

2020 INITIAL GENERAL MEETING (IGM)

President's Report
 Elizabeth Olsen

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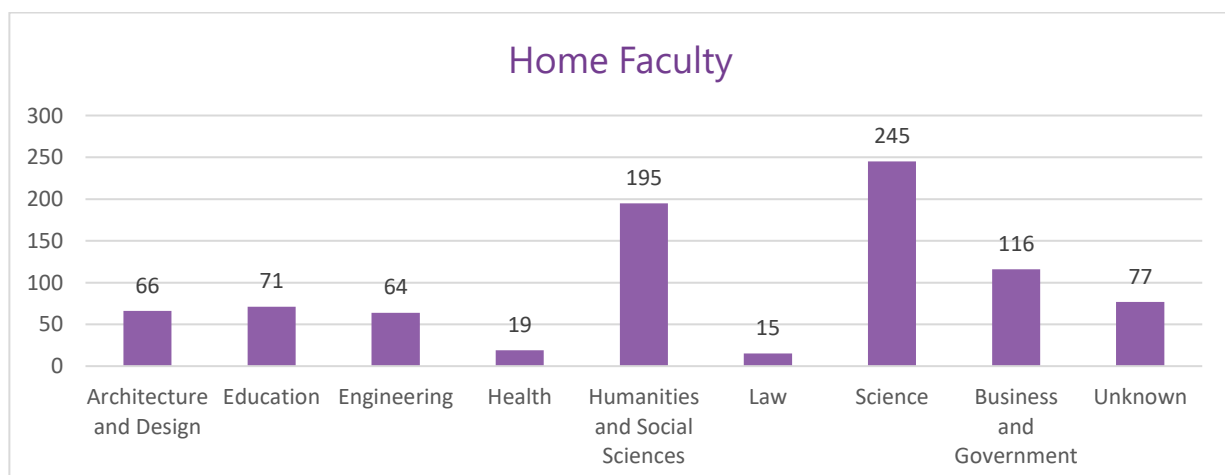
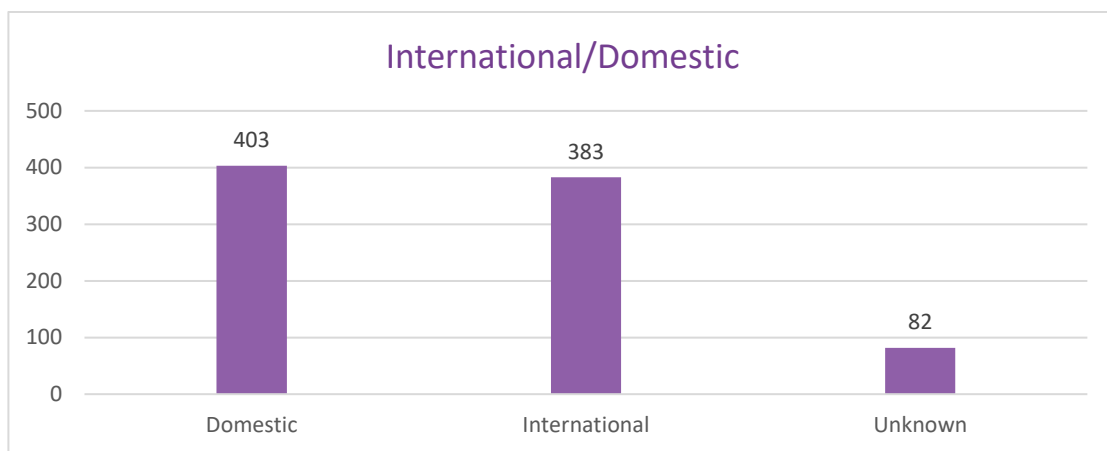
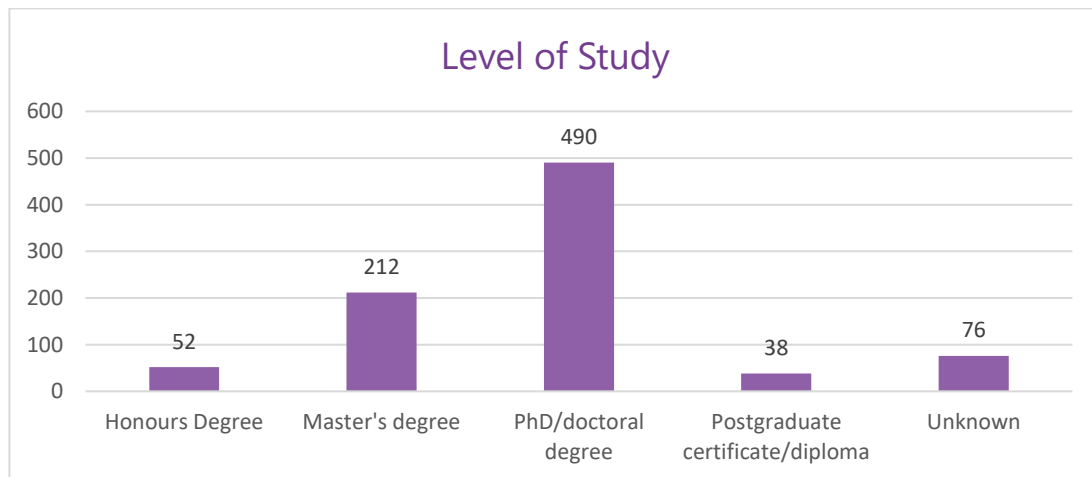
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Activities of the PGSA

Membership

PGSA membership stands at **868** members as at 30th March 2020. This represents a drop of 758 members since the 1627 figure reported in October 2019. This comes from a fault in our membership records which in some cases held only an email address. We corrected the fault as much as we could with the data we had on hand and appealed to members to provide their information. We then asked Student Academic Services to review our membership lists and advise who which of those on our register were actually eligible for membership ie registered as a student in 2020. As a consequence of these activities our numbers reduced dramatically but are now much more accurate.

Some PGSA membership statistics:



Academic Conference Grants

These awards are generously sponsored by Vice-Provost (Research) Professor Margaret Hyland and provide funding for PGSA members presenting their work at an international conference.

In early 2019 we overhauled the application process for the Academic Conference Grants. The changes were enormously successful in increasing the uptake of these grants. The final figure of distributed grants in 2019 is 22; compared with 5 grants distributed in 2018.

In negotiation a reconfiguration of the Research Excellence Awards to distribute these as awards, not grants, we accepted a reduced value for the Research Excellence Awards and an increase to the total amount we have available to distribute for the Academic Conference Grants. We released the revised policy in February 2020.

In light on the COVID-19 pandemic work is now underway to put in place a temporary policy to **use these funds to support the continuation of research during the pandemic**. The policy will have a wide scope to encourage all affected students to apply.

Student Representation

The PGSA holds positions on key Committees in the University, at both Faculty and University levels. Representatives on these committees are drawn from the PGSA Executive and other postgraduate volunteers.

The Vice-President – Community and the Vice President – Advocacy jointly manage the network of committee representatives across the University. Since October 2019 our vice presidents have worked hard to fill the vacant positions and improve the functioning of this network. Representatives have recently been invited to join a MS Teams group which we hope will encourage communication and collaboration amongst our representatives.

The PGSA thanks all those who have contributed to the postgraduate community through service on a University Board or Committee this year. For any postgraduate students interested in taking up a representative position on a Board or Committee check we have vacancies or upcoming vacancies on the following:

- Faculty of Education Board
- Faculty of Education Academic Committee
- Faculty of Science Faculty Board
- Faculty of Science Academic, Teaching and Learning committee
- Faculty of Architecture & Design Academic Committee (requires a design student)

Register your interest by emailing pgsa@vuw.ac.nz.

A priority for 2020 is to build a relationship with the Centre for Academic Development to gain their advice and guidance for representatives who sit on Faculty Academic Committees.

PGSA Management and Administration

The PGSA implemented MS Teams and migrated the organisation's documents to the cloud enabling the Executive to engage in robust work-focused communication and document collaboration.

The Executive has adopted an open, collaborative style of work which demands a high degree of engagement across the whole executive. This has enabled the executive to pool intellectual resource and time to achieve exceptional results in community building, advocacy, and representation. The achievements in this report are a result of the contributions from every member of the PGSA Executive who have worked with great commitment to deliver the PGSA's mission.

At the 2019 AGM we introduced the concept of including more roles amongst the Executive and specialising the Vice President functions. The Vice President – Community has oversight of the PGSA

events and calendar, and the Vice President – Advocacy oversees the advocacy functions of the PGSA. Jointly the Vice President's manage the network of postgraduate representatives on boards and committees throughout the university. The newly created Communications role manages our engagement with members through email updates, our monthly newsletter, Facebook and other social media. And the four outreach roles ensure that the Executive is better connected with the various postgraduate communities across the university.

Substantial work to formalise and introduce role descriptions for these positions has been completed, however role descriptions for the President and Treasurer are still outstanding. Completing this work is a priority for 2020.

Constitution Review

Cody Rei-Anderson contributed his expertise to the Executive leading a review of our constitution. The revised constitution and a motion for the membership to accept the revised constitution will form a significant part of the 2020 IGM discussion.

Advocacy

Victoria Doctoral Scholarship

In 2019 we campaigned for an increase to the Victoria Doctoral Scholarship. Informal feedback indicates that we have likely been effective but follow up work will help ensure continued effectiveness. To keep the pressure up, in 2020 we will write an open letter to Grant Guilford requesting an increase.

Postgraduate Student Allowance

In 2019 we collaborated with NZUSA's campaign for the restoration of the postgraduate student allowance, with the hope of having postgraduate allowances included in the 2020 budget which is scheduled to be announced 14 May 2020. We spoke at NZUSA's rally on the parliament lawn presenting the petition. We presented to the Select Committee, and we met with Universities NZ who then wrote a letter to the minister supporting the restoration of the postgraduate student allowance. Despite this, and despite the restoration of the postgraduate student allowance having been a Labour Party campaign promise at the last election we may not see a positive result in 2020.

Timesheets for Tutors

As part of the Holidays Act remediation process the Victoria University of Wellington received the legal advice that to be compliant with all the relevant employment legislation, all employees who work irregular hours have to record the hours they work. Tutors work irregular hours and will therefore have to record the hours they work.

The University intends to implement recording of hours worked by requiring tutors to complete timesheets. The current implementation timeframe is **Trimester 2, 2020**.

We have heard from the tutors in the postgraduate community of the numerous negative impacts of this change, chief among them being the change to variable paychecks and the interaction with loans/allowances. Our only option to challenge this change is to argue for a change of employment status, from waged to salaried. We have queried HR on this point who have presented reasons why with the payroll systems as they are, they would be unable to both implement the necessary recording of hours and employ tutors as salaried staff.

Since the implementation is being delayed to trimester 2 of 2020 due to necessary payroll software re-development, we believe it would be reasonable to request that the University invest in a system which could support the recording of hours for salaried staff.

Minimum Resources Agreement

We provided a draft revised agreement to the Faculty of Graduate Research. We then met and had a productive conversation about how we might best enable every research student to be able to access the resources necessary for their work. The key issue which will require thoughtful handling is how to ensure an equitable distribution of the university's most precious resource: space. The current approach is to change the direction of the document so that it is the 'Resources Agreement' which outlines the conversations which must take place for students to access resources, the type of resources that may be provided, and the expected quality of the spaces that research students will have access to.

The PGSA will present the final document to members for their acceptance before signing this new resource agreement.

University Accommodation

In 2019 the PGSA's advocacy with regard to University Accommodation languished. A priority in 2020 will be to re-start the work to advocate for more transparent decisions regarding accommodation costs, for accommodation services not to raise prices when the doctoral scholarship value has not increased and to ensure that accommodation providers are meeting their obligations under the code of practice for the pastoral care of domestic tertiary students.

COVID-19 Response

The PGSA advocated for students to be able to continue their studies during the pandemic. We supported VUWSA's advocacy for lecture recordings and will continue this work as the university adjusts to the level 4 restrictions. We are pleased with the result that research students will be able to continue their work uninterrupted. We are also pleased with the options provided for research students for whom the pandemic has created a major disruption. We were also pleased with the result that postgraduate students in apartment style university accommodation were not required to move to Weir House.

Later in 2020 the PGSA will help the University review the COVID-19 response and the lessons which can be learned about including students in decision-making, maintaining a forum for student rep groups, and communicating in times of rapid change.

Academic Policy Refresh

In 2020 the University intends to undertake a full review of all academic policies. The PGSA has a seat in the committee conducting this review process and will represent the interests of postgraduates during this review process. Postgraduates interested in being asked to provide feedback on academic policy documents should please contact pgsa@vuw.ac.nz to register their interest.

Cycle 6 Academic Audit

In 2020 the University will undertake a self-review as part of the Cycle 6 Academic Audit administered by the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities. The PGSA has a seat on the committee conducting this self-review and will work to ensure that the postgraduate student voice is heard during the self-review.

Relationships with Leaders at VUW

- Vice-Provost (Academic) – Prof Stuart Brock
The PGSA has a monthly meeting with VUWSA and the Vice Provost (Academic) to discuss matters which relate to the academic programme at VUW.
- Director of Student Academic Services - Pam Thorburn
The PGSA meets with the Director and her team on a monthly basis and has established a relationship in order to provide the university regular updates on the needs of postgraduates.

This has also enabled us to receive information on return and have a say in activities, measures and policies that are implemented to improve the postgraduate experience at VUW

- Vice-Provost (Research) – Prof Margaret Hyland
The PGSA maintains a strong working relationship with the Vice Provost (Academic) with who oversees the University's negotiation of the Minimum Resources Agreement, Provides the funding for the PGSA's Academic conference grants, and funds the Research Excellence Awards, the Victorias Awards event, the three minute thesis competition, and the travel and accommodation for our honours/masters winner to attend the national competition.
- Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Research – Prof Neil Dodgson
The PGSA maintains a strong relationship with the Dean of FGR who works with the Vice-Provost (Research) to support research students throughout the university.
- Associate Director Mauri Ora - Kevin Rowlatt
The PGSA meets with the Associate Director and his team on a monthly basis. This relationship has provided us an opportunity to engage with Mauri Ora directly and discuss the health and wellbeing needs of postgraduates which although similar are also sometimes different from that of undergraduates
- VUWSA Advocate - Erica Schouten and Alice Smith
The PGSA meets with the VUWSA Advocacy team on a monthly basis. Since this team directly deals with many issues face by our postgraduates, this relationship is vital for us to update our awareness on current issues faced by students and also update them in turn of the issues we see within our community.
- VUWSA President – Geo Robrigado
The PGSA meets once a month with VUWSA to ensure strong and stable ties between our two organisations.

Community and Events

COVID-19

Due to the restrictions to counter the spread of COVID-19, a number of our events have had to be cancelled or moved online. It will be challenging to run events over the coming months, particularly when the country is at alert status 3 or 4.

However, in the days since the country moved to level 3, we have been developing a strategy to allow the community to continue and grow online. So far, we have achieved this by creating the "PGSA Hub", which is a Slack workspace, and moving our events online (via Zoom) where possible. The events we have run this way so far have been successful, with very good attendance. We will continue to run events this way, and to evolve our strategy over the coming weeks.

The PGSA is committed to maintaining a strong community over the coming months and we encourage members to continue attending our events online, engage with the PGSA Hub, and let us know what we can do to support you!

2020 Orientation Week

We ran a number of events over Orientation Week 2020 (24th – 28th February), working closely with Student Recruitment and Orientation (SRO). It is a crucial time of year for building a Postgraduate community, because we can use these events to connect with students who can otherwise be very hard to reach (e.g. because they get busy during the year). Most Postgrads participating in O Week are in taught programmes (Masters/Honours), although there are some thesis students as well, some of who have been at the University for a few months.

This year, we had a Postgraduate Information evening (Monday), Picnic (Tuesday), Services info session (called "Thriving @ Uni", Wednesday), Postgrad Talks (Thursday) and Breakfast Social (Friday). Several

of the events were open to all members as well as new arrivals. All the events ran very smoothly, were well attended, and had good engagement. We saw an uptick in membership as a result, so overall the week was a great success.

Major Events

3 Minute Thesis Competition (3MT)

The PGSA will run the traditional VUW 3MT Competition in 2020. Heats will run 13-17 July and the Final will be held on 23 July 2020. The highest ranking PhD winner of the VUW Final will represent Victoria at the Asia-Pacific 3MT Competition, while the highest ranking Masters/Honours winner will represent VUW at the New Zealand Nationals.

As the Asia-Pacific 3MT competition date is still some time away, planning is still underway for the event to go ahead on Thursday 1 October at The University of Queensland, St Lucia Campus in Brisbane. The University of Queensland is monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic advice closely and will update the 3MT community accordingly.

The current COVID-19 situation may also affect how we run this year's competition, requiring that we host our heats virtually.

The PGSA encourages research students at all levels and stages of their candidature to enter. The challenge of condensing your research into 180 seconds for an intelligent but non-specialist audience is always rewarding to engage with.

Victorias Awards

The 2019 Victorias Awards were held in November in the Hunter Lounge. The Awards are a highlight in the PGSA's calendar and an opportunity to celebrate the excellence in the postgraduate community. At the Victorias Awards we recognise the research achievements of postgraduate students with the Research Excellence Awards a \$1500 award to one candidate from each Faculty, and a Maori Knowledge and Development award to a candidate from any Faculty whose research contributes to Maori Knowledge and Development. We also recognise and celebrate the professional development of postgraduate students with the student teaching awards. We take the opportunity to recognise that it takes a village to support postgraduate students with the Supervisors awards, and the Professional Staff Awards. Finally we recognise the outstanding contribution to the postgraduate community with the Landers Postgraduate Award.

This year's Victorias Awards will be held on 19 November.

PGSA Executive

The PGSA Executive is the core leadership team of our Association. Below is a list of members and officers of the Executive Board that served October 2019 to March 2020:

President: Elizabeth Olsen

Vice President, Community: Sam Crawley

Vice President, Advocacy: Miniruwani Samarakoon

Treasurer: Bernard Tawaih

Communications: Will Abbiss

Outreach (Te Aro): Glen Askey

Outreach (Pipitea): Cody Rei-Anderson

Outreach (Taught): Rebecca Edwards (now resigned)

Other Executive members: Deanna Ayupova, Nancy Marquez, Salman Rashid, Michaela Harris, Sraddha Venkataraman

Executive Assistant: Erella Sonnino

Communications

Website, Newsletter, & Social Media

Will Abbiss took on the newly-created role of Communications Officer in October on an interim basis in the absence of another candidate. In the last five months his focus has been on maintaining consistent communication with PGSA members, recruiting a successor, and establishing systems that can be handed over with minimal disruption.

The PGSA currently uses Mailchimp to communicate with its members and compose the monthly newsletter (Informer). Will was instrumental in establishing this system in December 2018 (while Co-Vice President).

Mailchimp allows Executive members to more easily communicate with the membership. It also allows the newsletter to be significantly more adaptable and its editor (now the Communications Officer) to have more autonomy over its content.

Over the summer the PGSA's events graphics were re-designed with the purpose of making them more consistent and adaptable. Will used Canva to create basic square icons and colour coding for each event, which can be simply resized and manipulated for posters and other graphics as required. This design template has also been used to refresh the PGSA's social media graphics and create new flyers and information sheets to promote the PGSA.

COVID-19

Following the announcement of the level 4 COVID-19 alert last week, and the consequent closure of the University campuses, our communications officer was crucial to the PGSA's successful communication with our membership. Will led the communication to the membership about developments and the information available to them. He also assisted Sam Crawley (Vice President Community) to establish online events (via Zoom) and the PGSA Hub (on Slack), facilitating the communication of these to the membership.

This took a considerable amount of work and organisation from all concerned, but we managed to action them within a short space of time and continue to support the postgraduate community during these trying times when community is more important than ever.

Volunteers

The PGSA is always on the lookout for keen people to join us! In addition to being a member, you might be interested in joining the Executive, or contributing to the student representation the PGSA coordinates by taking a seat on one of the many boards and committees at the University. If you are interested, please contact pgsa@vuw.ac.nz for more information!