



Please Sir, May I Have Some More?

Addressing LGBTIQ educational disadvantage
to achieve substantive equity.


Katrina Alexander &
Rob Cumings

Unpacking the presentation title.

“Please Sir” – refers to the prevailing paradigm of white, heterosexual males as the holders of power in higher education.

“May I have some more...” – refers to the lack of dedicated funding for LGBTIQ programs and activities in the higher education sector and the need for practitioners to repeatedly go ‘cap in hand’ to achieve recurring funding. For those of us who identify as LGBTIQ, this ‘cap in hand’ process is demeaning, repeatedly positioning us as unworthy of substantive equity, it can feel like a form of hetero-normative abuse and can cause emotional damage and questioning of self-worth.

“Addressing LGBTIQ educational disadvantage to achieve substantive equity” – refers to the current situation of individual institutions enacting change. However, substantive change will happen when LGBTIQ disadvantage is acknowledged sector-wide, LGBTIQ people are acknowledged as an equity group, data collection happens and funding for affirmative action is embedded.

SCU is now at a point of preparedness to incorporate an Ally program, which has been supported by the Head – Equity & Diversity Office and is a goal of the University’s Equity and Diversity Plan.

This image is of a current student, the photographer won the SCU 2014 Diversity Week photographic prize.

Let's get something straight...



...we're not!

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We are both queer and we both work in SCU's Equity & Diversity Office.

Rob: It has been wonderful to have Katrina join the Equity & Diversity Office team. She has amazing skills, knowledge, drive and commitment. She is also queer and understands my lived experience.

Having Katrina start work with us has meant that I can do 'reality checks' with a trusted, queer colleague. I've realized that, as a consequence of being "the only gay in the village", I had been exercising a form of self-censorship. I had been careful and circumspect about not pushing the LGBTIQ agenda too hard, in case I was seen as 'hysterical' or too partisan.

Kat: I had known Rob in the community for some time and it was great to be successful in my application for work at the Equity and Diversity Office at SCU and know that I had a gay already in the village!

Because of this we have been able to work on projects together with a shared understanding and vision to improve the scope and sense of inclusion for all staff and students at SCU.

Educational Disadvantage

LGBTIQ people experience educational disadvantage through stress, fear, mental health challenges, disruption to learning, homelessness and involuntary time away from school as a consequence of discrimination and violence.



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Dr Michael Flood observes that people of diverse genders and sexualities “...experience cultural invisibility, they are routinely told that their innermost feelings and desires are disgusting, dangerous, just a phase or non-existent, they are denied civil and legal rights and the recognition of their partners and relationships, their consenting sexual relations are criminalised and policed, and they are subject to verbal and physical harassment, bashings and even murders.” (Dr Michael Flood, Post-doctoral Fellow at Latrobe University in his ‘Gender, Homophobia and Heterosexism’, speech to an Anti-Homophobia Roundtable, August 2003)

Nic MacBean, in his article [Suicide attempts...It's a tricky thing to be openly gay in a school](#) investigates a report by Queensland LGBTI support organisation Open Doors that found “many young people felt so afraid at school that they had missed over two school weeks ... of classes to ensure their safety.” (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2008-11-11/bullying-pushing-homosexual-students-to-suicide/201864>)

A recent La Trobe University study of 3000+ LGBTI-identifying Australian school students found that 60% had experienced verbal abuse and 30% had experienced physical abuse, mostly in school. The study concluded that for these students “... the message that their sexual or gender identity is something to be ashamed of, and even physically beaten out of them, is a poignant form of school sexuality education beyond ‘official’ lessons.” (Jones, Tiffany Mary. & Hillier, Lynne. (2012) [Sexuality education school policy for Australian GLBTIQ students](#). <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14681811.2012.677211>)

The release in 2014 of a report on the findings of research conducted with more than 1,000 LGBTI-identifying Australians aged between 16–27 showed that “rejection by families can lead to homelessness, economic instability and/or destitution for some young people, particularly in families of different cultural or religious affiliations and growing up in rural and/or isolated communities exacerbates some young people’s feelings of being alone, with access to support services often limited or non-existent in these areas.”

Addressing the findings of this report, Young and Well CRC CEO, Associate Professor Jane Burns, said: “The findings of this study overwhelmingly highlight the serious impact of homophobia and

transphobia, particularly when you consider that 42% of those surveyed had thought about self-harm and/or suicide. This research suggests that LGBTI young people are at least six times more likely to consider taking their own life than their heterosexual peers.” (Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre (CRC), University of Western Sydney and Twenty10 (2014) [Growing Up Queer: Issues Facing Young Australians Who are Gender Variant and Sexuality Diverse](http://www.youngandwellcrc.org.au/research/) <http://www.youngandwellcrc.org.au/research/>)



Southern Cross University has a range of policies, practices and services in place to facilitate / support inclusion of LGBTQ+ students (and staff). These include recognition of same-sex relationships in provisions in the Enterprise Bargaining conditions of employment and acknowledgement of LGBTQ+ people in bullying, harassment and discrimination policies.

The University offers Equity & Diversity Contacts, Safe Places, acknowledgement of IDAHOT Day and Wear It Purple Day, Gender and Sexuality Diversity training for staff and LGBTQ+-themed Diversity Symposiums for students, staff and community members.

We are lucky in our area to have LGBTQ+ organisations such as ACON and Tropical Fruits which makes our inclusion of community easier. We are also living in an area whereby we have available public figures willing to participate and a large number of out and proud individuals.

LGBTIQ Visibility



Wear It Purple Day



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The beginning of our LGBTIQ inclusion journey started with academic, Prof Baden Offord posing the question– “How do LGBTIQ students see themselves represented, acknowledged and celebrated at the University?”

The answer was, apart from sporadic pockets of greatness (ie; Baden’s own pedagogy Equity & Diversity Office’s Safe Place campaign and some Queer Student activity), there was a sense of invisibility of LGBTIQ students and staff at SCU.

A meeting was held with Professor Offord, Rachel Callahan - Head of Equity & Diversity and Rob Cumings to brainstorm how to enact a strategic, meaningful and sustainable LGBTIQ inclusion strategy that started with visibility.

Our visibility started with celebrating Wear It Purple Day at each campus.

THE GREAT HANDBAG TOSS



Giving homophobia, transphobia, hate and harassment the toss.

The Equity and Diversity Office, in partnership with the Student Associations, Student Advocacy Service and ACON, presents the Great Handbag Toss.

Come along and join in the fun. Throw a handbag and maybe win a prize!

Coffs Harbour | Gold Coast | Lismore Orientation Week

Now, for students, LGBTIQ inclusion begins with Orientation with the inclusion of a “Diversity stall”.

The Great Handbag Toss is a very accessible activity for all students to participate in. Anyone can enter the competition to win a prize by throwing handbags labeled with the words HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA AND BIPHOBIA into a bin some meter's away. No-one can resist a drag queen mixed with a bit of sport and this activity has seen the most unlikely students want to win by throwing homophobia in the bin!

The Equity & Diversity Office has worked collaboratively with the Student Associations, Student Advocacy Service and ACON to provide a colourful rainbow area with lots of info.

At Coffs Harbour campus the local Gay & Lesbian Liaison Police Officer has participated.

Diversity Symposium
Transforming Understanding

INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA & BIPHOBIA
MAY 17 A Worldwide Celebration of Sexual and Gender Diversities



Activist, educator and fitness professional Hunter McBride and Southern Cross University graduate and visual artist Stephanie Mann in conversation with Senior Equity & Diversity Officers Katrina Alexander and Rob Cumings about the health and well-being and lived experiences of transgender people, especially those living in regional areas.



Tuesday 17 May 2016 from 12:00pm - 1:30pm
Lismore | Coffs Harbour | Gold Coast

Participant feedback...

"Thank you to the presenters and the team - we need more of these to challenge assumptions and discrimination."

"We could follow this up with a gay / straight alliance type group."

"Inclusion is something I want to be more active in understanding and acting upon in my role as an academic."

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In some senses, 'surfacing' transphobia and providing opportunities to hear the voice of trans-people was the unfinished business at the University.

This year, the Equity & Diversity Office developed a diversity symposium, in collaboration with trans-people, to start that process.

The symposium was video-linked across our three campuses with over 50 students and staff attending.

Outcomes of this symposium have been to raise awareness of issues faced by trans-people and to start a dialogue about the University's response to those.

We have also been contacted by Human Resources seeking advice on how to ensure gender diverse options in their staff record-keeping system.

The Office of Research and Ethics Committee conducted an audit of their forms, surveys and data collection instruments to ensure inclusion of gender diverse options.

And, an academic in School of Health & Human Sciences has sought content advice on including LGBTIQ awareness and a 'transgender health & well-being' case study into third year Nursing Unit.



The Lismore campus library recently hosted an exhibition of costumes, headpieces and awards of one of our Northern Rivers celebrities – Maude Boat. Maude’s work and life was on display for 3 weeks conveying the message to all that SCU embraces and celebrates LGBTIQ diversity.

This opening night event was embraced by the whole community including Lismore’s current Mayor Jenny Dowell. Here’s an expert from Rob’s opening speech at this event...

“I am a Senior Equity & Diversity Officer and a gay staff member at Southern Cross University, for me this exhibition is one of those delicious moments when the personal and the professional coincides.

The University strives to create an environment where all students and staff can feel a sense of connection, celebration and inclusion. The Learning Centre has always been a champion of inclusion and exemplifies this mission.

I am delighted to introduce Maude Boate, the subject of this wonderful exhibition, having known and admired Maude and her alter ego Michael, for many years. The gowns, wigs and ephemera on display provide a glittering insight into the creative brilliance and resourceful tenacity of this wonderful entertainer.

Adam Geczy an artist and writer who teaches at Sydney College of the Arts and University of Sydney has observed “Maude does not whisper, she screams, shrieks and guffaws. She is the living symbol of the persistence of the gayness of gay, and the refusal to be consumed by sadness or mediocrity”.

In introducing Maude, it would not do to reflect only on the dazzle - although, in her case, all that glitters is gold. Maude is a much-loved and valued Elder in the Northern Rivers LGBTIQ community. Michael, son of a past Lismore Mayor and friend of our current Mayor, generously gives back to the whole community through charitable works.

Whether as event coordinator of the extraordinary Tropical Fruits New Year Festival, mentor to young drag queens starting out in their career, or working to raise awareness and educate about the lived experiences of LGBTIQ people, Maude is tireless, fearless – but never humourless!

Student Support & Inclusion

11 Safe Places on 3 campuses

Equity & Diversity Contacts
11 staff on 3 campuses who have received LGBTIQ awareness training

Important dates

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Our strategy, as well as including visibility, was also to develop a support and inclusion framework and initiatives.

SCU currently has 11 Safe Places on 3 campuses and coordinates and trains Equity and Diversity Contact staff members.

SCU celebrates and acknowledges as many days of remembrance as will be accommodated in the calendar at appropriate student times.

Staff Development

Staff Training Workshop

Understanding Gender and Sexuality Diversity

Developed by the Equity & Diversity Office, this workshop aims to inform staff about the lived experiences of people of diverse sexualities and gender identities and to assist with creating understandings and promoting a more inclusive environment at the University.

The workshop uses a combination of real life narratives and stories and values-based activities to allow for a self-reflective engagement with issues of gender and sexuality diversity.

This workshop is open to all staff.

Thursday, 19 November 2015 | 9:30am - 1:00pm
Lismore campus - Z Block, Z.181B

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The Equity & Diversity Office worked with ACON Northern Rivers and the Anti-Violence Project in Sydney to develop this institution-specific workshop for staff.

Included in the University's Professional Learning Calendar, 70 staff trained since mid-2015.

Participant feedback...

"I felt like I had stepped into another world, and I'm glad I did."

"Brilliant!! Informative but also funny. The personal stories made this session such a success. I was moved way beyond my expectations..."

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This professional development workshop, developed in consultation with ACON and the Anti-Violence Project in Sydney, is included in the University's Professional Learning Calendar and is achieving cultural change.

The response to this workshop has been resoundingly positive and has created an environment of discussion and spurred a willingness for staff to take their new confidence and understanding around gender and sexuality diversity and sign up for an Ally program.

Staff now want an Ally program and they want to let others know that they have done the training and word of mouth is growing the numbers of attendees at each presentation.

Managers are asking for repeats of the training on their campus so that they can get all of their staff to attend.

Kat: Sometimes I think I might have been living in a gay bubble, not realizing how much people want to learn and understand and ask questions but have never had the opportunity.

We know from studies in America that if people can hear stories from real LGBTIQ people they are much more likely to change their attitudes positively and politically.

Community Engagement



Marie Reilly, Regional Manager
ACON Northern Rivers

"Congratulations on what you have achieved with LGBTI inclusion at Southern Cross University.

Your work has consistently demonstrated leadership and creativity in effecting positive change for a more inclusive campus life for everyone and LGBTI staff and students in particular.

We consider the Equity & Diversity Office and the University more broadly as a key stakeholder for ACON's work in the Northern Rivers and Coffs Harbour regions."

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A great strength of our LGBTIQ inclusion journey has been to partner with community organisations such as ACON, the Anti-Violence Project, NSW Police Gay & Lesbian Liaison Officers and Tropical Fruits as valued stakeholders in developing strategies, collaborating on cross promotion events at the University and in the community.

On the horizon – we are working towards adapting the “Understanding Gender & Sexuality Diversity” workshop for delivery to students, developing a “Trans @ SCU” policy-setting and implementing an Ally program.



What we’ve discovered, by starting on this journey, is that it effects and benefits all of us.

Our ‘straight’ colleagues in the Equity & Diversity Office are totally committed to achieving the University’s LGBTIQ inclusion strategy. They demonstrate this commitment by being active, positive allies. They help to set up and staff LGBTIQ information stalls, reflect on what they have learnt and how important it has been for them in developing their understanding of people of diverse gender and sexuality identities.

It has also been a reminder that LGBTIQ people are family members. So many staff and students who we engage with talk about having a gay son, a sister who is transitioning, a lesbian mum – they are appreciative that the University is being seen to be respectful and inclusive.

This work not only effects the sense of inclusion, health and well-being of LGBTIQ students and staff, but also their families and the wider community.

And, that is what effective equity practice can achieve.