

STAFF GUIDELINES ON ISSUES RELATED TO STUDENTS' DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION ON DISABILITIES OR IMPAIRMENTS

Purpose

These guidelines are intended to support staff with issues related to students' disclosure of disability or impairment.

Background

The University of Auckland is committed to providing equal opportunities to all students who have the potential and ability to succeed. It seeks to create an inclusive learning environment by striving to eliminate barriers to student progress, and actively creating an environment where students feel safe to disclose their disability or impairment.

Definitions

Many definitions of disability exist. The New Zealand Disability Strategy: Making a World of Difference. Whakanui Oranga (Ministry of Health, 2001, p.1) states that:

Disability is not something individuals have. What individuals have are impairments. They may be physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric, intellectual or other impairments. Instead, "disability" is the process which happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have.

The New Zealand Code of Practice for an Inclusive Tertiary Education Environment for Students with Impairments (Kia Ōrite Achieving Equity) uses the New Zealand Disability Strategy definition of disability and refers to people or students with impairments. This includes people with permanent impairments, those with impairments resulting from long or short-term injury or illness, the Deaf community and people with other impairments such as learning disability, neurological or cognitive difficulties, mental illness and other more hidden impairments.

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) provides Equity Funding to support students with the following range of permanent (ongoing for 6 months or longer) or temporary disabilities or impairments

- Deaf
- Hearing impairment
- Blind
- Vision impairment
- Specific learning disabilities
- Medical
- Head injury
- Mental health
- Physical/mobility
- Speech impairment

Audience

These guidelines are intended for all staff of The University of Auckland.

Relevant Legislation

The University is legally required to comply with each of the following:

- Education Act, 1990
- New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, 1990
- Human Rights Act, 1993
- The Privacy Act, 1993
- Health and Disability Commissioner Act, 1994
- Disability (United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) Act 2008.

Relevant Objectives from The University of Auckland's Strategic Plan 2005 - 2012

The University's Strategic Plan, 2005 – 2012, encourages proactive and imaginative responses to meeting the learning needs of all students, including students with impairments, for example:

- Objective 13. *Recruit and retain a high-quality staff and student body, striving to create equal opportunities for all of those of ability to succeed in a university of high international standing;*
- Objective 14. *Enhance and promote a student environment that is welcoming, enjoyable and stimulating, encouraging students to reach their full potential within a climate of academic excellence;*
- Objective 18. *Provide an infrastructure that supports teaching, learning, research, and community engagement of the highest quality.*

Disclosure

The Kia Ōrite / Achieving Equity Code of Practice for an Inclusive Tertiary Education Environment for Students with Impairments (Ministry of Education 2004, p42) vision advocates for:

Communication systems are effective in providing relevant and timely information to both staff and students, and a safe environment exists for students to disclose impairment information.

The decision to disclose is personal and may depend on the nature of the disability or impairment, the type of course or programme being undertaken, the kind of support that is needed and the perceived attitudes of staff and other students.

There is no legal requirement for students to disclose information about their disability or impairment at the time of application or enrolment. However, in order to access disability support, such as special accommodations for studies, tests and examinations, students will need to disclose information about their disability or impairment to the relevant section/s of the University such as the appropriate faculty staff, Disability Services, Student Health and Counselling, Examinations Office, Student Learning Centre and the Library.

Reasons for encouraging students' disclosure

Because non-disclosure can create barriers to success for students, staff should encourage students to disclose their disabilities or impairments by providing opportunities for disclosure at regular intervals throughout a course. For example, invitation for disclosure could occur at the start of each semester, prior to information given about assignments, placements or practicum, field trips, tests and examinations.

Staff should encourage disclosure to ensure that students:

- Are aware that the University of Auckland aspires to create an inclusive teaching and learning environment for students.
- Know how to access support services to maximise their potential for academic success.
- Understand the need to discuss their support requirements e.g. note-taking, special conditions for tests and exams, access to teaching and learning spaces, as early as possible so that they can be arranged in a timely manner.
- Understand that the University encourages disclosure and this will not result in being marginalised (particularly in the case of certain disabilities or impairments such as mental illnesses or specific learning disabilities).

Subject to consent from the student, Disability Services can liaise on their behalf with the relevant department(s) and/or staff members about specific support strategies required. This can avoid the need for students to explain their requirements to multiple staff members.

When students can disclose

There are different stages where students can disclose. These might include:

Application stage

- Students are given the opportunity to disclose a disability or impairment when applying for acceptance at The University of Auckland. This information is collected for (1) statistical reporting of students with disabilities (in a form which ensures individuals cannot be identified) as required under NZ law or by statutory agencies and (2) used within the University to enable staff to provide appropriate services to students with disabilities or impairments.
- Disclosure is required to prove eligibility if students apply for admission on the basis of disability or impairment to limit-entry programmes or courses through an Undergraduate Targeted Admission Scheme (UTAS).

At the start of semester

- Students need to contact Disability Services before lectures start to ensure adequate time is available to identify and implement the support strategies required.

At any time the need for support is identified

- The need for support may be identified by students or staff members at any stage of study, including after exams.
- If a staff member suspects that a student may have a learning disability or impairment such as Dyslexia it is recommended that they invite the student to meet to discuss this and, where appropriate, refer to Disability Services. Often this kind of condition has not previously been diagnosed and the student may not know themselves.

The University of Auckland takes confidentiality issues seriously. However, with the consent of the student, relevant information about their disability or impairment and required support strategies can be discussed with appropriate staff members. This can also avoid the need for students to continually explain their requirements.

Related Documents

- The University of Auckland Guidelines for Effective Teaching.
- The University Teaching and Learning Policies, Guidelines and Procedures: An Introductory Guide to Visiting, Temporary and Casual Teaching Staff.
- The University of Auckland Teaching and Learning Policy: Assessment of Student Learning.
- Code of Practice for Fitness to Practise (FMHS).
- The University of Auckland Equity Policy.

- The University of Auckland UTAS Policy.
- Kia Ōrite / Achieving Equity: Code of Practice for an Inclusive Tertiary Education Environment for Students with Impairments (Ministry of Education, 2004).
- Tertiary Students with Disabilities: A Resource Guide for Staff (The University of Auckland, July 2006).

References

- "Choosing your path - Disclosure: It's a personal decision". University of Western Sydney and University of Ballarat (<http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/ndco/disclosure/>)

Academix Magazine

- http://cad.auckland.ac.nz/content/files/academix_march2008.pdf.
- http://cad.auckland.ac.nz/content/files/academix_july2008.pdf.
- http://cad.auckland.ac.nz/content/files/academix_mar2009.pdf.
- http://cad.auckland.ac.nz/content/files/academix_aug2009.pdf.

Website links

For further information on recognising and responding to disabilities or impairments please visit the following links:

- The Centre for Academic Development: <http://cad.auckland.ac.nz/index.php?p=magazine>.
- Student Learning Services: <http://cad.auckland.ac.nz/index.php?p=slc>.
- University Health & Counselling Services: <http://www.auckland.ac.nz/uoac/cs-counselling-services>.
- Disability Services: www.disability.auckland.ac.nz.

For further assistance

Contact details for Faculty Disability Liaisons can be found online at:

https://uoac.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/9418

Contact details for Student Disability Services can be found on our website at:

<https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/on-campus/student-support/personal-support/students-with-disabilities.html>

Feedback on these guidelines is welcome at any time and will be considered carefully and in regular reviews on policy and guidelines.

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Approved by the University of Auckland EO Committee