



University of Melbourne Student Union

**NUS National Conference Grant Recipient Reports
to Students' Council 3(17)
24.01.2017**

These reports have been processed and collated by the General Secretary of UMSU. Small formatting changes have occurred to have a consistent document. There have been no changes to the content of the reports.

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Monica Leng

The NUS National Conference 2016 saw an array of issues discussed. From issues that directly affected students to other issues that might be of interest to students. From what I was able to gauge from the conference, the three main topics of discussion was the ongoing fight for marriage equality, the education campaign and welfare (in context of the government continually cutting welfare).

Marriage equality is yet to be won. This fight has been something students have been heavily involved in years prior and will continue to be a part of. It's a significant issue as there are many students who are LGBTI and despite some not having the intention to marry one day, it is more of an argument to support the marriage equality campaign as it's a call for equal rights in Australia.

The education campaign and welfare I believe fall into a similar category. It was evident that this issue in particular was an important and urgent one. The last time the Liberal government attempted to cut back funding on higher education was in 2014. 2014 saw an array of blatant attacks; fee deregulation was on the cards in a serious way. However, this was fought back by a strong student campaign. The arguments made at NatCon 2016 was that attacks to higher education was still the agenda of the government. There was a call for a serious education campaign.

What was announced in 2016 in the budget was not explicit in detailing exactly what the plans were for higher education but the campaign is necessary as to put students on the front foot instead of waiting for attacks to occur therefore creating a situation where students have to claw back what has been lost.

Furthermore, attacks have already been made. The Omnibus bill which was passed saw the termination of the start-up scholarship and introduce a lower HECs repayment threshold.

Furthermore, what was raised in regards to education in welfare in context of how it affects University of Melbourne students is that UoM is already expensive as it is. With planned future attacks it will only make education for inaccessible. But it's not only the government that are taking steps to make education expensive and lowering its quality. There are an array of re-structures that will go on to lower the quality of education and further exploit academics and tutors.

This was my first NatCon and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was interesting to hear all the arguments from various student factions.

Ryan Davey

From December 12th-14th I attended the NUS National Conference held at the Waurin Ponds campus of Deakin University. I had never attended a Conference before, and the bursary provided by UMSU was incredibly helpful in getting me there. Unfortunately, I had to leave half way through the week so I missed a great deal of the conference. While I was there, several important policy areas were discussed; with the majority of discussion time being dedicated to education, welfare, administration and unionism. It was really great to see policies around cuts to Centrelink, awareness of mental health issues, emergency student housing and other issues relevant to student welfare brought to the floor.

While many of the policies debated and passed were incredibly important, I couldn't quite get my head around the nasty behaviour that I witnessed. People at the Business Committee table were blocking other factions from putting forward items to go on the agenda. If they got a hold of pieces of paper written by another faction, they would often eat the motion to prevent it from moving forward. If the opposition did finally get a chance to speak at the lectern, they were drowned out by jeers calling them "scabs".

For all of its flaws, overall I witnessed hundreds of students who genuinely care for student unionism. When I spoke to people from different factions at the conference, they were genuinely kind and were happy to answer any questions I had. I expect that this line has been repeated hundreds of times, but there isn't really a new way that I can put it: NatCon needs reform. This leads into the most disappointing part of the experience, which came after the conference itself on social media.

Following the election of UMSU's campus representative, many were sceptical about Caleb being put up for the role. The initial criticisms levelled appeared fair, based on his first response. However, when he addressed these concerns with a reasonable reply he was immediately dismissed, and was told that he only desired the role to further criticise the NUS. This implies that the role should only go to someone who will agree with, and never question the organisation regardless of issues that arise. This was accompanied by a chorus of other attendees saying that they agree with a lot of the criticisms, and are committed to fixing them. However other reports I have read from previous years show that the same issues persist every year. The only conclusion that I can draw from this is that

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while many claim their desire to change how these events operate, their actions show that they not only have no desire to fix the conference, they enjoy it.

Apologies if this is considered by some to be a poorly written, sparse report.

Ella Shi

Overview

I attended the annual National Union of Students conference as an observer from Monday 12th Dec to Thursday 15th Dec 2016. As a first time attendee, my main interest was in experiencing and learning how student unionism functioned on a national level, and to gain new ideas – particularly in relation to autonomous policy – that could benefit the new UMSU People of Colour department in 2017.

I was very keen for the opportunity to engage in a national discussion, and to contribute my ideas. I submitted two pieces of autonomous policy which I felt very strongly about, and which related to issues I envisaged the UMSU People of Colour department addressing in 2017. As such, support from the National Union of Students would have been very helpful. The process of drafting these policies was a good learning experience. However I was disappointed to discover that neither of my policies – nor the majority of other policies submitted by UMSU were included in the policy document. While many important and good policies were included, I'm concerned that such a large error could have occurred and it left me with a negative impression of the conference right from the beginning. The two policies I wrote addressed Ethno-cultural policy, the first emphasising intersectionality and working with the NUS Queer officer, and the second relating to mental health. I have attached my submissions at the end of this document for reference.

Conference experience and impact on students

Autonomous policy was the focus of my attendance. It was especially great to hear so many passionate women of colour speak. In the current global context, it was good to hear affirmation of solidarity with refugees, and the importance of fighting Islamophobia and religious intolerance.

In relating to specific motions, I was disappointed that a motion to assist in the proliferation of Ethno-cultural or People of Colour departments at universities wasn't passed. I understand that different delegates hold varying views, but I didn't feel that there was sufficient in-depth discussion on the matter to reach this conclusion. In lieu of national support, as we have a strong People of Colour collective at UMSU and a growing department, we are willing and keen to offer support should other student unions choose to contact us.

Another key issue which stood out to me was a motion on mental health support for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse international students. I found the discussion around this motion very heartfelt, genuine and compelling. This is an issue I would like to address this year in conjunction with UMSU international and the welfare officers.

The most valuable aspect of the conference for me was the opportunity to meet and engage with students of colour from other universities, many of whom were also involved in Ethno-cultural and People of Colour collectives and departments. I've been in contact with some of them since the conference and the potential to discuss and compare policies and ideas with students from other universities will be very beneficial to our People of Colour department. I also look forward to the prospect of working with Lorena White the newly elected Ethno-cultural officer.

Aside from the policies, I felt that many procedural and 'cultural' aspects of the conference problematic and somewhat alienating. This included incidents of ridiculous behaviour like eating paper and physical altercations to prevent certain policies being discussed.

Additionally, I understand the merits and reasons for collective action and in the formation of unified voting blocs, but I felt that these pre-determined factional stances resulted in a sense of complacency and disregard for engaging in constructive discussion. As a result, as someone who didn't belong to a major faction, I felt that any attempt at speaking would only expose one, at worst, to heckling and abusive shouting from opposing factions and at best, indifference, and that ultimately any attempt at speaking would be futile as the vote had already been pre decided. Nevertheless, I did appreciate how supportive groups were to their own members and I imagine it would have been a good opportunity for public speaking and development for those belonging to a faction.

I was also surprised by the sitting times of the conference- starting after mid-day and going up to midnight. This doesn't seem reasonable and in my opinion, makes the conference less accessible to observers, given the difficulty and costs of securing transport so late at night. I would not be opposed to a late finish if effort was made to start at a reasonable hour. However the insistence on late hours meant there was insufficient time for many autonomous issues, a clear example being the relegation of ATSI policy to late at night, and Queer policy being passed in a few large blocs.

While these structural issues may seem minor, they contribute to the perception of the NUS as an insular organisation that is disengaged from the average student.

Summary

Despite some of the negatives mentioned above, I am impressed by the unified, collective mentality of the NUS as a whole and I think the ability to mobilise such a big group of students *can* be incredibly beneficial to students at the University of Melbourne when it comes to large scale campaigns. Moreover, a conference that brings together students from universities across Australia is valuable. While there discussions were often quite antagonistic, aggressive and in my opinion not constructive, I appreciated the overall progressive stance of the NUS and I'm glad that these are these are the views and values are being amplified. However I believe vast improvements need to be made if Nat-con is to continue, and to reach its full potential.

The common argument is that students would benefit from a better understanding of and engagement with Nat-con. However, I would rather say that it is Nat-con which would benefit from increased input from students. While I am grateful for my first hand opportunity to witness the conference, in light of my experience as an observer, I think grant money should be allocated in future years with the following two considerations:

1. With preference for members of autonomous collectives, to provide these students with the platform to speak and to engage with counterparts at other universities.
2. To sending a larger contingent of student media to facilitate an educative role and promote transparency.

Omitted Policy #1

Solidarity with Queer Students of Colour

Preamble:

1. Queer students can face disadvantages and discrimination as a result of queerphobia, heteronormativity, transphobia and gender essentialism.
2. Discrimination against queer students can disproportionately affect queer students of colour who additionally face oppression on the grounds of race and culture.
3. In the past year, some political voices and mainstream media outlets have capitalised on particular incidents of anti- queer sentiments arising from certain cultural communities, and have falsely characterised these communities as being anti queer.
4. This is not only distressing for queer students of all backgrounds, but also perpetuates a

problematic view that cultural communities are comprised of indistinguishable, unanimous voices rather than diverse individuals.

Platform:

1. That NUS supports and advocates for the rights of queer students, including queer students of colour.
2. That NUS recognizes that different forms of oppression and violence are not mutually exclusive but intersect, and acknowledges the importance of intersectionality in uniting autonomous departments in the campaign against oppression.

Action:

1. The NUS Ethno-Cultural Officer should work with the Queer, Ethno-cultural and People of Colour departments on campuses nation-wide to ensure these departments support queer students of colour.
2. Where necessary, the NUS Ethno-Cultural Officer should assist the establishment of autonomous collectives for queer students of colour.
3. The NUS and the Ethno-Cultural Officer should support and demonstrate solidarity with queer rights movements and campaigns.
4. The Ethno-Cultural officer should publically speak out against the misrepresentation of cultural communities, and publically demonstrate support and solidarity with queer students of colour.

Moved: Yan Zhuang (University of Melbourne Student Union)

Seconded: Zachary Power (University of Melbourne Student Union)

Omitted Policy #2

Mental Health support for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Students

Preamble:

1. Mental health is an important issue which presents real challenges and consequences for students. Mental health and wellbeing deserves thorough recognition, and all students should have access to information and support.
2. Awareness of and access to mental health support may be particularly difficult for some students

from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, due to a number of factors including the issue being a taboo topic, or a lack of information.

3. Racism – whether in the form of isolated incidents or structural racism which impacts social participation and engagement – can be a contributing and exacerbating factor for mental health issues.

Platform:

1. The NUS believes that support and access to mental health services should be available to all students.
2. The NUS recognises that different cultural backgrounds may result in different understandings and ways of communicating about mental health.
3. The NUS recognizes the importance of mental health awareness and support for student wellbeing and is committed to supporting all students including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Action:

1. The Disabilities Officer should work with their respective counterparts on campus to ensure that mental health support services on campus are accessible to all students, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
2. Where necessary, the Disabilities officer should assist in setting up autonomous collectives for CALD students for mental health support.
3. The Disabilities officer in conjunction with their respective campus counterparts should liaise with universities to ensure that the professional mental health and counselling services offered have staff members from CALD backgrounds, and who are trained and equipped to assist students from CALD backgrounds.
4. The Disabilities officer should work with the Ethno-cultural officer and relevant community groups to create material on mental health awareness that is accessible and relevant to CALD students, and distribute this material via their respective campus counterparts.

Moved: Yan Zhuang (University of Melbourne Student Union)

Seconded: Zachary Power (University of Melbourne Student Union)

Hannah Billett

Between the 12th and 16th the National Union of Students (NUS) held its annual National Conference (NatCon) at the Waurin Ponds campus of Deakin University. I attended the conference with a bursary from UMSU as an observer and was one of about a dozen Melbourne Uni students to do so. This report will detail my experiences and observations.

[Disclosure: I am a member of the Australian Labor Party and am affiliated with the Centre Unity group within it. However, this group does not have a presence at NatCon and I was elected to my current role with a ticket that is independent of any student Labor factions. Regardless, I do not speak for my ticket, faction or department. These are my thoughts only.]

Conference Organisation and Administration

Organising such a large event as NatCon is bound to present challenges. However, the overall running and administration of the conference was shambolic. Correspondence I sent to the General Secretary regarding the payment of one of our observers went unanswered. Many delegates and observers did not receive the emails telling them where to be when or the links to where the policy book was uploaded. In addition, many policies, including those written by University of Melbourne delegates, were left out of the official policy books and only included just before the commencement of policy debates. This hampered our delegates' ability to engage with policy and meant that there was not enough time for the different factional groupings to come to a decision on how they would vote for these policies.

Another structural issue with the conference is the process required to even have a policy debated. The process is not transparent or easy to follow, especially for first time attendees like myself, but basically requires a motion to have the support of at least two factions to be presented to conference floor. The main factions also seemed uninterested in engaging with the policies written by UMSU delegates, so as such it was impossible for us to get our ideas even heard. I feel that a structural and probably constitutional change is required to ensure that a variety of opinions and policy areas can be heard on conference floor.

Policy Discussion

Most of the policy that was passed was about generally uncontroversial things, in support of social and welfare issues that the majority of university students would be able to get behind. The NUS also agreed to run a major campaign around removing HECS and making university entirely free. This campaign was much discussed however was lacking in detail around how such a change could be implemented, especially under a Liberal government. This I feel is an ongoing issue with the NUS; policies often lacked detail and the floor seemed largely divided on how to go about achieving change. There was discussion about whether protests are actually capable of achieving change, or whether lobbying is the most effective way of changing the law. This debate was by far the most intellectually interesting and challenging of the week. Another policy debate that caused conflict was around trigger warnings in lectures. Some felt that it was impossible to implement as people could be technically triggered by almost anything, but the majority felt that this view was ableist and callous. Great and interesting ideas were debated at NATCON, but sadly the structure and lack of transparency meant that this was not able to be engaged with by many students.

Transparency

Issues surrounding transparency is the biggest issue I have with NATCON and the NUS more broadly. The longstanding ban on filming and recording is anti-democratic. It suppresses the ability of student journalists from being able to accurately report on the happenings of conference and union that students contribute money to. The reality is that there is a very high barrier to participation in NATCON. One needs to be able to afford to take a week off work, transport to the often inconveniently located conference venues, accommodation, and this is on top of the already exorbitant \$200 fee to be a conference observer. Even with support from their own student union, this is more than most students can afford. Students who can't overcome this financial barrier have a right to be able to see the conference and those who speak at conference deserve to be held to account for their words and actions.

There are other issues of transparency which came up at conference. The financial report was distributed without an independent auditor's report, which means that there is no way to verify the contents of the report. In addition, there was not an opportunity to ask the General Secretary to justify any of the spending decisions made by the NUS. This felt inappropriate in light of the revelation that the NUS had spent more on legal fees or flights for Office Bearers than on campaigns, something the

NUS claims is its core business. The lack of scrutiny at NATCON is a discredit to the organization and the students it represents.

Culture

The culture of NATCON is something which is well discussed in the student media regularly, with tales of punch and late-night personality clashes. To be honest, I don't really care about that part of conference. What happens in private is private. However, what does concern me is the culture and behavior on conference floor. This is perhaps the only conference I've ever been to where delegates got physical with each other and speakers were shouted over to the point where it was impossible to hear them. The situation got especially inappropriate when an Indigenous man was not allowed the space to speak on the policy he wrote for the Indigenous policy chapter, just because he's a Liberal. This was the low point of the conference and something I feel exemplifies the culture of NATCON and thus all that is wrong with it.

Conclusion

Australian students deserve a national union which is smart, capable, transparent and inclusive. I believe in this strongly, but I also believe that the NUS in its current form with its current practices is manifestly unable to be what students need. UMSU should consider its position on the NUS and NATCON over the course of the year and I look forward to participating in these discussions.

Alice Smith

The National Union of Students conference was a great opportunity to meet student activists from other universities and see where the money that we send to NUS goes.

The issues raised at the NUS national conference covered a variety of areas both affecting student's lives while at university and in their own lives. In addition there were multiple motions for solidarity with other unions and protest actions in the previous year that while not directly affecting students, comprise an important function of NUS's action as a union. There was much crossover between motions proposed by different factions that signalled a common understanding of the role NUS should provide by those across the factional spectrum.

Issues discussed included responses to sexual assault on campus, the education campaigns planned for next year and various welfare initiatives. There was very limited time to discuss and vote on motions relating to autonomous policy such as Indigenous and Disabilities due to extended discussion on education, unionism and welfare motions even though a majority of delegates know how they are voting prior to the conference due to factionalism. This led to frustration, as it appears that these departments are valued less than other departments. The University of Melbourne was condemned for the restructure that resulted in the cuts to staff and student services. While this doesn't have a real impact on Melbourne Uni it is an important reminder that other students stand in solidarity with UMSU in trying to fight cuts that are detrimental to the student experience at Melbourne.

Students at Melbourne will benefit from the campaigns run by NUS as decided at conference and this is an important reason to remain engaged with and providing financial assistance, as Melbourne has one of the most well founded unions in Australia. Even though national conference is notoriously vile (this year was no exception), attending as an observer allowed me to see we need to continue to work with NUS to provide the best outcomes for Melbourne students.

Amy Bartholomeusz

The National Union of Students (NUS) National Conference 2016, took place from the 12th to the 16th of December and I was given the special opportunity by the University of Melbourne Students Union to be able to attend the Conference. I wanted to go to the Conference, as I wanted to learn more about the issues that universities around Australia were facing and the ways in which these issues could be addressed. It was insightful to listen to the opinions of many different students who were able to get up and speak on their beliefs and comment on various aspects surrounding education, welfare and many more.

The conference was engaging and I found myself to be very interested and attentive to listening to the way in which policies were discussed and interpreted. I was particularly interested in the autonomous policy regarding women's and ethno-cultural policy as I found that the policies surrounding these sectors would greatly affect me as a student. The issues that were raised at the Conference included that of the issues surrounding the cost of education, the gender pay gap and fair work rights for young people, body autonomy, intersectionality, representation and welfare of Australian Indigenous People on campus, homophobia and transphobia, racism, counseling and mental health services, student poverty and the threat of online lectures. These issues, whilst being only a small handful of issues raised at Conference, will affect students at universities and could lead to detrimental outcomes for students if policies are not put in place to prevent them from doing so. As a person of colour I found it extremely confronting but also enlightening to learn about the treatment and current policy surrounding ethno-cultural students at affiliated universities around Australia. It was shocking to learn about the lack of an ethno-cultural department at most universities to be there to represent and uphold the rights of ethno-cultural students and the policy regarding the implementation of a department across all universities. This has occurred at the University of Melbourne and I believe that this will greatly improve the experience of ethno-culturally diverse students in their time at University. Another aspect of Conference that struck me was policy surrounding that of Women's policy. I identify as a woman and an issue that was raised at conference was the lack of support and health services for women students at university. This affects students in that they are not receiving the proper support and care that they may need and in turn, this may affect their studying and overall

academic performance. Women's health services are particularly suffering and this needs to change. It was great to learn about how the NUS is going to seek to change this and make health services more accessible to all students as well as more affordable. The Education and Welfare chapters were just as note worthy as these chapters would affect all students. Issues that were raised included that of students being exploited in the workplace, housing affordability on campus and the implementation of student surveys and collecting data. There was lots of discussion regarding campaigns and protests for free education and fighting deregulation. These talks brought up some new ideas and ways in which to combat these issues and why I think that the Conference was a good way for discussion to be held in which positive outcomes could be devised for all universities across Australia. I think that the University of Melbourne in the incoming year should take on what has been passed through the National Conference by the National Union of Students, as it is important for students to feel like they can attend university, safely, free from discrimination, feel like they have accessibility, financially and justifiably.

Overall, attending the NUS National Conference was a beneficial experience allowing me to see the broader issues that students face and the ways in which we can all tackle them.

James Power

The National Union of Students' (NUS) annual National Conference was held at Deakin University's Waurin Ponds campus from the 12th to the 15th of December 2016. As an observer, I attended and witnessed the proceedings of the conference on each day. I had not previously attended the NUS' National Conference. Throughout the proceedings a number of issues were raised, and policies debated, which will perhaps be of interest and relevance to students at the University of Melbourne.

Conference proceedings typically occurred in two stages, one prior, and one following, a break for dinner at around 7 PM. Proceedings generally began mid to late afternoon, and ended, following the dinner break, between 11:30 PM and 2 AM. The proceedings themselves were chaotic. Policies were initially addressed in a linear, orderly format. However, debates and speeches often devolved into exchanges of jeers, insults, and chants. At one point, some attendees chanted "DRAIN THE SWAMP". This was considerably inappropriate. "DIG IT UP, SHIP IT OUT" was also chanted, referencing support for uranium mining. Additionally, others chanted "FRACK FRACK FRACK" when the NUS Environment Department was abolished. No University of Melbourne delegate or observer engaged in this behaviour, but it will concern University of Melbourne students that elements of the NUS believe they can use such slogans without repercussion.

Moreover, speakers were consistently interrupted, and there were some instances of attendees being physically prevented from speaking. There were several cases of individuals present at the conference being named, pointed at, and condemned by speakers and/or other attendees. Furthermore, insofar as inappropriate behaviour is concerned, conference attendees also witnessed consistent physical and verbal altercations among members of the business committee. Sometimes these altercations required intervention from organisers. It bears mentioning that all this behaviour would be deemed completely unreasonable in any other context, and does not seem conducive to the safe and welcoming environment promised by the NUS. Indeed, though delegates and observers are ostensibly encouraged to speak on issues they care about, the sometimes-hostile atmosphere at National Conference did not inspire confidence, nor a desire to do so. Though first-time speakers

generally received an initial round of applause prior to their speech, the situation at National Conference was not otherwise favourable to newcomers.

Additionally, a ban on filming and photography on conference floor was among the initial administrative policies carried on the first day of proceedings, though office bearer reports and candidate speeches were exempt from this ban. The ban was justified as necessary to ensure the privacy and safety of conference attendees. Privacy and safety are, of course, paramount and worthwhile aims. However, it may concern students at the University of Melbourne that, even though they are members of the NUS, they cannot be party to proceedings at its National Conference. Indeed, this lack of transparency seems potentially counterintuitive, and possibly reinforces both overt and tacit complicity with the behaviour described earlier.

Insofar as policy is concerned, the University of Melbourne's More! delegation submitted 23 policies. My understanding is that many were inexplicably excluded from the policy book, such that only two of the proposed 23 policies reached discussion on conference floor. Among the two policies that reached conference floor was *HECS-HELP for Entrance Exams*, which carried. The policy asks that the NUS Education Officer lobby for entrance exam fee payments to be deferred via the existing HECS-HELP scheme. This is immensely important and relevant to current and prospective University of Melbourne students, especially as the LSAT is required for admission to Melbourne Law School. Additionally, the remaining policy to reach conference floor, *An NUS That Reaches Beyond Universities*, also carried. The policy requests the NUS National President and Education Officer study methods aimed at unionising TAFE students.

In terms of other issues and policies raised that pertain to University of Melbourne students, UMSU's pill-testing kit program received positive consideration via the *Safe Pill Consumption* policy, which carried. The policy asks the NUS National Welfare Officer to work towards implementing similar pill-testing kit programs at other campuses affiliated to the NUS. Additionally, the University of Melbourne's proposed FlexAP plan received considerable attention. A number of policies blanketly opposed to restructures in general, and FlexAP in particular, were brought before conference floor. Though the More! delegation had proposed a policy on restructures, *The Right Approach to Cuts and*

Restructures, that would have implored the NUS to critically assess these matters to determine its opposition or support, this policy did not reach discussion on conference floor.

Overall, some positive outcomes for students generally, and at the University of Melbourne, came from the National Conference. However, there seemed to be persistent structural issues, in addition to consistently inappropriate behaviour on display.

Desiree Cai

NUS National Conference (NatCon) which was held from the 12th to 15th of December at the Deakin University Warrun Ponds campus, was a great learning experience for me as an observer. It was useful in helping me understand some of the internal functioning of the National Union of Students, which is the peak representative body for university students in Australia. During the conference, student attendees also discussed and voted on policy written by students, which will ideally form the basis of campaigns and actions taken by the different departments and National Office Bearers for the next year. The conference was also a great experience as I was able to speak on some of the policy that I supported, and meet with people from many student unions around Australia and learn about some of the campaigns they were running how their unions functioned.

Policy discussed at the conference was broken into different individual chapters for the different departments of the National Union. Some specific issues were raised at the conference for the different departments within these chapters. Within the discussion around the women's department, the sexual assault campaign was a focus, which aims to raise awareness around sexual assault on campus and provide better resources for students at university for reporting and maintaining safety on campus. This specific issue was discussed on length and a more intersectional approach to the sexual assault campaign was also focused on in discussions in the conference. The importance of conferences for autonomous departments including NOWSA for Women's and the People of Colour conference was also highlighted in discussion during conference. These conferences were flagged as an important way that departments can organise nationally. Conferences like the People of Colour conference would be particularly useful for UMSU to participate in during the upcoming year, especially seeing as the People of Colour Department is a newly established one. As well as learning about NUS as an organisation, the conference provided a great opportunity to meet students from different universities and student organisations all over Australia. Throughout the week, I was able to talk to student representatives from universities in Western Australia, Adelaide, Queensland, NSW, as well as students from other Victorian Campuses including Monash and LaTrobe University.

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UMSU can take direction from, or directly contribute to various campaigns that the National Union will be running next year, many of which were discussed at Nat-Con. I'm sure many of the issues raised at Nat-Con, which are important to students, will come up in the operations of UMSU for the next year. Our student Union will have the opportunity to liaise and work with the National Departments of NUS on many different campaigns throughout the year. In the National Education Department, the National Day of Action to demonstrate against cuts to education in general, from government deregulation of degrees to cuts to services on campuses, will be a focus and so UMSU offices, especially the education offices should be active in promoting this campaign. In the Women's Department, it seems the National Union will be giving focusing on the campaign against sexual assault, especially in the wake of the recent survey ran by the Australian Human Rights Commission into Sexual Assault on Campus. Therefore it seems like this is a pertinent issue at this time particularly, and the UMSU women's department is well placed in order to address the safety of students on campus, and improve services around dealing with sexual assault.

While there have been valid criticisms about the way NUS and NatCon is run, going to the conference has showed me that it is important for UMSU to remain engaged and cooperate with the National Union of Students. There is a lot of potential for an organising body such as NUS to run great campaigns that will benefit all students in all areas from education to welfare and wellbeing, safety on campus, to reporting and dealing with discrimination for marginalised students. Our Student Union should be active and involved within these campaigns as they will benefit students at the University of Melbourne, and stronger campaigns from the national union translates to better outcomes for all students. There is a lot to learn from other campaigns and events run by other universities too, and so overall NatCon was a great opportunity to learn from and build UMSU.