

Charles Sturt University
Student Representative Council - Bathurst
bsutto01@postoffice.csu.edu.au

1 May 2002

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References
Suite S1.61, Parliament House

CANBERRA, ACT 2600

To Whom It May Concern:

Subject: Senate inquiry into students with disability

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this inquiry. I hope the information you receive from universities all around the nation proves useful and productive.

As it stands, you have already received substantial information concerning disabled students on our campus from the university's part-time Disability Liaison Officer Barbara Karrer (bkarrer@csu.edu.au). This letter should be considered together with that information and should be taken as the student voice within proceedings.

With this, it is worth mentioning that while Ms Karrer does exceptional work, the Student Representative Council believes it is inadequate that her position is a part-time one. Disabled students have a right to access help during normal business hours, the same as other students studying here. I realise this issue is more to do directly with our university, but felt it was worth mentioning.

As far as students are concerned, there are two prominent areas concerning disabled students that constantly need to be addressed:

1. ACCESS

After talking with staff and students at the university, I have found that the greatest issue in disability access at this university is that management plays a role which is **reactive rather than proactive**. The following case studies illustrate this concern.

- a. The Nursing School building on campus, which was constructed in the early nineties, has absolutely no disabled access to its upper levels. Three years ago a student came to study on campus who was unable to walk. This meant he was also unable to visit his lecturer's office (located on the top floor of the Nursing building) for private tutorials and consultation. In the end, a system was devised where the student would telephone his lecturer from the ground floor and she would come downstairs to consult with him.
- b. A girl who had a hearing impairment issued a complaint to the university administration in 1998. She had previously attended TAFE and was used to having adequate scribes and note-takers present at her lectures and exams. When she came to CSU there was no formal structure of support in

place, and casual note-takers were issued who were not properly trained for their tasks. This led to the student obtaining inadequate lecture notes and consequently becoming very stressed about her degree. Proper note-takers could not be organised until six weeks into term.

- c. Generally, there have been many issues where buildings do not contain fully operational disabled toilets, meaning the university has had to put them in after complaints from students.

These studies demonstrate the problem outlined above. It is not until the students complain that the university is active in disabled access. This obviously leads to stress for the students involved, as appropriate changes can take weeks or even months to take effect, and by this stage students are well into their semesters. There is the added burden of having to single themselves out with the complaints, at a time when most are trying to settle in to new lifestyles.

It is for this reason that the students of Charles Sturt University Bathurst believe access – both physical and educational – systems should be in place and ready to use for any disabled students who choose to study here.

2. SOCIAL

This is a problematic issue, but one worth discussion. It was found that disabled students studying at Bathurst often face social difficulties. Perhaps the senate could look into the benefits, if any, of establishing social groups for disabled students. The students of CSU Bathurst understand that some disabled students do not wish to be singled out in any way, while some would benefit from the extra social interaction. It is a difficult problem, but any findings or advice given to universities on the subject would be greatly appreciated.

The second attachment on this e-mail is a breakdown of the number of disabled students studying across the CSU campuses and what disabilities they have. I hope it proves to be useful in your inquiry.

Good luck with your work and I hope to peruse your results in the near future

Sincerely yours,

Benjamin Bill Sutton