

UWS students condemn lack of resources

27 March 2001

In comments given to the *WSWS*, students at the University of Western Sydney condemned the inadequate conditions at UWS, the role of the university's administration and the federal government's commercialisation of tertiary education.

Eileen, a mature age student, said some classes were so large that students had to sit on the floor. "This is a disgrace—all students pay HECS fees for a tertiary education. We pay the same regardless of whether we study at Sydney, the University of Technology or UWS. Why should UWS receive less funding than other universities per student?

"I have lived in the western suburbs for over 30 years and we always seem to be considered second-class compared to other areas of Sydney. If we are expected to follow the same curriculum as all other institutes, then we should receive the same level of funding per student.

"Our education will suffer with larger tutorials and less resources. Students will not have the same opportunities to become involved because there are larger numbers and less time to learn the same amount of work. The long-term effects could result in students becoming more stressed as more needs to be fitted into less time.

"Personally I am annoyed that I need to go to other libraries to complete assignments and this will become the norm soon because the library will not be able to provide the resources students need.

"I don't agree with universities being funded commercially—this will lead to the companies that provide finance having too much say in the running of universities and could have an impact on the standard of results. As we have seen with banks becoming privatised, the customer and staff members are of no consequence in the big picture—management is purely driven by making huge profits to satisfy shareholders. This could happen to universities!"

Eileen objected to the impact of the UWS

restructuring. "Restructuring often results in destruction. The idea of a restructure is to save money by becoming more efficient, but some services need to be provided regardless of what structure is in place. UWS is a place of higher learning; therefore the students are the people who need to be served and the staff who teach the students are important.

"Here is just one instance. I went to the faculty office to seek some guidance on choosing my elective subjects but was confronted with a sign saying that all students were to refer their inquiries to the Student Centre. After being in the queue for 20 minutes at the Student Centre, the staff there said they were unable to assist me, and that I should go to the faculty office.

"Of course, the window at the faculty office was closed, and there were no staff in sight. I was fortunate to catch one staff member who spoke to me about my situation, which was very good of her, considering they have been instructed that answering student inquiries is no longer part of their role.

"This situation is appalling. The Student Centre has a function but how can they be expected to be expert on the requirements of each of the faculties in UWS? Students are being given the run around—if they cannot get accurate information it could well result in a poor selection of subjects, which ultimately may affect their career prospects."

A student, who did not want to be identified, gave another example. "I have a class at Penrith (50 kilometres west of Sydney) from 3pm to 5pm and my next class is at Parramatta (20 km west of Sydney) at 6pm to 9pm. Taking the train always causes me to arrive about 20 minutes late.

"The Parramatta class can be considered, for lack of a better word, packed—so much so that some students **always** have sit on the floor. There are around 120 to 150 students in that lecture room and there are not enough chairs and tables to accommodate them. Basically, it's a UWS version of the musical chair

game, which each and every student has to play. Unfortunately, I am among those unlucky ones who cannot afford to be there early to have a 'fair' go at the 'game'. I don't know if it matters, but I would like to point out that this class is composed mostly of full-fee paying international students.

"Anyone with a brain can figure out the impact on the education of a student who has to sit on the floor, taking notes on his lap and not being able to see the overheads properly.

"On the question of funding, since I am fairly new in this country I'm not really sure about this but I would tend to think that the problem is with the location of the university, i.e. in the western suburbs. The authorities tend to think that everything in the western suburb is second-rate."

Lucas, a later-year student, said: "Class sizes keep getting bigger, meaning less face-to-face tutoring, less questions, less exploration of the subject material, less discussion, and ultimately a poorer education.

"In the end, employers will judge UWS students on their ability to analyse, absorb and disseminate information, and their industry skills. With cuts to funding, UWS will attract students with less ability. It will then provide a sub-standard education to them. Eventually UWS will produce below average students who will destroy any good reputation there may have previously been. I will therefore be judged on how much funding my university received."

Lucas ridiculed federal Education Minister David Kemp's claim that UWS was over-funded. "He claims that when you scale our funding in relation to the number of subjects we come out on top. This sounds bizarre to say the least."

Lucas criticised the commercialisation of education. "Education will potentially become a business, in which case the disadvantaged in society will not be able to easily afford an education and the wealthy will always be able maintain their elitist position by buying an education."

Another later-year student said the student demands for smaller classes and adequate facilities were basic requirements.

He opposed the shortening of semesters to make way for fee-paying courses. "A shortening of semester periods means an increase in learning with heavier workloads for students. Assignments and assessments

are being 'pushed through' faster.

"I believe that governments are trying to make the whole country more corporate, with companies sponsoring schools with advertising, etc. They are forcing all institutions to go that way. A commercial education—like anything else commercial—breeds distrust, an underhanded devious nature and a social Darwinist theory of 'survival for the fittest'.

"Commercialism in education compromises the integrity of all concerned. In the scandal at Wollongong University, academics were pressured by the university to 'bump up' marks of post-graduate students in order to increase funding."

See Also:

Students protest lack of funding at University of Western Sydney

[27 March 2001]

10,000 books buried at Australian university

[7 September 2000]

Australian university students occupy campus over substandard conditions

[8 November 1999]



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