

## **“We weren’t comfortable with the wording”: Navigating drug user identity disclosure in a university setting**

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### **Background:**

This presentation examines a recent example of my attempted drug user identity disclosure and subsequent interactions within a university setting. The situation began with a request to include the words “I am a drug user” in a short informal bio on a research project webpage. The intention was to be transparent about my positionality within the research project for prospective participants and other interested parties. While supported by the project’s Principal Investigator, this content was declined by university web staff due to an initial concern about personal risk.

Follow-up requests for clarification and biography changes revealed broader institutional concerns regarding policy compliance, reputational risk, and questions about health and safety implications for staff and students. Throughout the exchange, challenges emerged regarding interpretation of policy, what counts as acceptable public facing content, decision-making authority, and academic freedom. The experience also raised questions about institutional discomfort with disclosures of some types of experience but not others, how experience is valued, and concerns about potential stigma embedded within risk-based responses.

This case contributes to ongoing debates regarding drug use disclosure by drug researchers, illustrating how unclear processes and risk-averse institutional cultures can limit authentic academic representation and the destigmatisation of drug use. The resulting tensions for researchers attempting to balance community interests, personal values, and institutional compliance point to a need for clearer policies or pathways that honour academic freedom and transparency without compromising researcher safety, particularly for those acting as critics and conscience of society.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** JW conducted this work during tenure of a Health Sciences Career Development Award at the University of Otago | Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka.