

Gender-focused cultural audit of undergraduate students in CECS

Grant Objectives

In this grant, we proposed a cultural audit, with a focus on gender, of the undergraduate students, to better understand the attitudes held by students, challenges they face, and their needs.

The objectives of the grant were to:

1. Engage students in a discussion about gender in STEM
2. Identify gender-related attitudes of students CECS
3. Identify gender-related experiences of students whilst in high school and in CECS
4. Identify student-perceived gender-related attitudes of staff
5. Propose recommendations to promote gender equality within the undergraduate student population
6. Increase student awareness of gender-equality related issues in STEM
7. Educate students and staff on the status of gender equality in the undergraduate student population
8. Develop and implement strategic goals to address recommendations

Outcomes

The cultural audit was performed in August, with a total of 25 students participating. Findings and recommendations from the May group were received and presented to the CECS Executive in October, with the College Access and Equity Meeting discussing the report in November.

The audit was successful in identifying gender related attitudes of students, with an inhospitable culture commonly experienced by female students, created by peers, tutors, and lecturers. The report has detailed many recommendations encompassing leadership and accountability, systems and structures, and building awareness and capability.

CECS is currently engaged with iHR to deliver 'workplace reality theatre' training for staff, particularly those who deal with first year students. The frequency and evaluation of this training

is currently undetermined. The College also plans to use the inaugural Commencement Address for students next year to establish clear expectations of behaviour and culture, as this audit revealed instances of unconscious bias and sexual harassment amongst our student body.

Fifty50 is currently collaborating with the Engineering Students Association to develop more inclusive social events (a concern raised in the audit), and will then expand this collaboration to the Computer Science Students Association.

Challenges

This audit was unfortunately delayed, with the initial timeline having the audit completed by May. Additionally, administrative difficulties between the Access & Equity Chair, HR, admin, and Planning and Performance Measurement resulted in the online survey component of the audit not being completed. The small sample size (25 compared to the intended 90 students) for the focus groups was due to students being given one week's notice to sign up to the focus groups.

These challenges derived from an unestablished/uncertain chain of accountability and management. The Chair of the Access and Equity committee assumed responsibility for the audit, however, this audit did not receive the consistent management and time investment required to make it a success.

Despite these challenges, the May Group were incredibly professional and effective within their given scope, and we would recommend other Colleges at ANU undertake a similar activity within their student body to understand the nuanced challenges within each research school, and address them accordingly.