



**UNSW**  
SYDNEY

Australia's  
Global  
University

## Enhancing Self-Disclosure of Equity Group Membership



# Background

Australia's tertiary sector constitutes a diverse population in terms of age, background, socio-economic status, language, and other factors.

Students that are members of equity groups (people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women in non-traditional areas, people from Non-English speaking backgrounds, people living with disabilities, and people from rural and isolated areas) constitute a significant and growing population in Australia's tertiary sector.

This study focuses on three equity groups in particular – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Indigenous), students with a disability, and students from non-English speaking backgrounds.



**In 2015,**

Among the 1,035,474  
University Students



40, 281 students from non-English  
backgrounds

3.9% of the total university  
population

ABS 2016

27% of the total Australian  
population



60, 019 students living with a  
disability/disabilities

5.8% of the total university  
population

ABS 2016

18.5% of the total Australian  
population



15,585 Indigenous students

1.6% of the total university population

ABS 2016

3% of the total Australian population

**Total equity focus population:**

**115,885 students**

**OR**

**11.3% of the total university  
population**

# Why Disclose?

Disclosure



Sw/Dis1

@studentwithdisability1

“They would like to be treated with respect and dignity, and do not want to be questioned as a liar or wanting a “free ride” if their disability is not very obvious.”

[#notalldisabilitiesarevisible](#) [#respect](#)

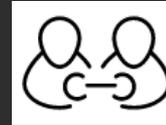
# Why Disclose?



To access support or enter targeted programs



Be part of a community



Meeting peers



Recognition of identity

# Non-disclosure

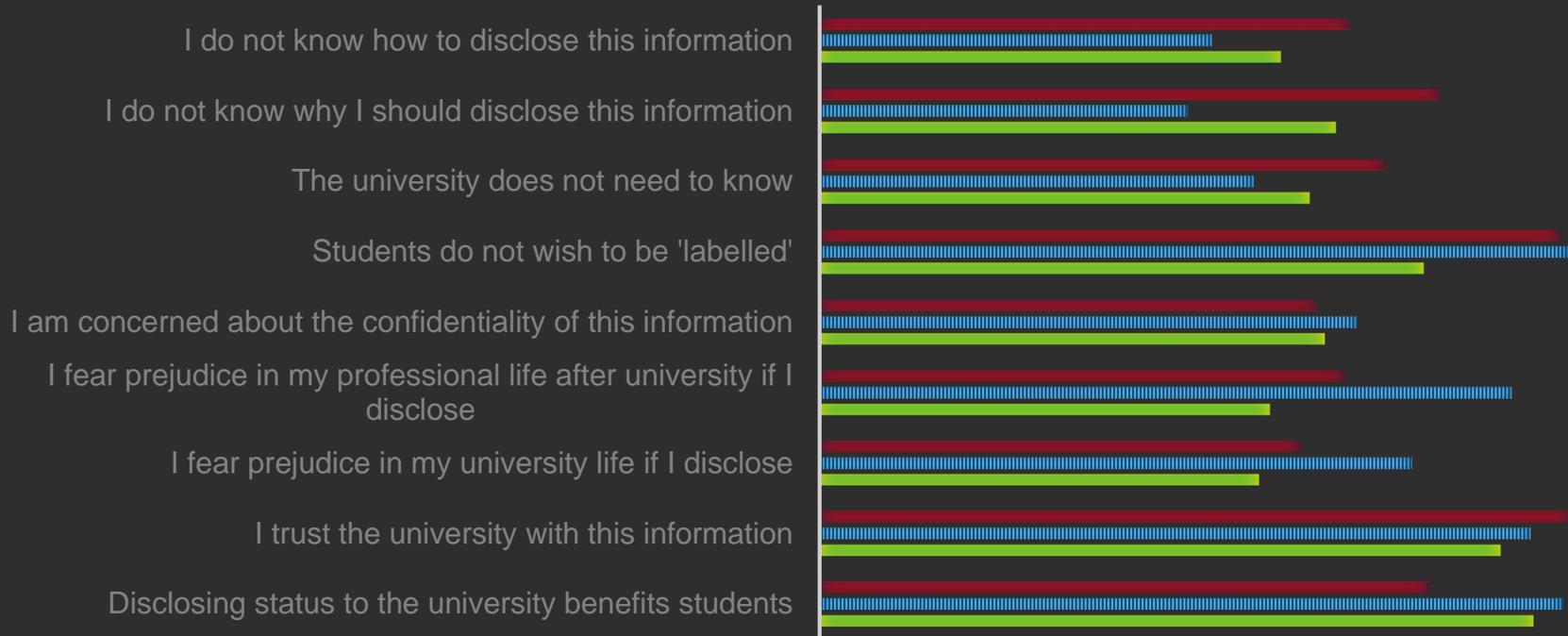
Despite these benefits, our research indicates a significant proportion of these three groups choose not to disclose their equity status to their university:

- 9.7% of students living with a disability
- 13.6% of indigenous students
- 16.5% of students from non-English speaking backgrounds

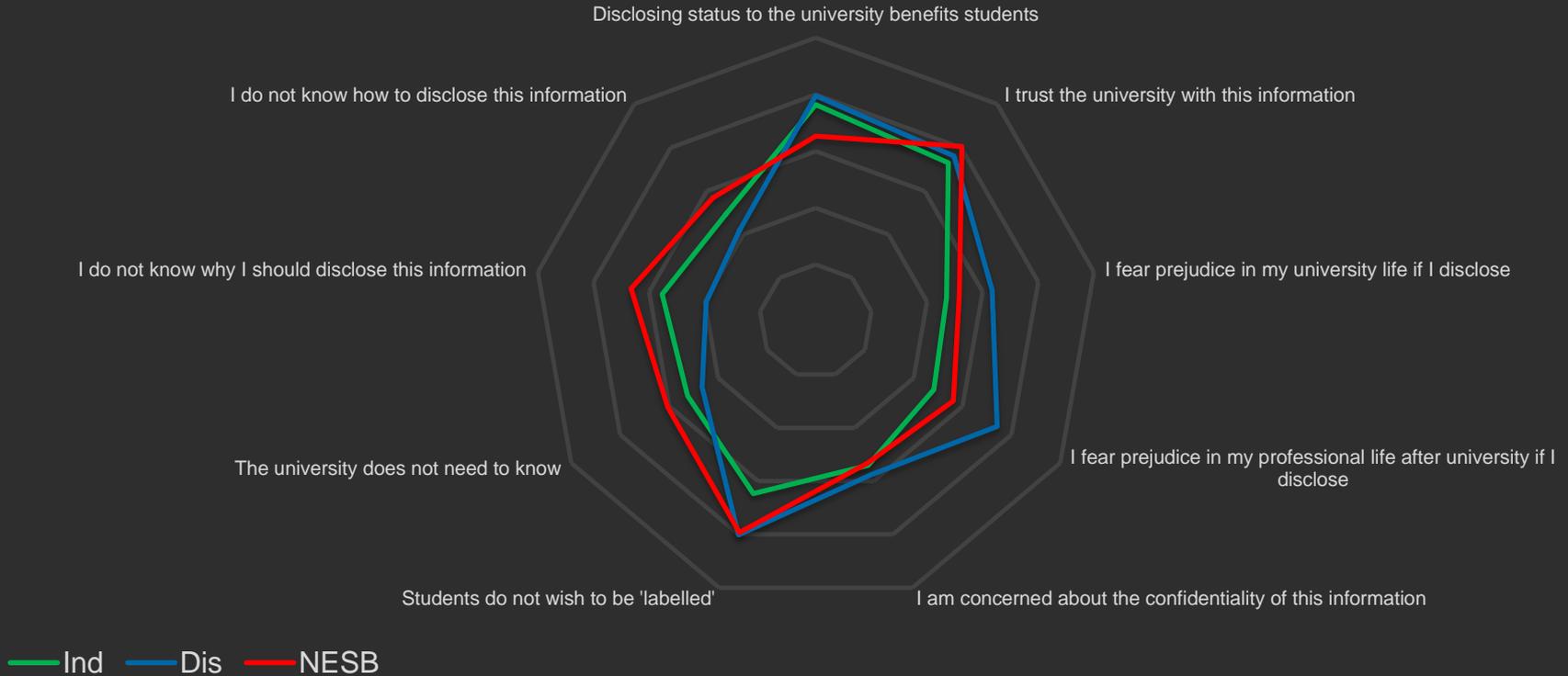
This can result in these students not receive services and accommodations they are entitled to, and the university lacking essential information for program planning and resourcing.

# Why / Why not disclose?

■ NESB ■ Dis ■ Ind



# Why / Why not disclose?



# What does this all mean?

These results suggest that:

1. Fear of 'labelling' is equally shared by the three focus groups.
2. While it may challenge lay-assumptions about Indigenous people, this group reported the least fear of prejudice in their university and post-university life through disclosure.
3. Indigenous students saw the least reason to disclose, and the highest doubts about the use of disclosing their identities to the university.
4. Students with disabilities and NESB students placed equally high importance on the benefits for students of disclosing their equity status.

# 'Doing disclosure'

As a national study, this research is also concerned with *how* disclosure functions across universities in Australia.

Broadly, there are two ways students disclose equity status at Australian universities.

1. Student self-disclosure during enrolment, and are 'followed up' by university equity services.
2. Students enrol, and then self-disclose later through a separate channel, either a dedicated equity service (e.g. disabilities unit, Indigenous centre, language skills service).

One question emerging from this research is which system of self-disclosure is *better*, and what does *better* mean?

# Discussion

- How do students disclose at your institution? What are the processes?
- What are the barriers for disclosure?
- How has your institution identified and approached these barriers?
- What needs to be changed?

# Get involved!

[Click here to do our student survey](#)

[Click here to do our staff survey](#)

[Our Facebook group](#)

# Contact us

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