

Impacts of COVID-19 on SSAF at VU

VU allocates Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) across several services and programs that provide student services and support. This allocation includes SSAF for VU's peak student organisations, clubs and societies.

The SSAF budget was determined in late 2019 to align with forecast student load for 2020. COVID-19 has impacted SSAF income due to a decline in anticipated student load. However, the quality and breadth of services to students is being sustained, albeit with changes to the delivery mode having moved our institution to digitally supported remote learning during Victoria's restrictions and lockdowns during the pandemic. We are providing all services as usual to students regardless of our shift to digitally supported remote learning and the adoption of digital technology across the institution to support students. We have increased our programs, activities and services where possible to support this new mode.

The opportunity to engage with students via digital platforms has in some service areas expanded our reach to students, across wider cohorts. An example of this is demonstrated by our careers/employment service, VU Employ, where career counselling has increased by 400% to date since the first Victorian lockdown earlier in 2020 (i.e. Block 2, 2020 student numbers were 189 and Winter Block that recently concluded had 810 students).

Services and programs continuing to be supported by SSAF in 2020 are:

- Student Advising (support and student success planning)
- Student Life & Leadership (orientation, leadership, student representation, events, conferences, volunteering, media)
- Student Media
- Student Wellbeing (Counselling, Advocacy, Student Welfare Support)
- VU Sport (sport and recreational activities)
- Employability & Success (employment and careers support, careers counselling, workshops and skill development)
- [Student Experience Initiative Grants](#)

VU peak student organisations and student clubs/societies supported by SSAF:

- Victoria University Postgraduate Association (VUPA)
- Victoria University Student Union (VUSU)
- VU's International Student Association (ISA) (VUSU affiliate)
- [Student Clubs and Societies](#)

Additional services and programs supported via SSAF in response to Covid-19:

- New *Leading Remote Teams* workshops developed and delivered in response to student feedback and requests to offer assistance for students who work and study remotely. This 2-hour learning module offered to students in addition to the standard modules of our Student Leadership program.
- In-class workshops (as requested) conducted with students via Zoom to enhance student skills and support for coping during COVID-19. *Managing Finances* has been the primary topic we are supporting students with during class sessions.
- All Student Life programs have been redesigned to conform to remote delivery platforms are being offered via digital technology (e.g. orientation, virtual O'Fest activities).
- Provision of pre-recorded information to help students in advance of their online orientation program and to provide support tools for the commencement of their studies. The *Getting Connected* videos are produced with Student Mentors and Student Advisors and have been a key feature of our student welcome activities.
- A new week-long program of, remotely delivered, Winter O-Fest and Student Welcome and Orientation activities were delivered in July. These included: yoga classes, Zumba lessons, Bollywood and hip hop dance classes, caricature sessions, cyber-savvy sessions, student clubs sessions and games rooms.
- Specialist training for Student Advocates, to assist with VU's Covid-19 Student Support Fund, has been provided so they may assist with student advising services for financial welfare/hardship.
- Establishment of a new program called *The Self-Care Series*, delivered by our qualified team of student Counsellors. 16 online information sessions to 298 unique students have been delivered to date including:
 - 8 Orientation Talks
 - 1 Webinar for VU UniLodge residents
 - 1 International Student Orientation Session
 - 6 Webinars for students
- Yarnathon (a supportive knitting circle for international students) has been delivered most weeks via Zoom.
- Scale-up of 1:1, group and drop-in services for students from qualified Career Counsellors to provide specialist programs and advice on career planning, employment and student placement (WIL). 1,377 student engagements have been reported through this new digital service offering to date.
- *Café International* is a new initiative for international students. It is an informal weekly catch up via Zoom that encourages social engagement and connection amongst international students during COVID-19 and the restrictions of Victoria's lockdowns in our community.