Student Life – UNSW Sydney

Enhancing Self-Disclosure of Equity Group Membership

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Introduction

HEPPP-commissioned project 2016

Outcomes:

• To explore self-disclosure of equity groups

• To estimate rates of non-disclosure of three groups (Indigenous, students with disabilities and non-English-speaking backgrounds)

• To understand reasons for non-disclosure

• To propose guidelines for universities to encourage disclosure
Disclosure

What is disclosure?

“The act of making something known”

Informal Disclosure, Formal Disclosure
Disclosure

Why disclosure?

Disclosing equity status lets universities know how many students have specific challenges, demands, and needs. This is vital for providing and resourcing services, understanding gaps in service provision, and planning for future student needs.
Research Team

Ms. Rita Kusevskis-Hayes

Dr. Colin Clark

Mr. Matthew Wilkinson

Also Prudence Watt, Helen Meas, Julian Barber
Process

- Research proposal
- Project design
- Initial exploratory study
- Review
- Survey: Staff
- Focus Groups: Equity Students
- One-on-One Interviews: Equity Students
- Coding and Analysis
- Publication
- Deliverables – policy and guidelines

Timeline:
- Dec 2016
- May 2017
- June/July 2017
- December 2017
- 2018

Focus Groups:
- Equity

Surveys:
- Staff
- Students

Interviews:
- Equity Students

Coding and Analysis

Publication
Target Groups

1,035,474
University Students
(2015)

Indigenous Students

15,585 (1.6%)
3% of Pop.

Data from Department of Education and Training (2015)


Students w/ Disability

60,019 (5.8%

Non-English Speaking Background

40,281 (3.9%)

27%

“...there are sooooo many special advantages for Indigenous people, that people that we must have not worked hard for our degrees, and that we are there for our skin colour- uni management tokens- instead of our brains”

#Notodisclose #ASTI #Student
Methods

Mixed method quantitative and qualitative study

1. Student and staff surveys
   - Australia-wide
   - Online

2. Interviews with equity students
   - In person and over the phone
Outcomes

The project has answered several questions that shed new light on this hidden population, including:

1. Why disclose?
2. How do students disclose?
3. What proportion of students in these cohorts do not disclose?
4. Why not disclose?
5. What policy recommendations can be derived?
I feel like lots of the time when people are in situations like that and very often when people come to [disability unit] they’re in strife so they’re not really thinking about expectations and best case scenario. So, you know, people who are in really difficult situations are trying to get through from one day to the next, so I feel like I was trying to do that, and for that reason I wasn’t kind of projecting expectations onto them.
Why do students disclose?

All groups report that disclosing equity information to the university benefits students.

Students also report a high degree of trust in the university with their equity information.
How do students disclose?

Channels of Disclosure

- Tertiary admissions centre
- Disclosed on enrolment
- Registered with support service
- Unsure whether disclosed
- Not disclosed

Indigenous | SWDs | NESB
11% of students in the study did not disclose their equity status to the university. This includes:

- 11% of students living with a disability
- 6% of indigenous students
- 18% of students from non-English speaking backgrounds

Non-disclosure at Australian universities
Why do students not disclose?
Student Views of Disclosure

- Disclosing status to the university benefits students
- I trust the university with this information
- I fear prejudice in my university life if I disclose
- I fear prejudice in my professional life after university if I disclose
- I am concerned about the confidentiality of this information
- Students do not wish to be 'labelled'
- The university does not need to know
- I do not know why I should disclose this information
- I do not know how to disclose this information

Legend:
- Ind
- Dis
- NESB
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants rejected special, different, and discriminatory treatment by their own Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers, and non-Indigenous peers.

My brother so he’s Aboriginal too, but he hates it. … he’s more inclined, along the lines of all the white people that he works with, who believe the only reason Aboriginal people get into university or get is because they tick the box.

If [people at university] find out through conversation, that you’re Aboriginal – then there’s a real change in the way that they articulate themselves, either they just ignore you completely or they... there’s a level of ignorance or hostility in the language.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reported a high degree of trust with the university’s use of their information, and saw benefits for other students in doing so.

Wished not to be ‘labeled’ or thought of as token Indigenous students.
Factors in (non)disclosure

Disclosure needed for financial assistance
May be needed for access to facilities

Reasons for nondisclosure

1. Inconvenience (of securing documentation)
2. Outsider (mis)perceptions
3. In-group discrimination
4. Lack knowledge of services
5. Reject special treatment

“It’s fairly progressive .... But I guess there are people who are not particularly culturally sensitive [to] stereotypes and what not.

Those could be one of the social factors, being singled out as being the token in the class. You can usually find a community to be a part of when you disclose that you’re indigenous”
Students with disabilities did not wish to be ‘labeled’, for wholly different reasons.

Rather than fearing tokenism, students with disabilities did not wish to be seen as getting special treatment.

Factors in (non)disclosure

Needed for most services/adjustments

1. Discrimination
2. Distrust of systems
3. Stigma
4. Inconvenience of processes
5. Lack knowledge of entitlements
6. Shame
7. Reject equity or disability labels

“My psychologist charges $480 for a report about my autism”
“Basically what I mean, I suppose more special treatment. I was aware that .... You do get more special circumstances within exams and that sort of thing.

I thought, one for all and all for one. Even though this might have gone wrong with me, I still should have the same pressure as the next person next to me”
NESB students reported higher rates of ambivalence or lack of benefit associated with their equity status, and much lower rates of stigma, discrimination and fears of differential treatment.

Factors in (non)disclosure

Disclosure channels may not exist
Disclosure may be “just because” the student is asked

Reasons for non-disclosure
1. Cultural reasons: don’t show weakness
2. “Represent and overcome”
3. Rejection of international student stereotypes
4. No particular reason to disclose when English is adequate
“I was brought up....very, very, old school. In other words, it’s always mind over matter, you should work as hard as the next person and you shouldn’t get any special treatment .... I didn’t want it to be like that and I know, that these are the certain things that come with disclosing that.”
Are there other options for disclosure?

Online tools have potential as gateways to support

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<thead>
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<th>Previously undisclosed</th>
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<td>Short-term issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70%</td>
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Policy recommendations

1. Offer staggered options for disclosure

2. Facilitate interactions between equity services and academic staff to encourage awareness.

3. Educate students on programs and services, with clear guidelines on accommodations and the disclosure process.

4. Encourage cross-university collaboration

5. Encourage a wider understanding of equity group membership.

6. Embrace inclusive practice to reduce reliance on disclosure
Q&A