

# The Parallel Universe of Educational Preparation and Professional Practice

Pathways 10: Inherent Requirements in Nursing

Presented by Rick Boffa MBA; BBA;  
Manager Disability Liaison Unit  
Student Services; RMIT University.

# The Presenter:

Rick Boffa – is manager of the Disability Liaison Unit at RMIT University

Rick has experience in working in Government at both State & Commonwealth levels and also within the Community Sector.

Rick joined the Education Sector 5 years ago and has over 20 years of professional experience in disability.

He also has slightly over 40 years personal experience in disability.....!

# Objectives for this presentation

During this presentation we shall examine the following issues

- Identify the complexities associated with balancing academic requirements for professionally accredited programs.
- Discuss the mechanism of providing information to students with disabilities who elect a career that has inherent requirements for practice
- Review the requirement for provision of academic support for students with disabilities whilst at the same time ensuring the academic integrity of the program
- Contextualise the need for inherent requirement information within the recent changes to professional registration across Australia.
- RMIT University's solution to ensuring that students get the correct information early and know where to go for assistance and/or advice.

# The Rights of the Student

The joy of living in Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- anything is possible
- a society respects the uniqueness of each human person to contribute to that society

These rights are supported in the educational sector by the following legislation

- The Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Disability Education Standards 2005

# Educational Responsibilities.

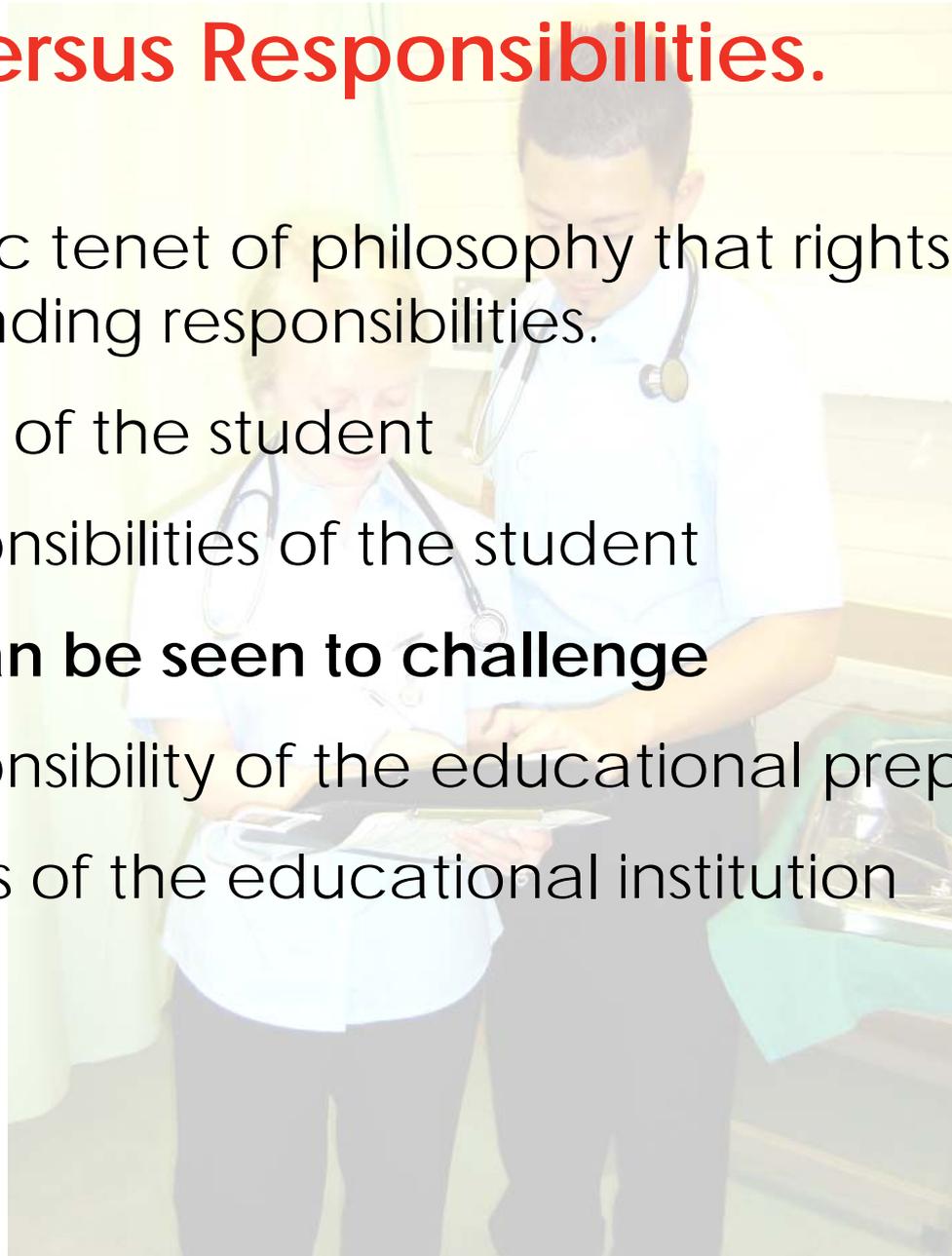
The educational sector has a responsibility to ensure that there is transparency regarding

- required attributes for entry into the profession
- ensure that the entry into tertiary courses meets the standards of informed consent related to ability to meet the required outcomes
- the rigors associated with professional practice.

# Rights versus Responsibilities.

It is a basic tenet of philosophy that rights invoke corresponding responsibilities.

- the rights of the student
  - the responsibilities of the student
- can be seen to challenge**
- the responsibility of the educational preparation
  - the rights of the educational institution



# Background to the Research

The contribution of students with disabilities to the human experience is without question

- but can provide challenges
- can polarise debate
- and firmly establishes the need to identify requisite attributes for practice.

# Background to the Research

The responsibilities of the universities providing that educational preparation has been identified as

- development of procedures to enable students to determine their ability to meet the attributes.

and to complete the award

- within a reasonable time frame
- without incurring unreasonable costs

# Background to the Research: the context at RMIT University

At RMIT University the Disciplines of Nursing and Midwifery have a commitment

- to provide a “level playing field” to support student engagement
- based on recommendations from the Disability Liaison Unit
- within the relevant legislative requirements
- commitment to a flexible learning environment
- a strong and supportive
  - Student Services Group
  - Disability Liaison Unit
  - Discipline appointed Disability Co-ordinator

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<http://mams.rmit.edu.au/3aq0y5ld5l8n.jpg>

# Registration Authorities: Recent changes in Australia

Registration for Health Professionals is now governed by the Health Professions Registration Act (2005)

Students are therefore in one universe

- undertaking their undergraduate preparation
- accessing appropriate accommodations to support this achievement

but upon Graduation seek to enter the parallel universe of Professional Practice where

- regulatory requisite attributes are required to be met.

# Registration Authorities: Recent changes in Australia

The Health Professions Registration Act (2005) contains the following exclusionary criterion

*“(a)...the character of the applicant is such that it would not be in the public interest to allow the applicant to practise as a registered health practitioner*

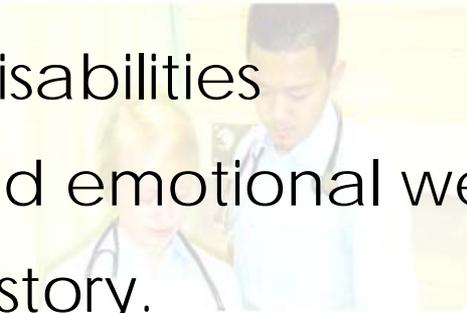
*(b) that in the opinion of the responsible board, the applicant is unfit to practice as a health practitioner because he or she is an alcoholic or drug dependent person which impairs his or her ability to practise as a registered health practitioner*

*(c) that in the opinion of the responsible board the applicant is unfit to be registered because he or she has a physical or mental impairment which impairs his or her ability to practice as a health practitioner....”*  
(2005; 14)

# The Self Paced Student Self Assessment Tool

Following a review of national and international criteria for requisite attributes the following list was developed

- physical disability
- visual acuity
- hearing impediments
- sensory deficits
- learning disabilities
- mental and emotional wellbeing
- criminal history.



A screenshot of a web browser displaying a self-assessment tool page. The browser's address bar shows the URL 'http://e-media.rmit.edu.au/nursingpractice/'. The page content includes a paragraph about the university's commitment to providing learning opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities. Below this, there are two text boxes. The first box states: 'In order to progress through the BN program, a student must possess a functional level of physical and emotional health commensurate with achieving the required nursing practice competencies. Physical, cognitive, psychomotor, affective and social abilities are required to provide safe and effective nursing care. The Bachelor of Nursing (BN) student must be able to demonstrate requisite skills and abilities (inherent requirements) with or without reasonable adjustments throughout the academic program.' The second box states: 'The essential physical, cognitive, psychomotor, affective and social aptitudes presented below are necessary to progress in the BN program and for the provision of safe and effective nursing care.' At the bottom of the page, there is a 'CONTINUE &gt;' button. The browser's status bar at the bottom shows 'Trusted sites' and '100%' zoom.

# The Self Paced Student Self Assessment Tool

These categories were then further expanded to identify particular impairments within each group. For example:

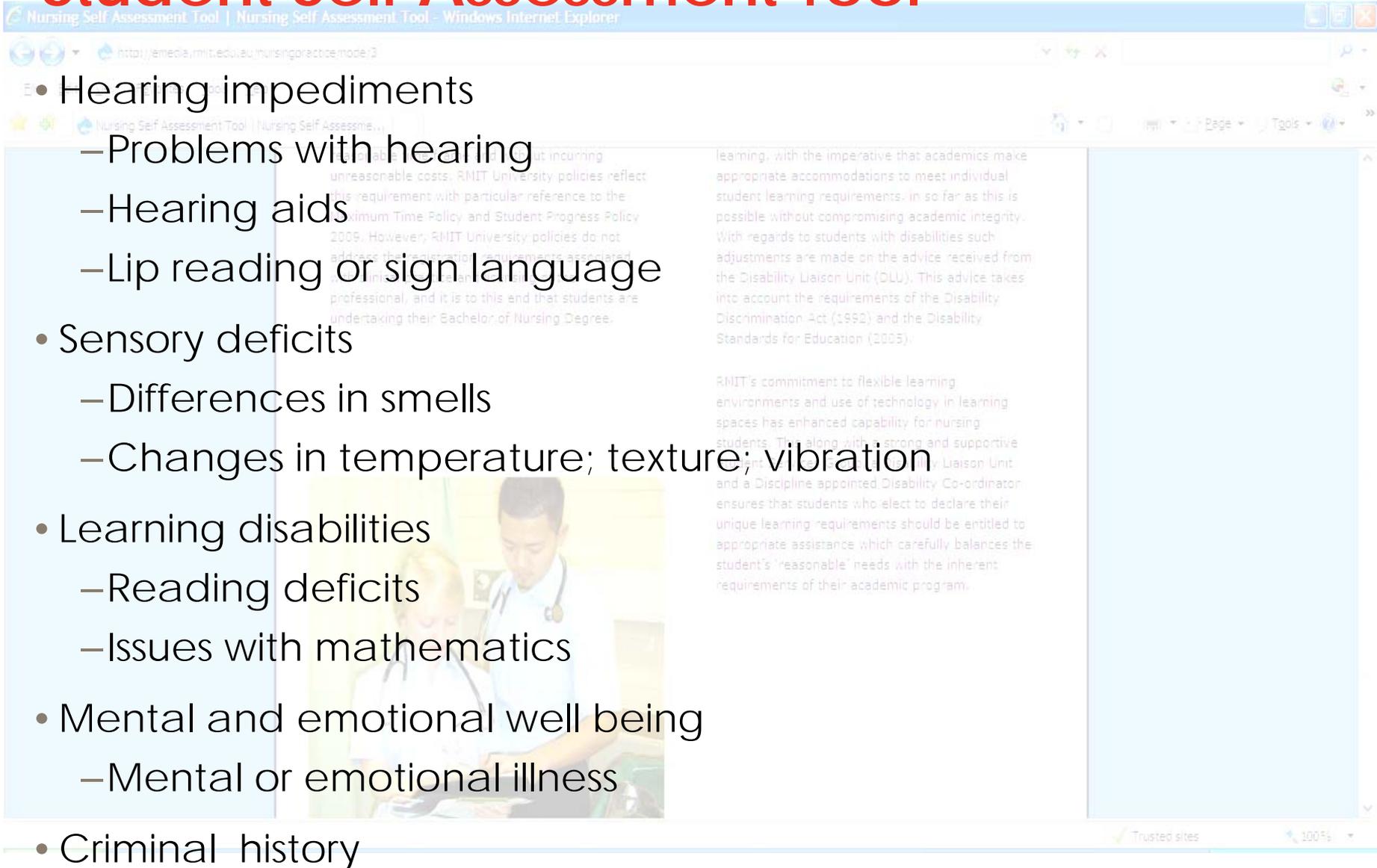
- Physical disability
  - Mobility or dexterity
  - Able to stand or walk unassisted
  - Walking aids
  - Bending and stretching
- Visual acuity
  - problems with eye sight
  - colour blind
  - vision degeneration
  - legally blind



reasonable time frame and without incurring unreasonable costs. RMIT University policies reflect this requirement with particular reference to the Academic Time Policy and Student Progress Policy 2009. However, RMIT University policies do not address the requirements associated with the licensing of the professional, and it is to this end that students are encouraged to seek advice from the Disability Liaison Unit (DLU). This advice takes into account the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005).

RMIT's commitment to flexible learning environments and use of technology in learning spaces has enhanced capability for nursing students. This along with a strong and supportive Student Services Group, a Disability Liaison Unit and a Discipline appointed Disability Co-ordinator ensures that students who elect to declare their unique learning requirements should be entitled to appropriate assistance which carefully balances the student's "reasonable" needs with the inherent requirements of their academic program.

# The Self Paced Student Self Assessment Tool



- Hearing impediments
  - Problems with hearing
  - Hearing aids
  - Lip reading or sign language
- Sensory deficits
  - Differences in smells
  - Changes in temperature; texture; vibration
- Learning disabilities
  - Reading deficits
  - Issues with mathematics
- Mental and emotional well being
  - Mental or emotional illness
- Criminal history

# The Criterion for the Tool

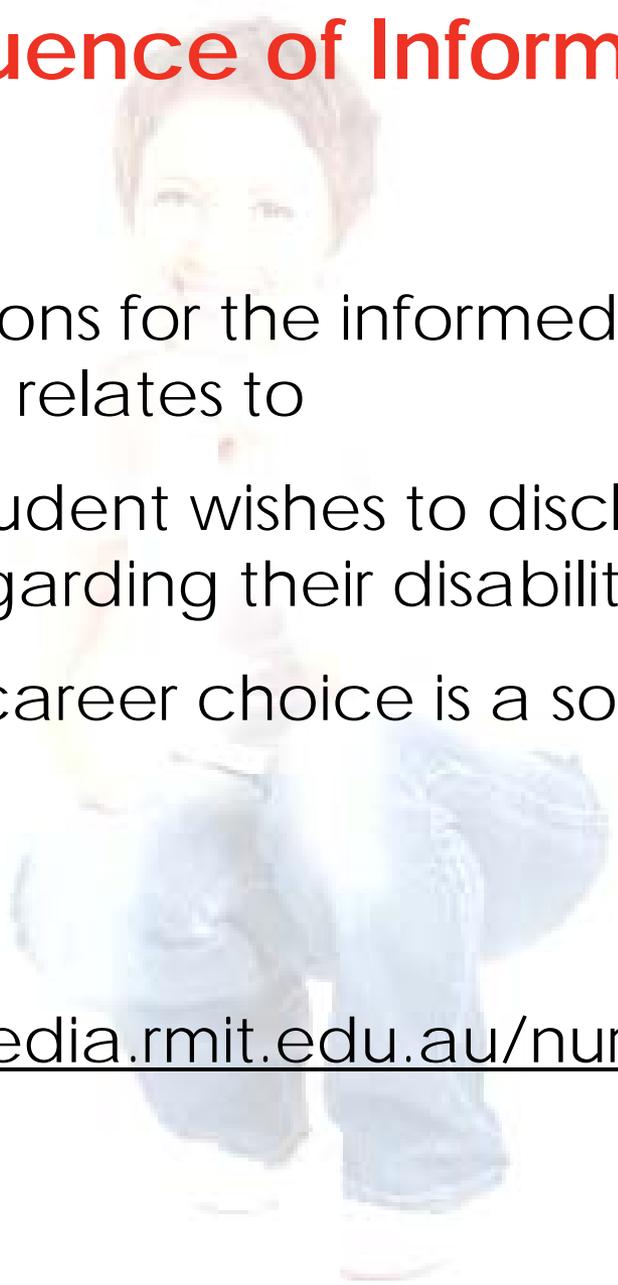
The criterion for the tool were

- intuitive
- web accessible & W3C Compliant
- compatible across the spectrum
- confidential
- enable informed decision making.

Nursing and  
Midwifery //

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# The Consequence of Informed Decision Making



The considerations for the informed decision making by the students relates to

- whether the student wishes to disclose the information regarding their disability.
- whether their career choice is a sound one.

<http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/nursingpractice/>

# Evaluation of the Self Assessment Tool.

## Phase 1 Evaluation:

The tool was piloted with ten students who self selected to participate in this process.

The rationale for the pilot was to answer the following:

- 1: do the students who use this self paced tool find it a “friendly” interface to navigate?
- 2: is there a degree of intuitiveness associated with the navigation of the tool?
- 3: were the students able to access the required information that pertained to their unique situation in relation to support services and avenues to pursue?

# Evaluation of the Self Assessment Tool.

## Phase 2 Evaluation:

- It is intended that the piloted tool, with relevant adjustments, will be “rolled out” during orientation week for newly enrolled students
- A longitudinal study will be undertaken to measure referrals and efficacy of the self assessment process

# Where to from here??

## Short Term Goals

- successful completion of Phase 2 of the Evaluation process with appropriate subsequent adjustments.
- integration into the enrolment and orientation process for all Bachelor of Nursing students at RMIT University

## Long Term Goals

- availability of the tool on the RMIT website for all prospective students to access to inform their career selection process.
- adopted for use across the university with appropriate adjustments to meet relevant discipline specific requirements.

# The Development and Research Team

This was a collaborative project undertaken by the Discipline of Nursing and Midwifery in the College of Science, Engineering and Health, School of Health Sciences and Student Services

- Ms Sonja Cleary – Nursing and Midwifery
- Dr Heather R Pisani – Nursing and Midwifery
- Professor Eleanor Holroyd – Nursing and Midwifery
- Mr Rick Boffa – Disability Liaison Unit
- Mr Ian Taylor - Student Services

The Web based platform was developed by the Educational Media Group at RMIT University EduTAG.