The MVSA reorganization

Aim:
To improve student life within Murdoch Veterinary School by reinvigorating the Murdoch Veterinary Students' Association (MVSA) and reorganizing student interest groups (SIGs)

Background:
The Murdoch Veterinary Students' Association (MVSA) is a student run group that performs a variety of duties within the veterinary school. We are responsible for clothing orders (overalls, scrubs etc) and ordering stethoscopes. We host various "stress relieving" social events where students can take a break from studying and enjoy the company of their classmates and meet students from other year groups. An example is the recent "Winter Dinner" where 130 students danced the night away at the Burswood convention centre. We also provide a direct voice to the Dean of the Veterinary School as we hold meetings with him to discuss student-related issues.

However, as the years have pressed on, the MVSA's presence has decreased and membership is at an all time low. The current executive committee believes that over the past several years the MVSA has focused too much on social events while letting other duties fall to the wayside. In addition MVSA membership does not offer much in the way of saving money unless a member goes only to social events.

For example:

Many students see the MVSA as a "big party" and nothing more. A large portion of "mature age" students do no join because of this reason.

People do not see the value in becoming a member. This year's clothing order offered a two dollar discount on all items. A vest for MVSA members was $78 while for non-members it was $80.

Several students, and some academic staff, have no idea overalls, a required clothing item for practical classes and clinical rotations, are supplied by the MVSA.

A stethoscope order is placed by the MVSA every year; however, many students order stethoscopes online because of a reduced cost only to find out later they are of inferior quality.

The above reasons, we believe, are a large part of why the student body has lost confidence with the MVSA. As confidence falls, so does membership. This only serves to decrease our funds and cancel various events. We have had to cancel two events this year due to low attendance, and we may need to cancel another next year due to insufficient funds. Our aim to grow into a more professional organisation will see these cancellations cease.

Murdoch Veterinary School SIGs

There are 11 "Student Interest Groups" (SIGs) within Murdoch which currently act as separate entities from the MVSA. Each has its own area of interest (Surgery, Business, Cattle, Horses, Dogs, Welfare, Pigs, Wildlife, Exotics, Public Health, and a student-run newspaper) and a Board that manages events/funding etc. The number of SIGs has doubled over the past three years and has provided numerous opportunities for students to learn outside of the classroom.

Examples:

Bovine Interest Group (BIG) holds an annual "Rural Practice Weekend" where a group of students listen to lectures and perform various wetlabs (e.g. enucleation surgery on cadavers) over the course of a weekend.

Murdoch Association of Veterinary Surgery (MAVS) holds regular suturing workshops to give first and second-year students a chance to practice basic surgical skills (on foam and pig's feet) and invites speakers to give talks over the course of the year.

Equine Interest Group (EIG) provides many hands-on labs (Lameness workshops, hoof care workshops, etc.) and gives students opportunities to practice vetting at local equestrian events.

Murdoch University Wildlife Association (MUWA) holds a wildlife necropsy lab yearly in addition to providing various talks and wildlife handling labs.

The Murdoch Moospaper (the Moos) gives students a public voice within the school, in addition to providing informative material and various wisecracks.

Veterinary Business Management Association (VBMA) holds a careers night and a two-day long course (given by various veterinarians) with insights on running a successful veterinary practice.

The newest groups, MACE (Murdoch Association of Companion Exotics), DIG (Dog Interest Group), and MAVPH (Murdoch Association of Veterinary Public Health), while not as large as the above, have already begun hosting talks and are working towards hosting wetlabs.

In addition, the SIGs each have a Board which teaches students how to work together to achieve large goals. Hosting an entire weekend based on cattle medicine and surgery is no small task!.

Unfortunately as the number of SIGs grows the landscape becomes more complex. SIGs are now competing for space for lectures and workshops and for funding. Last year it was attempted to bring the SIGs together with the help of Facebook, to try and organize events around each other. Without a unifying voice this did not last long, and the SIGs now resort to taking the first available time slots and rooms

without consulting any other group. It should also be noted that funding is scarce and certain smaller SIGs (such as Public Health) struggle to find support from any individual sponsors. New SIGs have asked the MVSA for support, however we cannot provide any funding at this time.

Goal 1: Increase the size of the MVSA
A new structure has been outlined for MVSA. In the past a small executive committee and a social committee ran events. The current number is too small and we plan to increase our ranks to spread workload and decrease stress within the group. Defined roles for all new positions are currently being written for next year's group. In addition many MVSA roles are selected by a popularity contest and not by merit. Interviews will begin this year for entry into next year's MVSA to ensure the right people are in the job.

The above is a fairly simple task and should occur without any delays. However, reorganizing the SIGs will take much more work.

Goal 2: Reorganize the SIGs place them within the MVSA
To combat its problems, the MVSA must change its image and grow into a larger, more professional organization. We will continue to support networking events, and "stress-relieving" events (Winter Dinner, Vet Revue, Sundowners, etc.); however, we want to become the voice of the Murdoch Students once again. In order for this to occur, we have decided to restructure the MVSA into a larger and more dynamic group.

We believe the best way to achieve this goal is to involve the SIGs and make them a part of the MVSA. The SIGs will provide a more varied voice on how the MVSA is managed as the boards of the respective SIGs will hold a place on the board of the MVSA. They will also be invited to regular meetings with the Dean to discuss issues within the school.

With the SIGs part of the MVSA, a suitable "social calendar" will be established, and clashes between events will be minimized and ultimately reduced altogether. The Moos will become a fortnightly electronic bulletin with the social calendar and new items such as student profiles to create a closer community within the student body. The MVSA has a physical office within the school and will share the office with the SIGs to enable them to store equipment and sell tickets to events, apparel, etc. which will make running a SIG easier.

The MVSA is willing to immediately offer the SIGs a place on the board. We are in talks with the Dean of the Veterinary School to offer academic recognition to all SIG board members. However, as part of our plan to grow into a successful, respected professional organization we also need to support the SIGs in another way - monetarily.

As funding sources are scarce, we would like to coordinate the funding of the SIGs through the MVSA. However, certain SIGs (BIG and VMBA) have a budget of nearly $2,000 per year, and in its current state the MVSA cannot support such endeavors.

To fund the current SIGs (based on approximations from a representative from each group) we would need $12,000 per year. The SIGs would apply for funding via a "grant application" within the MVSA. We would review the application and examine the groups' status and events (yearly budget, past years' memberships, total events held, number of students at each event, future goals, etc) and then award an amount. The money would pay for events (food, gifts for speakers) and subsidize clothing orders.

With a larger proportion of the student body becoming MVSA members we could support the SIGs and provide greatly subsidized prices for required items/clothing (stethoscopes, scrubs, overalls, etc).

We invite Hill's Pet Nutrition to become the major sponsor of the Murdoch Veterinary Students Association with a contribution of $12,000 per year for three years to enable the rejuvenation of the MVSA and support the entire veterinary student body.

We feel Hill's is an excellent fit as sponsor for the MVSA as it has a long history of supporting veterinary students and has demonstrated commitment to the veterinary profession.

Your support would help every student within Murdoch. We would place Hill's logo on all MVSA communications and events, and on all SIG events. An acknowledgement of your support would be made at each event and a Hill's representative would be invited to attend relevant and agreed upon events.

Your support would be appreciated by students at Murdoch for years to come.

Thank you for your consideration.