

Findings of a flash survey done on increased cult activity on the University of Melbourne Parkville Campus

This survey was open for one hour during a coffee catchup done by UMSU Education in the SWOTVAC period (non-teaching week before exams). It has 27 responses with 21 undergraduate, 5 postgraduate and 1 phd student. It has an almost even split between domestic and International students with 13-14 respectively.

1. Out of 27 students who answered the survey, 8 students responded yes and 2 students responded maybe to the question- 'To the best of your knowledge have you been approached by a member of a cult on campus?'

2. Some key quotations from the survey:

"I was studying for exams in the Arts and Culture building. A Chinese man came up to me and started asking me questions. He eventually moved the conversation on to how his life in China was godless, how he found Jesus in Australia and invited me to his bible study. He left me with a flyer"

- Anonymous student at Unimelb

"This was like 2 years ago ish they came up and started asking about where's a good place to study at uni, or restaurant recommendations, but after talking to them for a while I realised that they weren't even interested in library or food recommendations, but rather trying to get to know you more and ask quit[e] personal questions. This was at South lawn"

- Anonymous student at Unimelb

"They are relentless"

- Anonymous student at Unimelb

3. When asked how they think this situation could be improved on, some answers included:

“Greater levels of information and support for the services that students approach”

“More information about cults in induction to education institutions in Victoria. More advice for dealing with friends/family being drawn into a cult.”

“Spread more awareness, ideally visibly [and] also identify[ing] them officially so they can be sanctioned. Help victims financially”

- Anonymous students at Unimelb

4. Conclusion and Further Action

From this short survey it is hard to draw wider conclusions, but the fact that 8 students out of 27 in one afternoon had had an interaction with a cult, or a group or a member they assessed as one, is a sign of a bigger problem. We urge the university or the government to carry out a wider survey if they require more student input during study period or o-week next year.

However, as was highlighted by some students in the survey, providing more resources to organizations often approached by students, such as UMSU (and UMSU International), GSA or the chaplaincy service, and increasing awareness and visibility of both the issue and also the available help services will go a long way in fixing this issue. Students also called for a need for a stricter law and enforced regulation around this for a longer course of action.