"Quantity not Quality"

50% of Economics and Finances Classes Cut

By Fang Lu

Students in the School of Economics and Finance will return to uni this week to discover that 50% of their tutorials have been cut. Instead of weekly tutorials they will now only have fortnightly classes.

The decision was made three weeks before semester started without consultation with staff and they are understandably annoyed. Michael Rafferty, a lecturer in the school said the decision was "blatant cost cutting." The change has no academic benefit, in fact it will be severely detrimental, according to Mr. Rafferty.

"We have half as much time with students as we did before, so we can't get through as much work. We have been told to 'adjust our courses according.'"

Staff have also been instructed that they are allowed to spend a maximum of 40 minutes per semester assessing each student. This leads to a dumbing down, Mr. Rafferty said.

"It takes 20 minutes to mark an exam, so that leaves 20 minutes for the entire rest of the semester. It basically means no essays whatsoever. The problem is, essays teach the writing skills that students need. When you're in the workforce, no one asks you to do a multiple choice test."

Mr. Rafferty said that the changes are debasing the course. "In each subject you're only learning half as much as you used to. It really conditions that teachers have, and is in fact due to the too high standards to which we hold them. Our new programme will pump out graduates like nothing ever seen before. We have a target of doubling our output to 1200 per year."

Now graduates can get a Bachelor of Education that will satisfy the NSW Department of Education by passing 120 credit points worth of subjects instead of the normal 320. The thinking behind this is that everyone who has a degree already knows high school maths.

Continued page 4

Students are enthusiastic about the changes to the education degrees

New education course to 'pump out graduates'

By Luke Fomiati

UWS has recently won several grants to continue their innovative approach to higher education. One of the ways they are doing this is by new Bachelor of Education degrees which will dramatically increase the quantity of teachers graduating from UWS.

University spokesperson Bob Dawkins told The Western Onion "We realised that the current teacher shortage actually has nothing to do with the shit pay and

Continued page 4
Go on, write us a letter

Tell us how much you love The Onion or otherwise.

We reserve the right to publish anything we get and write sarcastic comments after it.

Be sure to include your degree as this week's letter writers so kindly have. (If you write something we don't like you will be hunts down and killed. This is so we can find you.)

Letters can be sent to uwsonion@yahoo.com (observe readers will notice that this is the same place that all other submissions go to).

Josephine S. Styrge
Health Science III

Editors respond:
Thanks for yesterday's news. Uni admin sold us out over the 333 bus years ago.

Helpful tips

The Wednesday February 8 Pearleth Press's 'Money column was up to its usual standard of providing totally useless information. Paul Clitheroe advised readers to 'do as the rich do' and save or invest 30% of our income. Maybe Paul doesn't realise it, but saving 30% of an income of $20,000 is a lot easier than saving 30% of the average student's income of $15,000. Also, whereas putting aside $60,000 a year will turn in a decent amount quickly, $5000 a year really doesn't add up to that much.

To 'do as the rich do', you actually have to be rich.

Tamar Robinisique
Equine Studies II

All Fall Up

So I hear UWS is offering 10000 new students places this year. Where do they expect to put them? Already we have to get chairs from neighbouring classrooms just so we don't have to sit on the floor (which is apparently a violation of the occupational health and safety rules). With so many new students, those other rooms will be filled as well, and not have any chairs or desks to spare. Will we be looking at our classes through the window next?

Sonja Miko
Science/Law IV

The Western Onion
"Jan Won't Listen to UWS Staff"

By Jennifer Jack

An early 8 am barbecue set the scene for a serious protest outside the Chancellery at the Westnongton Campus on February 16. This is the third time in a row that members of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) have camped outside this building, awaiting the arrival of the UWS Board of Trustees. Their cause - unfair treatment of staff at UWS and how this treatment is affecting university life for all staff and students.

As a first year student I was unaware of the issues facing my soon to be teachers at UWS and what the NTEU involved. The NTEU represents staff in all Australian universities. They therefore have a strong focus on the needs of students for quality education and their banners at the protest reflected this. "UWS Executive Out", "Dumb Down Subjects To Pay For Administration" and "Our Earned Reputation Deserves Fair Pay And Conditions" surrounded the entrance to the Board meeting.

The Board of Trustees is placing a huge amount of stress on our university staff's shoulders in terms of decreased funding and increased workload. They have taken funding from research and teaching activities and have expected staff to maintain the same professional standards. Staff are campaigning to convince the Board of Trustees to pay attention to the crisis that is facing the academic and general staff at UWS.

Robyn Moroney, President of the UWS NTEU Branch said "We are hurting so badly that we cannot provide the sort of quality of teaching and research that we are capable of and that students require."

Another issue that is facing not only staff but also students is parking. Members pressed the arriving Board members to do something about the conditions of parking at UWS and on how the parking policy had been breached by introducing fees without consultation.

The members of the NTEU are set to fight on these issues and in doing so create a brighter long-term future for the university.

Globalise Justice - Not War and Poverty!

Third Asia Pacific International Solidarity Conference

Easter — 24-28 March, 2005
Ashfield Boys High School, Sydney

Keynote speakers:

Stan Goff, US military veteran, with a son in Iraq, and now campaigner with the Bring Them Home Now! movement against the US occupation of Iraq.

Dita Sari, former political prisoner, Indonesian labour leader and anti-globalisation campaigner and winner of Asia's Nobel Prize, the Megawati Award.

Plus activists speaking from South Korea * the Philippines * Australia * West Papua * Palestine Indonesia * Pakistan * Bangladesh * Turkey * Mauritius * India New Zealand * United States * Europe * Latin America

Organised by Green Left Weekly newspaper in association with Action in Solidarity with Asia and the Pacific (ASAP)

Bookings phone (02) 9690 1977 or email: asap2005@bigpond.com
science, English and so on all the things we need to learn is how to teach it.

"Some naysayers say that you need to learn how to teach as you learn what you are going to be teaching as it influences how and what you learn yourself. This is just nonsense," said Dawkins. "It is the same kind of logic that says you need choice over your objectives."

The new graduate entry Bachelor of Education program will not only produce more teachers, it will also produce them faster. The old undergraduate-entry degrees took four years to complete, the new ones only one year. The six-subject-a-semester study load will keep students busy, according to Mr. Dawkins. "They'll have no time for wanning on protests, kids, jobs, and so on. We're about maximising the student's time."

"There'll also be less chance for students to develop an ongoing relationship with staff. Under the old system students would see most staff about three times at various points throughout their degree, allowing staff to see their progression and help them with any long term problems."

"Under the new system all subjects with the same lecturer will be done in the same semester, limiting chances of unnecessary contact and any relationship other than that of commodity buyer/seller developing. This will be most helpful when we want to restructure the school, as we frequently do, which always necessitates the sacking of some staff."

"In such a situation we certainly don't want students feeling they should 'support those staff.'"

Rumour has it that UWS intends to stop teaching secondary education at Bankstown and stop teaching primary education at Penrith. However, Mr. Dawkins was quick to deny this. "That would be putting financial imperatives before the well-being of our staff and students and the wider western Sydney community. We would never do such a thing."

Staff are reportedly ecstatic about the changes. In fact, they are so happy with the university administration that they refused to speak to The Western Onion on the record for fear that their comments may reflect badly on those staff who were not quoted.

Vice Chancellor Janice Reid stated that the changes will have no effect on the proposed Medical School.

Public transport group formed

Residents of western Sydney have formed a group to campaign for better public transport. Western Suburbs Commuters in Defence of Public Transport spokesperson Alunair Dickenson said that the collapse of Westbus shows the urgent need for action around public transport in the west.

"What we and the [Westbus] workers want is for Sydney Buses to step in take over the running of public transport in Western Sydney," Mr. Dickenson said. "We want to turn around this trend of privatising everything. What we need is public ownership for public service, not private ownership for profit."

Subjects cut...

Continued from page one should be half the credit points."

"You can't say that our course is the equivalent of a course from, say, Sydney uni. They've always had better facilities like libraries but now they also have significantly more face to face teaching time.

"Actually, our degrees are moving closer and closer to TAFE qualifications."

Economics and Finance are just the beginning though. So far, only schools with financial problems have been targeted for these radical reforms. However, the fact that this is happening with University Executive approval suggests that it is a trend that is likely to continue.

"It's the approach of a second rate small business," Mr. Rafferty caustically remarked. "You have cash flow problems so you cut the level of service."

"No one holds them accountable. They don't have to justify their pet projects to anyone. They spent $4.5 million building a New Administration Building at Werrington North campus and no one says a word."

"With these changes, they're resting on students' worries, thinking less classes is better. What students need to realise is they're effectively only getting half a course."

2005 looks to be a year of anticipation and expectation. It will be a big year for the Student Associations of UWS. With 2004 behind us it seems that we are living in a new ERA. Gone are the old Student Associations like PPSSA, CSSA, BSA, MSRA and HSU. Now we can say goodbye to UWSWA and UWSSConnect. The University Administration has indicated that they would like 2005 to be a time of moving forward to provide more and better service to our students.

Happy to oblige to such a request, UWSSA are going to be providing better services than ever for the Students of UWS. We are going to be fighting for the rights of all students (regardless of gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexuality, whatever) and ensure that all students can learn in a safe and positive environment.

We ask the University (which now owns all of the catering facilities across UWS) to do the same. UWS is now charging more for the provision of catering outlets than it ever has before (a whopping $6million in student fees in 2005) and for that we expect that the quality of service matches the cost.

We are also at a time when the administration has taken drastic and unprecedented steps in its rearrangement of UWS courses. Some courses have disappeared altogether, some have been drastically modified and some have been reduced in size or moved to different campuses.

If you are among the 20,000 students who are going to be affected through the course of your degree by these changes then we would like to hear from you. Don't just sit back and take cuts to your course; if you're not satisfied with any service within the university make sure that your voice is heard. Come and speak to your local SRC office bearer for more information.

The SRC of UWS passionately believe that ALL students are entitled to a quality degree and a memorable and worthy University experience. We believe that UWS has the potential to become a world class University, renowned for both its high quality of teaching and learning, and also for its respect and fair treatment of all those who enter its walls.

But this can only happen if the students take action and continue to help us help you to right any wrongs that are important to you.

As for me, this first-ever issue of Western Onion is as much a farewell as an introduction. I will now be serving a continued term as President for 2005.

It has been a pleasure serving the students of UWS over the past year. We survived what I think were the toughest times as far as student representation is concerned. I will ensure that the turbulent history of Student Organisations at UWS is not forgotten but I will be taking a back seat to younger and fresher leadership. I implore the new leaders of the student movement to remember that we got where we are by immense effort and passion, and I can only hope that this high level of energy and enthusiasm is maintained. I also hope that your journey from this point is as rich and instructive for you as mine has been for me.

Yours in Union,
Bernard Busoos
The UWS Film Co-op meets every Monday at UWS Kingswood campus in U building, UC-43 at 5:30pm and provides a forum for those who enjoy watching pertinent, educational and entertaining films from the four corners of the globe. It also provides the opportunity for filmmakers to present their work to an audience and to benefit from feedback during discussions after the screening. UWS Film Co-op members include students, filmmakers, academics and film appreciators whose co-operative efforts have made the film co-op a continuing success.

The UWS Film Co-op’s free screenings are offered to all and encourage friends, family and colleagues along to share in the unique experience of watching profound or thought-provoking cinema not offered at the local multiplex. The only pre-requisites for membership are enthusiasm, passion for cinema and a willingness to participate in lively debates about film and its production. The UWS Film Co-op promotes UWS student work and local filmmakers by screening short films and animated works prior to each feature.

Memorable events over the last two years include guest speakers Tom Zubrycki (Molly & Mebarak), Khoa Do (The Finished People) and Juan Salazar (De La Tierra a la Pantalla). The controversial screening of Larry Clark’s ‘Bully’ in 2003 sparked much-needed debate on campus about the Australian Censorship Board’s decision to ban Clark’s latest film ‘Ken Park’ and generated a lively discussion about the prevailing laws that censor cinematic works in this country.

UWS lecturers Peter McGregor and Philip Emery and a number of students conceived the idea for the Co-op in April 2003 in order to develop a much-needed film culture at Werrington South and Kingswood campuses. After the inaugural meeting of the UWS Film Co-op on 25 April 2003 a film programme was created and films began screening in May. Due to the success and growing enthusiasm during the initial screenings, film co-op members who nominate favourite films of every genre and nationality have compiled the seasonal film programmes.

The UWS Film Co-op aims to screen films of relevance to those who appreciate cinema, to encourage discussion and debate about film and film production, to offer support to students and amateur filmmakers, to showcase indigenous talent and to develop a ‘film culture’ on campus.

To find out about the UWS Film Co-op’s new and exciting Autumn film program for 2005 and to confirm venue, time and day, visit www.uwsfilmco-opeo.vze.com

Programme fliers will be available at Werrington South and Kingswood at the start of semester.

UWS Queer Collective

By Olivia Noto (2004 Penrith Queer Officer)

University is a less safe place for some students than for others. Australian research about young people has found that schools can be very unsafe for students who are, or are perceived to be, gay, lesbian, or bisexual. A national report on the sexuality, health and well-being of same-sex attracted youth conducted in 1998 found that:

- 13% had been physically abused
- 46% had been verbally abused
- Nearly 70% of this abuse had happened at school, by other students (60%), friends (10%) or teachers (3%)

Although studies specifically regarding Australian university students are difficult to come by, discrimination of queers unfortunately continues to be a problem on campus.

That’s where the UWS Queer Collective comes in.

It is our aim that 2005 will see EVERY campus have a safe Queer Space, a working Queer Collective and assigned Queer Officers.

WHAT IS A QUEER SPACE?

A queer space is an autonomous space for queers (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, intersexed, questioning people etc). It is a place where safety is assured. Easy access should be guaranteed. Queer books and resources should be readily available. Whether you just wanna sit and chat or work on the next campaign, the choice is yours.

Why isn’t there a straight place, you ask... There is. It’s called Earth.

WHY HAVE A QUEER COLLECTIVE?

Your Student association acts much like a workers’ union. It provides a voice for students, by students. So those affected by homophobia organise together (as the Queer Collective) to fight for queer rights on campus and student association provides support.

WHERE WE’RE AT NOW:

In 2004 Penrith and Parramatta joined forces to create their Queer Collective called ‘Divertuality’. A Queer Space is currently located on Penrith (Werrington South) Campus, in building BNG13. (Conditions apply for access, but we’re working to get a more ideal location.)

Parramatta campus is currently negotiating a Queer Space near the River Bar. Bankstown is planning to get a Queer Space, Campbelltown has one (though it isn’t ideal and there is no working collective on campus). And homophobia seems to reign supreme on the Hawkesbury and Blacktown campuses, where no Queer Spaces or Collectives have been established so far.

HOW TO BECOME A QUEER OFFICER?

This is a poor state of affairs across all six campuses, and more campaigning for Queer issues is vital to ensure safety for queers on campus.

You can help make campus a better place for queer students by joining (or in some cases, starting up) your own campus’ Queer Collective.

With your help, 2005 WILL see a Queer Officer on EVERY campus. The candidate (who must identify as queer) will be elected by their collective, and be the voice for queer students in the student association. Plans to have a UWS-wide Queer Officer (presumably one male-identifying and one female-identifying) are being negotiated now.

There are many positions up for grabs, so join your Queer Collective today!!

MORE INFORMATION:
Contact your Student Association for more information on UWS Queer Collectives and keep an eye on these pages for upcoming events.
A Guide to the Typical UWS Experience

By Lema Samandar

As you walk through the gates of the University of Western Sydney, your first impression of UWS will be of a large, modern campus. However, your experience of UWS will vary depending on which part of campus you visit. For example, the Kingswood campus is more focused on research, while the Campbelltown campus is more geared towards vocational education.

You might be surprised to learn that UWS has a rich history. It was founded in 1947 as the University of Western Sydney, and has since grown to become one of the largest universities in Australia. The university has over 60,000 students and offers a wide range of courses, from undergraduate to postgraduate levels.

Do You Know... What it feels like for a girl?

By Ange Gillespie

So many of the readers of this article will be the new crop of first-year students and it is only a short stroll down memory lane for me to remember that nervous and uneasy feeling of my first days at university.

Settling into the uni lifestyle can be challenging for all students, but as a female there are a few more confronting issues to be faced. Back when I was a first-year student, I remember spending the best part of fifteen minutes trying to give 'the hint' to a group of male students that I was not interested in their advances; a process which began with a polite "No thanks" and ended with a more abrupt "Just piss off!".

I know that this example is a mild case of the harassment many female students face on campus, but that does not make it any more acceptable. Well, what can WE do to resolve this problem? I believe the resolution of most problems lies in education. For example, if John Howard lived one day as a female student, I'd bet that he wouldn't screw us up the way he does! So UWSAA and the UWS Penrith Womyns Collective have come up with a fantastic and splendidous idea. Penrith campus will be hosting magnificent celebrations for International Women's Day. The theme for these celebrations is "RESPECT - Find out what it means to me".

The first event will be held at the UWS Penrith campus on Tuesday 8 March, which will include a free BBQ, a forum on issues facing females at uni, nationally and internationally and a free self-defence workshop (for female-identifying students only).

Thursday night, 10 March, will be the big-ticket event, with a concert held in honour of International Women's Day at the UWS Penrith campus. Sydney punk rock band Skullker will be headlining and all female-identifying students will be admitted for free.

And for dedicated feminists we invite you to head down to Town Hall on Saturday, 12 March 2005 to join in the annual UWSAA Women's Day Rally, where there will be inspiring speakers and great entertainment.

All of these events are aimed at promoting the partnership that both genders need to be active in to ensure equality within our society. It is not only a female-identifying student's role to assert her equality, but also for male-identifying students to advocate respect and parity for their female peers.

It is the right of all students to study and socialise in a harassment free environment. This is the first of a regular column exploring issues that affect women. If you would like to contribute, email uwsaawomenlyncos@ymail.com.

DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL
WHAT ARE THE LIMITS?

A special forum organised by the School of Law featuring:
Justice Michael Kirby - High Court
Michael Head - UWS School of Law
Harland Koops - Henry Davis York

A discussion of issues surrounding recent High Court decisions on the detention of asylum seekers without trial, notably the cases of Al-Kateb and Al Khafaji.

6-9pm Tuesday, 15 March
Lecture Theatre 1, Campbelltown Campus
All welcome
As the New Year Begins...

By Jesse Gardiner

The beginning of the uni student vacation after a busy spring semester heralds in a great many things. For many of us, the three month break provides a significant opportunity to work or seek employment in order to pay off the fees and textbook debts that seem to accrue throughout the year, or to at least prepare for the coming year’s worth of payments. For those lucky enough, the break provides the opportunity to do a bit of travelling. While for others, the break provides the perfect opportunity to catch up on missed TV, not to mention the feast of sport viewing pleasure to be had during the Australian summer.

For those of us involved with a Christian group on campus, such as Campus Bible Ministries or University Bible Studies, perhaps one of the highlights of the student vacation is the opportunity to attend the National Training Event (NTE), the annual national conference run by the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES). Held at the Australian National University, the conference provides students with a unique opportunity to gather together to study God’s word and prepare for a short mission in partnership with churches in QLD, NSW, VIC and the ACT.

In 2004, from 4-12 December, some 900-1000 staff and students from universities around Australia including staff and students from UWS Hawkesbury, Blacktown, Campbelltown, Parramatta and Penrith campuses came together for the event, the theme of which was “Evangelism: The Heartbeat of God.” (Give it a minute’s thought and it seems less cheesy than you first glance.)

As we look to begin a new year of grueling university study, I thought it might be helpful to draw on ideas raised in the conference:

1. That university is and should be more than just a stepping-stone to a 100k+plus salary; and

2. That the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not something to be ashamed of or kept to oneself but is something truly worth sharing with others.

That university is more than a place of (potentially high wage-earning) job qualifications, it is a concept that may be foreign to us as students. Universities have a history of being first and foremost places of individual learning and growth. It seems sad then, that we’ve come to the point where university is not valued as an opportunity for personal growth and learning, but rather is seen as a laborious three or four year task, the rewards of which are some how tied up in the pride of being university educated and hopefully the large salary this education will deliver. Indeed, the fact that we are able to partake in a higher education should in itself be enough to arouse thankfulness within us and a desire to make the most of that opportunity to grow.

The second point to have been raised by the conference was that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message not to be sat on. Rather, it is something truly worth sharing with all people.

A new fun and exciting project for the year 2005 is the ACON (the AIDS Council of NSW) project ‘Ins & Outs’, a peer education group for same sex attracted young women. Participants are being asked to sign up now to join in the project.

Would you like to be involved in the production of this paper?

All students can be!

To find out how, attend one of the following information sessions:

- **Bankstown**: 10am March 10
  - Students’ Association
- **Campbelltown**: 2pm March 10
  - Students’ Association
- **Parramatta**: 1pm March 7
  - PAUWS Building
- **Penrith**: 12pm March 9
  - Students’ Association (Kingswood campus)
- **Richmond**: 2pm March 15
  - Students’ Association

Alternatively just read page 2 for details

Calling Queer Girlz!

By Olivia Noto

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A new fun and exciting project for the year 2005 is the ACON (the AIDS Council of NSW) project ‘Ins & Outs’, a peer education group for same sex attracted young women. Participants are being asked to sign up now to join in the project.

Whether you’re out or not, butch or femme. Everyone’s welcome to participate, says Mahamati.

Mahamati. How to get there?

The street address is 9 Commonwealth Street, Surry Hills. If you catch the train, get off at Museum Station (car of Elizabeth St and Liverpool St) and look out for the huge American Express building. Just above the American Express sign is a gay rainbow flag! That’s us!

If you would like to participate in this project, call Mahamati on 9206 2084 or email mhmahati@acon.org.au
Al Qaeda Does Not Exist

"In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act"
George Orwell

The first reference in an Australian paper to 'Al Qaeda' is an article in the 1998 August 30th American Weekly Mail, in US papers it is two days earlier. This seems strange for the world's most terrible and best organised terrorist organisation which we are told has existed since the late 80s.

Three weeks earlier, on August 7, suicide bombers had detonated large bombs outside the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing hundreds. Not long after, two men who admitted involvement in the plot, Mohamed Rashed Daoud Al-Owhali and Mohammed Odeh, were taken into custody by the CIA. They claimed to be part of an organisation called Al Qaeda, led by Osama Bin Laden, which had authorised and planned the attacks.

When the trial of the Al-Owhali and Odeh got underway in 2001, the US government also wanted to convict Bin Laden, who they believed to have been behind the attacks. However, they had no evidence for this whatsoever, so they decided to use legislation and precedents aimed at combating the mafia to put the entire Al Qaeda organisation on trial.

The problem was that previous 'criminal organisations' that had been prosecuted using these laws had clear membership and centralised, hierarchical structures, Al Qaeda did not. It was more an idea and a strategy than an organisation.

Bin Laden, having lost faith in the ability of the Islamist movement to overthrow the regimes of the Muslim world and build true Islamic states, called for dramatic attacks on the United States in the hope that these would impress and mobilise the Arab masses. He became the focus of a small group of disillusioned Islamists who were attracted to his radical strategy. However, he was very much on the fringe of the movement, allowed to tour the camps in Afghanistan and preach only in return for large cash donations.

This real Bin Laden, who did not even use the words Al Qaeda, was not what the Americans needed for their case. They relied on the testimony of Juma al-Fadl, a former associate of Bin Laden on the run for stealing large amounts of money from him, to paint a picture of a vast terrorist network that had an organised network of control, headed by an all-powerful Bin Laden. This was a dramatic picture that still shapes how we see Al Qaeda, but it bore little relation to the truth.

As Jason Burke, author of Al Qaeda, says in the film, "the idea that Bin Laden ran a coherent organisation with operatives and cells all around the world of which you could be a member is a myth. There is no Al Qaeda organisation. There is no international network with a leader, with cadres who will unquestioningly obey orders, with tentacles that stretch out to sleeper cells in America, in Africa, in Europe."

Lies = Fact

After September 11 though, critical voices were lost in the stampede by the media and the US Government to blame Al Qaeda, an organisation that they themselves had constructed in a New York courtroom only months before.

Amidst the hysteria over the rise of the "most dangerous terrorist organisation the world has ever seen", no one stopped to consider that the only information we had about Al Qaeda came from either governments or the terrorists themselves; the two groups with the most to gain from its exaggeration. In fact, many of the claims of both parties are demonstrably false.

In late 2001, during the invasion of Afghanistan, the US government claimed that the headquarters of Al Qaeda was located in the mountains of Tora Bora, near the Pakistan border, in a huge underground network of caves fitted out, James Bond supervillian-style, with ventilation, years worth of food, communication systems, defence mechanisms, tunnels for storing tanks and secret exits. When the Americans actually got there, they found some small caves where fires had been lit and ammunition stored.

In June 2002 American Jose Padilla (aka Abdullah al-Mujahid) was arrested entering the US. We were told he was intending to detonate a radioactive 'dirty bomb' that could poison an entire city. He has been detained without charge ever since as an 'enemy combatant' despite having neither a bomb, nor a specific plan when he was arrested. You could be forgiven for thinking that a 'dirty bomb' was something extremely dangerous that someone would have to be pre-emptively locked up before they could even come up with a plan to build one.

In fact, the US military in the 1950s investigated using 'dirty bombs' but gave up when they realised that the amount of radiation released was so small that someone could only be seriously injured by it if they remained at the detonation site for months on end. The US Government's own Nuclear Regulatory Commission's
This map showing countries where Al Qaeda is active was removed from the US State Department website in early 2004 without explanation.

website says that there is far more danger from the panic created by the idea of a 'dirty bomb' than the bomb itself, which is largely harmless.

A vicious cycle has developed. Governments put out wild stories with no factual basis, which the Islamists are quick to verify (gaining through myth and fear the power they wanted but never had as a political movement) and which the media reports without bothering to check. Egged on by the media and aware of the power that fear gives them, politicians produce ever more extravagant tales of worldwide conspiracies, rogue states and weapons of mass destruction.

But few step to ask why the Homeland Security Advisory System's threat level has never been lower than 'elevated'.

A Myth to Believe In

Curtis sees the root of this bizarre situation in late 1940s America.

Leo Strauss, a professor at the University of Chicago, believed liberal democracy and ideas of individual freedom were undermining the social fabric. He said the country needed powerful and inspiring collective myths to bind the people together, giving them something to believe in.

However, in his own time Strauss's ideas were not popular. In the heyday of post-war liberalism the idea that society was steadily evolving towards greater freedom for the individual which would in turn provide the greatest collective freedom was widespread. Strauss's view that society needed to be fooled by myth and religion by an elite seemed totally out of touch.

By the early 1970s, however, with the American establishment and society seemingly unable to cope with the social upheavals of the time, many of Strauss's students and admirers formed a group in Washington which became known as the neoconservatives.

The group, including Paul Wolfowitz, Francis Fukuyama and William Kristol, allied themselves with the most right wing members of the Ford administration Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney with the aim of putting Strauss's ideas into practice.

The myth they created and sought to popularise was that America had a manifest destiny in the world, to be the one country that would consistently stand up for freedom and democracy wherever they were threatened. When they allowed themselves with fundamentalist Christianity in the early 1980s, the ideological core of the George W. Bush administration was created and the foundations laid for the war on terror.

The Politics of Truth

In recent years films critical of the war on terror, big business, Bush, fundamentalist religion and the 'axis of evil' that together they represent have become something of an industry. However, few mount a frontal assault on the fundamental assumptions of contemporary politics in the way that The Power of Nightmares does. Even Fahrenheit 9/11 takes for granted that Bin Laden is some kind of terrorist mastermind who must be hunted down.

This freshness alone makes The Power of Nightmares worth watching.

What makes Power of Nightmares so successful though is that Curtis makes his argument so persuasively. His use of interviews and archive footage, complemented by well-researched histories of the Islamist and neoconservative movements, make Power of Nightmares's central theme hard to ignore.

No one who watches the film will ever be able to hear the words 'Al Qaeda plot', 'sleepers cell' or 'terrorist mastermind' and take them at face value again.

One important criticism of the film must be made though: that Curtis almost totally avoids discussion of economic factors and their interrelation with the ideology of the neoconservatives. It is not necessarily a coincidence that Strauss's ideas gained prominence in the 1970s when the post-war economic set-up had unravelled, as opposed to the 1950s when the US economy was going strong.

Curtis himself has replied to this criticism. In reply to a BBC viewer's question he writes, "The neoconservatives and the Islamists help create ideas that can fundamentally change the world. In the neoconservatives' own words: "Ideas do have consequences."

"The reality is that both the neoconservatives and the Islamists became powerful and influential because of the power of their ideas and I wanted to make a series of films that explained the roots of these ideas and how they were taken up, simplified and distorted."

Fair enough. Nevertheless it does sometimes feel like something is missing.

With that proviso then, The Power of Nightmares is a film that deserves to be seen by everyone who's been subjected to four years of 'war on terror' propaganda. That is, it deserves to be seen by everyone.

The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear only shown on BBC2 in the UK.

If you missed it, it will be shown in three parts at UWS Parramatta on a date to be announced.

A low quality version of the video and a transcript are available at http://www.informationcleari

ghouse.info/video1037.htm, high quality versions are available through peer-to-peer file sharing systems.

Hopefully the ABC or SBS will have the courage to broadcast it one day.
There are several people who can tell this story and all of them will tell different versions of that story, with different anecdotes and with different people being corrupt as hell and not caring about the students and so on and so forth. But someone very wise once said history is told by the victors and I guess you probably already guess that if I'm sitting here in the new association writing an article about how it was created that I am a victor.

As some of you would know last year a lot of student services were cut back in our old campus associations. These old associations had names like CSA, BSA, HSA and PPSA. The services collapsed because about two years ago the university said that instead of having separate campus student associations they wanted a combined UWS wide association. Up until this point everything seemed fine. Why not have UWS wide student services? It would make things better, students would have better services, it would be better for everyone, right? The problem was that the university wanted to control the process, control all of the money and separate the organisations into a business that ran food and bars and a welfare association that ran clubs and societies, welfare caseworkers, political lobbying and so on.

Once the university had let this little cat out of the bag things only got worse, not only did they want to form a business they wanted it to get most of the money. Now it may seem like common sense but a business does not need a million of your dollars to be able to run. Businesses are supposed to run at close to a profit with a bit of your student fees going into subsidise cost and make sure businesses are open when students need them not just when they are making money. Needless to say perhaps, but 6 million dollars is a hell of a lot more than that.

Students would be robbed blind if all that money went to the business. The welfare, clubs and political association would get not much at all, meaning those services would collapse. I personally had wanted to investigate the possibility of getting a paid bulk billing doctor service for students. All of this now seemed lost. You can see that there is a problem here; the university was trying to force us to go to them and beg for money.

Now the primary function of the welfare association is to help students when the university refuses them over. By making trouble for the uni we make them accountable when, for instance, they cut lots of courses without telling students, put on parking fees (for new students parking has been free since the university started, the fee you pay this year is new) or act stupid. We harass the university and make problems for them and so far we have done a good job of it. However if we are begging the university for our budget at the same time as we are making trouble for them, will we be able to see what happens, we stop making trouble to get our budget but the main reason we need the budget is to make trouble, a perfect 'catch twenty two'.

Now to be completely fair, the university wanted to engage in this process because there had in the past and in some cases the recent past, been corruption in the organisations. Not from anyone who is currently elected, but from people, unsavoury people who did take advantage of their position. The university at the beginning may have had some if this in mind, however by the end of the process their own conduct had far outstripped any corruption that may have existed in previous associations.

The university tried to evict us from our buildings. They tried to get corruptable staff and students to sign on to achieve their money-making goals. Then we threw stuff back at them, we challenged their evictions and won in the Supreme Court, we tried to stop their corrupt students, we protested, lobbied politicians, we fought really hard. Several board members and staff started to go bald and get cancer because of all the stress. In the end we didn't win everything but we won enough. We got a decent budget, we will be able to provide services, and with a new UWS wide association things will better than they have been in the past.

So what is the moral of this non-illustrated and very brief history? If student want associations that work for them, that provide top-notch services and make the university and government accountable on their issues they need to get involved. You need to get involved, because it is regular hard working, caring students like you, who make the uni and even perhaps a little bit of our world a better place to live.

Note:
There is a far more technical version of this story that has dates and quotes and a lot of stuff that can bore you to tears. You can get this version by dropping into our offices and speaking to some staff and even some of the student reps who were there who saw it all and lived to tell the tale. But more importantly don't just stop in to talk about the past - drop in to talk about the future. Just to be a little bit more cliched, there no UWSAA without "U".
One Month in Beijing

By Justin Liew

My first good look at China was inside the toilet bowl at the Beijing International Airport. The accumulated nausea from 13 hours of flight was joining the rancid airplane food in my stomach to yank the-poker machine lever on my digestive system. Seven hours earlier I was wandering the bleak floors of the Kuala Lumpur transit lounge like a disembodied soul. Deserted and close to midnight, the place resembled some dimensional rift in Greenwich Mean Time where travelers browsed Cuban cigars and duty free perfume before the next jump to lightspeed. Alone and disheveled, these are the times when you vow never to set foot on a plane (or outside your front door) again.

For some reason I notice the toilet is unusually low, barely touching my knee and the next few hours become a jellied collage of such details. Polished black marble in Customs, Chinese characters. Potted plants. I emerge in Arrivals. A Buddhist monk wrapped in orange is prying to a fire extinguisher and this woman in a parachute jacket is holding a piece of cardboard with my name. She’s a lecturer from the Renmin University of Beijing, where I will be studying Chinese for the next month. We meet, exchange greetings and head to the taxi stand.

Time now: 5am. Temperature: -10 degrees. Renmin University (Renmin Daxue, or Renda for short) lies northwest of Tiananmen on the city’s edge. As the taxi speeds towards Renda, high-rise billboards advertising mobile phones emerge from the distant gauze of pollution. Beijing is just like it appears on SBS: the archetypal Asian metropolis. Beige-stained buildings frame the multilane, testaments to Chinese reliance on coal power and heavy black bicycles flutter through the traffic herd like iron sparrow. Although we are inside, the air smells of petrol and exhaust. We are construction cranes raise their tusselled necks to the sky. Change of engine pitch and the taxi shudders up Third Ring Road, orbital belts looping above our heads like the rings of Saturn. It’s very cold. Does it snow in Beijing, I ask. Yes, comes the reply, but you really shouldn’t eat the snowflakes.

Arriving at Renda, I stay up all night watching Channel V and begin my classes the following morning. I have three subjects: kuyuy (reading), konuy (speaking) and tingyi (listening), totaling fifteen contact hours a week. Mandarin is one of the most difficult languages in the world. Add to this China’s educational fondness for heavy exams and I was prepared for the worst. We were constantly tested dictation/ vocabulary exams, presentations and dialogues. Even so, the pressures of education didn’t seem to phase some of the others. One English guy hadn’t been to class since October and another group was in Thailand when the mid-semesters were announced.

But the world beyond the classroom would pose the greater linguistic challenge. University students often talk breathlessly about the cosmopolitan novelty of studying overseas and ‘being in a foreign environment.’ But when no one around you speaks English it can be pretty fucking scary. The Beijing accent, that florid cocktail of slurred endings and local slang, seemed impenetrable to our foreign ears. And everyone spoke so fast. With my fractured Mandarin I realised the importance of communication, not just as a means of conversing but as an ingredient of human dignity. If you can’t communicate, you can’t establish your presence. You don’t exist. You can’t bargain, tell jokes or ask for directions. You have no idea what you have to do for homework and you’re too freaking embarrassed to ask. On the plus side I could feel my Zhongg Gao hua beginning to solidify itself although I’m far from fluent. I got really good at using hand gestures though.

When the weekend came around, I escaped Renda with the other UWS students, Jocelyn and Luke, for a bit of sightseeing. Every Saturday morning we’d catch a taxi from the dongmeng (east gate) into the heart of the city. We’d wander the streets all day, just letting the ebb and flow of this foreign environment wash over us. Little girls would sell flowers in colephone while legless beggars watched from the footpath. A ninja strike team of black-suited saddmen lounge by the newstand, smoking their cheap cigarettes. A woman in white fur answers a phone whilst riding her bicycle. Beijing, I decide, is a city of contrasts.

We do the tourist thing and visit canonical sites like Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, Summer Palace... We go to the Temple of Heaven and watch elderly Chinese in thermals doing aerobics and tai chi. I buy a Tintin comic in Chinese from the Xidan bookstore and eat dumplings at Wangfujing. At night, we’d go clubbing. After dinner at the campus noodle bar, we’d trawl the bars and nightspots between Wudaokou District and the Workers’ Stadium, getting shifted on the equivalent of $20 AUS. We’d stagger out of bed on Sunday morning, do the laundry, check the e-mail and be completely refreshed by Monday for another week of wholesome learning.

There were plenty of foreign students around from countries as diverse as Mongolia, France, Russia, Bangladesh, Norway and Vietnam although we didn’t converse as much as I would have liked. Despite what McLuhan said about the global village, people tended to stick with their own nationalities rather than socialise across cultures. Amusingly, this meant that we were often surrounded by Americans although Jocelyn did a good job of attracting large numbers of army African men. After a night of studying, you’d wander downstairs and chat with whoever was in the foyer at the time. Smoking, as a conversation starter, proved essential and the cheap Yanjing beer flowed so freely I never had to buy a drink.

By the third week we were getting bored of the so-called ‘historical’ places. Beijing felt more like a second home now than a tourist attraction and we were slowly returning to our healthy Australian habits of buying shit and getting wasted. That weekend, we visited the Hongqiao Markets, perhaps the single largest repository of useless crap in Beijing. Imagine rows of hobbing Chairman Mao statues and cigarette lighters shaped like the Little Red Book and you get the idea. We went to the Silk Alley next. This was like a little bazaar in the snow, selling leather jackets, fake jade necklaces and pirated videogames at ridiculously inflated prices. Around us, locals eat meat on skewers while the hawkers haggle and tug at their sleeves as we pass.

Our time passed quickly and before I knew it I was standing with my luggage on the Luchuxihongqiao steps at 5am. It is the 29th of December, exactly one month after my arrival. Yesterday I sat my final exam and today I am leaving Beijing. I hear the crunch of tyres on snow as the black taxi arrives and good morning driver sir could you take me to the airport please? It’s certainly cold this morning. No, I’m not Japanese. And yes, Beijing was nice actually, very nice, thank you. Yes, I really must return some day...
Love in the Fast Lane

By Crystal Hew

Sought for love online but disappointingly found yourself confronted with suitors who didn't look anything like their online profile picture? Advertised in the personals only to receive answers from married men, immature sleazes, tights-wears, or dribbling geriatrics?

Got 'set up' with someone by well-meaning family or friends and spent the entire date calculating how to make the great escape? Wasted time, money and whole evenings chatting up people but just didn't 'feel that connection?'

Speed Dating can potentially put an end to these dating dilemmas. First developed by an American rabbi in 1998 as a way of helping young Jewish men and women meet spouses of their faith, speed dating has since become the latest craze, attracting singles from the US to the UK, and finally now Australia.

The popularity of Speed Dating down under is definitely on the rise. Rosti Zacharias, from Australian Speed Dating service Fast Date said, "The industry certainly has grown. When we started over 3 years ago, there was only one other outfit operating in Melbourne. Today, a web search turns up an array of speed dating organisations all over the country. Fast Date has now seen some 15,000 singles come through our system."

So, how does speed dating work?

Firstly, sexy singles hop on to a Speed Dating website and pay a registration fee, which is usually under $100. This price varies, depending on the organisation you pick to register with. Details, such as times and dates of events, are on the websites.

The venue selected by the organisers is usually an upmarket bar in the Sydney CBD. The organisers can close off an area of the bar, use the function room, or sometimes even take over the whole venue exclusively for Speed Daters. An equal number of males and females gather there, which is usually 25 of each gender. You are each given a scorecard, a pen and a badge with a name and number on it.

The women stay put, while the men rotate, spending three minutes with each female, chatting and trying to impress over drinks and assorted nibbles. A bell rings, piercing the excited, buzzing atmosphere.

Time for suitor rotation! Each participant ticks the people they want to see again on a score card. At the end of the night all the cards are collected, results collated and within 24 hours, potential matches (i.e. folks who both ticked "yes" to meeting each other again) are emailed with respective contact details. The rest is up to you...

What's fantastic about this process is that you don't have to face the fear of embarrassing, upfront rejection. Rhod Roberts, founder of LittleBlackBook Speed Dating said, "What's great about Speed Dating is the anonymity. You don't have to admit to anyone that you're interested in them. You just merely tick 'yes' on the match card. Everyone is there for the same reasons so there is less embarrassment about talking to people who want to know who you are."

Most of the events are for the 24-42 age groups, but there are events that cater for older and younger age groups. Generally age range is limited for any one event to a maximum of 10-12 years.

Speed Dating is safe as it is in a controlled environment. Roberts said "It's no different to a night out in a bar except you get to talk to everyone there."

You will never be bored on a Speed Date and it's a great confidence booster for the shy hard-to-break-out-of-the-shell types. Speed Dating is of course not just a cattle ranch for potential partners. You can make fantastic business contacts and friendships. Just think of it as extending your social circle!

Some people have complained that limiting a date to just a few measly minutes is too short a date.

Joseph Forgas, a social psychology professor at the University of NSW, said eight minutes was a shallow judge of a prospective partner. He said that dating decisions made in that time will be based on superficial qualities. "I am sceptical that you can know anything meaningful in that time when everyone is on their best behaviour and trying to put forward the most attractive person they can. Everybody can be nice for five minutes."

That may be true, but in the words of a friend, "It only takes one sip of wine to tell if it's a good bottle."

Besides, your Speed Dating experience will give you the invaluable knowledge of working out what kinds of personalities, qualities and looks you are instantly drawn towards, thus increasing your chances of making the perfect match. It's defiantly a voyage to self discovery!

Go on, live life in the fast lane. Give it a go. You've got three minutes to decide.

Luke Fontanelli reveals how badly Australia fuck up last election.

It's not really new that John Howard won a large majority of votes at the federal election last July. With the Senate in his hands, the Liberal Government will have more power than ever before.

I guess most people reading this probably did as I did and went to an election party that had sort of died by about 10pm and then went home to sleep. (I think.)

Then again, you could be one of the 1 750 000 people who voted informal, didn't vote at all or aren't even enrolled. Who cares about you? The thought of a Latham/Beazley/Gillard/Rudd/Whatever government doesn't exactly inspire a teary nostalgia for what might have been.

Anyway, the bottom line is Australia got itself another Liberal (it's as much a 'coalition' as the coalition of the willing government).

So what does this mean for us?

Good Times Ahead (if your name is John Howard)

"We do not intend to waste the opportunity that has fortuitously and unexpectedly come our way" John Howard, December 11, 2004

Already on the agenda is 'increasing productivity' by taking away various legal protections for workers. Little Jonnie wants to make it legal for small businesses to sack staff without reason and make further cuts to the unions, making it even harder for them to do their jobs and fight for worker's rights.

While not official government policy (yet) an influential group of government backbenchers is calling for massive George Bush-style, tax cuts to the rich, dropping the top tax rate from 47% to 30%. If implemented, that would mean big cuts to government spending. Never fear, these are already in the pipeline.

Education

It's easy to see that higher education generally and UWS specifically will be worse off under Howard. From this year, most new students (although not at UWS, thanks greatly for the efforts of the UWS Education Collective) will be paying 25% higher fees than students who enrolled in 2004. UWS students won't be paying the same, but the university's funding has been slashed. The administration is using this as an excuse to slash courses and force more students into already overcrowded classes. Soon there won't be a spare chair in the next room you can fetch back to class.

The Liberals also want to bring in Volunteer Student Unionism (VSOU) to deface the critical voice that student unions represent. Don't let the same fool you; you'll still have to pay fees. But under VSOU they'll be under the control of the university rather than students and criticism of the government won't be allowed.

Social Issues

It's fair to say that Johnny will continue to push his conservative social agenda, fucking things up for everyone who isn't just like him. Restriction of access to abortion and 'fathers' rights' reforms to the family law are possibilities. Although numerous international studies have proven that it is the capabilities of parenting, not the structure of the family, that play a role in child development, Howard still claims that "it is in the best interest of the child to have both their mother and a father." Wrong again, Jonnie.

Australia recently abstained on a motion in the UN Commission on Human Rights affirming the principle of non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and last year Liberal and Labor together passed a law banning gay marriage.

We can expect more of the same.

The Indigenous:

Not satisfied with the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) as a national voice for Aboriginal people, Howard isn't to be further 'reformed' to indigenous programmes. So far the main idea seems to be a return to the paternalistic policies of the 1950s and 1960s, for example making welfare contingent on communities banning alcohol.

Media

With the massive support provided to Howard by the Murdoch press, it is not seven out of the nine major Australian newspapers had editorials on election day calling for support to the Liberals) it's no surprise that he's looking to repay the favour. Out-funded cross media ownership laws are soon to be reformed, leading to the further monopolisation of the already bland and monotonous Australian television and print media.

The full privatisation of Telstra will no doubt also be happening soon.

The "War on Terror"

Howard plans more military interventions into "failing states", modelled on that in the Sudan. He is working hard to pop up the same neo-colonial rhetoric that caused the "failure" in the first place.

The Australian Defence Force is to be beefed up so that it will allow greater cooperation with the militaries of Asian countries recalling the discredited Kopassus Special Forces program with Indonesia's Kopassus Special Forces, which helped sustain a brutal military dictatorship and occupation of East Timor. And don't get me started on the mess in Iraq or the certainty that we'll have traumatised refugees locked up concentration camps in the desert and on small Pacific islands for the next three years...

He'll also be giving more power to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (secret police) to install listening devices and carry out wiretaps and allow secret evidence in terrorist trials.

Welfare

The government has plans to make welfare unaffordable to large numbers of the community. They are especially targeting the elderly. Because we're experiencing an ageing population, the government thinks it's "unsustainable" to provide pensions. The first step is to subsidize the aged pension to be paid through the carrot of tax concessions to encourage people to keep working after turning 65. Sooner or later though the stick will be brought out.

Health

Health is another area targeted for "reform". The point of the Medicare "safety net" (where doctors get paid more for bulk billing concession card holders) and the increase in the Medicare rebate is to get more people used to paying to see a doctor and will increasingly unaffordable for doctors to bulk bill anyone other than concession card holders as the payment they get from government decreases. They also are increasing the private health care rebates to make it entirely unaffordable for doctors to bulk bill anyone other than concession card holders as the payment they get from government decreases. They also are increasing the private health care rebates to make it increasingly unaffordable for doctors to bulk bill anyone other than concession card holders as the payment they get from government decreases. They also are increasing the private health care rebates to make it entirely unaffordable for doctors to bulk bill anyone other than concession card holders as the payment they get from government decreases.

You're part of the majority of people who oppose the increasing domination of society by big business, the replacement of values of social solidarity and community with narrow individualism and disengagement from the world and a politics that reflects this...and something about it.

This year more than ever, we need to fight.

All figures taken from Newspoll and Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2003.

Would you like to advertise in The Western Onion?

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All others for policy and rates email k.carroll@uws.edu.au

Prime Minister John Howard on hearing that George W. Bush would be dining on "meat and three veg" during his 2003 Australian tour.
Go West!

Life is...different there

By Sophie Zdenkowski

"I love a sunburnt country, a land of sweeping plains..." You may be aware that this famous line was once written by Dorothea Mackellar, but did you know she was referring to a little place called Gunnedah?

They say travel writing is the best gig in the journalism biz, but I think this is highly dependent on the location that you get to report on. I'm currently in Gunnedah. Not a beach in sight and not one of the six local pubs knows how to make a daiquiri; not exactly the tropical oasis I would have opted for when choosing a holiday destination. However there is one saving grace. I have found the one café in town that knows how to make a good coffee. The owners of 'Red gum' thankfully are aware that a barrista (spelt with an 'a') is not an occupation associated with a court of law, and quite frankly I think I'll be needing my caffeine fix to get through this confronting experience.

Gunnedah is located in northwest NSW, about a 50-minute drive west of Tamworth. There’s a population of about 10 000 spread out across the shire. It’s mostly rich farmlands but there are patches of native forest in the area. These patches happen to accommodate the largest population of Koalas found in Australia. Tourism caught on to this statistical gem and Gunnedah is now known as the Koala Capital of the World!

So the question begs; why would a young student choose to spend five weeks of her summer holidays in Gunnedah? Well I managed to secure an internship with a national public relations firm that specialises in rural and regional clients and it’s based you guessed it in Gunnedah.

I’ve got to say, I was more than a little shocked when I stepped out of the first day and actually witnessed a tumbleweed roll past my feet. Inside the building. I could not be more connected with the outside world. Phone, fax, email, we have it all. But one foot out the door and you knew straight away just how remote this place is.

For a little known country town it must have a few drawbacks up its metaphorical sleeve. The Deputy Prime Minister, Mr John Anderson, calls it home. Recently even Hollywood has shown an interest and wants a slice of the rural action. A US production company is importing 300 people to film parts of the new Superman movie here. In March 2005, Gunnedah will become the reinvented 'Smallville', Superman’s hometown.

Locals have a good sense of humour and will freely make light of their small town existence. They even let me in on an insider’s tip; “Save the weekly grocery shopping for the weekend because the best place to go on Sunday is Woolworths!” The reason being is that Woolworths is the only place open on a Sunday. Everyone goes there, and so it turns out to be a good place to socialise and more importantly it’s air-conditioned! Trust me, most summer days in Gunnedah you will be looking for any excuse to dwell in the frozen food section just that little bit longer.

It’s been over a month and I’m still not used to the heat. Being in the communication business I might describe the weather as quite balmy. But the locals will tell you it’s just right; "It’s just too f**king hot!"

The heat aside, I’ve gradually acclimatised to this small towns’ ways. I don’t have to do a double take every time a truckload of sheep, piled four stories high, rolls down the main street permeating the air with that very distinct odour. Instead of going to the movies, I sometimes go for a horse ride after work and I’ve even had my first lesson riding a motorbike. I’ve given farming a go, and blistered my hand trying to water a crop of cotton. I also discovered that in bad times cows are often the best listeners because they always have time to spare and they don’t gossip about you when you leave the paddock! I’ve learnt the value of a good sunhat and at the end of the week when our office closes an hour early there’s no better place to be than across the road at the old bowling club, drinking cheap beer and chatting about plans for the weekend.

So while this country life has pushed this urban girl out of her comfort zone on more than one occasion, the initial shock is starting to fade. I’ll admit that maybe Ma Mackellar had a good point; Gunnedah is a special place after all.

"My class got cancelled" "Uni is boring" "I got to my tutorial 5 minutes late and there were no seats so I had to leave" "My lecturer told me he’d pass me if I did him a ‘favour’" "A group of students told me they don’t like ‘my type’ on campus" "I think user-pays is a terrible principle to base a society on" "I think imperialism should only exist in history books"

Don’t agonise, Organise!

Get involved in your Students’ Association branch:

Bankstown Building 1 9772 6488
Blacktown TBA 4620 3188
Campbelltown
Parramatta Ena (temporary) 9828 9545
Richmond N Building 4736 9232
K3 4570 1700

Continued from page 9

screened phone with camera will set you back $700 and going on a plan could result in enormous debt. Personalised accessories such as ring tones and phone covers don’t help your wallet either. Similar to cars it also gives people independence, especially young people whose long love affair with the telephone has been shifted to mobiles.

Fifteen year-old Sandra says that though her over-protective parents bought her a mobile so they could keep track of her and for emergency use "it gives me more freedom from my parents because they don’t have to know who I’m calling and when I’m calling them", she says.

But the mobile phones get praised most for the convenience when getting lost and for making it easier to organise social gatherings. Fearing ostracism by friends is the main reason young people are so attached to their mobiles. "People have their phone on 24 hours a day. They are frightened of missing a call because to not be available is to cut oneself off from one's social network," says Professor Michael Holme, chairman of Teleonomy.

It seems as though owning a mobile phone is like taking a highly addictive drug. One emergency mobile when you are twelve and you’re hooked for life. But as mobiles become more advanced, more expensive and hipper than ever, could you ever go cold turkey? Or is your mobile controlling your life?
VSU = Silence
Don't Lose Your Voice

By Amber Jacobus

Thinking back to my first year at uni, I wasn't really concerned about what went on outside of my timetable. I commuted to uni four hours a day. I worked three days a week and I studied for the other four days. Why would I care what my Student Association did for me? Then I found out that my degree had been cut... No discussion, no negotiation, it just happened. I was so angry. I wanted someone to listen and I wanted someone to help me fight. All I could do was ask fluctuated questions of my course coordinator. I got the expected reply... "mumble mumble mumble... streamlining... university more efficient... better this way". Better for whom? Unsatisfied I turned to my Student Association, the only organisational body that cared or had any resources to assist me.

As I became increasingly involved in UWSA (UWS Students' Association) and the fight against the degree cuts, I realised my story wasn't unique. Courses and subjects were being deleted all over UWS. I found it appalling that students and staff members alike were being kept in the dark about what was happening to their area of study and the only organisational body that was mounting a fight was the Student Association. Later I discovered the Federal Government plans to impose VSU (Voluntary Student Unionism) and I was horrified. VSU would see the decimation of funding to student organisations (such as UWSA) that was providing me, a normal student, with the representation I needed to fight for my right to study.

VSU would see the removal of the Student Services Fee that must be paid each semester. This fee provides UWSA (the provider of welfare and advocacy services) and UWSconnect (the provider of food outlets and sports events on campus) with the funding to operate services for students.

HES rates were not raised as a result of a blockade organised by students and the Association of a meeting of the UWS Board of Trustees where the fee was seen... well... raised by 25%. This victory ensured that UWS maintains one of the lowest HES rates of any university in Australia in 2005 and new students this year directly benefit from this.

Sometimes student organisations are critical of the Federal Government and particularly its decisions relating to higher education. By imposing VSU, the Coalition Government is making a direct attack on students' rights to voice political dissent. Unions nationally are gearing up for the fights of their lives this body.

In Western Australia and Victoria, VSU has already been implemented to the detriment of both the students and the university. Professor Millicent Poole, Vice-Chancellor of Edith Cowen University in WA recently said that VSU had "lead to some fairly significant problems for the University Administration. The university has had to dip into its own resources to provide some of the social, cultural and sporting facilities that students want, so it's a burden on us in terms of providing very real facilities that enrich student life". UWS has a funding crisis of its own and is not in a financial position to offer additional help to student services. This means that there could be a real chance of services simply not being available at all should student organisations be starved of funding, e.g. no bars, no food, no sport, no welfare support or student advocates.

Although it may seem like a drag to pay your Student Services Fee each semester, the benefits far outweigh the cost. Every time you eat cheap food at uni, enjoy a free barbecue, drink subsidised beer, want funding for your club, society or collective, play sport, need financial or legal support or you need someone to help you appeal your grades, you are enjoying the benefits your Student Services Fee has provided.

Of course, VSU not only affects students, but also the hundreds of staff members employed to work in the coffee shops, gyms, bars, retail outlets or as student advocates or counsellors. VSU could see them all out of a job.

It is in every student's interest to get involved in the fight against VSU this year. Don't let the Government silence you or your union, get involved and help preserve your right to a collective voice.

Solidarity vs Dog Eat Dog
Collectivity vs Individualism
Organisation vs Disarray
Learning vs Uncritical Absorption
Left vs Right
Action vs Apathy

To remove the experience of unionism from the lives of the youth is to ensure smooth future subordination
Quiet Students = Docile Wage Slaves
Fight Back
Resist Revolt Riot Rebel

No VSU

This fee also allows students to organise campaigns that affect students on campus (such as against the degree cuts) and also around issues relating to education, environment, women's, queer and social justice. The funding allows students to organise their own campaigns and run events that make campus a safer, engaging and enjoyable place. Last year's campaign was an example of why students need to be supportive of their union and fight against the proposed introduction of VSU. It is absolutely necessary to have a united student body that can speak out against decisions that adversely affect our education.

Campaigning for student rights can also mean that this year and it isn't any different for Student Unions. VSU would not only affect students' ability to organise on campus, but also nationally as the National Union of Students (NUS) could face possible extinction in a VSU environment. This would leave students without national networks or a national lobbying and campaigning
Welcome Week

To welcome everyone (back) to uni, UWSSA presents a week of fun filled entertainment

Penrith Campus
Monday February 28
Kingswood
Heaps of Clubs and Societies
Live Music
Horizontal Bungee
Mechanical Bull
Free Snow Cones

Bankstown Campus
Tuesday March 1
Clubs and Societies
Music
Jousting
Bouncy Boxing
Snow Cones

Blacktown Campus
Wednesday March 2
Student Association Stall
Music
Jousting
Bouncy Boxing

Hawkesbury Campus
Tuesday March 1
Clubs and Societies
Free BBQ
Mechanical Bull
Horizontal Bungee
Popcorn

Campbelltown Campus
Wednesday March 2
Clubs and Societies
Music
Sumo Wrestling
Horizontal Bungee

Parramatta Campus
Thursday March 3
Clubs and Societies
DJs
Performance Artists
Mechanical Bull
Jousting
Snowcones

UWS Dance Party
Wednesday 9/3
Roxy Nightclub
69 George St.
Parramatta
Free entry for students

Win tickets to the
Tooheys Uni Lawn Party
(ad on page 5)
Email k.carroll@uws.edu.au and tell us why you deserve to go