Diver—sified:

Promoting co-production in course design and delivery between neurodivergent students and instructors.

Contents

The UNSW Diversified team featured in the ABC News report: Women with ADHD 'falling through the cracks' with diagnosis and treatment (aired 18 February 2022). From left: Karin Watson, Professor Terry Cumming, Dr Holi Berman, Josie Bober.

"Nothing about us without us"

Introduction

Historically, students, especially those who are neurodiverse, have had little say in their learning (how coursework is delivered) at tertiary education institutions, including UNSW. Diversified is a student-led project with the aim to elevate student voice in course design. The project was born during Term 2 in 2021 when fine arts student Josie Bober approached her course convenor, about difficulties she was having interpreting a project brief in the Typography and Publications elective she was studying at UNSW Art & Design. Josie's attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) meant she had to work twice as hard as her classmates to read the brief. The typical monochrome colours, multi-page formatting and horizontal text used in the project brief did not meet her needs. The convenor, Associate Professor Ian McArthur responded, and with the help of Dr Emily Chandler, this small team developed a teaching tool that enables tutors and students to collaboratively reformat an assessment brief as a one-page handout by presenting weeks as vertical columns. This is effective because some readers who are neurodivergent focus best when text does not take up too much horizontal space. More information about the resource is available to all staff and students.

Image: Josie Bober, UNSW Alumni and co-founder of Diversified

As word spread about this initiative, the team was joined by Professor Terry Cumming, Holi Berman, Karen Kriss, Karin Watson, and Science student Aaron Bugge. The group applied for a small EDI grant and the Diversified project was born.

The Core Team

Aaron Bugge (student), Josephine Bober (recent UNSW alum), Ben Nott (student), Chantel Henwood, Associate Professor Ian McArthur, Professor Terry Cumming, Karen Kriss (ADA Disability Champion), Dr Alexander Smith (ADA Disability Champion), Dr Karin Watson, Dr Holi Birman, Dr Emily Chandler, Dr Scott Brown

The extended team/workshop participants numbered 40+.

Clockwise from top left: Josie Bober, Aaron Bugge, Ian McArthur, Karen Kriss, Chantel Henwood at the Diversified video shoot.

Joe Becigneul,
Board Chair,
Greater St Albert
Catholic Schools, Alberta

"Allowing a student with a hidden disability (ADHD, Anxiety, Dyslexia) to struggle academically or socially when all that is needed for success are appropriate accomodations and explicit instruction, is no different than failing to provide a ramp for a person in a wheelchair".

Project aims

This project aimed to promote co-production in course design and delivery between neurodivergent students and instructors. The goal of the Diversified project is to promote student voice in their courses through instructional co-production between neurodivergent UNSW students and their course instructors. Three workshops were planned where neurodiverse students would work with academics and professional staff to:

• map issues and challenges faced by neurodivergent students at UNSW

• respond as a team to develop ideas to communicate or solve some of these issues,

• propose prototypes, policy recommendations and strategies to make courses at UNSW more inclusive for everyone.

We have approached achieving these aims by establishing a student consultation group and the delivery of the three proposed student-instructor co-production workshops.

The original plan was to centre the first workshop around framing the problem; the second to support student-instructor teams to respond to the problem together; and the third to provide time and space for the teams to refine their ideas/products. The Diversified team hope to showcase their work to the university community in 2022.

Methodology

The group successfully applied for a small EDI Project Grant ($5,000) to run the series of co-production workshops. When the pandemic forced another lockdown, all workshops were moved to online mode and some of the funding was diverted to fund the work of the student leaders, Josie Bober and Aaron Bugge, while the rest was earmarked to provide student workshop participants with a token of appreciation for their time and effort.

While the initial team meetings were focused on planning the workshops, we decided that having set meetings 2x a week was necessary to stay in touch, discuss important issues and provide us with time to hear all voices and plan our way forward, while taking all types of diversity into consideration.

Additionally, to attract more involvement from UNSW management, academics, and the student body, Disability Co-Champions Alexander Smith and Karen Kriss procured an additional $13,973.20 (funded by the UNSW Equity Diversity & Inclusion Committee (EDI) for production of a neurodiversity awareness video and additional workshops, which will be used to inform the Faculty of Arts, Design, and Architecture (ADA) and larger UNSW community. The video has been produced to raise awareness at the university of the experience of neurodiverse students studying at UNSW.

In 2022 this process has continued with the Diversified team successfully gaining additional funding for a project to collaborate with industry partner Esem Projects, which will lead to the development of an Arc Linkage grant application.

Milestones

2021

• Information sessions took place on: 26/8/2021 and 27/8/2021

• Co-production workshops were held on 1/10/212, 28/10/21, and 17/12/21.

• Kudos AD School Matters [podcast](#).

2022

• The ADA Disability Champions funding used towards additional workshops and the production of a neurodiversity video in early 2022.

• [ABC News interview and report](#) featuring Josie Bober and Diversified team (18 Feb 2022).

• ADA Faculty Research Grant received to seed a Linkage grant application.

Recommendations

Our Diversified Project workshops were attended by neurodiverse students and neurodiverse and neurotypical teaching and Professional staff The following is a summary of the recommendations emerging from the three workshops.

We have organised these into categories that emerged during our workshops: **(1) Administration/Processes; (2) Spaces (Environments, buildings, infrastructure, facilities, technology); (3) Student Identity and Culture; and (4) Staff/Academic culture.** These recommendations have been further grouped into actions that should be taken at *UNSW – Systemic level, Faculty level/School level, and Course/Instructor level.*

(1) Administration/Processes

UNSW – Systemic level

• Remove the onus for students to have to come up with answers to support their learning - Ask "How can I support everyone to better access teaching and learning in my course?"

• Develop a central checklist for accommodations/modifications to allow students have more ownership of their supports.

• Make accommodations more specific, such as how to support students in large and small group discussions, working on group projects, etc.

Faculty level/School level

• Change the structure and wording of course outlines to make them more accessible and accurate.

• Course documentation to articulate more specific outcomes based on careers/long-term benefit.

• Pacing of lectures should take ability to engage into account.

Course/Instructor level

• Make lecture and tutorial slides more accessible - fonts, colour contrast, amount of information, etc. and provide ahead of time.

• Use disability confident communications guidelines when designing all course materials including lectures.

• Provide close captioning and transcriptions (both Teams and Zoom support these).

• Structure courses with clearer logical progression.

• Provide students with timely feedback.

> **"**
> **Change the structure and wording of course outlines to make them more accessible and accurate.**

(2) Spaces
(Environments, buildings, infrastructure,
facilities, technology)

UNSW – Systemic level

• Consider ways to make lighting suitable for more students. How does lighting affect visibility of screens?

• Audio amplification makes the lecture more accessible.

• Consider whether students have accessibility to technology and how to use it.

Faculty level/School level

• Survey for first year students - responsive survey that collates answers and makes recommendation to go to ELS if a certain level of applicable responses is reached. The survey should provide a detailed picture and trends related to the broader neurodiverse community in a faculty, which can inform investment in resources to support neurodiverse students.

Course/Instructor level

• Think about layout and the activities that are planned.

• How will you control for noise?

• Does the lighting cause sensory processing issues for neurodiverse students? Is the level and type of lighting conducive to learning?

(3) Student Identity and Culture

UNSW – Systemic level

• Faculties and their staff (both teaching and admin) should be approachable and consistent with care and support

• The culture of academe should be accessible and inclusive, as historically it deters and excluded promising neurodivergent students (and faculty!).

Faculty level/School level

• Make student programs and experiences collaborative across faculties; currently siloed. For example, there are different orientations for different faculties, different supports, and different expectations. Guidance for teaching staff on how to support neurodiverse students is also different across faculties.

Course/Instructor level

• Trust students regarding special consideration; procuring documentation can often compounds the problem, particularly if it is anxiety and/or burnout.

> **"**
> **The culture of academe should be accessible and inclusive, as historically it deters and excluded promising neurodivergent students (and faculty!).**

(4) Staff and Academic Culture

UNSW – Systemic level

• Create awareness of neurodiversity To overcome the lack of lived experience by neurotypical teaching staff and students,.

• Compulsory training modules for <u>all staff</u> on neurodiversity including casual staff (in manner of ADA Cultural Reflexivity modules).

• Awareness campaign across the university from management down.

• Upper management to foster a more open, compassionate, inclusive culture that addresses the needs of all students + Funding to support this.

• Moodle bots that provide appropriate support, links to services, and answer questions.

• Expanded Moodle profile or dashboard (not public) (linked to ELS) that ND students can use to self-identify, articulate, update, and notify academics about needs, issues, episodes etc.

• Publish clear guidelines for all staff.

Faculty level/School level

• Pre/Early course survey to inform teachers who is in class/issues/needs/access to technology etc.

• Templates/forms for students to self-identify as neurodiverse

• More encouragement for students to access help

• UDL/ULS feedback surveys that flag neurodiverse students to academics (via email?) upfront

• Flexible attendance/opt-in to class modality – Flexible delivery (eg. self-paced, modular)

• Better early intervention mechanisms

• Academic expectations adjustment framework

• Allow students choice of mode of attending and participating.

• Encouragement and training for staff to be able to offer neurodiverse students other modes of engagement rather than current narrow range of expectations, patterns, and understandings of what a "good student" is.

• Course outlines in plain English

Course/Instructor level

• Please remember that the early part of a course shapes the culture.

"

Create awareness of neurodiversity To overcome the lack of lived experience by neurotypical teaching staff and students, create.

- Greater flexibility in delivery and assessment – one size does not fit all.

- More options for students to choose projects and how they want to be assessed.

- Unconditional access to lecture recordings.

- Make lecture slides available ahead of classes.

- Disability/confidence training for student presentations.

- Greater availability and approachability (links to training).

- Link learning outcomes to what is being covered each week and to assessments.

- Provide access to lecture recordings, to allow for self-pacing of lectures.

- Remember that engagement looks different for different people.

Greater flexibility in delivery and assessment – one size does not fit all.

Conclusion

Project Diversified met its main aim, which was to promote co-production in course design and delivery between neurodivergent students, along with the promotion of student voice through instructional co-production between neurodivergent UNSW students and their course instructors.

This was accomplished through workshops that were attended by both neuro-diverse students and interested teaching staff. The three collaborative workshop sessions allowed the group to map issues and challenges faced by neurodivergent students at UNSW and respond as a team to develop ideas to communicate or solve some of these issues.

The group will continue to promote the recommendations proposed above through presentations, promotional videos, social media, and continued project work. We will seek funding from several sources, with the ultimate goal of making Diversified an integral part of the UNSW community.