Exploring the narratives around an emerging cohort: Students of concern
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The challenge for 21st century higher education institutions is responding to an emerging trend – an increase in the number of students who need an advanced level of care, often referred to as “students of concern”.

This cohort is not based on traditional diverse needs of ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, age, abilities, or socio-economic backgrounds. These students are those unwilling or unable to manage their wellbeing, who challenge the university discipline statutes or who live with complex issues that impact on academic success.

Historically, tertiary institutions developed student services that responded to and reflected the needs of its student population. Later, funding was provided for specific equity groups to improve access, participation and achievement. More recently support services have been developed to meet the needs of other emerging cohorts - refugee students, first in family and the Rainbow community.

However, in the last five years, this emergence of a new wave of “students of concern” has presented challenges for higher education institutions as it is uncharted territory. Processes need flexibility, regulations need challenging and staff who traditionally haven’t engaged with “student support” can find themselves at odds with how to respond.

Challenging existing narratives around this cohort is required, as is a whole institution approach to listening to student stories. Courageous conversations, flexibility in regulations, resource allocation and capability building of staff through dialogue must be considered.

Learning outcomes
- To hear how AUT challenged the narratives surrounding this cohort and in doing so, influenced institutional change.
- How student voices help us to understand the complex factors that students navigate whilst studying.
- To provide opportunity to support dialogue and targeted responses and services to this emerging trend.
- Alternative naming options.

Presenters
Joanne Wilkins, Auckland University of Technology

Jo Wilkins is the Manager of Student Relations at AUT. Her role also advances the wellbeing of students, with a focus on students who need additional care. Jo has a Social Work background and has over 20 years’ experience in tertiary education, both as an academic and in student support.

Siobhan Daly, Auckland University of Technology

Siobhan Daly is the Associate Director of Student Conduct at AUT. With a legal background, her role is to guide and oversee the administration of the University’s Code of Practice (Health, Well-being and Fitness to Study) Discipline statute, laws and ensure compliance. Siobhan contributes to the maintenance of order and discipline of the University through education and expertise, while advancing the wellbeing of students deemed to be at risk.