

**LEADERSHIP**

**STUDENT LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE**

**STRENGTH  
IN DIVERSITY**

**2024 Program**

**SSAF  
FUNDED**

*Student*  
**LIFE**  
 **VICTORIA UNIVERSITY**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Kulin Nation (Melbourne Campuses), the Eora Nation (Sydney Campus) and the Yulara/Yugarapul and Turrbal Nation (Brisbane Campus) who are the traditional owners of University land. As we share our own knowledge practices within the University may we pay respect to the deep knowledge embedded within the Aboriginal community and recognise their ownership of Country.

We acknowledge that the land on which we meet, learn and share knowledge is a place of age old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal and that the Traditional Owners' living culture and practices have a unique role in the life of this region.

To learn more, please contact the Moondani Balluk Academic Unit on +61 3 9919 2836 or [Moondani.Balluk@vu.edu.au](mailto:Moondani.Balluk@vu.edu.au).



# WELCOME

The Student Leadership Conference is Victoria University's flagship student leadership event. This annual one-day event is an opportunity for you to develop your leadership skills and to grow your professional networks by hearing from inspirational keynote speakers, participating in interactive workshops and connecting with peers and community leaders.

Since 2010 the Student Leadership Conference has inspired and empowered VU students to learn more about themselves, cultivate a growth mindset, seek out opportunities, and take on leadership roles within VU and beyond.

Our theme for this year's conference is **Strength in Diversity**. Join us to:

- ◆ discover how diversity, equity and inclusion foster cohesiveness among teams
- ◆ explore why diverse teams are better equipped to identify opportunities and generate innovative solutions
- ◆ learn how to create an inclusive environment.

This year's conference will explore leadership practices that put people first, and empower you to empower others.

Victoria University strives to support our students to shape not only their own futures but also the wider world in which they live. We have a deep and unwavering commitment to inclusion, respectful relationships and diversity. VU is a place where everyone is supported to realise their potential and aspirations.

Our 2024 Student Leadership Conference will help you to realise your leadership potential. There will be occasions to listen, reflect and learn by doing, as well as network, make friends and get outside your comfort zone.



**Michelle Gillespie**  
Chief Student Officer



# ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS

Time	Program Component	Presenter
8.30AM	<b>Registration &amp; Breakfast</b>	
9.30AM	<b>Acknowledgement of Country &amp; Welcome</b>	<b>Ashlie Thorburn</b> Student Leadership Assistant, Student Life & Leadership  <b>Mickey Sajwan</b> Student Leadership Assistant, Student Life & Leadership
9.40AM	<b>Networking Session</b>	
10AM	<b>Morning Workshop Session</b> (choose one)	
	<b>'High performance starts with diversity'</b>	<b>Jahin Tanvir</b> CEO, Australian School of Entrepreneurship
	<b>'Empowering your mindset and unlocking your potential'</b>	<b>Ahlam Haddad</b> Head of Learning Experience, PEXA
11.35PM	<b>Panel Discussion</b>	<b>Devanshu Arora</b> President, VU Student Union  <b>Tariro Makwasha</b> Development and Customer Strategy Executive Manager, Industry Capability Network VIC (ICN VIC)  <b>Bec Cole</b> Executive Director & Co-CEO, Footscray Community Arts  <b>John Kon</b> Community Lawyer, Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre
12.30PM	<b>Lunch</b>  LinkedIn photo booth	

Order of proceedings continued on page 2.

Time	Program Component	Presenter
1.30PM	<b>Afternoon Workshop Sessions</b> (choose one)	
	‘Introduction to sexuality & gender’	<b>Max Evans</b> Presenter Team Lead, Minus18
	‘A different brilliant - understanding, accepting and embracing autism and neurodiversity’	<b>Janet Cheong</b> Occupational Therapist, Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)  <b>Tom Broadley</b> Autism Liaison Officer, Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)
	‘Inclusive leadership in practice: embedding intersectionality’	<b>Tierny Long</b> Senior Manager Practice Compliance & Development, Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS)
3.00PM	<b>Break</b>	
3.10PM	<b>Closing Keynote</b> ‘Comedy, connection & the power of education’	<b>Justine Sless</b> Author, Comedian, MC & Community Cultural Development Practitioner
4.10PM	<b>Closing Remarks &amp; Thank You</b>	
4.30PM	<b>Post Conference Networking Event</b> Music, drinks, canapés & photo booth	
5.30PM	<b>Event Concludes</b>	

# YOUR MCs



## **Mickey Sajwan** *(he/him)* Student Leadership Assistant, Student Life & Leadership

Mickey is one of the Leadership Assistants in the 2024 Student Life and Leadership team. Mickey is an international student at VU, studying a Bachelor in Cybersecurity and is currently in his second year. At VU, he works as a Student Mentor in Student Services team and holds an executive position in VUSU as VP of education. As a student, he was a Team Leader in V4U Day and has completed the LEAD program.

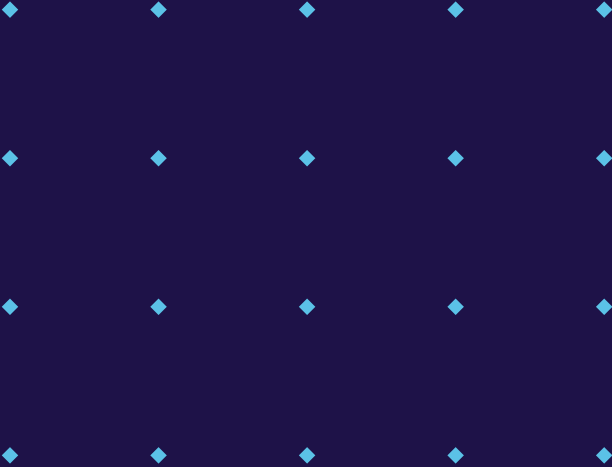
## **Ashlie Thorburn** *(she/her)* Student Leadership Assistant, Student Life & Leadership

Ashlie is one of the Leadership Assistants in the 2024 Student Life and Leadership team. Ashlie is currently in the final year of the Bachelor of Dermal Science. She is experiencing clinical work at the VU Dermal Clinic, expanding her skin knowledge. At VU she has worked as the Vollies Assistant in the Student life and Leadership team and is currently a Student Mentor in Student Services team and Library Assistant. She has been a Team Leader in V4U Day and has completed the LEAD program.

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# MORNING WORKSHOPS

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# Jahin Tanvir *(he/him)*

## CEO, Australian School of Entrepreneurship

Jahin Tanvir is the CEO of the Australian School of Entrepreneurship, Australia's largest soft skills training provider. Jahin is a 3-time TEDx speaker, board director, and was named on the 40 under 40 Most Influential Asian-Australians for 2022, at the age of 21.



As an award-winning advocate for young people, and diversity and inclusion, Jahin was named a 2022 Young Australian of the Year finalist and was the 2021 Young Canberra Citizen of the Year in Individual Community Service. He was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and moved to Australia in 2003.

[jahintanvir.com](http://jahintanvir.com)



[linkedin.com/in/jahintanvir](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jahintanvir)

## Workshop

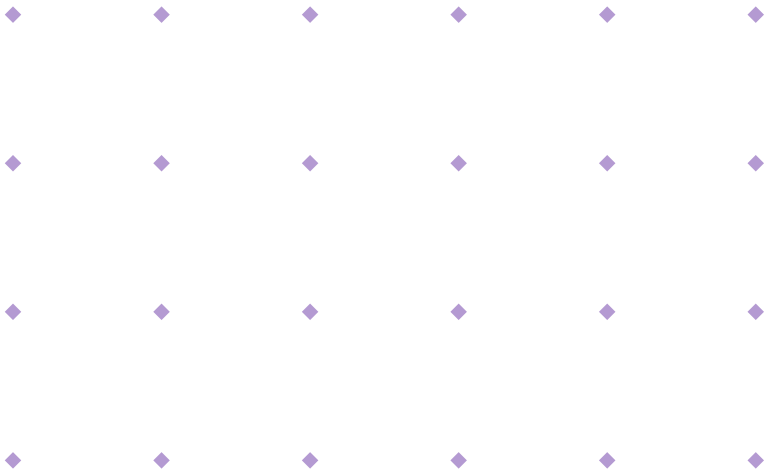
### ‘High performance starts with diversity’

Learn how to develop your inclusive leadership skills, enhancing your ability to manage and inspire diverse teams. Discover strategies for integrating diverse perspectives to boost team innovation and high performance. Find out how diverse leadership has led to tangible results in real-world scenarios.

# Ahlam Haddad *(she/her)*

## Head of Learning Experience, PEXA

Ahlam has had a wealth of experience in developing strategies and implementing programs that help individuals realise their potential to move to their ideal future state: to become better versions of themselves. Working at organisations such as NAB, ME Bank and more recently Bank of Queensland, Ahlam has contributed to significant enterprise-wide transformation agendas that have changed the way teams work: designing and rolling out programs to become business ready and meet commercial outcomes for organisations. This is why she is the Head of Learning Experience. Ahlam's loves cooking, travelling, unwinding with family and friends and having downtime with her hubby.



## Workshop

### ‘Empowering your mindset and unlocking your potential’

Embracing a growth mindset is the key to unlocking your full potential and achieving success in all areas of life. Whether you’re aiming to excel in your career, pursue personal goals or simply enhance your overall wellbeing, cultivating a growth mindset is essential.

Join Ahlam for an empowering conversation aimed at understanding and cultivating a growth mindset – a powerful, self-reflective session that will support your personal and professional development. In this session, we will explore the power of adopting a growth mindset and how it can positively impact your life and career. Through interactive exercises and insightful discussions, you will learn more about mindset, overcoming challenges, embracing feedback and how you can continue to strive to reach your full potential by cultivating resilience.

By the end of the session, you will be equipped with the tools to strengthen your ability to self reflect, thrive in the face of adversity and ultimately, unlock your full potential.

PEXA and VU have a Major Alliance partnership in place and work together to support VU students to graduate job-ready, with digital skills for their future careers. In turn, the partnership helps PEXA to grow sustainable talent pathways and support the learning and development of PEXA staff.

Find out more about the [PEXA partnership](#).

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# PANEL DISCUSSION

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At this panel event, we will hear from executives and staff from Victoria University's partners including Industry Capability Network (ICN) VIC, Footscray Community Arts, and CommUnity+. These guests will explore the conference theme of '**Strength in Diversity**', reflecting on their experiences and sharing advice on enhancing inclusivity within their workplaces and communities.

This panel has been put together by the VU Major Partnerships Team. Panel members are from organisations that have formal Major Alliance and Strategic Partnerships with Victoria University. VU Strategic Partners actively contribute to the student experience and work collaboratively with us to benefit the region and communities we serve.

Find out more about [Partnerships at VU](#).

## Devanshu Arora *(he/him)* President VU Student Union

### Panel Moderator

Devanshu is an international student from India undertaking a Bachelor of Engineering, and is the current President of the VU Student Union. Previously Dev held the position of VP of Education for VUSU and contributed to the executive team of the National Union of Students.

Find out more about [VUSU](#)



## Tariro Makwasha *(she/her)* Development & Customer Strategy Executive Manager, Industry Capability Network VIC (ICN VIC)

Tariro is a data-driven transformation strategist at Industry Capability Network Victoria. Combining analytical expertise with inclusive leadership, she connects emerging technologies with people to drive innovation and market impact. Passionate about bridging technology with positive economic and social outcomes, Tariro champions a people-centric approach to unlock shared value for organisations and communities. Her vision? Digitally-enabled organisations built on transparency and collaboration.



[linkedin.com/in/tariromakwasha](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tariromakwasha)

Find out more about the [ICN VIC partnership](#).

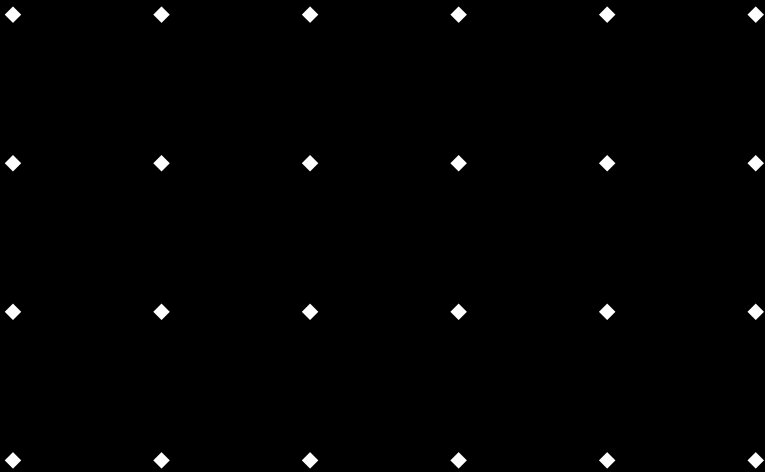
**Bec Cole** *(she/her)*  
Executive Director and Co-CEO,  
Footscray Community Arts (FCA)

Bec is a champion for creating access to contemporary art and performance for everyone. She has worked extensively in local government across leadership, strategic and creative programming roles, spanning public art, galleries, performing arts, creative industry development, major events and activity centre settings. Bec is proudly Palawa.



[linkedin.com/in/bec-cole](https://www.linkedin.com/in/bec-cole)

Find out more about the [FCA partnership](#).



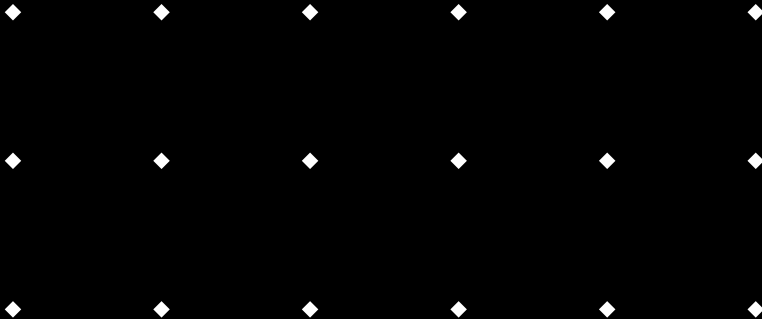
**John Kon** *(he/him)*  
Community Lawyer,  
Brimbank Melton Community  
Legal Centre

John was born in South Sudan and migrated to Australia almost 20 years ago as a refugee. John graduated with a Bachelor of Laws at Victoria University in 2018 and with a Diploma of Legal Practice in 2019 at Leo Cussen Centre for Laws, and was admitted into practice in 2019. John is currently a Community Lawyer at Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre, and was acknowledged in the Victorian Parliament for his community work by Melton MP Steve McGhie in 2019.



[linkedin.com/in/john-kon-a8aa0616b](https://www.linkedin.com/in/john-kon-a8aa0616b)

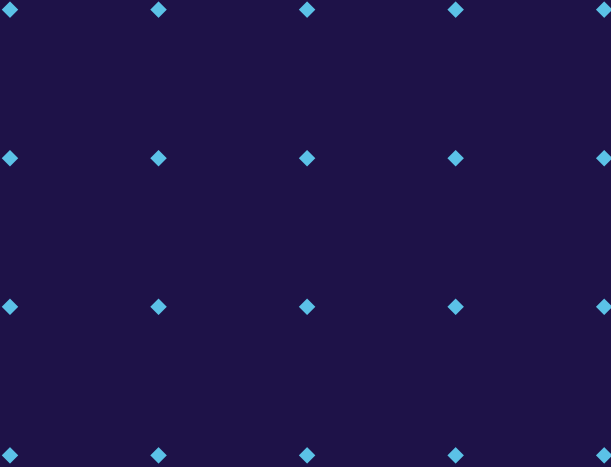
Find out more about the **CommUnity+ partnership**.



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# AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS

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## **Max Evans** *(he/him)* Presenter Team Lead, Minus 18

Max (he/him) is a vibrant and spirited queer person who feels strongly about promoting and creating safe spaces to drive LGBTQIA+ inclusion all across Australia. As a member of the Education Team, Max has an extensive background in both in-person and virtual facilitation with over four years of experience in running sessions to audiences ranging from single individuals to professional groups of over 100. In his role as Education Presenter, he is truly passionate in giving others the knowledge and tools they need to flourish using an enthusiastic and positive approach.



### **About Minus 18**

Minus18 aims to improve the health and wellbeing of, and provide a safe environment for, same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people in Australia, seeking to empower them to feel comfortable and confident in their sense of identity and assisting them to grow as happy, healthy individuals well into the future. We also offer tailored professional development workshops to help you support your LGBTQIA+ clients and team.

Through understanding positive language and relationships, championing self-expression, and exploring the barriers that LGBTQIA+ people face, we provide the tools to challenge perspectives and create inclusive and awesome spaces for everyone.



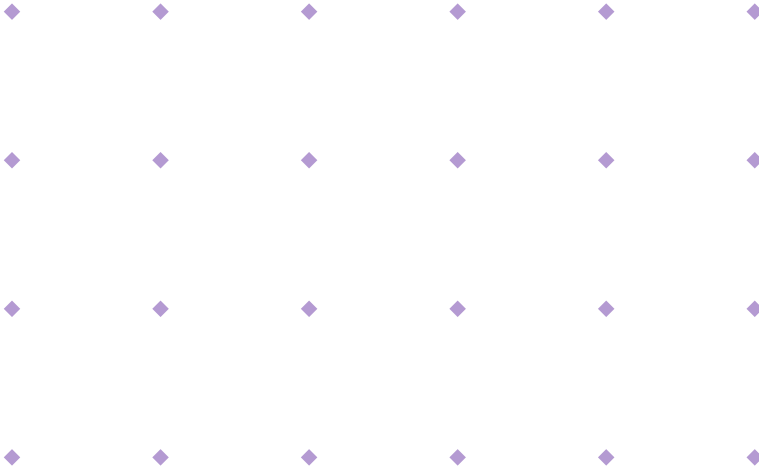
# Workshop

## ‘Introduction to sexuality & gender’

Be introduced to LGBTQIA+ identity and the barriers LGBTQIA+ people face in everyday life. Empower yourself with tools to become an inclusive leader.

This workshop will include:

- ◆ the tools to build safe and inclusive experiences for colleagues and clients
- ◆ key concepts and definitions of sex, gender and sexuality
- ◆ evidence based barriers LGBTQIA+ people face at work and accessing services
- ◆ practical tools to support LGBTQIA+ people interpersonally and professionally
- ◆ LGBTQIA+ lived-experiences via our expert workshop presenters as they talk about their personal journeys being LGBTQIA+.



**Janet Cheong** (*she/her*)  
Occupational Therapist,  
Autism Spectrum Australia  
(Aspect)

Janet Cheong is an occupational therapist with over 30 years of experience in early childhood, community child health, disability and autism practice. She has worked at Aspect for the past 8 years, as a clinician, behaviour support practitioner and OT clinical supervisor, in both Sydney and Melbourne. Her current role includes a clinical caseload, OT supervision, an outreach service to Tasmania and delivering workshops. Janet is passionate about supporting autistic individuals and their support networks through a neuro-affirming and capacity-building practice lens.



**Tom Broadley** (*he/him*)  
Autism Liaison Officer,  
Autism Spectrum Australia  
(Aspect)

Tom is an autistic adult who came in contact with Autism Spectrum Australia at the age of 20 with the intention of developing his social skills and engaging in activities in his local community. Tom developed a passion for assisting his peers to achieve their goals; so much so that in 2021 he was offered the innovative role of Autism Liaison Officer at Aspect Adult Community Services. This is an opportunity that Tom has enjoyed immensely, even though he has found it can be challenging at times.



## Workshop

### ‘A different brilliant - understanding, accepting and embracing autism and neurodiversity’

Neurodiversity is a movement that is fundamentally about acknowledging, respecting and celebrating difference. This moves away from the medical model that seeks to fix something defective, and towards a model that supports people to be themselves, to feel comfortable to remove the mask, and to live without barriers to participation and success. This workshop seeks to build understanding of neurodiversity, including the latest information and thinking about autism and ADHD, including their interrelationship and autism gender differences. Tom will share snippets of his lived experience of growing up autistic and what life is like as an autistic adult. This will be an interactive session where you are invited to ask questions, bring up points for further discussion, and participate in small group discussion. We hope that as student leaders, you will be able to contribute to a world that is genuinely accepting and inclusive of autism, ADHD and other neurodivergence.

[aspect.org.au](http://aspect.org.au)

Aspect and VU have a Major Alliance partnership in place aimed at improving the health and wellbeing for people on the autism spectrum. Aspect have opened Australia’s first on-campus community centre for autistic adults at VU’s St Albans Campus. The centre pioneers a new on-campus model. It creates positive outcomes for adult participants through programs, therapy and education, and VU students through placements and employment pathways into the disability sector.

Find out more about the [\*\*Aspect partnership\*\*](#).

**Tierny Long** (*she/her*)  
Senior Manager Practice  
Compliance & Development,  
Youth Support and Advocacy Service  
(YSAS)

Tienyi Long (she/her) is a lawyer and senior manager, specialising in building systems and structures to help for-purpose organisations work better. She is an expert facilitator and mentor, and has worked in universities, government, and not-for-profit organisations, including UNICEF Australia. Tienyi is a first-generation migrant from Malaysia, and she will always be passionate about supporting young people and diverse communities.



## Workshop

### ‘Inclusive leadership in practice: embedding intersectionality’

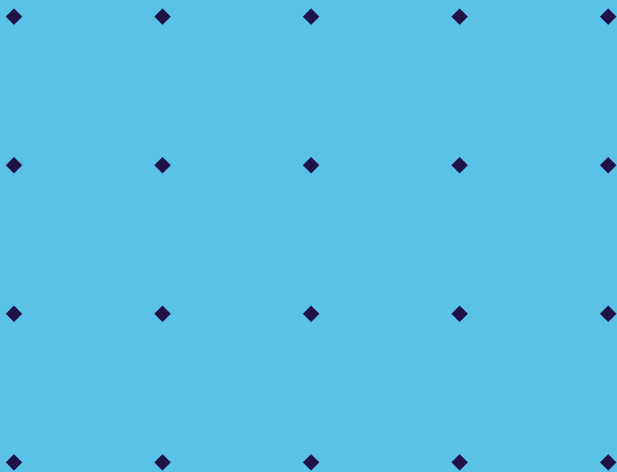
We all have a unique combination of life experiences. Factors like gender, age, education, race and (dis)ability intersect with each other to shape the way we see and move through the world. Successful leaders are respectful of those differences, and actively take steps to ensure that everyone can feel safe and included in everything they do.

In this interactive session, participants will explore concepts of intersectionality, and learn practical tips for leading projects, events and teams which welcome, respect and celebrate diverse experiences.

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# KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

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## **Justine Sless** *(she/her)* Author, Comedian, MC & Community Cultural Development Practitioner

Justine was born and raised in Sunderland Northeast UK and now lives in Melbourne. She is an author, comedian, and community cultural development practitioner. When Justine became a student at VU she had a two-month-old baby and very nearly didn't make it to the interview... but she's so glad she did – getting that Bachelor in Community Development changed her life! Sless has utilised those skills in construction, local government and in the non-profit sector. Sless is author of two books: *Mistress of Mirth's COMEDY Tour*, an adaptation of her *Masters by Research in Creative Writing* from La Trobe University, and *Measured Silk & Other Stories* - fourteen linked stories about loneliness, connection and belonging. Justine's short stories have been awarded prizes, and appeared in anthologies and academic journals. She is working on a new collection of short stories and has completed a novel that will be published in 2025. Justine has written numerous comedy shows and performed at comedy festivals and events nationally and internationally. She also teaches comedy in schools and workplaces. At the 2024 VU Student Leadership Conference Justine is honoured to tell you about what strength in diversity means to her.



[justinesless.com](http://justinesless.com)



[linkedin.com/in/justinesless](https://www.linkedin.com/in/justinesless)



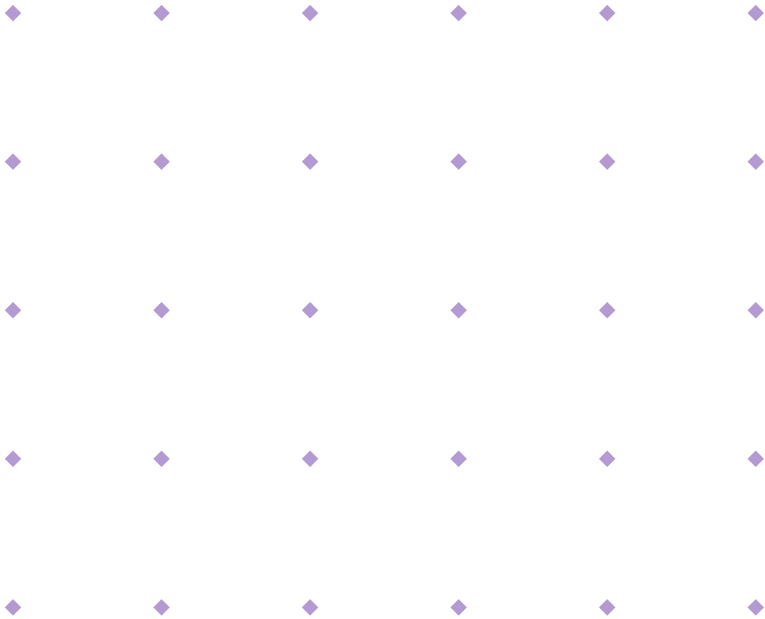
[@Justinesless](https://twitter.com/Justinesless)

# Closing Keynote

## ‘Comedy, connection & the power of education’

In the closing keynote at the 2024 VU Student Leadership Conference, Justine is honoured to tell you about what strength in diversity means to her.

She’ll also share creative writing tips and insights into how to transform stories into comedy, and discuss the power of community. She’ll delve into how having a diverse skill set can be both a blessing and a curse, and share her experience on how to she learned to conquer fear and shame to become a successful author and entertainer.







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# THANK YOU

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## FOR JOINING US!

To find out more about the Student Leadership Program, click the button below or visit [vu.edu.au/student-leadership](https://vu.edu.au/student-leadership)

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

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