



Committee for
UNIVERSITY TEACHING and STAFF DEVELOPMENT

FINAL REPORT FOR A 1998 STAFF DEVELOPMENT GRANT

IDENTIFICATION

Name of Project Leader(s)

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Project Title

Achieving Diversity and Inclusivity in the Wider Educational Context: Enhancing General Staff Capacity to Provide Services to a Diverse Student Body

10 Key words or phrases that describe the project

wider educational environment
diversity
inclusivity
cross-cultural awareness
cross-cultural communication
students with disabilities
service provision to students
general staff
action-learning
staff development workshops

Executive Summary

This staff development project focuses on the wider educational environment, which extends beyond the classroom and other teaching and learning environments and includes administrative areas, the library and other areas providing services to students. This project was developed to improve the way the services are delivered to all students and sought to do so through a staff development initiative for general (non-academic) staff.

The aims of this 12-month project (March 1999 - March 2000) were to:

- raise staff members' awareness and knowledge of diversity and inclusivity issues within the wider educational context of service provision
- increase staff members' competence in inclusive communication practices including cross-cultural communication
- increase staff groups' competence in designing and implementing more inclusive administrative and organisational practices
- develop guidelines on appropriate practices.

The project commenced with a formal launch by the Vice-Chancellor and was followed by diversity-awareness and skills-based workshops. It then moved from centrally delivered workshops to more locally based initiatives which allowed learning to take place experientially through workplace processes. The final phase of the project was a presentation to the University community of the action-learning projects and the launch by the Vice-Chancellor of the report publication.

The project was evaluated on an ongoing basis to inform and develop the project as it evolved. There was evidence throughout each stage of the project that the project achieved its objective of raising awareness and knowledge of student diversity and inclusivity issues within the general staff community.

The awareness-raising and skill development workshops were all well attended and in some cases over subscribed. In addition, the quality of the initial diversity-awareness workshops helped to generate interest in learning more about diversity and inclusivity and hence in attending other workshops forming part of the project as well as participating in action-learning projects.

The action-learning group reports, which indicate increased staff awareness and skills as well as positive changes to administrative and other processes and services, evidence the success of the group projects. These reports form part of the publication *Inclusivity in Providing Services to Students: Responding to a Diverse Student Body*, available on the Web at <http://www.csd.uwa.edu.au/ipss/report/>. Also included in the publication is a detail report of the project, as well as recommendations for future action.

Project Statement

Justification

The educational experience that a student has is not only affected by the direct teaching and learning context of the lecture room or classroom, but also by the wider educational learning milieu,¹ formed in part for the student by contact with staff in a range of other contexts such as the administrative areas of the departments and faculties, the library, enrolments and so on. Recognising the importance of the wider educational environment and the diversity of the University's student population, this staff development project was developed to improve the way the services are delivered to all students by raising the awareness of staff who provide these services, most of whom are general (non-academic) staff.

The project complemented an earlier academic staff development project, '*Achieving Diversity and Inclusivity in Teaching and Learning at the University of Western Australia*', and was the result of an informal needs analysis carried out as part of the academic project. Issues relating to cross-cultural communication and inclusive practices were identified, particularly in the areas concerned with the delivery of different kinds of services to students.

The University of Western Australia's student population is characterised by diversity in relation to such characteristics as gender, race, age, disability, sexual orientation, cultural background and socio-economic status. Given the increasing diversity in the student population, with approximately 17% of UWA students coming from a non-English speaking background,² it is essential that the students' experience of the wider learning milieu is inclusive and sensitive to their different needs.

Target Group

The project focused on the development of general staff who have a responsibility for the provision of services to students, including staff who are a direct and often first point of contact for students.

At each stage of the project, numerous staff members from various departments and at various levels attended functions, workshops and information sessions and/or participated in other aspects of the project such as the steering group and action-learning group projects.

The following attendance and participant numbers provide some indication of the interest in and beneficiaries of the project. (The numbers in bold print indicate the activities scheduled to be held after the official close of the project in March 2000.)

¹ Partlett, M. & Dearden, G. (1977)(Eds) *Introduction to Illuminative Evaluation: Studies in Higher Education*, Pacific Sounding Press, Cardiff-by-the Sea, California.

² Extracted from Unistats 1998, Statistics Office, The University of Western Australia

Activity	Numbers -
• Launch of project	70
• Presentation to university community & launch of project publication	65
• Diversity awareness-raising workshops (5) + (1)	95
• Cross-cultural communication workshops (2) + (1)	30
• Advanced cross-cultural workshop (1) + (1)	15
• Aboriginal cross-cultural awareness workshop (1) + (1)	25
• Ensuring support and access for students with disabilities and medical conditions workshop (1) + (1)	17
• Information dissemination sessions (1) + (3)	22
• Facilitated networking events (3)	64
• Action Learning Groups (7)	51
• Steering Group members	14
Total-to-date	<u>468</u>

In addition, a copy of the publication was sent to all executive deans, heads of department and managers of services areas (approx 180).

Technical Soundness

Overall the project was sound in its design and implementation. The initial submission clearly defined the objectives and illustrated the required series of activities with a clear flow-chart. The scope and design of the project was achievable within the cost and budget constraints.

Although the project was officially completed within the allocated life cycle of 12 months, a longer time frame for the overall project - 18 months rather than 12 months - would have eased the pressure on action-learning groups and allowed for a greater number of workshops to be held and projects to be submitted.

Administrative Convenience

The project did not commence in January 1999 as planned, as the Project Director's position was vacant for a few months, causing delays in the appointment of the Project Co-ordinator. The project commenced in March 1999 when the Project Co-ordinator was appointed. This resulted in workshops and action-learning projects starting later than was ideal in the academic year.

Considerable attention was given to advertising and promoting project activities, which meant an increased workload for administrative staff in the Centre for Staff Development. It is doubtful that the project would have been as successful as it was if workshops and information sessions had only been advertised through the normal channels (in the staff development programme produced each semester and in the staff newsletter).

Scheduling activities to suit the great range of general staff schedules proved to be a challenge, as staff in different roles and areas have different peak and 'quiet' times during the year when they are able to participate in staff development activities.

Organisational Acceptance

The University of Western Australia has a strong commitment to ensuring equity and access for its student population. Commitment to the project at the highest level was demonstrated by the Vice-Chancellor at the launch of the project and of its publication.

University decision makers and policy makers, and those who lead and manage areas that provide services to students were sent a copy of the project publication with a memo from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor drawing their attention to recommendations in the Project Co-ordinator's report.

Evaluation

The project was evaluated on an ongoing basis to inform and develop the project as it evolved. There was evidence throughout each stage of the project that the project achieved its objective of raising awareness and knowledge of student diversity and inclusivity issues within the general staff community

The ongoing evaluation process helped to refine and develop project activities and included reviews of:

- issues raised during workshops
- comments and suggestions in workshop feedback forms
- suggestions from consultants and staff who ran workshops
- input from steering group members
- issues raised at facilitated networking events

Workshops were all well attended and in some cases over subscribed. This was in contrast to similar workshops run prior to the CUTSD project. The increased attendance and interest was probably due to the profile given to the project through the launch and the staff newsletter, and the running of seemingly unrelated workshops under the single 'banner' of *Inclusivity in Providing Services to Students*. The increase can also be attributed to the promotion of workshops through memos to department and section heads, emails targeting all general staff and active encouragement by steering group members. In addition, the quality of the initial diversity-awareness workshops helped to generate interest in learning more about diversity and inclusivity and hence in attending other workshops forming part of the project.

The action-learning group reports contained in the project publication, which indicate increased staff awareness and skills as well as positive changes to administrative and other processes and services, evidence the success of the action-learning group projects. There are, however a number of ways in which this feature of the project could have better outcomes.

Although there was the capacity for the formation of 12 action-learning groups, only seven groups were formed, despite considerable interest expressed by individuals at the launch and

at the workshops. The major obstacle for most general staff was finding the time to carry out an action-learning project. While \$2,000 grants provided support for costs such as research assistance and surveys, the projects also involved considerable staff time by those involved, and for some the time of the year for carrying out the project was not ideal (October 1999 to January 2000). A longer time frame for projects (six rather than three months) and in some cases more support and encouragement from those responsible for managing service areas might have increased the number of action-learning project proposals. Those who participated in the projects indicated that they needed more time to carry out the projects and write their reports, and that they would have preferred to schedule their project at a time that suited their work area than that dictated by the 12-month project.

The Project Co-ordinator and steering group were of the view that a longer time frame for the overall project (18 months rather than 12 months) would have eased the pressure on action-learning groups and allowed for a greater number of projects to have been submitted. A longer time frame would also enabled the Project Co-ordinator to have more contact with and provide additional support and guidance to action-learning groups. In addition, as it was not possible to schedule all workshops proposed in the CUTSD project submission in the time available, several workshops have been scheduled after the official close of the CUTSD project and incorporated into the Centre for Staff Development's regular programme of central workshops.

The outcomes of the project are described in detail in the publication *Inclusivity in Providing Services to Students: Responding to a Diverse Student Body*, available on the Web at <http://www.csd.uwa.edu.au/ipss/report/>. Also included in the Project Co-ordinator's report are a series of recommendations for future action to carry on the work of the project.

Publication

Inclusivity in Providing Services to Students: Responding to a Diverse Student Body, available on the Web at <http://www.csd.uwa.edu.au/ipss/report/>. Two copies of the publication are enclosed.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are made in the project publication

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