

ANUSA at 50

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Stories of ANUSA's history are buried in archival boxes, in the memories of alumni and in old dusty (but now digitised) editions of Woroni. Digging through some of these, a picture of ANUSA begins to emerge. ANUSA was and continues to be the representative body for undergraduate students at ANU. It is responsible for student welfare, advocacy and the social life of undergraduates. While some things have changed over the years, many have not, and there is strong continuity at ANUSA. Here is a brief overview of some of the highlights and notable moments of 50 plus years of ANUSA.

ANUSA began when the ANU began accepting undergraduate students in 1960. In the early 1960s, ANU was largely dominated by older, part-time students who did not spend significant amounts of time on campus. However, it wasn't long before younger, full-time students, many of whom lived on campus, became the majority of undergraduates.

O-Week and Bush Week

ANUSA was responsible for O-Week each year. Students could attend introductory lectures, join clubs and societies, tour Canberra's bars and restaurants and attend social activities. For many years, ANUSA produced an O-Week handbook for new students with advice and information on student lifestyles, safe sex, drugs, university politics as well as international events.

Bush Week was first held in 1961. Its original aim was to, 'remind students of their debt to the pioneers of this nation and of the part played by all under-privileged workers of today; to provide an occasion for student frivolity, and to raise (if possible) funds for charity'. It was a week of frivolity and a time for students to 'run riot'. Early activities included a Bush Ball, a wood chopping competition, a procession or 'prosh' through Civic and a pilgrimage to the Bungendore pub. A scavenger hunt led to a variety of items being pilfered, including signs from around the city. In 1965, this included seven Dobell paintings from the War Memorial. A feud with Royal Military College in 1963-4 saw a car burnt on the Duntroon parade ground, and a retaliation attack on Bruce Hall. Subsequent Bush Week's included Amnesty activities with the RMC.

Clubs and Societies

ANUSA provides funding for various Clubs and Societies on campus. Clubs and societies have changed over the years, but have included: the ANU Labour Club, the ANU Liberals, the ANU Left Group, Wimmin on Campus, CampUs Homosexuals, Students for a Democratic Society, ANU Debating, AbSchol (Aboriginal Scholarship) as well as many language groups and various sporting clubs. As more international students joined ANU, national societies, such as the Malaysian Students Organisation, were established. Benefits of affiliation with ANUSA included "finances for meetings and guest speakers; AGM's; conference travel fees; occasional wine and

cheese, and other money for worthwhile projects, e.g. publications, street theatre, excursions.”(Woroni, 1984).

Departments

While there had long been clubs and societies for various groups and causes, ANUSA officially began to incorporate and formalise the departments into its structure in the 1990s. For example, the Women’s Department was created in 1993, and the Rapunzel Room – a safe space for women on campus - was opened. In 1994, the Sexuality Department - renamed the *Queer Department in 2012 - was established. Other departments have been created more recently, such as the Disabilities and Indigenous Departments in 2006, and the International Students Department in 2007. Most recently, the Ethnocultural Department was created in 2016.

Groups advocating for women and queer students had existed previously under many names, including Homosexuals on Campus (1977) and Wimmin on Campus (1979). The Sexualities Department was officially created in 1994, but faced such funding shortages that a complementary interest society – the Jellybabies – was maintained to gain extra funding. This allowed a number of Balls, support for the University of Canberra’s LGBTQIA group and contributions to Querelle, a national queer publication. Becoming a department meant more funding from union fees as well as department officers as representatives within ANUSA.

All the departments have been active in both student advocacy and activism – contributing to campaigns directed at the university as well as externally. These have included those against nuclear power and for divestment of shares in fossil fuel industry (the Environment Collective); for reproductive choice and against gendered violence (Women’s); for LGBTQIA rights (*Queer); and for disability rights and accessibility (Disabilities). The Women’s Department published annual handbooks for many years, which included articles on a range of topics and a list of local accessible women’s services. .

Student Media

Until 2011 ANUSA was also responsible for student media on campus. This included the student paper Woroni, as well as ANU Radio. Woroni began in 1950 as the student newspaper for Canberra University College (CUC) and continued to be the student mouthpiece of the amalgamated ANU and CUC. From 1960-2010 Woroni was published by ANUSA, but in 2011 became independent. It is now published by ANU Student Media. The pages of Woroni are filled with campus news, satire, controversy and politicking. Woroni was crucial in connecting students across the university through the sharing of ideas as well as through broadcasting news and events.

ANU Radio began in 1973 and was only broadcast through the ANU Halls and the Union. It became community broadcaster 2XX FM in 1976. From music to politics, campus news and poetry, 2XX was another mouthpiece for ANU Students. Shows in 1988 included the ANUSA

show, the Feminist Broadcasting Collective, the World News Round Up and Wot's On Around Town. 2XX continues today as a Canberra community radio station.

Activism and Apathy

Throughout their time, ANU students have staged protests against Vietnam, nuclear power, uranium mining; marched at the tent embassy and held rallies for peace. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw student protests focussed on global issues. Students protested the Vietnam War, with sit-ins, teach-ins, and demonstrations. The first anti-Vietnam sit-in was held on Alinga St in 1965 and the first teach-in took place in Childers Hall in 1966. ANU students received global attention with their protests against US President LBJ's visit to Canberra in 1966. A photograph of ANU student Megan Stoyles in a 'Make Love Not War' tshirt made it into *Time Magazine*. Many of these protests were not organised by ANUSA, but instead by the ANU Labour Club and the Vietnam Action Committee. For a time the organising hub was a house in Ainslie, 30 Canning St.

In the 1970s, ANU students protested the 1971 Springbok tour and in 1972 were involved in the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. Later in the decade, protests were more internally targeted. 1974-5 were labeled 'The Troubles' at ANU and included demands for staff/student control of course content, student choice of the means of assessment, an end to over crowded classes, representation of non academic workers on Council, and the institution of a Women's Studies course at the ANU. When these demands weren't met, students occupied the Chancelry in April 1974.

Student housing was also an ongoing issue, as supply for low cost housing did not meet the growing demand. In 1980, students occupied 27 Brian Lewis Crescent on the ANU Campus, a house that had been previously used for furniture storage. They requested that more campus accommodation be provided for undergraduate students from the University's housing stock. For several years ANUSA ran *The Cottage* at 16 Balmain Crescent. This house functioned as both crisis accommodation for ANU students and as a drop in centre.

The Education Collective was active in the late 1970s and early 1980s, launching a campaign against the public publishing of results outside Chifley, which Irving Goffman described as a 'public derogation ceremony'. They also distribute questionnaires on courses – surveying students on their views and opinions and then publishing them in the 'Counter Course Handbooks and Alternative Law Handbooks'. These student-published course reviews were the hard fought precursor to SELTS.

Student fees and student government support (or lack thereof) were often cause for discontent and protest. Voluntary student unionism, rises in course fees, compulsory student amenity fees and the reduction of scholarships and student welfare payments were all causes of concern. In 1989, HECS was introduced and was met by protests. More protests around fees followed in the 1990s. In 1994, there was an 8 day occupation of the Chancelry by 150 students when the fee for the diploma of legal practice rose to \$5000. In the late 1990s and 2000s, students

protested the introduction of GST in 1999, the Iraq War in 2003 and met the abolition of voluntary student unionism in 2006 with fierce protests. Other notable recent protests include those against the cuts to the School of Music in 2011, ANU's investment in fossil fuels and against deregulation of universities in 2014. This included a 'read-in' outside the Chancery.

As suggested above, while ANUSA was sometimes behind this student activism at ANU, oftentimes it came instead from independent student groups less constrained by bureaucracy and infighting. In fact, ANUSA has remained rather conservative and even voted to briefly disband itself in 1971. An 'anonymous' contributor to the 1967 *Current Affairs Bulletin* wrote that due to its location, ANU, 'might well have been expected to prove the most dynamic and involved campus in the country,' but 'undergraduate life is distinguished by its apathy, conservatism and indifference to national causes'. Often, activism was conducted by a vocal minority of students and more general student apathy was constantly bemoaned - Woroni after Woroni has urged students to be more engaged in both Australian and world politics.

Over the past 50 years, ANUSA has seen both continuity and change. Much of its advocacy and representation is not noted here but has been conducted without fanfare. The students involved in ANUSA were always a small but vocal minority of the student body.

The above summary risks suggesting that *all* student life and activism at ANU was through ANUSA. It is important to note, however, that many action and activity was carried out by independent students groups and faced both criticism and apathy from the broader student body. There was also significant and continued opposition to ANUSA and to student unionism by ANU students over the years.

Despite this, ANUSA has survived 50 years. Both it and ANU students have a solid history of advocating for the rights of students academically and politically, as well as supporting a vibrant social life on campus. They both continue to do so.