

From: [Kaitlyn Handreck](#)
To: [COFG](#)
Subject: Deakin University Cults Statement.
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Attachments: [Outlook-qjyu0o3.png](#)
[Cults on Campus Statement.docx](#)

To the committee,

Please see attached the letter that will be sent to Deakin University Students in the coming weeks, which I have written as the Assistant General Secretary of DUSA.

It will be put onto a Deakin Blog, and sent to students, I believe via email or our Cloud site.

The reason that I wrote this was because I became entangled with the Shincheonji cult in my first year of uni, and I wanted to make sure that students are aware of high-control groups on campus and are aware of the pathways to leave if they need to.

This was not the only reason that this has been written up. We had had reports to Deakin Security and Safer Community to report instances of people being targeted or recruited on campus, at both Geelong and Burwood campuses. I had also heard of one incident on Warrnambool campus.

I know of four students (including myself) directly who were recruited in Geelong (at separate times), and one student personally who reached out to me, but there have been so many more!

I think that the advocacy from DUSA is imperative when dealing with these cases. Having a student association to back up students and to make them aware of these groups is important to make sure that we don't have students entangled in cults, because, speaking from experience, it can be a weird and confusing experience, and it's important for people who have been involved to know that there are people who can support them through it.

I'll wrap up this email to say thank you to the committee for investigating this issue- it's something close to my heart and I have a tremendous amount of respect for you for exploring this.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

Kind Regards,

Kaitlyn Handreck

Assistant General Secretary



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Dear Students,

Welcome to the start of a new year! We're excited to work alongside you and support you throughout your time at Deakin.

We are writing to raise awareness about the increasing presence of high-control religious groups (often referred to as cults) operating around university campuses, including Burwood, Waterfront, Waurin Ponds, and Warrnambool.

One group we want to specifically alert students to is Shincheonji (SCJ). Shincheonji is a South Korea-based doomsday religious cult founded in the 1980s. Its leader, Lee Man-Hee, claims to be the second coming of Jesus Christ. The group is widely known for using fear-based teachings, secrecy, and manipulation, including claims that the world is ending and that only followers of Lee Man-Hee will be saved.

While we have received an increasing number of reports from students who have been impacted by Shincheonji, it is important to note that this is not the only high-control group students may encounter.

Our goal is not to create fear, but to equip students with information so you can recognise concerning behaviours, protect yourself and others, and know where to seek help if needed.

Recruitment

A Deakin student who asked to remain anonymous shared their experience of being recruited into Shincheonji:

“They recruit people who are looking to make friends. They meet you in places where you do normal life things — at uni, bus stops, car parks. I was even recruited at my church.”

Students have reported that recruiters often:

- Approach people casually, asking for directions or striking up friendly conversation
- Show strong interest in getting to know you personally
- Ask questions such as »Are you affiliated with a church?« or »Have you ever done Bible study?«
- Use “love-bombing” tactics, such as constant messaging, frequent catchups, and excessive attention

Recruitment often feels harmless at first and may be framed as friendship, mentorship, or study support.

How to notice you may be in a cult

It's important to emphasise that not all religious groups are cults. Deakin University Student Association (DUSA) is affiliated with several faith-based clubs on campus that are transparent, voluntary, and safe.

However, warning signs that a group may be a cult include:

- Recruiters asking detailed questions about your faith, background, family, or vulnerabilities
- Invitations to frequent "Bible studies" or classes (often 2–3 times per week or more)
- Pressure to prioritise the group over your studies, work, family, or friends
- Encouragement to distrust parents, friends, or religious leaders outside the group
- Secrecy about the group's true name, church, or organisational affiliation
- Being told that you are being taught "special" or "hidden" knowledge

Common Shincheonji-specific red flags

Students involved with Shincheonji have reported:

- Phrases such as »Secrets.of.the.Kingdom.of.Heaven«, »The.Seed«
- Telling you that the studies will help you learn the bible in the year
- Being told not to tell family or friends about lessons
- One-on-one sessions increasing if you begin asking too many questions
- Frequent calls or messages if you miss classes
- Strong emotional pressure to continue participation

If you or someone you know needs support

If you have joined a cult, or think you might be involved in one, you are not alone, and there is absolutely no reason to feel shame. These groups use manipulation and psychological pressure, and support is available.

Deakin support services

- **Chaplaincy & Spiritual Wellbeing**

Confidential, non-judgemental support regardless of your faith or beliefs.

- Burwood: LC1.030

- Warrnambool: F1.03

Website: <https://www.deakin.edu.au/students/student-life-and->

[services/health-wellbeing-and-safety/hwb/spiritual-wellbeing/our-chaplains](https://www.deakin.edu.au/services/health-wellbeing-and-safety/hwb/spiritual-wellbeing/our-chaplains)

- **DUSA Advocacy**
Independent support for students navigating difficult situations, including coercion or exploitation.
Website: <https://www.dusa.org.au/advocacy>
- **DUSA Welfare**
Email: dusa-vp-welfare@deakin.edu.au
- **Deakin Counselling Services**
Free, confidential counselling for all Deakin students.
Website: <https://www.deakin.edu.au/students/health-and-wellbeing/counselling>
Phone: 1300 390 930
- **Safer Community**
Support for students experiencing harassment, coercion, or unsafe situations.
Website: <https://www.deakin.edu.au/students/student-life-and-services/health-wellbeing-and-safety/safety-security/safer-community>
Email: safercommunity@deakin.edu.au

Any suspicious behaviour (including cult recruitment activity) observed on campus can be referred to Security, either at the time or later. This can be done on the SafeZone App or by calling Security on 1800 062 579.

If you are ever unsure about a group, or worried about a friend, trust your instincts and reach out early. Support is available, and you deserve to feel safe, respected, and informed during your time at university.

Warm regards,

Deakin University Student Association