

Pathways 7 Conference 2004

Dr Simon Darcy

On Secondment to the Equity and Diversity Unit
Senior Lecturer

School of Leisure, Leisure Sport and Tourism
Faculty of Business, University of Technology, Sydney
PO Box 222, Lindfield NSW 2070

Ph:02 9514-5100 Fax: 02 9514-5195 Email: Simon.Darcy@uts.edu.au

Dinah Cohen

Project Officer

Equity & Diversity Unit, University of Technology, Sydney

Keywords: Academic; Disability; Professional Development

Presentation requirements: data projector; laptop with CD drive; PowerPoint software

Authors: Dr Simon Darcy and Dinah Cohen

DON'T CALL IT TRAINING: A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODULE FOR DISABILITY AND INCLUSIVE ACADEMIC PRACTICE

1 Dr Simon Darcy and 2 Dinah Cohen

Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Business, University of Technology, Sydney
Project Officer, Equity & Diversity Unit, University of Technology, Sydney

Introduction

This paper reports on the development and implementation of the **1 in 5: Disability and Inclusive Academic Practice** at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). **1 in 5** developed from UTS's commitment to disability issues formulated in the first UTS *Disability Action Plan* (DAP). Two further initiatives arising from the DAP, the *Disability Curriculum Project* and the *Alternative Assessments Working Group*, both concluded that there was a need to provide professional development opportunities to assist academics in understanding inclusive teaching practices and their responsibilities under the *Disability Discrimination Act, 1992*. **1 in 5's** curriculum was developed over the second semester of 2003 and piloted in December 2003. The implementation of **1 in 5** involved a series of marketing sessions targeting key personnel from faculties and units across the University. The paper presents an overview of the formulation process, the implementation strategy, the experiences of implementation and a preliminary analysis of the completed evaluations of **1 in 5**.

Background

UTS has had a commitment to disability issues over the last 15 years. The unit charged with overseeing UTS's disability responsibilities is the *Equity and Diversity Unit* (EDU). The philosophy that EDU adopts is highlighted in the introduction to its website through a visual of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This declaration enshrines the equality of access to higher education based on merit. Secondly, it directs that higher education should seek to fully develop the human personality and that the development of the human personality is an important foundation for human rights, freedom, understanding, tolerance and friendship amongst all groups for the maintenance of peace.

UTS's first strategic policy commitment to disability came through the development and publication of its first Disability Action Plan (DAP) (Equity and Diversity Unit, 1997). The formulation of the DAP involved extensive consultation across all Faculties and Units of UTS together with the establishment of a DAP steering committee, which was rolled over to become the DAP Implementation Group. One recommendation of the DAP was the need for disability awareness training for staff including academics. In the first term of the DAP, disability awareness training was undertaken for support staff in security, the library, Property Development Unit and in general sessions open to all staff. The training offered the following focus:

- generic disability awareness training, which focused on increasing staff knowledge about their responsibilities in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act; and
- training focusing on specific disability issues, including
 - Mental Health Awareness Training

- Introduction to Australian Sign Language (Auslan)
- Accessible web design
- Access to the built environment

The EDU's records indicate that about 500 staff attended the training sessions over a three-year period. This resulted in a series of very positive outcomes for those staff involved and, more importantly, for people with disabilities who came in contact with these groups through direct service provision or as users of the completed built environment projects (see Equity and Diversity Unit 2003 for detailed outcomes). Amongst other successes of the DAP, this proactive approach to disability awareness training was recognised in the *UTS Disability Action Plan Review 1997-2003* (Equity and Diversity Unit, 2003a).

Another action to take place under the initial DAP was the *Disability Curriculum Project* (Darcy, 1999). This cross Faculty research sought to gain an understanding of the breadth and approach to disability within the curriculum and in relation to academic responsibilities to teaching students with disability. The findings of the project can be summarised as an almost nonexistent recognition of disability in the curriculum and a lack of awareness by academics that they had a responsibility to be inclusive of students with disabilities within their curriculum. Needless to say a major recommendation of this project was the need for specialist disability awareness for academics. See Darcy (1999) for other outcomes of this project.

Following on from the *Disability Curriculum Project*, the EDU and the Student Services Unit through the Faculty Academic Liaison Officers (ALO) reported a great deal of concern within the Faculties with respect to alternative assessment and students with disabilities. This led to the establishment of the Alternative Assessments for Students with Disabilities Working Group which sought to canvass the Faculties for the major issues surrounding alternative assessments. Apart from recommending a general need to educate academics about disability and inclusive practices, the report identified that most issues surrounding alternative assessments could be attributed to people with mental health issues and people with learning difficulties (Alternative Assessments Working Group, 2001).

Yet, even with this background, little effort had been made up to and including the *UTS Disability Action Plan Review 1997 - 2002* to address specific disability awareness for academics. To redress the situation, a proposal was developed by the EDU for academic disability awareness training (Equity and Diversity Unit, 2003b). As a result of this proposal, Dr Simon Darcy was seconded from the Faculty of Business to develop and implement a disability awareness program for academics. Dinah Cohen from the EDU was appointed project officer to assist in program development, to produce program documentation and to assist with the administration of implementation. Dr Simon Darcy's background includes a Ph.D. that sought to understand and explain the tourism industry's responses to disability, intimate knowledge of UTS processes and a history of involvement with disability advocacy issues. He has had extensive previous involvement in the development and delivery of disability awareness training for government, the private and the third sector.

Approach and Development

From the outset the **1 in 5 team** sought to incorporate a social approach to disability within the curriculum. The social approach to disability can be summarised by the quote, 'Disabled by society not our bodies' (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001) . Too often disability is not even regarded as being on the fringes of the higher education agenda. While gender, race, ethnicity, age and sexuality studies have made an impact within curriculum in higher education generally, and in the social sciences in particular, disability has been still largely invisible in these same areas (Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999). Cross Faculty research at UTS in the Disability Curriculum Project (Darcy, 1999), concluded that teaching of disability related issues and practices within UTS was done so from the perspective of the problem of disability residing within the individual, and saw the cause emanating from the functional/psychological losses supposedly arising from the disability.

These approaches are founded on the 'personal tragedy theory of disability' (Oliver, 1996). This view has dominated professional training offered by higher education. However, over the last twenty years this dominant discourse has been challenged with the development of the social approach to disability and the rise of disability studies within universities. This has seen disability re-conceptualised from a 'personal tragedy' to a complex form of social oppression (Oliver 1990, 1996; Abberley 1987, Barnes 1991) constituted through the disabling social environment and prevailing "hostile social attitudes" (Barnes 1996:43).

Central to the social approach to disability was the empowerment of people with disabilities through recognition of viewing disability from a disability perspective. This philosophy was exemplified by the slogan, 'Nothing About Us Without Us' (Charlton, 1998). The slogan was, and is, a direct challenge to traditional professional training within Universities that viewed people with disabilities as subjects to be studied rather than individuals of equal status. A range of strategies can be employed to be more inclusive of emancipatory research and curriculum practices (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Pfeiffer, 1997; Schlesinger & Taub, 1998).

The social approach to disability recognises that people with disabilities have substantially lower rates of employment, and hence, substantially lower incomes than the non-disabled (Gleeson, 1998) not because of any inherent deficiency of the individual but due to a series of disabling social practices. Education is the precursor to employment and can be the circuit breaker to the poverty cycle. Low employment rates, low income and higher living costs create a poverty trap for people with disabilities. The University and academics within the University, should seek to have inclusive practices that maximise educational participation rather than making any ill informed judgements about what they think people with disabilities cannot do (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2003).

Set within this context, **1 in 5** aims to **develop an understanding and knowledge of disability issues as they affect students and staff**. The learning outcomes of **1 in 5** are to:

- be familiar with measures that support students with disabilities in a teaching context;
- identify where to go for help and advice within UTS;

- know what is meant by disability;
- have an overview of how the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) impacts upon the University; and
- provide reasonable accommodations for colleagues with disabilities.

1 in 5 was developed from the best available disability awareness training packages identified by an extensive literature review (Cameron, Darcy, & Daruwalla, 2002; Disability Services Commission (WA), 2000; Gething, Poynter, & Reynolds, 1994; Parsons, 1996 ; Student Support Unit of the Central Coast Campus, 1999; Wray, 2003). It was decided by EDU that from the evidence gathered by the Alternative Assessments Working Group, that the emphasis of **1 in 5** was to be on people with invisible disabilities and, in particular, people with mental health and learning disabilities that were identified. Apart from the issues identified with alternative assessments, these two groups are the largest growing proportion of people with disabilities seeking admission to University and requiring reasonable adjustments within the academic context (Equity and Diversity Unit, 2003a, 2003b). **1 in 5** is based on a three hour session that includes the following 10 sections:

1. Introduction
2. What is a disability?
3. Models of Disability
4. What are UTS disability responsibilities?
5. DDA concepts
6. People with Disabilities
7. Scenarios to apply the knowledge
8. UTS Disability Partnerships
9. Question session
10. Conclusion/Evaluation

Central to the learning philosophy is the operationalisation of best practice research about disability awareness and attitude change which suggests the outcomes are best when information is imparted through not only traditional information sources, video case studies and scenarios but through programs designed for involvement with people with disabilities (blind, mental health and learning disabilities) who the participants could regard as their peers (Daruwalla, 1999). These interactions are essential to the outcomes of **1 in 5**.

1 in 5 was piloted with Academic Liaison Officers in December 2003. The evaluation identified that the strengths were the knowledgeable content, interactive scenarios, disability speakers, delivery of the main presenter and the ability to react to the group's needs/questions. The areas for improvement included not having/changing the introductory questionnaire, the tightening of the involvement of the specialist disability speakers and more time for the scenarios. This feedback was incorporated into the final package. A manual was provided for each participant that contained the presentation slides, detailed information about UTS disability partnerships, a publication about inclusive academic practice (Lawrence, 2000) and a guide to interacting with people with disabilities (Lawrence, Flood, & Alsop, 2000).

Implementation

The **1 in 5** team recognised that the relatively short timeframe of implementation and the current climate of the higher education environment meant that the project had to be marketed to capture the Faculties involvement. It was decided that the focus of the preliminary marketing of **1 in 5** would focus on senior academic management. The Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic) was responsible for EDU and, hence, the person who had signed off on the establishment of **1 in 5**. He recognised the importance of having a major impact within the Faculties rested on senior academic management providing leadership for involvement in **1 in 5**. Two key sessions were held during the regular monthly meetings of the:

- Deans; and
- Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning.

A scenario based **1 in 5** was devised of about one hour duration and tailored for the two groups. The **1 in 5 team** was notably cautious about the likely engagement of the Deans and the Associate Deans due to their relative remoteness from the teaching process. However, much to our surprise both sessions with these groups were lively, engaging and very interactive. Most of the Deans had dealt with significant disability issues over the past 12 months either personally, in relation to a student or a staff issue. The Associate Deans were similarly involved but more in relation to student issues surrounding alternative assessment and the intricacies of mental health issues. The concluding section of both sessions involved an outline of the variety of delivery options that the **1 in 5 team** could offer to Faculties, units, departments or schools.

From this basis, **1 in 5** has been run in the following entities:

- Pilot program with cross Faculty Academic Liaison Officers (12);
- Faculty of Information Technology (15);
- Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (two separate sessions) (26);
- Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery and Health (12);
- Faculty of Education (Two separate sessions for Teacher & Adult Education) (13);
- Institute of International Studies (14);
- Institute of Multimedia and Learning (12);
- Office of the Registrar (to be determined);
- a module has been designed for incorporation within the orientation of new academics to UTS (to be determined); and
- an open session for academics from all faculties (to be determined).

At the time of writing the paper approximately 110 academics had attended the sessions that varied in duration from the full three hours to two hours and one hour. With each of the entities, the full three-hour session was strongly suggested but the **1 in 5 team** had to work within the constraints that the entities suggested. It is recognised that this was not an ideal situation. UTS have 864 full-time academic staff and the attendance at the sessions so far represents approximately 13% of academic staff.

The other involvement has been with the Faculty of Business where the Faculty Board endorsed a requirement to include a statement relating to the support needs of students with disabilities in every subject outline. Further negotiation with the Faculties of Business, Law, Science and Design/Architecture/Building is continuing for sessions for 2005. Further, a cross faculty working party has been established for developing cooperative curriculum and research opportunities around disability and through the likely relocation of the Disability Studies and Research Institute (www.dsari.org.au) to UTS. The DSaRI working party offers the opportunity of providing an entity to network, educate and research all aspects of disability at UTS.

Conclusion

For those who attended, **1 in 5** can be regarded as a successful program for the target population and within the limitations of the project budget. The preliminary evaluations show that most academics had been exposed to information that they had previously not known about and had greater understanding of the characteristics of disability, related inclusive practice and the UTS disability partnerships that they could draw on. The areas for improvement included greater time to explore individual issues that they were dealing with and more time to discuss the scenarios/complete further scenarios. However, a major issue that became apparent early on was the *preaching to the converted* elements of those who attended. Many people who attended had previous experience of students with disabilities and could be regarded as the types of people who went out of their way to accommodate any manner of adjustments. The question remains of how to improve people who have negative attitudes towards students with disabilities and inclusive practices to attend such sessions?

References

- Alternative Assessments Working Group. (2001). *Alternative Assessments for Students with a Disability Working Group*. Sydney: Equity & Diversity Unit - University of Technology, Sydney.
- Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (1997). *Doing Disability Research*. Leeds: The Disability Press.
- Barnes, C., Mercer, G., & Shakespeare, T. (1999). *Exploring disability: a sociological introduction*. Malden, Mass: Polity Press.
- Cameron, B., Darcy, S., & Daruwalla, P. S. (2002). *Disability Awareness Training Resources for Government Tourism Organisation*. Kew, Vic: Easy Access Australia Pty Ltd.
- Charlton, J. I. (1998). *Nothing about us without us: disability oppression and empowerment*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Darcy, S. (1999). *Disability Curriculum Project*. Sydney: Equity & Diversity Unit - University of Technology, Sydney.
- Daruwalla, P. S. (1999). *Attitudes, Disability and the Hospitality and Tourism Industry*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Newcastle, Newcastle, NSW.
- Disability Services Commission (WA). (2000). *Training resource kit: accessing new markets - You can make a difference to customer service for people with disabilities [kit]: hospitality, tourism, retail & entertainment industries*. West Perth: Western Australia Disability Services Commission.

- Equity and Diversity Unit. (1997). *Disability Action Plan 1997-2001*. Sydney: University of Technology, Sydney.
- Equity and Diversity Unit. (2003a). *Disability Action Plan 2003-2007*. Sydney: University of Technology, Sydney.
- Equity and Diversity Unit. (2003b). *Disability Awareness Training at UTS Proposal*. Sydney: University of Technology, Sydney.
- Gething, L., Poynter, T., & Reynolds, F. (1994). *Disability awareness package* (2nd ed.). Sydney: University of Sydney Community Disability and Ageing Program.
- Gleeson, B. (1998). Disability and Poverty. In R. Fincher & J. Nieuwenhuysen (Eds.), *Australian Poverty: then and now* (pp. 314-333). Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (2003). *Don't judge what I can do by what you think I can't: Ten years of achievements using Australia's Disability Discrimination Act*. Retrieved 22 August, 2003, from www.hreoc.gov.au/
- Lawrence, A. (2000). *Inclusive Practices for Students with Disabilities – a Guide for Academic Staff*. Sydney: Universities Disabilities Cooperative Project.
- Lawrence, A., Flood, M., & Alsop, L. (2000). *Interactions – a Guide to Assisting People with disabilities*. Sydney: Universities Disabilities Cooperative Project.
- Oliver, M. (1996). *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice*. Basingstoke, Houndmills: Macmillan.
- Parsons, I. (1996). *Disability awareness, disability discrimination law: a training manual*. Geelong West, Vic.: Villamanta Publishing Service.
- Pfeiffer, D. (1997). *The Teaching of Disability Studies*. Pfeiffer, David 1987, The Teaching of Disability Studies: Center for Disability Studies.
- Schlesinger, L. a., & Taub, D. E. (1998). *Syllabi and Instructional Materials for Teaching Sociological of Disability*. Wasgintrun: American Sociological Association.
- Shakespeare, T., & Watson, N. (2001). The social model of disability: An outdated ideology? In S. N. Barnartt & B. Mandell Altman (Eds.), *Exploring Theories and Expanding Methodologies* (Vol. 2, pp. 9-28). Stamford: JAI Press.
- Student Support Unit of the Central Coast Campus. (1999). *Disability Resource Kit for Academic Staff*. Retrieved 15 August 2003, from <http://www.ccc.newcastle.edu.au/student-support/DisabilityResourceKit/Contents.htm>
- Wray, M. (2003). *DEMOS Project – Online Disability Awareness Module*. Retrieved Dec 12, 2003, from <http://jarmin.com/demos/index.html>