



Review of Undergraduate Education Submission

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association

May 25 2011

1. Introduction

Thank you for this opportunity for the Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA) to submit, on behalf of students at Victoria University of Wellington (Victoria), to the announced Review of Undergraduate Education at Victoria.

This submission has been prepared by Dr. Fiona Beals, VUWSA Education Organiser on behalf of VUWSA President Seamus Brady and Vice President (Education) Bridie Hood.

Along with the rationale posed by Victoria, we feel that this review is both timely and opportune. We also endorse Victoria's desire to meet the political demands on tertiary education through enhancing and improving the educational experience of students. To this effect, we hope that the points of view raised in our submission are helpful in the discussion ahead. Our Representatives on all the Working Parties, and the Steering Group itself, will be using the points raised in this document in their associated roles.

2. Student Consultation

As soon as the Student version of the *Issues for Advice and Consultation* was released the VUWSA created an anonymous online survey to gather student perspectives throughout the seven faculties (inc. the New Zealand School of Music) at Victoria. We distributed this survey primarily through Class Representatives but also used VUWSA-affiliated Clubs and Representative Groups (including the Law Students' Society, the Science Society, Women's Group, UniQ, and the Postgraduate Students' Association) and the wider student community through our website and social media.

Over this period of consultation we received 409 responses in total. We also held a discussion forum for students to come and hear about the review, why it was happening and how students could contribute. Students were also made aware of the review and our associated survey and forum through two of the VUWSA President's weekly *Salient* columns and news stories written by *Salient* volunteers.

This submission is based primarily on the responses of the survey. It is, where noted, supplemented with results from a longer (but smaller) consultation we have been doing with Class Representatives on assessment at Victoria and the experiences or issues faced in undergraduate education that have come to the attention of the VUWSA.

The survey was structured around the consultation questions posed in the Student Version of the consultation document. It included mostly closed ended (yes, no, unsure) responses to enable a quick snapshot of student opinion which could help in the construction of this submission. Ideally, it would have had more space for flexibility but our analysis time needed to be short.

The structuring of the survey slightly differed to the consultation document (starting with the broader scope of teaching and learning then moving to research-led teaching etc). We did this to enable students some 'thinking' space before moving to the specific. We also put demographic (Faculty, Year of Study) questions right at the end so that we got a greater response to the specific questions guiding the review and the traditional full off to responses to generic questions that would enable filtering and crosstabbing.

Research-Led Teaching and Learning

- Ensure that courses focusing on the development of research skills have assessments which allow this to be practiced and provide research-focused feedback.
- Do not attempt to enhance the research capacity and capability of students through compulsory papers.
- Ensure that research-led teaching is a thread of learning throughout the University experience, but realise that not all students come to Victoria to become researchers.
- Rationalise the types of assessments needed within a research-led teaching environment to develop research skills (i.e. do exams create researchers?).

Specialist/Broad Balance

- Reflect on the student opinion that: *Undergraduate education develops critical thinkers who have a strong content knowledge and are able to communicate their points of view clearly within the framework of their discipline. Students embarking on an undergraduate degree should find the experience to be intellectually challenging. (Summary of Survey Response)*
- Enhance and create opportunities for flexibility in a student's learning at Victoria. Students should have the ability to choose subjects outside of their major and the University, degree structure and programme structure should allow for this to occur.
- Examine further the first year experience at Victoria. Rather than making generalised course knowledge compulsory, look at ways to enable flexibility within discipline knowledge.

Curriculum Threads

- Do not introduce curriculum threads if they are adding more content/subject knowledge to their degree and to staff workload.
- Consider having Graduate Attributes brought forward within courses as threads, but not at the cost of content or subject knowledge.
- Review how the current graduate attributes such as communication and critical thinking could be enhanced through flexible pathways to degree completion.

Assessment

- Set clear guidelines and processes on the setting of feedback and assessment criteria. Feedback should be acknowledged by Victoria as essential in engaging students in deeper learning. Criteria should be set that encourage deeper learning and directly relate to learning objectives.

- Incorporate formative feedback into the learning of students. However, do not do this in a way that adds more work to staff and/or students.
- Review the changes to points values in the Faculties of Commerce and Administration, Law, Science and Architecture and Design courses – particularly if the University is aiming to acknowledge the time that goes into higher order thinking.

Opportunities to Broaden Study

- Consider rebranding ‘leadership’ programmes like VicPlus and Victoria International Leadership Programme (VILP) so that students interested in the concept of these programmes (volunteering, community development, international development and then leadership) sign up.
- Consider small structural changes to VicPlus and VILP programmes around timetabling of seminars, point structures and accredited activities.
- Look at feasible ways of restructuring courses so that practical ‘real world’ elements can be incorporated (e.g. bringing in guest lecturers, involving undergraduates in research experiences, broaden the application of internship and fieldwork so that students in all faculties have an opportunity to connect their learning with wider society).
- Continue to build on the foundational work happening at Victoria around representation and consultation as these opportunities extend students outside of their programme of study into the academic culture of the university.

4. Findings

Research-Led Teaching

I believe research will occur when assessment criteria are not so restrictive. (Survey Response)

More links between faculty and students with regard to current faculty research. (Survey Response)

I believe some courses do not encourage research because of restrictive assessment criteria. I would like to see lecturers setting questions about current social, political, economic and environment situations. Any questions that stem from these areas will force a student to have a good understanding of these areas first. Thus they would be encouraged to do research in order to gain an understanding of the questions being asked. (Survey Response)

We asked students how courses could best assess the development of research skills, the four techniques that were most favoured by responding students were:

- Have sequenced assignments which build our skills gradually (e.g. a proposal, literature review, final project) especially when we begin to study at university (70%);
- Make sure assignments that use research skills actually tell us that we will be learning to research and then provide feedback on these skills (68%);
- Make sure that we clearly learn what research is in our discipline in the first year of study (67%);
- Provide students wishing to gain deeper research skills the option of an assessed research project in the final year of study (58%).

Whilst students were clearly asked how research skills could be assessed, their responses showed that research skills need to be learnt and a key aspect of this is in the way that assessments are structured and feedback is provided.

A good example of this came from comments of a Class Representative in an International Relations Paper: "INTPxxx (2009) – amazing organised assessment for this course. There were fortnightly quizzes in tutorials that tested your understanding of the readings but were a fair sized quiz for the small grade they were worth. Then there was an essay and part of that was an essay proposal that encouraged you to think about your essay early and provided an opportunity for feedback if you were on the right track with the essay. (Class Representative in Assessment Consultation, 2011)

There was a clear indication from students that some assessments did not help in the development of research skills. These comments tended to be swayed towards exams and tests which students noted look at the development of content knowledge – not skills. However, this did not mean that assessments should be all research skill based but should be rationalised to fit the pedagogical needs of the course. That is, assessments should be balanced towards research, content and specific discipline skill development.

Students also noted that in courses where there can be a tendency for lots of small assessments, the ability to develop 'big skills' can be lost. The argument here was not for a clear reduction in assessments but, rather, a need for the University to acknowledge the workload factor already carried by students (particularly when taking four 15 point papers) and small assessments in an already tight workload can restrict the time needed by students to develop deeper process level skills.

Responses regarding whether research should be a compulsory element of a student's final year of study were mixed. Students were slightly higher in agreement that a compulsory research paper would be beneficial compared to other faculties (27 out of 63). In contrast, students from Humanities & Social Sciences (79 out of 117), Law (38 out of 75) and Commerce & Administration (39 out of 75) tended to disagree with this proposal.

Comments from students reflected this divergence and questioned whether Victoria would retain a distinctive character of being a "University" if compulsory courses were added into a student's academic portfolio of courses. However, the general direction was in agreement with the development of research skills not through compulsory papers but through the academic experience of students at Victoria.

The final year is where you define your direction. If courses are compulsory everyone goes in the same direction. (Survey Response)

Yes... the University is an academic institution so learning methodologies and research is important. However, I would recommend caution in overdoing compulsory papers. (Survey Response)

Some majors are simply not suited to that (compare Psychology with Finance). (Survey Response)

BUT this should be integrated into learning in the core papers for the major, NOT a separate course. (Survey Response)

Finally, the general comments to the survey did stress the reality that not all students come to Victoria to become researchers. Students did acknowledge the importance of research skills and knowledge but expressed a strong caution towards 'forcing' research as the outcome of undergraduate education. To achieve this they stressed the need for these skills to be developed early on within their major and to have teaching and learning experiences which, in turn, enhanced this. Some suggestions included involvement in staff research, inclusion within the post-grad student community and hearing from staff about what they are researching whilst the project is in progress.

Balancing degrees between specialist disciplinary or professional focus and broader general education

When it comes to defining the basis for a broad general education at Victoria, students clearly felt that the focus of undergraduate education should be on the development of:

- Critical thinking (86%);
- Content knowledge (75%);

- Intellectual Challenge (68).

Students also expressed within the written responses that communication skills were also an essential basis for defining a broad education. If these comments were to be put into a defining statement, responding students felt that:

Undergraduate education develops critical thinkers who have a strong content knowledge and are able to communicate their points of view clearly within the framework of their discipline. Students embarking on an undergraduate degree should find the experience to be intellectually challenging. (Summary of Survey Response)

Over 92% of responding students felt that flexibility was needed within undergraduate education. Whilst not all students agreed that flexibility should be a compulsory requirement, students who had taken subjects outside of their major definitely spoke about the benefit these subjects brought back to their study in their respective major:

There was a liberal requirement for Graduate Diploma in Professional Accounting. All students were required to have 72 points worth of liberal points (i.e. not Commerce related). Without this requirement, I would have not taken a DSDN104, EPOL113 and WRIT101. I believe all these papers have given me broader knowledge and awareness. (Survey Response)

I am currently a study abroad student at Victoria University. As a full time student at a liberal arts college back in the U.S., I can attest to the quality of a liberal arts education. Requiring students to take a few subjects not related to their major (whether humanities, maths and sciences, writing, religion etc.) not only increases general knowledge, it broadens the academic horizons of a student. (Survey Response)

Definitely. We only limit ourselves when we isolate subjects from each other. Everything is connected! By requiring students to study complementary (or not) subjects this creates more opportunity for inter-disciplinary workings generating more innovative ideas and solutions. (Survey Response)

I believe many top universities require general education courses outside one's field of study, but should be optional as there are too many requirements at VUW. (Survey Response)

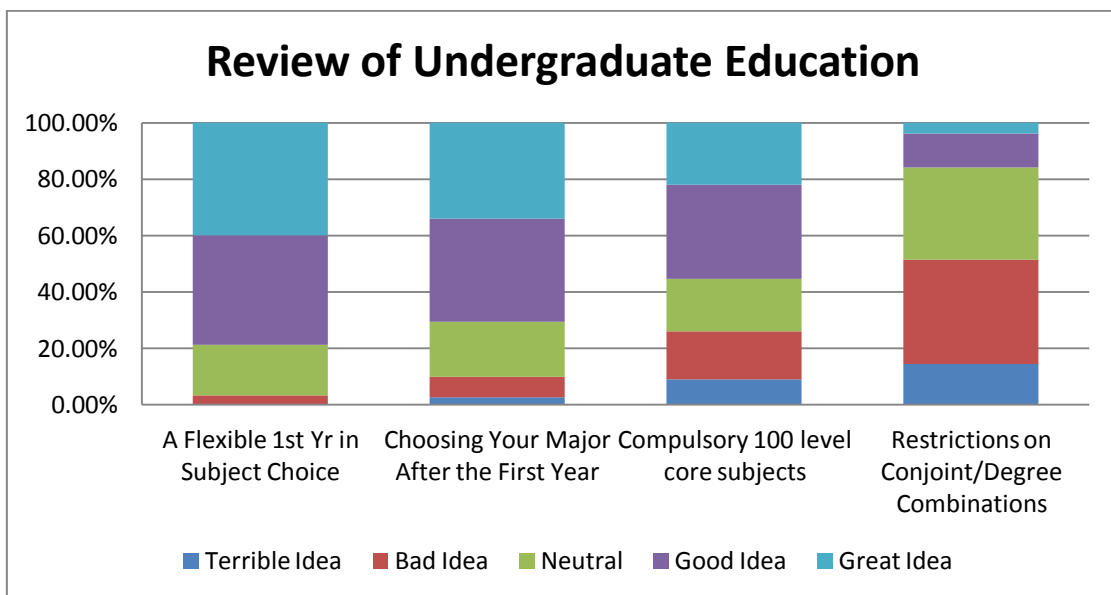
Students also indicated that currently, the ability in some faculties to have flexibility to study outside of one's major was quite restrictive given the requirements of their respective majors. For example, in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration, compulsory first year papers (which are a requirement for accreditation purposes) have been seen by some students as restrictive. There are similar feelings amongst students in the Faculty of Architecture and Design

Overall, students agreed in the need for flexibility but stressed especially within the current restraints of specific majors that this flexibility should be optional. Students did express that ultimately the choice for flexibility and how it should look should be the choice of the student. However, students also stressed that Victoria needs to:

- Provide strong sound advice to students – particularly in their first year of study;

- Ensure that timetables between campuses are flexible and can accommodate student needs;
- Work with VUWSA to streamline access to bus passes;
- Review the points system to ensure consistency across faculties – this would, in time, allow the structure of a UG degree to be clear to all students;
- Review the compulsory requirements of majors to allow for flexibility.

We also asked students for their opinion regarding the first year and a number of options, either suggested in the issues paper or discussed in policy reviews. The following graph outlines the response from students.



Reflecting the above findings, responding students strongly felt that flexibility was a key factor needed in the first year of study at Victoria (mean 1.8 (Great Idea/Good Idea); SD=.8). There was also a strong agreement that it may be beneficial for students to choose their major after a year’s study (and exposure to university education) (mean 2 (Good Idea); SD =1). Whilst there was some agreement amongst responders that some subjects should be compulsory in the first year the deviation here (mean = 2.6 (Good Idea/Neutral), SD = 1.2) indicates that the support is not strong. Restricting conjoint and degree combinations also did not receive a lot of support (mean =3.4 (Neutral/Bad Idea); SD =1).

What these findings indicate is support for a general education at the level of flexibility rather than compulsion. What would be of value for students is to continue to look at the first year experience and the transition from secondary to tertiary. Students do enjoy the flexibility offered to them within University study; however, it is hard for students on initial enrolment to make all the right planning decisions. For this to occur, students need advice and support. When commenting on assessment, a VUWSA Class Representatives said:

As a first year student, I didn't realise exactly what was required: how much work some assessments could be etc. If I was going to speak to first year students there'd be a lot of extra details in advice I would give them that I wish I'd understood. Specifically about assessment: how important all the work from day one is, how to prepare and plan your assessments etc. (Class Representative in Assessment Consultation, 2011)

As this Representatives stressed, this feedback has to do mainly with assessment; however, it is clear that the first year is the essential stepping point into tertiary education. How students experience this year, how flexibility is given to students and monitored, how advice is given to students etc will play some part in determining their success within the course of their degree.

Introducing Curriculum Threads

There was no consensus amongst responding students that having curriculum threads throughout the undergraduate degree structure at Victoria was a good idea (38% of students agreed that it was a good idea compared to 37% disagreed and 24% unsure).

If Victoria were to offer threads then the general sway (56%) of student opinion is to have these threads integrated into existing courses. Only 39% of responding students would be supportive of separate courses. Reflecting all of our findings, the general feeling is that any addition to 'content' or 'approach' should not be at the cost of discipline specific content. Some students were also concerned that additional threads would also add to the workload of staff.

In fact, the overall perspective of students shows strong support for enhancing and bringing forward our current graduate attributes (81% of students would be supportive of the threads being based around attributes). In fact the general comments to this section endorsed this need even further by stressing the need for critical thinking and communication elements (esp. academic literacy) within courses. Ideas students suggested that could be used to achieve this were around second language learning, core philosophy streams, incorporating critical math approaches to research and ensuring basic content knowledge is strong and then developing on from this stage.

All these suggestions emphasise a need to build attributes into courses in ways in which they make sense to students and staff. They also emphasise the need to incorporate elements of flexibility into the undergraduate programme which can see courses from other areas being incorporated to into a student's understanding of their specific subject matter.

Encouraging Students' Deeper Learning

I believe it is important to take on a more dialogical approach to education. In some courses, I believed that you are forced feed information and just regurgitate that information back through a limiting criteria. This can have the adverse effect of restricting your own research, which I believe is more fundamental than a restrictive criterion. In addition, the knowledge gained from these courses goes in and out of your brain because you are not actually learning effectively. (Survey Response)

Bulk memorising for exams usually results in forgetting much of that content very soon after. (Survey Response)

If you're at university, hopefully you should already know how to learn. Formative assessment would be good for feedback, but shouldn't largely contribute to the overall grade. (Survey Response)

Feedback is the most important part of the student learning experience. In addition to encouraging students to keep on top of their workload, it also provides regular feedback to teaching staff as to the effectiveness of their teaching. (Survey Response)

It was clear in our survey responses, that students value assessment and the feedback they receive from assessments. It was also clear that assessment design and feedback need to be seen by both staff and students as integral to the whole learning experience. Students are often dependant on feedback to both develop both content knowledge and skills (whether it be in practical applications, research or communication). However, students have experienced a wide variance within assessment at Victoria. This variance has shown that issues around feedback and assessment don't just centre on the feedback after the assessment but the feedback given to students prior to assessments.

For example, a key issue faced by Class Representatives in the last two years has been changing assessment criteria and lack of information given on assessments prior to the hand-in day. In the words of one Representative, a key issue with assessment:

... [is] not being given clear assessment criteria: it's like a guessing game, where the co-ordinator can change the answer without notice. (Class Representative in Assessment Consultation, 2011)

In contrast to this, another Representative spoke of the opposite occurring in their CRIM course. This quote emphasises the need for feedback in the setting and marking of assessments:

CRIMxxx essay assignment. Set clear topics with enough content behind each to give students the opportunity for their own critique of the material while still covering integral parts of the course. It meant that students learned the material and were encouraged to think critically and decide on possible problems/solutions for themselves. When I received the essay back there was clear feedback and encouragement. (Class Representative in Assessment Consultation, 2011)

Two Representatives (one from the Faculty of Commerce and Administration commenting on an Accounting course and one from Education commenting on an Educational Psychology course) had very similar feedback. They described their learning as making their head spin/hurt in a good way. Both courses took students out of their comfort zone in critical thinking about content knowledge through eclectic approaches. The assignments were hard in that students had to work (this meant thinking) to pass and the comments back encouraged even better work in future studies. We have also had similar feedback from papers in Architecture and International Relations.

Formative assessment (weekly assignments on course content contributing 2% each week) are a good way of learning, but need to contribute to overall grades to be successful. Also, some courses tend to overload the weekly formative assessment meaning there is no time left for regular study/study for tests etc. (Survey Response)

Yes, but effort should be made to ensure that such assessment is spread more evenly over the trimester/year rather than a mad panic of work in the last two weeks. (Survey Response)

I find that some papers don't give you feedback until a major piece of assessment. Feedback should be put in place before these assessments so that students are able to see where they are going wrong and correct it before the major assessment. (Survey Response)

I feel that having too much internal assessment and feedback places more on stress on students to keep up with things when they are balancing multiple papers. However, I feel that this is more appropriate in low level papers where students may be unfamiliar with material and concepts and are still learning 'the basics'. (Survey Response)

There is nothing worse than doing assessments that don't count towards the overall grade. Personally I put no effort into these as it doesn't matter. I prefer tests as that is how I learn but it depends on the course. (Survey Response)

Students are in strong support of formative feedback (37% only if contributing to overall grade, 52% contributing to grade or just feedback). However, the feedback (such as above) suggests that this feedback should not put undue stress on students (and staff) to set and complete more work. It might be worth considering allowing assignments to be assessed in stages so that students have ongoing feedback (as is occurring in some courses).

Students have expressed support of short pop quizzes for content knowledge as this supports them in their weekly study and reading. Whilst, this might be seen as only addressing surface knowledge, students in the Faculty of Science have found some real value in this approach to assessment and feedback as, particularly in the first year, the tests help students adjust to academic study at university.

Students also agree that the University should provide a balance of assessment tasks and approaches (64% of responding students). However, there is not strong support for peer or self assessment (52% opposed to peer/self assessment). Whilst, peer and self assessment do have a pedagogical place in some courses of study, the general feeling expressed is that this would be seen as handing over the need for feedback to less the experienced/knowledgeable. The fear would be that rather than enhancing student learning, this would in fact inhibit deeper engagement.

With regard to assessment, spacing of assessment and balancing of the assessment, a side issue that has been brought up for some time at the VUWSA Education Office and was raised again in this survey has been around the changes to points in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration, Law, Science and Architecture and Design some time ago. Whilst this may seem out of the remit of this review, for students it is central to this review. Students have expressed that since the changes in points stress levels for students have gone up. Students are now having to do four (sometimes five) papers a trimester to keep on top of their studies. For some students, this can mean up to 75 hours a week study (especially if there are no exams).

The general complaint is not around workload levels being maintained at the 20pt level; but rather that within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences papers in particular there is some flexibility around workload (you can pass some (not all) courses for much

less than the 200 hours required a trimester). However, the 15 point papers ensure that you must work the 15 hours – there is no flexibility and you cannot pass the course doing in less than 150 hours a trimester. This may not seem a major issue to the University, but for students, stress levels do impact on the ability to engage in deeper learning. If increasing formative feedback to students is going to see students engaging in more work then the point value of courses does need to be addressed.

The general feeling from students is to raise the value of points in courses in other faculties to be reflective of the deeper learning that is required to achieve well in these courses. There is not strong student support to reduce points in FHSS courses as where there are well designed courses, the workload does meet the requirements for 20points and students are engaging in higher order thinking.

This comment reflects some the above concerns in an emotive but true fashion:

This year has been HELL. It is just silly. We don't learn ^&^ just rush through to get stuff handed in. Four papers per trimester. Idiotic! There are not enough hours per day to get stuff done. Everybody is exhausted, fed up. It makes me doubt whether I actually want to work with what I've spent three years studying, and hell-of-a-lot of money. I would not recommend anyone to study anything [in my Faculty at] Vic now. It's not worth it. There are better schools out there. This whole school needs restructuring. Do one paper at the time like several unis in Europe, not four at once. At least by doing one paper at the time, we can focus all our time on it, rather than splitting up bits and pieces of the day to focus on four. I hate this year! (Survey Response)*

The above response may seem too emotive and may induce reactions; however, they are the feelings expressed by Representatives in classes and on Faculty Boards. Research into deeper levels of thought processing show clearly that it is not just teaching, assessment and feedback which lead to developing these abilities; it is also having the time to think, rethink and put skills like critical thinking and communication into action at higher levels. It is not about more assessments, but about developing assessment practices inside a well timetabled and supported learning environment.

Opportunities to Broaden Study

VicPlus and Victoria International Leadership Programme (VILP)

They are good, but the whole idea of going to a "leadership" course sounds a bit snobbish. Having said this, once you have attended a good seminar or speaker event, you know you really learn a lot. The VILP exchange grant got me to go to these, so a way of linking what people really want with the leadership programmes they don't know about is a good way. Perhaps make courses promote events (not massively, otherwise people blank it out). Or perhaps have speaker events that are relevant to particular degrees on blackboard under a "broaden your horizons" button or something. (Survey Response)

The VILP is a great idea, however for people for me who have to work to study, having a lot of seminars from 5-7 makes it inaccessible. Big oversight by Vic! (Survey Response)

I am aware of that these programmes exist, but I don't know exactly what they entail. They have an air of high school elitism that I dislike and I think is very off-putting. So I

suppose improving their image is important, and discussing the benefits of them. (Survey Response)

Tell people about them via posters, in Salient and orientation booklets. (Survey Response)

When signing up for these it is very unclear of what you need to do. They need to be clearer in this aspect. (Survey Response)

Over 40% of responding students were unaware of the leadership programmes offered by the Careers Service. Students that were aware of them did indicate that naming these programmes as 'Leadership' programmes can deter some students from further investigation. From the VUWSA Education Office's working with the Careers Service on these programmes, it is clear that the programmes redefine leadership. They do this simply by acknowledging that volunteering is an act of leadership. Hence, the general feedback students had regarding these programmes concerned promotion and communications. Suggestions by students included:

- Posters, *Salient* and Orientation books;
- Blackboard announcements;
- Website buttons;
- Enrolment forms – students could indicate an interest.

Students also made suggestions around improving VicPlus and VILP. These included:

- Looking at the time of day VILP seminars are on – if students work they can't attend;
- Looking at the communications of what is needed to achieve each award once students are enrolled;
- Provide more seminars and trainings as they often book up fast;
- Review the points structure of VicPlus as it can be restrictive for some students;
- Review the accredited activities for both programmes to include other volunteering activities.

Connected to the Leadership programmes offered by Victoria is the recognition, support and development of a strong representation model. Victoria is the only University in New Zealand at the moment offering leadership awards and both these awards (VicPlus to a greater extent) strongly acknowledge the role of representatives in leadership development.

Further to this, last year, VUWSA conducted a review of international research looking at best practice in representation structures at universities. Research evidence from Europe, Canada and the United States all showed that when representation is effective at all levels of student engagement (from the classroom to the development of academic polices) then the academic learning culture and relationships between staff and students are enhanced.

This year, VUWSA taking the evidence of overseas practice and has concentrated on building a 'partnership' model of representation where students are seen as working with staff and students (not against the University as political models of representation have tended towards). The results of this has seen students (particularly Class Representatives) actively engaging in enhancing the experiences of their fellow students, feeding suggestions through to VUWSA so that student reps on faculties and Victoria Boards and Committees are empowered to speak from the 'student' perspective rather than 'personal' opinion.

This development would not have been possible without the strong support of the VicPlus award. The award has created an opportunity for students to be leaders in their class and faculty. It would be good to explore ways that this can be further enhanced so that the perceived 'tokenistic' culture around representation can be further addressed by both Victoria and VUWSA. The relationship our Representatives and staff have with the Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and his staff has been a huge success here; but we would like to know that if that position was filled by another person, the culture at the University would continue to support a relationship of partnership and empowerment (for both staff and students) in representation.

Fieldtrips, Internships and Placements

Bring in guest lecturers relevant to the course matter to talk to students about what it's like in the 'real' world and how they can best plan for it at uni. (Survey Response)

I would like to see Victoria make a practical component compulsory; i.e. a minimum of six weeks in your field of study paid or not. I believe this would give students more experience and additional skills which will become beneficial when applying for jobs. Plus it could be good for the economy. (Survey Response)

Offer them more widely than obvious fields like geography. E.g. take finance students to the NZ stock exchange to see how a stock market looks and feels and operates like. (Survey Response)

By actually having more of them. The amount in my degree (BBSc) is alarmingly low with lecturers often citing large class sizes as a reason for being unable to arrange field trips etc. (Survey Response)

Actually do them! Internships only seem to be promoted for the commerce students - what about the science faculty? Like even just chances for undergrads to get involved in post grad research - so they can get a taste of it (e.g. just helping out with information gathering or whatever; menial tasks, but still helping to give undergrads a chance to see what post grad research is like). (Survey Response)

I think that teaching experiences in teacher training programmes could be longer, or for there to be slightly more of them. (Survey Response)

Make them available to a wider range of students; I'm not sure that either of these apply to my degree in Linguistics. I'd love to go on a field trip! (Survey Response)

Never had any practical teaching at Vic. (Survey Response)

Law School needs more of this. (Survey Response)

Definitely. There should be many more field trips and they should be structured so that they can be put on a student loan. (Survey Response)

My country (Japan) has courses including field trips and internships during final year, which helps students to find the issues/topics deeper and develop their thoughts. (Survey Response)

By making better connections with the wider community, i.e. local iwi and marae, experts working in the field, and organisations that might be able to support and host students for these activities. (Survey Response)

Likewise, internships and the like should be made more accessible and be more encouraged. (Survey Response)

Most students felt that they could not give a good detailed response to this question as many had not experienced learning in the field or on an internship or placement. However, as the above shows students are supportive of bringing acknowledging the practical applications of their learning, whether this is through bringing in guest lecturers to taking a class to the New Zealand Stock Exchange. However, students did stress that this needed to be feasible for both staff and students. Students should be able to afford to incorporate costs (even if through the Student Loan) and the University should not have to restrict enrolments and resources to enable this to happen.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the student response indicated a need for flexibility within the degree structure. Students do support many of the proposed ideas but also point out that for every student the reason that they are at University is different. Yes, there is a need to develop research skills but this should not happen at the cost of flexibility and 'real world' application. Students are in strong support of good feedback in assessment but also have stressed the need to look at how deeper thinking is developed within a timetable that often allows no space for thinking.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, as one Representative stated in the survey, above all else Victoria needs to enhance and develop its communications with students so that programmes are known about (like VicPlus and VILP) and that students know what to expect and what is expected from them when they enrol.

There are some things that each student should hear when they enter uni. I don't think the first week of any course should be assessed (they don't in LAWSxxx, and it's really nice to get a chance to get into things) unless it's not included in your grade, but just an indication of what to expect. It should just be an orientation week - what sort of work you're doing, how to manage your studies, what options are available for extra curricula activities etc. it should be compulsory for each first year course to have a 'welcome to uni, and this is what you can expect, and this is what is out there for you' lecture. Although, it would be boring to get the same one for each course. (Survey Response)

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit on this very important review. VUWSA looks forward to working with the Review of Undergraduate Education Steering Group and its associated Working Parties over the coming months.