

## VSU: It's Your Choice

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There's a lot of rhetoric going around universities all over Australia about how VSU will kill student associations. This rhetoric is, of course, created and distributed by the student unions themselves. It's common to see posters and hear statements such as "Fight For Your Student Union – So It Can Fight For You" and even claims as absurd as suggesting that the ANU Students' Association supports the Uni Bar (which is, actually supported by Tooheys).

The ANUSA website states, among other things, that under VSU, clubs and societies will be threatened, that the cost of food and drinks will rise (note how they emphasize beer), that there will be no more free student diary, departments such as the Women's Department will cease to exist, and that Woroni will become a 'corporate brochure'. The website even goes so far as to state the 'Education Department' will lack the funds to operate efficiently.

Other than the food and drinks, ask yourself – how many of these services do you actually use? And how often have you felt that these services were of a poorer quality than their commercial counterparts (this includes food and drinks). How many beers or sausages can you buy for \$220? ANUSA has a monopoly over food outlets in Union Court, and is therefore restricting both competition, and your choice.

Many of the services the Student Association provides either are already provided by the university, or duplicate services provided by the government or the private sector – and often with added expense and poorer quality. If these services are not financially viable under VSU, they will collapse – and be provided at a higher level of quality by the private sector.

The real reason unions are fighting so hard against VSU is that they'll lose a large portion of their money from students who find no value in their services. Suddenly, instead of being handed hundreds of thousands of dollars on a platter, these unions will be forced to convince students to join. This keeps unions accountable – to the students. No longer will union members be free to embezzle union funds, or throw money at services that can't hold themselves up. No longer will students subsidise the Student Association's president's \$1,100 mobile phone bill, or \$10,000 for conferences and travel.

Among the propaganda is unions claiming that unions give students a voice. How often has the Student Association staged a protest about something you don't care about, or worse; something you are opposed to? Your fee is going towards funding a union protest where a bike is thrown through a pane of glass, or funding a 'fake crime scene' for an Anti-VSU protest. Your fee is going towards funding the Student Association printing posters for protests that they can plaster around university. These posters are essentially graffiti – they cost money to remove, and make the university look disheveled.

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The ANU Students' Association says that Woroni will be adversely affected by VSU. They may even have to charge for it! Woroni is so full of anti-Howard, left wing crap that they know nobody in their sane mind would pay for it. And no self-respecting business would advertise in it for this same reason. The Howard government makes for an easy scapegoat, but the fact remains, they won the majority vote. Woroni makes up the ANUSA's largest expenditure, at almost 13% of the 2005 budget. If the Student Association is forced to axe this derogatory publication under VSU, then it is a move that should be welcomed.

Student unions often attempt to liken the compulsory union fees to taxes imposed by the government. The difference is that government taxes go towards services that benefit society as a whole – services which would not ultimately work as a user-pay system, such as the military and roads. ANUSA services such as the Woroni magazine, and subsidising gym fees benefit very few students. The other difference is that taxes are imposed on a percentage basis, so that those on lower incomes do not pay as much tax as those on higher incomes. Compulsory Student Unionism makes attending university even harder for those on low incomes. If student unions were governments, they would be the least scrutinised, most corrupt governments in the country.

Back in the real world, it is illegal for an employer to force employees to join a union. Why should University be any different? It is my democratic right to have the choice whether or not to join a union. If you don't feel the union provides services that are of any use to you, then vote with your feet.

**VSU gives students a choice.**