

Subject: Community Psychology at VU

Michelle Fine, Distinguished Professor of Critical Social/Personality Psychology and Urban Education

The Graduate Center of the City University of New York

365 Fifth Avenue

New York, New York 10016

And

Visiting Professor University of South Africa

Professor John Germov

Jessica.town@vu.edu.au

October 4, 2023

Dear Professor John Germov and Colleagues:

I write as a community psychologist, a Distinguished Professor at the Graduate Center, City University of New York and Professor Extraordinary at University of South Africa. I write to express my deep support for Community Psychology program at Victoria University, and grave concern about a possible closure. Others can speak to the local significance of the Programme. As a scholar who works primarily in the U.S. and Europe, with an appointment in South Africa and strong intellectual ties to Victoria University, I want to address the transnational impact of Community Psychology at VU.

The Community Psychology program at VU is internationally recognized, rooted in both the knowledges of First Nations people and academic perspectives, committed to work borne at the intersection of democracy, racial and ethnic justice and social science. The VU programme is the only Community Psychology programme in Australia which dramatically limits the capacity for other universities to engage meaningful collaborations with local communities and transnational networks.

Significantly, the scholarship of VU faculty, students and community partners has been taught around the world in undergraduate, masters and doctoral course – in Canada, the US, South America, South Africa and Europe. The commitments of Community Psychology at VU to epistemic justice, intellectual rigor, multi-racial ethnic democracy and public scholarship are ground-breaking as methods for public pedagogies, community partnerships and public science for the college good. At VU, and elsewhere, Community Psychology as a field supports public health, public education and the other social sciences by bridging with the concerns of everyday community people, particularly in this case members of the First Nations.

Put simply, Community Psychology is an embodiment of VU's commitments to inclusion and equity, protecting country and centering First Nations Knowledges. To close the program would signal a betrayal of these commitments and cut off the intellectual blood streams that connect and sustain higher education to community well-being.

These transnational and local intellectual networks are crucial to sustaining the relevance, life blood and democratic, multi-racial commitments of higher education. I urge you to support the outstanding work of Community Psychology at Victoria University. The programme is a transnational treasure.

Sincerely,

Michelle Fine, Distinguished Professor of Critical Psychology

The Graduate Center, CUNY and University of South Africa

Dear Prof. Germov and anyone involved in Victoria U. Psychology restructuring,

I am writing to urge you to do whatever is needed to save the community psychology program at Victoria University, **the last program in that field in all of Australia**. I have worked at four research universities in the U.S. and have served as a visiting professor and scholar at four universities in Australia, and others in Italy, China, Germany, Spain, Chile, and South Africa. I understand the difficult decisions required by university budget reductions. But those making such a decision at Vic U have the added responsibility to avoid closing the only program in a vital branch of applied-research psychology left in your country.

Based on over a decade of research on the [Global Development of Applied Community Studies](#), I can assure you that community psychology is a growing field in over 50 countries around the world. Australia has seen the opposite trend occur, but **NOT in terms of employment opportunities for trained community psychologists**. Rather, the retrenchment emphasizing more traditional branches of laboratory and clinical psych is only in terms of formal academic structures of universities and the Australian Psychological Society. Thus, it would be extremely unfortunate if students throughout Australia interested in pursuing community psychology at the graduate level had no opportunity to do so without leaving the country!

Let me conclude by noting what a great resource you have developed at Vic U in the community psychology program, with **25+ years of operation, including internationally recognized faculty** such as Chris Sonn, Alison Baker, Amy Quayle and others in a long line that has included Adrian Fisher, Heather Gridley, Isaac Prilleltensky and others. And it has produced many talented, well-trained community psychology graduates. Again, in the strongest terms possible, **I urge the relevant administrators NOT to close the critically-needed program in community psychology at Victoria University.**

Sincerely yours,

Douglas D. Perkins, Ph.D.
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Dear Professor Germov and VU Colleagues,

I was dismayed to learn that Victoria University is thinking of closing its internationally renowned Community Psychology program. I had the pleasure of giving a keynote address at the Trans-Tasman Community Psychology conference in July, 2009 (and speaking at the Australian Psychological Society about homelessness on the same trip). I returned to Melbourne for the Victorian Homelessness Conference in 2015. Unfortunately, I had to miss the 8th international conference on Community Psychology held in Melbourne in 2020 due to family health issues.

VU faculty and students in Community Psychology do important work that contributes to Australian communities and Australian society. Work on prevention, community development, and the development and evaluation of community programs enhance the well-being of your citizens and promotes just solutions to social problems. Community psychology at VU is very much on the international map with the cross-fertilization across countries and programs leading to vibrant research and theoretical development. Closure of the program at Victoria University would be felt around the world.

Sincerely,

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[TED Talk: How to end homelessness](#)



Shinn, M. & Khadduri, J. (2020) *In the midst of plenty: Homelessness and what to do about it*. Wiley.

Re: Letter of Support for the Community Psychology program at VU

Dear Professor Germov and VU colleagues,

We write as a group of community psychologists from Aotearoa/New Zealand representing Massey University, the University of Waikato and the University of Auckland in support for the continuation of the Community Psychology program at your university. We have interacted with staff and students from the VU program for decades and continue to be impressed by the calibre of the academic and applied scholarship that is carried out in Melbourne and across Australia.

This is the only Community Psychology program in Australia and a key element of the university's distinctiveness. Given its international profile, the program likely contributes significantly to the international ranking of VU and knowledge translation into diverse applied settings. The cessation of this program will detract from the efforts at VU to embed the university and its activities within the local community and to contribute to the betterment of Australian society.

The VU program in Community Psychology is widely recognised internationally for significant contributions to the discipline, advancing applied scholarship, and staff contributions to the wellbeing and flourishing of local communities. This program represents key elements of the role of the contemporary scholar engaged in rigorous research and applications of academic knowledge for the betterment of society.

The VU Community Psychology program aligns well with the university's goals of promoting equity and inclusion and conducting research and related actions for the advancement of justice in Australia. This program is a crucial part of the discipline that complements allied programs in areas such as clinical, counselling, health, and work psychology. It is often more cost effective to prevent rather than respond to ill-health. Accordingly, community psychology offers a coherent prevention-focused framework for responding to the various unfolding crises arising in contemporary societies. Key contributions from the Community Psychology program at VU are in community development and the creation and evaluation of programs that promote wellbeing and keep communities vibrant and healthy. Staff and students in this program also respond to the needs of communities in distress and place the university at the centre of their efforts to reach out and support the Australian citizenry.

We strongly support the retaining of this high profile and impactful graduate program in Community Psychology at VU.

For your consideration

Professor Darrin Hodgetts (Massey University)

Professor Linda Nikora (University of Auckland)

Professor Nikki Harre (University of Auckland)

Associate Professor Bridgette Masters-Awatere (University of Waikato)

Associate Professor Shiloh Groot (University of Auckland)

Associate Professor Mohi Rua (University of Auckland)

Dr Ottilie Stolte (University of Waikato)

Dr Pita King (Massey University)

Dr Shemana Cassim (Massey University)

5 October 2023

Dear Professor John Germov,

Re: Letter of Support for VU Community Psychology Masters

I am writing this letter from South Africa in support of the VU Community Psychology Masters course.

The course remains an inspiration for many colleagues around the world, including those of us in South Africa. It has proven exemplary in contributing to and honouring a diversity of psychological approaches and practices within and beyond the Australian context.

As the only formalised community psychology course in Australia, cutting it will no doubt signal the end of this important and utterly vital programme, which has offered intellectual and, indeed, psychological sustenance for so many around the world. I know that I speak for myself and many others when I say that community psychology courses, like those offered at VU, are the only homes that I have found within psychology. Without community psychology courses like these, I would undoubtedly have left the discipline a long time ago.

I have had the privilege and the honour of interacting with some of the graduate students who were trained in the VU community psychology course. The attention to detail, scholarly rigour, collegiality, and commitment to scholar-activism displayed by each one of these graduates was inspirational and truly a testament to the training offered within the VU community psychology course.

Similarly, the teachers within the VU community psychology course that I have interacted with have been generous, kind, and patient in their engagements. Their teaching is informed by global networks that comprise community members, students, and other scholars. In housing such esteemed teachers, VU's community psychology course has for many years been the envy of many community psychology departments around the world.

The VU community psychology course, as I understand it, is aligned with VU's goals of inclusion and equity, protecting the country, centering First Nations Knowledges and conducting research with impact. Cutting it would be a tremendous blow to upholding these goals.

I am writing to request that the decision to cut VU's community psychology masters course be seriously reconsidered.

Sincerely,

Dr Nick Malherbe
Senior Researcher
Institute for Social and Health Sciences
University of South Africa