= ***Student demands refund of student union fees***. By Krysta Davies and Jason Oatway, The Voice, Feb. 8, 1996 *[See pg 10 of LSU News File]*

Langara student Gary Johnson only got his LSU students fees refunded because his circumstances were "exceptional," said a union staffer. But Johnson said: "If freedom of choice was deemed a legitimate concern in my case, then wouldn't it be the same for every student?"

= ***LSU chair defends fee refund***. By Jason Oatway, The Voice, Feb. 22, 1996

Gary Johnson, the Langara student who demanded and won a refund of his student fees, is prepared to go to court so that other students can get theirs back too. He gave the LSU the option of refunding his money or going to court. The LSU chose the first option, even though it is not obligated to refund the fees. A second student, Rob Logan, is asking for the same.

Student demands refund of student union fees

By KRYSTA DAVIES and JASON OATWAY

One Langara student got his student fees refunded, but other students may not be able to do the same.

Gary Johnson, a women's studies student, got his $43.70 student fees back from Sandy Biggerstaff, ombudswoman for the Langara Students' Union.

"The LSU is not obligated to pay back an individual's fees," Biggerstaff said. She refunded Johnson's fees because she felt his circumstances were "exceptional."

Johnson believes he should have the right to choose whether or not to belong to the student union, even though the college automatically includes LSU dues in tuition fees.

Biggerstaff acknowledged that Johnson is a friend.

"Gary is a great guy," she said, "I'm glad to see him taking a stand for something. This was a judgment call."

Valerie Dunsterville, the dean of student and education supplies services, said that the college only collects and transfers funds on behalf of the LSU.

Johnson said that after Dunsterville told him student fees are requested, not required, he sent a letter to the LSU, asking for his money back.

When the LSU received his letter, he said Biggerstaff asked him to come to the LSU office and refunded his money, "very quickly and very quietly."

"They paid me out of petty cash and then I guess they thought I'd go away," he said. After hearing about Johnson's success, another student, Rob Logan, wrote to the LSU to receive a reimbursement of his own.

Logan still hasn't had a response to his letter. When the LSU did not respond to Logan's letter, he requested a refund in person on Tuesday. Instead, he said, he was offered a list of LSU services, although he was told that his letter would be reviewed at next Monday's LSU meeting.

Two LSU members said they were unaware that Biggerstaff had refunded Johnson's fees.

"Gary had legitimate concerns, so we refunded his money," said Biggerstaff.

Johnson said his only concern was that he was not given the choice of LSU membership.

"If freedom of choice was deemed a legitimate concern in my case," asked Johnson, "then wouldn't it be the same for any student?"

"Maybe you should tell Rob Logan to come and talk to me," said Biggerstaff.

Jason Oatway photo

Gary Johnson flashes his refunded student fees.

Voluntary membership

See article - Voluntary student unionism. Voluntary student unionism (VSU) in Australia and voluntary student membership (VSM) in New Zealand mean that membership to student associations and payment of associated fees are optional, protecting the right of association.

While direct membership fees were eliminated, both nations have introduced alternative funding models like the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) to fund services. (This fact was noted in a B.C. Finance ministry memo of 2025.)

Key details regarding voluntary membership:

- **Australia (VSU):** Introduced to allow students to choose whether to join student organisations. However, universities may still charge a mandatory Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) for non-academic services, which was introduced to support student unions after VSU implementation.

- **New Zealand (VSM):** Policies aimed to stop mandatory membership fees, though some student associations initially tried to bypass this by offering universal membership without a required fee.
- **Purpose:** These policies generally aim to ensure students are not forced to pay for representation or services they may not use.
- **Voluntary Groups:** Other organizations, such as the Golden Key International Honour Society, operate on a voluntary basis, offering membership based on academic criteria rather than mandatory fees.

  Historically, in Australia, early student unions were voluntary and focused on social activities, notes Wikipedia.