

First Nations Anti-racism Policy

Section 1 - Summary

(1) This Policy gives effect to Victoria University's (VU) commitment to anti-racism in relation to all affected people, peoples of colour, and Australia's First Nations Peoples. It focuses on explaining racism to provide a framework to enable the decolonising of University systems that in some cases perpetuate all forms of racism, including colonisation.

(2) Racism is complex, deeply rooted, constantly changing, and is embedded in interpersonal and institutional interactions and systems. Racism is maintained by denial and neglect, including institutional neglect. Institutional failure to deliver freedom from racism causes harm and does not deliver equal outcomes. This is a failure of duty of care and a denial of human rights.

(3) The University recognises the complexity of addressing all forms of racism experienced by all affected peoples. Also that the context and characteristics of racism differs across affected peoples, requiring targeted responses.

(4) The University commits to the long-term ongoing process of systematically dismantling racism and colonisation inherent and/or hidden in its policies and practices and other ways of working, knowing and being. Anti-racist objectives will be initiated with targeted actions embedded in a framework to decolonise systems within the University.

(5) This Policy enacts commitments in the Victoria University Strategic Plan 2022-2028: Start Well Finish Brilliantly in relation to listening and privileging the voices of First Nations Peoples. It aligns with initiatives in the Higher Education Sector, and current priorities at the State, National and International levels. These are detailed in Section 5. It also aligns with the VU [Student Charter](#), the [Diversity, Inclusion and Equal Opportunity Policy](#), and the [Student Equity and Social Inclusion Policy](#).

Section 2 - Scope

(6) This Policy applies to all students and staff of Victoria University community at all 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.

Section 3 - Policy Statement

(7) The Anti-racism Policy is consistent with the sections in VU's [Strategic Plan 2022 - 2028: Start Well Finish Brilliantly](#) that affirms that the University honours Indigenous cultures, that it will privilege the voices and standpoints of First Nations Peoples and will uphold First Nations sovereignty and authority. The University will do this through new approaches to policy, advocacy and justice, and the aspiration to be world leaders in integrating First Nations knowledges. The Plan commits the University to address the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(2015\)](#) and to underpinning its operations with the integrative approach of Protecting Country.

(8) The Anti-racism Policy reflects the [Victoria University Act 2010 \(Vic\)](#) Preamble that states VU focuses "on the

development and provision of educational, cultural, research and related services to build social, cultural and economic capital particularly in the Western Metropolitan region of Melbourne, and in ways which reflect principles of equity and social justice". The preamble also reaffirms the "commitment to excellence in teaching, training, research and scholarship, providing for its local and international community". VU cannot meet these without providing a culturally safe and anti-racist institution.

(9) This Policy supports the context of Australia's First Nations Peoples being the oldest and continuing people who are the original inhabitants and custodians of Australia's lands, skies, and waters. This context is guided by Protecting Country and an understanding that Country connects First Nations People to place, to ancient knowledge systems, spiritual and social practices. Knowledges continue to be generated by Country, Elders and knowledge holders.

Cultural knowledges exist in the fields of social science, medicine, astronomy, science, agriculture, land care and animal care.

(10) The context and experience of racism in relation to Australia's First Nation Peoples derives from multiple sources and acts of violence. It is laden with the impact of history, all forms of racism, and the continuation of colonisation.

(11) The following are targeted anti-racism practice principles in relation to Australia's First Nations Peoples that can equally be applied to all Global People of Colour who experience racism:

- a. Acknowledgment that the lands, waters and skies of Australia's and global original occupants, the First Nations Peoples, were never ceded and that invasion and colonisation disrupted existing sovereignties;
- b. Acknowledgement that the colonisation process involved human rights abuses and atrocities that cause dispossession and intergenerational harm that continues through many forms of racism including institutional racism;
- c. The recognition and removal of institutional racism and the continuation of colonisation in current practices;
- d. Leadership in truth telling, and truth listening, on past and present wrongdoings, racist and colonial practices is required;
- e. Agreement to the implementation of long-term evidence based transformative actions to systemically decolonise university practice;
- f. Agreement to engagement with First Nations Peoples community leaders for guidance and partnership.

(12) This Policy commits Victoria University to:

- a. develop effective anti-racist practices in relation to all affected people, Peoples of Colour, and Australia's First Nations Peoples.
- b. initiate this commitment by targeted anti-racist practices in relation to Australia's First Nations Peoples that:
 - i. respect and recognise the sovereign rights of Australia's First Nations Peoples;
 - ii. acknowledge past wrongdoings and support reparative actions;
 - iii. recognise and change present wrongdoings in relation to educational access;
 - iv. recognise and name the continued racist and colonial practices, including those that impact in administration, teaching and research;
 - v. undertake long term actions to systematically decolonise University practices;
 - vi. promote truth telling and truth listening across the University;
 - vii. engage community leaders in partnership;
 - viii. uphold and enact sovereign rights in the authority, governance and resources of the University related to First Nations Peoples.

Section 4 - Procedures

(13) Nil.

Section 5 - Supporting Documents and Information

Policy context

a. International

(14) [United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(1948\)](#): sets out the basic rights and freedoms that apply to all people. The Declaration recognises that 'the inherent dignity of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'. It includes civil and political rights, like the right to life, liberty, free speech and privacy. It includes economic, social and cultural rights, like the right to social security, health and education.

(15) [United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples \(1960\)](#): the General Assembly condemned colonialism and all practices of segregation and discrimination in whatever form and wherever they exist and proclaimed the necessity of bringing them to a speedy and unconditional end.

(16) [United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination \(1963\)](#): the General Assembly affirmed the necessity of eliminating racial discrimination throughout the world in all its forms and manifestations and of securing understanding and respect for the dignity of the human person. The term "racial discrimination" means any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which effects, nullifies or impairs the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

(17) [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(2007\)](#): sets out the rights of Indigenous Peoples including Indigenous advancement in education. The principles state that Indigenous peoples have the right to access, or to establish and control, educational systems and institutions that provide education in cultural languages and in ways appropriate to cultural methods of teaching and learning. Also, that Indigenous Peoples have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

(18) [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(2015\)](#): are a call for action by all countries to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. Central to achieving the goals is ending poverty with strategies that build economic growth and address social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

b. National

(19) [Racial Discrimination Act 1975 \(Cth\)](#): makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person because of race, colour, descent, national origin or ethnic origin, or immigrant status. The law ensures everyone is treated equally and given the same opportunities. In Australia, it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of age, disability, race, sex, intersex status, gender identity and sexual orientation in certain areas of public life, including education and employment.

(20) [Racial Hatred Act 1995 \(Cth\)](#): amends the Racial Discrimination Act and allows people to complain about publicly offensive or abusive behaviour based on racial hatred. Unlawful behaviour is defined as public acts which are likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate.

(21) [Uluru Statement of the Heart \(2017\)](#): is grounded on the concept of sovereignty of First Nations Peoples. Sovereignty is the acknowledgement 'that Aboriginal tribes were the first sovereign nations of the Australian

continent, that sovereignty was never ceded and that it co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown'. The Uluru Statement outlines the way towards recognising First Nations Peoples in the Australian constitution. Key elements of the statement are 'Voice, Treaty, Truth'. It seeks to change the constitution to enable First Nations Peoples a voice in making the laws and policies made about them.

(22) [Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022-25](#): aims to continue to advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in and through universities. It highlights the need for universities to explicitly combat racism. It foregrounds Indigenous knowledges as a strength inside institutions and a benefit for students, staff and all Australia. It seeks to move beyond aspirations to concrete actions and outcomes.

c. Victoria

(23) [Yoorrook Justice Commission](#): Yoorrook means "truth" in the Wemba Wemba/Wamba Wamba language from north-west Victoria. The Yoorrook Justice Commission is the first truth-telling body in Australia. It is independent of both government and the First Peoples Assembly. In June 2020 the Assembly 'agreed that truth-telling must be a fundamental part of Treaty-making and called on the Victorian Government to establish a formal truth-telling process'. Based on consultations with First Nations Peoples across Victoria 'the mandate and form of the Commission was designed by the Assembly and the government'. The Yoorrook Justice Commission was formally established in May 2021. In September 2021 the Assembly presented the Commission with the Tyerri Yoorrook report (means "seeds of truth") that outlined how 'First Peoples across Victoria wanted the Commission to interpret its mandate'. The Commission will establish an official record of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples in Victoria using First Peoples' stories and inquiring into 'historical systemic injustices perpetrated against First Peoples since colonisation (for example massacres, wars and genocide) as well as ongoing systemic injustices (for example policing, child protection and welfare matters, health, invasion of privacy and exclusion from economic, social and political life)'. The commission will recommend to the Victorian Government changes to laws and policy, and considerations for the making of Treaties.' Its final report is planned for June 2024.

Victoria University Policy Context

(24) [Bathelmun Yalingwa Strategy 2017-2020](#): is a whole of University and community approach to Aboriginal participation, particularly in the west of Melbourne. It locates the role of the University as a leader in raising awareness and forging change. It commits to increasing educational opportunities and success for Aboriginal students. Actions include defining Indigenous Knowledges, recognition of First Nations Peoples, activating protection and management related to teaching and research. Also, to factors regarding the University estate and environment, and the arts. The Strategy outlines the University's aspiration to "Grow" the number of students and their success, to strengthen Moondani Balluk, and to increase the Aboriginal workforce within the University. Also, to "Share" Aboriginal culture and knowledges and to privilege Indigenous perspectives. Actions include promoting Aboriginal competencies for all students, addressing epistemic justice through decolonisation frameworks, and privileging Black lives, experience and participation. The University commits to embed Aboriginal voices and knowledges, and to "Connect" Aboriginal culture to the University and the campus environment. (Also see Bathelmun Yalingwa Enterprise Plan 2022).

(25) [Yannoneit Employment Strategy 2019-2021](#): details aspects of the Bathelmun Yalingwa Strategy and the ways the University can gamadji (grow), dambunmon (share) and jerrboongun (connect) Aboriginal community and culture through employment. As a leading employer in the west of Melbourne the University aspires to be a place where Aboriginal University staff flourish in the community with other Aboriginal workers, and within the University. Yannoneit aims to increase the number of Aboriginal people employed at the University and to provide development opportunities across the University, for Aboriginal academic staff. Also, to establish the University as a culturally sensitive and safe workplace for Aboriginal People.

(26) [Aboriginal Education and Cultural Equity Policy](#): states the University's commitment to advancing social justice and equity for First Nations Peoples, and to providing employment, educational and development opportunities. It

commits to educating staff and the wider community on Aboriginal history and culture. This Policy is informed by the Victoria University Strategic Plan 2016-2020, the Bathelmun Yalingwa Strategy 2017-2020, Yannoneit Employment Strategy 2019-2021, and the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020.

(27) [Black Lives Matter Australia: Moondani Balluk Statement](#) (2020): highlights the impact of Black deaths in custody, both overseas and on Australia's First Nations Peoples. It speaks of embedded systemic racism and ongoing racist acts on Black people and Aboriginal people that is 'draining hope and aspiration(s)'. The Statement points to the impact of racist violence on First Nations staff of the University. It speaks of the difficulty of academic staff who, while teaching, are triggered and confronted by Aboriginal content. At times challenged by others, whilst also needing to manage their fragilities. This is amplified by the lived experience of systemic racism, and connection to family and those who have died in custody. The Statement calls for action, not just from Moondani Balluk staff, but action from University colleagues 'to show up, be counted, to educate themselves and to take action themselves against systemic racism and to speak against acts of violence on Black bodies... to join in solidarity to decolonise... practices and systems so that our Aboriginal families, children and youth can feel safe... in white spaces'. It calls on colleagues to 'show respect to our Country, our Culture, and understand the ongoing impact of dispossession and dispersal on our bodies and spirits'.

Section 6 - HESF/ASQA/ESOS Alignment

(28) HESF: Standard 2.2 Diversity and Equity; Standard 2.3 Wellbeing and Safety; 6.1.4 Corporate Governance

(29) Outcome Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2025: Standard 2.5 Diversity and Inclusion, 2.6 Wellbeing. Compliance Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations and FPP Requirements 2025: Standard 20 Compliance with Laws.

(30) National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (Cth): Standard 5 Younger Overseas Students; 6 Overseas Student Support Services.

Section 7 - Definitions

(31) Atrocities

(32) Ceded

(33) Colonisation

(34) Country

(35) Decolonisation

(36) Dispossession

(37) First Nations Peoples

(38) Institutional racism

(39) Racism

(40) Sovereignty

(41) Treaty

(42) Truth-telling

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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"First Nations Peoples" - are the original inhabitants and owners of Australia's lands, skies and waters.

"Colonisation" - is the act of a nation or party appropriating and settling in another place, dominating the original inhabitants and establishing themselves as rulers.

"Racism" - is the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, economic, intellectual and cultural violence and dispossession of First Nations Peoples. Racism occurs in various forms including personal and institutional racism.

"Atrocities" - are extremely violent, cruel and dehumanising acts and wrongdoings. Legally sanctioned atrocities were enacted on Australia's First Nations Peoples by colonisers.

"Dispossession" - is the effect of the systematic denial of truth and human rights and the persistent experience of disrespect and devaluing of a person's cultural way of being.

"Institutional racism" - is racism that is embedded into social systems and institutions. Typically, institutions are set up to privilege those in power, and on ideas that white ways and knowledge are superior. Institutional racism manifests in the failure to deliver equal outcomes to all people.

"Decolonisation" - is a process of reframing and revising matters from the perspective of First Nations Peoples. Decolonising a university requires uprooting institutional racism through truth-telling and incorporating cultural knowledge and practices.

"Sovereignty" - is a nation or party with the authority to exercise decisions and to self-govern. First Nations Peoples have the inherent right to self-determination and self-government.

"Ceded" - is to have surrendered sovereignty to another nation or party. Sovereignty of Australia's First Nation Peoples, their lands, waters, and skies have never been ceded.

"Truth-telling" - is bringing truth to light. It is the process of extracting and documenting Australia's history and the experiences of First Nations Peoples, from the standpoint of First Nations Peoples. Truth-telling reaps perspectives to revise recordings of Australian history and the impact of past and present colonisation and racism.

"Country" - is about people, place and planet. It is about the land, waters and skies, and all living things. Country is about all times, the past, present and future. It is about Dreamings, Songlines and the Creation Spirits. Country connects First Nations Peoples to place and ancient systems of knowledges. Country guides obligations for protecting cultural places, the land and the environment, and the importance of these for the wellbeing of all people and the planet.

"Treaty" - is a formal, legal agreement between nations or parties that define their relationship and establishes rights and obligations between them.