

NUS WOMEN'S DEPARTMENT

'Support Women Students, Support the SSAF' Campaign

During university O'Weeks, the NUS Womens Department will be rolling out a campaign called "Support women, support the SSAF" which is based around increasing support for the Student Services Amenities Fee (SSAF) and the funding that is provided through the SSAF for women's departments and other student services that support women.

The Problem

In 2015, the National Union of Students (NUS) conducted an Australia wide women's survey titled 'Talk About It' which found that the services provided by student organisations are essential to the retention of women at university. In the survey, many women reported having had financial difficulties, caring responsibilities, and experiences of harassment, sexual assault and / or violence while studying which impacted on their ability to succeed at university. These difficulties are even more pronounced for women who faces multiple intersections of disadvantage, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) women, Ethno-culturally diverse women, women with disabilities, and women from regional areas.

At Universities around Australia, student organisations provide a range of services which help to address these issues including student counselling, financial support, and autonomous women's departments which provide an independent voice for women students. However, while these services are essential to supporting the well-being of women students, they rely on receiving SSAF funding from universities, which is often not sufficient or ongoing.

Furthermore, the SSAF is at risk of being removed altogether under the current government which has a longstanding opposition to its existence. Under the current higher education environment, the removal of the SSAF would no doubt have a drastic affect on the ability of women and other disadvantaged groups of students who rely on its services to study, and would likely lead to lower rates of completion.

The Solution

In order to ensure that women students are supported at university, it is essential that the SSAF is maintained and that funding arrangements for student services and student organisation women's departments are strengthened.

This requires that we demand that our political representatives support the SSAF, and that our university administrations better fund our services.

Campaign Roll Out Guide

O'Week - first half of semester

During the O'Weeks and the first week of semester, the NUS Womens Department will be working with women's officers and campus activists to build support for the SSAF, and to strengthen funding arrangements for womens services. Take the following actions and be a part of the campaign:

- 1 Sign the NUS petition to support student services and share the link on social media (<https://www.megaphone.org.au/petitions/don-t-threaten-our-ssaf-demand-a-better-future>).
Use @NUSwomen and @NUSEducation, and #supportthessaf, and #savestudentservices -- remember to also tweet at your local MP's!!
- 2 Change your Facebook cover photo and / or profile picture to show that you support the SSAF (attached)
- 3 Put the campaign posters up on your campus and holding a stall during O'Week to collect signatures, and to encourage students to join the movement to demand more support for women students (soft copies are attached and hard copies will be distributed to you very soon!)
- 4 Talk to your student organisation / university about increasing support / funding for your women's department. A good way to tell if you are being well funded is measuring your women's department funding against the funding provided to other departments. Often women's departments will be funded less than welfare and education, but to do just as much
- 5 Co-write a letter with your student organisations president to your VC and / or local MP encouraging them to support the SSAF and become advocates for the SSAF and students services (I've attached a template letter for you to edit)

Remember to include key asks when you meet with them!

- a. Ask your university to provide SSAF funds (or more SSAF funds) for services which directly benefit women students.
e.g. Childcare, Counselling and Womens support groups.
- b. Ask them to pledge to promise to support the SSAF and be a public advocate for its importance (it is essential to have prominent people who are willing to stand up for the SSAF in case it is threatened by the government) - this is just as important to ask Vice-Chancellor's as it is MPs. VC's are powerful stakeholders in the Higher Education Sector.
- c. Ask them to promise / advocate for more SSAF for student organisations / women's departments. VC's can do this by distributing more of the SSAF revenue your university receives to your student organisation, and MPs can do this by promising to advocate for changes to the Federal / state SSAF legislation to require universities to provide a minimum percentage of the SSAF they receive to their student organisation (the NUS is advocating for 50%). This is particularly important to ask members of the Labor and Greens parties who may be more willing to make promises to support students in the lead up to the Federal election.