

## Equity and Student Services Newsletter

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### Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Equity and Student Services)

The Division of Equity and Student Services is a very broad portfolio and includes: Counselling, Careers and Employment, Equality and Diversity Centre (including equity programs and training, providing support services for students with special needs, harassment and discrimination support and equal opportunity for women in the workplace), Indigenous Education, Chaplains, Student Services (including Sports Centre, Children's Services, Campus Life, Legal Services for Students), the Ombudsman and Student Engagement.

#### Message from Dr Kerry Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Equity and Student Services)

In an attempt to communicate the range of activities currently occurring in Student Services, snippets of "goings-on" are presented in this newsletter.



This portfolio is so dynamic I never know what each day will bring, which is mostly a good thing! This year alone there have been challenging matters affecting student's lives: the devastating bushfires, swine flu and understanding the changes to Student Income Support, recently adopted by the Government.

We are all still awaiting the much debated Services and Amenities Fee (SAF) Bill.

If this newsletter is of interest, the forthcoming review of Student Administration and Student Services will be covered and further reports on the SAF, Student Income Support arrangements and the Student Hub.

#### Bushfire relief assistance for students

La Trobe University continues to support all students and their families who are affected by the Victorian bushfires.

The Vice-Chancellor established a Hardship Fund to assist Students affected by the Bushfires. Students who required assistance relating to hardship were directed to contact faculty/school administration staff in the first instance.

Any students requiring counselling were urged to contact the Counselling Service which provides free private confidential consultations to students. Information is located at: [www.latrobe.edu.au/counselling/](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/counselling/)

The University acknowledges support will continue to be required as the devastation for many of our students will be ongoing and long-term.

#### La Trobe University awarded Employer of Choice

The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) released the 2009 Employer of Choice for Women citation list on the 18th March and La Trobe University has once again been successful in achieving the Employer of Choice for Women citation for 2009. This is the ninth year in a row the University has received this recognition. Status as an Employer of Choice for Women is granted by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency of the Australian government.



The Equality and Diversity Centre is responsible for applying each year and detailing the university's approach and achievements across numerous criteria including;

- percentage of women in senior roles
- salary comparison between men and women across all levels of the institution
- flexible working arrangements
- maternity leave provisions
- education of staff in anti-discriminatory practices
- senior staff and major committee responsibilities for Equal Opportunity for Women

Both policy and process is assessed as evidence of the university's commitment to delivering improved outcomes for women and the institution. More information can be found online at: [www.latrobe.edu.au/equality/eeo-work/employer-choice](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/equality/eeo-work/employer-choice)

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### Student Life to be Revitalised

Yes it's true that Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) had a pretty devastating effect on student facilities and services with many vital components of student life either lost or diminished. With its own limited funds and foreseeing the hard times ahead, the University allocated \$3.5 million to assist in the shortfall of running the student services that survived the VSU Legislation. The University took on this financial challenge acknowledging the importance of providing a full range of services on campus.

To ensure a better understanding of student needs a student survey was undertaken which provided direction for the future needs of students and some startling new results emerged. For one, many students requested a one-stop shop and the University Council agreed that this was a vital service that should be introduced. The University received a Grant from the Federal Government of almost \$5 million, which has now been placed into creating and building a "Student Hub" in the Thomas Cherry building. It is planned that Contact, Car Parking, Centre Link, Cashiers, Financial Aid, Computer Access with printing/copying facilities, Student Centre and the Student Legal Service will be located in the Student Hub. Construction is scheduled to commence in early 2010.

The Division of Student Services also successfully applied for funds from the Higher Education Equity Support Program (HEESP), administered by the Equality and Diversity Centre. These funds have supported services at the Shepparton and Mildura campuses.

Though the impact of VSU has been vast, with the University using a range of ways to secure funds, it has reduced much of the damage caused by VSU and vital services are being maintained.

In late 2008 the Government announced it was reintroducing a compulsory Services and Amenities Fee (SAF). It is hoped that this new legislation will pass through the Senate shortly thereby ensuring student life into the future.

### Careers and Employment Services

#### Career Mentoring Program

Following a short pilot program in 2007 the first full career mentoring program ran from April to October 2008 with 50 students and 45 mentors. In 2009 these figures have increased significantly with 145 students and 100 mentors drawn from staff of the University, alumni and members of the wider community. Many mentors are returning for the second or third time which indicates that it's not just the

students who feel they have something to gain from their involvement.

At the celebratory event to mark the conclusion of the 2008 program, it was gratifying to hear students describe the benefits they had derived from their interactions with their mentors, each of whom willingly gave their time to share their knowledge, experience and advice with someone about to embark on their careers. Many students commented that they had grown in confidence as they interacted with new people and developed a better understanding of themselves and the issues they might face in their careers. One student wrote the following comment in his/her evaluation: "Incredibly useful. Congratulations and thank you for the amazing opportunity."

From the mentors' perspective, it was an opportunity to "give back", to develop their own communication and leadership skills and sometimes to learn. One mentor (presumably a staff member) claimed a benefit was "Having contact with our students. Central Admin areas can become isolated from our stakeholders." Another commented in the evaluation form, "I personally found the program very rewarding. It is a pleasure to deal with these bright and excited students. Watching them accomplish tasks and acquire new skills while learning that everything is do-able, is wonderful."

More information can be found online at: [www.latrobe.edu.au/careers/students/employable/CareerMentoring/index.html](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/careers/students/employable/CareerMentoring/index.html)

#### The Work Ready Program

At the beginning of 2008, in response to the increasing number of international students who wish to work in Australia after graduation, Rita Soares from Careers and Employment developed a five-week "Work Ready Program" specifically for international students. This is a voluntary commitment which is acknowledged by the awarding of a certificate for attendance at four sessions. The true value of the program, however, is the increase in confidence, motivation, knowledge and skills enjoyed by the participants.

Overall 82% of students rated the usefulness of the program at 8 or above on a scale of 0-10 and in all five sessions, students asserted an increase in the level of their knowledge and skills. Words typically used to describe the program were "valuable" and "inspiring". In 2009, we have received far more interest than we have been able to accommodate – an indication of the special needs of our international students. More information can be found online at: [www.latrobe.edu.au/careers/students/Int-students/Work-Ready.html](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/careers/students/Int-students/Work-Ready.html).

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### Counselling Services

#### **Respect, Responsibility and Equality: Preventing Sexual Violence**

In 2007 Counselling Services undertook a VicHealth funded project aimed at the prevention of sexual violence against women on campus. Brendan Fitzgerald, the project coordinator, initially worked with student leaders to develop ways that they could act as public advocates against violence to women. This approach recognises the effectiveness of focusing preventative work on influential members of the community rather than on survivors or perpetrators.

Students from the general population at Bundoora were also invited to participate in a range of creative and reflective processes to consider their own attitudes and commitments and develop a range of health promotion resources. Resources included a poster series entitled 'This Place Nurtures Good Relationships,' a magazine style survey and information resource; a short film aimed at preventing date rape; and a design for a fridge magnet and postcards.

A 2009 HEESP grant has enabled expansion of the project to include the development of resources with a range of clubs and societies aimed at the prevention of violence in their particular context. A trainer's kit will also be produced to extend the reach of the project within and beyond La Trobe University.

We believe the approach taken in this project extends the existing social norms marketing framework and could be applied across a range of health promotion areas.

#### **'Meeting the Needs of Students with Mental Health Issues through Community Capacity Building'**

This HEESP funded project seeks to implement key recommendations from the 2006 research project within a coordinated settings approach which is consistent with the broader aim of supporting La Trobe University as a health promoting organisation. The project is structured into three modules that together comprise a comprehensive program.

The first module aims to support staff to appropriately assist students with mental health issues by developing a 'best practice' model. In 2007/8 an advisory group was established and staff consultative forums were conducted to facilitate the development of best practice guidelines. The guidelines and a flowchart were then introduced to academic and general staff along with a two part training sequence in responding to the needs of students and supporting successful outcomes for students with mental health issues.

The remaining two modules will be implemented in 2009. One seeks to increase awareness of student support services among students and assist them to overcome external and personal barriers to accessing services and supports. The final module will focus on the development of an innovative peer mentor program for students with mental health issues aimed at reducing social isolation, supporting students in transition into university life, and increasing academic and social participation. More information can be found [www.latrobe.edu.au/counselling/assets/downloads/Mental-Health-Report.pdf](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/counselling/assets/downloads/Mental-Health-Report.pdf) online at:

### Equality and Diversity Centre

#### **The Tertiary Aspirations Network (TAN)**

An exciting new initiative emerged late in 2008 for Victorian university staff who work to promote access to university for disadvantaged students. The Tertiary Aspirations Network (TAN) meets regularly to share information and develop collaborative strategies to encourage students to think about university as a post-school study option.

The Network's focus is currently on under-represented schools (i.e. schools with less than 50% of their Year 12 graduates (in the previous two years) progressing to university study. It is a well recognised fact that most students at these schools do not have anyone in their immediate circle of family and friends who has experience of university, so the students do not consider university as an option. As the number of unskilled jobs rapidly declines, it is essential that these students are provided with tertiary study options.

The first job for TAN is to determine which of these schools are currently being visited by at least one university, and which are not. TAN then hopes to share the work around so that all under-represented schools get at least one visit from a person who can talk about special entry, pathways, and support programs at Victorian universities. TAN has also developed an interactive program of activities for Year 10 students at various careers days and tertiary information days. We recently attended the Shepparton and Seymour Careers Days which attracted around 2,000 Year 10 students.

TAN representatives have also met with the Director of the Careers Education Association of Victoria. This meeting confirmed our view that Careers education is very under-resourced at many schools and we will soon survey Careers Advisors at under-represented schools to determine how we can best assist them in their work with students

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from disadvantaged backgrounds.

La Trobe's representative on TAN is Holly Langfield, Student Diversity Officer with the Equality and Diversity Centre. For more information contact Holly on Ext. 1507 or email [h.langfield@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:h.langfield@latrobe.edu.au)

### **Inspiring middle year students to remain in education- Cultivating lifelong learning: Community partnerships for successful middle-years transition.**

The Equality and Diversity Centre in collaboration with The Smith Family and the Shepparton campus, seeks to identify the barriers and enablers that influence student participation in middle years schooling in the Greater Shepparton region, for broader application across La Trobe regional campuses. Successful transition through the middle years is crucial to positive lifelong learning outcomes.

The schools in the Greater Shepparton Region have poor middle year retention rates, particularly among low socio-economic and other equity group students. The area has high youth unemployment rates that are linked to lack of skilled/educated workers. There are many community groups and government agencies in the area attempting to address the problems of early school leaving and unemployment but there is only modest evidence of efficacy of these programs.

The aim of this pilot project is to develop 'best practice' interventions that will inspire middle year students in the Greater Shepparton region to successfully complete their education. A partnership between The Smith Family and La Trobe University will facilitate the development of a cluster of community agencies such as relevant government agencies, local government, Indigenous Elders, cultural group leaders, families, tertiary, secondary and primary education providers who will work together with the aim of raising the educational aspirations of students from a diversity of backgrounds to successfully progress through the middle years of school.

## Indigenous Education

### **The World Visits La Trobe University**

The annual meeting of the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) was recently held at La Trobe University in Melbourne. More than sixty Indigenous educators working in higher education attended the meeting from 2 – 4 December 2008.

Meeting convener, Mr Gary Thomas who is the Executive Director, Equity and Student Support Services at La Trobe University said the university was honoured to host the group

and it was a fantastic way to end the year.

The WINHEC grew out of a meeting held at the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education in Canada in 2001. The group has held an annual meeting each year since at various locations around the world.

The delegates at the WINHEC meeting participate in a number of working groups which progress the participation of Indigenous people in higher education across the world.

Mr Thomas said "WINHEC is such an important gathering. It affirms the work Indigenous people do in higher education across the planet. We share ideas and strength. The way WINHEC has developed and continues to operate is grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, Indigenous ways of being and Indigenous ways of becoming."

Groups will be working hard progressing the WINHEC agenda before meeting in late August 2009 in the land of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Toronto, Canada).

More information can be found online at: [www.win-hec.org/](http://www.win-hec.org/)

## Student Engagement

### **Student Engagement Team**

The Student Engagement team has had a boost with the addition of a Regional Student Engagement Officer. Jon Neal joined La Trobe University in October, having worked most recently at BRIT and with the Aim Higher and Connexions programs in the UK. Jon brings with him a great deal of knowledge and experience in working with non-traditional university students through mentoring, industry and community engagement and aspiration building programs.

Jon is based at Bendigo but works across all regional campuses to support their staff in implementing programs around the transition and success of students, and to enhance the La Trobe experience through ensuring access to the Infinity Leadership Program across Mildura, Wodonga and Shepparton campuses. You can contact Jon via email: [j.neal@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:j.neal@latrobe.edu.au) or phone 5444 7406.

Katie Bell also joins the Student Engagement team as a Project Officer, after two years working with Careers and Employment. Katie brings with her excellent project development skills, and will be supporting the implementation and development of the Infinity Leadership Program and new programs throughout 2009. Katie will also put her marketing and communications skills to good use through creating and maintaining new webpages designed to keep students and staff informed on student engagement projects and outcomes. Katie's email

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is [Katie.bell@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:Katie.bell@latrobe.edu.au) For more information on what student engagement is, how the team can support you, and new activities and projects to come, please contact Ngaere Blair Manager, Student Engagement on [n.blair@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:n.blair@latrobe.edu.au) or phone 03 9479 3425.

### Infinity Leadership Program

La Trobe's new and exciting Infinity Leadership Program is underway with 30 keen and eager Bendigo and Bundoora students taking part in the pilot program, developed by the Student Engagement department in partnership with the Alumni Relations Office.

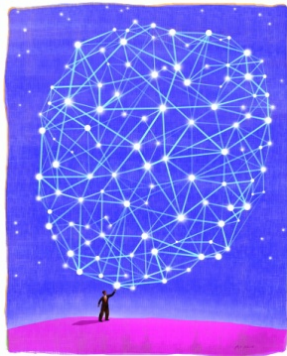
The program, designed for future and aspiring leaders, aims to empower La Trobe students with the skills and knowledge needed to take on leadership roles within La Trobe and the wider community. Emphasis is placed not only on the theory involved in leadership, but also on experiential learning, with the program incorporating a community project element in second semester.

The program kicked off with a full-day retreat with students engaging in a variety of leadership scenarios and discussions, whilst networking and enjoying great food!

A number of high profile La Trobe University staff members and alumni make up the guest speakers throughout program including the Vice-Chancellor, Distinguished Alumni Award recipient Dr Annabelle Duncan, from the Biosciences Research Centre, Bernadette McMenamin AO, Chief Executive Officer of Child Wise™ Limited, and Dave Sweeney, environmental campaigner for the Australian Conservation Foundation to name a few.

The initial success of the Infinity Leadership Program paves the way for an exciting and valuable experience for those undertaking the program throughout the rest of 2009, with the organisers now working on rolling it out to all campuses for 2010.

More details can be found online at [www.latrobe.edu.au/students/leadership](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/leadership)



## Student Services

### Re-Opening of Main Oval

An upside of VSU was that the Government allocated \$80 million Australia wide for capital works associated with student services. La Trobe University was successful in its application to completely re-surface its main oval which had become severely degraded after 40 years of use.

A new drainage and lighting system was introduced as was the planting of drought resistance grass.

The oval was re-opened on Sunday 29 March 2009 with Pro Vice-Chancellor, Kerry Ferguson and the Deputy Chancellor, Tony Sheehan, officiating.

The Football Club, Cricket Club and a number of community based clubs now have state of the art facilities which will become a great asset for the University and the students who use them for many years to come.

### Women's Football Team



After the great success our women's football team had in the 2008 University Games, La Trobe University Football Club is entering a team into the Victorian Women's Football League (VWFL) for 2009. If you would like to join the club, either to play, volunteer or officiate, please contact: Jess Smith on 0432102462 or [jesssmith01@hotmail.com](mailto:jesssmith01@hotmail.com)