To co-ordinate, facilitate, and lead their respective UniQ subgroups; GLBT at Pipitea, GLBT at Karori and GLBT at Te Aro.
2. To extend the influence, visibility, and community spirit of UniQ to their respective campuses.
3. To keep the Executive informed of queer issues on their respective campuses.
4. To create (if applicable) and maintain a Facebook group and mailing list for their respective campuses.
5. To advertise UniQ events to their campus' population via posterage, email and social media on their campus solely designated for queer news and promotional material - when permission for such a space is acquired.
6. To facilitate small events for UniQ members on their campus, such as study groups, outings, coffee dates and casual drinks.

Another facet of this programme is a campus mapping endeavor which aims to provide visual image of each campus outlining where the UniSex Bathrooms are. As the specifically gendered bathrooms are often a scary, uncomfortable and dangerous place for transgendered, genderqueer and gender nonconforming people, this aims to make life on campus a little easier for students that may not fit neatly within a gender binary.

- b. Queering Our Campuses Delegates: These individuals will be advertised for during Week 3 (via mailing list, Facebook and posters on each campus) and elected at the UniQ AGM in Week 4. I will also meet with Jimmy, the Queer Officer at Massey, and discuss the possibility of extending this program to Massey.

Mapping: These maps have been created after several meetings with Campus Services. I still need to visit the bathrooms to double check the maps' accuracy and convert the images to pdf files.

3. Safer Spaces

- a. "The VUW Safer Spaces Programme is an LGBT education and awareness programme for staff, students and affiliates of Victoria University. By providing regular fun and interactive sessions for staff and University leaders, this Queer Officer Project aims to raise awareness about topics and problems relating to queer youth and to make the university experience of equal and exceptional value for everyone. The Safer Spaces Programme encourages its participants to become active 'queer allies' and to reflect their acceptance and support of queer students by displaying a safer space sticker. Having completed the programme and become 'Safe Space Certified', graduates are encouraged to place this Safe Space stickers in their office or on their office door, on their RA bedroom door, on text books, back packs, etc. Thus creating a visual network of acceptance around campus.

“This programme works by incorporating the opinions and knowledge of those who participate in it in order to remain completely relevant and completely democratic. After each training session, the stories, questions and criticisms of the participants are incorporated to make the program as inclusive, accurate and informative as possible. As no single person or group can possibly define what is conclusively and absolutely a ‘safe space’ for everyone (in fact, there is no such thing), this programme functions as both a research project as well as an awareness raising endeavour, a discussion and a process. Due to continuous updating, this project is evolving and manuals produced for each session are unique. Safer Spaces at Vic aims to make the campus a more inclusive and informed place primarily through the input of its participants.”

- b. Having nearly completed a full revision of the program subsequent to researching similar projects, this project is scheduled to launch in Wk1 Tri2 with its first formal session. Prior to this, I need to undergo community consulting, with Student Counselling, Vic staff and LGBT leaders in the wider community, most likely in the form of a trial Safer Spaces session. I will also need to refine the functionality of my unique idea regarding an ‘evolving’ project – see above.

4. Website

- a. This project aims to create and launch a new UniQ Website - a communications platform for the group. This site will be equipped with a homepage, blog, events page, and subpages for The Girls’ Group, The Queer Officer and The Gender Club. When completed, the website will be maintained by the Communications Officer of UniQ. Artistry will be coordinated with the promotional material associated with Pride Week.
- b. This website has been commissioned and is likely to be functional within a fortnight.

5. ‘Other’

I am working privately on two web-based resources that I hope to fully formulate over the next year or so. These activist projects are still very much in their infancy but

have potential. I plan to work on these at the end of the year after the former projects are completed.

Representation (for more information, please see above)

1. UniQ Victoria Executive

- I serve as an honorary (non-voting) member of the UniQ Executive. This year, my role has been largely as an 'over-seer'; working alongside the President to coordinate the many facets that the club has grown into in recent months.

2. Legalise Love – National Coordination Committee

- I sit on this committee and a Wellington Representative of the group. My leadership is limited but I support and provide advice on executive organisational structures and event planning.

3. Legalise Love – Wellington Branch Executive

- Ibid.

4. VUWSA Executive Committee

- I sit on this committee as an executive member. I support VUWSA in all their endeavours as a Student Representative Body and the projects of my fellow executive. In particular, I serve to support and represent queer students on campus. For more information, please see above.

5. Welfare Reporting Committee

- I sit on this committee as a member of the Welfare Team. We meet approximately fortnightly and share plans and progress and discuss issues regarding the Welfare of Victoria University Students.

Strengths

1. Organisation and Leadership

I find my primary strengths in coordinating the strengths and skills of individuals within a team towards a specific goal. For instance, I devised an organisational structure for the UniQ Executive that allowed the small group to organize nine separate events for Pride Week within the timeframe of a few weeks. Similarly, in my own personal projects, I relish in finding time-effective ways of dividing up and completing my tasks.

2. Motivation and Passion

Despite the emotional and physical stress of leadership and the occasionally rather harrowing downsides of being involved in politics, I do thoroughly enjoy my position with VUWSA. Queer Activism is my passion and I hope to continue on several of my own personal projects well after my term with the university has ended. I also plan to run for NZUSA President in the 2012 election.

Weaknesses

1. Communications

UniQ has in recent months become a target of largely unwarranted and damaging online bullying. While this has been a source of a lot of stress for the hardworking executive, luckily, this is a problem that is solvable. Myself and the Executive have, as a result, learnt a great deal and are consulting with a variety of different groups to form practical and effective solutions to this problem. It is likely that a formal communications policy will be written into the constitution at the next AGM.

2. Niche Role

I often feel like the work I do for VUWSA is significantly distanced from that of other executive members due to the niche nature of my role. While I enjoy supporting VUWSA's activities in any way I can, these events and services are more often than not irrelevant to the role for which I was elected. I'd thus wholeheartedly support any reformulations of the executive structure which are likely to streamline its roles and avoid unnecessary and costly overlap.

Overall Rating

Overall, it's been a thoroughly enjoyable and extremely productive trimester. Within half a year I have nearly completed all four of my initiatives, two of which are original projects, and the groundwork has been laid for their launch in early tri two. However, there's definitely room for improvement on many fronts. Funding will continue to be a problem as will publicity. As subjective as such a rating is, I'd give myself a 7/10, with the aim to improve my performance over the next half-year.