



PARSA
ANU *postgraduate &*
research students'
association

Postgraduate and Research Students' Association President's Report 30.06.2021

As many of you would know, PARSA has undergone significant challenges to its governance structure. Although the events of this matter were formally publicised on the 5th of February 2021, these issues had arisen several weeks beforehand.

Given the fact that we are undergoing an independent governance and financial review led by Ernst & Young and discussed these matters at great lengths during our previous Special General Meeting (15.06.2021), I will be excluding this topic from my report.

Advocacy campaigns and concerns raised from June 2020 to 2021:

One of PARSA's greatest strengths has been in its ability to run student-led advocacy campaigns. In the past year we have raised issues related to the affordability of accommodation on campus, fee reduction for students who are unable to attend in-person classes, and the need for the University to continue offering students affected by COVID-19 with a CRS/CRN grade.

One of the major campaigns we ran in late 2020 focused on the quality of education provided to students. We found that certain academic colleges were chronically understaffed in their administrative departments as a result of the 'ANU Recovery Plan', and that students were being provided with reused lecture materials, or out of date reading.

We note the financial difficulties the University has faced due to decreased enrolment numbers. However, providing adequate support to students both on and offshore is an obligation the University needs to continuously uphold.

Upcoming advocacy concerns:

As many of you would be aware, Universities' Australia has launched its second nation-wide survey into sexual harassment and sexual assault on campuses. While we have supported the preliminary phase of development, we anticipate further support to be needed in the near future.

One issue many of these survey's tends to raise is the need for a culturally competent staff to be included in these types of discussions. Sensitivity is needed when dealing with many of these issues. Yet culturally and linguistically diverse postgraduate students tend to be underrepresented in many of the statistics the ANU collects. Being able to promote these events is important, as data collection helps ensure that key areas within the University continue to be resourced.

Given the grave underrepresentation of Higher Degree by Research students in previous PARSA activities, the team has tried to increase the level of support given to these members over the past quarter.

As many of you would know, the ANU has launched an oral thesis examination pilot program for PhD candidates. This raises equity concerns for us, especially given the small sample size collected in the University's initial study. Please look forward to developments within this field over the upcoming semester.

Student support services:

Following the economic impacts of COVID-19, the University provided PARSA with \$800,000 in funding which was to be provided to members of our community who were struggling. Despite this funding having been fully utilised in early 2021, we have continued to place a significant focus on our financial student support programs. By introducing new grants such as the Family Safety Grant, and changing the criteria for our PARSA Emergency Grant, we hope that we have shed an increased light on these issues.

Our professional staff have done a wonderful job in supporting students through challenging academic periods as well. In early 2021 we engaged with Legal Aid on a contractual basis to ensure that students could receive legal advice when needed. Migration advice is not available through this program, although we provide financial assistance to those who need this type of referral.

Our waiting times for legal appointment have decreased from an average of 6 weeks to often less than a week. These are services which we need to promote further though, as they are being significantly underutilised.

Postgraduate Representative Committee activities:

Over the past year, members of the PRC have organised events such as the PARSA monthly movie, equity catchups (such as Queer*, Disabilities, Women's), re-launched in person Shut Up & Write events, held Unwind at Badger & Co. and re-launched PARSA Playdates. With the introduction of the Parents and Carers Officer, I believe that we are more adequately prepared to address the needs of postgraduate student parents, and those students who have recently graduated.

Our Summer Program was a notable success, as was our Welcome Evening and End of Semester Party. Notably, however, we have struggled to achieve attendance levels which are at the same level as they were pre-pandemic. This is an issue many student groups have faced on campus, so I look forward to seeing our registrations increase over the following year.

Our failure to appropriately engage with the ANU's First Nations community should be reiterated. This has been an astonishing disappointment which we cannot overlook. If this trend continues following our next vacancies announcement, the executive committee will

consider ways in which we can ensure that PARSA's reconciliation obligations are improved upon before the 2020-2021 committee's term ends.

Conclusion:

It is of primary importance that we note that the Constitutional changes proposed at our 15th of June SGM were accepted by the University. As such, members of PARSA's executive committee have accepted the liability imposed of directors.

Overcoming these challenges would have been impossible without my team's commitment and support. I extend my appreciation particularly to those who continued to organise events for our members throughout the past year, and those who attended their relevant representative committee meetings.