It’s About Time:
Working towards more equitable understandings of the impact of time for students in higher education

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**Project description:**

Higher education experiences are increasingly intensified by competing imperatives of study, work, and personal commitments. However, despite significant change, the assumption persists that time is a neutral and linear framework in which all students are equally positioned. Despite the foundational role of ‘time’ in organising higher education experiences, it has received little attention in research (Stevenson and Clegg 2012). Yet one of the main reasons students from under-represented backgrounds cite for leaving study is ‘lack of time’ and ‘time pressures’ (e.g. Horstmanshof and Zimitat, 2007). This paper will explore perceptions of ‘time’, ‘time pressures’ and ‘lack of time’ and show how such perceptions impact on the educational experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. The paper will provide a platform from which assumptions of ‘time’ and ‘time-management’, conventionally considered to be an individual problem - simply the result of an individual's lack of organisation and choices - can be re-configured in more informed, socially aware and responsive ways.

**Conceptual and/or methodological framework:**

The project draws on theorisations of ‘time’ in scholarly literature from fields of Sociology and Physics. This body of work suggests that the rigid structuring of time reinforces existing power relations and masks the inequalities around how time is perceived and lived (Clegg 2010; Adkins 2009; Barad 2001, 2007). Such theoretical perspectives suggest that there are differential—and distinctly ‘relational’—experiences of time in higher education. The ways time is experienced is deeply interconnected with social, cultural and geographic relations of difference and power. Time commitments may be significantly stretched and constrained according to particularities of geographic distance, SES status, gender, disability, and other such contingencies. However, this is not simply about 'making time' to travel to university, complete homework or fit in childcare. Time management is embedded in complex social relations so that unequal access to temporal resources, and the ways that temporal constraints are understood, judged and translated in disciplinary, pedagogical and institutional contexts, contribute to exacerbating inequalities and exclusions in higher education. The project aims to provide a deeper and more refined understanding of how time plays out across social differences, how conventional understanding of ‘effective time management’ might be limited in relation to institutional aspirations for equity and inclusion and how policy and practice might be more sensitive to those differences, power relations and complexities.

The qualitative project will involve in-depth interviews with students from undergraduate Nursing, Law and Engineering programs at one Australian and one English regional university. Additionally, the students will be invited to produce ‘time journals’ of a two-week period of their studies. The three disciplinary contexts were selected to examine differences between them in how time and ‘time management’ is constructed and structured, how that impacts students’ temporal experiences and how time pressures might vary across programs of study and in relation to geographic issues.

**References:**


