



EXECUTIVE HALF YEAR REPORT

NAME	Rawinia Thompson
POSITION	Academic Vice President
REPORT PERIOD	1 January – 30 June 2014
TOTAL WEEKS WORKED	26
HOURS WORKED	665

Reporting on Priority Goals:

1. Goal 1:

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

(a) **VUW Council, Academic Board, Academic Committee, Learning and Teaching Strategy Committee, Faculty Boards**

VUWSA's membership on these university boards and committees means that gains can be made for students at a very high level, and that there is somebody there speak up for students where boards and committees make decisions that affect students.



I believe VUWSA's active engagement in these boards and committees has gained us respect in the eyes of academics, general staff and management of the university, and I have built very positive relationships with many members of the university community this year as a result.

While not a member of the VUW Council, I have sat in the public gallery of the Hunter Council Chamber at every Council meeting this year to support our student representatives on the Council, and have been pushing to

keep student seats on Council in the face of the legislation currently before Parliament that, among other things, seeks to remove the legislative requirement that students be represented on University Councils.

Many issues are discussed at Academic Board that are highly relevant and could hugely impact students. I've spoken on issues such as:

- Tutorials for Political Science and International Relations at 300-level
- Honours at VUW, and the future of 180-point Masters degrees
- The end of the Social Policy major at VUW
- VUW Strategic Plan: How VUW can be a more distinctive university in New Zealand and the world by offering a distinct student experience, drawing on all that Wellington City has to offer.

(b) Class Representatives

The Class Representation system is a joint venture between VUWSA and VUW, with the VUWSA Education Team responsible for its administration and delivery. We provide training and ongoing support to class reps. We consistently exceed the targets set for us by VUW, and this year has been no exception.

In Trimester 1 we had class reps in 95% of all undergraduate courses at VUW. 100% of the undergraduate courses in the Faculty of Architecture and Design had class reps, and 98% of the undergraduate courses in the Faculty of Commerce had class reps. Our Class Representation system is nationally renowned as one of the two most impressive systems in the country, the other being administered by the Auckland University Students' Association.

This year, I have worked with my team to overhaul the Class Rep Handbook, making it much more user-friendly, and also overhauled the structure and content of our training sessions, shortening them in length of time from two hours to one hour to maximise engagement. I have co-run basic training sessions at Kelburn, Pipitea and Te Aro campuses, and been present at advanced training sessions run by the Head of Student Learning Support. I have provided support to individual class reps by email, phone calls or meeting in person when they have contacted me seeking advice on a wide range of issues.

See *(j) Student Representation Celebration* for class rep awards.

(c) Faculty Delegates

I have worked with the VUWSA Education Organiser to receive applications from interested students, interview applicants, and appoint students to act as VUWSA's delegates on Faculty Boards.

My team provides our delegates with training, and prepares them for each board meeting by meeting with them, discussing the issues that will come before the board and running them through the board papers. We also attend board meetings to support our delegates. I have created a new reporting template for delegates to complete after each meeting

they attend. I have also provided support to individual delegates by meeting them in person, through email or over the phone when they have sought advice from me on a range of issues.

(d) Student Academic Committee

I am the convenor of this committee, which has only just been established this year. It brings together student representatives from VUWSA, the Postgraduate Students' Association, Ngāi Tauira, the Pasifika Students' Council, Faculty Societies like the Victoria Commerce Students' Society and the Victoria Science Society, and the independent student representative on the University Council, to discuss all issues academic.

(e) Programme Reviews

The programmes of study offered at VUW are reviewed periodically, and the VUWSA Education Team seeks to widely consult students of these programmes and submit their feedback to the review panel. I have made efforts to ensure that we engage students not only through class reps, but through as many different channels as possible. For example, I ensured the opportunity to provide feedback on the review of Geography, Environmental Studies and Development Students was made known through the relevant faculty society, the Victoria Science Society, and other relevant student groups like the Victoria International Development Society.

(f) Tutorials for Political Science and International Relations courses at 300-level

Programme reviews present an excellent opportunity to achieve change for the benefit of students. The review of Political Science and International Relations resulted in an opportunity for me, at the first Academic Board meeting of this year, to raise an issue that students have been talking about for years; that there are no tutorials in 300-level POLS/INTP classes, where students felt they were needed. I had a follow-up meeting with the Head of Programme, Ben Thirkell-White, who promised that tutorials would be provided for these students from 2015 on.

(g) VUW Academic Audit

This year, VUW is being externally audited for academic quality. The VUWSA Education Team was highly engaged when VUW was preparing its self-review, and we held a focus group of students to inform this process. We have submitted independent comment on academic quality at VUW to the auditors, and will meet with the panel of auditors in person when they visit campus.

(h) Assisting students ad hoc with academic issues

Many students will get in touch with me by email, phone, or visiting VUWSA reception and asking for advice on education issues they are

facing. I seek to address their issues where I can, or provide guidance going forward, or otherwise in more serious or difficult cases refer them to the VUWSA Student Advocate, Jackie Anderson.

(i) Relationships with student leaders and student groups

I have built good relationships with many student leaders and members of student representative groups at VUW. I will often email, call or meet with student leaders and members of student groups like the Pasifika Students' Council, the Victoria Commerce Students' Society and the International Students' Representative Group, who are facing challenges and need support on a wide range of issues.

(j) Student Representation Celebration

I have led the planning of an evening awards ceremony hosted by VUWSA to celebrate student representation at VUW. This ceremony will acknowledge our best class reps, faculty delegates, student representatives from faculty societies, other student groups, and general students who have worked to build a student community on campus or provided good service to their fellow students. I plan to invite the Vice Chancellor, VUW academics and other distinguished guests to present awards.

VUWSA Education Officer Caroline Thirsk and I recently sat down and made a shortlist out of the 182 nominations for awards we received from students and course co-ordinators for class reps in Trimester 1. This is a staggering number of nominations and we were impressed by the high regard in which some class reps are held by their classmates and the course co-ordinators they engage with.

2. Goal 3:

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

(a) VUW Council, Academic Board, Academic Committee, Learning and Teaching Strategy Committee, Faculty Boards

Where there are matters that come before these boards and committees concerning students from disadvantaged groups like Māori and Pasifika students, students with disabilities, international students, students in financial hardship, or any students generally, I advocate strongly for the most fair, just and equitable outcomes possible.

(b) Review of the Student Conduct Statute and Associated Procedures

I was heavily involved in this review since my time as VUWSA Education Officer in 2013. I had engaged with and continued this year to engage with the Yvonne Oldfield, the VUW Student Interest and Dispute Resolution Adviser, who lead the review. I sought to ensure that any changes to the statute and its procedures were fair and reasonable for students, and any interpretation of the wording would not result in any

unjust outcomes for students. I made sure students were consulted widely through a survey and their feedback incorporated in VUWSA's written submission on the proposed changes. I spoke on the proposed changes at Academic Committee and Academic Board.

(c) Social Policy Major and Review of Māori Business

See *Reporting on Other Goals: 1. Goal 6: Public Issues: (a)*

(d) Controversial content in courses

Many courses offered at VUW cover content that is controversial in nature, as university courses should. However, this kind of content, e.g. abortion, sexual violence, immigration, welfare, gay marriage, Māori and Pasifika issues and so on, can cause students who identify with these groups or experiences to feel unsafe in their learning environment, be it due to the way content is delivered, discussion facilitated, opinions expressed by other students that may cause offence, or any other reason.

I arranged a meeting between myself, the Acting Head of School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations, and the VUWSA Equity Officer, to discuss how the delivery and facilitation of discussion of controversial content can be better managed. I am also preparing a feature article for Salient on this issue.

(e) Supporting International Students' Representative Group

I have supported this newly established group, particularly the group's President, to identify academic issues that international students face, and how these issues might be overcome. I arranged a meeting between the President and the university Pro Vice Chancellor International.

(f) VUW Academic Misconduct Appeals and Grievance Committees

These committees decide on outcomes where a student has gone through disciplinary processes as a result of misconduct, or a student has brought a complaint against the university. As the student representative on these two appeals committees, I have advocated for fair, just and reasonable outcomes for students.

(g) Course Signals Pilot Project

This year, VUW is piloting a project in several 100-level courses that aims to identify students early on who are at risk of failing courses, and advise them on where they can seek help to be successful. I have been engaged in this project since my time as VUWSA Education Officer in 2013. This project has sparked some controversy.

I have met and corresponded with the project leader, and have attended training sessions for course co-ordinators whose courses are a part of the project, stressing that students at risk of failing should be encouraged to seek help from places like Student Learning Support and not to withdraw from the course. I have accepted lecturer's requests to

speak to their classes about the project. I have also discussed the project with students, tutors and academics.

Reporting on Other Goals:

1. 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) Social Policy Major and Review of Māori Business

I take every opportunity, whether it be through written submissions, engaging with academics and other members of the university, or at the university boards and committees I sit on to emphasise the university's role as critic and conscience of society. Our university should be allowing students to flourish as critical thinkers who are highly engaged in public life, and needs to offer courses of study that encourage engagement with public affairs and critical thinking. I see Social Policy and Māori Business as two excellent examples of these kinds of courses, but 2014 has seen a review of Māori Business teaching in the Victoria Business School likely to recommend that it ceases to be offered. 2014 has also seen the end of the Social Policy major at Victoria, which was the last Social Policy major offered in New Zealand.

I have run around various offices in the Murphy Building at Kelburn campus meeting academics in Sociology and Social Policy, across the road on Kelburn Parade to Te Kawa a Maui, the school of Māori Studies, and down to Rutherford House at Pipitea campus to meet the Head of the School of Government, Professor Brad Jackson. I've discussed end of these courses, and how to ensure the best possible outcome going forward so that the value of these courses and what they offer isn't lost.

(b) Student Representation on University Councils

A continuation of the work I did in 2013 as VUWSA Education Officer, submitting to the Ministry of Education review of governance in tertiary institutions. The review resulted in the introduction of the Education Amendment Bill (No 2) to Parliament earlier this year. If enacted, the Bill would see structural changes to University Councils, including a decrease in size and no legislative requirement that stakeholders like students and staff be represented.

This year, I have unfortunately been unsuccessful in co-ordinating the student action I had envisaged on this



issue. In saying that, I have promoted the issue on social media in order to raise awareness among students. I also prepared VUWSA's written submission on the Bill, and President Sonya and myself appeared before the Education and Science Select Committee at Parliament to speak on the Bill.

(c) VUW Strategic Plan 2015-2019

I have been highly engaged in the university strategic planning process, promoting the centrality of the student experience to the future success of the university. Right now, I am organising a student forum where the Vice Chancellor will give a presentation on the Strategic Plan and receive student feedback.

(d) Engaging students in politics and voting

As a member of the VUWSA Campaigns Committee, I have been involved in developing strategies to get our students engaged in political issues and voting in the upcoming election. I attended the Electoral Commission's Valuing Our Vote Conference, a day-long conference at Parliament on democracy, how to increase political participation and engage hard-to-reach, disengaged communities, and get more people out to vote. I have arranged for the whole VUWSA Executive to attend Professor Jack Vowles inaugural lecture on the same topic.

(e) Arranged meetings with Wellington Deputy Mayor and Green Party Education Team

I arranged for the Deputy Mayor of Wellington City, Justin Lester, to visit VUWSA for an afternoon to see our new offices, meet some of our staff, learn more about our organisation and how it works, and discuss student issues.

I also arranged for myself, President Sonya Clark, Welfare VP Rick Zwaan and Campaigns Officer Alasdair Keating to meet the Green Party's education spokespeople, Hon. MPs Holly Walker and David Clendon, to discuss student representation on University Councils and other tertiary education policy issues.

(f) Press Releases

I have been involved in the drafting of many press releases where VUWSA has made comment on tertiary policy and other issues important to students and society more generally.

(g) Safety at VUW and in Wellington City

I was one of the only VUWSA Executive members in Wellington over mid-trimester break, when two sexually-motivated assaults occurred on the edge of campus, on or near the Boyd-Wilson walkway. I was contacted by many concerned students during this time and provided support as best I could. I also participated in the Let Me Go Home march

to reclaim the Boyd-Wilson walkway, promote a safer VUW and Wellington City.

(h) Wellington City Council Draft Annual Plan and Greater Wellington Regional Council Draft Regional Transport Plan

Myself, President Sonya and Welfare VP Rick appeared before the Wellington City Council to give an oral submission on their Draft Annual Plan, and emphasised the important issues for students like warrants of fitness for rental housing, student fares on public transport, better lighting for a safer Wellington City, and the possibility of a Memorandum of Understanding between VUWSA and the Wellington City Council like the Otago University Students' Association has with the Dunedin City Council.

I also supported the Welfare Team in drafting their written submission to the Greater Wellington Regional Council on the Draft Regional Transport Plan.

General Tasks and Initiatives:

1. Stress Free Study Week

I contributed many hours to serve students free breakfast and lunch during study week at Kelburn, Pipitea and Te Aro campuses.

I find Stress Free Study Week really useful as it provides a unique opportunity to chat with everyday students about their study. I quiz them on what courses they're taking; what their workload and assessments are like; how their degree is structured; what they hope to do with their degree once they graduate; if they are postgraduate students, what they are researching; if they are postgraduate international students, where they're from, and what attracted them to VUW; all things academic. I find it particularly useful at the satellite campuses like Pipitea and especially Te Aro, where VUWSA is less in touch with students. I enjoy getting to know individual students and learn a lot having these conversations with them.

Representation

1. **VUW Council**

I have sat in the public gallery of the Hunter Council Chamber to support our student representatives on Council at every meeting this year. I take an active interest in matters that come before Council, many of which arrive at Council after going through many of the boards and committees I sit on. I presented to Council on behalf of VUWSA at one meeting when President Sonya was on annual leave.

2. **VUW Academic Board**

3. **VUW Academic Committee**

4. **VUW Learning and Teaching Strategy Committee**

5. **Student Academic Committee**

6. **VUW Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee**

7. **VUW Grievance Committee**

8. **Faculty Boards**

I regularly attend meetings of Faculty Boards primarily to support student representatives on those boards, and will speak on occasion where I feel my contribution will be valuable. So far this year, I have attended meetings in the Faculties of Science, Commerce, and Humanities and Social Sciences.

9. **Regular meetings with VUW Academic Office**

Dr Leanne Ivil, Director of Academic Office, Kevin Gould, Academic Committee Convenor, and Martin Boswell, Senior Academic Quality Advisor

10. **Regular meetings with student representatives on Academic Board**

VUWSA, Postgraduate Students' Association, Ngāi Taurira and the Pasifika Students' Council

11. **VUW Committee to Review Trimester Three**

12. **VUWSA Executive**

13. **VUWSA Executive Officers Weekly Meetings**

Weekly meetings of the VUWSA President and Vice Presidents Academic, Welfare and Engagement.

14. **VUWSA Education Team Weekly Meetings**

Weekly meetings of the VUWSA Academic Vice President, Education Officer and Education Organiser.

15. **VUWSA Campaigns Committee**

16. **VUWSA Executive Reporting Committee**

17. **VUWSA Policy Committee**

18. **VUWSA General Manager Performance Review Committee**

Strengths

1. Personal relationships: being a 'people person'

I am a very open, positive, genuine, talkative and friendly person, and am able to connect with people quite easily. I like to get to know people and know them well, and value personal relationships like this very highly. This has been useful in developing good, positive relationships with many VUW academics, general staff, management, student leaders, members of student groups, general students and others. I'm very comfortable meeting with people and speaking with them about anything and everything.

It has also been useful in working as a member of the VUWSA team, as I have invested time and energy in my personal relationships with each individual member of the VUWSA Executive. I care deeply about the wellbeing and happiness of the people I work with, and like to know what is going on in their lives outside of VUWSA so that I can help them do their best in VUWSA.

2. Working to achieve outcomes and being solutions focused

I have become quite pragmatic this year. When faced with problems, I identify solutions to achieve a desired outcome and quite promptly proceed on the basis of that. Also, I don't see means to achieve ends as ends in themselves, but instead I am always thinking of the 'bigger picture' and striving toward that.

3. Diplomacy: striking a balance between being critical and being constructive

Sitting on many university boards and committees, and being the only student representative on some, has given me good experience in the fine art of saying things in such a way, picking my battles and learning to compromise.

4. Genuine passion for issues I advocate for in my role

I genuinely believe in a high quality education accessible to all for the betterment of our society. I think improving our education system in New Zealand will become my life's work.

Weaknesses

1. Achieving a balance between work, life and study

I was very, very disappointed in myself at the beginning of Trimester 1 when faced with the reality that I could not manage the demands of studying Law on top of the demands of VUWSA. I was very proud to have gained entry into second year Law; having to withdraw from the Law papers I was enrolled in after Trimester had started was very hard and very disappointing for me.

For the courses I did take, I really struggled to attend lectures and tutorials, manage assessments, and my grades suffered greatly as a result. As someone who works toward a very high level of academic achievement, this was a further disappointment.

In saying that, my work on VUWSA has equipped me with invaluable skills, knowledge and relationships. I will simply need to manage my time and energy better over the next six months. I have stuck post-it notes on my VUWSA computer as a reminder to myself to *'go to class,' 'write your essays'* and *'see your friends!'*

2. Relationships, diplomacy and pride: not saying what I really mean

I am a highly diplomatic and person, and try to avoid stepping on people's toes for the sake of keeping the peace in my relationships. I am also very proud and worry about other people's perceptions of me, and because of this I really struggle to admit when am having difficulties. I often do this to the detriment of myself and my feelings and interests.

3. Failing to engage the VUWSA Executive in my work in education

I have been consistently frustrated and felt disappointed when discussing my work with the VUWSA Executive only to be met with a lack of enthusiasm and disinterest. I am incredibly proud of the work the VUWSA Education Team does. I lead a high-performing team that consistently delivers good outcomes for students and VUWSA as an organisation, but I've often felt that the Executive does not value our work.

The Executive's lack in investment in education is a problem, but I admit that it may be due to a failure on my part to clearly and simply articulate my vision in a way the Executive can engage with.

Overall Rating

This has been an incredibly rewarding year. My role on VUWSA has equipped me not only with invaluable knowledge and skills, but also an given me an opportunity to increase my personal networks and engage with many diverse people, enriching not only my university experience but also the way I view the world.

In saying that, this year has been tough. I've been upset, infuriated, deeply disappointed, disillusioned, and seriously considered resigning many times. There is significant opportunity cost associated with being on VUWSA, and I've often had negative experiences where I've seriously questioned whether my decision to reduce my commitment to my studies and involvement in many other activities for VUWSA was worth it.

A shortcoming of the organisation I've observed this year is that educational quality has not been a top priority at the governance level. Although educational quality is the first goal of VUWSA under the constitution, practice does not reflect that. This is not adequate and needs to change in future. At the operational level, I note that our staff member, Education Organiser Jay Chhana, is an incredibly valuable asset to the organisation and his support this year has been invaluable to me.

There aren't many opportunities for young people to step into such a multi-faceted role as an advocate, a representative and a governor, while also being a student, and in that sense it's almost impossible to know what you're getting yourself into. At the same time, this is a totally unique opportunity, one I'm ultimately glad I took up.

Overall, I really believe in VUWSA as the best mechanism for ensuring Victoria University delivers a quality education and university experience to students. I'm proud to have been a part of it.