

To the Acting Vice-Chancellor Jennifer Windsor, Vice-Provost Academic Stuart Brock and the Provost Wendy Larner of Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington

We are writing to call on you to **guarantee universal access to lecture recordings for 2023 and beyond** – all lectures should be recorded, available online for the entire course, to all its students. Our petition that has over 2000 signatories demonstrates a mandate for this.

VUWSA - Te Aka Tauria, the Students' Assembly and Student Academic Committee advocate for and represent the 22,000 students studying at Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington.

During the last two and half years, the University has emphasised universal access to lecture recordings as a part of the dual delivery mandate. However, some faculties, schools and courses have moved towards diminished lecture recording access. Hardship thresholds to access recordings are loaded with stigma, so students often choose not to disclose their struggles. Recordings being available for a limited time or with a delayed upload unfairly punish students who cannot attend live lectures, and are inconsistent with course structures that have week 12 assessments which require revision of all content.

### **Our asks**

1. A policy commitment from Tri 1 2023 onwards: Universal access to lecture recordings - that all lectures are recorded and made available for the whole length of a course. The University must also make other necessary policy changes to accommodate this.
2. An initiative to seriously invest in resource and support for staff to develop high-quality online and blended learning to engage all students and ensure student success.
3. A requirement that courses build-in direct links to studyhub resources that support students' online learning and study skills.
4. An urgent meeting with the Acting Vice-Chancellor, Provost and Vice Provost Academic to discuss all of the above.

### **The future of learning and teaching at this University**

As the custodians of the future of learning and teaching at Te Herenga Waka, we ask you to **commit to high-quality online and blended learning for current and future students**. We cannot regress to a pre-pandemic world that does not make use of modern technologies and pedagogies. Universally accessible lecture recordings are a **mainstay** that students

fundamentally rely on to have an **accessible education**. Barriers to lecture recordings undermine students' agency in how they engage with their education.

Punishing students by refusing to upload lecture recordings for the entire course and requiring in-person attendance are unsophisticated measures that do not address the nuanced problem of dwindling lecture attendance and participation, an issue that was increasing even pre-Pandemic. In 2019, VUWSA's Check the Rec campaign demonstrated that even pre-Pandemic, 97% of THW-VUW students felt recordings made university studies more accessible and manageable. **Looking to a post-Pandemic era of learning and teaching, the University must steer away from this evidentially-unsupported, binary narrative of the availability of recordings equating a lack of in-person lecture attendance.**

**Learning environments must rapidly evolve** if Te Herenga Waka is going to be a place where we can all learn from each other, and maximises opportunities for all taura to succeed. The University must seriously invest in resource and support for staff to teach online and blended-learning well, so that they are empowered to **engage with all taura, their diverse needs and modern realities.**

Students pay significant fees to study at Te Herenga Waka and deserve **inclusive, modern and high-quality learning and teaching practice, which includes a variety of learning options, and cannot exclude lecture recordings.** A commitment to universal access to lecture recordings provides baseline accessibility, whilst we progress towards this goal.

### **An accessible education**

An accessible education for current and future students, guaranteed through universal access to lecture recordings, means that Te Herenga Waka **stands for welcoming and acknowledging students with a diversity of lived experiences and realities.** Moreover, the Pastoral Care Code requires the University to respond to diverse learner voices (Outcome Two) and foster positive learning experiences (Outcome Three) to meet the needs of all taura.

Barriers to accessing recordings will only **disproportionately disadvantage the academic success of our marginalised students.** Students who can regularly show up to their lectures in-person and prioritise study over employment or other commitments, tend to be the more privileged students. This University can make education more accessible and equitable or it can become a more elitist institution for privileged students.

Victoria Disabled Students Association and the National Disabled Students Association calls on Te Herenga Waka to **uphold the rights and dignities of disabled students and those with chronic illnesses**. Lecture theatres are often inaccessible for many disabled students. Lecture recordings are often the difference between these taura succeeding in tertiary education or not. Hardship thresholds do not work for these taura, as disclosure is stigmatised or they have not been diagnosed yet for a variety of reasons. In the Kia Ōrite Toolkit, recordings are an inclusive learning strategy essential to Universal Design in Education. Universal accessibility necessitates lecture recordings being made available to everyone.

Due to the cost of living crisis, which is a human rights crisis, many students are working much more than usual to survive. This has been recognised by the Acting Vice-Chancellor at the last Academic Board. The University cannot ignore the reality of student poverty and accompanying psychological distress. In order to survive, students work to pay for exorbitant rent, bills and groceries instead of attending lectures in-person. The Peoples' Inquiry into Student Wellbeing, which had over-representation of students studying at Te Herenga Waka (22% of the sample), demonstrated that living in a shared flat in Wellington, rent was on average \$261 per week and **56% of students' weekly income**. Only 40% of students receive financial help from family. **64% of students sacrifice time in class to work so they can afford to live**. Students also study outside of Wellington, as they cannot afford Wellington's cost of living. In contrast to the University's values of equity and diversity, **arbitrary refusal of access to lecture recordings exacerbates unequal student success for students who are already struggling with exceptional financial pressure**.

Ngā Rangahautira urges that this University commit to universal access to lecture recordings, as it enables taura Māori to manage their commitments to whānau, hapū, iwi, employment, other kaupapa, hui and events. Being able to return home when the need arises is important for taura, without fear of missing out on lectures. Taura who are parents need flexibility in their schedules, through access to recordings. Moreover, some taura may struggle with fast paced teaching, and need time to revise content. **The University must support the identities and obligations of these taura by not forcing them to choose between these commitments or live lecture attendance**.

The Pasifika Students' Council strongly urges there to be universal access to lecture recordings. The colonial and Western-centric nature of higher education does not establish a successful educational environment for Pasifika students. Lecture recordings help address some of the gaps caused. Recordings allow for revision of content for deeper learning, and also provide a chance to reflect on content not initially understood due to language barriers or gaps in education. The University's pedagogy must be culturally responsive to this and seek to enhance

Pasifika Students' success, rather than make harmful assumptions about these students' motivations to 'engage.' **Recorded lectures increase the possibility of Pasifika students' continuing to fulfil their community and family obligations while furthering their education. As New Zealand moves to a 'Pacific Nation' identity, more and more is being asked of our Pasifika peoples.** Recorded lectures enable our Pasifika students to engage more with language strategies and preservation, consultations on education in New Zealand, and future initiatives in relation to the Pacific. **We are more than just students. We are community serving peoples,** who are often faced with difficult choices such as discontinuing studies to assist in decolonising our cultures.

Students commonly experience "moderate levels of psychological distress" as demonstrated by NZUSA's Report on Student Mental Health in Aotearoa 2018. Since then, the Peoples' Inquiry into Student Wellbeing demonstrated 69% of students experienced poorer mental health during the pandemic. Current and future students have built their study and lives around the availability of online learning or accessing lecture recordings - **a risk of diminished access to these recordings is an unnecessary disruption on top of students' current mental health issues.** Students need time to sleep, rest and recover and it is up to us, not the University, to determine how we manage our workloads in order to lead healthy lives. **Clashes in our personal lives with lecture times are an inevitable reality the University must accommodate.** Whilst many aspects of blended learning must improve, lecture recordings are a key way to provide the empathy needed for students' wellbeing.

Victoria University of Wellington International Students Association advocates that lecture recordings are especially essential for international students who may struggle with language barriers. Different accents, fast-paced teaching and complex vocabulary means it is crucial to be able to revise content at your own pace. **International students pay tripled domestic fees, and it is unacceptable to not provide accessibility through universal access to lecture recordings.** Even with borders open in 2023, many previously offshore students have been deeply accustomed to studying with access to lecture recordings. A risk of diminished access to recordings, and forcing live lecture attendance would be unnecessarily disruptive to their studies and wellbeing.

Many students are also passionate participants in extracurricular or volunteer activities that represent the University nationally or internationally, or undertake kaupapa that supports student communities. **It would do the University a disservice to require these students to always prioritise live lecture attendance rather than partake in these commitments.**

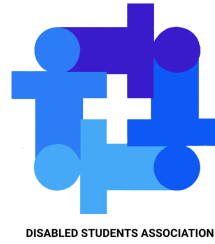
**The University needs to acknowledge and respect that modern students aren't *just* students anymore.** We have multifaceted identities, experiences and obligations that mean we can't attend every single live lecture. Many students would not be able to enrol, nor complete their degrees without lecture recordings.

**Universal access to lecture recordings is a cornerstone of accessible education that must exist in tandem with urgent investment in resources and support for staff to develop high-quality online and blended learning environments, to ensure student engagement.**

Ngā mihi nui,

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association - Te Aka Taura (VUWSA), The Students' Assembly and Student Academic Committee, National Disabled Students' Association, Victoria Disabled Students' Association, Pasifika Students Council, Ngāi Taura, Victoria University of Wellington International Students' Association, Ngā Rangahautira, Victoria University of Wellington Law Students' Society, Asian Law Students' Association, Victoria Engineering Club, UniQ, STUDI0 and VicCom

A special thanks to the National Disabled Students Association, Victoria Disabled Students Association, Pasifika Students Council, Ngā Rangahautira and Victoria University of Wellington International Students Association who put in extra mahi to support VUWSA and co-write this open letter. Our student representatives are always relentless advocates for the taura at Te Herenga Waka, despite being unpaid.



## Further reading

- Guarantee Students Universal Access to Lecture Recordings Petition  
<https://chng.it/rNCSHvrvv2>
- Student Stories: Why do you need universal access to lecture recordings? (See below)
- Peoples' Inquiry into Student Wellbeing  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f0515b1b1a21014b5d22dd6/t/62d4b1aa20f3367350086d1b/1658106319006/CS+Student+Inquiry+2022.pdf>
- Check the Rec Report 2019 (VUWSA Lecture Recordings' Campaign)  
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/560c5149e4b0bab049399fc9/t/5d631f5ea930480001b38204/1566777184483/Check+the+Rec+--+Campaign+Report.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3K0-14R2aalvPzTaJ9s9NTr296rLY9REcyh6L5KprK\\_n0hP1xITq1PDTg](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/560c5149e4b0bab049399fc9/t/5d631f5ea930480001b38204/1566777184483/Check+the+Rec+--+Campaign+Report.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3K0-14R2aalvPzTaJ9s9NTr296rLY9REcyh6L5KprK_n0hP1xITq1PDTg)
- Pastoral Care Code 2021
- NZUSA Kei Te Pai? Student Mental Health Report 2018  
[https://gallery.mailchimp.com/b109fde7924adea2d9afaa28d/files/3d3cdb2b-c0ef-4191-847e-3f32b0bf21eb/Kei\\_Te\\_Pai\\_Report\\_on\\_Student\\_Mental\\_Health.pdf](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/b109fde7924adea2d9afaa28d/files/3d3cdb2b-c0ef-4191-847e-3f32b0bf21eb/Kei_Te_Pai_Report_on_Student_Mental_Health.pdf)
- Turn up, tune in, don't drop out: the relationship between lecture attendance, use of lecture recordings, and achievement at different levels of study:  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-018-0320-8>

- Kia Ōrite Toolkit:  
[https://www.achieve.org.nz/\\_resources/themes/achieve/images/toolkits/Kia-Orite-Toolkit-Section-4-Preparing-to-implement-the-Learning-support-responsibilities-toolkit-Final.pdf](https://www.achieve.org.nz/_resources/themes/achieve/images/toolkits/Kia-Orite-Toolkit-Section-4-Preparing-to-implement-the-Learning-support-responsibilities-toolkit-Final.pdf)
- Why we should record lectures post-pandemic:  
<https://michaeldennin.ovptl.uci.edu/2021/05/28/episode-12-why-we-should-record-lectures-post-pandemic/>

## **Student Stories - Why do students need universally accessible lecture recordings?**

*“For many disabled people university is inaccessible, and for those of us who are able to undertake tertiary study we are faced with daily roadblocks. Every one of these blocks takes emotional and physical energy to overcome. I choose to believe that these barriers come from a place of ignorance to disabled experiences, thus I want to share why recorded lectures are crucial to my education as a disabled student.*

*I have severe Irlen Syndrome (Visual Dyslexia). Throughout my time at Te Herenga Waka I have found the vast majority of lecture theaters and tutorial spaces are inaccessible due to a number of things (E.G. harsh lighting). With my Dyslexia I get debilitating headaches. On good days I can manage in these spaces but on bad days I can't. I need the option to access my education from a non-problematic space. Though attending lectures/tutorials through Zoom is an option it often distorts text in a way that exacerbates the symptoms of Irlen. Additionally, when experiencing an intense headache the last thing I'm able to do is sit down and take comprehensive notes from a live lecture. I need the ability to hold off watching lectures until I am able to work without pain.*

*On top of Irlen, I also have Auditory Processing Disorder. This disorder affects how my brain processes sounds and leads to confusion in verbal communication. Recorded lectures allow me to use closed captions - this allows me to process what's being said at the same rate as my peers. For the times when listening in conjunction with captions fails me, recorded lectures allow me to replay a section as many times as I need to hear, process and understand the content (something live lecture in person and over zoom cannot do). On top of this, one aspect of my APD is the blending of sounds. This means that my brain cannot separate background noise from what I'm trying to focus on. Peers chatting, the sound of typing, the pinging of messages or vibrations of phones all become blended with the Professor's voice. Recorded lectures cut out this background noise, this stops me from exerting unnecessary energy on trying to separate sounds to 'hear' what I'm trying to.*

*Though Irlen and APD both affect my studies, they don't affect my day to day life in the same way being Autistic does. Every choice, in every facet of my life, factors in my needs as an Autistic person in order to be successful, well and happy. I have to take time away from the realities of life to recover and recuperate. This timeout is sometimes preplanned but can also be thrust upon me. Recorded lectures allow me to take a step away to rebalance myself without sacrificing my education. I also use recorded lectures as a tool towards managing sensory input. I can sit entirely still in my otherwise silent room watching a recording or I can stim, move around, stretch and fidget as much as I need. Still and silent isn't possible in a lecture theater but neither is creating extra stimuli without disrupting my peers. Being able to pause recorded lectures allows me to better meet these needs as they occur.*

*If disabled voices aren't heard or valued in the discussion of recorded lectures I cannot continue to believe that barriers to education at Te Herenga Waka are merely ignorance. Disabled students are just as worthy and deserving of education as any non-disabled students. This issue directly affects us; our voices need to be heard and our experiences considered." - Grace Green*

*"My situation is as follows - I have been living in Wellington for 4 years now (previously completed a BA, which is why I am still doing second year law papers), and due to a number of reasons including; mental health, cost of living, and family members sudden serious illness. I have made the decision that I need to move back to Auckland in order to be close to my family.*

*I am currently in the process of applying to transfer to Auckland University, however, this is extremely competitive as they only let around 6 people in a year at the stage I am at in my degree. After gaining more information from Vic uni about what being a distance student will be like next year - I am very concerned about how I am going to make it work. I have been informed that it is going to be extremely different to the dual delivery we have been used to. For example, I have been told that in many situations we will miss out as distance students - for example; guest lectures may not be recorded and we may be tested on different things than the rest of the students who attend the lectures in person.*

*Due to the fact that transferring to Auckland is so competitive I am extremely worried about if I don't get in what it would be like next year being a distance student." - Anonymous*

*"I use lecture recordings to revise as I have a learning disability that slows down sensory processing of reading, writing and understanding information. Often this means I miss critical information in lectures and cannot keep up. I work 20+ hours a week outside of the university to pay rent and survive. Sometimes I am so exhausted, burnt out and physically sick that I know if I turned up, I would get severe burnout and be too unwell for anything else for the rest of the*



*week. Coupled with this, I have an extremely unwell parent. The law school/university policy requires everyone to apply for recording access even if they are registered with disability services.” – Anonymous*

*“I work full time in a law environment, sometimes performing up to 60-65 hour weeks. I live 45 minutes via train to Wellington, (excluding walks at either end). If I were to have to attend in person, this would amount to 2.5 hours per day of travel, as well as time spent in the lecture/tutorial. I also have an anxiety disorder which makes my ability to face tasks such as these a breeze on some days and utterly impossible on others.” - Anonymous*

*“I have been well-served by the ability to watch lectures online/recorded and to have my tutorial via Zoom. I would not be able to study if not in this manner and my law degree would need to be completed elsewhere. Whilst I would not meet any hardship provisions, I live week to week and would not be able to work less to achieve in-person attendance.” – Anonymous*

*“The cost of living crisis is already making it incredibly hard for students to do well at uni while earning enough money to get by. Without lecture recordings, I would have to choose between continuing my studies or being able to make rent. Law school’s plan for 2023 is scary to me. By neglecting to post lecture recordings, the faculty is forcing us to make impossible choices and trade offs. Without at least one or two days a week where I can work and then watch recordings later, I will not be able to afford to live. This is unjust and unfair to us, especially with the technologies that make these things readily available. By withholding recordings, the University is leading students to fail.” - Anonymous*

*“Lecture recordings have been crucial to my education for the last two years. Being hard of hearing and having some mental health struggles has meant that sometimes making it to in-person lectures is difficult, and even if I do make it, clearly understanding what is being said can be another challenge. The recordings not only allow me to catch up in my own time if I don't have the energy to make it into town, but also give me a clearer understanding of the content and give me a chance to rewind and listen again if I miss what was said. Having these recordings in 2023 will make completing my third year much less stressful and challenging than I imagine it would be without them.” – Dannii Falloon*

*“I’m currently doing a BA/LLB majoring in law, psyc and crim. Alongside that I work 20 hours (3 days) per week with additional weekend shifts when rostered on. Without recorded lectures I could not work like I do and with increasing costs of living working less is not an option. That aside, for the past year I have not been able to schedule my timetable without clashes, since*

*there aren't many lecture or tutorial options. Lack of recordings would mean missing out on class and a disadvantage come assessment time (these classes were all compulsory). On top of all this there is little money (even while living at home) for healthcare such as the dentist, glasses and mental healthcare (which I want to seek but cannot afford). All this and I don't even qualify for loans or benefits from the government as by a few points, I'm not considered full time (I took 3 papers this trimester)." – Anonymous*

*"Providing students with lecture recordings is essential for my well-being and safety. I'm afraid that a lack of recordings will force sick students into lecture theatres, ultimately threatening me and the vulnerable people I am in close contact with. Buses in Wellington also experience considerable cancellations and I can't afford to spend an hours wage on Ubers to get to a class I could watch online, every time the bus is cancelled- especially with the cost of living crisis." – Anonymous*

*"I don't necessarily have the same barriers that many of my peers and friends have when it comes to needing access to lecture recordings. I have a family member fighting through cancer which has taken a toll on my mental health and made it difficult to keep up with lectures in person. It goes to show that majority of people have something going on in their lives that might prevent them on occasion from being able to focus and attend in person lectures - making those recordings vital. If they are going to be recording these lectures anyway, I don't understand the need to gatekeep them and make people prove that they are suffering through something in order to access them." - Anonymous*