Student diversity as a potential ‘problem’ for teachers, he sees that very diversity as essential for the successful execution of open-ended student projects, with students’ new perceptions and insights acting as a catalyst for student learning and engagement.

How to apply elements of a Teaching Quality model to university teaching in Education is the subject of a piece by Michael Anderson, Robyn Ewing and Robyn Gibson. Focused on similar concerns is an account by Miranda Rose, Sally Farrington and David Rose. Learning of students who have entered academia with few formal skills in academic literacy. Although the students in this group were all Indigenous, the authors argue strongly for broader applications of such an approach - including internationally.

Foreground in this issue, including giving space to students who are also staff, such as Vicki Bradford, Paul Ishiguchi and Leah Raja, Mun in the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education). We have also set aside our regular ‘Talking’ segment for undergraduate voices. In sharing with readers our conversations with just three of the University’s thousands of international students (and Tai), we hoped to signal that listening to students is an often under-utilised route towards understanding learning needs such as open-mindedness and flexibility on the part of teachers.

Our wide-ranging leading article by Yasuko Claremont, William Renner and Fredericka van der Lubbe reports on a research initiative investigating student and staff perspectives of Arts learners from designated equity groups. Findings from their study and the responses of some of the students who specifically asked for a web-based resource where students could both share their stories and access resources, and where the student vignettes are accompanied by inclusive teaching strategies from which others can benefit.

Peter Deooh-Hall adopts a research-enhanced perspective on dimensions of music teaching, sharing with his Conservatorium students (and with us), the research and learning outcomes he achieved in studying with Balinese musicians. Peter’s subtly argued piece weaves together themes of the cultural specificity of teaching and learning styles, how to implement and measure these within the classroom.

Our regular Profile feature focuses on Chris Roberts, much of whose work in educational research and reform in the Faculty of Medicine has been underpinned by a specific concern for the equity and fairness sought by so many colleagues in this issue. In the Teaching & Learning Focus we acknowledge, report on and congratulate all members of the university community who were successful in gaining national recognition for their excellence in teaching. We continue to bring you news about the work taking place in the ITL, and the usual odd bits and ends related to future conferences and some recent publications (on diversity), are all here in this issue.

As the year closes and academic activity begins to slow, we want to thank all those who offered their commitment, experience and wisdom to this issue of ITL. Internationalisation, cultural diversity and Indigeneity are catching but contested areas in university teaching and learning. Each of the contributors, we think, has shown a light on the very nature of that complexity. Collectively, their work signals a hopeful future.

From the ITL, a happy and safe holiday to all.

Christine Asmar
Institute for Teaching and Learning

Students do not participate equally in higher education. Inequity can be observed in the statistics of low participation and less-than-satisfactory retention rates. Universities and governments have been keen to redress this policies aimed to support and assist students who are at risk or disadvantaged in their learning. Yet, these figures and policies mask the reality of daily life – the broader range of issues and needs which students experience over the course of their studies. In this qualitative study of student equity, we sought to amend this imbalance of perception with a focus on the experiences both of students and staff, and to identity positive approaches for dealing with inequity and with overcoming disadvantage.

The ‘Inclusive Equity’ project grew out of a project proposal for the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education) offered by the Institute for Learning and Teaching at the University of Sydney in 2004. The premise of the project was to create a website for the Faculty of Arts, drawing together all the services available to students from equity groups. At the same time we aimed to conduct research into the situation of such students from the perspective of both teachers and students, and showcase innovative methods of managing equity issues where they impact on learning, including the notion of inclusivity. It was to provide academics with examples of how other colleagues have overcome issues of equity. The aim was to help students within equity target groups, not only within the Faculty of Arts, but within the whole University.

In her rigorous analysis of factors influencing Indigenous post-graduates’ chances of successful completion of higher degrees, Diana Day reminds us of facts which we may be aware of cognitively, yet which are easy to overlook in the personal dynamics of student-supervisor relationships. How many of us, for example, would connect published statistics on Indigenous health, to the impact of chronic illness on an Indigenous college’s chances of completing her thesis?

Richard Seymour uses problem-based learning and authentic activities to teach social entrepreneurship. Far from seeing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background, and people of non-English speaking background. The University’s objectives are to increase the number of people from the nominated groups who enrol and complete their studies at the University. These groups were first nominated in the University’s first Equity Plan of 1990 and, then as now, no priority was set for any particular group, the assumption being that equity issues will be integrated into mainstream activities.

Formally, this effort was to help address Recommendation 5 of the Academic Board Phase Two Review and the Faculty of Arts Teaching and Learning Strategy 1.5, namely, that the Faculty should develop more strategies to increase the participation of and retain students from all equity groups. This project is closely related to the Not Dreaming, Waking Program within the Faculty of Arts, which seeks to assist and support students at risk to identify and adopt strategies likely to help them complete their courses, improve their experience and learning outcomes at University and also to develop awareness on the part of academic staff of the nature of the issues. The ‘Inclusive Equity’ also builds on a profile of the Faculty already exposed in the Artificial Intelligence project, completed in 2005. It complements work done by Amor et al (2003, 2002) on diversity and inclusive teaching in relation to the Faculty of Economics and Business, and to the University as a whole; and McLay & Day (2004) on supporting Indigenous students within the (former) College of Science and Technology.

In order to gather the information needed for this project, we conducted both online and face to face interviews in second semester, 2005. Our focus was on the following groups of students:

- disabled students
- low income students
- international students
- non-English-speaking background students
- rural students
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students
- women studying in a non-traditional area or postgraduate areas

Our concern was not to concentrate on minority groups within the Faculty, or on groups which experience discrimination, but simply on key identified equity groups.
We also surveyed all students on strategies for managing their problems and the responses were overwhelmingly positive. While the role of the tutor or teacher figured strongly in answers, responses which focused on what the student could do were as follows: asking to tape-record tutorials; preparing for a topic by conducting online background reading; asking neighbouring students; asking teachers and presenters to speak more slowly; trying to participate more in group activities; trying to understand Australian culture better by reading old newspapers; watching local TV and trying to make more Australian friends. The need to understand Australian culture was emphasised by one student, who spoke of the benefits of having had Australian friends before arriving.

Where the role of the teacher was emphasised, respondents spoke of ‘teachers who “understand” international students’ and who were prepared to be patient when students were used to a different style of learning. The same students also spoke of the need to meet expectations and become more ‘active’ in class. Others spoke of the need to ask tutors for the meaning of words, while others expanded at length on the qualities of a good teacher. A good teacher is approachable and has time at the end of the tutorial to explain terminology. Going through the main points of the tutorial or lecture is helpful, and again, taking the time to explain terminology ‘or Western concepts is helpful, or providing weblinks so people can chase up the information themselves. Three students were also aware of the burden which these plans on the lecturer and were reluctant to become ‘troublemaker[s]’. Another student praised small group work as an opportunity to speak more and become more involved.

It was difficult to elicit information regarding services which may benefit NESB/international students. Four respondents did not know of any services. One student who was well aware of the problem of isolation and lack of access to resources and support commented that the University had a ‘community service’ in the Koori Centre. Students also spoke of the need to make more mainstream students aware of the work of the Koori Centre.

Students with a disability
There were 5 responses from this category. The diversity of disabilities is such that each impairment impacts on the individual’s learning situation in different ways. All, however, had problems with reading, writing, and oral communication, and all had difficulties with assignments. The research showed that the average Australian student was not aware of the fact that he or she had a disability.

Existing services and resources of benefit to this group were the legal service; the ‘Women’s Coffee Room’; the University Counselling Service, the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA), the International Student Support Unit, the Library, and microwave-equipped common rooms. Three respondents suggested improved access to information on financial assistance, more opportunities for on-campus employment, and more assistance to postgraduate research students not receiving scholarships (as there appears to be an assumption, in the opinion of one respondent, that all are on scholarships). One suggestion was free tutorials for students; and another two respondents praised the computing resources on campus but called for better subsidisation. Another service highly praised was the availability of electronic journals, for which the cost of printing is either cheaper than photocopying or free if done via the Postgraduate Arts Research Centres which provide desk space and computing facilities to research students.

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Research findings: Students
There was a strong initial response to our ‘invitation to participate’. In total we received 111 student responses to our invitation. From these, 35 interviews were conducted, both online and face to face. There were 7 responses which fell into the category of being from a language background other than English and/or international students; 9 respondents were categorised as low-income students; 6 respondents reported a disability; 1 respondent was a rural student; and 1 respondent was a woman from a non-traditional area. Three students identified themselves as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. We also interviewed 13 members of teaching and general staff from the Faculty of Arts who were in close contact with students from equity groups.

When compared with Faculty figures, it was a relatively small student sample, albeit rich in qualitative data. Faculty figures for 2001 indicate there were some 7305 students in total, including 19 (0.26%) Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students; 144 (1.97%) disabled students; 483 (6.61%) international students; 106 (4.19%) non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students who have been in Australia for less than ten years; 40 (3.33% (4.56%) students living in localities characterised as low socio-economic areas. Nevertheless, we did not necessarily see our respondents as conforming with those students composing Faculty figures, for a number of reasons. First, we allowed students to self-identify with the categories. We allowed self-identification for low-income and disability, for example; rather than following the strict criteria employed by government agencies. Second, we allowed students to identify with more than one category. Third, we also recognised that in some cases, status may change over time, and that students may be reluctant to identify with a category if there is stigma attached. As such, we were able to aggregate student responses into the four broad equity categories, discussed below.

Summary of student views
A number of issues raised by students cut across the equity categories discussed above. The key concerns were as follows.

Time
An important discovery about students with equity issues is that they are time-poor. Poverty may or may not be an issue, but time is at a premium. Students unable to meet financial commitments typically seek employment, and students who work as well as study are time-poor. They complain about their poverty and their lack of free time, and go to great lengths to explain their time-management strategies, down to how to punch the holes in photo-copies - a trivial example, but illustrating the levels of stress upon such students. Time is a serious problem for other equity groups also. Students
who have children are time-poor, as are students with a disability making it take longer to get to class or appointments, or hand in work, and who have to make special efforts to access disabled facilities or lecture materials. Cultural background A difficulty for non-English-speaking background students reported was not being able to communicate. Some departments have employed support staff with specific skills in teaching English as a second language to tutor students intensively, which brought many benefits. From staff, who make special efforts to accommodate the needs of these students. Provisions ranged from preparing copies of free access texts, printing facilities and University computer support services will remain important elements of equity provision into the future. Research findings: Staff Twelve members of teaching and general staff from the Faculty of Arts were interviewed. The surveyed staff all had a high level of awareness of equity issues. They reflected that staff have extended family and NESP students and the teaching challenge they present. This was not to diminish the enrichments such staff bring to classroom learning, both of which are made a reality. Here there are truly innovative solutions to teaching problems which demand a more active response than some other types of disadvantage. It is noted that international students are by no means a homogenous group, and different nationalities bring different interactional styles. More than once lecturers mentioned that the various language and culture characteristics of these students brought with them insights into better teaching methods. One lecturer who worked extensively with Chinese background postgraduates spoke of engaging simpler, gentler by structuring interaction through small group work or by naming students explicitly and drawing them into interaction. He spoke of such students as often shy, by capable and highly motivated, and urged others not to waste them as a resource. The same lecturer pointed out the need to: ‘...speak more slowly, repeat what you say more often, give definitions as simply as possible and sometimes in different ways’. Another lecturer spoke of a strategy she had adopted which was to institute a website with week-by-week expectations for each tutorial class and each lecture so that the information was put forward in a very easy-to-read format. It was this approach that allowed her students to engage more deeply, and so the website could be used as a learning tool. Another strategy adopted by the same lecturer was to showcase bad examples as well as good examples of writing, and allow students to provide critique, as a means of improving expression. Other lecturers spoke of such strategies to encourage students when assessing work, avoiding jargon and fostering creative projects involving recording students in Mandarin with native English speakers in the same group acting as translation links, and the general level of pleasure and animation amongst the students in such ventures. Two lecturers raised the issue of inclusion amongst international students, pointing out that numerous international students arrived after Orientation Week and missed out on developing connections with others. For one rural student, who evidently resides outside of Sydney, the internet is the main place where I find things out. Maybe there could be a [place] on the USyd site… specifically for people with equity issues. (Low income student, Faculty of Arts). However, plagiarism by international students was raised by lecturers as an object of concern. There is evidence that some cultures find it appropriate to show respect to an authority by repeating what you say more often, give definitions as simply as possible and sometimes in different ways’. A Faculty strategy - the Inclusive Equity website Thanks The project team would like to express its thanks to Bryde Dodd, Heather Middleton, Jacqui Wechsler and Jennie Kearnes for their substantial contributions to the project. Special thanks also go to Nerida Jarkey and Claudia Crosariol for their support. Selected references University of Sydney Academic Board Review Phase 2 Report University of Sydney Equity Plan 2002 – 2004 Faculty of Arts Teaching and Learning Plan 2005 - 2007 Aimers, Christine (2005). Internationalising students: reassessing distance, time and learning environments. Studies in Higher Education, Vol. 30, No.3, June 2005, pp 291 – 309 Aimers, Christine et al. (2003). Diversity and inclusive teaching: strategies for incorporating diversity and supporting students at risk within the teaching setting. It is intended that information sharing will help future students within target equity groups to have a better learning experience within the Faculty. The vignettes are by nature personal. However, all names, places or other distinctive identifying features of the participants have been anonymised to ensure that privacy is protected. One of the reasons for creating this service is that it gives equity groups a voice and a presence in the Faculty of Arts. Most initiatives by the University for equity groups are one-way, with the University deciding how it will determine its relationship with such students. This service empowers the voices of staff and students for communicating these important issues. It is also a very public statement that our University cares about students with equity issues. We hope that those students’ voices will now reach out to inform an improved awareness of their special needs in the learning environment.