

AASWWE 2012 SYMPOSIUM

Celebrating Diversity: Navigating the
Challenges of Inclusivity; 27 & 28 September

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- ▶ **The Challenges and Opportunities of University based Field Education Programs; issues of cultural diversity and ability within student population**

What are the issues?

- ▶ Diversity of students.
- ▶ Indigenous
- ▶ International
- ▶ Migrant and Refugee backgrounds
- ▶ Disability, mental illness
- ▶ Part-time
- ▶ 'Flip Flopping' between courses
- ▶ Work based placements
- ▶ New opportunities
- ▶ Positive outcomes?

University of Western Sydney (UWS) student diversity

- ▶ Bachelor of Community Welfare(BCW) & Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)
- ▶ Reflect cultural diversity of Sydney, new migrants & refugees.
- ▶ 100 ethnic backgrounds
- ▶ Low socio-economic status (SES).
- ▶ BCW = 20%

Indigenous students at UWS

- ▶ BSW–Eight Indigenous students.
- ▶ **Badanami Centre for Indigenous Education–45 students** enrolled in Bachelor of Community and Social Development (BCSD) with 38 % low SES students (UWS Enrolment Submission to DEEWR/DIIRTE, 2010–2012).
- ▶ ‘Block Mode’ –three one week residential blocks per semester.
- ▶ From rural and remote NSW and Queensland.

Indigenous (continued)

- ▶ Range of academic capabilities, literacy
- ▶ Cultural issues and social responsibilities
- ▶ Badanami Centre: Indigenous staff
- ▶ Literacy programs
- ▶ Sensitive to the cultural obligations
- ▶ Value: Indigenous welfare professionals (deliver services to their communities).

Opportunities & challenges of culturally diverse students?

- ▶ Students diversity, providing diverse future workforce.
- ▶ Refugee, migrant, international students. Great people want to study. Link life experiences to placement experience.
- ▶ Field educators value culturally diverse workforce.

Challenges (continued)

- ▶ Multicultural/refugee placements popular.
- ▶ Emphasis writing and verbal communication skills in English over cultural competence.

Recent arrivals, language other than English

- ▶ English literacy and verbal communication skills, compared Australian-born students.
- ▶ literacy support
- ▶ Discuss value of cultural and first language skills, support students in English
- ▶ Encourage student to work on spoken English.

Culture and communication

- ▶ Cultural differences, misunderstanding in workplace.
- ▶ Identifying cultural components of any disagreement and helping those involved to understand.

International students

- ▶ Come mainly from Japan, Vietnam, China and Nepal.
- ▶ International and local students learn from each other.
- ▶ Very busy working and studying.
- ▶ Face isolation, miss family and support
–under huge pressure to succeed.

International students and stress

- ▶ Anxious and worried about studies, fear of 'letting their families down'.
- ▶ Stressful: completing placements, attending classes, assignments, doing paid work.
- ▶ No simple solution.
- ▶ Field educators simply should be aware of this.

Health and mental health issues

- ▶ May influence the placement progression
- ▶ Influenced by parents' health.
- ▶ Mental health issues, sometimes pose big challenges.
- ▶ Do not always choose to self- disclose, not always easy to support them on placement (Cleary et al, 2011).

'Reasonable adjustments' for disability or chronic health conditions

- ▶ Academic Integration Plan or AIP
- ▶ AIP for the student placement.
- ▶ BCW, there are 11 AIPs, of 142 students,
- ▶ BSW, 18 AIPs, of 387 students.
- ▶ Mental health communication difficulties.
- ▶ Surface stressful periods when assignments are due exam periods

Mental illness

- ▶ Supported some students
- ▶ Easier when students –good understanding of illness.
- ▶ Strategy: inherent requirements for all degrees: the abilities, knowledge and skills need by all students.
- ▶ Disability Discrimination Act (2009) legislation and Disability Standards for

‘Flip flopping’ between courses

- ▶ Students change courses BCW to BSW, BSW to BCW –placements are more manageable in busy lives.
- ▶ Financial pressures.
- ▶ Planning more difficult.
- ▶ Placements are negotiated and then cancelled

Part-time students

- ▶ Option that meets the needs of many
- ▶ Planning more difficult –enrol field education last moment in Week 1.
- ▶ Many move to part time study, postponing placements.
- ▶ Requires a great deal of resources and staff time to provide flexibility.

Work based placements

- ▶ Financial reasons, lack of time, lack of options in small communities.
- ▶ Do placements in their paid workplace.
- ▶ Problematic, may not learn new skills, internal conflicts of interest.
- ▶ Pre-placement visit with the three parties.
- ▶ Clearly articulated learning contract, identify potential issues

New opportunities

- ▶ Academic Exchange, University of South Pacific in Fiji.
- ▶ Ten final year social work students for 2013.
- ▶ Expand to other countries in the Pacific.
- ▶ UWS, Housing NSW and University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Initiative, joint academic position.
- ▶ Revitalize Mt. Druitt Community Environment

What are the positive outcomes?

- ▶ Most students good placement, find employment in Human Services Sector.
- ▶ See the relevance of field education to degree.
- ▶ Value have ‘worked’ in the sector and gained practical experiences.

Positive outcomes (continued)

- ▶ UWS committed to educational opportunities to people underrepresented in high education.
- ▶ Culturally diverse communities attend and complete degrees.
- ▶ Social capital to their communities.
- ▶ Good role models, students go on to further education.

Conclusion

- ▶ There are many challenges, providing field placements to students with diverse skills and needs.
- ▶ Essential to work with this diversity,
- ▶ Positive education experience for the students,
- ▶ Skilled and culturally diverse workforce,

References

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Thank you for listening!

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Any Questions or Comments?