Student Equity and Social Inclusion Policy

Section 1 - Summary

(1) This Policy defines Victoria University's (VU) ongoing commitment to equity and social justice for students.

Section 2 - Scope

(2) This Policy applies to all students and staff at both domestic and offshore campuses, including student residences, and staff and students undertaking VU work, study or professional experience in places other than VU campuses.

Section 3 - Policy Statement

Part A - Equity and Social Inclusion

(3) VU is committed to the promotion of equity and social justice for students. VU will:

a. Recognise the spirit and principles of equal opportunity legislation and practice, based on international human rights conventions;
b. Initiate social inclusion activities in partnership with the community;
c. Undertake 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. Respond appropriately to issues of racism, unlawful discrimination and harassment.

(4) Principles of equal opportunity, equity and social justice are embodied in the Victoria University Act 2010 (Vic). These core principles are strongly aligned with "Victoria University Strategic Plan 2022-2028". In the section titled "Our Vision" it states:

a. we have a deep and unwavering commitment to inclusion, to respectful relationships and diversity. We will be a place where people will love to study and work, and are supported to realise their potential and aspirations.

(5) Planning and strategy development recognise that VU's past is characterised by "policy, systems, infrastructure and technologies to ensure accessibility and equity for our students".

Equity, Diversity and Social Justice

(6) VU 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 and parity 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 racism, discrimination or harassment;
f. Protection of the human rights of students; and,
g. Opportunities for challenging mainstream normative systems through a decolonial lens.

Social Inclusion

(7) VU 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.

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

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

(10) VU is committed to the principles of Universal Design across all teaching and service delivery areas and encourages all staff to practice inclusivity. Curriculum design, teaching delivery, assessment and service delivery will be accessible to students with a diverse range of abilities as far as practicable, and taking account of the inherent requirements of the course.

Equal Opportunity

(11) In order to meet its obligations under this Policy, VU undertakes to promote equal opportunity and anti-racism in all aspects of VU'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.

(12) VU's policy should be interpreted to include all attributes protected by Federal and State anti-discrimination legislation, and acknowledges that in many cases grounds may intersect.

VU's Commitments

(13) VU will develop and implement plans and programs to increase access and promote success in education for designated under-represented groups.

(14) To promote equity and equal opportunity, VU will:

a. Provide an inclusive teaching, learning and working environment that values universal design, cultural and linguistic diversity, fosters mutual respect, anti-racism 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 VU's community on the goals and principles of inclusive teaching, inclusive service delivery and philosophy of equal opportunity, equity and social justice;
d. Develop a plan to help break the cycle of poverty through education by promoting financial inclusiveness for all VU students through a range of measures that work towards alleviating financial distress and improve access to education and success by enabling students to overcome financial hardship;
e. Recognise and welcome students and staff of diverse genders, sexes and sexualities and create an environment where students are free to be themselves and bring their whole selves to their student experience;
f. Develop a Gender Affirmation Guide and VU Gender Affirmation procedures to support students and staff wanting to affirm their gender and ensure an individual's gender affirmation journey is a positive experience;
g. Affirm the place of Aboriginal people as the original inhabitants and owners of this country. Promote the inclusion and support of Aboriginal students through community education, student enrolment and broader education strategies, and the work of the Moondani Balluk Academic Unit;
h. Improve educational outcomes for students who identify as female, addressing gender imbalances and promoting flexibility for students particularly those in supporting caring and parental roles. Create a culture of safety and respect, and deliver programs and initiatives that challenge gender stereotyping and help change attitudes and behaviours around sexual assault and sexual harassment;
i. Recognise and welcome students from diverse backgrounds, languages, ancestries, ethnicities, cultural traditions, and religious. Enact policies and practices and behaviour that support inclusion and equality and do not perpetuate systemic discrimination or exclusion due to bias;
j. Use non-discriminatory, inclusive language and practices; and
k. Provide effective mechanisms to resolve equal opportunity-related complaints. Students may make a complaint of discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation or vilification under the Complaints Policy. Allegations of student misconduct are managed under the Student Misconduct Procedure.

Part B - Accountabilities

Responsibility

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

Implementation

(16) Actions required to implement this Policy include:

a. Development and implementation of anti-racism and social inclusion strategies in partnership with the community;
b. Ensuring that all of VU's 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 Victoria University Accessibility Action Plan for Students 2021-2023, student equity and diversity plans and other strategic documents 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;
f. Pro-active measures to assist all areas of VU to promote social inclusion, inclusive teaching practice and

inclusive service delivery, equal opportunity in education will be identified, encouraged and monitored by Accessibility Services, Staff Inclusion and Diversity and Cultural Diversity, Moondani Balluk and overseen by all Senior Executive (or Directorate) Leaders in all areas and across VU. Such measures will take into account groups identified through analysis of VU'S student profile data as well as those targeted in anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation and relevant government policies and programs.

(17) To ensure the effectiveness of this Policy, VU will:

a. Require senior managers in VU 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 inclusive teaching practice, inclusive service delivery, equal opportunity, equity, diversity and social justice matters;
c. Monitor and review progress in the implementation of inclusive teaching practice, inclusive service delivery, 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 Accessibility Services to decision-making bodies and senior managers in order to facilitate embedding inclusive practices, 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

(18) Information regarding this Policy will be included on VU's website and 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

(19) VU will ensure that students and staff are trained in inclusive practices, equal opportunity, equity, diversity and social justice matters.

Section 4 - Procedures

(20) Nil.

Section 5 - HESF/ASQA/ESOS Alignment

(21) HESF: Standards 2.2 Diversity and Inclusion; 2.3 Wellbeing and Safety; 6.1.4 Corporate Governance

(22) Outcome Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2025: Standard 2.5 Diversity and Inclusion. Compliance Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations and FPP Requirements 2025: Standard 20 Compliance with Laws.

(23) National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (Cth): Standard 6, Overseas Student Support Services.

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Section 6 - Definitions

(24) Accessibility – Accessibility refers to the ability for everyone, regardless of disability or health condition, to access, use and benefit from everything within their environment. It is the degree to which a product, device, service, or environment is available to as many people as possible. The goal of accessibility is to create an inclusive society for people with health conditions or a disability – including mental illness, physical, mobility, visual, auditory or cognitive disability.

(25) All-Gender

(26) Community

(27) Direct Discrimination

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

(29) Diversity

(30) Equity

(31) Gender Affirmation

(32) Harassment

(33) Human Rights

(34) Indirect Discrimination

(35) Intersectionality

(36) Race

(37) Social Inclusion

(38) Social Justice

(39) Universal Design

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Status and Details

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Accountable Officer	Lisa Line Deputy Vice-Chancellor Enterprise and Digital Lisa.Line@vu.edu.au
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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"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: Civil and political rights such as the right to life, liberty and freedom from torture and slavery, freedom of opinion, expression and religion; Economic and social rights such the right to health care, education, work, food and a reasonable standard of living; 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.

"Direct Discrimination" - Direct discrimination occurs if a person treats, or proposes to treat, a person with a protected attribute unfavourably because of that attribute.

"Harassment" - The act of systematic and/or continued unwanted and annoying actions of one party or a group, including threats and demands. Harassment includes actions such as stalking.

"Indirect Discrimination" - Indirect discrimination occurs if a person imposes, or proposes to impose, a requirement, condition or practice: that has, or is likely to have, the effect of disadvantaging persons with a protected attribute; and that is not reasonable.

"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.

"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) Aboriginal 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.

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"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.

"Social Justice" - 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.

"Universal Design" - Means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design. “Universal design” includes assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed.

"Gender Affirmation" - A personal process where a trans or gender diverse person implements steps to live as their defined or affirmed gender identity, rather than the gender assigned to them at birth. Transition may involve social, medical/surgical and/or legal steps that affirm a person’s gender.

"Intersectionality" - Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person’s identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. Aspects of a person's identity can include social characteristics such as Aboriginality, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, colour, nationality, refugee or asylum seeker background, migration or visa status, language, religion, ability, age, mental health, socioeconomic status, housing status, geographic location, medical record, criminal record, etc. Attitudes, systems and structures in society and organisations can interact to create inequality and result in exclusion. These include: sexism, racism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, intersex discrimination, ableism, ageism, stigma. When these aspects or characteristics combine, there is a greater risk of people experiencing disadvantage; people find it harder to get the help they need due to systemic barriers and there is increased risk of social isolation.

"All-Gender" - A space or activity explicitly designed to cater for users of any gender, i.e. all-gender bathrooms that may be accessed by any user.

"Community" - VU’s heartland is the west of Melbourne. Partnerships, collaborations and bridging between local governments, community groups, business, industry and all VU departments, Colleges, staff, students and visitors work to develop programs that respond to local needs for skills, knowledge and learning.

"Race" - As defined in the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic), Race includes— (a) colour; (b) descent or ancestry; (c) nationality or national origin; (d) ethnicity or ethnic origin; (e) if two or more distinct races are collectively referred to as a race— (i) each of those distinct races; (ii) that collective race.

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