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Striving for equity and diversity

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Striving for equity and diversity

Abstract

Earlier commemorative histories of The University of Western Australia focused on the development of physical buildings and the growth of staff and student numbers.¹ There were glowing reports of audits and assessments with nary a mention of equity or diversity. Today, universities face a variety of challenges in the equitable treatment of staff and students. No longer white, middle-class and mainly male, Australian universities have evolved into institutions of learning that are microcosms of modern Australian society. Empirical evidence suggests that the University has met many of the challenges of catering for the different needs of its staff and student populations head-on, winning awards and accolades in many areas. This has come about mainly through its leadership in recent years but statistics also reveal that until comparatively recent decades, there were dismal shortcomings and deficiencies in some areas. This chapter examines how the University has fared in instigating changes in its response to staff and student diversity: Indigeneity, women, disability, childcare, sexuality, religions and economically disadvantaged people.

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Chapter 8 Equity and Diversity

Cecilia Leong-Salobir

Earlier commemorative histories of the University of Western Australia focused on the development of physical buildings and the growth of staff and students.¹ There were glowing reports of audits and assessments with nary a mention of equity or diversity. Today, universities face a variety of challenges in the equitable treatment of staff and students. No longer white, middleclass and mainly male, Australian universities have evolved to institutions of learning that are microcosms of modern Australian society. Empirical evidence suggests that the university has met many of the challenges of catering for the different needs of its staff and student populations head-on, winning awards and accolades in many areas. This has come about mainly through its leadership in recent years but statistics also reveal that until comparatively recent decades there were dismal shortcomings and deficiencies in some areas. This chapter examines how the university has fared in instigating changes in its response to staff and student diversity: Indigeneity, women, disability, childcare, sexuality, religions and those from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds.

Putting in place policies for diversity and equity in universities and other corporations is not only sound on ideological grounds but also makes good business sense. Providing tertiary education has become a competitive industry at both a local and international level. UWA had more than 23,000 students in 2011, an increase of thirty-four percent in a decade. The majority were domestic students, but over 5,000 were international students.² Thus UWA and other universities view the needs of minority students as not mere challenges but have sought to cultivate an environment of inclusiveness, of not just tolerating but celebrating differences. Today the prospective student is assailed with pamphlets, seminars and websites on a huge array of amenities, facilities, advice, all tools to cater for the newcomer to campus.

In recent decades two individuals in leadership positions at UWA — Fay Gale and Alan Robson — stand out as instrumental in bringing about changes in response to growing diversity at the University. In 1990 UWA appointed its first female Vice-Chancellor, the late Professor Fay Gale (also the first female vice-chancellor in Western Australia as well as the first in the Australian Group of Eight universities). Her appointment was both symbolic and substantial at a time when white, able-bodied and heterosexual males dominated both the university sector and UWA. In Gale's eight-year term

UWA shot up from the bottom to the top of Western Australia's gender equity index and won several awards for equal opportunity.³ A story worth telling illustrates Gale's hands-on approach and her commitment to making the university welcoming to women. In 1991 when concerns were raised by female students about dim or unlit grounds (fears were prompted by a rape in Kings Park), Gale set about looking for ways to improve security. When she failed to convince an unsympathetic finance and resources officer she declared, 'I am going to hold you personally responsible if there is a rape on campus'.⁴ Subsequently night security improved significantly through better garden maintenance and light installation. In 1993 Professor Alan Robson was appointed as Gale's Deputy-Vice Chancellor, a role he continued in until he became Vice-Chancellor in 2004. Robson provided exemplary leadership in transforming UWA from a monoculture to one that wins numerous awards for the university for its efforts in embracing diversity in all its forms.

Robson led the way in more ways than one when he became the first university leader to say 'sorry' on National Sorry Day in 1998. A year earlier Robson had supported the establishment of an Indigenous research centre, led by Professor Sally Morgan, known as the Centre for Indigenous History and the Arts (CIHA). It focused on ensuring that Indigenous oral traditions and cultural expressions are supported, recognized and valued. CIHA built on the work of the Centre for Aboriginal Programmes established in 1988 under the leadership of Winthrop Professor Jill Milroy.⁵ Both centres are now integral parts of the School of Indigenous Studies.

The ability of the School of Indigenous Studies in creating an Aboriginal community on campus to support the programs it offers has been critical to the success of Indigenous students within the mainstream university.⁶ Between 1988 and 2010 the school and its forerunners assisted 253 Indigenous students to complete undergraduate and postgraduate studies. In the earlier years most Indigenous students enrolled in arts, social work and education but since the school's initiation of Indigenous pre-Law and pre-Medicine/Dentistry courses more than sixty-four students have qualified in these professions. There is now an increasing number of students in science, engineering, architecture and commerce.⁷ The school's Outreach Program in conjunction with other programs at UWA such as Follow the Dream, Aspire UWA and Future Footprints, seeks to encourage Indigenous students to consider tertiary education. For example, in 2011 forty Indigenous students from Years 9, 10 and 11 from all around WA were invited to UWA for an Indigenous Science, Engineering Health Camp.⁸ The high standard of teaching at the school⁹ was recognized in the national Australian

Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) teaching awards for 2011 when Assistant Professor Blaze Kwaymullina received the Neville Bonner Award for Indigenous Education.⁹

Indigenous leadership and self-determination are key features of the School of Indigenous Studies where the majority of full-time staff members and its senior executives are Indigenous people.¹⁰ UWA is committed to significantly improving Indigenous employment at all levels in the university through its Indigenous Employment Strategy, 2010–13.¹¹ In 2010, the University employed thirty-four Indigenous staff, representing 0.85 per cent of UWA's staffing profile, with the School of Indigenous Studies being the major employer of Indigenous staff. The Centre for Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health also employs a significant number of Indigenous academic staff. According to the 2006 Census, three per cent of Western Australia's total population is Indigenous and UWA aims to have Indigenous people represented at its workforce at a level commensurate with this.

In the areas of equal rights for women, legislation, in particular the State *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* and the Commonwealth *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986*, have paved the way for the removal of discrimination. But this was foreshadowed and later paralleled by the work of many remarkable women at the university over many years. Two women were members of the first Senate, Mrs M. L. (Katherine) Moss B.A. and Dr Gertrude Mead M.B. B.S.. They and others like them began raising awareness to give women rights at the university.¹² In March 1913, women students were allotted a room, though it was 'a bare and comfortless room at the rear of the university'.¹³ In the next month, some wives of professors and lecturers suggested the formation of a Women's Club, but it was not until 1923 that the Women Graduates' Association (later re-named Western Australian Association of University Women) was established with Dr Roberta Jull its first President. She served on the Senate (1914–1942), was Warden of Convocation (1925–1930), and worked for the establishment of a women's college on campus over many years.¹⁴ Jean Rogerson was also a member of the Senate (1956–90) and was Warden of Convocation for two periods totalling eight years. She died in 1993, bequeathing thirty per cent of her estate to the university.¹⁵ Another long-serving women on Senate, who contributed significantly to women's issues, was Dorothy Ransom (1978–1996).

Documentary records that reveal the role of women at UWA in the past are scarce but fragmentary information hints that the systemic discrimination that was widespread in society was just as prevalent at UWA. In the 1920s Dr Margaret Moir was one of two lecturers in Mathematics—

Physics. In 1929 Mathematics and Physics were split and it was Moir's employment that was terminated due to lack of funds.¹⁶ Lucy Hosking was a Demonstrator in Geology from 1924, becoming an Assistant Lecturer when she completed her degree in 1931, but as was the norm resigned following her marriage in 1933. As early as 1925 the Women Graduates' Association had raised the subject of equal pay and the status of women and in 1942 became affiliated with the W. A. Joint Equal Pay Committee.¹⁷ But in 1923 there were only two women on the academic staff.¹⁸ The first women professor was not appointed until 1963, when Mary Lockett took up the appointment as Professor of Pharmacology. She was single. The first mother to be appointed to a chair was Cheryl Praeger, Professor of Mathematics, appointed in 1983.¹⁹ Women occupied all typing and secretarial posts in the university's early years.

It would be difficult for a young woman staff member at UWA today to imagine that in 1968 a woman who became pregnant had to resign from the university and that many women had to resign after marriage.²⁰ Trish Crawford tells the story of one young mother in the 1960s who was patted on the arm by the Chancellor and told that 'We think you young ladies should be at home looking after your children'.²¹ The institution was following accepted societal practices at the time. Where women made their presence felt then was in supporting and voluntary roles. In 1948, for example, wives of academics and the few female academics formed the Tuart Club, primarily to foster friendship on campus. In its forty-year existence it fundraised for charities, including the Save the Children annual book sale and Uni Camp for Kids.²²

It was the work of just a handful of women who instigated for long-term planning to improve the position of women at UWA from the 1980s. In 1983, four academics Liz Newby, Dorothy Parker, Audrey Bolger and Trish Crawford met as the Status of Women Group; it later included non-academic staff, other female employees and women students. In its first three years the group lobbied for an Equal Opportunity Officer.²³ The group realized that even with the introduction of equal opportunity laws there had been little improvement in the workplace. Women held only fifteen per cent of academic posts in 1987, about half of them as senior tutors and below; sex segregation of work was the norm; most women were employed as non-academic staff, earning less than male staff; and there were few promotional opportunities for women. Among the group's other concerns was the difficulty of obtaining childcare for staff.²⁴ Through the work of these women, in 1985, the Senate voted for equal

opportunity for academic, technical and administrative staff, appointment of childcare committee for staff and students and the employment of an equal opportunity officer.

However improvement took time. In 1990 the university had one of the lowest proportions of women on its academic staff of any Australian university. In 1990, women comprised 55 per cent of general staff and only 22 per cent of academic staff. On the other hand, 48 per cent of students were women.²⁵ This was attributable to a range of factors, including historic and systemic barriers within the University. The university offered traditionally male-dominated disciplines such as medicine, agriculture and engineering and, unlike many other universities after the 1988 Dawkins reforms, had not merged with institutions comprised of predominantly female-dominated disciplines such as teaching, thus changing the statistical picture.²⁶ But even so, the culture within the system was such that young male academics were expected to rise through the ranks while there was no such expectation of young female academics.

In 1990 there were no women in senior management and only three female professors in that year, compared with 92 male professors.²⁷ Nine years later, UWA formally adopted the new

Commonwealth Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act (1999), which stated that

the University will act to ensure that its structures are free from direct or indirect discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status or pregnancy, race, age, sexual orientation, gender history, religious or political beliefs, impairment, family responsibility or family status.

By 2000 the number of women professors had increased to twelve, compared with 118 male professors, and there were also five women in senior management positions. Many of these advances were attributed to Vice-Chancellor Gale and to the human rights movement from the 1960s as well as to government legislation.²⁸

The inroads that have been made in recent decades have been through a combination of innovative strategies to ensure gender issues are identified, articulated and acted upon. In 2002 UWA identified five strategic areas in which 'the voices of women and their experiences of a gendered work culture are heard, validated and addressed'. This included dismantling barriers and aiming for a 'Gender Neutral System of Promotion for Academic Staff'; conducting cultural audits to review the position of female academic and general staff; fostering female leadership at all levels of employment; and enhancing workforce diversity by surveys.²⁹ Two years later maternity leave was renamed

parental leave to encourage men to take up caring roles and to accommodate same sex couples and the following year a return to work bonus was introduced.³⁰

UWA has consistently lived up to the federal Workplace Act by being named an Employer of Choice for Women in 2011 for nine consecutive years since the federal government began making these national awards. The University is one of fewer than a hundred organisations to be recognized from a field of more than 2,500. On that occasion of the 2011 award Vice-Chancellor Robson noted that, as an advocate of equal opportunity and gender equity, UWA had increased the number of women at senior levels and made provisions for high achievers, paid parental leave and encouraged family-friendly working arrangements. At the same time Robson stated that 'it is part of the University's culture to help women and men achieve their full potential while also helping them find a balance between work and family'.³¹

In the years preceding the setting up of Unicare in 1972, the provision of childcare at UWA was opposed from several quarters, including individual academics, the Senate and the University Architect's Office, arguing that child-minding was an 'illegitimate' use of university resources.³² It was students and staff who agitated for the service with law student Patrick Mullally leading the charge. The first meeting of the management committee of the Child Care Club convened on 14 February 1972. Those present were J.A. McGinty (Guild President), Mullally, R. Roach, S. Grove, J. Easton and Patricia Crawford. It was decided that child care costs were between 32 to 45 cents an hour.³³ The club started operating on 4 April 1972 at 40 Parkway with an initial intake of twenty children.³⁴ Four staff were employed at the centre with volunteers helping to mow the lawn to keep down costs.³⁵ The child care centre was financed by the Guild of Undergraduates with an annual contribution of \$7,000 and renovation costs of \$3,500 of the premises was also met by the guild.³⁶ In 2012, childcare facilities for staff and students operate from two facilities. The UWA Early Learning Centre is a new facility on the corner of Gordon and Clifton Streets Nedlands (which offers part-time and full-time care to up to one hundred children per day aged six weeks to five years). The UWA Out of School Hours Care Centre is located at 18 Parkway Nedlands on the university campus and has been in operation since February 1988 (providing after school care and vacation care for pre-primary students to twelve year olds, during state school terms and school holidays). Experienced play leaders program for a maximum of thirty-nine children per day and offer a diverse range of creative and stimulating experiences.³⁷

In setting its goals towards best practice for promotion and tenure processes, UWA reduced structural barriers and conducted 'cultural audits' of gender equity for women staff. In response to under-representation of women at senior levels of decision-making, the University started the Leadership Development for Women program in 1994 and established a network of pro-active women leaders on campus. This program has been recognized nationally and internationally, testament to the notion that it was as much about the 'critical acts' taken by an organisation to achieve gender equality as they are about recruiting and developing a 'critical mass' of female staff in key positions and in all aspects of the organisation's activities.³⁸

But despite the strides that have been made, it should be noted that there is still a way to go to achieve full gender equity amongst academic staff — it is a work-in-progress. As Figure 8.9 shows in 2011 there were 37 female professors at UWA (ten per cent of the 380 female academic teaching and research staff) compared with 189 male professors (23 per cent of the 647 male academics). Within a decade, however, if present trends continue considerable gains towards equity will have been made; an analysis of Figure 8.9 also reveals the percentage of males and females holding Level E (Winthrop Professor) and E (Professor) positions as a percentage of the total male and female academic staff: there are 86 Level D and E males (13 per cent of the total number of males) and 88 (23 percent of the total number of women).³⁹

	Level E	Level D	Level C	Level B	Level A	Total
<i>TOTAL male</i>	189	138	177	115	28	647
<i>TOTAL female</i>	37	51	136	110	46	380
TOTAL persons	226	189	313	225	74	1027

Figure 8.9 Number of academic teaching & research staff by category and sex, 2011. Source: Uni Stats

Considerable attention has also been paid to the gender balance, or lack of, amongst students in various disciplines at UWA. University statistics reveal that, in 2011, in most faculties the gender balance was around 50:50 with more women being represented in the Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (67%), Education (65%), Life and Physical Sciences (61%), Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences (60%). There has been little difference in these percentages in the past decade. But the proportion of female to male students is still low in some areas and programmes have been

put in place to redress this. Particularly notable is the Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) Project, established in 1997 to increase access, participation and retention of women in undergraduate engineering, physical sciences and mathematics courses. The WISE Mentor Scheme for first year students was so successful that it was extended to other Faculties as the Uni Mentor Scheme. It provides a raft of activities, with attendant publications, to assist female students in engineering and maths; visits to schools, an engineering role models program, Science Fairs, campus seminars, focus groups, and individual counselling. Initially the percentage of women among commencing undergraduate students in engineering courses increased from 19.43% in 1999 to 21.11% in 2000. But in 2011 the percentage of women enrolled in all undergraduate courses in the Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics remains at around 18 per cent. There are systemic social reasons for this that go way beyond the university campus. However the success of women in engineering courses at UWA has also continued to compare favourably with that of men.⁴⁰

The UWA Centenary Trust for Women was established in 2002 to support and encourage women facing financial hardship while studying at the university. A initiative of women on the UWA Senate, it was initially chaired by Dr June Jones (member of the Senate between 1993 and 2006), and then Erica Smyth (1996-2006) with the support of the Trust patrons, Lady Jean Brodie–Hall, Professor Fiona Stanley, Dr Janet Holmes a Court, Professor Margaret Seares and Justice Christine Wheeler. It has used several fundraising initiatives to support a scholarship scheme. These have included an annual lunch with inspirational guest speakers, all alumni, ranging from opera singer Sara Macliver to Sue Murphy, engineer and CEO of the Water Authority, and a Graduates Walk (granite paving stones inscribed with the donor's name) around the Oak Law, with the first stage completed in 2011.⁴¹

Today most modern western universities are morally and legally bound to cater for the different needs of their staff and students. It was a different scenario in the early years. At UWA it was again through student activism that rights for gay students were gained. In 1979 the Guild ran a campaign to encourage gay students to 'come out' without fear on campus, and organized a phone-in on homosexuality for new students during Orientation. More than three decades since those tentative small steps were taken towards gay rights, UWA now has services in place to raise awareness and promote an understanding of sexual diversity.

While UWA has equity responsibilities under the Western Australian *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* and Commonwealth legislation, its initiatives towards the employment and inclusion of Gay,

Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Intersex (GLBTI) have won the University numerous awards. In 2011 UWA ranked in the Top 10 Employers List for GLGBT employees. The University commenced the sexuality initiative in 2001 with its Rainbow Project that assessed the campus 'climate' on awareness and acceptance of GLBTI issues.⁴² This project led to the Ally Program launched by Deputy Vice Chancellor Robson in 2002, the first initiative of its kind in the Australian higher education sector. Since then the program has been emulated by many other Australian universities.

UWA has also enabled people with disabilities to gain employment in the university. Increasingly research has shown that people with disabilities are among the most socially marginalized and economically disadvantaged.⁴³ UniAccess provides a range of services for students with disability or medical conditions, a far cry from 1983 when 'help for disabled' was lumped together with student problems in personal relationships, aptitude- and interest-testing for career choices, financial advice and accommodation for overseas students.⁴⁴ In late 1999 UWA employed its first diversity officer, to increase the number of culturally and linguistically diverse staff and to liaise with staff responsible for the needs of students with disabilities and Indigenous students. Two years later the Workforce Diversity Strategy was implemented to create jobs for people with disabilities, people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as those who are indigenous. By 2002 the Diversity Strategy had employed fifty-two staff members (thirty-four women and eighteen men), earning the Prime Minister's Award for meeting diversity issues.⁴⁵

The changing strategies to assist people with disabilities are exemplified by UWA staff Arnold Cook and Greg Madson, some fifty years apart. Cook, who suffered from Retinitis Pigmentosa, lectured in economics from 1950. He brought a guide dog, 'Dreena' back to Australia after his studies at the London School of Economics, the first such dog in the country in 1950.⁴⁶ Cook, 'Dreena' and later 'Ingrid', were among the first visible signs of disability on campus. But there was limited assistance; Cook wrote his lecture notes in braille and Barbara Williamson, then a shorthand-typist with the Department of Economics, remembers reading his mail and the *Financial Review* and *The Economist* to him. More recently modern technology, as well as a guide dog (first 'Pollock' and then 'Nicholas'), have assisted Madson, with Retinitis Pigmentosa reducing his sight to blindness, to work as a receptionist at the Centre for Legumes in Mediterranean Agriculture (CLIMA) since 2001. He is also an Equity and Diversity Adviser at UWA. Madson has a range of aids to help him perform his duties; including a screen reading program, a software package using synthetic speech that voices

what is on the computer screen and a text-to-speech scanning program which enables him to scan and read printed material, via a synthesized voice, and the Brailnote note taker.⁴⁷

UniAccess today provides a range of services to UWA students who wish to disclose a disability or a chronic medical condition and request assistance. The Disability Officer arranges for support to help the student maximize his or her academic potential and advises on physical access to the campus and its buildings, liaise with staff on the student's behalf to make alternative arrangements for examinations.

Another program that has delivered highly successful outcomes in student transition support is UniSkills. First launched in 1987 UniSkills helps first year undergraduate students who find the transition to university difficult. It caters to the student who is from a rural or remote area, from overseas, from a school that is under-represented at UWA, returning to study after a break, has recently immigrated or speaks English as a second language, has a medical condition or disability that impacts on his or her ability to study, has financial difficulties, needs to commute long distances to university, is the first in his or her family to go to university, has family commitments or is facing any other significant barriers in the transition to university. UniSkills is a year-long transition program that up to 2011 has benefitted 6,008 students.⁴⁸

Recognition of diverse spiritual needs within the university first came about through the foundation of a chaplaincy service. After a suggestion from the Perth branch of the World Council of Churches in 1962, it was not until 1966 that the chaplaincy was formally put in place by the Senate. While the Professorial Board had been positive, the Humanist Society objected to the idea of having campus chaplains. The university provided accommodation and secretarial assistance, but initially the salaries of the three chaplains (representing Roman Catholics, Anglicans and other Protestant denominations) were paid for by a donation from Sir Thomas Wardle.⁴⁹ Their stipends are now paid by their respective churches. Since that time, with an increasingly diverse staff and student population on campus, UWA like other Australian universities, has needed to cater for many faiths, religions and belief systems. A chapel and reading room is available for use by religious groups, and a prayer room is available for Muslim students and staff. The 2011 UWA interfaith calendar is crammed full of key dates for the University community in its cultural and religious diversity, including Indigenous Australians, Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Shinto.⁵⁰

The University not only provides chaplains and prayer rooms for people of different faiths but also support efforts to promote understanding between faith groups. UWA's Religion and Globalisation Initiative, as part of the global university network working with the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, offers courses, lectures and academic conferences that examine the ways in which religions and secular ideologies impact contemporary life and global politics.⁵¹ UWA was the first Australian University to join the network in 2010.⁵²

The University has grown to provide a varied range of services to larger numbers of staff and students in an increasingly complex environment. In its foundation years, student activists mainly fought for the rights of minority groups. However in the last few decades, a committed leadership has resulted in the design of inspiring and innovative programs, winning the University numerous awards for the way in which it meets the needs of its diverse community. The University's equity and diversity plan ensures that it embraces cultural change, and aims to 'maintain an inclusive environment where all members of the campus community are valued, respected and able to realize their full potential'.⁵³ UWA's success in its equity and diversity strategies has involved the courageous dismantling of impediments to the disadvantaged and in their place the employment of robust social inclusion policies.

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² Unistats 2011, sighted 30 January 2012.

³ Joan Eveline (ed.), *Ivory Basement Leadership: Power and invisibility in the changing university*, Crawley, 2004, p.62.

⁴ Eveline, *Ivory Basement Leadership*, p. 73.

⁵ See <http://www.sis.uwa.edu.au/research>, 14 September 2011.

⁶ *Succeeding in Mainstream: Graduating Indigenous Professionals*, The School of Indigenous Studies, The University of Western Australia, Crawley 2003, p.2.

⁷ Indigenous Course Completions 1988-2010, Uni Stats

⁸ University News, 25 July 2011.

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- ²¹ Crawford & Tonkinson, *Missing Chapters*, p. 23.
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- ²³ From 'Notes about the history of the Status of Women Group' by Trish Crawford, 8 September 1993 (in private collection of Jenny Gregory, UWA).
- ²⁴ Eveline, *Ivory Basement Leadership*, pp.40-41.
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- ²⁶ EOWA Business Achievement Award 2002, UWA Equity and Diversity Office, July 2002.
- ²⁷ Eveline, *Ivory Basement Leadership*, p.41
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- ³⁴ Crawford & Tonkinson, *Missing Chapters*, pp. 29-30; deGaris, *Campus in the Community*, pp.143-4.

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- ⁵⁰ http://www.equity.uwa.edu.au/welcome/cultural_diversity/interfaith_calendar, 14 September 2011.
- ⁵¹ *UWA News*, 1 August 2011.
- ⁵² *UWA News*, 8 June 2010.
- ⁵³ UWA Equity and Diversity Management Plan 2009-2011.