

Drew Pavlou - Submission to The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security
into National Security Threats on Campus

1. I write to the Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security regarding Chinese state interference at The University of Queensland which is pervasive and ongoing. In my experience as a campus human rights activist opposed to Chinese government atrocities, I believe universities like UQ are now so economically dependent on China that they are willing to censor Chinese government critics to safeguard positive ties. This authoritarian creep illustrates the insidious danger Chinese state interference poses to our national security and democratic way of life.
2. My story began last year when I held a peaceful campus sit-in at UQ on July 24th, 2019 calling for the university to divest from its close economic ties with China in response to the Chinese government's crackdown on democratic protestors in Hong Kong and its genocidal campaign against the Uyghur ethnic minority. I had no experience as an activist – this was the first protest I had ever organized in my life. I was driven by a pressing sense of outrage at the images of police brutality being relayed from Hong Kong and the increasingly dire reports coming out of Xinjiang, and I was furious that many in public life chose to look the other way due to China's economic importance while Uyghurs faced genocide. I had studied the history of the international community's failure to prevent the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide, and I was tormented by the fear that we would again break the solemn vow we made in the aftermath of World War II: "Never Again." This was what drove me to organize a protest on July 24th, the university's Market Day. We specifically chose this day because it is traditionally the busiest day of the year on campus and we wanted our peaceful sit-in to cause maximum disruption so as to wake up fellow students to the nature of our university's ties to this regime.
3. These ties were, and remain, pervasive, to the extent that the University of Queensland arguably has the closest relationship of any university in the English-speaking world to the Chinese government. UQ's original agreement with its Confucius Institute was notably opaque even by the standards of Hanban, the Chinese government organization that manages Confucius Institutes worldwide. The agreement gave Hanban overriding authority over all UQ Confucius Institute teaching content.¹ Vice-Chancellor Peter Høj was a senior consultant to Hanban and was later appointed a member of the governing Council of Confucius Institute Headquarters in 2017. He only stood down in late 2018 due to legal advice surrounding his required signing of Australia's Foreign Interference Transparency Scheme.² His support for Hanban was so great that in 2015, China's Vice-Premier Liu Yandong awarded him with the Hanban

¹ Fergus Hunter, "Universities must accept China's directives on Confucius Institutes, contracts reveal," July 25 2019 for The Sydney Morning Herald. www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/universities-must-accept-china-s-directives-on-confucius-institutes-contracts-reveal-20190724-p52ab9.html

² Sean Rubinsztein-Dunlop, "The Chinese Government co-funded at least four University of Queensland courses," October 15 2019 for ABC News. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-10-15/chinese-government-cofunded-four-university-of-queensland-course/11601946>

Most Outstanding Individual of the Year Award in Shanghai for his efforts promoting Confucius Institutes worldwide.³ This is significant because senior Chinese government officials have described Confucius Institutes as “an important part of China’s overseas propaganda set up.”⁴ It is for this reason the United States government designated the Confucius Institute U.S. Center a foreign mission of the PRC in 2019, describing Confucius Institutes as forming a key role in “Beijing’s global propaganda and malign influence campaign.” While Høj did not receive financial compensation for his role as a consultant to Hanban, financial incentives did play a part in his overall willingness to advance Chinese propaganda interests. On May 12th, 2020, Senator James Paterson used parliamentary privilege to reveal that documents provided to him by an unknown whistle blower showed Vice-Chancellor Peter Høj received a \$200,000 bonus in 2019 based partly on his success in growing the university's relationship with China.⁵

4. This relationship was and remains characterised by an economic dependence on China that threatens the ability of the university to safeguard principles like academic freedom and the independence of course content. UQ has stated that it relies on China for at least twenty per cent of its overall revenue. Against this backdrop, an ABC Four Corners investigation found that at least four courses at UQ were co-funded by the Chinese government, including one course, ECON3820: Understanding China that seems to justify the Chinese state’s genocidal campaign against Uyghurs based on their overrepresentation in “terrorist statistics,” a key Chinese government propaganda line. Another ECON3820 class discussion asked students whether pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong amount to terrorism.⁶ It appears from this that Chinese state propaganda is taught as course content at the University of Queensland. Facing mounting public criticism of the UQ Confucius Institute and its role at UQ, Chancellor Peter Varghese took to ASPI’s *The Strategist* blog to issue a strident defence of UQ’s Confucius Institute, characterizing it as an innocuous language and cultural studies program responsible for such socially productive activities as “work(ing) with the Queensland police force to help educate visiting Chinese about safety at Australian beaches.”⁷ He was not

³ UQ News, “UQ Vice-Chancellor receives Confucian award from China’s Vice-Premier,” December 7 2015. <https://www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2015/12/uq-vice-chancellor-receives-confucian-award-china%E2%80%99s-vice-premier>

⁴ Ethan Epstein, “How China Infiltrated US Classrooms,” January 16 2018 for Politico. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/01/16/how-china-infiltrated-us-classrooms-216327>

⁵ Fergus Hunter, “Liberal senator hits out at university China reliance, reveals whistle blower documents,” May 13 2020 for The Sydney Morning Herald. <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/federal/liberal-senator-hits-out-at-university-china-reliance-reveals-whistleblower-documents-20200513-p54sf9.html?fbclid=IwAR2DgC33v2GRQvMeG24l3S3nZdxOaiFModW4BpWSnLpMpgD4RShJPzo2XyM>

⁶ Shannon Molloy, “Australian university teaching pro-China class that amounts to propaganda, critics say,” July 3, 2020 for news.com.au. <https://www.news.com.au/finance/business/australian-university-teaching-prochina-class-that-amounts-to-amounts-to-propaganda-critics-say/news-story/d2d4f7e4182f0fc922f351ec26c5fb1b>

⁷ Peter Varghese, “Australian universities and China: we need clear-eyed engagement,” August 23, 2019 for ASPI’s *The Strategist* blog. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australian-universities-and-china-we-need-clear-eyed-engagement/>

however able to explain how the UQ Confucius Institute's ties with Chinese nanotechnology experts and state-backed civil-military helicopter development researchers advanced the Confucius Institute's important swim safety programs.⁸ Nor for that matter was he able to expound upon what involvement UQ Professor Heng Tao Shen may have had with these swim safety programs, if any. Heng Tao Shen now resides in China, where he heads Koala AI, an artificial intelligence surveillance company assisting China's genocidal crackdown on Uyghurs. Evidence suggests Heng Tao Shen built up Koala AI in part based off knowledge gleaned from UQ research grants.⁹ If UQ's Confucius Institute academics are able to produce world leading research in highly sensitive technological areas while also leading joint efforts with the Queensland Police Force to reduce drownings at Australian beaches, we can only conclude that these must be highly versatile, well-rounded researchers. Perhaps the same could be said for Brisbane Chinese Consul-General Xu Jie, who was awarded an honorary UQ doctorate and made an adjunct UQ professor in a secretive appointment that has drawn considerable public scrutiny considering his lack of any evident academic credentials.¹⁰ Again, one can only conclude that Dr. Xu Jie is a highly dexterous individual considering his ability to juggle responsibilities as a UQ Professor while simultaneously serving as a diplomatic representative of a regime currently orchestrating genocide against ethnic minorities.

5. UQ's extensive ties with China thus provided us good reason to protest on human rights grounds. As July 24th, 2019 approached, Chinese nationalist students sought to pressure UQ into shutting down our protest, smearing us as supporters of "Uyghur Islamic Terrorism" – a common propaganda line repeated by Chinese authorities as justification for the detention of more than a million Uyghurs in concentration camps. When this failed, these nationalist students turned to terror tactics, seeking to intimidate us into abandoning the protest with threats of violence. I responded with defiance to the numerous death threats I received, vowing to press ahead with the rally regardless. At around 3 AM on the morning of the protest, I received an ominous text message from a man I only know by the English name Frank Wang who would prove to be one of the key leaders of the Chinese nationalist counterdemonstration on the day. He said: "Cancel the event, if u keep doing this, ur gonna face millions of people on your opposite side."
6. On the day of the protest, we carried out a peaceful, albeit disruptive sit-in rally with around fifteen to twenty pro-democracy supporters in a corridor of the university that

⁸ See research presented by ANU China expert Geoff P. Wade:
https://twitter.com/geoff_p_wade/status/1165589215700144128;
https://twitter.com/geoff_p_wade/status/1165586580074971136

⁹ Alex Joske, "The Company With Aussie Roots That's Helping Build China's Surveillance State," August 26 2019 for ASPI's *The Strategist* blog. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-company-with-aussie-roots-thats-helping-build-chinas-surveillance-state/>

¹⁰ John Power, "University of Queensland faces heat for naming Chinese diplomat Xu Jie as faculty member," July 26 2019 for The South China Morning Post. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/3020168/university-queensland-faces-heat-naming-chinese-diplomat>

led to the Great Court. We were about to conclude the protest when we were attacked. Unbeknownst to us, three hundred supporters of the Chinese government had surrounded our sit-in demonstration while we had been distracted with chanting. They then proceeded to attack us with the intention of shutting down our protest with violence. I was physically assaulted on three separate occasions on the day by masked men who took steps to conceal their identity and spoke into earpieces. They acted in a co-ordinated way, ganging up on and assaulting exposed pro-Hong Kong students in packs.

7. We were ultimately surrounded by hundreds of Chinese nationalists for hours. They refused to let us peacefully withdraw from the protest. This meant that dozens of police had to be called in to protect us. I was punched in the ribs and mouth and on one occasion was attacked from behind by a man in a mask bearing skeletal teeth. He struck me in the back of the head, and I fell to the ground in a dizzy haze. Since we were surrounded on all sides, some of the nationalist men were able to attack our group from the rear, pouring drinks filled with spit and phlegm over us. A UQ security guard was assaulted and bitten by one of these Chinese nationalists when he tried to intervene, and one pro-Hong Kong student was choke slammed to the ground. One Hong Konger girl even had her dress ripped. We tried to fight back in self-defence, but it was of no use because we were so utterly outnumbered. The Chinese nationalists drowned out our pro-democracy chants with a boom speaker playing the Chinese national anthem and some held up signs belittling Hong Kongers as dogs and vermin. They yelled insults in Chinese describing Australians as white trash and Hong Kongers as subhuman. It was a terrifying display of ultra-nationalism with frightening racial supremacist undertones, such that it called to mind images of fascist rallies in the 1930s.
8. To this day, no one has ever been able to identify the violent agitators in the Chinese nationalist crowd. UQ's investigation turned up nothing and was not able to identify the main perpetrators of violence as students. I reported the man in the skeletal teeth mask who king hit me from behind to the police who were present, and they took down his details. They would not file assault charges against him until some thirteen months later when public pressure forced them to take this course of action. They had previously ignored two separate requests by my lawyers to file charges against him. By the time the man was charged, a routine Border Force check found that he had left the country to return to China. The Queensland Police Service would not give me his name, nor would they tell me whether he was a student.
9. In an effort to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the protests on the day, police called me and Frank Wang, the leader of the Chinese nationalist delegation, aside to speak. I expressed my desire to Frank that we wanted to peacefully withdraw and requested safe passage to leave. The leader of the Chinese nationalists refused us safe passage, demanding that we apologize to the Chinese nation for our offensive protest. In full view of police and UQ security officials, he told me that members of his crowd were not students and he could not protect me from them if I refused to apologize. He told me that the crowd was angry and would be furious if I did not apologize to China for ignorantly attempting to split up the nation. Based on this exchange and based off the

way the co-ordinated group of men who attacked us spoke into earpieces and took steps to conceal their identity, it is my sincere belief that the violent attacks that day were orchestrated by the Chinese Consulate in Brisbane. I would urge the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security to investigate this possibility. We know that the Chinese Student Scholar Association, the body through which we suspect the counter-protest to have been so quickly organized, boasts of its ties to the Chinese Consulate. I believe the possibility that a foreign government could be organizing and coordinating violent attacks on Australian shores so as to stop Australians from peacefully carrying out their right to freedom of speech and right to freedom of assembly represents a pressing matter of national security concern.

10. Unfortunately, violent intimidation on the part of nationalist actors continued in the aftermath of the protest. After refusing Frank Wang's requests that I speak before the Chinese nationalist crowd to apologize for causing offense to the Chinese nation, the crowd comprised of Chinese nationalists refused to guarantee our safe passage from the area. Police therefore had to escort us to safety in order for us to leave without being assaulted. For all my attempts to demonstrate bravery and defiance in the face of these violent terror tactics, I remember feelings of intense fear settling over me as I confronted the prospect of walking to my parked car to drive home. Pro-democracy students walked each other in groups to people's cars so that no one would be "jumped" or assaulted on their own. Meanwhile, the Chinese nationalist crowd stayed behind to continue leading nationalist chants over their boom speaker – their cries echoed throughout the grounds of the university.
11. Sadly, at least one Hong Kong student was viciously assaulted by nationalists in a UQ car park in the aftermath of the protest. He was identified by his Hong Kong Student Association hoodie and consequently jumped by a pack of Chinese men. He never visited police because he feared this would lead to his identification by the Brisbane Chinese Consulate and lead to further reprisals. Whether or not the Consulate was involved, I believe it is significant that an Australian resident would fear reporting an unlawful assault to Australian police forces out of fear that somehow Chinese intelligence would identify him, because it speaks to a general belief among dissident diaspora populations in Australia that Chinese intelligence is beyond the reach of the law even here in Australia.
12. On the night of the protest, Chinese state media posted my name and photograph, identifying me as the protest leader alongside other pro-democracy Hong Kong students. After this, the Chinese Consul-General in Brisbane, UQ Professor Xu Jie, endorsed the "spontaneous patriotism" of the nationalist crowd that assaulted us, denouncing us as separatists. Separatism is a death penalty offense in China, one of the most heinous crimes the Chinese state can accuse someone of. So, what followed the Consul-General's statement was an avalanche of death threats against me and my family. Chinese accounts, some registered in Australia, sent messages promising to torture my family and rape my mother in front of me before murdering us. I received dozens of threats like this that mentioned my family and described graphic depictions of violence. I believe Consul-General Xu Jie's statement encouraged this, meaning the Brisbane Chinese Consulate effectively incited violent attacks against my family for the

crime of speaking freely as an Australian citizen about the Chinese government's atrocities. Foreign Minister Marise Payne in fact denounced this appalling and possible illegal behaviour on the part of the Chinese Consulate, as did the US Ambassador to Australia. I urge the Committee to investigate Xu Jie's actions and his communications with Chinese government authorities to determine to what extent he acted to intimidate and incite violence against myself and other Australian critics.

13. The death threats I received in the immediate aftermath of the protest were horrifying and my terrified family demanded I leave the house. Without any possible alternative accommodation, I was almost made homeless. Other pro-democracy students had it even worse. Within 24 hours, Chinese state security officials visited the Chinese family members of at least two pro-democracy students and warned these families that they would risk losing their jobs or even being imprisoned if their Australian relatives continued to take part in "anti-China activities" at The University of Queensland. The speed with which the Chinese authorities were able to identify members of our crowd and track down their families in China was terrifying and again points to the involvement of the Brisbane Chinese Consulate in organizing against our pro-democracy organization. The students targeted in this way would never again take part in active political activities or protests in Brisbane again – the Chinese authorities succeeded in intimidating these Australian residents into silence.
14. Possibly the most frightening development involved the incredibly personal "doxing" of one pro-democracy participant, with a viral Chinese social media post circulating such invasive information as this pro-democracy student's refugee papers, his address, UQ student details, passport and marriage certificate. The post's Chinese caption translated to: "We will never let him rest safely in Brisbane." This student and his young family were ultimately forced into hiding for several months. Months later, Chinese nationalists recognised him on a night out with his Brisbane family, hurling abuse at him and calling him a "race traitor" until restaurant staff removed them from the premises. As word of these incidents spread through the Hong Konger student community at UQ, most would completely forgo any further activism. I never saw most of the pro-democracy students of July 24th again. Some messaged me to explain that they were too terrified to protest given the violence and intimidation of July 24th. Most completely cut all contact with me given the way the Chinese state media had singled me out for attack. I urge the Committee to investigate Chinese government attempts to intimidate pro-democracy activists on Australian campuses and the extent to which these attempts to silence critics in Australia represented official Chinese state policy.
15. No one on the nationalist side faced any comparable treatment. UQ never disciplined a single nationalist student, and to my knowledge the man in the skeletal teeth mask who fled the country for China is the only person to ever be charged by police for the brutal attacks of that day. On Chinese social media, the nationalist crowd was mostly rewarded for their heroism. Video of the Chinese nationalist crowd playing the Chinese national anthem to drown out "separatists" went viral on Chinese social media, attracting at least 100 million views. The leaders of the nationalist crowd were held up as patriots and heroes and lauded by the Chinese press. Consul-General Xu Jie, an adjunct UQ Professor at the time of his statement endorsing violent attacks on UQ

students, remains a UQ professor as of the date of this submission. Because ultimately, instead of protecting me, or disciplining the men who attacked me, or removing the Consul-General in response to his calls for violence, UQ went after me and other pro-democracy students, attempting to pressure us into giving up our protest activities.

16. I would argue that this demonstrates a profound arrogance on the part of those who run The University of Queensland – those responsible for crafting this policy response to violent attacks on campus seem to have believed themselves somehow liberated from considerations of Australia’s democratic values or its national security interests. Chancellor Peter Varghese, Vice-Chancellor Peter Høj and Deputy Vice-Chancellors Joanne Wright and Rongyu Li seem to have totally disregarded the Foreign Minister’s condemnation of the Consulate, instead taking it upon themselves to craft their own parallel foreign policy.
17. Documents obtained under freedom of information request show that on the evening of July 24th, 2019, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for External Engagement Rongyu Li, a man who also chairs the board of the Confucius Institute at UQ, was asked by senior university administration officials to send a message outlining the university’s response to the violence to the Brisbane Chinese Consulate “for review.” The meaning of the phrase “for review” in the context of the message suggests that Rongyu Li was being asked to send the message to the Brisbane Chinese Consulate to evaluate the university’s response. This is untoward in the extreme, suggesting that the university upper brass was more concerned about the Chinese Consulate’s position than the safety of students like myself. UQ has continued to deny all accusations of collusion with the Brisbane Chinese Consulate, so I believe it remains open to the Joint Committee on Intelligence to determine the facts. It is my strong suspicion that the University administration did work with the Brisbane Chinese Consulate in relation to the campus protests, and so I urge the Committee to investigate this possibility by subpoenaing university communication records, including the email and phone logs of senior university administration officials like Chancellor Varghese, Vice-Chancellor Høj, and especially Deputy-Vice Chancellor Rongyu Li, who appears to have been the university’s point man for relations with the Consulate given his position on the Confucius Institute board. The possibility that an Australian public university colluded with foreign officials in an attempt to suppress campus protests represents a serious threat to national security that demands thorough investigation.
18. Given the university did not act to protect me or my fellow students victimised by the violent attacks that day, I almost immediately organized a follow up protest in defiance of the violence to be held on July 31st, 2019 at 12 PM. On July 25th, UQ authorities held a crisis meeting with the student leaders of the UQ Union. UQ Union President Georgia Milroy and Union Secretary Ethan Van Roo called me on the evening of July 25th to inform me that UQ Deputy Vice-Chancellor Joanne Wright had used this crisis meeting to instruct them to apply pressure to me to call off the protest.
19. UQ authorities then called me into an ostensibly unrelated disciplinary hearing conveniently scheduled for July 31st, 2019 at 12 PM. I refused to attend, so they called a security meeting with me, where they gave me a list of conditions under which they

would allow me to hold the protest. If I didn't comply with their draconian conditions - they demanded I hold the rally in a specially designated "free speech zone" behind high security fences on a patch of grass behind a car park far from the centre of campus - they would call police to haul us away. After giving me these conditions, those present in the security meeting made an implicit threat to my enrolment - "We like you being a student at UQ and want that to continue into the future." The message was clear - comply with our demands or face expulsion. This was the first time the university linked my continued enrolment to my protest activities.

20. I ultimately held the rally on July 31st at 12 PM without complying with their conditions as I saw them as an unreasonable restriction on our right to freedom of assembly. I then continued my activism, running for the UQ Senate, the board that runs the university. Students democratically elected me to the position on a platform that involved opposing the university's ties to the Chinese state. I promised to relentlessly oppose the university's unethical ties with a government orchestrating genocide, and students roundly endorsed my vision. UQ harassed me throughout my campaign, repeatedly calling me into lengthy disciplinary meetings to discuss minor personal infractions and breaches of campaign rules. I believe this may have been an attempt to lay the groundwork for disqualifying my candidacy on technical grounds.
21. UQ tried to bar me from the Senate after my democratic election. On the day of my electoral victory itself on October 11th, 2019, they delayed certifying the results of the election for an unexplained six-hour period in what I believe to have been an attempt to find grounds upon which they could legally invalidate my election. After I sent a letter promising to take legal action should they act illegally, they immediately certified the result. Undeterred, Chancellor Peter Varghese and Vice-Chancellor Peter Høj then began a campaign of harassment against me, stacking up multiple supposed disciplinary infractions against me and continually threatening my enrolment through intermediaries.
22. At the likely direction of Chancellor Peter Varghese and Vice-Chancellor Peter Høj, UQ Senate manager John Montgomery tried to pressure me into deleting social media postings where I expressed my support for democracy and human rights in Hong Kong as a UQ Senator. I was accused of damaging the university's reputation, a bizarre charge considering there is widespread support for democracy and human rights in the Australian community. I can only infer that they meant I was damaging the university's relationship with Chinese authorities. One would then be forced to consider whether such a relationship premised upon the rejection of democracy and human rights in Hong Kong is in Australia's national interest. I believe this would in fact be a total abrogation of Australia's important role in the Asia-Pacific region as a middle power committed to the safeguarding of human rights. University of Queensland authorities seemed to differ in their opinion as to what Australia's role should be.
23. I first met UQ Chancellor Peter Varghese in early January 2020 for a routine introductory Senate meeting. He emphasized the legal rules upon which UQ Senate membership was predicated, and I sought to assure him that I would abide by the UQ Senate's rules by speaking candidly, explaining that while I had obviously had a highly

public, contentious relationship with university administration officials in the past, I intended to separate this rabble-rousing public activism from my personal work on the Senate where I would abide by the rules and act professionally. I did however let him know that I remained firmly committed to my opposition to the university's deep ties with the Chinese government considering its human rights record and would not compromise on these views on the Senate considering the democratic mandate students had just handed me at the election. Chancellor Varghese responded with legalese explaining that I had no democratic mandate or special responsibility to undergraduate students as their representative because once confirmed to the Senate all members were legally obligated to act not on factional lines but in the university's best interests – despite my formal title as Undergraduate Representative to the Senate, the Senate was not a democratic or representative body but instead analogous to a corporate board. He countered my arguments about Chinese government influence by explaining that UQ had begun a strategy to diversify its international student intake, and that while he understood concerns about CCP influence, engagement with China was the only path forward considering declining public expenditure on universities. He then explained that he regarded the UQ Confucius Institute controversy as a “settled” issue as the Senate had just confirmed a renegotiated contract with Hanban a month before I joined the Senate in January. He forbade me from discussing any of this, specifically instructing me that I was not to follow through on an election promise that I would keep a blog about my Senate activities as former Senate members had previously done before me. He explicitly refused to seat me on Senate sub-committees related to budgetary expenditure and he refused to consider my request that I be allowed to take a \$1 salary in exchange for the university promising to donate the rest of my \$50,000 salary to Amnesty International. I left with a feeling that Varghese had intended the meeting as a show of force on the part of university authorities to demonstrate they would not compromise or buckle on any elements of my democratically mandated agenda.

24. Dejected by the university's stonewalling tactics, I reverted to the choice weapon of the powerless, that is, the use of satire and ridicule. Offended that Varghese considered the Confucius Institute matter “closed” as soon as I won election, I attempted to put it back on the agenda by making satirical online posts mocking Vice-Chancellor Høj's relationship with the Confucius Institute and drawing attention to the fact that it remains an arm of the genocidal Chinese government. Varghese then appears to have concluded I was to be humbled into submission for failing to bend the knee. He escalated his shock-and-awe tactics by instructing the university's high-powered lawyers at Clayton Utz to threaten me with a lawsuit seeking “indemnity costs” for reputational damage unless I deleted the online posts immediately. These legal threats were marked confidential and they warned that I would face further legal trouble if I discussed them in public. As a 20-year-old undergraduate student supporting myself through part-time work tutoring high school students, I had absolutely no way of paying a billion-dollar institution like UQ indemnity costs, and they knew it. It was an attempt to scare me and bully me into submission. I caved to the pressure and deleted the posts before seeking confirmation from Clayton Utz partner Ian Bloemendal that the university would drop the lawsuit threat. I expressed a belief in an email to Bloemendal that these threats were best characterised as an extortion threat given the power

differential between myself and the university. To really drive home this power differential, Bloemendal preceded to then send me a thuggish email in which he warned he might sue me for defamation if I referred to UQ's legal threats as an extortion threat.

25. Unfortunately, Varghese was not done. That month, UQ Chancellor Peter Varghese convened a meeting of the Senate to discuss stopping me from ever being seated. For nearly three hours, the UQ Senate discussed whether my democratic election should be overturned. I was expected as a 20-year-old to face a room full of high-powered corporate executives, judges and administrators and to defend myself without legal representation present. I was subjected to a fairly merciless dressing down in which UQ Senate members appointed by Vice-Chancellor Høj took turns to question me about my "disgusting attacks" on Høj. Outside the room, Vice-Chancellor Peter Høj smirked at me and said: "Well done Drew, I don't think I've even ever kept them waiting this long before." I read it as an attempt to intimidate me. Ultimately, Chancellor Varghese was not successful in removing me, but he did approach me at the Senate dinner after, smirking, to say: "You survived today, Drew." The entire episode was marked confidential and wiped from the public minutes of the UQ Senate meeting and I was warned that I would be immediately removed from the Senate if I discussed it.
26. At the same UQ Senate meeting, I discovered that Vice-Chancellor Peter Høj was to be awarded a \$200,000 bonus for achieving his performance metrics, one of which included deepening ties with China. In a document circulated to Senate members, we were instructed to approve the bonus because he had cultivated ties with Chinese officials by visiting China several times over the past year. Chancellor Peter Varghese led a round of applause on the Senate for Høj because Høj had apparently elected not to receive the highest possible bonus of \$250,000. I was the only member of the UQ Senate to oppose the motion and question the wisdom of Høj's remuneration, at which point Varghese lost his temper at me and asked: "Are you done?" This was an attempt to humiliate me before the other Senate members and remind me of my place. The bonus was marked confidential and not included in the public minutes of the meeting. I was threatened with court action and immediate removal from the Senate if I discussed it.
27. At the same UQ Senate meeting, I was also the only member of the UQ Senate to oppose the signing of a new five-year deal with the Confucius Institute, a deal personally negotiated by Høj. I questioned whether the Vice-Chancellor was aware that the Chinese host university UQ was to deal with under the deal, Tianjin University, was considered a "High Risk" university according to ASPI's China Defence University Tracker – it carries out research for China's Ministry of State Security and hosts MSS researchers. Høj replied that he was personally satisfied with Tianjin University's credentials and human rights record and that UQ had never noticed anything untoward in its relationship with Tianjin. The motion was then passed over my objections.
28. At the UQ Senate dinner after the meeting, Høj mocked my concerns and my history as an activist, saying: "Well done on your activism Drew, I just reapproved the Confucius Institute deal for five years." He and the other UQ Senate members present laughed in

my face, belittling me. The experience hardened my belief that the UQ Senate existed as simply a rubber-stamp body for approving Høj and Varghese's plans, and it hardened my belief they were totally unaccountable to any democratic mechanism for dissent on campus. The fact that they openly mocked my campus political activism told me that they saw themselves as untouchable and above any attempt from within the university to express discontent with their China policies. The level of disrespect levelled towards me on the part of senior university administration officials was remarkable and confirmed for me the utter impossibility of working through the UQ Senate for change. I resolved to direct my attentions towards pressuring the university externally as an activist. I therefore escalated my protest activities on campus.

29. After I escalated my protest activities in response to the administration's reluctance to compromise on any aspect of its deep relations with the Chinese government, I believe Varghese and Høj sought to remove me as a Senate member and student by initiating expulsion proceedings against me. I believe there is scope to investigate the origins of UQ's decision to investigate me and seek my expulsion – freedom of information requests show UQ initiated the investigation that would lead to my expulsion within just two hours of becoming aware of a public protest I led against the Confucius Institute.¹¹ This indicates UQ directly targeted me for my political activism against Chinese government human rights abuses, completely making a farce of UQ's public statements that the process was initiated independently in response to "student complaints."
30. Later, Chinese authorities would express public approval of UQ's attempt to expel me, endorsing my expulsion in Chinese state media like the Global Times.¹² UQ would condemn the public intervention of democratically elected Australian members of Parliament in my case but never once denounce the Chinese government's intervention which in itself represented an extraordinary example of foreign interference. I would urge the Committee to investigate the extent to which Chinese authorities interfered in my case by subpoenaing university communication records, including the email and phone logs of senior university administration officials like Chancellor Varghese, Vice-Chancellor Høj, and especially Deputy-Vice Chancellor Rongyu Li, as well as investigating the Brisbane Chinese Consulate's communications. To this day, UQ refuses to unseal tens of thousands of pages worth of internal documents related to my case.
31. The actual 186-page expulsion dossier outlining the university's case against me was served to me on April 9th, 2020. This document included a number of petty and vexatious allegations, including the farcical allegation that I had disrupted campus by

¹¹ Anthony Klan, "UQ compiles 13,770 pages of legal "advice" on student Pavlou: Uni docs scandal," October 23 2020 for The Klaxon.

<https://www.theklaxon.com.au/home/draft-template-9d2az-lbygd-s46mc-apas7-h4dxj>

¹² Xu Keyue, "Australian university students support anti-China rioter expulsion," April 24 2020 for The Global Times <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1186614.shtml>; Xu Keyue, "Aussie university students say 'justice comes' after anti-China rioter's suspension," May 31 2020 for The Global Times

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1190099.shtml>

failing to pay for a pen in a gift shop after I used it to take a note before placing it back on the shelf. Other allegations involved UQ taking screenshots from my personal Facebook wall and interpreting them in the most malicious and uncharitable light possible in order to drag me through the mud – this suggested that university authorities subjected me to an extended and unexplained period of surveillance.

32. I believe UQ launched an investigation into me in search of a crime. For example, in February I responded with insults to trolls who sought to taunt me over my friend Wilson Gavin's suicide by accusing me of having been complicit in his death. His death is something that still deeply impacts me to this day, and I have often regrettably lashed out in anger over the tragedy out of grief. My vitriolic response to these trolls was unwise, though I believe understandable given the dark place I occupied at the time, just days after a close mate's tragic suicide. UQ sought to use screenshots showing me responding to these trolls with insults as evidence that I was a dangerous bully who had to be expelled. Rendering these screenshots devoid of their original context was malicious in the extreme and served to indicate that UQ's lawyers simply trawled through my social media profiles looking for anything to use against me. After some students involved in the exchange came forward to make clear they had never actually complained about me, the ABC was able to report that at least two of the charges against me involving "student complaints" were manufactured by the university.¹³ UQ did not respond to this embarrassment by dropping these particular charges, but by resorting to absurd legal semantics, saying that they employed an "objective" standard when evaluating cases of bullying, so that it did not matter whether the students involved had actually felt bullied or complained about me to UQ, but whether a "reasonable person" would have felt bullied if they had been the recipient of my insults in relation to those taunting me over my friend's suicide. UQ's lawyer, MinterEllison partner Tom Fletcher, pressed on with his recommendation to the Disciplinary Board that they impose the highest possible penalty of expulsion.
33. Indeed, UQ's lawyer, MinterEllison partner Tom Fletcher, pressed for the UQ Disciplinary Board to impose the penalty of expulsion for "offenses" directly related to my political activism. One allegation levelled against me by UQ in the expulsion dossier alleged that I had made a Chinese student withdraw from their courses in response to an online post I made in support of Hong Kong. Another allegation levelled against me charged that I had damaged the university's reputation with my criticism of the university's ties to China. The university and their legal representatives apparently considered the exercise of free speech on campus to constitute an offense worthy of a possible lifetime ban from UQ.
34. UQ initially sought to deny me access to legal representation, writing to me that they reserved final say over who they would allow accompany me to my Disciplinary Board hearing as a "support person." They would only cave into allowing me legal representation after significant public pressure. All the while, they trashed me in the

¹³ Conor Duffy, "Victim' of University of Queensland student activist Drew Pavlou says charge is 'laughable' in email lodged as part of appeal," June 4 2020 for ABC News.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-04/anti-china-activist-drew-pavlou-ug-senate-hearing/12320016>

media by denouncing me as a threat to other students, a defamatory attack on my good name. At one point, as the Australian Financial Review records, a UQ spokeswoman shockingly mocked my sex life to journalists, claiming I was only a campus activist because I was a virgin looking for sex.¹⁴ This campaign against me as a student was shocking and appalling considering my youth and my poor mental health in the wake of my friend's suicide. UQ even had its lawyers threaten me with prison time when they had MinterEllison accuse me of contempt of court for seeking to expose UQ's communications with the Chinese Consulate on the evening of July 24th, 2019 – this was an attempt to blanket UQ's China dealings in silence and deny the public their right to know.

35. In the wake of UQ's attempt to expel me, I was forced to increase the dosage of the medication I take for anxiety and depression and at times fell prey to suicidal ideation. UQ brought in three law firms, including the internationally renowned Minter Ellison and Clayton Utz, to direct the disciplinary panels that heard my case within the university to expel me. These disciplinary panels were made up of full-time employees of the university, casting doubt on the idea that they could be expected to make an independent decision in the face of UQ's pressure. They promptly did the university's bidding. Such was the pressure exerted on them that the chair of the Disciplinary Board that handed down a two-year suspension against me, Professor Doune MacDonald, would later testify to multiple people that she felt used and discarded by UQ for her part played in this travesty. This was confirmed to me by an ABC journalist who was contacted by one of her friends.
36. While the original two-year suspension the Disciplinary Board handed down was reduced to six months on appeal before the UQ Senate Disciplinary Board, and 9 of the original 11 charges against me were eventually thrown out by UQ's own Kangaroo Court as unsustainable, they still had their way in removing me from the UQ Senate to which I had been democratically elected as an independent student voice opposed to the administration's links with China. They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on lawyers to achieve this outcome. One wonders how much tax-payer money was wasted on this Kafkaesque charade. I would encourage the Committee to investigate the amount of money UQ spent on these lawyers as well as the source of this funding.
37. Ultimately, I firmly and unequivocally believe that the University of Queensland and its executive team headed by Chancellor Peter Varghese and Vice-Chancellor Peter Høj targeted me and sought to punish me for my political views critical of the Chinese state and the university's close ties with the Chinese state. UQ's relationship with China is worth hundreds of millions of dollars a year, and billions over the next decade. I believe that the University of Queensland sought to silence me to avoid threatening these lucrative economic ties. In the case of Vice-Chancellor Høj, the \$200,000 bonus he received tied to cultivating ties with the Chinese state meant that he had a direct

¹⁴Aaron Patrick, "The war against Drew Pavlou, UQ's rebel senator," May 31 2020 for The Australian Financial Review. <https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/education/the-war-against-drew-pavlou-ug-s-rebel-senator-20200531-p54y1j>

financial incentive to shut down campus criticism of the Chinese government's human rights policies.

38. Due to the University of Queensland's dependency on China for foreign investment, it has sought to curtail and silence criticism of the Chinese government on campus. Other universities have behaved similarly, with the University of Sydney barring the Dalai Lama, a Nobel Peace laureate, from campus after protests from Chinese officials and the University of New South Wales censoring the work of human rights expert Elaine Pearson after she called for the international community to intervene in Hong Kong in support of human rights. The way Chinese government investment has induced universities across the country to discard civil liberties like the right to protest when this threatens their bottom line and the bonuses of top officials is a grave, dire threat to the national interest and Australian democratic values. The University of Queensland, and indeed universities across Australia, cannot be trusted to police themselves when it comes to threats to free speech and democratic values from totalitarian actors abroad and I believe the situation demands urgent government intervention to hold university executives betraying the national interest to account.