



OFFICE OF FILM  
& LITERATURE  
CLASSIFICATION

*Te Tari Whakarōpū Tukuata, Tuhituhinga*

Censor for a  
Day

• Term 1, 2010

[www.censorship.govt.nz](http://www.censorship.govt.nz)

0508 CENSOR (236 767)

## Introduction

The Term 1 Censor for a Day event for 2010 was held in cinemas in Wellington, Dunedin and Christchurch. 326 students were introduced to New Zealand's classification system by the Chief Censor, Bill Hastings. Students were taken through the criteria that the Classification Office uses to classify films as set out in the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993. The students were then shown a film and asked to think about how they would apply the law they had just learnt about to this film. Students filled out a form which took them through the classification criteria, and were asked to recommend a classification, descriptive note and explain the reasons behind their choices. The Chief Censor then led a discussion about the film, the students' recommended classifications, and about the classification system in general.

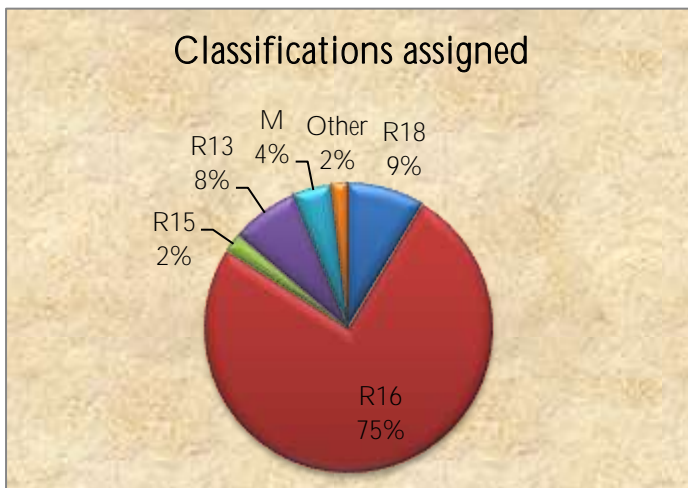
## The Film

*Daybreakers* is classified in New Zealand as R16 with the descriptive note 'violence, offensive language and horror'. This horror, sci-fi action thriller is set ten years into the future, where a virus has turned the majority of the population into vampires. Humans are the minority race, and are hunted and farmed for their blood. As the human population dwindles, the vampiric society face starvation and the race is on for their scientists to develop a 'blood substitute'. Aware of the situation facing the vampires, the remaining humans see their chance to rebuild the human race.



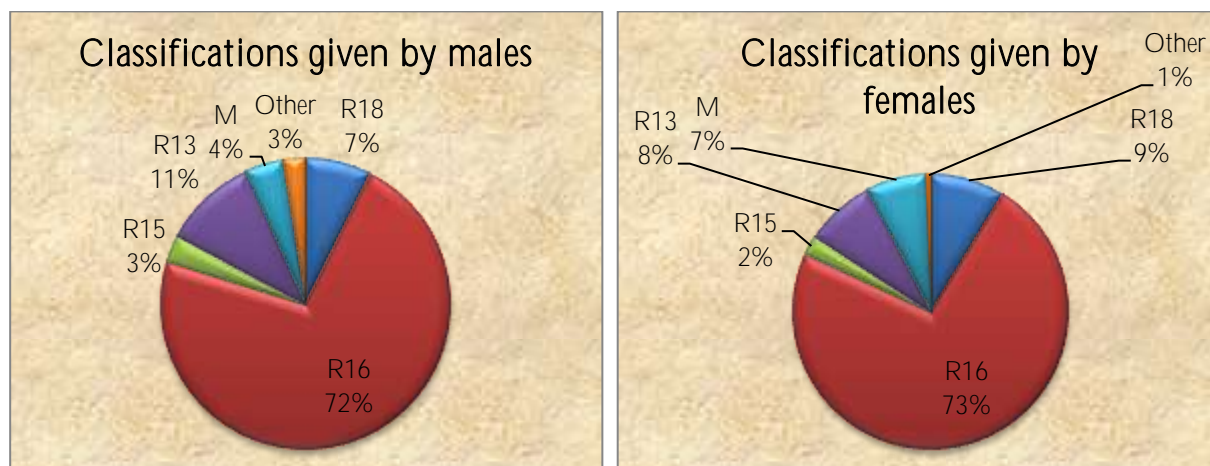
The film stars Ethan Hawke, Willem Dafoe and Sam Neil. It is directed by Michael Spierig and Peter Spierig.

## Survey Results: an Overview

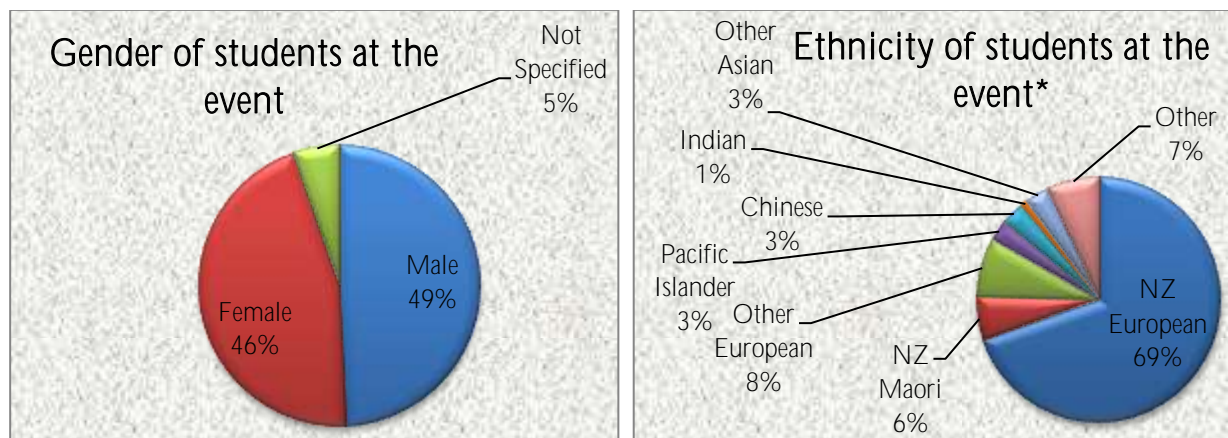


The majority of students (75%) assigned *Daybreakers* a classification of R16, restricting the film to persons aged 16 and over. Only four percent gave the film an unrestricted classification.

There was almost no difference in the classifications given by male and female students. Overall, female students were slightly more inclined to recommend higher classifications than male students, with 82% recommending R16 or higher compared to 79% of male students.



The gender split of students at the Term 1 event was almost even, with slightly more males attending than females. Just under three quarters of the students identified as NZ European; 6% identified as NZ Maori, 8% as Other European, and 3% as Pacific Islanders. 6% identified as Chinese or Other Asian and 8% indicated an ethnicity other than those above.

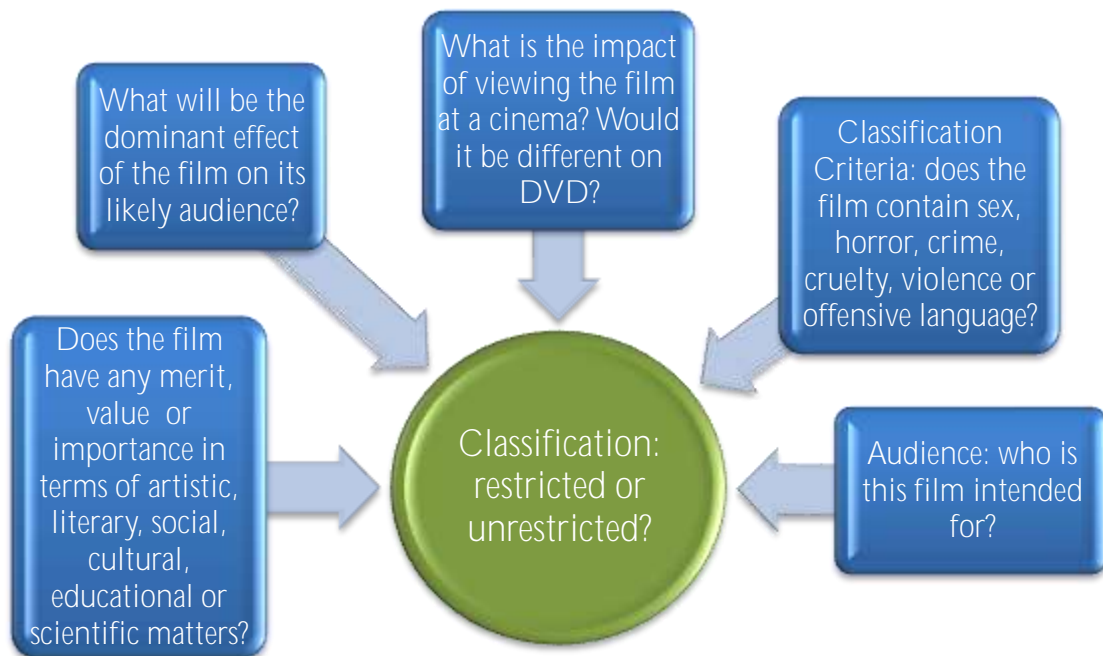


\*Some students indicated more than one ethnicity



### The Classification Exercise

Students filled out the classification form – which is a shortened version of the 21-page Consideration Sheet classification officers use when classifying a film. The exercise involved students answering the following questions which relate to specific sections in the Classification Act. The students were asked to use their answers to these questions to decide on a suitable classification and descriptive note.

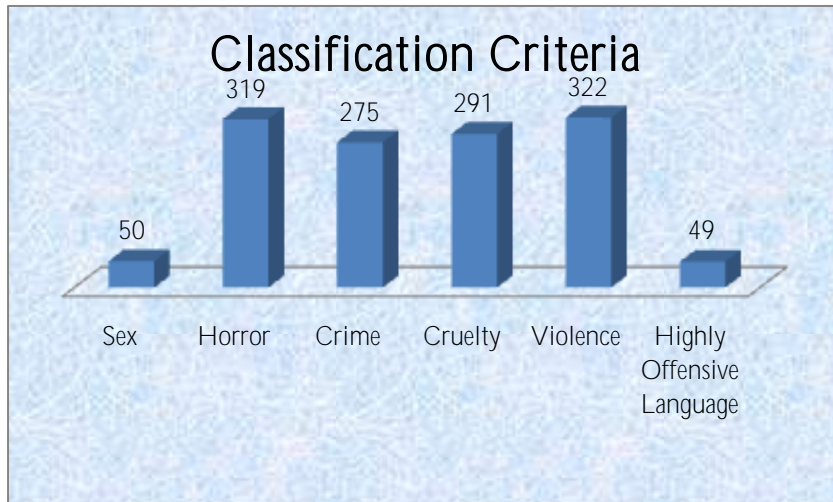


After evaluating *Daybreakers* using New Zealand’s classification criteria, students decided on a particular age restriction – for example ‘R16’ or ‘R18’, or they decided the film should be unrestricted, for example, classifying the film as ‘M’ (recommended for mature audiences 16 years and over). While films can also be classified as ‘G’ or ‘PG’, no students chose these classifications for this film.

## Survey Results

In order for a film to be age restricted, or banned, it must in some way deal with material such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty or violence. Films can also be age restricted if they contain highly offensive language.

When asked to consider what elements of the classification criteria were depicted or dealt with in the film, most students noted the extent, degree and manner in which the film dealt with violence, horror, cruelty and crime. A sexual joke in the film prompted some students to tick the box for 'sex'.



Interestingly, only 49 students (15%) thought the film contained highly offensive language. Though there was frequent use made of words Classification Office research has shown to be 'highly' offensive, students felt that because the words were not used aggressively, or at any individuals, they could not be considered 'highly offensive'.

## Material Considered by the Classification Office

While both the Classification Office and the students agreed that the film contained horror, crime, cruelty and violence, the Office restricted the film to people aged 16 years and over primarily because of the film's treatment of violence, horror and offensive language. In the Summary of Reasons for Decision it was noted that:

*The publication deals with matters of horror with the use of horrific imagery and themes. The plot revolves around the concept of vampires, who have taken over the world, harvesting humans for their blood... There are several depictions of corpses both vampires and humans, throughout the feature. One scene depicts a room filled with dead humans, who appear to have had their blood drained. Their faces are sunken, body parts are missing and mutilated, some have been beheaded. The scene is brief.*

## Students' Views

Students had widely differing viewpoints about how potentially restricted content was used in the film. The following are some examples:

## Sex

Fifty students indicated that there was sexual content of some sort in the film. Those who ticked this box primarily referred to an off-hand joke made by Willem Dafoe's character about the risks of having sex with a prostitute. Students also mentioned the presence of nudity in the film – humans who were being farmed for their blood were shown unconscious and naked. As this nudity was not sexualised, the majority of students did not consider it constituted a matter of sex.

## Horror

Students felt that the film fitted into the horror/sci-fi genre due to both its horrific themes and its horrific images. They felt that the idea of vampires killing humans, or hunting and farming them, was “scary and disturbing”. Students commented on the high amount of blood and gore presented throughout the film – while many were “grossed out” by this, some felt that the over-the-top extent and degree of the depictions meant they became almost humorous.

## Crime

Though a lot of students said that the crime of murder was presented in the film, many commented that in the world of the film itself, this was not seen as a criminal act – vampires killing humans was a means to gain food and survival; while humans killing vampires was done primarily in self-defence.

## Cruelty

Many students felt that the vampires' treatment of the humans was cruel. They indicated that the farming of the humans for blood was exploitative and dehumanising. Students who ticked the box for 'cruelty' also discussed a scene in the film where vampires who have mutated due to a lack of blood are chained and dragged into the sun as a form of execution. Some students commented on the hypocrisy of the vampires killing creatures that were once like them, and which they would become like themselves if they didn't find a solution to the blood shortage. Students made comparisons between this genocide and the Holocaust.

## Violence

The majority of students felt that the violence in the film was depicted to a high extent (there was a lot of it) and degree (it was very intense). There were some differences in opinion about the manner in which the violence was presented. Some students felt that it was “scary”, “disturbing”, “graphic” and “extreme”. Other students felt that it was typical of an action-style film, and some felt it was so over the top as to be humorous. When discussing violence in the film, students tended to focus more on the gun fights and explosions rather than the bloody vampire feeding, which was more often discussed in relation to 'horror'.

## Offensive language

While most students believed the film had offensive language, most did not think the language was 'highly offensive' – they felt that a lot of the words were commonly used in everyday language, and that though potentially highly offensive words were used, because they weren't directed at an individual or spoken with particular aggression (they were usually spoken by Willem Dafoe's character in almost a 'comic relief' kind of way), this meant their level of offensiveness dropped.

## Audience

Students were asked to think about who they thought the film was for – who is the film's intended audience? Most felt that the film was primarily aimed at people in their late teens and early twenties. They thought the film would appeal to fans of action and horror, and many also connected the film's appeal to the current vampire-craze illustrated by the popularity of films such as those in the *Twilight* series. While some students

thought the film would appeal to men and women, most seemed to think it might appeal more to men because of the violence and gore.

### **Dominant Effect**

When asked what the dominant effect on the film's likely audience would be, some students thought people would be scared or disturbed by the horrific images and violent content in the film: "I think that most people who watched this would come out of this feeling entertained but others might be a bit more grossed out and sick feeling (the gore)". Others thought that the target audience, used to vampire movies and horror, would be entertained, or possibly a little bored.

### **Merit, Value or Importance**

Students were asked whether they thought *Daybreakers* had any 'merit, value or importance in terms of artistic, literary, social, cultural, educational or scientific matters'. Most felt that the film did not have any merit or value. Some felt that it had social merit – one student commented that the film was an "example of the deterioration of society in times of extreme hardship". Students who indicated that the film had merit or value of this nature compared the blood shortage facing the vampire society to resource shortages (such as oil) facing our own society. They also suggested that this film might encourage people to think about human nature and morality in terms of how humans treat their own society, other species, and their environment.

### **Impact of the Medium**

Students were asked if the experience of viewing the film would be different on DVD as opposed to the cinema. Most felt that the larger screen size and more intense surround sound of the cinema increased the impact of the images and made the viewing experience of the film more intense – "the larger image shows graphic close-up details you could miss on a TV. Surround sound makes you feel like you are in their presence". Some thought that if they were watching the film on DVD at home the impact would be greater – they would be more scared if watching it at night or alone. In contrast, some students thought they would feel 'safer' watching it on DVD as they would be in familiar surroundings and could turn it off if they wanted.

## The Classification

After considering what elements of the classification criteria were in the film and how they were presented, as well as the likely audience; the dominant effect; the presence of merit; and the impact of the medium, the majority of students (75%) decided to assign *Daybreakers* a classification of R16.

The R16 classification means that it is illegal to make the film available to anyone under that age. When deciding on a classification for the film, students were asked to explain why they had chosen their classification:



*Violence may disturb a younger audience in a manner that could negatively influence their behaviour. Constant exposure to violence at a young age means more acceptance of what is NOT acceptable.* (Wellington)

*The audience who are over 16 will be able to see past the horror. People under the age of 16 may find the overall film too intense and shock them, with the gore, vampires, drinking of blood, violence, etc.* (Wellington)

*Continued gore, horror, violence, crime and cruelty risks desensitisation and after effects for younger viewers.* (Christchurch)

*It is not appropriate for younger people to watch because of the level of violence and horror. It could provoke violence in the highly impressionable youth.* (Dunedin)

Other students felt an R13 classification was more appropriate for the film:



*Because the violence isn't likely to be imitated so it isn't injurious to the public good in that regard. However the violence could still be traumatic to under 13's.* (Wellington)

*Because I'm 16 – it appealed to me and I would've watched it when I was 13 too and not been scared. People MAY be scared but they won't go round killing everyone.* (Christchurch)

In contrast, 9% of students felt the film's content warranted an R18 restriction:

*Personally, at 17, I felt uncomfortable watching it. There was a lot of gore, blood and guts which, if removed, I feel would give it an R17 rating. This movie could cause nightmares, used harsh swearwords, and showed violence in a casual way.* (Wellington)



*The extent of horror, crime, violence and cruelty are too much for a 16 or 17 year old to watch. It will harm them because it reinforces that violence is ok.* (Wellington)

*Due to the graphic nature of the film it would be best if those that saw it were mature enough to handle the strong images. The amount of violence is inappropriate and is unnecessary to be available to, for example, 16 year old boys, the most likely gender this kind of movie would appeal to. It would not benefit them in any way and could leave them feeling violent.* (Dunedin)

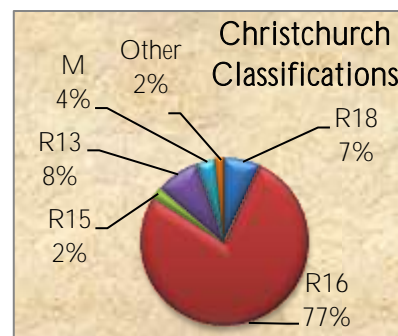
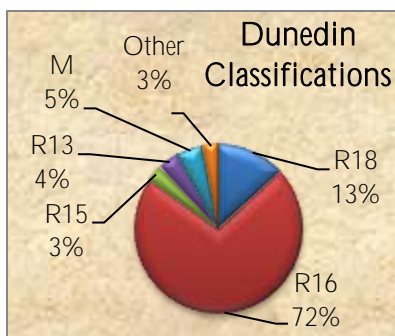
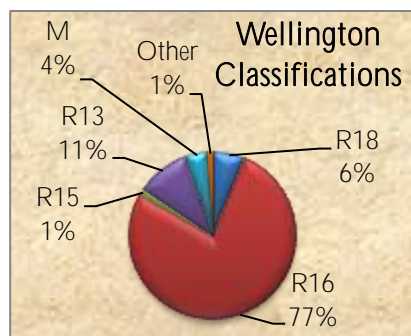
*Because anyone under this age could be negatively influenced in that all of the gore and cruelty in this movie might make them feel afraid or feel sick, as it is quite graphic.* (Christchurch)

A small proportion of students felt that the film did not require restriction, and assigned it an M classification:



*Horror and violence is sort of over the top making it less serious and frightening. (Dunedin)*

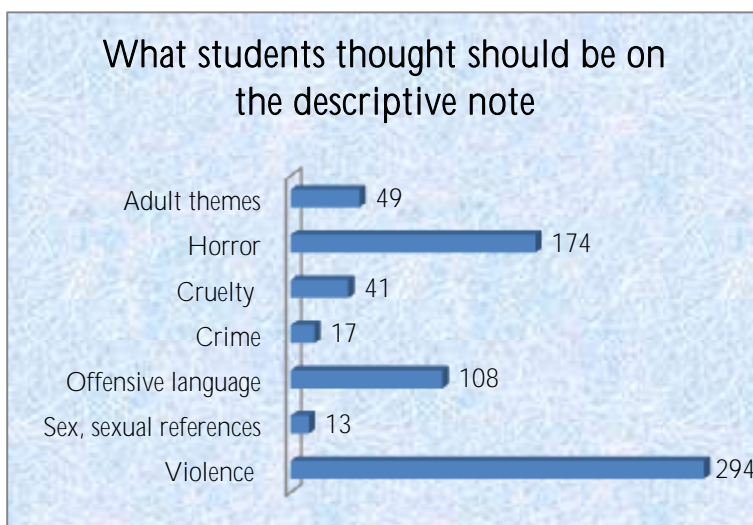
*Initially I thought R16. However, this film is very unrealistic and therefore does not really cause injury to the public good. I chose the M classification as teenage boys like these kinds of films and because even though it contains a high level of violence it is totally unrealistic. (Wellington)*



## The Descriptive Note

Descriptive notes inform the public about content within a film so that they can make an informed decision when choosing to see a film or show it to someone else. The descriptive note for *Daybreakers* informs potential viewers that the film contains ‘violence, offensive language and horror’.

Students agreed with the Classification Office’s choice of warning for the film: when asked what descriptive note they thought the film should have, most noted ‘violence’ (90%), followed by ‘horror’ (53%), and then ‘offensive language’ (33%). Fifteen percent of students wanted the film to carry a note warning of adult themes such as disturbing content, supernatural themes and nudity.



In addition, 28% of the students felt the note should warn of the “graphic”, “extreme” or “gory” nature of the violence and horror.

## Wellington

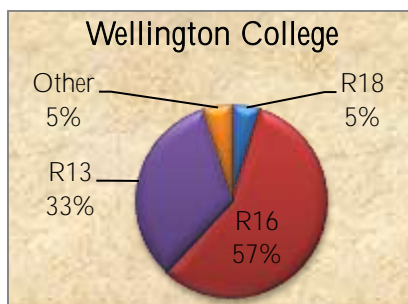
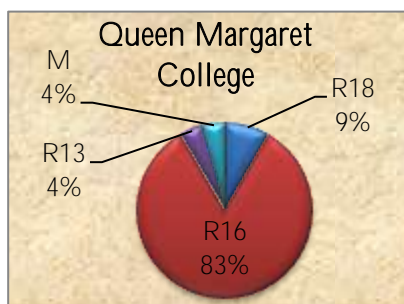
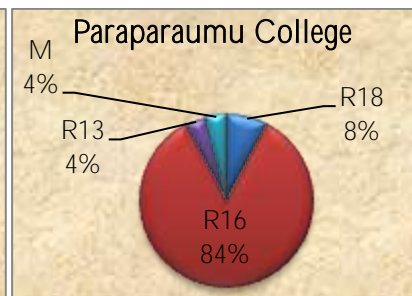
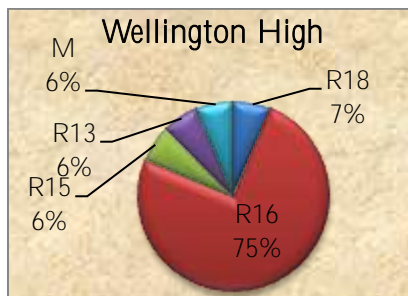
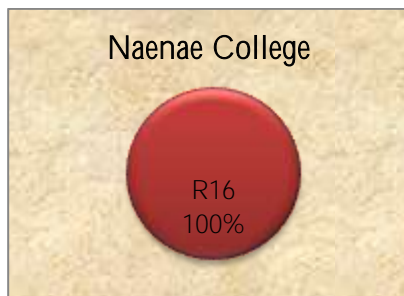
- Naenae College
- Wellington High School
- Queen Margaret College
- Wellington College

The first event was held in Wellington at the Spectrum Theatre on Monday 22 March.

Out of a total of 96 students, 74 (77%) classified the film as R16. R13 was the second most common classification (11%) followed by R18 (6%).

The classifications given by Wellington students were very similar to those given by the students in Dunedin and Christchurch, though overall Wellington students were slightly more likely to recommend less restrictive classifications (16% assigned classifications lower than R16 compared to 12% and 14% in the other cities).

There were 49 male students (51%), 43 female students (45%), and three students who did not specify a gender. Males and females were very similar in the classifications they chose, though male students were more likely recommend a restricted classification. Only one male student recommended that the film be classified as unrestricted, compared to 10 female students.



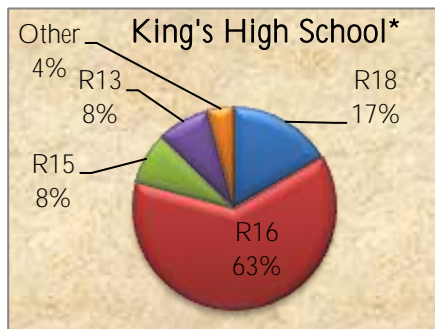
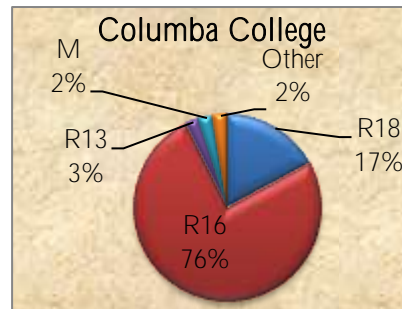
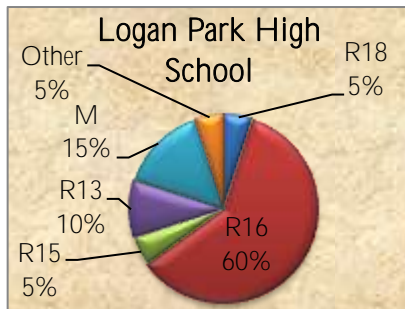
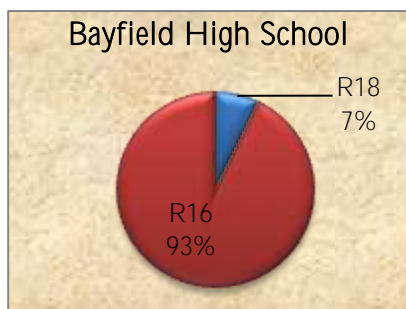
## Dunedin

- Bayfield High School
- Logan Park High School
- Columba College
- King's High School\*

The Dunedin event was held at Hoyts Octagon on Thursday 25 March.

Out of a total of 99 students, 72% classified the film as R16, which was slightly less in the other two cities (77%). Dunedin has the highest number of R18 classifications, with 13% of students choosing this classification (compared to 7% in Christchurch and 6% in Wellington).

There were 36 male students (36%), 58 female students (59%) and five students who did not specify a gender. Females tended to recommend higher classifications than males, with 91% of females classifying the film as R16 or higher compared to 75% of males students.



\* This group also included students from Queen's High School, Cromwell College and Taieri College.

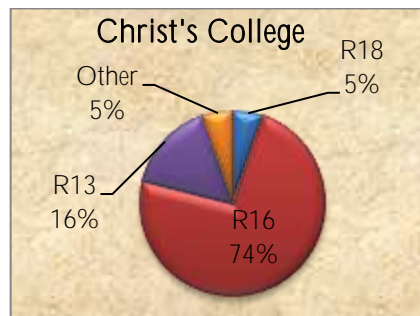
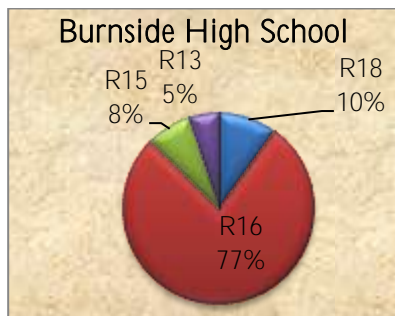
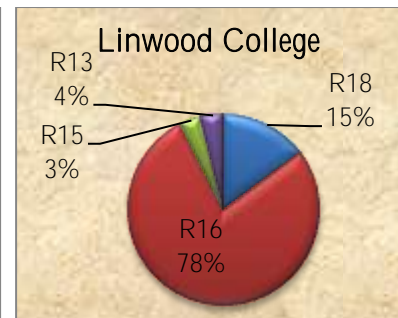
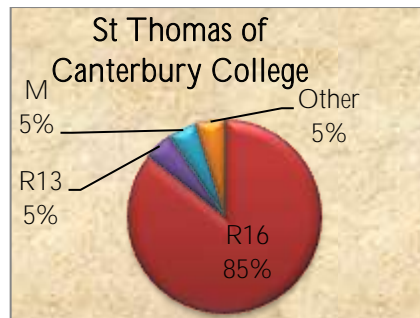
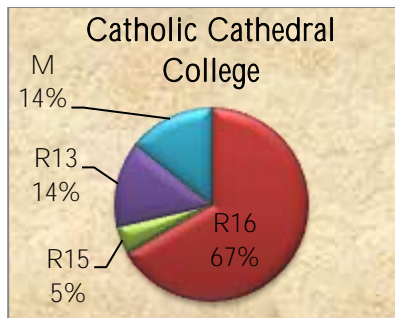
## Christchurch

- Catholic Cathedral College
- St Thomas of Canterbury College
- Christ's College
- Linwood College
- Burnside High School

The Christchurch event was held at Hoyts Moorhouse on Friday 26 March.

Of the 131 students who attended the event, 77% classified the film as R16. R13 was the second most common classification (8%), followed closely by R18 (7%).

There were 75 male students (57%) and 47 female students (36%) and nine students who did not specify a gender. Male and female students in Christchurch were almost identical in their classification choices, with the R16 classification being chosen by 74% of female students and 76% of male students. As was the case in Wellington, only 4% of Christchurch students recommended an unrestricted classification for the film.



## Teacher feedback results

Teachers who attended Censor for a Day were encouraged to fill in a feedback form about the event. This feedback helps us ensure that the event is meeting the needs of media studies educators and their students.

Of the teachers who filled in the feedback forms, all agreed that:

- the length of the programme was suitable
- the classification form provided on the day was easy to follow
- students were provided with sufficient information
- the programme enhanced students' understanding of film censorship
- the content of the film was appropriate for the students
- their school would wish to participate in a similar event in the future.

Teachers had the following to say about the film:

*Engaged them and challenged them to think about what and why they watch horror/vampire movies.*

*Great film to show this lot!*

Most teachers said the time slot was suitable, however one commented that the timing of the event fell during a week of assessments at their school.

When asked to rate their students' experience of Censor for a Day, six rated it as 'excellent' and three as 'very good'.

Some further comments:

*The students were enthusiastic and fully engaged in the discussions. They loved asking questions and sharing their ideas. Thanks for a thought provoking day.*

*This is an extremely valuable experience for my students as it exposes them to a range of ideas and issues outside of their normal classroom experiences.*

*The students really enjoy this experience & it gives them a 'real' tangible experience. Bill Hastings is an engaging host whose use of anecdotes to exemplify points is totally aimed at students and draws their interest. Congratulations to the organisers also - well run and totally excellent.*

*My kids all left humming - full of thought and debate. Complex material was presented in an accessible way - but students didn't feel patronised at all. Thank you!*

## Acknowledgements

The Classification Office would like to thank Hoyts Distribution for allowing us the use of *Daybreakers* for the event. Without distributors' generosity in lending us a pre-release film, Censor for a Day would not be possible.

A special thank you to Hoyts Cinemas. Cinema operators were asked to donate the use of their theatres for the event and Hoyts Cinemas generously supplied venues free of charge. The Hoyts complexes and facilities were excellent venues for these events, and Hoyts' support allowed us to invite over 250 Media Studies students to participate. Staff at the Hoyts Octagon and Hoyts Moorhouse locations were well-informed, helpful, and friendly.

We would also like to thank the Film and Video Labelling Body, who helped us find a suitable film, and the caterers who provided us with tasty, student-friendly food!

Lastly we would like to thank the students and teachers from Wellington, Dunedin and Christchurch who made the event another success and who gave us invaluable feedback in the process.

The proposed schedule for the next Censor for a Day is Term 3, 2010, in the Bay of Plenty and Waikato regions and Wellington.

If you would like to attend a Censor for a Day event but are unable to, the Office has produced a free DVD resource for classroom teaching. For more information please contact the Classification Office on 0508 CENSOR (0508 236 767) or at [information@copyright.govt.nz](mailto:information@copyright.govt.nz).

