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NAME	Marlon Drake
POSITION	President
REPORT PERIOD	1 st January – 30 June, 2018
HOURS WORKED	1176.5
HOURS REQUIRED	1040

Intro

The first half of this year has been absolutely fantastic. This is mainly due to an absolutely amazing executive. We kicked off the year with an awesome retreat out at Waitarere beach, where the team came together to get to know each other, and plan out our priorities for the year. We actually only had an executive of 9 from the beginning as the Education Officer position was left vacant when the winner of the election transferred to AUT. Luckily, at our AGM in March we elected an amazing EO in a by-election, so we were still able to get things started super smoothly.

From the start, my main goal this year has been to put as many of our students at the forefront of their own issues. Aside from each of the constitutional goals I'm charged with carrying out this has been how I am measuring the success of my presidency. Giving students a platform to share their experiences and make change far more effective than just me speaking on their behalf.

Goal 1: Education Quality: To ensure that the University provides the best teaching and learning, research opportunities, assessment and training to students.

a. Class Rep Outreach

A huge focus for me this year has been to ensure that we are reviewing the way we run our class rep system in a way that is effective and involves as many students as possible in the process. We want our class reps to have the skills and confidence to take part in the academic process by representing the views of their peers and improve the courses they take. This year our goal was to affect change through the way we engage with our class reps.

This starts with recruitment. We produced a class rep recruitment video which was a lil bit crackup and put it on our social media, and in lecture theatres. We got good feedback on the video, and it received good engagement.

The next stage is training. By bringing training online we're able to save costs (and paper) and re-invest that money in class rep events.

For class rep events, the model we decided on was 'Sharing with Charlotte' sessions. On the whole these have gotten good attendance and feedback from our class reps who want the sessions to continue. They are a place for class reps to meet each other, feedback on issues from their faculty, and put a name to the face of our SRC to make communicating have one less emotional barrier.

b. Academic Board

This year a goal of mine has been to have effective pre-meets with the whole student representative team on the Academic Board to ensure that everybody is on the same page, everybody is participating, and everybody is coming along. At these pre-meets we have the AVP, the PGSA President, the Student Rep on Academic Board, the Pasifika Representative, the Māori representative, the SRC, and myself. This spawned from a lack of engagement between VUWSA and the other student reps last year. It's a simple change, but I believe has had a positive impact so far and we started the year strong with academics noticing the strongest presence from students in a while.

Due to a few personnel changes in our partner associations, NT and PSC, it's been difficult to maintain the presence but fortunately as the semester ends we have new people in the roles ready to pick up and continue the good mahi.

c. Printing Costs

One of the complaints I heard coming into this year was around the cost of printing. Early on, through lobbying relevant university staff members, I was able to secure a 5 cent decrease on the cost of colour printing. This is a very very small first step but hopefully relieves some of the pressure for some of our students. After that the conversation moved to reducing the need for printing in the first place. Together with the AVP Simran we have begun discussions around online assessment, investigating the way it is currently done, as well as discussing future opportunities to do so. This includes everything from brand new online tests, to simple online essay submission. It is clear that a bit of a culture shift is required around this.

Goal 2: Student Support: To advocate for adequate financial support, income and welfare for students in order to remove barriers to education.

a. Fairer Fares

After a successful campaign last year we received a commitment from Regional Council to introduce a tertiary discount for full time students in the Wellington Region. The early days of this year were spent in consultation with the university and GWRC on the best way to implement this. The CEO and I spent a lot of time in discussion around this issue and heavily advocated for the option with the least admin required of students. This was the decision that ended up being upheld so overall it was

a successful process. The next stage of this will be pushing for the discount to be extended to part time students.

b. Student Allowance, and Fees Free

This year we saw a \$50 increase to the student allowance and living costs, and the first year of one year fees free. We've been lobbying in support of these changes, as well as pushing for a universal student allowance. Not only that but we have been public advocating for this change to remain in place and in fact continue to grow into a USA. This is important as there was very nearly a media backlash towards the \$50 increase due to a misconception around the impact of the increase. There was also a lack of appreciation for the fees free policy, which puts the policy at risk of political backsliding. If we do not stand up for successful student policies in the public eye, then we will lose them.

We brought the conversation to Chris Hipkins, the Minister of Education, and discussed the allowance and fees free and our support for these policies. We explained that we believe this is only the first step in the direction where we'd like barrier free education to go next. This was a very productive discussion, and gives the minister more support for policies which are very much having a positive impact on students.

Goal 3: Equity and Access: To promote equity for disadvantaged students in access to and within the University.

a. Ngāi Tauira

Last year we saw a very close relationship begin to be built with our partner association Ngāi Tauira (NT). This year I have sought to continue that relationship with Nikayla and Aidan, the 2018 co-presidents of NT. There are two main ways I have endeavoured to do this.

First, by trying to have regular meetings with the pair. In this meetings I try and stay in touch with the issues facing Māori students at VUW. Not only this, but I try and provide support for them and the issues that presidents of students' associations know so well, i.e. internal politics. I would be lying if I said they didn't also support me in this way.

Second, by this year trying to sort out an MoU. We started this by first agreeing to investigate the possibility, as currently we do not have an active MoU with NT. We agreed to look further to go further than this by establishing a kawenata. Aidan and I sought advice on this from a previous NT and Te Mana Akonga president, Te Wehi Wright. He gave me some really really good strong advice that I have to say challenged my views in the best way possible.

b. Pasifika Students Council (PSC)

I have sought to continue the relationship with PSC in a similar way. It is so important that I keep in touch with issues facing the Pasifika community, and keeping in touch with Andre and his team has very much allowed me to better represent issues facing the community at board meetings I attend. I have also spoken at length about how we can best support our Pasifika students with the AVC Luamanuvao Winnie Laban.

c. Queer Support Coordinator

This year I have made it an absolute priority to see that a staff position for a Queer Support Coordinator is introduced at VUW. We are **behind in this area nationally**. Members of the LGBTQIA+ have no dedicated support and this is unacceptable. I am pushing for this at ACSSL, within VUWSA, and also within my one on one meetings with university staff.

Goal 4: Services: To provide quality, cost effective services for the benefit of members, and, where appropriate, students.

a. Promotion

VUWSA has fantastic service provision, but so many of our students do not know about them. This year we sought to actively change that with dedicated hall visits to each hall to make sure all of our first year students are being indoctrinated into our mighty union from the get go. This was also an opportunity to get to know heaps of first year students which is always an absolute blast.

b. O'Week

This year I organized for the inclusion of a safe space in town for every night in O'Week, except Wednesday as that was anticipated to be a chill night. This received high usage, and loads of positive feedback from our first year students, as well as good comments received from older students too. The space offered a place to be picked up from, a place to charge your phone, free water and lollies, and most importantly paramedics as well as security guards so you could get away from an unsafe situation if you need to.

I also made a crack up video with the Wellington Police about staying safe during O'Week. Haha.

c. Advocacy

I have been pushing the university hard on the need for a second tenancy advocate to deal with the massive increase of tenancy cases our advocate Erica is receiving. Students are getting a rough deal in the current property climate. Some property managers are taking advantage of the housing situation in Wellington which is resulting in this increase of cases, as students need support in what is an emotionally draining process for many of them. Our advocate is amazing, and does an amazing job. The problem is the volume, and the university needs to help us mitigate the housing issues as we wait for more student accommodation.

Goal 5: Activities: To support sporting, social and cultural activities for and by students; primarily through Clubs and Representative Groups.

a. Arts Week

We wanted to really experiment with Arts Week this year, and put students at the front of all of our activities. Arts Week should be a time for students to express themselves! With this in mind we organized two new main features (alongside other changes of course, well done to our events manager Beth!) which were in my opinion just awesome.

First, a "paint your feelings" wall in the hub where students could come up and paint whatever they wanted, and however they were feeling. Needless to say there was some pretty crackup stuff.

Second, a student art exhibition. This was a massive success. We had a huge turnout on the opening night with over 100 students showing up in what was a relatively small space. Students could submit their art to the exhibition, where it was then purchased by other members of our community. Nicola Willis MP attended and performed her first ever ribbon cutting. Heaps of the art sold, and some students even made a few hundred dollars to cover the cost of living for a couple weeks! We will definitely do this again in the future.

b. Food Trucks

We want an engaging campus at VUW. The university in many ways is our home, and it sometimes feels like we can't even utilize spaces on our own campus without being told a firm "NO" because we might spill something. We've been in talks with the university about wanting more engagement activities on campus run by VUWSA, and by working with the COO Mark we've been able to establish regular monthly food truck days, complete with music and beanbags. We've received fantastic feedback from students AND from staff. The best part about the food truck days is when we have all the students out there, talking, taking a break, getting a bit of variety in their diet, and mingling amongst staff doing the same thing. THAT is true community building, the results of which are so so positive.

Goal 6: Public Issues: To be the critic and conscience of the University and society, by promoting discussion and action on issues concerning students.

a. Russell McVeagh, and the March on Midland

This year started off with awful news of disgusting behaviour at one of the country's largest law firms, involving students from our very own institution. There was huge anger within our student community, particularly from our law school. We decided that we were going to be the ones to take action on what was not only a student issue, but also a legal system issue. We marched with around 250 students to Midland Park, which sat outside the Russell McVeagh office in the heart of the CBD. We made headlines, sent a ripple through the country, and most importantly, gave our law students a platform to speak. From then on we got a seat at the table with the Law Society to discuss the future of the profession, bringing representatives of VUWLSS into the Law Society Boardroom. We also got an audience with the Minister of Finance who helped us prepare a policy proposal for changes in procurement policy, suggesting that government should consider a firm's ethical practice not just whatever is most financially efficient. This was accepted by the Attorney-General David Parker who also sent a very positive reply. All of this was organized by our VUWSA team and law students. What a great campaign.

b. Sexual Violence

Sexual violence does not just take place in law firms. It is a wider societal issue. This year we have been working hard on the issue inside and outside the university. After a meeting with the Sexual Abuse Prevention Network, the Wellington City Council, and the Wellington Police, we started a campaign called "Don't Guess the Yes", which targets sexual assaults on Courtenay Place amongst the nightlife. The campaign is a sex positive one which focuses on the offenders, and pushes for people (particularly our young men) to think about their actions, and their words. The campaign is in an effort to reduce rates of sexual violence in town. It was received very positively, and is set to continue in waves around major festive periods in Wellington through posters, and videos.

c. Student Housing

I have been pushing the university on getting more student housing ready for our students in order to send a wave through the rental market in Wellington to ensure students have a place to live when they study. I have been doing this through internal conversation, and through media engagement as well. It is so so important that if the University wants more students, they give them a place to live as well. This has been met with large success and I have had some very productive conversations with stakeholders as a result. I have also made my concerns heard to the Mayor, as it will take council and the University to work together to free up land and give permits for construction.

More student accommodation is now in the works and we will continue to make sure students are a part of this process. The next big focus is making sure that accommodation is not just a roof over a head, but also a place where community can be organically built with support from VUWSA and the institution.

d. Letting Fees

“What the F*** are Letting Fees?” is a campaign we launched this semester to gather submissions for the Residential Tenancies Amendment Bill (Letting Fees) which seeks to ban letting fees. Letting fees and administrative cost are bullshit arbitrary charges which property managers use to skim a bit more off the top from their tenants. They’re so bullshit and random that nobody has actually asked what they are, and we just pay them. Well no longer! We asked students what they thought the money was used for, what they would use it for if they didn’t have to pay a letting fee, and got some pretty amusing and concerning results. We presented this to the select committee with super star tenant Finn Carroll, another student with a platform to speak for an issue affecting themselves. Awesome stuff!

Goal 7: Finance: To maximize the member benefits by minimizing fees or user charges through internal efficiency and non-member revenue.

a. PA System

This year we decided to purchase a new PA system. Previously, we had resorted to hiring out a PA for all of our events which was stacking up costs over the years. Some student associations close to us also had to resort to this. Instead we made an investment in a high quality sound system which will provide us a net gain in a couple of years, and also is a service we can offer to some of our close and trusted student groups (e.g. NT).

Goal 8: Accountability: To ensure accountability to, and representation of, members

a. NZUSA

This year I have pushed hard for more transparency around the internal workings of NZUSA, and have voiced the concerns of my executive and students to NZUSA. The feedback has been met extremely well and I have contributed to the internal structural review of NZUSA which is running along smoothly. Transparency and accountability is one of the big principles we have taken as a national exec, with good leadership from the National President Jonathan Gee.

Goal 9: Sustainability: To recognize the needs of current and future generations by promoting sustainable lifestyles and actions to members while ensuring the sustainable operation of the Association and University members

a. Trailer and Bins

I have been working with our amazing Wellbeing and Sustainability Officer Ella Hughes on ensuring our major events, i.e. O'Week and Stress Free Study Week, have efficient waste disposal systems. This has meant a bit of investment in hiring a trailer, purchasing already branded sustainable cups, and other changes to volunteer expectations. Small changes absolutely add up and we continue to make them where we can.

Conclusion

The first half of this year has been amazing. I have no doubt missed bits in here but have covered the major points. We have even more planned for the second semester. I don't like to go on and on, so I'll end it by saying I have been blessed with a fantastic team of staff, a fantastic team of exec members, and most of all an engaged student community ready to have their voice heard. HERE'S TO A GOOD YEAR MY G!