How Can Universities Encourage Self-Disclosure by Equity Students?

Colin Clark, Rita Kusevskis-Hayes, Matthew Wilkinson
UNSW Student Life and Communities
Among the 1,410,133 University Students in 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic students from non-English backgrounds (NESB)</td>
<td>40,879 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total university population</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>ABS 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian population</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>63,717 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total university population</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>ABS 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous students</td>
<td>17,800 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total university population</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>ABS 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian population</td>
<td>122,387 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total Australian population</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>ABS 2016</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Non-disclosure at Australian universities

A significant proportion of these three groups choose not to disclose their equity status to their university:

- 12% of students with disabilities
- 6% of indigenous students
- 18% of domestic students from non-English speaking backgrounds
How do students disclose equity status?
Fear of ‘labelling’ is equally shared by the three focus groups.

Indigenous students had the least fear of prejudice from disclosure.

NESB students were the most sceptical about the value of disclosure.

Students fear discrimination at uni and in the workplace (esp. SWDs).

Students see no need to disclose (esp. NESB) or see it as a bureaucratic goal.

BUT most students see benefits or even necessity of disclosure.

Other findings on disclosure
Equity students...

1. Fear stigma and being ‘outed’ as equity students
2. Have concerns about privacy and the security of their information
3. Often are not aware of the rights and the services they are entitled to.
4. Often choose not to disclose without knowing the benefits
5. Wait until a ‘crisis’ or a critical point to disclose
Universities differ in the following ways:

• The pathways available for disclosure (and whether limited disclosure is possible)
• The extent to which the need for disclosure is explained on university websites and the ease finding this information
• The degree of active outreach to equity students
• The need for documentation for services, and whether this documentation is required immediately, or a period of grace is permitted
Doing disclosure better

Disclosure processes and outcomes should be clear to equity students, including criteria, evidence and likely accommodations.

Some adjustments – e.g. captioning, hearing loops, recordings and accessible facilities could be available to all, reducing the need for disclosure.

Students want to decide the amount of relevant information that they disclose.

Students want reassurance that information is safe and will not be released without their authorization.

- Transparent
- Inclusive
- Confidential
- Student-centric

Transparent

Inclusive

Confidential

Student-centric
Recommendation 1: Adopt inclusive practices

1. Reduce the need for disclosure by accommodating as wide a range of needs as possible

2. Options available to all do not constitute ‘special treatment’ or privileges
   - e.g. screen reader software and accessible online materials
   - Close-captioned lectures

3. Get common sense measures right – accessibility, toilets, lift access

4. In consultation with students, consider the implications of segregating facilities / services (e.g. Indigenous)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation 2: Offer options for Disclosure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> Give students control over data and the ability to limit disclosure</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **2** Allow disclosure for a particular course or activity  
  - Use in conjunction with staff training to avoid misuse of information |
| **3** Consider online tools for students to explore options: e.g. NavigateMe |
Recommendation 2: Options for Disclosure: Online Self-help tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total respondents</th>
<th>Disability (TAC)</th>
<th>Disability (MyUNSW)</th>
<th>Require Assistance (MyUNSW)</th>
<th>Regd. with Disability Service</th>
<th>Previously undisclosed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short-term issue</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>47 (77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term issue</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2 (1.5%)</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37 (90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>17 (13%)</td>
<td>37 (27%)</td>
<td>31 (23%)</td>
<td>2 (1.5%)</td>
<td>99 (70%)</td>
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</table>
Recommendation 3: Explain equity programs and services

- Advertise services through faculties / lectures
- Outline benefits of disclosure / rights / protections
- Where certification is necessary (indigenous or disability) offer guidance on obtaining it
Recommendation 4: Adopt clear and consistent definitions for official use

Take a social-relational approach to disability, focusing on needs being met rather than basing responses on purely medical criteria:

“the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities”. (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS, 1975)

Versus a medical approach:

“A person has a disability if they report they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities” (ABS, 2016).
Recommendation 5: Encourage wider understanding of equity groups

1. Be clear about definitions of equity
   - Criteria such as impact on study matter more than arbitrary limits

2. Focus on needs (e.g. captioning) rather than labels (NESB / Disability)

3. Be sensitive to differences: e.g. Indigenous nations and social rules

4. Discourage comparison with others – one person is not more worthy of support than another, but may have different needs
Recommendation 6: Allow non-responses UAC form

Government statistics

- Do you speak a language other than English at home?
- None

- Are you an Australian Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander?
- Neither Australian Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander

- Number of parents or guardians during schooling
- Neiher Australian Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander
  
  - Australian Aboriginal
  - Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
  - Torres Strait Islander

- Parent/guardian 1 details *
- -- select highest education level --

- Parent/guardian 2 details *
- -- select highest education level --

Do you need support services during your studies?

Do you have a disability or illness? *
- Yes
- No
Recommendation 6: Allow Non-responses

- Definitions and criteria are not usually clear
- Students may not be willing to disclose without understanding the implications
- Some answers are not clear-cut; e.g. disabilities may be episodic or controlled
- Universities may not have the right to demand an answer
1. **Adopt** inclusive university practices and procedures

2. **Offer options** of disclosure channels and times

3. **Explain** equity programs and services to students at university, with clear guidelines for benefits, confidentiality and processes

4. **Adopt** clear, consistent and easily understood **definitions** of equity groups

5. Encourage a **wider understanding** of equity group membership among staff and students

6. **Explain requests** for relevant equity group information, and allow non-responses for students who prefer not to answer.
Questions?

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