

QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme

Supported by QUT's Learning Potential Fund

2009 winner of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council Program Award



The award-winning QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme assists thousands of low-income students each year.

The Scheme is made possible because of support from QUT's Learning Potential Fund.

This booklet contains the submission to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council which resulted in the award.

It describes the Scheme and its positive impact on students.

QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme

Winner 2009 Australian Learning and Teaching Council Program Award

In 2009, the QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme won an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Award in the category of 'Programs that Enhance Learning — Services Supporting Student Learning'.

The programs that receive these national awards must have demonstrated their effectiveness through rigorous evaluation and are considered to set benchmarks for similar activities in other institutions. In 2009, only 10 Awards for 'Programs that Enhance Learning' were allocated throughout Australia. The QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme was one of only two Queensland recipients for this category and the only program in Australia in the sub-category of 'Services Supporting Student Learning'. The team members awarded include Mary Kelly, QUT Equity Director, Anna King, Beth Standing, Melanie Syron and Lilijana Simic.

The QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme is made possible by the Learning Potential Fund, QUT's perpetual fund to assist low-income students. Each year, the interest earned from the Fund is directed towards scholarships and bursaries for low-income students.

This document, which is the submission to the ALTC for the Award, describes the details of the Scholarships Scheme and its positive impact on students.

For further information on anything contained in this submission or the QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme please contact Equity Services on 07 3138 2689 or email equity.enq@qut.edu.au



'Getting an Equity Scholarship made a big difference to reducing my financial stress and giving me more time to study. It helps to know that QUT looks after and supports students through this Scheme and the Learning Potential Fund.'

**Jennifer Turpin
Bachelor of Justice**

Front cover photograph (left to right):
Mary Kelly, QUT Equity Director; Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard; Anna King, Senior Project Officer – Scholarships; Melanie Syron, QUT Oodgeroo Unit.

QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme

Synopsis

The QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme (the Program) assists low-income students with the costs of student life, so that they can give more time and attention to their studies and better pass and complete their degrees.

It is conceived of and implemented as a learning program, not a welfare program. Having time, a clear head, and a 'sense of belonging' are pre-requisites for successful learning. This Program is focused on providing that opportunity for some of our most vulnerable students, to enable them to flourish as learners. In existence since 1999, the Program has grown significantly, and is now the largest of its kind in Australia. Over 3000 low-income students currently receive a needs-based scholarship or bursary. These students come from all equity groups including students with a disability, regional and remote students, and Indigenous students and those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

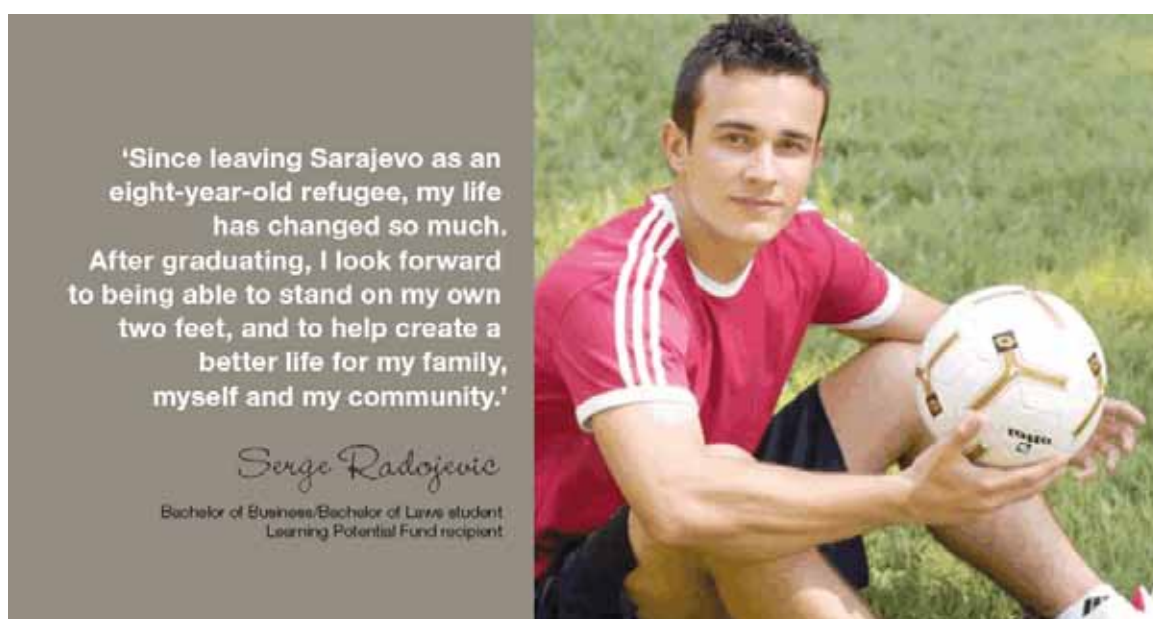
Five years of student survey results and data analysis outcomes confirms the retention impact, with scholarship-holders having attrition rates 35% lower than other students. This effect is consistent across all scholarship types, all equity groups, and for both commencing and continuing students. Analysis reveals that students use their scholarship money to buy books and living essentials or to reduce their paid work hours. They report having less stress and more time, as well as a heightened sense of connectedness to the University. It is this combination of factors that leads to a proven increase in retention, and a reported improvement in academic results.

The Program also contributes to the recruitment of low-income students through encouraging such students to persist with their enrolments, and as a device to lift engagement with low-income schools and challenge the myth that university is unaffordable. It is a crucial part of a wider QUT agenda to build aspiration and widen participation.

The Program is located organisationally within an integrated raft of other financial support measures provided across the University. The Program's distinctive features include its integration into a long-term plan to widen participation, supported and generously funded by the University Council; its poverty-based individualised selection methodology; and its connection with a perpetual fund (the Learning Potential Fund).

The conceptual underpinnings of the scheme are grounded in decades of research documenting the intransigent correlation between poverty, low achievement and limited access to educational opportunity.

The Program will continue to play a central role in QUT's efforts to boost the recruitment and retention of low-income students.



Selection Criteria

1. Distinctiveness, coherence and clarity of purpose

Purpose

The purpose of the QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme (the Program) is to assist low-income students with the costs of student life, so that they can give more time and attention to their studies and better pass and complete their degrees. Since its inception, over 8,000 students have benefited from this Program.

The clear focus on learning as the Program's core purpose arises from an equally clear approach to low-income students, which considers the whole person and not merely the customer, the client, the learner, the business unit, or a deficit-based 'problem' to be managed.

The approach is based on a belief that low-income students are motivated and capable people whose lives are made complex by social and financial hardship. Alleviating some of that hardship enables them to flourish as learners.

A person cannot focus on study if they are working excessive hours in employment to make ends meet; if they are constantly pre-occupied with juggling bills; if they cannot afford books, a computer or transport to campus; if their carer responsibilities leave them no time to study; and especially if they feel their university doesn't seem to care about their issues.

Having time, a clear head, and a 'sense of belonging' are pre-requisites for successful study, and this Program is focused on providing that opportunity for some of QUT's most vulnerable students.

This scholarship truly is the difference between my studying and not. It is difficult to describe our gratitude for this award, but to a low-income family with no other current source of financial support for educational expenses, this is huge and is very encouraging. As we work towards breaking the poverty cycle that, in our family, spans generations this gives us a chance to pursue the tertiary study option. As my thirteen year old son put it 'Looks like someone has finally recognised your true potential, Mum.' Amazing boy and an amazing gift. We are truly grateful.

Nerrin, 2007

The University has been steadfast in pursuing this clear purpose, as the Program has been operating in one form or another since 1999, significantly growing in scale from 2004. Its purpose over this time has remained unchanged, and arose in the first instance

from the University's social justice policy and associated strategic plan priorities.

The long-standing nature of the Program is one of its distinctive features.

Integration with broader plan

The Program is integrated within a four-point plan, endorsed and funded by University Council in 2004, to:

support participation and retention in QUT by individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds across four broad categories:

Creating Aspiration: *including marketing/outreach to low-income schools and neighbourhoods and on-site visits to de-mystify university;*

Opening the Door: *including admission mechanisms which take account of disadvantage and its depressing effect on school results/achievement;*

Helping with Costs: *scholarships, bursaries and other financial support measures such as book vouchers, photocopy cards, and student contribution exemptions or discounts; and*

Supporting Enrolled Students: *extra support for students whose retention rates are low via First-Year Experience programs, buddy schemes, mentoring and other strategies.*

University Council, February 2004

The University Council set aside \$3 million per year to fund this integrated effort, over \$2 million of which goes to the scholarship scheme each year. This four-point plan gives the Program coherence. The plan is based on the belief that barriers to the participation and success of low-income students are a complex mix of issues—affordability, cultural/family issues, awareness and achievement—and that an integrated long-term effort across the four categories is required in order to effect change. Innovative at the time, such thinking has since become mainstream.

This four-point plan, like the Program itself, arises from an understanding of poverty and disadvantage and its intersection with educational opportunity and learning outcomes. As an organising device, it has provided a concept map within which the steady growth of the Program and a suite of associated, aspiration-building outreach activities have found coherence. It has helped us to define the difference between competitive recruitment activities aimed at promoting QUT, and 'widening participation' activities aimed at promoting post-school study (see SM9 and SM10). In particular, the four-point plan has prevented the University from

relying on scholarships alone as a means of recruiting and supporting low-income students.

Instead we have used scholarships not just to help students with costs, but to create interest from and engagement with prospective students; to challenge myths of un-affordability; and as an attention-seeking device for target cohorts. For example, for three years (2005–2007) school-of-origin scholarships were made available to 35 target schools—all low-income urban high schools. The application rates from these schools rose, as did the degree of engagement with on-campus activities. Similarly when school-of-origin scholarships were replaced with a scholarship guarantee for Q-Step¹, Indigenous and The Smith Family (TSF) students, the number of applications for special entry doubled, indicating that the existence of the scholarship guarantee triggered a more systematic approach to the admissions issue.

Our understanding of the precise role scholarships can play in ‘creating aspiration’ has emerged from this context, and a paper focused on this issue was presented at the *Enhancing Student Success Conference* in Newcastle in 2008 (see References, Kelly & King, 2008). Without the four-point plan the Program would be useful, but of narrow impact. Within the four-point plan, the Program becomes a seamless part of a broader, more significant agenda of widening participation, and contributes to integrating the plan through the multiple roles scholarships can play.

The Bradley Review (2008), with its emphasis on ‘a new more sophisticated form of outreach’ encompassing ‘awareness, aspiration and attainment’, has echoed QUT’s integrated approach.

The University Council established the scholarships and outreach fund by resolution in 2004, and re-affirmed its decision in 2007. Members of Council take a direct interest by participating in the scholarships selection panel and in the work of the Learning Potential Fund. While the Program is considered to be a flagship for the University’s social justice efforts, it is particularly pleasing to also note the very positive impact it has on significantly reducing the attrition rate for scholarship holders.

Major General (Retd) Peter Arnison,
AC, CVO
Chancellor, QUT

The integrated approach, endorsed and funded at the highest level of University governance, is a distinctive, and, we believe, unique feature of the Program.

Coordination

The Program is coordinated with a suite of other financial support measures, such as emergency loans and grants, free computers and money management advice, which are integrated operationally and conceptually to cover all low-income student needs. This coordination involves Faculties, Divisions, the Student Guild, The Smith Family and alumni.

These measures include a mix of University-wide point-in-time supports such as the Program, and Faculty/Division-based just-in-time supports such as loans/grants, book vouchers, grants for high-cost practicums, grants for summer school, computers and dedicated support staff in each Faculty. Operational coherence is provided through a University-wide committee, the Low-income Student Support Committee, made up of the Low-Income Student Contact Officer from each of the nine faculties, plus key providers from the Divisions. The object of the coordination is to have a seamless, highly visible, practical and de-stigmatised approach to financial support so that it is simple and dignified for students to access.

The scholarship guarantee for The Smith Family students is part of a comprehensive agreement between TSF and QUT. The support QUT provides to disadvantaged students complements the work being done by TSF and together we work to build aspiration for post-school study amongst some of Queensland’s most disadvantaged young people. From working in partnership with the University since 2005, I appreciate how the scholarship program is coordinated so that our students feel supported both practically and personally.

Damian Foley, General Manager,
The Smith Family (Queensland)

Another element of coordination is within the Program itself. All but a small number of equity-related scholarships and bursaries, whether funded by the Commonwealth, the University or individual faculties, are accessed by one application process. This process also accommodates a free computer scheme, scholarship guarantees for certain cohorts, and some one-off externally-funded products such as the Australian South Sea Islander Scholarship.

The free computer scheme is aimed at those students who are too poor to buy their own computer and are unable to use on-campus labs due to distance, disability or carer responsibilities. Second-hand hardware is sourced when QUT computers are upgraded, with staff from the relevant Division cleaning and revamping machines, installing modems, loading

¹ The Q-Step program is an alternative entry program for low-income students offering a 3 OP (Overall Position) or 6 Rank bonus to students.

free software, and providing a free dial-up connection. An internet-connected computer at home is indispensable for a time-poor, cash-poor student, and contributes to relieving their daily struggle, making learning convenient and providing them more time on task.

Thank you very much for awarding me a Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarship and a computer. It has taken a lot of travelling costs and also time spent travelling...I shall put the money and computer to good use.

Kerry, 2006

I have been allocated a computer through the scholarship scheme and I would like to say thank you very much it is certainly very much appreciated. This will now allow me to complete a major component of my studies from home.

Shirley, 2008

Thank you so much for making available computers to struggling students. When my computer broke down I was unsure how I would manage to complete my studies. I am extremely grateful for your support and I love my new computer.

Lisa, 2008

Since 2003, 1750 computers have been given to students through the Program.

The technical staff who work in partnership with the Equity Section to manage the computer element of the Program are very enthusiastic and committed and have won a University service award for their efforts (see SM11).

From a student's point of view, the Program's coordination of multiple elements creates a 'one-stop shop' that simplifies access to these supports.

Distinctive selection methodology

A distinctive feature of the Program is the design of the criterion-referenced selection methodology, developed by QUT and based on academic research and practitioner experience. This design allows for large numbers of applicants to be ranked solely on the basis of need, rather than by proxy measures such as Centrelink status, or by tertiary entrance scores. Applicants provide detailed evidence of their income, expenditure and life circumstances, and are allocated scores for various parameters that are aggregated to derive a total score. All parameters require supporting evidence before scores are allocated.

The Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee study for Universities Australia, *Paying their Way* (2001), and the follow-up *Australian Student Finances Survey* (2006)

both confirmed the 'catch 22' that many low-income students experience, whereby their attempts to meet the educational and living costs associated with being a student (through long hours of paid work) are undermining the amount of time and attention they can give to their studies. The QUT selection methodology, consequently, measures not just how 'cash-poor' applicants are, but also how 'time-poor' they are through parameters such as caring for others, having a disability and so on.

Another feature is open-ended questions and free text provided by the applicant, one of which relates to the impact of financial hardship on their daily life. This free text is scored using a range of core and supplementary indicators derived from research (e.g. cannot pay rent on time, went without meals) (Saunders, 2004). From this, a full picture of the impact of poverty on the applicant is possible, which allows for fine-grained distinctions between students who may have similar cash flow profiles but very different lived experiences of financial deprivation. Comparability of scoring on the qualitative, criterion-based evidence is maintained through assessor training, a detailed scoring guide, and cross-marking (see SM8).

Academic merit is not used as a scholarship selection criterion, in part because QUT's admission standards are relatively high overall, but also because of the correlation between poverty and low achievement in Australian schooling (McGaw, 2007). With many more applicants than there are scholarships, our Program prioritises applicants by poverty, rather than by results.

SM6 shows a de-identified page of selected applicants from a larger report considered by the Scholarship Selection Panel. Applicants are ranked by total score, and sub-ranked by the Financial Hardship Score derived from the free text. QUT believes the impact effects of the scholarships, such as lower attrition and a heightened sense of belonging, are linked to this careful selection methodology.

The purely needs-based selection methodology and the use of qualitative text are distinctive features of the Program. It has been shared with the higher education sector and adapted by other universities. Most recently—for 2009—Queensland's eight public universities co-designed a state-wide application and selection process for use by the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC), and many of QUT's design features were incorporated in that joint effort.

Integration with a permanent fund

The Program is integrated into a futures-oriented philanthropic effort through the Learning Potential Fund (LPF)—an endowed, perpetual fund set up in 1999 to provide a permanent base of scholarships for low-income students. Made up of donations from alumni, staff, members of the public and the University,

interest earned from this fund contributes to the overall equity scholarship budget, and in due course will be the sole source of funds.

Recipients are aware that their scholarship is part-funded by the LPF, and consequently many become engaged in fund-raising activities (see SM3 and SM4). The LPF was the first fund of its type in the sector and an informal survey suggests it is the largest. It provides a whole-of-lifecycle approach for low-income students in that it allows them to become involved after they have left university.

It is common for recipients to spontaneously offer to become donors after graduation, as they have been both surprised and touched by the idea of alumni helping current students.

As a mature age student, I was unable to receive Austudy, and lived on my partner's casual income. The money received from my scholarship allowed me to pay for text books, course materials, and everyday living expenses whilst pursuing my degree. Without financial assistance, I would have been unable to continue studying.

I would also like to thank the generous benefactors who contribute to the QUT Equity fund, to make these scholarships possible. After experiencing the benefits of these scholarships first hand, it is my desire to contribute to the fund once I am established in my chosen profession, so that I may 'give back' to the university to assist other students in need.

Shirley, 2008

QUT has sought to become systematic about this 'cycle of giving' and successfully bid for a grant from the Diversity and Structural Adjustment (DASA) fund in 2008 (\$1.1m). The grant includes a philanthropic element establishing a two-year project to formalise contact with the 5,000 graduates who have benefited from the LPF, and to re-engage them as mentors, champions or donors to assist current low-income students.

This integration with a perpetual, endowed fund involving former recipients is a distinctive, if not unique, aspect of the Program.

Systematic evaluation

The systematic evaluation of the Program's impact is linked to its purpose and has been focused on the retention and recruitment effects of scholarship-holding by way of annual student surveys and data analysis each year since 2005.

The student survey of recipients has been the same since 2005, thus producing time-series data on

the impact of scholarship-holding on study; retention/attrition; a 'sense of belonging'; recruitment; Centrelink benefits; awareness of the Program; and business process improvements. SM7 shows one page of the 2008 survey report. Full reports from each year are listed in the References section. Each year, we only survey those receiving a scholarship for the first time, so no individual student is ever surveyed more than once. The very high response rates and the consistency of findings over time provide a strong basis for the outcomes and claims arising.

The attrition data analysis since 2005 has measured the impact of scholarship-holding by scholarship type, by equity groups, by commencing and continuing students, and over time. This analysis (see SM5) allows us to measure the attrition rate of those who hold equity scholarships compared with those who do not, both overall and within distinct categories. On every parameter, in every year, scholarship-holders have lower attrition rates—up to 55% lower for rural and remote students. The attrition data is consistent with the survey outcomes. Combining the two data sets with the information from the details application assessment process has allowed a rich evaluation of the impact of scholarships.

The results of this systematic evaluation have been used to make improvements to the products and processes of the Program, and to lobby for public policy improvements (see Selection Criterion 3).

2. Influence on student learning and student engagement

Impact on time and attention to study

Students use their scholarship money to buy books, living essentials, or 'time' (by reducing their paid work hours). Over 75% of scholarship holders reported that the scholarship helped them give more time and attention to their studies, to a large or very large extent. As well, 82% reported that the scholarship reduced stress and worry.

Over half the student recipients used the money to reduce their paid work hours and devoted time to study instead. This is an admirable and canny use of a relatively modest amount of money, and reflects these students' determination to take their studies seriously.

It is very difficult to maintain a part-time job while completing this course. At this time I am unable to claim Youth Allowance and I am living out of home so it is very hard for me to support myself, even to pay for necessities. [The scholarship] has helped me to focus my energies on my studies rather than stressing about my financial situation

Yvette, 2008

I just want to thank you and all of the scholarship team for giving me another scholarship this year. I can now pay off all my debts, and concentrate on my studies.

Denise, 2008

Thank you so much for giving me this scholarship. I have had such a bad year even though we are only into March and it only seems to be getting worse but this scholarship has lightened a lot of the weight that I have [been] carrying around. It not only relieves worries for me but it also takes a great deal of stress away from my family. I am so appreciative for the help that I have been given and now I can put all of my focus into succeeding in this course so that I can become the best teacher that I can be.

Natalie, 2008

This trend, where scholarships result in more time and attention to study, is consistent over four years of survey data.

Impact on 'sense of belonging'

Survey results reveal students feel supported and affirmed, and connected to the University.

Originally unexpected, but consistent over four years, is the psychological effect of being selected for a scholarship. Students, in large numbers by way of survey comments and spontaneous letters/emails (see SM1 and SM2), have revealed their gratitude that the University cares about their issues; their motivation and determination to succeed and prove their worth; and their rise in self-esteem and confidence as learners.

It was such a huge weight lifted off my shoulders when I received the scholarship. It gave me a sense of moral support. I felt like I was a valued member of the university community.

Cecilia, 2005

It gave me the impression that I was valued as a student and that I was encouraged to continue my studies.

Comment by student from
2008 Scholarships Impact Survey

You have made my heart skip with joy, relieved an enormous financial pressure and renewed a fierce determination to justify the faith implicit in awarding me this scholarship.

Richard, 2007

Impact on retention

Students with scholarships have attrition rates about 35% lower than other students. The effect is consistent across all scholarship types and all equity groups, and seems to be the result of less stress and more time, combined with a heightened 'sense of belonging'. The University has not been able to find any other institution with a similar analysis with which to benchmark. In the absence of any comparative data it appears that the Program is a leader within the sector for measurable and consistent impact on learning and retention (see table on p. 7 as well as SM5).

This will be my last year of study at QUT and I would like to say that without this help I may not have been able to complete my studies here at QUT.

Katina, 2008

Without this scholarship I honestly would not be able to live financially and attend uni.

I was close to drop out. Thanks a lot for your support, and I'm passing all my units. I will never stop saying thanks.

Comments by two students from
2008 Scholarships Impact Survey

Impact on results

Many students claim that their results have improved because of having a scholarship. Given the multiplicity of factors at play in academic achievement and the lack of a 'control' group, we have been unable to ascertain a clear cause and effect relationship between scholarship-holding and academic success. However, what is clear is that many recipients experience a boost, either perceived or real, to their academic achievement. Whether this boost is the result of more time on task or merely a feeling of heightened confidence and connectedness is unclear from current data.

Thank you very much for my \$1000 scholarship for this year. I have been able to concentrate on my studies. The results for my last assignments were a 7, 6, 6, 5. The money has made such a difference and my results show this.

Pollyanna, 2008

My GPA has increased which made it easier for me to get vacation work in a city law firm.

Comment by student from
2007 Scholarships Impact Survey

Ex-QUT Attrition with and without scholarship, 2004–2008

Cohort	2004 to 2005	2005 to 2006	2006 to 2007	2007 to 2008
	% Attr.	% Attr.	% Attr.	% Attr.
All QUT students	12.55%	12.44%	14.09%	14.80%
All scholarship holders	4.09%	7.20%	9.49%	10.31%
All QUT no scholarship	12.64%	12.61%	14.33%	15.10%

Source: QUT Decision Support

3. Breadth of impact

Large scale

As at the end of 2008, about 3,000 students held a Commonwealth or QUT equity scholarship or bursary. This represents about 8% of the total student body, and about one-third of the low-income student cohort. Since its inception, about 8,000 students have benefited from the Program. This increasingly large scale of scholarship-holding is beginning to impact on attrition at a whole-of-institution level. As far as we have been able to ascertain, it is the largest scheme of its kind in the sector.

Recruitment

As well as the powerful effect on retention described in Selection Criterion 2, the Program contributes to the recruitment of low-SES students. About half of the commencers who were aware of the QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme prior to enrolling said that this awareness positively influenced their decision to enrol from a *slight* to *very large extent* (see References, QUT Equity Section, scholarship reports and impact survey results, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008). Selection Criterion 1 outlines how the Program contributes to widening participation in a variety of other ways.

Student engagement

Apart from the large number of recipients, the level of student engagement with the whole process is very broad. Over 3,800 students applied in Semester 1, 2009. Particularly for commencing students, submitting their application and talking to friendly and supportive staff about their 'story' is a positive early experience that affirms their importance and legitimises their place at the University.

QUT's scholarship team is committed and professional and provides personal attention to applicants. Despite the large numbers, many scholarship recipients are known to the staff by name, and stay in touch about their progress and concerns.

The staff team and individuals within it have received the highest levels of recognition via the QUT 'Outstanding Contribution' awards.

Much of the phenomenal growth in application numbers has been word-of-mouth encouragement from recipients to other students. During the latter part of 2008, a small campaign—'Tell a Friend about Scholarships'—was run with the student body to harness this energy, and application numbers doubled in the 2009 round.

I cannot begin to tell you how much getting this scholarship means to me (and my wife). It will allow both of us to concentrate on our studies and will substantially lighten the financial burden placed upon us due to my wife's illness. I would like to thank you and all your staff for the outstanding service that you provide and I know that there are many other students out there who would love to give you all a big hug! Keep up the great work and again, thank you so much.

Mark, 2008

Thank you very much for contacting me. I understand you are very busy going through and having to select those students most in need, it must be a hard task. To take time out and explain everything to me over the phone is amazing. Thank you very much though for your advice, it will definitely be going to use.

Tim, 2008

I wish I knew about the scholarship before I started at uni. I now encourage everyone from my home town going to uni at QUT to apply (most people don't even realise they would qualify). THANK YOU!!

Comment by student from
2008 Scholarships Impact Survey

Influence on institution

The high visibility of the Program has contributed to widespread awareness about student poverty, which has infused policy, practice and organisational culture across the University.

The Program leader, Mary Kelly, has been an active member of the Teaching and Learning Committee, and the First Year Experience (FYE) Program for over a decade, and has played an important role in embedding equity awareness in all aspects of teaching policy and practice. For example, student survey results, enrolment statistics and retention statistics are routinely disaggregated by equity group so that the implications for low-SES students can be monitored; guidelines for managing and making clearer the cost of study units were developed when it became apparent this was a issue for low-income students; and all student services routinely triage needy students to the available supports.

Apart from providing the suite of financial supports already mentioned, staff are engaged as donors to the LPF through a payroll deduction scheme. As well, there is an active Staff Giving Committee who stage events to raises awareness of the LPF's role.

The scholarships program has been highly visible within QUT, and has certainly gained the commitment of professional staff in this large service division. The success stories associated with this scheme, and particularly the observation that an incremental amount of help can make the critical difference to a student's progress, strike a chord with these service staff. The number one destination for the large amount of computers being turned at QUT is equity students. The growing reach of the program has lifted staff awareness of the issue of economic disadvantage and service staff strongly identify with both the aims and the values of this scheme.

Professor Tom Cochrane,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Technology, Information and Learning
Support, QUT

Influence on the sector

The Program and its outcomes have been of benefit to other institutions and to the higher education sector. The Program has been presented at two EOPHEA² conferences, as well as an interstate and overseas conference (King, Doutre, & Macindoe, 2007).

²EOPHEA (Equal Opportunity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia) is the professional organisation for university and TAFE equity practitioners who work in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific region.

The selection methodology and impact tracking survey information are shared annually through equity practitioner networks across Australia and feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many institutions would like to implement a comprehensive model but either lack the funds, support or staff to do so.

I have long wanted our unit to do something like this, but for all sorts of reasons we have never got to it. This report is gold. Thank you so much for sharing it.

Manager, Careers Employment and Equity
from a Queensland university, May 2006

With regard to public policy, evidence gathered from recipients during the application and survey process, as well as enrolment and attrition data has been used nationally by QUT, Universities Australia (UA), and the Australian Technology Network (ATN) to pursue improvements in public policy, such as reforms to income support and changes to low-SES data tracking. Multiple submissions to Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and the Federal Government have been made over the years. For the latest, see QUT's submission to the Bradley Review (see References, QUT Submission in response to the National Higher Education Review Discussion Paper, July 2008).

QUT's equity scholarship scheme is recognised by equity practitioners across Australia to demonstrate leading practice as a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy addressing issues related to significant financial disadvantage for enrolled and potential students of the University.

Importantly, QUT has shared with colleagues the details of this strategy, including comprehensive and detailed research that equity staff have undertaken to ascertain its effectiveness. This research has demonstrated considerable positive impact on individual students' lives, and has contributed to a significant improvement in student engagement and retention as well as proving an additional factor in encouraging students from impoverished backgrounds to consider undertaking study at university.

The Scheme is well-known throughout the equity practitioner network for its creative approach to selection and thorough approach to impact-tracking, and is regarded as an exemplar by those of us working in the area. Consequently, innovations and findings from this scheme have influenced the thinking of equity practitioners and shaped improved practice in other universities relating not

merely to financial support issues, but also and more importantly, to the larger question of widening participation. With the recent federal budget announcements that will focus attention of universities around Australia on the need to improve access and retention of students from financially and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, I have no doubt the QUT model of scholarship support will gain even greater importance in influencing the development of similar strategies elsewhere in institutions of higher education.

Dr Ann Stewart,
National Co-convenor, EOPHEA

4. Concern for equity and diversity

Social justice purpose

The raison d'être of the Program is to assist low-income students from all equity groups to pass and complete their degrees. From its inception in 1999, both social justice issues (that merit and not wealth should determine a person's access to educational opportunity) and business issues (the need to enhance the University through diversifying its enrolment profile and improving its success/retention data) have underpinned this Program. The Program is a highly visible feature of QUT's broader social justice efforts.

Indigenous students

The proportion of equity group students who hold a scholarship is high. In particular, 40% of undergraduate Indigenous students were in receipt of a Commonwealth or QUT scholarship in 2008.

On benchmarked 2007 data from DEEWR, QUT has the second highest percentage of Indigenous scholarship-holders of all institutions. With regard to Indigenous students, the Equity Section works in close partnership with staff of the Oodgeroo Unit³, beginning with the pre-enrolment interview process where all prospective Indigenous students are encouraged and assisted to make on-the-spot scholarship applications. Staff of the Oodgeroo Unit are instrumental in helping students with the paperwork and necessary evidence, and in providing advice about individual applicants. One of the team for this ALTC submission is a staff member of the Oodgeroo Unit.

Best wishes for QUT's work in supporting Indigenous students to access and participate in higher education as evidenced by the proactive way in which you have embraced the new Indigenous Access Scholarships in 2008.

DEEWR staff member, 2008

Impact on all groups

The improvement in attrition that arises from scholarship-holding is apparent for all equity groups, including low-SES, regional and remote, disability, NESB and Indigenous students. In particular, regional and remote scholarship holders have, at 7.56%, one of the lowest attrition rates in the University, despite these students being one of the attrition 'at-risk' groups.

Cornerstone

The Program has been the cornerstone of QUT's efforts in recruiting and supporting low-income students from all equity groups. Through its large scale, visibility, degree of staff engagement, permanency (via the LPF), high-level support (via University Council) and impact on student learning, the Program is well placed for the future. As the national focus shifts to targets around degree-holding and low-SES enrolments, this Program will continue to play a key role in building aspiration, in retention, and in supporting learning.

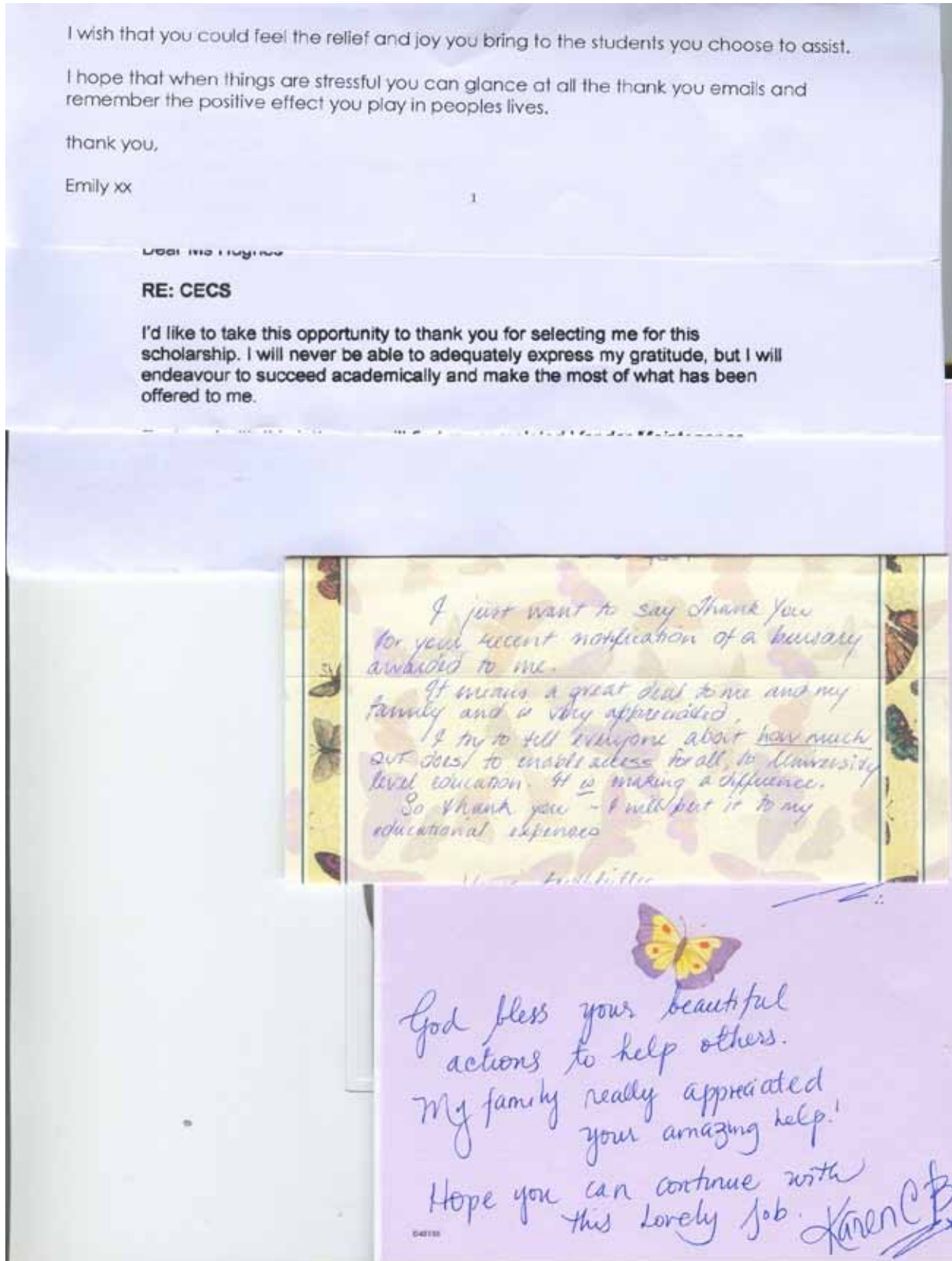
³The Oodgeroo Unit is responsible for the recruitment and support of Indigenous students at QUT.

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Supporting Materials

SM1: Additional testimonials sourced from hundreds of unsolicited letters/emails/cards, and from the comments section of the annual Scholarships Impact Survey



SM2: Additional testimonials sourced from hundreds of unsolicited letters/emails/cards, and from the comments section of the annual Scholarships Impact Survey (2)

Just a quick note to say THANK YOU VERY MUCH from my daughter Jessica and me, for the attention and time you gave us. We picked up the PC yesterday and Jess is rapt (we celebrated last night for her). The bursary will certainly assist in paying her fees. It means she is able to pay up-front at least this semester from her savings and not incur the penalty fee. **Chris, 2005**

Thank you very much for the good news. This amount will go a long way in helping pay the bills on time and assist me to give my daughter the things she needs and deserves. **Donna, 2005**

Thank you so much for sending me such good news. QUT has been very supportive to my study for last 4 years. I am deeply touched by receiving another help from QUT. This good news is going to keep my study up and hopefully I can finish my study at the end of this year. Again, thank you very much for your support and encouragement! Have a lovely night. **Mei-hsia, 2005**

Thank you so much for this excellent news... it just brought a tear to my eye in the very public computer lab. **Molly, 2005**

I have received my letter of confirmation signed by Mary Kelly for my successful application for QES 2005. I write to thank you and your department for allowing me this assistance. I am so grateful for this. It allows me to pursue a career that is of my choice while raising my children as a single parent. I love university. It has given me back a life that validates my worth in the community beyond being a "Mum". **Maree, 2005**

I will be forever grateful and you can rest assure I will put the money towards my studies. You guys are life savers. THANK YOU AGAIN! **Danielle, 2006**

Two little words—THANK YOU however they mean so much!!!!!!! **Tracey, 2006**

I just received the email stating that I have been granted a CECS Scholarship. I am extremely grateful for being awarded the scholarship and am emailing to thank all those involved in making this possible. The scholarship will make my studies at QUT much easier and will make my dream of becoming a registered nurse seem closer than I ever imagined. **Kylie, 2006**

Thank-you sooo much! This will help me so much; I was worried that UNI would not be possible for me ... so thank-you again! **Amy, 2006**

This is going to help me sooo much and take so much pressure off! And it's even made me feel more enthusiastic about uni! Even though I'm absolutely loving it!! I'm over the moon! I feel like I've won gold lotto!! Heehee! So thank you again! **Katriona, 2006**

Thanks to everyone at Equity for the scholarship! I am truly grateful and wish everyone the best. This scholarship will allow me to achieve a greater balance in my life between work, study and family life. **Vikki, 2006**

I am not sure if this is the correct way to go about this. I wanted to thank you and whoever I need to for the wonderful opportunity you guys have given me both with the computer and the accommodation scholarship. You have no idea what this will mean to me. I will always remember this. **Kim, 2008**

I wish to say a sincere thank-you to you, Mary Kelly and everyone else involved with the Equity Scholarship Scheme, for granting me a scholarship. It could not have come at a more opportune time, considering my financial circumstances, and I am deeply grateful!!! I shall spend it WISELY. **Karen, 2008**

After my three daughters left for school today, I sifted through newsletters and next year's booklists and forms for school campus and I wondered what in the world I was thinking when I put on a \$150 layby for clothes that the kids desperately need, and I couldn't even afford to think about shoes. I'm in the midst of a custody battle and face a drop in my pension should my ex be successful. My rent takes up almost half my income, the school swim club, of which I have just stepped down as President, has membership fees due before the girls can swim and they need togs to start with. Needless to say, the start of my day was less than ordinary. Then at 2.40pm the postie came with the day's mail as I was struggling with an assignment, due in two weeks, so the break from the computer screen was welcome. When I opened it with a little fear and trepidation, I burst into tears of relief, outside my front yard. This is a rather long and drawn out way of saying how much I appreciate being the recipient of this bursary and thank you for taking my application into consideration. It will help in more ways than you could know, relieving a huge amount of pressure from my financial situation. Thank you all so much. **Pia, 2003**

I'll have to buy you a beer at the Guild Bar sometime! **Anthony, 2008**

SM3: Scholarship recipients assist with fundraising for the LPF, and with widening participation (1)

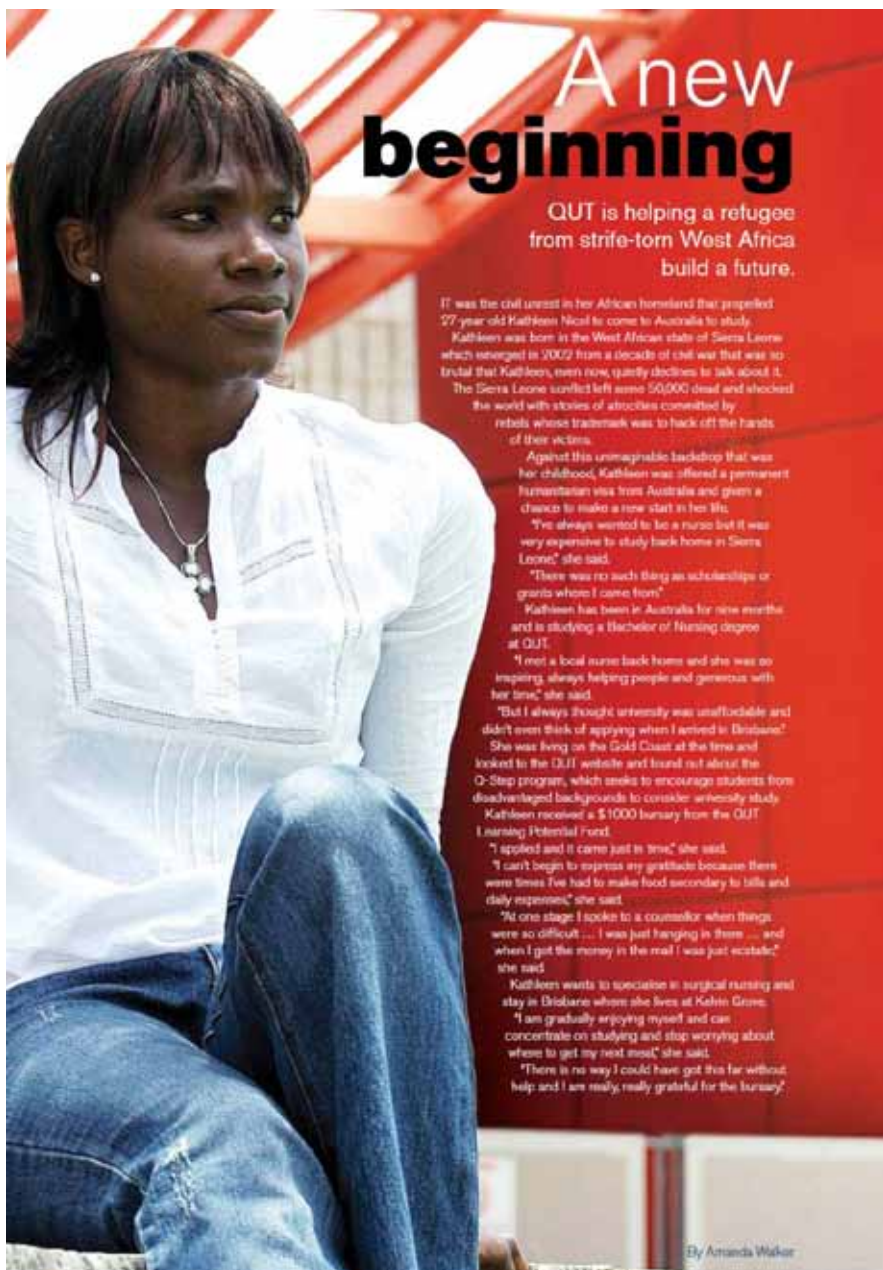


Figure 1 (left): Excerpt from *Alumni Links Magazine*, September 2006. Kathleen Nicol received a bursary from LPF funds via the QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme.

Figure 2 (below left): Greg Hayden also received an LPF-funded bursary and is featured in the LPF brochure that profiles students who benefit from the Fund.

Figure 3 (below right): Hannah Wickes features in a range of QUT promotional material promoting scholarships for low-income students. QUT Student Ambassadors are our best advertisement for coming to university. They are used in a variety of outreach activities and because of their diverse backgrounds, are an effective way to challenge the myth that 'people like me don't go to uni'; and they build aspiration.



SM4: Scholarship recipients assist with fundraising for the LPF, and with widening participation (2)



SINGULARLY successful ... QUT early childhood honours graduate Melinda Miller and her son Jackson, 7.

Struggling mum a study in determination

SINGLE mother Melinda Miller is testimony to the capacity of low-income students to not only embark on tertiary education, but also to excel at it.

The 37-year-old, who is one year off completing her doctorate at Queensland University of Technology, after graduating with first class honours in Early Childhood Education in 2006 and winning QUT's prestigious university medal, also knows well the value of financial support for students.

Ms Miller said the bursaries and scholarships she received meant the difference, semester to semester, to studying on or dropping out.

"If that money wasn't there, there would have been some semesters I could not have continued," she said. "It dramatically increases the capacity of students to complete a higher education degree."

Ms Miller, who began studying when her son, Jackson, was one, said that in

her first year she received help with text books and other study expenses and thereafter, through QUT's Learning Potential Fund, accessed Commonwealth scholarships worth up to \$2000 a year. Part-time work supplemented her income.

Now doing her PhD, Ms Miller said, as well as working as a sessional academic, she successfully applied for scholarships worth up to \$30,000 a year.

Margaret Wenham

(Figure 4, above): Article in *The Courier-Mail*, 10/03/2009. Melinda Miller, Q-Step student and scholarship recipient, demonstrates the success of the QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme in supporting students.

(Figure 5, below): Extract from LPF letter to current and potential donors such as alumni and staff.

From school leaver to university graduate

Consider indigenous student Cecilia Wade, who left high school after year 10. In her late 20s, she was accepted into a Bachelor of Applied Science (Environmental Science) at QUT. By the time Cecilia graduated, she had made the Dean's List with a grade point average of 6.25.

Cecilia treated her university studies as her full-time job, studying, researching and preparing for lectures. She paid the financial price, scraping by on savings from holiday jobs.

"It was such a huge weight lifted off my shoulders when I received the scholarship. It gave me a sense of moral support. I felt like I was a valued member of the university community."

Cecilia now works for the Brisbane City Council's Natural Environment and Sustainability Department.

These stories are inspiring. Frankly, we need more people like this in universities and in society as a whole. These individuals are the kind of courageous, committed, disciplined people who are going to use their education not only to help themselves, but also to help others.



SM5: Attrition data***Ex-QUT attrition of scholarship holders, 2004–2008***

Cohort	2004–2005	2005–2006	2006–2007	2007–2008
All students	% Attr.	% Attr.	% Attr.	% Attr.
All QUT students	12.55%	12.44%	14.09%	14.80%
Non-scholarship holders	12.64%	12.61%	14.33%	15.10%
Scholarship holders	4.09%	7.20%	9.49%	10.31%
QUT Equity Scholarship holders	8.70%	6.79%	12.27%	11.83%
CECS holders	4.51%	6.55%	8.51%	10.24%
CAS holders	3.09%	8.22%	8.79%	9.39%
Commencers and Continuers				
Non-scholarship holding commencers	16.55%	17.23%	19.80%	20.20%
Scholarship-holding commencers	5.19%	8.36%	13.86%	14.57%
Non-scholarship holding continuers	10.79%	10.01%	11.04%	11.86%
Scholarship-holding continuers	3.05%	6.53%	7.13%	8.35%
Low SES				
QUT LSES students	12.81%	13.53%	13.90%	15.89%
LSES non-scholarship holders	12.99%	13.95%	14.46%	16.50%
LSES scholarship holders	1.49%	6.16%	7.76%	10.66%
Low & Medium SES combined				
QUT L+M SES students	12.32%	12.40%	13.75%	14.90%
Non- scholarship L+M SES	12.40%	12.59%	14.05%	15.29%
Scholarship holders L+M SES	4.67%	7.35%	8.39%	9.42%
NESB				
NESB students	14.94%	11.76%	13.49%	14.93%
NESB non-scholarship holders	14.94%	11.95%	14.23%	15.79%
NESB scholarship holders	14.29%	4.17%	4.65%	8.06%
Regional and remote students				
R/R students	13.16%	13.37%	14.78%	15.85%
R/R non-scholarship holders	13.38%	13.76%	15.57%	16.87%
R/R Scholarship-holders	4.35%	7.24%	6.95%	7.56%
Indigenous students				
Indigenous students	17.88%	18.80%	19.02%	25.06%
Indigenous non-scholarship holders	20.07%	21.33%	19.49%	27.46%
Indigenous scholarship-holders	5.36%	9.64%	17.71%	18.92%
Students with a disability				
Students with a disability	14.07%	15.25%	16.38%	15.97%
Non-scholarship holders with a disability	14.22%	15.89%	16.69%	16.32%
Scholarship holders with a disability	5.00%	8.04%	13.79%	14.08%

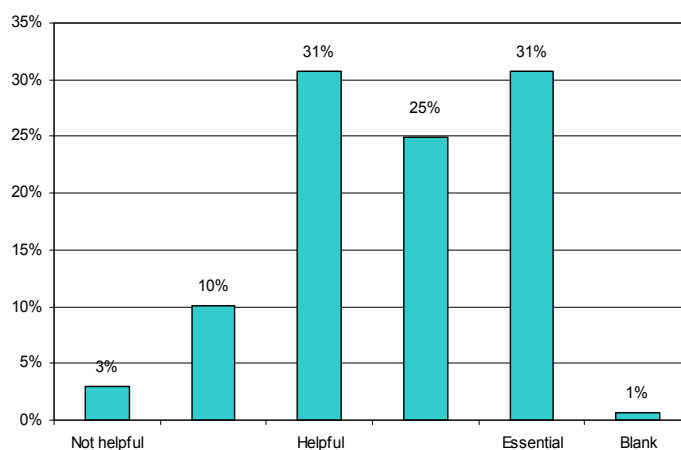
SM6: Extract from report to Scholarship Selection Panel showing scoring and rankings

Surname	Summary	Indigenous	Health Care/ Pension card	Income points	Points for children	Sole/Partnered Parent	Other Dependants	Special Needs of dep.	Social Disadvantage	Financial Hardship	Total Score	Rank
	single mother, Indigenous, cares for ill mother—fell ill during semester & disrupted education, no family support. No social life or extra-curricular activities due to finances, cannot save money.	8	1	5	4	6	2	0	2	4	32	2
	refugee w/dependents (only 1 shown on Clink docs), describes experience as refugee of Sierra Leone conflict. Unable to afford texts, internet/comp, printing, transport, accessories to help organise for study.	0	1	10	2	6	0	1	5	4	29	7
	ACCESS sing, ind student, father dec, from rural area with no fam fin support, income covers rent, t'sport and "most of my meals", will have to save up for study expenses	8	1	11	0	0	0	0	4	4	28	12
	single, @h, sole parent bg, disruptive relationship w/ father and his family (inc verbal abuse), suffers from severe eczema—results in days off. Struggles to afford textbooks, struggles to pay for health expenses.	8	1	10	0	0	0	0	4	4	27	16
	Distance for travel difficult. Missing out on transport and resources. Partnered, 4 kids. Living off wife's income (family tax benefit not included).	8	0	7	4	2	0	0	1	4	26	30
	single, @h, family is currently homeless—accommodation ranges from caravans to tents, cannot afford petrol for car, constant worry about next meal.	0	1	9	0	0	0	0	5	10	25	31
	partnered, 2 depts., refugee from war in Sudan—family still over there, NESB, cannot pay insurance for care, cannot afford medical appointments, cannot afford school expenses.	0	0	8	2	2	0	0	5	8	25	32
	partnered, 2 depts, partner's knee badly injured—complex emot, phys, rehab journey, left in extreme fin. h/ship; misses out on food, t/port, clothing, social events, t/books, comp./internet.	0	1	9	2	2	0	0	3	8	25	33
Withheld	sole parent, NESB, cannot afford text books, has debt, looking for place to rent.	0	1	9	2	6	0	0	2	4	24	57
	looks after grandchildren, NESB w/ community commitments, cannot pay bills, food amounts suffering, walking to save petrol, cannot afford unexpected expenses.	0	1	8	2	2	0	0	2	8	23	65
	single, come out as homosexual—unsupportive parents and high school, developed depression/anxiety, at times cannot afford transport, sometimes goes without food.	0	1	9	0	0	0	0	4	8	22	82
	Sole parent, suffers from depression and anxiety. Describes difficulty in affording food at times, has debt, describes a "constant struggle"	0	1	3	2	6	0	0	4	6	22	93
	sole parent, 1 dep., rural bg, time poor, cannot save for unexpected expenses, at times affects grocery budget significantly (\$30 p/w).	0	1	5	2	6	0	0	2	6	22	107
	partnered, 4 depts, unsupportive parents and breakdown of 1st marriage disrupted tertiary educ., basic food a struggle, kids miss out on sport/dance/art activities, can't visit fam., can't aft. after school care.	0	1	7	4	2	0	0	2	6	22	108
	single, away from home, fin. indep., lost job, not ely, for Clink, can't move back home; living off plain rice for a month, can't aff t/books other course reqs, got assist. fr QUT Welfare	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	3	8	21	128

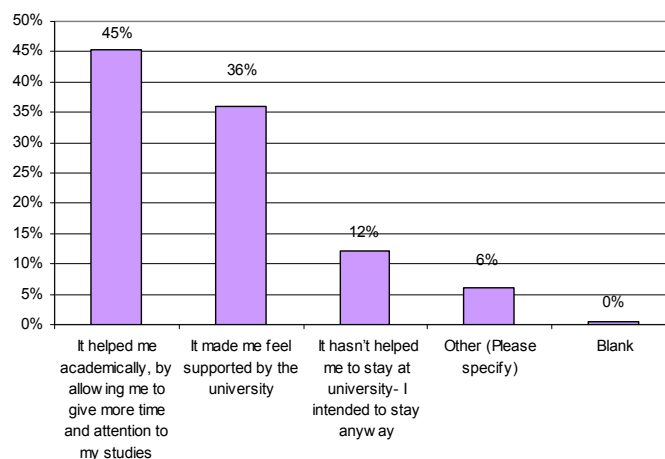
SM7: Extract from 2008 QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme Report: Part 2 Scholarships Scheme Impact Report (p. 13) [For full annual reports, see References]

Some scholarships are now worth approximately \$4,300 per year, with others valued between \$2,500 and \$2,100. Questions six and seven were disaggregated by scholarship type to see if the scholarship value affected responses. As in each of the previous years, students who held the more generous scholarship gave stronger answers (84%) to question six, and a stronger response to 'reduced paid work' (70%) in question seven. This is more evidence that the value of smaller scholarships should be reviewed upwards.

Question 8: How important has the scholarship been in helping you to stay at university rather than drop out? (select one)




Question 9: In what way do you think the scholarship has helped you to stay at university? (select one)



Questions eight and nine related to the 'retention' effect of the scholarship. As in 2007, the proportion of students who said the scholarship helped them to stay at university rather than drop out was overwhelmingly positive at 86%.

There was also an increase in the proportion of respondents who said this retention effect was due to the scholarship 'helping academically by allowing me to give more time and attention to my studies' (45%). There was a decrease in the proportion who said it made them 'feel supported by the University' (36%). There was a slight decrease in the proportion of students who said the scholarship had no retention effect, as they intended to stay anyway (12%).

SM8: Extract from Equity Scholarships Scheme assessor training



What we assess

- Centrelink payments
- Income
- Number of children or dependents, and if they have special needs
- Sole parenting/parenting
- Social Disadvantage (Personal Circumstances)
- Financial Hardship

CRICOS No. 00213J



Financial Hardship: Research and development of methodology

- Points awarded from 0 – 20, 20 being most severe
- Scorers to reference documentation/scoring manual and use judgement
- Henderson Poverty line insufficient
- Saunders, P (2004) *Towards a Credible Poverty Framework: from income poverty to deprivation*
- Definition of poverty: "an enforced lack of socially perceived necessities" p. 6
- Core (C1 and C2) and supplementary (S) Financial hardship indicators (modified Saunders indicators over time, for heightened applicability to our cohort)


CRICOS No. 00213J



Social Disadvantage (Personal Circumstances)

- Points awarded from 0 – 10, 10 being most severe
- Scorers to follow documentation guidelines/scoring manual and use judgement
- Developed on the basis of experience over a number of years
- Judged according to the impact of social situation on student's life particularly in relation to study:
 - Number of factors (ie one or multiple)
 - Longevity
 - Seriousness (ie trauma)
 - Barriers to study
 - Impact on daily life
 - Self or others

CRICOS No. 00213J



Core Financial Hardship Indicators

Core 1 (C1) – Less severe

- cannot afford to pay gas, electricity or phone bill on time
- cannot afford to pay rent on time
- cannot afford to pay registration, insurance on time
- Regularly unable to make minimum repayment on credit card


Core 2 (C2) – More severe

- pawned or sold something
- went without meals
- sought assistance from welfare or community agency (other than Centrelink)

Supplementary Financial Hardship Indicators (S)

- cannot afford leisure or hobby activities
- cannot afford brand new clothes (usually buy second hand)
- cannot afford entertainment/going out once a fortnight
- cannot afford textbooks
- cannot afford to eat out, even occasionally
- sought financial help from friends or family
- Cannot afford public transport or fuel to get to school or university


CRICOS No. 00213J



Examples of Social Disadvantage

- Long work hours
- Family discord
- Rural/isolated background
- First in immediate family to attend university
- Low-income background
- Sole Parent background
- NESB and faces difficulties due to this
- Refugees
- Mental illness
- Disability
- Recent death of close relative/friend
- Illness
- Domestic violence
- Extremely difficult personal history
- Addiction
- Homelessness

CRICOS No. 00213J



Examples of Financial Hardship

- Lives a basic lifestyle to stay within their means
- Cannot afford to partake in culturally significant activities
- Short-term poverty while studying – juggling bills/debts, poor diet
- Goes without meals
- Numerous debts
- Borrows or goes without
- Long term entrenched poverty
- Under constant financial pressure
- Severely limited lifestyle

CRICOS No. 00213J

SM9: Scholarships and widening participation resources [see SC1, 'Integration with broader plan']

Figure 6 (below left) is a newspaper advertisement that was part of a campaign to encourage low-income students to come to university despite obstacles such as financial hardship, rural location or socio-economic background. It uses scholarships to challenge the myth of un-affordability and spark interest in post-school study.

Figure 7 (below right) illustrates a DVD and web resource called 'project u', which is also aimed at encouraging students to consider university as an option and uses real uni students to deliver the key messages through interviews and videos. The accompanying website provides additional supporting information and focuses on challenging myths and barriers about going to uni such as affordability, academic ability, fitting in, new learning styles and the type of people that go to uni. Since 2005 it has had over 25,000 hits and over 150,000 copies of the award-winning DVD have been distributed to low-income students in Queensland.

Don't let anything stop you



People like you do go to uni. QUT has thousands of students just like you. Help is available. Each year QUT provides millions of dollars in financial assistance, free computers and lots of advice and support. It may not be easy, but it will be worth it. Find out more at askus.qut.com



Figure 8 (below): 'Lfl at Uni' brochure. QUT and The Smith Family have an MOU that provides students from The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program with a guaranteed scholarship and entry bonus when they apply, and which also provide aspiration-building potential to Lfl students in their high school years. This aspect of the QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme is aimed at widening participation amongst low-income students with the help of community partnerships.

SM10: On-campus 'widening participation' activities that include scholarships as a central feature [see SC1, 'Integration with broader plan']



Figure 9 (above left): One of 120 students from the Year 10 Student with Potential Program, who was nominated by his school as having the potential to go to university, attends a function with his family to receive a certificate and gift from QUT.

Figure 10 (above right): Students from Murgon State High School attend the Wide Bay Region Discovering Uni Camp at QUT. This camp offers low-income students from the Wide Bay region, where there is low participation at university level, a chance to explore the campus and attend workshops and QUT Open Day as part of widening participation activities provided by QUT. Funding is provided to transport these students to this free camp experience. Student Ambassadors speak to them about scholarships and transition issues.



Figure 11 (left): Students from the Access Scholarships Program (2005–2007) pictured with the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Peter Coaldrake. These commencing students were nominated by their high school for an Equity Scholarship.

SM11: QUT Equity Computer Scheme [see SC1, 'Coordination']

Figure 12 (below): QUT staff upgrading ex-QUT hardware for use by students through the QUT Equity Computer Scheme. Over 300 computers each year are re-distributed from QUT computer labs for low-income students to use for their studies.





Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

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The paper used in this publication has the credentials:

