



## Creating a welcoming campus in Semester 2

24 July 2024

Dear students,

As we prepare to gather on campus for Semester 2, I wanted to take the opportunity to welcome you. I'm glad you're joining us for the semester ahead, and I look forward to seeing what you achieve over the next four months.

University is more than what you learn in the classroom – it's about the experiences you have and the lifelong connections you form. And it's critical that every member of our diverse student community feels included and has equal opportunities to participate in all facets of our vibrant campus life.

I know the events of 7 October 2023, the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, and the reverberations of that conflict in Australia and on our campuses have been deeply distressing for many in our community. In these challenging and divisive times, it is ever more important that we have the right settings in place to provide a safe, welcoming and vibrant campus for all members of our community, while supporting an environment where we can draw on our rich history of activism, protest and debate. We must therefore uphold our proud tradition of civil debate and practise the skills of listening closely and disagreeing well that are the bedrock of deliberative democracies.

With this dual intention, we've introduced the [Campus Access Policy 2024](#), which provides clearer information about our expectations and requirements of conduct on campus. The Policy balances our commitment to freedom of speech and academic freedom with our legislative obligations to protect the health and safety of our community, and to do our best to prevent both psychological and physical harm.

### **What does the Campus Access Policy mean for protests?**

We support the right to protest and, as for demonstrations on public land throughout New South Wales, we now require 72 hours notice to ensure we've got the right resources in place so that demonstrations can proceed in a way that's safe for both protesters and other members of our community.

In recent months, we have clear evidence that advance notice of protests allows careful planning to avoid situations that might be dangerous for community members, particularly when multiple protests are planned for the same time.

We also know, through the repeated testimony of staff and students, that tactics including protests inside buildings where people are working or studying, the use of megaphones indoors and the targeting of individuals not participating in protests, can undermine our shared obligation to create a community that is safe and welcoming.

## What does the Campus Access Policy mean for campus life?

We'll continue to foster a vibrant campus culture. Students remain free to set up stalls, put up posters in designated areas, and run events that question and challenge the status quo as they always have done – provided they don't jeopardise the health and wellbeing of their peers or significantly disrupt the operations of the University. The approval requirements set out in the Campus Access Policy balance the rights of freedom of expression with our obligation to protect the physical and psychological safety of all members of our community.

At the end of semester, there will be consultation with staff and student groups on how the policy has operated in practice and we can fine-tune as necessary, recognising our multiple commitments to free speech, academic freedom, safety and wellbeing.

As members of a university community, we must seek to embody the best of long-standing traditions to listen deeply to those whose life experiences and perspectives are different from our own. In the semester ahead, therefore, we want to work as a community on how we can be more skilled at dealing with these deep complex divisions evident across broader society. The ability to disagree well and to come together peacefully across lines of difference have never been more important.

Kind regards,  
Mark

**Professor Mark Scott**  
**Vice-Chancellor and President**

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