

Monash Graduate Association (MGA)

SSAF survey

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I want my post grad fees attributed to post grad activities that benefit me
and those striving for further education.
Let the undergrads play with their own income.”*

*“It would be nice to be respected and appreciated as a post-grad student by my own
institution.”*

*“I just felt that MPA is probably one of the associations that makes me feel like I belong in
Monash.”*

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Introduction

In July 2019, Monash University senior management took the unprecedented step of interfering in the finances and operations of the Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA)¹, an independent incorporated body.

The MPA is funded from a portion of the Student and Services Amenities Fees (SSAF) paid by graduate students. Each year, the MPA had paid approximately 5% of their funding to the undergraduate student associations in recognition that some of their generic services were open to graduate students. Data provided by the undergraduate student associations showed that the percentage of postgraduates participating in the range of undergraduate-led programs was generally between 0 and 2%, with one service (Clubs) showing a 5% participation rate.

At the 2019 AGM, the graduate student community formally requested that the MPA reduce the amount of graduate SSAF being donated to the undergraduate student associations on all campuses, on the basis that they did not use or value those generic services. Subsequently, the MPA entered into individual funding negotiations with the four undergraduate student associations. Negotiations with Caulfield, Parkville and Peninsula campuses were successfully concluded.

Negotiations with the Clayton undergraduate student association (MSA) were more difficult, with the MSA continually increasing their claim on the graduate funds, from 5% to 10% to 15%. After a complaint made by the MSA, the DVC (Education) intervened and redirected 15% of the MPA's Clayton budget to the MSA. For more details about this intervention, please see <https://mpa.monash.edu.au/your-voice/campaigns/>

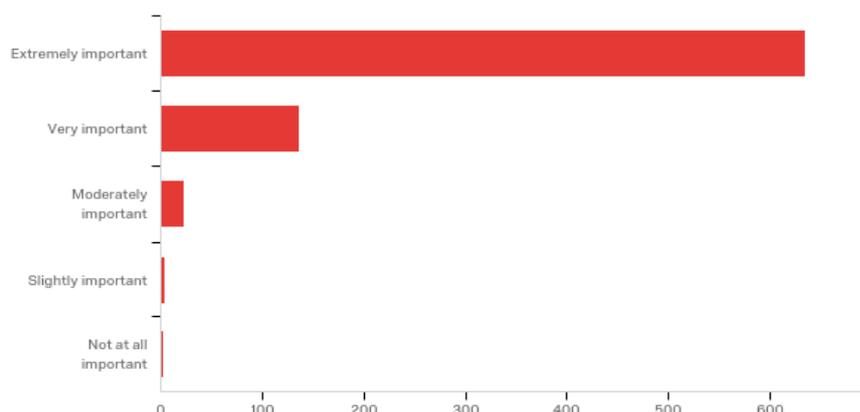
The purpose of this survey was to hear directly from the wider graduate student community on a number of principles related to the independence of student associations, how they wanted their graduate SSAF allocated and which undergraduate services they wanted to fund, to ensure that any position or action taken by the MPA (now MGA) accurately reflected the position of the graduate students.

There were 804 responses to the MPA SSAF survey. Respondents were enrolled predominantly through the Clayton (64%) and Caulfield (30%) campuses. The vast majority (91%) were full-time students. Fifty-nine percent (59%) were coursework and thirty-nine percent (39%) HDR postgraduates (see Appendix 1 Demographics).

¹ At the time of launching this survey, the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) was known as the Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA). The Association changed its name in October 2019. Therefore, in the questions and student responses the MPA acronym is used.

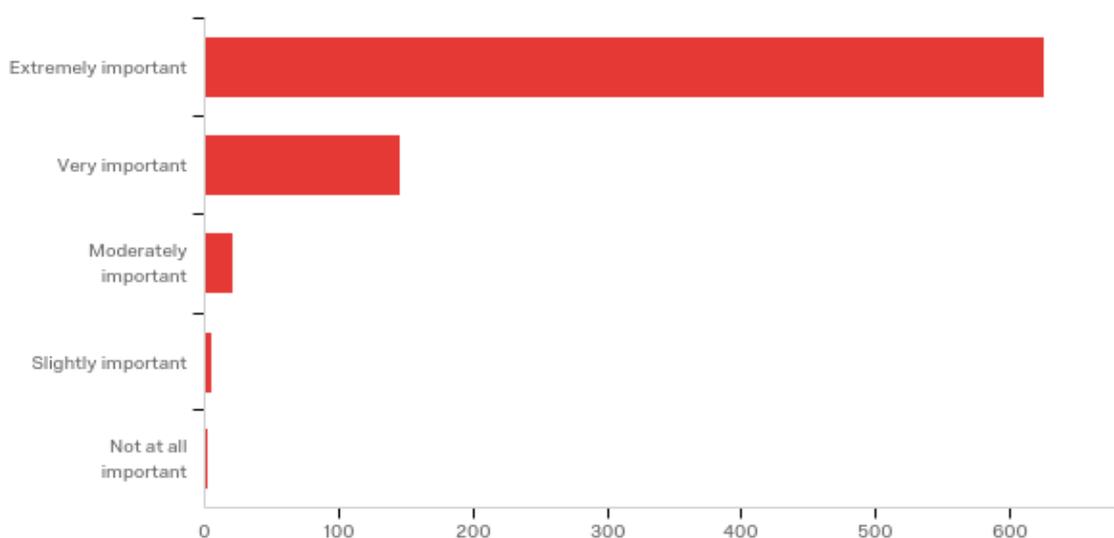
Results

1. How important is it to you that the MPA's status as an independent representative body is recognised and respected by the University?



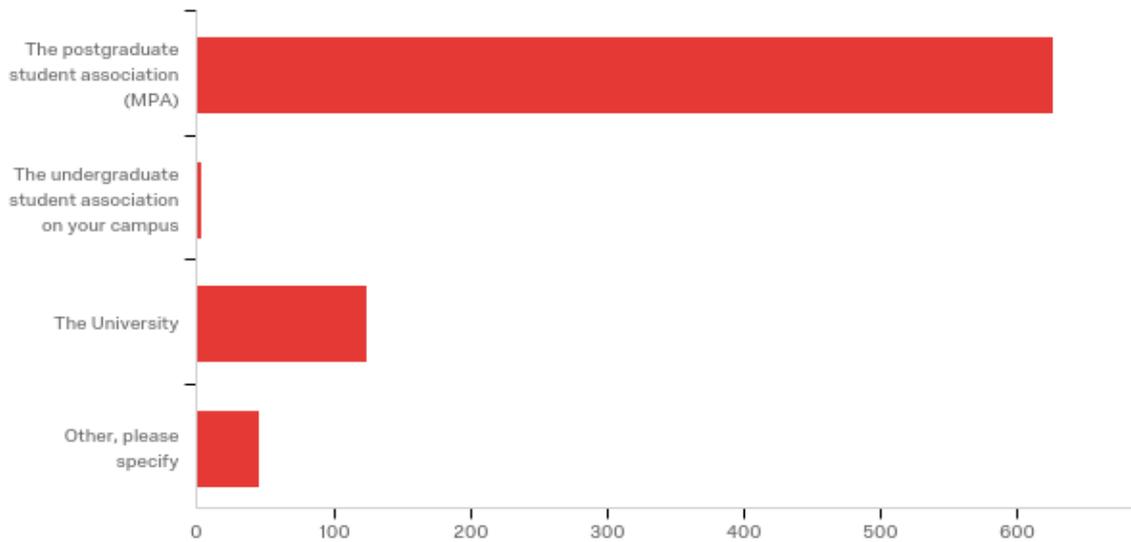
An overwhelming majority, 96% of respondents, felt it was either *extremely important* or *very important* that the MPA's status as an independent representative body is recognised and respected by the University.

2. How important is it to you that the University allows the MPA to determine how to spend their allocated share of the postgraduate SSAF?



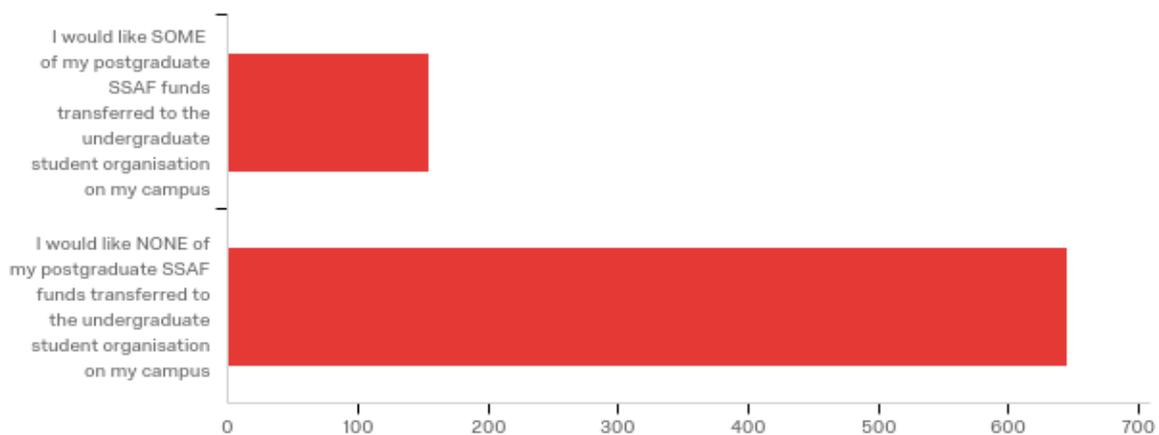
An overwhelming majority, 96.5% of respondents, felt it was either *extremely important* or *very important* that the University allows the MPA to determine how to spend their allocated share of the postgraduate SSAF.

3. The MPA negotiates with each undergraduate student association to determine how much of your postgraduate SSAF to give them. In the event that the two parties cannot reach agreement, who should make the final determination?



Seventy-eight percent (78%) of respondents to this question thought that the postgraduate student association (MPA) should make the final determination of how much of the postgrad SSAF goes to the undergraduates, where agreement cannot be reached.

4. Where would you like your postgraduate SSAF funds to be directed?



When asked where postgraduates would like their SSAF to be directed, they overwhelmingly responded that they did **not** want funds going to undergraduate organisations:

- 19% selected “I would like **SOME** of my postgraduate SSAF funds transferred to the undergraduate student organisation on my campus”
- 81% selected “I would like **NONE** of my postgraduate SSAF funds transferred to the undergraduate student organisation on my campus”

5. I do not want any of my postgraduate SSAF transferred to the undergraduates because... (respondents were asked to select as many as relevant, from a predetermined set of options):

Of the 81% who wanted **NONE** of their postgrad SSAF going to the undergraduate association, the top three reasons they selected this option were:

- I believe that postgraduates should decide how to spend postgraduate funds (90%)
- I do not think their services cater to the needs of postgraduates (50%)
- I do not use any of their services (43%)

6. I would like to support the following undergraduate-run generic services with my postgraduate SSAF funds: (respondents were asked to select as many as relevant, from a predetermined set of options).

Of the 19% who wanted **SOME** of their postgrad SSAF going to the undergraduate association, the top three services they wanted to support were:

- Welfare initiatives (free food/ breakfast club/household items) (64%)
- Clubs/clubs and societies (48%)
- Volunteering (43%)

7. If the transfer of postgraduate funds to the undergraduates means that the MPA must reduce services to postgraduates, I would like the MPA to reduce spending in the following POSTGRADUATE-SPECIFIC areas: (respondents were asked to select as many as relevant, from a predetermined set of options).

The following were the three most popular areas, as selected by respondents, where the MPA should reduce spending, were it forced to reduce services:

- Free fiction library (28%)
- Annual ball (20%)
- Free food trucks (17%)

8. If you have any further thoughts on this issue, please let us know.

One-hundred and fifty-four graduate students took the opportunity to leave a comment.

The top twelve themes to emerge from their responses were:

General theme	Number of responses
Graduate student money to graduate students	47
Anger/disbelief	38
MGA appreciation and support	25
Graduate students not feeling valued by Monash	17
Sense of belonging from MGA events	16
Graduate students should decide where their money goes	9
Off-campus opinions/issues	9
Undergraduate and graduate student needs are different	9
15% is too much	8
Don't attend/like MSA events	8
International student opinions/issues	8

The most frequent comments from respondents related to how **graduate student money should go to graduate students**. Interesting comments included:

“Having already contributed undergrad fees to the MSA, I want my post grad fees to be attributed to post grad activities that benefit me and those striving for further education. Let the undergraduates play with their own income.”

“I am strongly opposed to postgrad funds supporting undergrads. If undergrad activities require additional funds then the University should fund them or the undergrads should fundraise [as] I did as an undergrad.”

“I feel this move to transfer the funds meant for my postgraduate experience to undergraduate students unrelated to me and for services I am unlikely to use (since MPA already has them), is ridiculous to me. The money I spent on the SSAF as a postgraduate student, should go to services directed for postgraduate students.”

“How dare they spend MY money to undergraduates?! I am giving that money to be spent for ME! Let's protest this shit!”

“I wasn't aware that any of the MPA funds were being redirected to undergraduate organisations, and am a bit shocked and confused to find this out. I would have thought that undergraduate organisations already have a lot of money, and regardless of that, that funds allocated to postgraduates should be spent on postgraduates.”

“Since postgraduates are paying for the SSAF fund, all of the funding should go to an organization that works for postgraduates. I never have heard of any events dedicated to postgrads from other clubs and groups, and I don't find their events of much interest or help.”

“I cannot fathom why the SSAF postgraduates pay should be spent on anyone other than postgraduates. We have limited financial freedom as it stands, and the SSAF is not a trivial

fee. The MPA has been a critical resource for me personally, and for many of my peers, and reducing their funding will negatively impact graduate student wellbeing.”

“This is absolutely ridiculous. Undergrad SSAF money should go to undergrads. Postgrad SSAF money should benefit postgrads otherwise what’s the point? It might as well just be renamed as a study tax we get slugged with, rather than implying that the money is going on services and amenities for ME!”

Many of those leaving comments expressed **anger and/or disbelief** with the situation. Notable comments included:

“I don't value the abundance of social programs that I did in undergrad, as I don't have the time to attend them. A PhD is a full time (plus some) job! If postgraduates don't need the same funding as undergraduates, change the fees! Don't make me pay for someone else's party.”

“The apparent lack of transparency is disgraceful and, frankly, embarrassing. The conduct from the MSA is childish and does not cast them in a positive light ... If the MSA cannot conduct themselves like adults when faced with difficult problems like this, there should be some oversight by the university to ensure that they are not abusing their power. Many of those undergrads will end up as postgrads, so their actions lack foresight.”

“For those fees to go to undergraduates is outrageous - why am I paying for that??!!”

“Undergrads have so many concessions and advantages. As a postgrad I’m stunned that they need more money. They need accounts and budgeting lessons instead.”

“This is unjust and a clear violation of our trust in Monash to provide us a good experience in this university.”

“It is outrageous that I am paying more in fees, obtain less services and yet somehow it is the undergraduates that are getting more funding.”

“I still don't understand why the MSA have all their undergrads pay \$25 to be a part of the services and they also expect the MPA to give 15% of funding when so few postgrads benefit from the MSA anyway ... The MSA make ZERO effort to reach out to postgrads and I don't see why we should be putting funds towards a group that doesn't acknowledge us really at all.”

“I am annoyed that we have to ask the university not to allocate postgraduate money to MSA ... it's so unfair.”

“It is just UNFAIR! Let them pay for themselves!”

“It's disappointing to think that some money every graduate student is contributing is going towards undergraduate needs. Don't they have their own student services?”

“The MSA is already being funded by undergraduates - it is UNACCEPTABLE that the MSA is requesting so much more funding from the MPA, that would so significantly reduce available funding for postgraduate initiatives. It is ludicrous that the university is forcing the MPA to 'pay up'. Postgraduates need support, we need social inclusion activities that help reduce stress and feelings of isolation, we need career progression and development.”

Not feeling valued by Monash University was a complaint that several graduate students made. Memorable comments included:

"It would be nice to be respected and appreciated as a post-grad student by my own institution."

"My faculty is already an undergraduate-focused environment. We as post-grads are pushed to the side and given time when available. The last thing they need is more funding."

"I can't believe that people decided that our funds are not as important to us so that we can just give them to the MSA!"

"That the amount we pay for our services is being allocated to the undergraduates is completely unfair and the university should ensure that the money we pay is put across for our own association's use."

"This is absolutely atrocious! Undergrads get concession to travel too, the least they can do is use our money for the things we can control."

"It is depressing, as a postgraduate, to know that our funds are being redistributed to undergraduates without our say-so. I understand that undergraduate programmes probably chew up a lot more funds, but as fee payers we deserve as much say as undergraduate bodies."

"Postgrads don't get public transport concessions, which undergrads do. Postgrads are already restricted to their perks. The University should care about the Postgrads, too."

"It is not fair to grab money from graduates. We are also students. Our parents also have paid a lot to support us. For example, my parents contribute more than half of their fortune to support my study here. If Monash Uni wants to provide more to undergraduate students, please try another way ... Graduates are not the bank of universities."

"This issue expresses to me that the MSA and the university do not see postgraduate studies and undergraduate studies to be of equal value, and that is ludicrous to me."

Several respondents took this as an opportunity to express their **appreciation and support for the MGA**. Revealing comments included:

"The MPA has been immensely important to me as the services and events run by them cater to my needs and interests. I have to say that the orientation done by MPA deserves five stars. Orientation and events run by the MSA pales in comparison. I was surprised by the difference in quality to detail but it is the truth. MPA is way better than MSA."

"When things go seriously awry, it is the MPA who really provide the services that allow us to negotiate problems and actually succeed in our studies."

"We should not cancel or reduce these great programs/facilities for postgrads!"

"I like MPA the way it is now. Please do not change anything about it."

"Good luck with the campaigning! You guys are fighting the good fight, thank you for doing it on our behalf."

Graduate students feeling a **sense of belonging through participation in MGA events/services** was relatively common:

"I just felt that MPA is probably one of the associations that makes me feel like I belong in Monash."

"All the events hosted and made by the MPA have greatly impacted my life in a wonderful way. Everything that they do helps me study and feel a sense of belonging in Monash."

"As a postgrad, I need mature conversations [at] events that have character. MPA has done a great job representing us ... The one time we get a breather is through MPA events."

"I have found the MPA to be always approachable, professional and apolitical. I sought advice from their advocacy service early on in my PhD which enabled me to make well-informed decisions, in order to assert myself. As a result, my PhD ran smoothly and my thesis is on-track for early submission. In my opinion, it is vital that the MPA remains adequately funded and that MPA advocacy support remains a high-quality service that is independent from the University."

"All the events and programs you are providing for us students are important. I'm a PhD student and without your events I can say I would be pretty lonely. Those socialising events are important and for example yoga is a highlight of my week!"

Several respondents were frustrated with how this process had unfolded – believing that **graduate students should be responsible for deciding where their money goes**.

"The MPA governs postgraduate life at Monash, and while I am happy that we do give a portion of our funds to students, it should be up to our representatives to decide how much and where, not the university."

"If UGs want PG funding, then it must be in accordance with the wishes of the PGs ... Allowing the UGs to take a further portion of funding severely limits the ability of the MPA to run programs at Chambers that are already limited."

"[These are] our funds and it should be spent only on us. Nobody has the right to give a share of it to others without our approval."

"This greatly concerns me because I never use any of the MSA services. Post grad students should be able to choose how our SSAF is used. I fully appreciate all the services by the MPA and intend to continue using all the ones I need. Thank you. Please keep the funds with MPA."

Some respondents voiced that they **did not like or attend MSA events**. These comments included:

"This greatly concerns me because I never use any of the MSA services."

"I support not paying them any of our fund."

"Please stop spending my money on things I don't need. Much appreciated."

Some respondents who were based at off-campus sites, but whose SSAF is paid to Clayton Campus expressed their unique takes. These included:

"I wouldn't be able to attend most of the undergraduate events anyway since I used to be based at AMREP and [am] now off campus ... I believe there are more undergraduate students than postgraduate so they should already have enough funding, taking in account that majority of those undergraduates are international."

"It is absurd that the SSAF payments from students studying the JD at Chambers are going toward undergraduate student services on other campuses."

Emphasising that **undergraduates and graduate students have different motivations and needs** was what some respondents used this opportunity to do. Notable comments included:

"I am a new HDR student. When I started in June, I signed up to both the MPA and MSA and proceeded going to events for both. The MSA events lasted about 2 weeks, after which I quickly realised I had very little in common with the interests of undergraduate students and the events that excite them."

"Postgraduate students tend to be at a different stage of their life, not only academically but personally, and, therefore, require different services to undergraduate students, hence why so few postgraduates join MSA ... Likewise, undergraduate students benefit from having a society that is in tune with their needs at their point in life. The two should not be mixed too much as it risks reducing the quality of their services."

"The MPA exists because post-grads are a distinct group with distinct needs; therefore, MPA can tailor activities and services for us ... I'm able to make a direct comparison because I was also an undergrad at Clayton, straight from high school. As a post-grad, I want to study efficiently and get home to my kids. I'm happy for undergrads to have concerts and sausage sizzles, but I've never attended one of those ... I don't use a club. I live a post-grad life. I want my funding to go to MPA to reflect that, please."

"The cultural outlook of people within MSA and MPA vary vastly, with a good amount of MPA members being of an age group where they prefer calm events which let them mingle with their peers in a laid-back environment."

"Postgraduates face different challenges to undergrads, specially economically."

Some respondents agreed that the MSA should receive some funds from the MGA, but expressed that **15% is excessive**. Comments included:

"In order to have access to some of the benefits and activities regulated by the MSA, postgrad students have to purchase the MSA Card, and pay the same rates as undergrads to attend events. I reckon it is fine to give 5% of the funds to the MSA or any other association, but not 15%. Especially because postgrad students have access to less amenities than undergrads and, due to our "adult" responsibilities, we have different needs and interests than most undergrads."

"I believe the funds equivalent of the 5% population should be passed on."

"I wouldn't say MSA shouldn't have any funds for postgraduate students, cause being a member of the MSA means that you get discounts at a lot of places and also gets you a discount to join clubs at Monash as well, which I think is something the MPA does not have."

"Given the number of undergraduates and perhaps especially international students, I would think their service fees more than cover their events/services. I've also needed and valued more of the services the MPA provides than their equivalents as an undergraduate student at Monash."

International students communicated what they thought of the situation. Notable comments included:

"As an international postgrad student, I have taken full advantage of the extra activities that the MPA has put on as a way to meet other postgrads. If the MPA is no longer able to put on these excess events, it will be harder for students alike to meet new people outside of our courses."

"This is totally unfair, postgrads SSAF should be utilised for Postgraduate related events only. Huge amount of money is being brought in university fund from international students and they won't be aware of it how it is being used by undergraduate associations."

"Most of the postgrads being international students, I believe the university is ripping off money from us and are using it to fund undergrads who are mostly domestic students. Moreover, the MPA already lacks resources for most of the things and [the] cutting of 15% is going to reduce their resources even more."

"I just think it's unfair as heck that undergrads get to be so invasive when postgrads are constantly battling their status as a student and many international students really need the support MPA provides."

"For international students like us these services help [us] socialize and make us feel at home."

Other notable comments included:

"If I had to choose between the undergrad-funded generic events and specific MPA events and services, I would choose the MPA events every time."

"A difficult issue to allocate funds; funds contributed by students to their relevant student bodies should be contributed to said bodies. An independent arbiter should then determine in the event of dispute, not a university body."

"What the university is doing with this funding diversion is fucking disgusting. I've been a postgrad since 2013 and I've been protesting the university's bullshit decisions for nearly 8 years and I'm just so tired of it all. Solidarity forever MPA, you have a hard job. The corporate university is squeezing us."

"MPA money should help Monash students get to Uni with subsidies for PTV. Undergrad students [get] concessions so at least MPA could help with that money coming to our transportation fees - we are at a disadvantage compared to undergrads, they don't need our money."

"Not cool Monash."

"If you allocate more funds to Postgrads that would be helpful rather than reducing it. More stress is gone through by postgrads and the only relief is MPA services. I would strongly recommend not to transfer the MPA funds."

"If I had to choose between the undergrad-funded generic events and specific MPA events and services, I would choose the MPA events every time."

"I've paid student fees for a lot of years. I don't appreciate funds being redirected to undergrads."

"MPA should take charge of their funds. The undergraduates cannot force them to do so."

"The MSA already has enough funds I believe and they raise funds throughout semester because all their services cost money!"

"I think it should be on the university to help undergrad associations if they don't have enough funding not postgrad students!"

"Don't give more money to them. They' already over funded. I even never come to their event."

"MPA money is BY and FOR the Postgrads. No reason why Uni should meddle with this and allocate to a different faction. Make the UGs pay more if they need more money for their cause."

Appendix 1. Demographics of respondents

Campus	count	percentage
Clayton (including off-campus locations)	512	64%
Caulfield	241	30%
Other	46	6%

Course Type	count	percentage
HDR	312	39%
Coursework	473	59%
Other	14	2%

Attendance type	count	percentage
Full-time	726	91%
Part-time	74	9%