Report: Deadnaming at ANU

"Had an instance where I had to give my deadname to try and gain card access to the spoon space because "my name didn't match the records held by ANU security". My name had been changed in ISIS and on my uid for some months at that point.

"Got dead named in an exam, the invigilator was saying that my ID and the name in their system didn't match. Had to explain that my ID hadn't been updated but they didn't seem to understand, this was all during writing time in an exam."

"Despite having given ANU my preferred (and actually legal) name, for any automated emails they will deadname me instead."

Context

ANU has hundreds of Transgender students, staff and residents as part of its community. Transgender people are a particularly vulnerable demographic and face an unwelcoming society, discrimination and often harassment as part of their daily lives. Some of the ways that this manifests are misgendering, hate speech, and relevant to this report: deadnaming, which is when a person's name from before their transition is used in place of their preferred name.

Transgender people at ANU have anecdotally been reporting this as an issue in on-campus contexts for a long time. There have been reports of a variety of ANU digital systems, as well as sometimes in-person teaching and residential contexts in which deadnaming has taken place. In this context, the ANU Students Association (ANUSA) and the ANUSA Queer Department released a survey to examine the scale of the issue, as well as where in particular it appears.

Severity and Scope of the Issue

ANUSA and the ANUSA Queer Department survey ran from 13/04/2024 to 28/05/2024, and garnered 30 responses. Estimates of the percentage of transgender people in the population generally stand at around 1-2%[1], and that this only applies to those who are changing their name, but have not yet done so legally (many trans people do not seek to change their name or have already gone through the difficult legal process). With that in mind, this likely constitutes a significant and representative sample of the impacted transgender community at the ANU.

Out of these 30 responses 97% reported some example of deadnaming by ANU systems, with only a single response stating that there were no cases that they had noticed. The worst cases reported were Residential Halls (43%: various halls, and including the overall ANU Accommodation system), ANU Accessibility (40%), and student invoices (33%). None of the systems which respondents were prompted with had 0 reports of deadnaming, and several non-prompted systems were reported with issues.

It is clear that there is a systematic deadnaming problem with ANU systems, and that real action must be taken to remedy this. In general, these will likely be issues with using the wrong data in constructing automated emails, giving the wrong systems access to people writing emails, and other issues that can be fixed with quite simple training or system structure modifications. However some of the areas where deadnaming occurred had specific issues and are covered below.

ANU Deadnaming Survey

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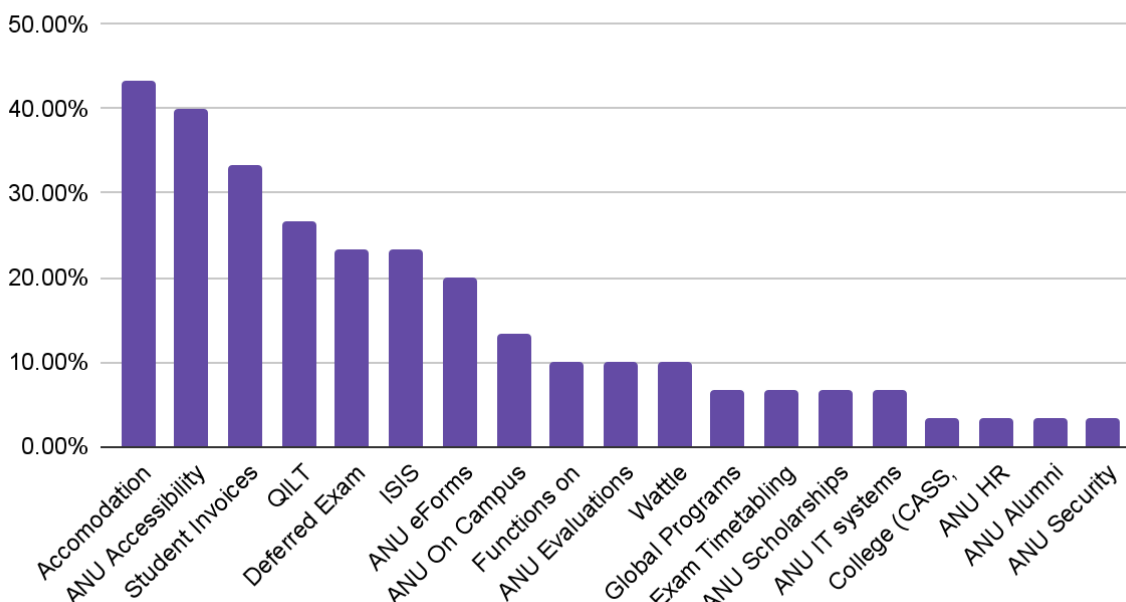
[1] Ipsos Pride 2023 global survey: a majority of Australians support protection from discrimination for transgender people, but we divided on other transgender discrimination issues. (2023). *PRESS RELEASE*.

Residential Halls (43%)

Problems were reported at many different halls, including Fenner, Burton and Garran, Wright, Bruce, and Unilodge. In addition, issues with emails from the overall ANU Accommodation system were reported.

Several unique and specific issues with residential halls were reported, including:
- Senior Residents being given the deadnames of their residents in addition to their preferred names, information which should not be given out with the consent of the students and would not be relevant to their roles.
- Receptionists refusing to use preferred names and difficulties being reported in updating preferred names

ANU Accessibility (40%)

ANU Accessibility automated emails reportedly use both deadname and preferred name when addressing students. This is entirely unnecessary, and would simply require a modification to the structure of these emails to only use preferred names to fix.

ANU Scholarships, Alumni, and Early Entry (13%)

All of these systems reportedly use a separate process to the general ANU ISIS names database. This means that even when a legal name is updated in ISIS they continue to use deadnames for the students in question.

This could be fixed by creating some kind of system to update student details in these systems when they are updated in ISIS.

Global Programs (7%)

The Global Programs Portal completely lacks a preferred name field, meaning that avoiding deadnaming is difficult. Bringing Global Programs in line with other ANU systems by having a preferred name would solve this.

General ANU IT issues (7%)

Issues with updating the name attached to an ANU email address when a name change is processed in ISIS have been reported.

In addition, issues with deadnames popping up when accessing ANU library document downloads, printing, and similar systems have been reported

Issues with dealing with non-Western name formats (7%)

While not being the point of the survey, multiple responses noted issues when ANU systems dealt with names that do not conform to the First Middle Last format. This included a student who had their middle name used instead of the first due to a difference in how their

name is ordered, as well as a student who had a name without a last name where they were assigned a full stop instead of it being left blank.

Recommendations

1. That the ANU Undertake a holistic review of its IT systems, training and data in order to identify all areas where deadnaming regularly occurs and take steps to ensure that preferred names are used in any and all applicable areas
2. That the ANU takes rapid action in remedying the issues already identified in this report with deadnaming, with special focus given to the particularly poor areas of Residential Halls, Accessibility, Invoices and QILT.
3. That ANU Residential Halls:
   a. Ensure that all front-facing staff are given training on how to interact with transgender residents in a sensitive manner, including ensuring that they always used preferred names
   b. End the practice of giving out deadnames in any circumstances where it is not legally necessary, especially to Senior Residents
4. That the ANU systems for Scholarships, Alumni, Early Applications and Global Programs be updated to ensure that they all have preferred names, and that their name fields are updated for students when those details are changed on ISIS