



SYDNEY UNIVERSITY POSTGRADUATE REPRESENTATIVE ASSOCIATION

“Students working for students”

Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association

ADVICE

ADVOCACY

REPRESENTATION

COMMUNITY

May 2006

Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association *“Students working for students”*

SUPRA is an independent representative association that provides advice, advocacy and support services for the postgraduate student community of the University of Sydney.

SUPRA provides our postgraduate student members with:

- An association run by postgraduate students for postgraduate students
- A free confidential advice and advocacy service
- Representation on University decision-making bodies including participation in academic governance and policy development
- Representation to all levels of government and the wider community
- Affiliation to the national peak body for postgraduate students
- Information to assist with postgraduate student issues, including a postgraduate survival manual, a thesis guide, fact sheets and brochures
- Regular communication through a quarterly publication, email updates and a website
- Events including academic forums, information sessions, social activities and conferences
- A resource room including computers, daily newspapers, tea and coffee making facilities and relaxation and meeting space
- Subsidised printing, binding, photocopying and faxing
- Networks for equity groups
- Networking, community building and leadership opportunities
- Personal Accident Insurance for all postgraduate student members

Historically, all of the above has been achieved through an elected Council of postgraduate students (currently 25), between five and eight SUPRA staff and a system of universal student unionism.

With the introduction of VSU in mid-2006 SUPRA will be unable to continue to offer the above services to the postgraduate community of the University. The independent advice, advocacy and representation offered by SUPRA are essential to the student experience.

The independence of SUPRA is a key factor in ensuring that the highest levels of trust, confidentiality, integrity and quality advice, advocacy and representation is provided to our postgraduate student members.

SUPRA is the best-positioned and experienced organisation to continue to cost effectively provide these independent services to postgraduate students. Moreover, SUPRA represents a valuable solution to the ethical challenge of how the University can provide support for students negotiating its own structures and processes.

Through the provision of assistance to ensure SUPRA's survival the University will be actively moving to achieving its aspiration of 1:5:40.

Issues for further consideration*:

- Membership fee level and how to maximise membership
- Which services should be available to all postgraduates and member only services
- Other services SUPRA can provide to members (such as migration, tenancy, industrial relations and general legal advice)
- Student representatives at department, faculty and university level as SUPRA members
- Maintaining accountability with independence in the funding arrangement

* SUPRA is preparing a more detailed discussion paper for circulation that will address these issues in more detail.

SUPRA, Postgraduate Students and the University of Sydney *“Achieving the ambitions of 2010”*

The University of Sydney Strategic Directions 2006-2010 identifies four core areas for reform. Ensuring SUPRA’s survival and independence will enhance the University’s ability to meet the priorities outlined in each of these areas.

Research and Innovation: attract outstanding research students

In a post-VSU environment not all Australian universities will be able to offer students considering studying at their institution access to independent advice, advocacy, representation and peer networking opportunities. SUPRA will be a significant factor in positioning the University of Sydney as Australia’s premier university for the student experience.

Learning and Teaching: continue to adapt and respond to student feedback

SUPRA provides the University with an effective, responsive and flexible means of gaining student feedback and consultation both through our elected student representatives and our communication with members. The resources and staff support offered to students at present enhance this contribution considerably. The University aims to achieve “a vibrant and well resourced learning environment” by 2010. Dynamic and informed student representation will be crucial in fostering an ever improving student learning environment.

Community Engagement and Outreach: participate in public debate to inform community opinion and public policy

SUPRA representatives participate in public debate on education and social issues that impact on the lives of postgraduate students. This includes media comments and also the preparation of submissions. SUPRA holds forums and seminars that involve external speakers, including alumni. These outreach activities and other events ensure SUPRA’s involvement, and thus the University’s, in “the cultural, social, economic and political life of the community”.

The Student Experience

The advice, advocacy and representation offered by SUPRA is essential to addressing each of the priorities outlined under “The Student Experience” in the *Strategic Directions*. SUPRA’s Student Advice and Advocacy Officers “provide services to help students manage the academic and personal challenges which may arise”. The SUPRA Policy Advisor and elected student representatives work with the University to “ensure user-friendly administrative processes and systems which support the management of the entire student life cycle”. In particular, SUPRA’s services are relied upon disproportionately by fee-paying international students and thus contribute very significantly to the ‘provision of effective bridging support for international students’.

There is no doubt that the postgraduate student experience would suffer significantly without the advice, advocacy and representation SUPRA provides.

SUPRA may be able to provide some basic services from membership fees under VSU. However, in order for the level of services currently provided to all postgraduate students to continue into the future substantial assistance will be required from the University.

Costs¹

3 x Student Advice and Advocacy Officers @ \$70,000 <i>Assist students with candidature matters, equity issues, welfare issues, etc. Includes staff recruitment, travel and training.</i>	\$210,000
4 x Student Representative Stipends @ \$38,000 <i>To provide stipends for President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Director of Publications, four equity officers (Women, International, Indigenous and Queer) and committee convenors.</i>	\$152,000
1 x Policy Advisor @ \$70,000 <i>Provide research assistance to SAAOs and student representatives. Includes staff recruitment, travel and training.</i>	\$70,000
Representation, Campaigns and Affiliations <i>Including election of student representatives, political campaigning, activism, community participation and affiliation to Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations.</i>	\$50,000
Office Space* <i>Including utilities, maintenance and security.</i>	\$? ²
Administration* <i>Including Administration Officer @ \$60,000, office equipment, stationery, postage, telephones, capital infrastructure and miscellaneous.</i>	\$110,000
Publications/Communications* <i>Including quarterly editions of eXpress, annual production of Survival Manual and Thesis Guide, occasional production of brochures and fact sheets, website and electronic communications.</i>	\$50,000
Finances and Audit* <i>Including contracted Finance Manager @ \$26,000, payroll management service and annual audit of accounts.</i>	\$45,000
Information Technology, Legal Advice and Insurance* <i>Including IT maintenance, website and email hosting, software; legal advice for SUPRA matters; and insurance for all postgraduate students, contents and workers compensation.</i>	\$58,000
Events and Conferences* <i>Including venues, catering, publicity and other organisational costs for information sessions, networking and an annual postgraduate conference.</i>	\$40,000
TOTAL	\$785,000

*The italicised items are all expenses that could be significantly reduced through the University offering in kind support or absorbing the costs of some of these aspects through already existing University structures.

¹ SUPRA does not have reserves and so in addition to the assistance we would be seeking from the University to continue to provide the same advice, advocacy and representative functions we would also request this assistance be doubled for the first five years to allow for SUPRA to build reserves. It is desirable to ensure independence into the future so that SUPRA is able to work towards financial sustainability.

² The University has traditionally covered this cost for SUPRA. Given the current situation this agreement would need to be formalised as part of the new post-VSU arrangements.