

Equity and Student Services Newsletter

Edition 2: September 2009

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

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

Welcome to Edition Two of the Equity and Student Services Newsletter. Included in this Edition are some fantastic initiatives being undertaken by the Equality and Diversity Centre and Careers and Employment Services. There are also updates on the Student Hub, Student Services and Amenities Fee and various other programs being undertaken by Student Engagement and the Division of Student Services.

2009 Premier's Women's Summit

I recently attended the 2009 Premier's Women's Summit. Speakers included Dr Anne Summers, academic and social commentator; Ms Maxine Moran MP, the Minister for Women's Affairs; Dr Helen Szoke CEO, Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission and other leading women in private and public organisations. Strategies were discussed that could be utilised to ensure the workplace provides leadership opportunities for women and the benefit to organisations when women participate in leadership roles was examined. The Summit has given renewed impetus to the issue of increasing women's leadership in the workplace in Victoria.

Selected presentations given at the Summit are available on the Office of Women's Policy website at <http://www.women.vic.gov.au/> The website also provides information on the Women's Leadership Grants, the Victorian Honour Roll of Women and the Victorian Women's Register.

Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention, University of Hong Kong

I have also recently had the opportunity to meet with Professor Paul Yip, Head of the Suicide Prevention Research Centre, University of Hong Kong

The University of Hong Kong believe that university students should possess both intellectual and psychological competencies to meet various future challenges. Thus, they have designed a course that utilises a cognitive – behavioural model to give a comprehensive overview on stress, depression and suicide. The course: "Stress, Depression and Suicide" is taught by Paul Wong, a clinical psychologist at the centre. The major aims of the course are to enhance the mental health literacy of their undergraduate students and to introduce evidence-based practical skills in dealing with everyday life hassles. Paul regards the course as a program that informs and supports students. It is an interesting way to provide other forms of awareness and support for students.

Other initiatives being undertaken by the Centre include:

- Care for Suicide Survivor Project. This is conducted at the local hospital. The project is aimed at suicide survivors recognising their unique support needs and high at risk potential. Involves mentor-matching.
- Suicide and the media. Recommendation on Suicide Reporting for Media Professionals.

At the University of Hong Kong they have a:

- First Generation to University project. The first generation students are provided with a bank account with a grant to support extracurricular activities, e.g. overseas trips. What is not utilised is retained by the university. The grants are supported by philanthropic groups.
- Project on early identification of individuals at risk of suicide.

Further information regarding Suicide Research and Prevention can be found at:

<http://csrp.hku.hk/WEB/eng/pageHandler.asp?id=1>

Celebrating together: LTU Ramadan Iftar Dinner

La Trobe University together with the Australian Intercultural Society hosted a Ramadan Iftar Dinner at John Scott Meeting House on Tuesday 25 August, 2009.

This initiative was the outcome of meetings between staff at La Trobe University and representatives of the Australian Intercultural Society. The aim was to progress

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partnerships and understanding of the Muslim community and to provide opportunities to increase cultural understanding.

Whilst the weather was wild on the night (you may remember the severe storms we experienced late last month) the evening was a huge success.

Evenings such as this assist to promote the awareness of Islamic ceremonial traditions and practices, and to acknowledge the importance of our Muslim students participating in Higher Education, and their families.



La Trobe University Islamic Students Association Annual Iftar Dinner

I also attended along with other staff the La Trobe University Islamic Students Association Annual Iftar Dinner held at the Moat Café on the 9 September. This dinner was energetic, happy, informative and most enjoyable. I was also able to meet many of the Islamic women students.

Office of the Ombudsman

La Trobe is one of only a handful of Australian universities to have established an Office of Ombudsman in 1993. We are also rare in making the services of the Ombudsman available to all members of the university community across all campuses. Other universities often separate services for staff from those provided for students.

The Ombudsman operates under the Ombudsman Statute 2009 which clearly delineates roles, functions and responsibilities in conducting mediations and investigations where complaints or grievances arise.

In order to preserve the independence and impartiality of the Ombudsman, the office must be seen to operate independently of the University administration and executive structure.

The recently revised Statute states, inter alia, that -

- the Ombudsman is not subject to the direction of the Council or the Vice-Chancellor (section 5(2)(a));
- the Ombudsman is to have an office and office facilities separate from the central administration building of the University (section 8); and
- only the Council may dismiss the Ombudsman or Acting Ombudsman (section 9).

The Ombudsman is Cliff Picton and can be contacted on 94791897 or by email at c.picton@latrobe.edu.au.

Careers and Employment Services

Expos

On 5th August Careers and Employment hosted its annual Work Experience Expo attended by well over 1000 students. Thirty organisations were on hand to answer questions about paid vacation work, volunteer roles and opportunities to work overseas or undertake further study. The enthusiasm of students reflected their desire to give themselves an edge over others with whom they will compete for graduate positions. Feedback from employers was extremely positive with one commenting "Excellent, professional, well organised" and another "Staff were friendly and very supportive."

For the first time this year we organised a series of mini expos specifically for science students. Employers such as CSL, Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute, CSIRO and the Department of Primary Industries were available to talk to students and staff in Biological Sciences 1 (Level 2) from 10.30 to 2.30 each Thursday between August 20th and September 17th.



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Careers in Focus Month

Another recent initiative has been "Careers in Focus Month" offered by Careers and Employment staff at the Bendigo campus. Each lunchtime during August a seminar on a particular careers topic was offered and in the final week there was a presentation by local employers on what they are seeking in graduates. Whilst initial attendance at the seminars was disappointing we were heartened by the steady increase over time, particularly as those who attended one topic almost invariably returned for the others.

The Way Ahead Program

While a series of lunchtime seminars designed to put our students "way ahead" of the rest by showing them the "way ahead", has been held for students from generalist degrees for the last four years, we decided it was time to re-think its format and presentation. So, for the first time the program will be run during the mid-semester break and will be open to any student at any year level. The first day will focus on the student getting to know themselves and their career options, while the second day will be aimed at preparation for life after university. Students can elect to participate in either day or both. The approach will be very interactive and will incorporate sessions by external speakers. We would like to involve members of the La Trobe community as interviewers on the second day, so please give us a ring on extension 2459 if you can spare an hour on October 1st.

Careers Ambassadors

Last semester we "employed" our first group of volunteer Careers Ambassadors to help us promote our services to other students, assist in answering queries and undertake research on careers topics. They were a wonderful asset and each felt that they had grown as a result of the experience and had developed valuable skills. Three new Ambassadors have recently joined us for second semester and we're delighted to have them in the team. They have undergone a rigorous selection process and a full day's training and will volunteer 26 hours of their time this semester.

Presenting for Success

Careers and Employment is about to launch on its website (www.latrobe.edu.au/careers) a series of five videos under the umbrella title of "Presenting for Success". They have been written and produced in conjunction with Hobbledehoy Productions and feature some very talented La Trobe students as the actors. Our concern that students are often unaware of workplace expectations in terms of behaviour, etiquette and grooming is supported by feedback from employers. As workshops are unlikely to be well attended if students don't know that they lack a professional approach, we decided to share these messages via short amusing

vignettes supported by tips from "experts". We are delighted with the result and believe this is a "first" for any Australian university.

Equality and Diversity Centre

Homework Club Pilot Program

To achieve the Low SES targets recommended by the Bradley Review, more students of Low SES background need to remain academically engaged during high school. The government is encouraging universities to form partnerships with local schools, and the La Trobe Golden Key Homework Club program was piloted in 2009 to determine if this might be a useful partnership arrangement.

The Golden Key Honour Society is an international organization which invites membership to university students who are in the top 15% for academic grades. The Society has a community service aspect to its charter. The Equality and Diversity Centre approached the La Trobe branch of the Golden Key Honour Society to determine their interest in participating as volunteers in a Homework Club. Strong interest was expressed by this student group, and eight students volunteered to be tutors in the pilot program.

The Equality and Diversity Centre then approached Banksia La Trobe Secondary College to determine their interest in a Homework Club. The Principal advised that they had a 'Top 20 Club' for their Year 12 students who aspired to go on to further study and these students would benefit greatly from the Homework Club. The School agreed to bring the students to Bundoora Campus each Wednesday for a 75 minute tutoring session.

A group of seven voluntary tutors have been meeting each week with these students. As well as offering study assistance, the Club has also included some brief discussion at the beginning of each weekly session on various aspects of transition to university. The students participating are enjoying the program and are finding it helpful to their preparation for VCE.

The Banksia La Trobe Secondary College already operates an after school Homework Club for students in Years 7 – 12, and one of the Golden Key voluntary tutors opted to attend this Club on a regular basis, which has been greatly appreciated by the College staff.

The voluntary tutors received training in tutoring by Jarrod Benson from the Student Engagement Unit, and the volunteers are eligible to participate in the La Trobe Awards program. The Equality and Diversity Centre intends to expand the Homework Club programs in 2010. Holly Langfield is the Homework Club Coordinator. Please

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contact her on Ext. 1507 or email h.langfield@latrobe.edu.au if you would like more information.

Tertiary Aspirations Network (TAN)

The Tertiary Aspirations Network formed in 2008 and aims to assist schools where less than 50 per cent of students progress to university. These are defined as 'under-represented schools'. Student equity staff from each Victorian university are represented on this network.

The TAN has mapped the under-represented schools in Victoria and found that 64% of Victorian schools are under-represented. There is clearly much work to be done with these schools if the university sector is to meet the new government targets for university enrolments of Low-SES students.

In 2009 TAN has conducted a number of interactive workshops with Year 9 and 10 students attending regional schools. These have received excellent feedback from participants and TAN hopes to expand the program in 2010. TAN will also be trialling a Parents Information Evening at Seymour in September 2009.

The La Trobe representative of TAN is Ms Holly Langfield. Please contact her on Ext. 1507 or email h.langfield@latrobe.edu.au if you would like to discuss any aspect of TAN activities.

Support for Students with Refugee Background

A program offering additional support to students with a refugee background has been operating at La Trobe University since July 2008.

There are now 44 students registered with this program across La Trobe's campuses. Each campus has appointed a Refugee Contact Officer who meets with the students and ensures they are aware of all relevant student support services. An important aspect of the program is to help these students navigate their way through admission and transition phases, and then meet with the student each semester to discuss their progress.

Each semester these students also receive a small amount of assistance with the cost of textbooks or transport. Where necessary the Equality and Diversity Centre also provides a reconditioned computer, and may assist with additional tuition if this cannot be provided by the Academic Skills Units.

At Bendigo campus one student has also benefited from an Accommodation Scholarship provided by Residential Services. At Albury-Wodonga Campus a group of eleven students with a refugee background have recently commenced the University Bridging Program. The Equality

and Diversity Centre has provided funds for additional classes in English as a second language, and in basic computer skills for this group of students.



Bridging Program Students

Provision of Reconditioned Computers to Low SES students

The Equality and Diversity Centre, with the assistance of the Scholarships Office, have once again provided reconditioned computers to around 80 students from low SES backgrounds across all five campuses. This is the third year the program has operated, with computers provided by Green PCs.

Many students who were unsuccessful in their application for an equity scholarship were offered one of these computers, which came with a range of software suitable to the needs of university students. The offer was also made to students who were bushfire victims, and students with a refugee background.

Student Engagement

Another Student Engagement Initiative

A peer mentoring program for new international students was established by Student Engagement in conjunction with La Trobe International and the Faculty of Law and Management this semester, and is now well under way.

The pilot program commenced in the first week of this semester and gives new international students who are studying in the Faculty of Law and Management, the opportunity to meet in groups on a regular basis to discuss any issues they may have with their transition to La Trobe. Each group consists of two mentors; one local and one international, and up to four mentees.

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Every participant is required to meet informally in their groups at least three times throughout the semester as well as attend three compulsory sessions – presented by staff in the areas of academic skills, careers and employment and stress/exam management. Some mentors have taken their groups on campus tours, advised them on the resources available on/off campus and have been starting points of call for many of their mentees.

The program has been well received, and while the program aims to assist the new students, it has also provided the mentors with valuable skills and experiences. For more information, katie.bell@latrobe.edu.au

First Year Summit Explores First Year Success

The Student Engagement team hosted the First Year Summit on August 14th to engage students and staff in discussion around the issues and opportunities facing new students.

After an address by Professor Belinda Probert, academic, administrative and student support staff worked with twelve students to identify what contributes to student success, how barriers can be overcome and what is the role of the curriculum, student support or students themselves in achieving success. Workshops were facilitated by students and were designed to shape ideas and put forward recommendations.

Ultimately, a successful transition into university ensures a student has every opportunity to be engaged in their learning, be active participants in campus life and achieve the outcomes students aspire to. A report on the Summit will be available on www.latrobe.edu.au/studentengagement/

Students Make it Count with the La Trobe Award

A new framework for recognition and training will allow students who are participating in clubs and societies, mentoring, leadership or other volunteering based programs to register for a La Trobe Award, which formally acknowledges the contribution they have made and the skills they have acquired.

Training is offered free to students who are registered as volunteers, in areas such as Communication Skills, Teamwork, Business Writing and Leadership and new training programs will continue to be developed according to demand.

The La Trobe Award allows program coordinators to offer students an extra advantage for their participation and the opportunity to incorporate high quality training into the program.

For more information, please go to:
www.latrobe.edu.au/students/award/ or email
n.blair@latrobe.edu.au

Student Services

Student Hub Project

Planning for the new Student Hub is now in its final stages with the project about to go to tender. Construction is expected to start in February 2010, and as a result, the University community will start to see the Thomas Cherry Building remodelled into a new “Student Hub”. This area will provide a new and exciting workplace area for Academic and Student Services staff and a more streamlined student resource area that will centralise a range of services including enrolment, legal and financial services, centrelink, car-parking and the cashiers. The Student Hub will also include a student lounge, computer room and study facilities into a central area.

The main motive of this project was to combine the scattered elements of administrative staff who provide support and advice to students, into one centrally accessible location, and provide a study and learning space for students in a prominent ground level location on campus. The benefits of this project will further enhance the University’s capacity to help and provide adequate face-to-face support for students. It is anticipated that the Student Hub will be completed by December 2010, ready for a new intake of students in 2011.

The Student Hub project is being funded through the Federal Government’s Better Universities Refurbishment Funding Initiative.

Architectural views of the Student Hub:



Internal View of main entry to Hub, view online
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/staff/assets/images/Hub-Internal-View-main-entry.jpg>

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Internal View of Service Counter of Hub, view online:
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/staff/assets/images/Hub-Internal-View-of-Service-Counter.jpg>



Internal View of Computer Area of Hub, view online:
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/staff/assets/images/Hub-Internal-View-Computer-Area.jpg>



External View of weather shield screens to Hub, view online:
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/staff/assets/images/Hub-External-View-Screens.jpg>

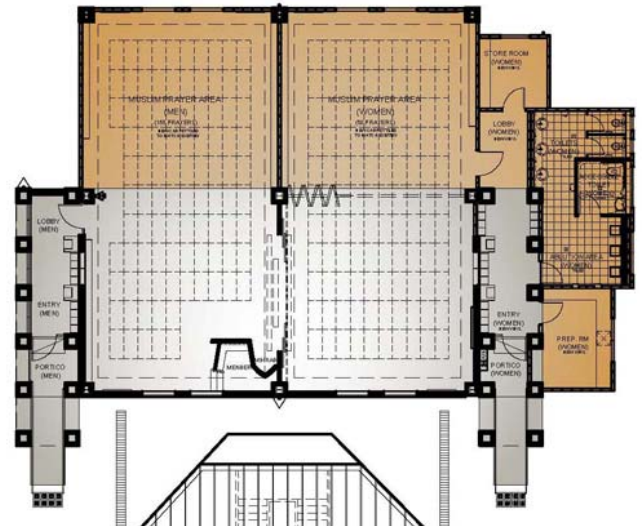
Muslim Prayer Room

Another building refurbishment that Equity and Student Services is involved with is the extension of the Muslim Prayer Room, located in the HUED complex.

In 2007 in a joint initiative between LaTrobe International and the Division of Student Services, funding was allocated from

the capital management plan to double the capacity of the Muslim prayer room to meet the needs of the growing Islamic student population studying at La Trobe.

Construction of the room started in mid 2009 with the expected completion date of November 2009. During the refurbishment, the Division of Student Services has been able to provide temporary prayer rooms within the Union Building.



Exterior Prayer Room and floor plan of new Prayer Room with existing area shaded, view online:
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/staff/assets/images/prayer-floor-plan-new-area-with-old-shaded.jpg>

Student Services and Amenities Bill 2009

On Tuesday 18 August 2009 the Senate rejected by the barest margin the Federal Government's Student Services and Amenities Bill 2009. It is possible that the Government will re-submit the bill in November and if again rejected

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would then join the queue on twice rejected legislation if the Government does pursue a double dissolution.

The University was hoping to generate approximately \$5 million from a compulsory Services and Amenities fee in 2010 which now seems unlikely.

It was heartening to learn that the National Party at its Federal Council now supports a deferrable, compulsory service fee of \$250 for sport and health services (Fiona Nash, ABC radio).

The University has funded Student Services and the incorporated student bodies by approximately \$3 million per annum over the past couple of years supporting a large range of services including the Sports Centre and Sports Clubs, Clubs and Societies, Orientation, Student Theatre, Contact, the Student Legal Service, the Children's Centre, Student Advocacy together with support for the SRC, Post Graduation Association and the student associations at the Bendigo, Wodonga, Mildura and Shepparton campuses.

Australia is the only country in the OECD that denies Universities the right to charge a compulsory service fee to its students. By denying Universities the ability to collect a compulsory service and amenities fee students continue to be denied the full range of services, amenities and activities critical for a comprehensive student experience, which ensures successful learning outcomes and preparation for employment.

The University will continue to support the Governments reform agenda on Student Services and supports the re-introduction of the legislation to the Senate as soon as practicable.

Band Room

The beginning of Semester 2 heralds the opening of the Guild's newest service to students, the Band Room. Musically interested La Trobe Bundoora students will now have the opportunity to rehearse and jam with friends on campus. Available for students to use are:

- Electronic Keyboard and amplifier
- 1 Guitar amplifier
- 1 Bass Guitar amplifier

Tennis Court Refurbishment

Work has begun on Tennis Courts 1 & 2 to re-surface them in the aim of having them ready for the warmer weather.

Asphalt was laid in the first week of September 2009 and will require up to a month to settle (weather dependant). After this period, lines will be painted on so that they will be able to

be used as Hard Courts until the end of the year. In early 2010, Plexi Cushion (the surface choice of the Australian Open) will be laid and once cured will enable tennis enthusiasts to compete on a top quality playing surface.

News from Student Theatre

It's been a very hectic couple of months at the Office of Student Theatre & Film. This year's Short Works was a big hit – with massive attendances. Howard Barker's "The Ecstatic Bible" received rave reviews and was a terrific experience for all those involved.

Upcoming Events

U Ball

The La Trobe University Guild is organising the U Ball, a celebration for all students to be held at the Powerhouse Function Centre in Albert Park on 8 October. Information is available from CONTACT in the Agora or the Guild Administration in the Union Building. Alumni are invited.

Student Theatre

Coming up is a very interesting event that is being co-produced by La Trobe Student Theatre along with Union House Theatre from Melbourne University.

IT CAME FROM STUDENT THEATRE!
(cue space horror music)

This night will be a celebration of that unique cultural force that is Melbourne's Student Theatre scene. With excerpts from current student theatre works from Melbourne's four major universities: La Trobe, Melbourne, Monash and RMIT along with a Culture Quiz, interviews with the stars, audience Q and A and other diversions – this will be a unique opportunity to see the 'lie of the land' both past and present.

STUDENT THEATRE IS ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN MELBOURNE!

Join noted alumni from La Trobe University; Corrine Grant, Robert Reid (Theatre in Decay), Thomas Henning (Black Lung) and from Melbourne University Lally Katz, Joanna Murray-Smith and Michael Veitch

When: 6.30pm, Thursday October 15, Union Theatre, Union House, University of Melbourne. Bookings: 03 98344 6975. Gold coin donation.

ALSO coming up!!! Our annual presentation of student made films:

Short Flicks at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Federation Square, Melbourne at 8pm on Monday, October 12th. Bookings 8663 2583 or enquiries 9479 1198.