



Committee for
UNIVERSITY TEACHING and STAFF DEVELOPMENT

FINAL REPORT FOR 1997 STAFF DEVELOPMENT GRANT

1. IDENTIFICATION

Name of Project Leader(s): Dr Sarah Mann (1998), Ms Barbara Black (1999)

Project Directors: Dr Sarah Mann (1998), Ms Barbara Black (1999)

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Project Steering Group: Dr Sarah Mann (1998 Chair), Ms Barbara Black (1999 Chair), Mr Ranil Ratnayeke (Co-ordinator), Ms Maria Osman (Equity Manager), Dr Sato Juniper (Student Support Services), Mr Michael Clare (Department of Social Work), Professor Roger Slee (Graduate School of Education), Dr Bruce Mackintosh (International Office), Dr David Sang (Psychology), Ms Jill Milroy (Aboriginal Programmes), Ms Fiona Dick (Secretary).

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Project Title

Achieving Diversity and Inclusivity in Teaching and Learning

10 Key words or phrases that describe the project:

Inclusive teaching and learning; inclusive curriculum; student diversity; cultural background; students with disabilities and medical conditions; law and religion, managing diversity.

Executive Summary

The University of Western Australia (UWA) sought funding support for a project to encourage inclusive teaching and learning practices. The 18-month project was based at the University's Centre for Staff Development and managed by a half-time project co-ordinator.

The project objectives included raising awareness of diversity, informing staff of best practice approaches, and promoting the implementation of inclusive curricula. Diversity was considered in a broad context to include characteristics such as gender, race, age, disability, sexual orientation, cultural background, socio-economic status as well factors such as preferred learning styles.

Heightening an awareness of diversity and inclusive teaching and learning issues was addressed through a range of activities including an ongoing series of workshops which aimed to assist teaching staff to:

- recognise that each student (and teacher) brings a unique culture to the classroom;
- enhance creative problem-solving by actively engaging the 'multiple perspectives' found in any classroom;
- build 'cultural bridges' to enable all students to participate fully;
- create environments where students are encouraged, and their personal identity honoured; and
- recognise the importance of being positive role models for co-responsibility.

Additional professional development activities included forums as well as the dissemination of print and Web-based information. These activities encouraged teaching staff to develop self-awareness coupled with respect for the diverse backgrounds of students, and to reveal unexamined assumptions such as stereotyping. Evaluation of awareness-raising activities found participants to be more open to issues of diversity and, in their teaching, more willing to draw on the multiple perspectives found in the classroom. In total over 300 staff participated in workshops and other professional development activities. These participants now form part of an interdisciplinary inclusivity network and have been provided with information about diversity related activities.

A second set of objectives aimed to increase competence in the development and implementation of inclusive curricula. An important initiative to support inclusivity was the adoption of a 'Teaching for Diversity Checklist' by the University's Academic Council following circulation to all faculties, departments and specialist interest groups. The Checklist provides suggestions on design, content and delivery of the curriculum, and student assessment.

Action-learning projects have resulted in progress towards three new courses of study. These projects provide tangible models for achievable inclusive curriculum change:

- 'Managing' Diversity: The Department of Organisational and Labour Studies has developed a unit to prepare students for workforce diversity.
- Universal Design Studio: Two 'Universal design' units are currently being taught in the School of Architecture and Fine Arts.
- Law and Religion: In 2000 The Law School will offer Australia's first course on 'Law and Religion'
- Course Delivery and Disability: A Student Services research project.

A final outcome of the project has been a report which includes a description of four inclusive projects and includes recommendations to further embed inclusive principles in curriculum processes, in promotional criteria, and suggests a pool of funding for innovative curriculum projects.

Project Statement

The *Achieving Diversity and Inclusivity in Teaching and Learning Project* (Inclusivity Project) was carried out between January 1998 and September 1999. The project was managed by a half-time project co-ordinator located in the Centre for Staff Development at the University of Western Australia (UWA). The project builds on inclusivity-related workshops and research conducted at UWA over the past five years.

Justification

The Inclusivity project has contributed to further developing the University's capacity to respond to diversity through flexible and responsive teaching and learning practices. The Project has also confirmed strong support for changes to the curriculum amongst many teaching staff and senior managers. The major benefit of an inclusive approach was seen to be twofold: firstly, students with a better understanding and skills for living and working in a diverse global environment; and secondly, benefiting 'minority' groups by acknowledging and valuing differences and enabling the values and worldviews of all students to be given equal expression in teaching and learning. In more general terms the inclusivity project was seen as contributing to a number of organisational priorities and values as outlined below:

- moral arguments (redressing grievances of under-represented groups)
- demographic arguments (responding to student populations which have become far more diverse)
- civic arguments (contributing to Australia's need for a skilled workforce drawn from diverse backgrounds)
- academic enrichment (enriching academia by providing multiple perspectives)
- political (contributing to the Universities response to issues of access, equity, racism and discrimination)
- economic (attracting and retaining under-represented groups as well as fee-paying students).

Positive project outcomes have included:

- a multi-disciplinary group of academic staff with a better understanding of diversity and inclusivity through participation in workshops and other professional development activities.
- a number of innovative inclusivity inspired courses which provide transferable models for curriculum development.
- a checklist to guide curriculum development and delivery.
- a ground-swell of support from across the University for curriculum transformation

Target groups

The project aimed to involve academic staff, departments and others interested in teaching and learning. Over 300 staff participated in workshops, forums, professional development activities and curriculum projects. These participants formed an 'inclusivity network' which provided an avenue for the dissemination of information about workshops, conferences and related activities.

A core group of academic staff participated in ongoing professional development workshops and other project activities. Most cited positive benefits to their teaching. These included heightened awareness of student and personal diversity, and the limitations of traditional curriculum materials and teaching styles. A number of these participants have taken the additional step of becoming active promoters of inclusivity within their departments and in other fora.

Other academic staff participated in the development of the 'Teaching with Diversity Checklist' which was circulated to all faculties and departments for comment. The checklist is now one of the curriculum development tools used on an ongoing basis by many staff across the University.

The project also involved exploratory work with staff from the Departments Social Work and the faculty of Engineering who participated in workshops and meetings aimed at strengthening their capacity to deal with student diversity and inclusive curricula.

Finally staff from three departments, Architecture, Organisational Studies and Law, were involved in curriculum development projects which led to new units. These projects have additionally involved and influenced other departmental staff who have been involved in reviewing new units. A fourth project used structured questionnaires and interviews to identify teaching styles preferred by students with disabilities, academic staff attitudes to meeting the learning needs of students with disabilities, and strategies for enhancing teaching.

Technical soundness

The project was broadly successful in meeting project objectives of "increasing staff members competence in the development and implementation of inclusive curricula (defined as a focus not only on substantive content but also on educational methods and processes)"¹

An important contribution to the effective management of this project was a diverse multi-disciplinary project Steering Group comprising people from drawn from academic and support staff from Arts and Science background. Most members had a long-standing interest in issue of diversity.

Awareness-raising initiatives

A broad cross section of UWA staff participated in awareness raising workshops, in curriculum projects, and by supporting changes which promoted inclusivity through teaching and learning committees at the departmental, faculty and chancellery level.

Professional Development

An important aim of the project was the promotion of diversity issues as they impact on teaching and learning. This was addressed through a range of activities including an on-going series of workshops which aimed to assist teaching staff to:

- recognise that each student (and teacher) brings a unique culture to the classroom;
- enhance creative problem-solving by actively engaging the multiple perspectives found in any classroom;
- build 'cultural bridges' to enable all students to participate fully;
- create environments where students are encouraged, and their personal identity honoured; and,
- recognise the importance of being positive role models for co-responsibility.

These workshops were of varying length including intensive two-day, one-day and half-day sessions. Workshops were advertised widely through University journals, training schedules and electronically, and were successful in attracting staff from a wide cross section of disciplines.

Additional professional development activities included forums, and the dissemination of written and Web-based information. These activities encouraged teaching staff to develop self-awareness coupled with respect for the diverse backgrounds of students, and to reveal unexamined

¹ Achieving Diversity and Inclusivity in Teaching and Learning, project proposal.

assumptions such as stereotyping. Evaluation of awareness raising activities indicated that most participants found this form of professional development personally and professionally rewarding in providing insights into the 'multiple perspectives' found in any group of students, lecturers and the community and in curriculum resources.

Website

A UWA Inclusivity Website was established early in the Inclusivity Project to provide information about the project and links to other inclusivity related projects and sites both within UWA and externally. This has been a valuable resource for teaching staff and students, particularly as it provides access to information about some well-documented curriculum developmental work in the United States.

Curriculum projects

A further outcome of the project were action-learning projects and have resulted in progress towards new courses of study dealing with diversity and inclusivity. The Architecture course commenced in August 1999, and new courses in the Law School and the Department of Organisational and Labour Studies are being developed and will be available next year. The Student Services project provides teaching staff with a very useful analysis of teaching strategies which meet the learning needs of students with disabilities. These strategies also benefit other students, such as those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Course Delivery and Disability: This Student Services project researched the:

- i) impact of delivery components of a course on students with disabilities.
- ii) perceptions of academic staff about delivery methods.
- iii) types of delivery preferred by students' with disabilities.
- iv) resource implications of more flexible teaching methods.

Designing and Mounting a Unit on Managing Diversity: The Department of Organisational and Labour Studies has developed a unit to prepare students for workforce diversity. The unit has been designed not only to teach 'diversity' as a topic, but also to accommodate and respect difference with regard to students, academic disciplines and teachers. This innovative new course will be offered in 2001.

Universal Design Studio: Two innovative 'Universal design' units have been developed in the School of Architecture and Fine Arts. These seek to broaden student understanding and awareness of the human condition in order to respect and attempt to understand the range and diversity of the human experience in our culture today. 'Universal design' is a design approach which enfranchises the widest possible population to use designed facilities and services.

Law and Religion: In 2000 The Law School will offer Australia's first course on 'Law and Religion', a one-semester interdisciplinary unit providing a comparative study of the relationship between law and religion and its implication for Australian law, religious tolerance and freedom.

Each of these courses has stimulated dialogue about inclusivity within each department in processes such as negotiating approval for the new units. A further positive outcome are the presence of 'advocates' speaking for inclusivity within each of these departments. In addition, the project reports provide tangible models for achievable inclusive curriculum change.

Departmental projects

The project was less successful in initiating two proposed pilot department-wide projects. One department and one faculty expressed an interest and participated in a range of activities to identify

needs and barriers to inclusivity. These included meetings with departmental staff, awareness-raising workshops and focus group meetings with students on their perceptions of need.

Departments were reluctant to initiate department-wide inclusivity initiatives without funding support, citing reduced levels of funding, higher administrative workloads, competing departmental priorities, and increased staff-student ratios as dissuading factors.

The success of individual departmental projects suggests the benefits of providing project funding and targeting individuals to promote and support inclusive initiatives.

Attitudes to diversity

The project has also identified opposition, which was often based on misconceptions about inclusivity, or a narrow interpretation of the role of universities. Some staff saw inclusivity as 'reducing standards'.

Additionally there was an underlying attitude held by some staff across departments that it was the student's responsibility to adapt, rather than the department's responsibility to meet the different learning needs of students.

These views highlight the need for unambiguous University and departmental policies on inclusivity, leadership by senior staff, and ongoing professional development about the responsibilities of teaching staff to meet the learning needs of all students.

Administrative Convenience

The project was based at the Centre for Staff Development (CSD), a unit of 20 people established to promote teaching excellence across the University with a shared philosophy which encouraged innovative teaching strategies such as inclusivity. The Centre's staff and infrastructure enabled the rapid dissemination of workshop details and project information, and provided the resources for professional development activities.

The project was also able to draw on other resources within the University including support from the Equity Office in conducting workshops and evaluating inclusivity initiatives.

Organisational acceptance

Leadership

The project has benefited from the continuing support of UWA's senior managers. The aims of the Inclusivity project have been strongly endorsed from the Vice-Chancellor Professor Schreuder at the project launch, in articles, and public addresses. This role has been reinforced by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Robson, who has also been a strong and consistent advocate of inclusivity in public comments and through his participation in many key University committees. The active support of the University's two most senior officers has helped promote the project and ensure greater levels of co-operation.

Diversity Checklist

While many lecturers and others involved in curriculum development supported the need to make the curriculum more inclusive, there was uncertainty about how this was to be achieved. As a result there were ongoing requests to the Inclusivity Project, Teaching and Learning Committee and the Equity Office to provide guidelines. The Teaching and Learning Committee, chaired by the Deputy

Vice-Chancellor, took responsibility for producing guidelines, which were then to be put before the University's Academic Council for ratification. Academic Council approval was seen to provide the guidelines with significant authority and the potential for ongoing influence.

The Inclusivity Project was co-opted to co-ordinate the process of developing the guidelines on behalf of the Teaching and Learning Committee. A literature search of existing guidelines identified a framework suitable to UWA. Consultations with academic staff and representatives of the target groups identified in UWA's Equity Plan helped clarify the teaching and learning issues which needed to be addressed.

Through this process a draft *Teaching with Diversity Checklist* was developed and, following endorsement by the Teaching and Learning Committee, was circulated for comment to all faculties, departments, inclusivity workshop participants, and specialist bodies including Student Services, Aboriginal Programmes and the Equity Office. This document was generally well received with few suggested changes. The amended Checklist was forwarded to the Senate and passed without amendment in May 1998 with a recommendation that the document be reviewed in twelve months.

In the review conducted in May 1999 a similar group of stakeholders were consulted. They identified the need to strengthen the Checklist to include greater reference to disability issues, explicit statements about not tolerating racist and homophobic comments in tutorials and other learning environments, and an explanatory note about the 'duty of care' which UWA staff have to be responsible for students' welfare at the University, both inside and outside classrooms.

The development of the Checklist focussed attention on inclusivity across the University at the departmental, faculty and corporate executive levels and has helped to embed inclusive values.

Evaluation

The project was supported by a multi-disciplinary Steering Group whose members were diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity and life experiences. This group included academic staff, a departmental head, and staff with equity, professional development and student support backgrounds. This group provided continuous evaluation of project activities.

Formal participant feedback was obtained from all inclusivity workshops, and additionally, a follow-up email evaluation was sent to all workshop and seminar participants. This provided both initial and medium term perceptions about the benefits and outcomes of professional development activities.

Seminars, midway and at the conclusion of the project, allowed the curriculum development projects to be aired, and evaluated by a diverse group of academic and support staff. Written reports of these projects and other inclusive activities was also widely distributed and feedback obtained from across the University.

In addition to the workshops, seminars and Diversity Checklist, a particularly successful aspect of the programme was the action-learning projects. Details of these can be found in the publication *Achieving Diversity and Inclusivity in Teaching and Learning at The University of Western Australia* available on the Web at <http://www.csd.uwa.edu.au/adi/report/>. The Project Co-ordinator's report, which is also included in the publication, contains a series of recommendations based on the findings of the project

Publication

Achieving Diversity and Inclusivity in Teaching and Learning at The University of Western Australia available on the Web at <http://www.csd.uwa.edu.au/adi/report/> Copies of the report are also enclosed.

Acknowledgments

These are included in the publication.

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