

STUDENT EXPOSURE TO EXPLICIT OR CONFRONTING MATERIAL GUIDELINES

RELEVANT POLICY/PROCEDURE

These guidelines are made under the following policies/procedures published in the Melbourne Policy Library:

- Responsible Conduct and Expectations of Students Policy

BACKGROUND

The University recognises that students may, in the course of learning and teaching activities (including classes and assessment), come across material that is explicit or confronting, with the potential to cause discomfort, offence or distress. The University is committed to minimising any unnecessary adverse consequences from exposure to such material, whilst balancing the rights of students and staff to free speech within the law, and the legitimate academic need for some confronting material to be covered in particular subjects and courses.

SCOPE

These guidelines are not intended to apply to activities, materials, speech or representations, including incitement of hatred or ridicule towards others on the grounds of race, religion or gender, that are unlawful under Australian legislation. Speech that merely gives offence is not unlawful. However, staff and students are asked to be considerate of others and follow these guidelines when presenting material which may potentially cause offence, recognising that individuals' reactions and cultural sensitivities can be subjective and it may therefore be difficult to predict what they will find offensive.

Examples of potentially explicit or confronting material to which these guidelines apply include:

- Creative work produced in the visual or performing arts, such as representations of violence, nudity or sexual activity (including in art works, films and theatre performances).
- Work produced in creative writing, such as descriptions of violence, sexual activity and particularly sexual violence.
- Criminal law cases which students are required to read, discuss and be examined on.
- Graphic discussion or depictions of historical events such as war, revolution or genocide.
- Graphic depictions, or actual performance, of human or animal dissection or autopsy.

Breach of these guidelines may result in faculties/graduate schools taking action that is either restorative (providing support for staff and students affected) or pedagogical (providing staff and students with advice about how impacts on others could be minimised).

GUIDELINES

1. Staff and students are asked to be mindful of the potential for discomfort, offence or distress when presenting explicit or confronting material to other staff and students, recognising that material may impact in different ways on different individuals.
2. Students are asked to take reasonable steps to minimise unnecessary adverse consequences when presenting explicit or confronting material in the course of learning and teaching activities (including group work outside formal classes). Such steps may include:
 - Warning others when they will be presenting explicit or confronting material, with a brief description of its nature.
 - Avoiding gratuitous presentation of explicit or confronting material.

- Discussing how to manage the presentation of the material with the subject coordinator, lecturer or tutor ahead of time.
3. Students who are concerned about the possibility of encountering material they may find confronting or offensive during learning and teaching activities should raise the issue with teaching staff and/or the subject coordinator, particularly in cases where the impact of such material on the individual student may be difficult for others to predict. Students may also seek advice from their student centre or graduate school, and from central service providers such as the University Counselling Service.
 4. Staff are asked to take steps to minimise unnecessary adverse consequences when running learning and teaching activities involving the presentation of explicit or confronting material. Such steps may include:
 - Providing brief information in course and subject Handbook descriptions and subject materials where students may be exposed to explicit or confronting material, particularly when they cannot absent themselves.
 - Warning students well in advance (before the start of the class where possible) when explicit or confronting material is to be presented, with a brief description of its nature.
 - Advising students who may intend to present explicit or confronting material of point 2 of these guidelines.
 - Avoiding gratuitous presentation of explicit or confronting material.
 - Advising students that they may opt to absent themselves from the presentation of explicit or confronting material, where this does not impact on the academic integrity of the learning and teaching activity in question.
 - Providing students with information about any relevant support services (such as the University Counselling Service) where they have concerns about the impact and it is not possible to avoid exposure to explicit or confronting material.
 5. Students should note that absenting themselves from exposure to explicit or confronting material may not always be possible without compromising the academic integrity of the relevant course or subject. Students for whom this causes difficulties should consult with the relevant subject or course coordinator, or a student adviser, about the possibility of other enrolment options.
 6. Notwithstanding these guidelines, situations where students are exposed to explicit or confronting material may occur from time to time and should be viewed as opportunities for constructive reflection and learning about appropriate management of these issues by both staff and students. Staff and students who would like further information or advice can refer to the [Fairness and Diversity Unit](http://www.hr.unimelb.edu.au/advice/equity-diversity) (<http://www.hr.unimelb.edu.au/advice/equity-diversity>).

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

The Provost is responsible for the development and review of these guidelines.

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER

The Manager, Policy and Programs (Office of the Provost) is the contact officer who can provide further information on these guidelines.

REVIEW

These guidelines are to be reviewed by 30 April 2015.

VERSION HISTORY

Version	Authorised By	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections Modified
1	Provost	28 May 2012	30 June 2012	New