

Australian Ally Conference 2018

Activating Human Rights: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status –
Leading the Change

27-28 September 2018
Curtin University
Perth, Western Australia

NUPSA Executive Member Conference Attendance Report

Barrie Shannon – LGBTI Representative

I had the pleasure of attending the second Australian Ally Conference representing NUPSA, after having attended the inaugural conference in 2016. In 2018, the conference moved from Western Sydney University to the other side of the country at Curtin University, Perth. Overall, this conference built upon the success of the first, becoming much more coherent and organised – there were more sponsors, more resources, more presenters and a more engaging schedule of events. In this report, I share with the Executive my observations and insights gained from this valuable conference. Tweets from the conference, including my own, can be viewed using the hashtag #AllyConf2018.

Day 1

First plenary

After a welcome, the conference began with a plenary featuring a number of short, ten-minute speeches from local queer activists to gain ‘lived experience’ perspectives. This initial plenary grounded the conference in a community-focused lens. Sadie Ward offered a critique of seeing queer people just as ‘queer’ – an abstract concept - rather than as a human being. She asks us to consider how this is an important factor in our activism and our Allyship.

Aaron Matthews outlines the potential role of Allyship in addressing gaps in services, representation and inclusion for indigenous LGBTIQ people, especially in more rural and remote areas.

Jax Jacki Brown outlines intersectional Allyship that incorporates the social model of disability, especially breaking

Allyship

- Owning your power and privilege
- Why you are doing this work?
- What do you expect in return?
- Conditional allyship
- Listening to LGBTIQ disabled people and working alongside us, not on behalf of us
- A history of non-disabled people acting in disabled people's supposed ‘best interest’

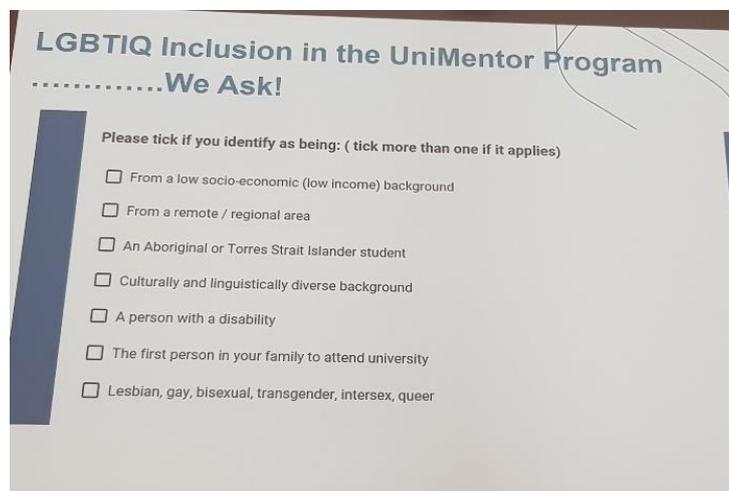
the supposed taboo around disability and sexuality. Jax shares her thoughts on what makes a good Ally (see picture).

Morgan Carpenter provides an interesting talk on intersex variations that problematises our contemporary understandings of sexuality and gender and criticises the tendency for people to assume being intersex is another sexuality or gender category.

First concurrent session

The first concurrent session I attended was titled 'University Ally 1'. It was in this session that I presented with the Equity and Diversity Co-Ordinator on our Inclusive Communities project.

Firstly however, Harper Dalton-Earls and Katrina Alexander of Southern Cross University discussed the UniMentor program at SCU, in which volunteers are asked about their various community memberships/social identities, in order to help match mentors to people based on their specific needs. Among other identifiers, mentors are asked to volunteer



LGBTIQ Inclusion in the UniMentor Program
.....We Ask!

Please tick if you identify as being: (tick more than one if it applies)

- From a low socio-economic (low income) background
- From a remote / regional area
- An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student
- Culturally and linguistically diverse background
- A person with a disability
- The first person in your family to attend university
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer

information about themselves including their sexual orientation and gender identity (pictured). Providing this information was not compulsory. My understanding is that UON has refrained from gathering this kind of information in many of its surveys and programs before, out of concerns for privacy or data saturation. However, from this presentation I have reaffirmed my belief that collecting this information is integral to developing initiatives that are responsive and relevant to all students.

Liberty Cramer from University of Western Australia presented information about Project Peacock - 'a suite of self-paced fully online modules for academic staff'. The project was developed partly to address difficulty in extending proper 'Ally Training' to all staff. At UWA, professional staff are overrepresented in Ally Training rather than academic staff, which the Project seeks to address. The Project itself is a scaffolded module that aims to build staff knowledge and capacity in service provision for queer students. Liberty suggested that Project Peacock may be accessible to other institutions apart from UWA once it is completed, and I would recommend that NUPSA keeps an eye on this – it is something that could be very beneficial for staff and students here in Newcastle.

The Equity and Diversity Co-Ordinator and I then presented our work on providing competence training to Residence Mentors within the UON student residences (see slides attached as an Appendix for more information about the project). Our presentation was generally well-received, and I feel that we made an important contribution to a generally sparse field – social inclusion initiatives in the student residence context.



Following our presentation, Alli Edwards of Monash presented an interesting narrative on the development of the Victorian Pride Centre, which incorporated some hands-on, crafty activities.

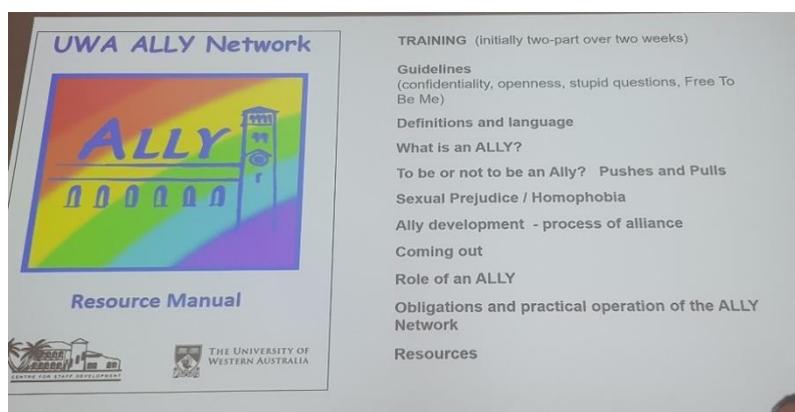
Second plenary

The second plenary was a discussion between Professor Baden Offord of Curtin and Vice Chancellor Professor Adam Shoemaker of Southern Cross University on inclusive LGBTIQ+ cultures in universities. Professor Shoemaker discussed his leadership on supporting and promoting marriage equality during the 2017 postal survey. He argued that supporting marriage equality and actively campaigning for a 'yes' vote fit comfortably within the ethos and values of the university and lamented the lack of leadership from other institutions, with a few exceptions. I reflected on UON's comparatively poor effort. While Professor McMillen supported marriage equality in a newsletter and celebrated a 'yes' result after the fact, the

University itself did not make any sort of stand for marriage equality. Many other universities were entirely silent on the matter.

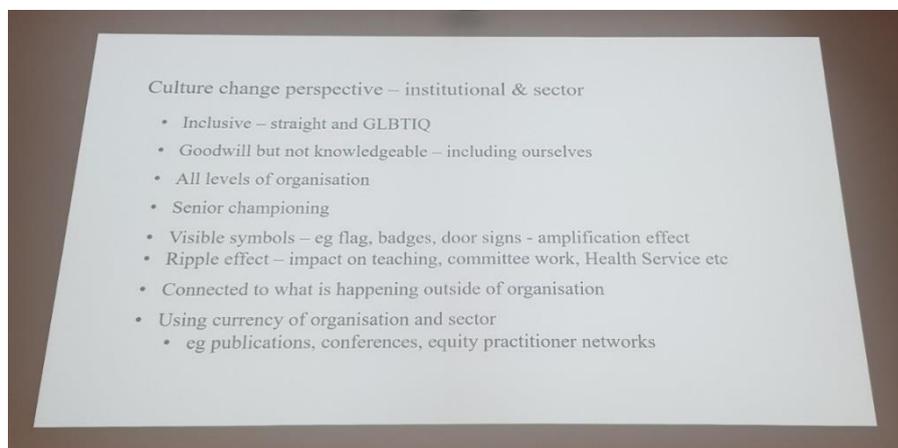
Second concurrent session

The second concurrent session I attended was titled 'Ally Network in focus: Ally programs – Evolving best practice'. Despite the somewhat clunky name, the presentations were quite engaging. Alan Goody of UWA presented a history of the Ally Network, the first of which began in 2002 at UWA. Interestingly, Alan's presentation included the content of the first Ally Training, which was conducted using an Ally Resource Manual (pictured).



I believe that such a manual should be developed for UON – in fact, I had developed a plan to produce one for the University! However, they saw it as the responsibility of the Equity and Diversity Co-Ordinator and did not wish to proceed with my proposal. I believe that with the current broad scope and extensive workload expected of any individual in this position, the development of a thorough Ally Training resource by an Equity and Diversity Co-Ordinator is very unlikely. However, I will continue to work with the Ally Network to provide training as long as I am able.

Jen De Vries continued by highlighting a culture change perspective in ensuring the creation of safe spaces at universities, and the proliferation of Ally Networks (pictured). These factors are all extremely relevant to ensuring that



NUPSA and the University continue to support a successful Ally Network and an inclusive campus culture.

Third plenary

The final plenary session for the first day of the conference focused on the politics of belonging, and featured, among others, Victorian Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality Ro Allen, Terri Butler MP and Rodney Croome. The panellists discussed what it meant to belong, and unpacked the term. Some interesting points were raised, including a perceived difficulty in consolidating 'belonging' with an insistence on adding letters to "LGBTIQ" in order to include everybody. If sexuality and gender are truly fluid, then this is not likely to be possible. I reflected on what this could mean for NUPSA – I have long held the belief that the "GLBTI Representative" position should be renamed 'Queer Representative', or at the very least 'LGBTIQ Representative'.

Conference reception

I attended the conference reception with a group of fun and interesting people I met on the first day of the conference. The reception was emceed by local personality 'Famous Sharron' and featured free-flowing wine, beer and canapés. There was too much corn in the canapés, but when it's free, it's not really worth complaining about.

The conference reception also featured spoken word performances by queer-identified performers. Jax Jacki Brown offered some particularly humorous insights into disability and sexuality in her performance.



I had the opportunity to catch up with some of the conference attendees who presented in our session, and we had some quick discussions about our experiences advocating in the University setting. From what I can gather, many allies in universities around Australia have similar feelings of being constrained by restrictive budgets, and being afforded a low priority. Here in Newcastle, I think we have some momentum, built by strong people in key positions.

NUPSA is firmly in the lead in terms of advocacy and getting things done – and we must continue to be.

Day 2

Fourth plenary

The fourth plenary was a discussion between Dr Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli and Commissioner Ro Allen, titled 'Alliances and solidarities: In conversation'. Commissioner Allen showed a video from the Victorian Government 'Engage' program in which she embarked on a gender and sexuality 'roadshow' to various rural Victorian towns to educate, and to share information and culture. I was impressed by this – it was a great example of activism that specifically incorporates the needs of queer people living in rural and remote areas. It is an idea that should certainly be replicated in NSW. It would likely be quite costly, but it is a potential idea for a future NUPSA event, or a collaboration between NUPSA and UON for Pride Week. I can imagine student engagement would be an issue, but it would be great to assist small campuses such as Tamworth or Port Macquarie in hosting their own Pride Week celebration events to ensure staff and students there feel supported by their institution. This has been a key theme emerging from the conference – institutional support as integral to the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ staff, students and community members.

Fifth plenary

The fifth plenary was a roundtable discussion titled 'The complexity of visibility and social recognition: Out in the university, out in the workplace'. It was an interesting discussion that sought to interrogate our definitions of 'belonging', 'visibility' and 'recognition' to tailor our allyship to include everyone. It was a robust session that featured voices from the Noongar nation, and the migrant, disability, intersex and transgender communities. I reflected on how NUPSA can improve its engagement with people from diverse backgrounds, most especially disability and minority queer identities.

Third concurrent session

The third session I attended was titled 'Ally in Education'. Alisha Taylor-Jones of RMIT outlined the composition of their queer support framework. RMIT has a DGSS (Diverse Genders, Sexes and Sexualities) Staff Network, an Ally Network and a Queer Collective. They use the

term DGSS because they believe it is all-encompassing and avoids the confusion and debate over the LGBTIQ+ acronym. I see their point, but I believe the problem with using entirely new terms like 'DGSS' make it largely inaccessible – 'DGSS' does not mean anything outside RMIT and therefore students and staff may not easily be able to identify it as being to do with queer staff and students. For international students, 'DGSS' probably also means nothing – 'LGBT(IQ, A, +)' and 'queer' hold almost universal recognition, which is why I support continuing to use these terms.

RMIT conducted staff surveys on their DGSS population in order to improve services and identify issues. I strongly believe UON should follow suit, and I have been arguing for this for a long time. UON has been reticent to collect this information, but I believe that it is extremely important if we expect to be responsive to student needs. Alisha's suggestions for inclusive academic content was affirming of my own current teaching standards, and are in line with the suggestions we make in Ally training. Alisha also made a point of mentioning that RMIT translates DGSS materials, which is an important consideration. We made sure this was done in the international student sexual health website resource too.

At this stage, I left this session and joined another that was titled 'Research'. I chose to attend this session because it lined up with my personal interests – but it ended up offering some critically important insights for NUPSA and UON to consider. Brooke Brady, on behalf of Western Sydney University researchers Nicole Asquith, Tania Ferfolja and Ben Hanckel, presented data from the ['Diversity and Safety on Campus @ Western' project](#). This is a phenomenal project that looks at student and staff attitudes toward diversity, while also looking at SGD (sexuality and gender diverse) student and staff experiences. It seeks to provide a full picture of the SGD experience in an Australian university, taking into consideration campus climate, community attitudes, experiences of discrimination and violence, and puts forward recommendations to assist WSU in enhancing student safety. Brooke noted that it was difficult to get the University to allow this project, knowing that it would likely expose negative attitudes and incidences of discrimination and violence on campus – and it did. However, the data itself was incredibly rich and detailed, and will be extraordinarily important in affecting change. Perhaps the most exciting part of this presentation was Brooke's offer to allow other institutions full access to the survey so that it can be replicated elsewhere. This is a great opportunity for us, and I believe that it is the best interests of queer staff and students that we push for this inquiry to be made.

Following this presentation, Curtin PhD student Evan Lawless presented a theoretical paper on 'new' new homonormativity, offering a searing critique of 'It Gets Better'. From a

sociological perspective, this was fascinating and will likely be useful for my own PhD research.

Sixth plenary

This plenary focused on how universities can champion full LGBTIQ+ inclusion, and featured Hon. Michael Kirby, Commissioner Ro Allen, and Professor Deborah Terry, the Vice-Chancellor of Curtin. Kirby outlined his experience in student politics and university bureaucracy before Ally Networks. All panellists agreed that curriculum change in universities is extremely contentious and is arguably the next battle. They agreed that each subject should be holistic in addressing perspectives and needs of all Australian community members.



Professor Terry was asked how Curtin balances its commitment to social justice with their operation of campuses in countries within which homosexuality is illegal or harshly punished. This was an interesting question I had not considered before. Homosexuality is illegal and punishable in Singapore, where UON operates an offshore campus. While all institutions must obey the laws of the countries in which they exist, it is an interesting question that deserves to be answered. How do universities like Curtin and UON protect their



LGBTIQ+ staff and students? Are they satisfied with the status quo, or do their supposed values demand that they play a more active role in advocating social justice? Following the plenary, we got a selfie with Michael Kirby (pictured).

Seventh plenary

The final plenary was a roundtable political discussion featuring various politicians including Senator Louise Pratt, Dr Anne Aly MP, Alison Xamon MLC, Senator Dean Smith, alongside Rodney Croome. The panel was balanced between Labor, Liberal and Green representatives, however the panel discussion largely reflected their respective political rhetoric. The closing session followed immediately after, where the conference was officially closed by the organisers.

Recommendations

The second Australian Ally Conference presented a range of ideas and initiatives to improve Allyship within universities and corporations around the country. I believe that there are some key lessons that NUPSA and UON can learn from this conference. I have outlined them succinctly below, and am happy to elaborate further during the Executive Meeting in October:

1. NUPSA must continue to be a visible and vocal ally to the LGBTIQ+ community at UON.
2. NUPSA should lobby UON to collect data from students about LGBTIQ+ issues to be responsive to student need.
3. NUPSA should consider avenues of collecting this information if the University is not willing.
4. NUPSA should lobby UON to consider adopting the 'Diversity and Safety on Campus' program that was developed at Western Sydney University.

Barrie Shannon

LGBTI Representative