



## EXECUTIVE HALF-YEAR REPORT

<b>NAME</b>	Max Salmon
<b>POSITION</b>	Education Officer
<b>REPORT PERIOD</b>	March 9 <sup>th</sup> – July 12 <sup>th</sup>
<b>HOURS WORKED</b>	170
<b>HOURS REQUIRED</b>	160

### Introduction:

Kia Ora!

I'm Max, originally from the sunny Mount Maunganui currently studying Classics and Philosophy here at Vic. I joined the team late this year, shortly after lockdown began following the stepping down of the elected AVP. As Taylah moved up to fill his role I stepped in to the Education Officer position. It was always going to be an interesting time in the role for many reasons, mainly COVID-19 related, but also as our first President Geo Robridago stepped down and the AVP role became vacant. In a normal year, as has been mentioned by my predecessors, the role's responsibilities are vague and somewhat outdated. "Maintain a strong working relationship with the AVP and SRC" and "advocates for students to the university on education related issues". The second part in particular, as the AVP now sits on the high-level boards and committees. The description lacks proactive instructions and charges. However, this year two key events occurred that changed the status quo.

1. The lack of an AVP mean the EO now filled the seats on various boards reserved for the AVP
2. COVID-19 provided a very clear, very explicit set of issues to advocate for students on

My main goal was split into two parts. The university has been thoroughly rocked by COVID-19 with both students and staff negatively affect by the pandemic. This inevitably meant various crises

meetings and rushed changes to various areas of VUW's academic system. The first goal for this year was to ensure that these changes were to the benefit of students. This involved seeking rep group input and advocating at various boards. This was the reflexive, crisis management part of the year. The second part which has begun and will be pushed throughout the rest of the year is taking the changes that benefitted students and fighting to keep them. This has (and will) involve seeking feedback on the various changes from students and rep groups and then raising these issues with CMT, SLT and the AD's to ensure that they are aware of the positive impacts these changes have had, and could continue to have.



*Me meeting all the gang for the first time. (incidentally one of the only group photos that successfully has us all in frame)*

### **Pre-VUWSA rep work:**

Before I begin the substantive part of my report, I thought it necessary to mention one of the foundational reasons for my eventual role in VUWSA. Before starting at VUWSA I had already been a faculty rep for the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences for the last year, work I have continued on with throughout 2020. This work deserves mention as it was critical to my decision to accept the offer to join the 2020 exec as EO. There were two central parts to it.

1. The knowledge it gave me. Academic work has given me an understanding of how the university works, how it reforms itself, introduces new courses and deals with staff feedback. It also crucially gave me experience managing relationships with staff, understanding the complexities of their lives in academia and the perspectives it gives them when it comes to decision making. These two skills were very important when it came to managing the influx of covid related documents and being thrust into meetings filled with many, many aforementioned academic staff.

2. The realisation that student advocacy works. Students and staff aren't so different holistically in their views of how the university ought to run. However, that may differ the higher up the chain of command you go. But the fact that the staff were open to discussion, to criticism and to the idea of change was something that I came to see quite clearly during my time on committee and board, making me optimistic for cooperation and change in a role at VUWSA.

## Academic issues:

### Whiria:

The Whiria project was supposed to be a tool to implement the university's strategic plan, however early during its introduction there were rumours that it was going to be used as a tool to make redundant university professional staff under the guise of restructuring. This presented a clear issue for VUWSA as a student advocacy body. The university and its bureaucracy are often hard to navigate on many levels for undergrad students and the administrative staff are very useful in guiding students. On top of this, administrative staff also form the general backbone of the University body supporting academics and senior management. The decision was made to reach out to the VC in the form of a meeting of the Student Academic Committee. Suffice to say, the meeting left the majority of those involved with a desire to see the project halted and VUWSA stood with various other academic staff in doing so. As of writing this, the Whiria project has been pushed back to become a discussion document only, with no enforceable outcomes, a happy success for those opposed.

### 5% grade bump

The 5% grade bump issue has not ended on the best of terms for students at Vic. Despite the successes of AUSA and (very recently) OUSA, the decision to recognise the impact caused by COVID-19 on students' grades was shut down by both staff and senior management. There is only so far that we can go when met with such strong resistance, and despite the hard work done by both VUWSA and the wider student body in the form of a petition, unfortunately we were unsuccessful.

### Lecture recordings (pushing to keep now)

One of the central projects of the previous education officer was the 'Check the Rec' campaign, aimed at having universal mandatory lecture recordings. Whilst this campaign had significant momentum at

the end of last year and at the start of 2020, it fell to the wayside as COVID-19 began to take the forefront. However, one of the significant changes that resulted from a move to online learning over the first lockdown was the recording, or general digital availability of lectures and lecture materials. This was a welcome change given the circumstances, however with the switch to dual delivery there has been somewhat of a movement, or rather an apathy among lecturers, to continue recording their lectures. Moving forwards, it will be one of the central aims of the academic team at VUWSA to ensure that lecture recordings continue to be compulsory.

### Ongoing Meetings:

#### Vice-Provost Academic Meetings:

Throughout lockdown and after, the Vice-Provost Academic (Stuarts Brock) held a series of meetings consisting of members of the Senior Leadership Team, student representatives and Associate Deans. From VUWSA we now have myself, Michael Turnbull, Taylah Shuker and Joanna Li in regular attendance. When they first began these meetings tended to run overtime, were administratively lacking, were dominated by certain personalities and struck me as quite inefficient. Whilst the meetings have improved somewhat from their inception it is still easy to become frustrated with the lack of desire for student input and the lack of consideration given when that input is provided. Of all the ongoing meetings I attended I feel that this was the one to which the term 'token consultation' applies best.



*Overexposure to VPA meetings may cause headaches, perpetual bewilderment and nihilistic thought.*

#### VUWSA Student Rep Meetings:

These meetings were established and managed by Pam Thorburn, the director of Academic Services at VUW. I attended these alongside my colleagues Joanna, Michael and Taylah throughout lockdown and well into the period after. Perhaps due to their explicit aim, these meetings tended to be a

refreshing change from other COVID-induced committees. Pam developed an open space for all varieties of student reps to voice their issues, and took action to ensure that they were dealt with to the full extent that she was able to. This care and respect should serve as a model template for student representation at Victoria as we head into 2021.

### Education Team Meetings:

These meetings are (in an ideal world) a weekly gathering for the SRC, AVP and EO to come together and discuss relevant issues in the Academic area. This year that group consisted of Joseph Habgood, Taylah Shuker and myself. The education team meetings are often useful, consolidating our approach to the week and raising any issues that needed to be addressed by the academic team moving forward.

### Re-retreat

VUWSA re-retreat was an excellent opportunity for me as the fresh face to meet the rest of the team outside of a work environment, and for Taylah to step into her new role as president, allowing us all to settle into the new normal following a lockdown of rapid change. Our time was mainly spent on team building and strategic planning, spending time with each other and having fun. It made a for a pleasurable change under lockdown and we left the retreat as much more of a solidified team than we had been going in.



*VUWSA's cutest couple on retreat and their loving family.*