How Can Universities Encourage Self-Disclosure by Equity Students?

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Among the 1,410,133 University Students in 2016

40, 879 domestic students from non-English backgrounds (NESB)

2.9% of the total university population

ABS 2016

27% of the total Australian population

63, 717 students with disabilities

4.5% of the total university population

ABS 2016

18.5% of the total Australian population

17,800 Indigenous students

1.3% of the total university population

ABS 2016

3% of the total Australian population

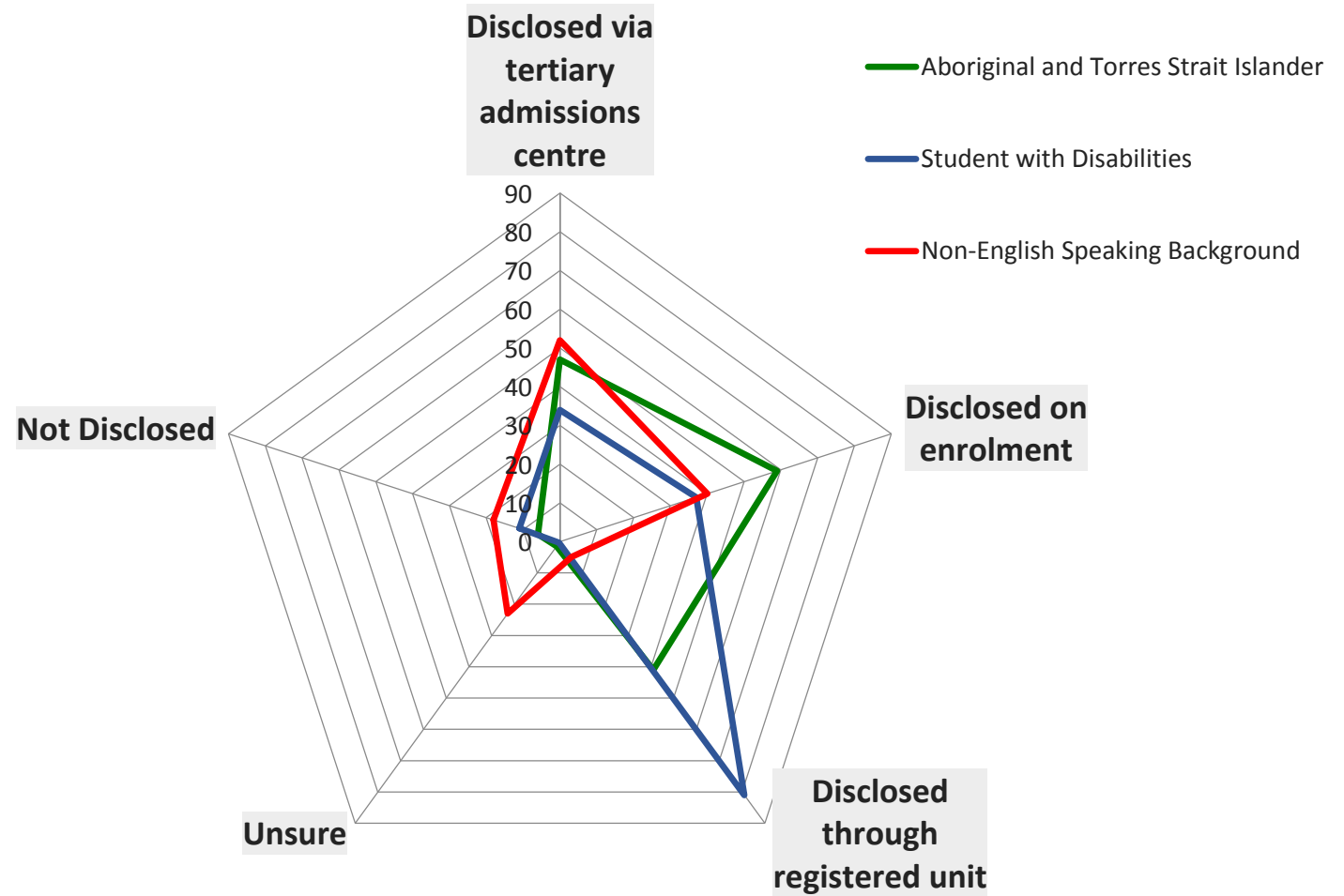Total equity focus population:
122,387 students

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

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…

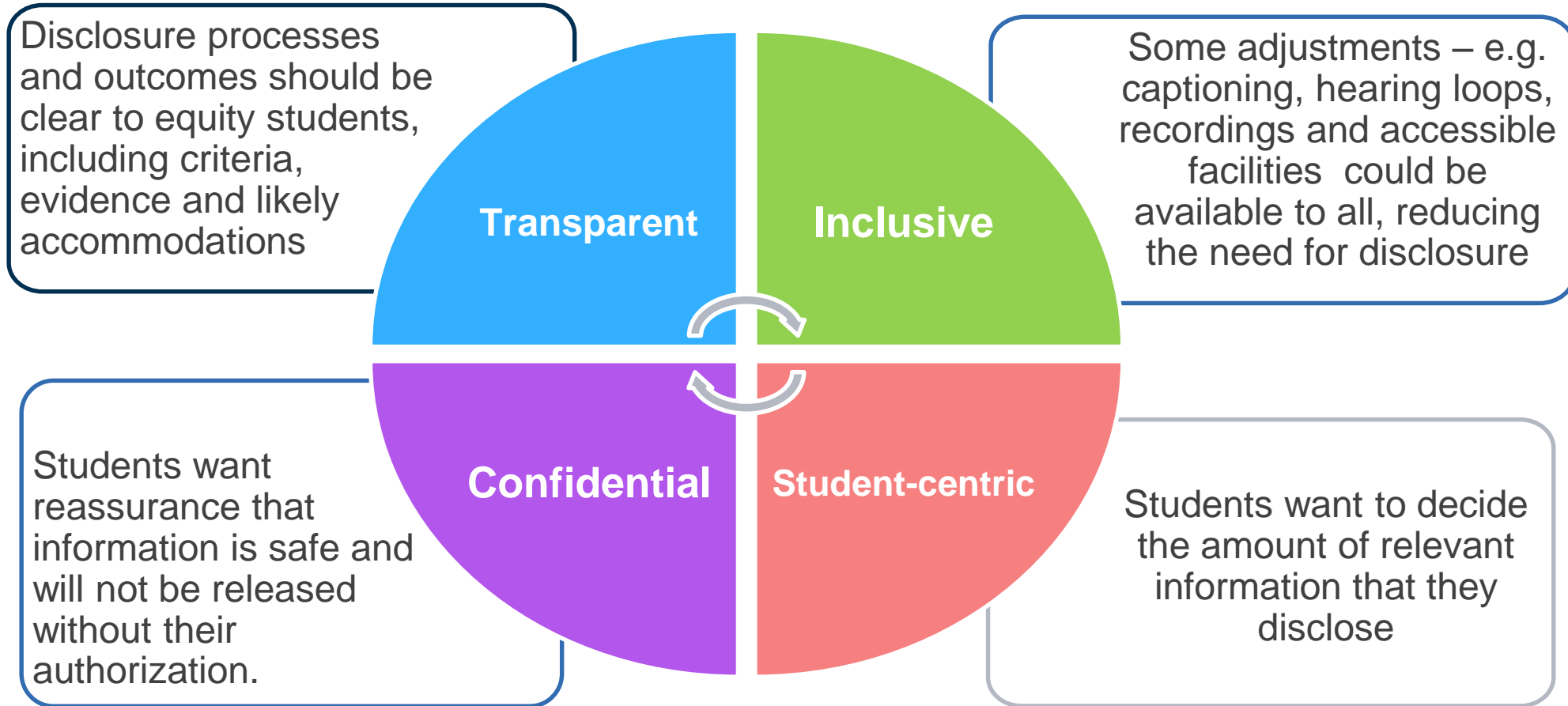| 1	2	3	4	5
Fear stigma and being 'outed' as equity students	Have concerns about privacy and the security of their information	Often are not aware of the rights and the services they are entitled to.	Often choose not to disclose without knowing the benefits	Wait until a 'crisis' or a critical point to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

University disclosure regimes

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

Transparent

Inclusive

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

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

Confidential

Student-centric

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

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)

Recommendation 2: Offer options for Disclosure

1

Give students control over data and the ability to limit disclosure

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

	Total respondents	Disability (TAC)	Disability (MyUNSW)	Require Assistance (MyUNSW)	Regd. with Disability Service	Previously undisclosed	
Short-term issue	61	3	11	8	1	47 (77%)	
Long-term issue	40	12	22	20	1	15 (37.5%)	
Disability	41	2 (1.5%)	4 (3%)	3 (2%)	0	37 (90%)	
TOTAL	**142**	**17 (13%)**	**37 (27%)**	**31 (23%)**	**2 (1.5%)**	**99 (70%)**	

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	2	3	4
Be clear about definitions of equity	**Focus on needs (e.g. captioning) rather than labels (NESB / Disability)**	**Be sensitive to differences: e.g. Indigenous nations and social rules**	**Discourage comparison with others – one person is not more worthy of support than another, but may have different needs**
• Criteria such as impact on study matter more than arbitrary limits			

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 ▾`

- **Neither Australian Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander**
- Australian Aboriginal
- Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Torres Strait Islander

Number of parents or guardians during schooling

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

Six Recommendations

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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