

**EXECUTIVE HALF YEAR REPORT**



NAME	Rhianna Morar
POSITION	Education Officer
REPORT	Half Year Report
REPORT PERIOD	9 April 2018 – 30 June 2018
HOURS REQUIRED (PER WEEK)	10
HOURS REQUIRED (HALF YEAR)	120
HOURS WORKED	165

Kia Ora!

Ko Rhianna tōku ingoa. Nō Taitoko au. E noho ana au ki Pōneke. He tauira au ki te Whare Wānanga o Wikitōria. E whai ana au i nga tohu ture me arts i roto i te tōrangapū. My name is Rhianna. I am from Levin, I live in Wellington. I am a student at Victoria University studying an LLB and BA majoring in political science (and international relations).

I was late to the party and joined VUWSA at the end of March/ start of April. This ones going to be an interesting one. The Education Officer responsibilities are very vague – “maintain a strong working relationship with the Academic Vice President (‘AVP’) and Education Organiser (now the Student Representation Coordinator)” and “advocates for students to the University about education related issues”. The description is also outdated – the EO does not sit on any university academic committees or boards, this is the AVP’s job. The AVP also chairs the Student Academic Committee, with support of the EO. There were no “required responsibilities”, if you will, going into the role aside from assisting the AVP and Student Representation Coordinator (‘SRC’). So, I made the role my own the best I could with a fresh face to student politics.

My main goal for this year is to highlight the importance of the relationship between wellbeing/ equity and academic related issues. This is what I wanted to bring to the table. The Education Team isn’t all about sitting on large committees and talking about course amendments, it is also about looking at ways in which VUWSA can engage with other rep



groups and services to put on a 'wellbeing' (hauora) lense during each respective wānanga (study) sessions. To achieve this, I wanted to focus on strengthening existing, and to build new relationships, between the VUWSA Education team and other education reps from rōpū (groups) and services. For me, these relationships are key to what makes VUWSA a 'VUWSA for all students'. The constitutional goal that really stood out to me is – 'Equity and Access: To promote equity for disadvantaged students in access to and within the University'.

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

**Education Conversation Conference**

In early May, I attended the Education Conversation Conference in Christchurch with the VUWSA President and Welfare VP. This was a government funded conference which acted as consultation around how the government can improve education – ranging from kohanga (pre-primary school/ 'kindergarten') to tertiary education. Other associations like OUSA, and UCSA, and a few poly technic associations also attended the Christchurch conference. I found this extremely valuable – I attended presentations on Māori kura (school) with a more 'discovery-based' approach to learning, rather than the conventional 'desks, chairs, teacher is the boss' sort of deal. It highlighted that there needs to be value in different ways of working and different ways of assessment – for instance, stop measuring knowledge based on degrees or those who consistently get A+'s on their assignments and tests. Assignments and tests – what about value in discovery learning or practical 'assignments'?



A speaker told a story of a young tamariki (child) who had transferred to mainstream public school from kohanga and was told she was behind because she couldn't spell her name. She *knew* her name though and recognised it. She could also plant her own garden and nurture it – but this skill wasn't valued. These discussions validated my kaupapa – that wellbeing/ equity issues are interlinked with academic related issues and the way we measure knowledge.



### **Class Rep Mixers**

This year, the Education team trialled class rep training and mixer events during the year between class reps and VUWSA. Our SRC manages the class rep system, with assistance from the AVP and EO. These were held at all three campuses. The AVP, SRC and myself organised these. The mixers proved to be a good way for class reps to update the SRC, share their experiences with other reps and bring to attention any problems they have encountered. Mixers at all three campuses means reps get to know us, making VUWSA more accessible to them. For instance, I had a student who is keen to help write a submission on the MPI Intervention Services Change Proposal which is due to be released later in Trimester 2, who I probably wouldn't have met if not for these mixers.

### **Class Rep Handbooks**

In light of our new online class rep training system, myself and the AVP have also gone through the (somewhat outdated) class rep handbook and are hoping to have an interactive online class rep handbook in the foreseeable future. The SRC made the decision to stop printing handbooks last year when the online training was being developed; after student consultation it was found that few students were gaining value from the hard copy of the handbook – and were mostly looking for information about the role of class rep online anyway.

### **Class Rep Campaign Videos**

VUWSA's SRC manages approx. 600 class reps per trimester. Given that we've launched our online training system this year, the VUWSA President wanted to put out a series of campaign videos to spread awareness about not only the importance of class reps – but also the changes being made to the registration and training processes. The Education Team worked collaboratively with the President and Salient TV to put together a number of educational videos – which can be seen here: <https://www.vuwsa.org.nz/class-representatives/>.

### **Student Rep Celebration**

VUWSA's Education Team organises and hosts an annual Student Rep Celebration to honour and recognise the hard work of class reps, Faculty Delegates, student activists, and lecturers who've made outstanding contributions to the student experience (in particular, within the teaching and learning space) at Vic throughout the year. This year we will be hosting the event at Milk & Honey on 16th August – a change-up from the usual Hunter Lounge gathering. Together with the SRC and AVP I have been assisting in the planning and organising of the event. The Education Team has been very lucky to have the assistance and



expertise of our Events Manager, Beth Parker, in making this event hopefully the best one yet. Faculty Delegates will receive certificates for their hard work sitting as reps on faculty boards/committees, class reps have been nominated for awards by their peers, lecturers have been nominated for awards by their students, and VUWSA also honours student activists who've put in a lot of work throughout the year in improving the lives of students in general with the Student Experience Awards. I have also had the privilege of securing DVC Māori, Rawinia Higgins, as guest speaker for the event.

### **Aegrotat Transformation – Phase 1**

The University is transforming its aegrotat process so that it is more accessible to students and more efficient for staff. The AVP and myself have been a part of the transformation working group. Phase One focused on communications regarding the aegrotat process, specifically how the information can be better communicated to students. This included re-constructing the application flow chart, making the website more accessible by clarifying the content, and displaying the messaging on lecterns. We also looked at how the communication process could be streamlined from faculty managers to student health. The next steps are to release an experience survey to those students who participated in the phase one changes. The SRC, AVP and myself have worked in collaboration with the Aegrotat transformation team to put together this survey and release it to students who were involved in the piloting of the new aegrotat process. We will be working on a report of those findings in the coming weeks.

### **Faculty Delegates and Student Consultation**

The Education Team oversees and supports the faculty delegates, this include pre-meeting before faculty committee and board meetings to ensure the delegates feel supported in any concerns or questions they would like to raise at these meetings. The SRC usually does this, but while our SRC was on annual leave the AVP and myself undertook these pre-meets. This helped strengthen the relationship between the Exec and the delegates, and identified various areas where student consultation was needed.

The AVP and myself conducted consultation on course amendments and the graduating year reviews the University does regularly. Getting to know some of the class reps, and general students who had taken these courses was a great learning experience. As a law student, I obviously have no idea how significant an amendment to a MATH course could be just by looking at the justifications – it is essential to have the background knowledge of what is required for the degree and the consequences on future careers arising out of proposed



amendments. I learnt a lot more from the students about how different programmes and degrees worked, and was able to provide them with a platform for the student voice through VUWSA's position on academic committees/ boards.

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

**Ngāi Taura ('NT') and Pasifika Students Council ('PSC') Collaboration and Services (Te Putahi Atawhai ('TPA'), Te Roopu Awhina ('TRA'), Student Learning)**

During Trimester 1 exam period, VUWSA x NT x PSC organised a wānanga called 'Whakawhanaungatanga' (a sense of belonging/ community). The workshop itself was run by Student Learning – 'coping with exams: exam prep'. In conjunction, we ran a poi making space alongside the workshop to emphasise the relationship between wellbeing and academia. This largely consisted of a lot of relationship building and strengthening behind the scenes with the respective rōpū academic reps and services. I wanted to ensure we were not duplicating the services provided by TPA and TRA. Initially I wanted to get them on board, as a collab between the student societies and student services, however the organisation of our wānanga and their wānanga schedule did not coincide. In the future, I would like VUWSA, NT and PSC to work more closely with TPA and TRA during their wānanga sessions to support each other.



This is something I envisage for Trimester 2 – the workshop was very much trial and error, being the first rodeo of its kind in the Education team. I am happy with the strength of the relationships I have built with NT, PSC and student services going into Trimester 2, and we now have precedent to work with and improve upon as we've already tested a collaborative effort.

**Other things not directly (or 'conventionally') related to education:**

**NZUSA – Project Team**



At the end of Trimester 1, I started volunteering for NZUSA in their project team as the communications officer. This is more directly related to education on government policy and scrutinising the University. Things like more tertiary scholarships for Māori school leavers, the release of the *Kei Te Pai?* Report (which prompted the free counseling for under 25 year olds), fees free policy and the tertiary discount on public transport in Wellington. I am looking forward to continuing to work with NZUSA in Trimester 2.

### **Six Stories of Assault Piece in Salient**

I was privileged and brave enough to be involved in writing a piece for the 'Six Stories of Assault' spread in Salient, an initiative led by the Welfare Team as part of their sexual violence campaign. It was emotional. But the thing that pushed me to do it was by sharing my story, other students will feel validated in their feelings and experiences regarding sexual assault. And they did – I received several facebook messages thanking me for sharing my story because, as some had experienced assault, they felt like they had been validated. If your physical or mental wellbeing is suffering, your academic success is going to suffer too.



Even just a piece in the student magazine, is getting at that grass-root level of engagement about important issues and opening a dialogue to change the perception that equity issues and academic issues are interrelated. The University should care about these experiences, because ultimately it has negative consequences for your ability to achieve academic success (which is the reason why we're all here!).

### **Sex in the Hub**

I helped paint the vagina for the Wellbeing and Sustainability Officer's event coming up in September called 'Sex in the Hub'. Less related to education, but for a similar purpose as the above: to help open a dialogue where students aren't scared





or ashamed to learn more and express their sexuality in a safe and inclusive environment.

### **Before VUWSA ...**

I wanted to back-track a little because there are two massive things I would like to mention which I was involved this year in before I was elected as Education Officer. In essence, they were what prompted me to run for this role.

### **Thursday's in Black**

In my executive capacity on VUW Feminist Law Students Society, I volunteered to spearhead the TIB campaign at law school in conjunction with the wider TIB campaign the VUWSA Welfare Team run as part of their overall sexual violence campaign. This eventuated into having discussions with lecturers and students about the significance of TIB (in the wake of the Russell McVeagh revelations) and helping manage the the TIB Op Shop at Kelburn Campus. The Op Shop was a major success and I had so many discussions with students (mostly first years!) explaining what the TIB campaign is and how they can get involved. I liked it so much I decided to run one down at Law school, primarily organised by myself with the help of VUWSA's resources. Again, it was a success for the same reasons. Since Law school is such a tight-knit community, I had a few lecturers coming up asking about the campaign and various rep groups came down to show their support.



### **March on Midland**

I was privileged enough to be a member of the organising team for the March on Midland: A Rally Against Sexual Violence. It was only week 3, and yet I was going to meetings every day (mostly at 7.30am – the only time which suited all of us) with VUWSA and VUWLSS to organise what I will say has been the greatest experience of my life so far. On the day, I was even asked to speak





as one of the other student speakers had dropped out – I stood in front of an entire crowd of students and called out sexual violence. We managed to get over 300 people to march down Lambton Quay to the Russell McVeagh offices. Mobilising this many people was easy enough when you all care so much about the cause. I don't think words are very helpful with this one – thank you for the opportunity.

