Student Equity and Social Inclusion

Section 1 - Purpose / Objectives

(1) To give effect to Victoria University's commitment to the promotion of equity and social justice for students by:

a. recognising the spirit and principles of equal opportunity legislation and practice, based on international human rights conventions;
b. initiating social inclusion activities in partnership with the community;
c. undertaking proactive programs for designated student equity groups;
d. making a commitment to implement strategic initiatives to promote equity and social justice, particularly in the western region of Melbourne; and
e. responding, appropriately to issues of unlawful discrimination and harassment.

(2) This policy applies to all students and staff of the University community, at both domestic and offshore campuses, including student residences, and to students and staff of the University undertaking University work, study or professional experience in places other than Victoria University campuses.

BACKGROUND

(3) Principles of equal opportunity, equity and social justice are embodied in the Victoria University of Technology Act 1990. The objectives of the University include 'the provision of programs and services in ways which reflect principles of equity and social justice' (S.6 (j)) and 'the fostering of participation in post-secondary education for persons living or working in the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne' (S.6 (i)).

(4) These core principles are strongly aligned with Making VU 2016: A Statement of Purpose, which establishes Victoria University's Strategic Direction and Priorities 2008-2016. Two of Victoria University's Values are 'equality of opportunity for students and staff' and 'diversity for its contribution to creativity and the enrichment of life'. Planning and strategy development recognise that the University's past is characterised by 'an embedded commitment to social justice and equity'. This commitment also forms the basis of the University's Equity and Diversity Strategy for Students.

(5) State and Federal equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation, together with relevant employment law, place obligations on the University to provide specific policies and programs to create an equitable and inclusive teaching, learning and working environment.

(6) For students, this policy replaces the Equity and Diversity (for Staff and Students) December 2009, which was approved as an interim policy after a review of the Equity and Diversity Policy 2008. A separate equity and diversity policy will apply to staff.

Section 2 - Scope / Application

(7) This policy is important to:

a. All students and staff of the University.

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(8) This policy applies to all students and staff of the University community, at both domestic and overseas campuses, regardless of location and to students and staff of the University undertaking University work, study or professional experience in places other than Victoria University campuses.

Section 3 - Definitions

(9) Diversity: Diversity involves recognising the value of individual differences in the educational setting and in the workplace. Diversity in this context includes, age, cultural background, disability, ethnicity, family responsibilities, gender, language, religious belief and sexual orientation. Diversity also refers to the other ways in which people are different, such as educational level, life experience, work experience, socio-economic background, personality and marital status.

(10) Equity: Equity relates to fair treatment. Our equity objective is to ensure that people from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in post secondary education. This includes (but is not limited to) Indigenous people, people with disabilities, women in areas of under-representation, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people from lower socio-economic and rural backgrounds. "The balance of the student population will be changed to reflect the composition of society as a whole more closely".

(11) Equal opportunity: Equal opportunity is about ensuring that everyone has equal access to, and opportunity to take part in, areas of public life such as, education, employment, accommodation and access to goods and services. Equal opportunity law sets standards for the way we treat each other in these areas and provides remedies for people who have been treated unfairly.

(12) Human rights: Human rights are the basic entitlements that belong to all of us just because we are human beings. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, forms the basis of these entitlements. The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 is a formal recognition of Human Rights and aims to protect people from injustice and to allow everyone to participate in and contribute to society. Our human rights entitlements include:

a. Civil and political rights such as the right to life, liberty and freedom from torture and slavery, freedom of opinion, expression and religion;
b. Economic and social rights such the right to health care, education, work, food and a reasonable standard of living; and
c. Environmental and cultural rights including the right to live in a clean environment protected from destruction and the right to cultural, political and economic development.

(13) Social inclusion: Social inclusion refers to a program of measures to overcome social exclusion and promote social justice. Victoria University's social inclusion strategies work in partnership with the community and contribute towards reducing disadvantage, increasing the ability of people to participate in the life and work of the community and to have their voices heard.

(14) Social justice: the attainment of a more equitable society, to which the University contributes through the transforming power of education.

(15) Discrimination: Discrimination means treating someone unfairly or less favorably because of a characteristic such as their sex or race or age (see list of protected attributes at 5.2). Discrimination can also be setting a requirement that people with a particular characteristic (protected attribute) cannot meet and which is not reasonable.

(16) Direct discrimination on the part of an educator, employer, provider of goods and services (including accommodation) and in the areas of sport or clubs, involves treating a person less favorably because of a protected attribute than another person in comparable circumstances. It is recognised that some forms of harassment may amount to unlawful discrimination.

(17) The term indirect discrimination refers to a requirement, condition or practice which appears to be neutral but which results in a particular person or group being adversely affected. Indirect discrimination is usually unintended. In order to constitute indirect discrimination, the particular policy or practice must be unreasonable in the circumstances.

(18) Harassment: refers to discriminatory behaviour in relation to a protected attribute (see 5.2), which is reasonably likely in all the circumstances, to humiliate, offend, intimidate or distress the person(s) concerned.

Section 4 - Policy Statement

Equity, Diversity & Social Justice:

(19) Victoria University is committed to being fair, equitable and sensitive to the diverse needs of all its students in all its policies and practices. The following principles of equity and social justice will be integrated into all the University structures, policies and procedures:

a. fairness in the provision of University services and programs to students;
b. fair access to educational opportunities at the University;
c. fair opportunities for successful participation of students in University programs and services;
d. opportunities for genuine participation in decision-making for students;
e. promotion of a learning and work environment which is socially inclusive, values diversity and allows students to realise their full potential, where students are able to study and work effectively without fear of discrimination or harassment; and
f. protection of the human rights of students.

Social Inclusion

(20) The University will work in partnership with the community to achieve social inclusion by encouraging participation in all levels of education, especially by people from previously excluded groups.

(21) The University will develop and operate plans and programs to increase access and promote success in education for designated under-represented groups.

(22) The University is committed to providing policies and programs which recognise and address the character and needs of the people of the western region of Melbourne.

Equal Opportunity

(23) In order to meet its obligations under this policy, Victoria University undertakes to promote equal opportunity in all aspects of the University's activities through strategic initiatives and by eliminating unlawful direct and indirect discrimination and harassment on the grounds of:

a. race, colour, national or ethnic origin, descent, nationality;
b. sex, gender identity, lawful sexual activity, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, breastfeeding, family responsibilities, status as a parent or carer;
c. religious or political belief or activity, industrial activity, irrelevant criminal record;
d. age, physical features, disability (past, present or imputed), medical record; and
e. personal association with a person who is identified by reference to any of the above listed attributes.

(24) The University's policy should be interpreted to include all attributes protected by Federal and State anti-discrimination legislation.

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The University's Commitments

(25) The University will develop and implement plans and programs to increase access and promote success in education for designated under-represented groups, including people from a low socio-economic background. The University is committed to providing policies and programs which facilitate social inclusion by recognising and addressing the character and needs of the people of the western region of Melbourne.

(26) To promote equity and equal opportunity, Victoria University will:

a. provide a teaching, learning and working environment that values cultural and linguistic diversity, fosters mutual respect and cultural competence and responds to diverse needs;
b. ensure that its structures, policies and practices are free from direct and indirect discrimination;
c. educate the University community on the goals and philosophy of equal opportunity, equity and social justice;
d. use non-discriminatory, inclusive language and practices; and
e. provide effective mechanisms to resolve equal opportunity-related complaints.

ACCOUNTABILITIES

Responsibility

(27) All students and staff are responsible for understanding and applying the principles of equal opportunity, equity and social justice. All senior staff, academic and teaching staff, managers and supervisors are responsible for ensuring that the teaching, learning and working environment is safe, inclusive and free from discrimination and harassment.

Implementation

(28) Actions required to implement this policy include:

a. Development and implementation of social inclusion strategies in partnership with the community;
b. Ensuring that all University policies, procedures and plans are consistent with equal opportunity principles and practices;
c. Development and implementation of proactive measures and strategies to address the under-representation and disadvantage experienced in education by equity target groups;
d. On-going review and implementation of the Disability Action Plan and student equity and diversity plans to meet legislative and government requirements;
e. Ensuring procedures to resolve equal-opportunity related complaints are regularly updated and provide prompt, fair and effective outcomes for students;

(29) Pro-active measures to assist faculties, departments, schools and units to promote social inclusion and equal opportunity in education will be identified, encouraged and monitored by Staff Equity and Student Equity and Disability. Such measures will take into account groups identified through analysis of the University's student profile data as well as those targeted in anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation and relevant government policies and programs.

(30) To ensure the effectiveness of this policy, the University will:

a. require senior managers in the University to integrate equal opportunity, equity, diversity and social inclusion objectives into the functional and operational plans for their area of responsibility;
b. ensure that staff and students are trained in equal opportunity, equity, diversity and social justice matters;
c. monitor and review progress in the implementation of equal opportunity, equity, diversity and social inclusion;
d. develop performance indicators for equal opportunity, equity, diversity and social inclusion outcomes to

facilitate accountability; and

e. provide expert, professional assistance through Student Equity and Disability to decision-making bodies and senior managers in order to facilitate embedding equal opportunity, equity, diversity and social justice strategies and mechanisms throughout the University; and
f. provide support to all students and staff affected by this policy.

Promotion

(31) Information regarding this policy shall be included in Faculty, VE and FE Handbooks, course guides and student diaries and will be available in libraries and Student Service Centres, and on the University's website. Information regarding this policy will be included in staff induction material and reinforced in staff professional development activities. Promotion of the policy to our students will be available in a range of languages.

Training Plan

(32) The University will ensure that students and staff are trained in equal opportunity, equity, diversity and social justice matters.

Section 5 - Procedures

(33) Applicable Procedures

a. Student Complaints Policy.

Section 6 - Guidelines

(34) Nil

Status and Details

Status	Historic
Effective Date	22nd October 2014
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Responsible Officer	Darrel Caufield Chief Student Officer and Registrar darrel.caulfield@vu.edu.au
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