A Social Justice Framework for Safeguarding Student Learning Engagement

The Social Justice Framework and the set of social justice principles which underpin it were developed as resources for the sector as part of an Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) project: Good practice for safeguarding student learning engagement in higher education institutions. The framework is contained within the major deliverable of the project - A Good Practice Guide: Safeguarding Student Learning Engagement (Nelson & Creagh, 2013), which is focused on good practice for activities that monitor student learning engagement to identify and intervene with students who are at risk of disengaging from their studies.

**PHILOSOPHICAL STANCE**

This social justice framework adopts a recognitive approach to social justice. A recognitive stance values all members of society, has positive regard for social difference and is advocated through socially democratic processes that involve individuals and groups determining outcomes that impact on them.

**CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

This social justice framework is designed to challenge thinking about dominant power structures, cultures and ways of knowing in higher education. The framework provides a set of principles that when considered together enable the reconstruction of existing relationships based on an examination of identity and needs.

**APPLICATION OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK**

For this project the social justice framework has been interpreted for initiatives or activities that actively monitor and intervene with students to promote learning engagement. This the social justice framework is expressed as a set of inter-connected and independent principles that are designed to safeguard the people and processes involved in monitoring of student learning engagement (MSLE).

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**Social Justice Principles for Safeguarding Student Learning Engagement**

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<th>Principle</th>
<th>Conceptual Model</th>
<th>Application of the Social Justice Framework</th>
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<td><strong>SELF-DETERMINATION:</strong> Students participate in program design and enactment and make informed decisions about their individual participation in the program.</td>
<td>In the context of monitoring student learning engagement this principle is interpreted to mean that students are actively involved in the design and enactment of programs and in the review of program outcomes.</td>
<td>Adapted for good practice in MSLE:</td>
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<td><strong>RIGHTS:</strong> Initiate should ensure that all students are treated with dignity and respect and have their individual cultural, social and knowledge systems recognised and valued.</td>
<td>MSE activities focus on the rights of students to be treated fairly with dignity and respect, as well as their rights to obtain information ...and to have their rights recognised by institutions that expect compliance with institutional policies.</td>
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| **ACCESS:** All individuals have access to social, cultural, political and economic resources. | Access is determined by outcome structures, pathways and strategies that promote learning engagement, particularly for students whose access to higher education has been previously constrained by their social, political and/or economic backgrounds. |...
| **EQUITY:** Social difference is understood so that responses can be designed and applied to particular situations to counteract the barriers that impede participation. | In the context of monitoring student learning engagement the removal of barriers to access such as finances and the hidden curriculum is a focus for activity. | |
| **PARTICIPATION:** Participation is not predicated on previous opportunity or privilege. | All students have the opportunity to succeed and complete their qualifications in ways that are harmonious with their individual backgrounds and circumstances. | |

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Examination of the social justice literature and its application to the higher education sector produced a set of five principles: **Self-determination, Rights, Access, Equity and Participation**. Each principle was defined and elucidated by a rationale and implications for practice, thus completing the framework. The framework: reflects the notions of equity and social justice; provides a strategic approach for safeguarding engagement activities; and is supported by a suite of resources for practice and practitioners. When we engage in conversations about the framework we can consider how it might be applied to other types of student engagement activities critical to the first year of university life, such as orientation and transition programs, teamwork activities, peer programs and other academic support initiatives.

**Lead Institution:** Queensland University of Technology
**Participating Institutions:** Auckland University of Technology, Charles Sturt University, Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, RMIT University, University of New England and the University of South Australia

Project details, the final report and the Good Practice Guide can be found at: safeguardingstudentlearning.net

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