



Respectful engagement on campus

19 February 2024

Dear students,

As students return to campus for Semester 1, we turn our minds again to the environment we want to foster as a place of learning. One of civility and mutual respect, where everyone feels welcome and included. A culture where we remain true to our values as a scholarly community, where ideas are developed and debated, and where divergent views are not just tolerated but valued. A place where the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom are cherished, but where antisemitism, islamophobia, and racism in any of its forms, as well as intimidation and harassment, are never tolerated.

As Australia's first university, we have a responsibility to model the kind of deliberative conversations our broader community needs to have about difficult issues. We need to be a place that can host multiple perspectives, and hold challenging, courageous conversations that consider the complexity of our environment. This extends to our engagement in public discourse – where our experts are trusted by the community as authorities on some of the world's most challenging problems and working together to find the solutions that will create a better future – through to our classrooms, our offices, and our online communities.

I've been encouraged by the many students and colleagues who have expressed their interest in laying the foundations for this respectful engagement this year. They are eager to reconnect with their peers, to respectfully explore their differences and – in the absence of common ground – to commit to disagreeing well.

We want to facilitate these opportunities and be clear about our expectations of all members of our community, equipping you with the knowledge and understanding to engage well with your peers and students.

We have recently launched an online module for students, [Engaging with Civility](#), which includes interactive scenarios to build understanding of the [Student Charter](#) and expectations at university, including respectful protest and cultural safety.

We have also updated the [Guidance Note on Freedom of Expression for students](#) to highlight that this right does not extend to the disruption of lectures and classes, preventing other students from learning. It also does not extend to harassing or intimidating staff and students who may hold a different view or simply do not wish to engage in protest or debate. It means not exercising freedom of expression in a way designed to limit others exercising their freedom of expression.

And we published the University's [Anti-Racism Statement](#) last year, outlining our commitment to upholding human rights and to building an inclusive community in which we are all treated fairly and with dignity, as well as our commitment to truth-telling and acknowledging our past.

I also want to assure you that we're working with students and colleagues from relevant teams across the University to ensure continuous improvements to our systems and processes, as well as coordinated and timely responses to matters relating to the safety and wellbeing of our community.

Resources and support

As always, the safety and wellbeing of our community is our priority. If you require support, visit our [student life, wellbeing and support](#) webpage or [talk with one of our University counsellors](#).

Now more than ever it is important for us to be guided by our values of trust, accountability and excellence, as well as our aspiration to be a [community that thrives through diversity](#) and one that is committed to the principle of disagreeing well.

Regards,
Mark

Professor Mark Scott AO
Vice-Chancellor and President

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We recognise and pay respect to the Elders and communities – past, present, and emerging – of the lands that the University of Sydney's campuses stand on. For thousands of years they have shared and exchanged knowledges across innumerable generations for the benefit of all. Learn more.

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