



Protest encampment update

16 May 2024

Dear students,

Like you, I continue to be horrified by the conflict and loss of life occurring in the Middle East. As I said last October, the University abhors violence and any breach of human rights, and we unequivocally condemn racism in all its forms, including antisemitism and Islamophobia. Like you, we watch the international situation unfolding with collective hope for an immediate cessation of hostilities. These issues are deeply distressing for many of us, and the profoundly polarised debates about the conflict encourage further division rather than constructive dialogue. I extend my sympathies to everyone affected and encourage you to reach out for support if you need it: you can [visit our student life, wellbeing and support webpage](#) or [talk with one of our University counsellors](#).

Unacceptable conduct

Since the protest encampment on our campus began, we have been focused on the safety and wellbeing of our community, ensuring our campus remains peaceful and our University activities can continue uninterrupted.

Where instances of alleged unacceptable conduct occur, we have acted decisively. We will continue to take a reasonable and proportionate approach to any alleged misconduct and deal with unacceptable conduct on a case-by-case basis, consistent with our approach of de-escalation.

We have repeatedly directed protesters not to share their student or staff ID cards with visitors to campus. Individuals who have been found to have shared their ID cards have had their cards confiscated and will be subject to misconduct proceedings.

We have become aware that some individuals have allegedly gone beyond the bounds of acceptable political announcements before the commencement of classes by:

- deliberately covering their faces in a manner intended to conceal their identity and, in contravention of University policy, not identifying themselves upon request
- interrupting classes or not allowing classes to commence at the scheduled time
- acting in a way that can reasonably be considered to be intimidatory of staff and/or students.

The University has an obligation to provide a safe learning environment for our students and a safe workplace for staff, and we will be taking disciplinary action against identified individuals involved in these incidents.

Equally, we are aware of an instance of counter-protesters allegedly engaging in intimidatory

behaviour towards the encampment overnight earlier this week, and we are co-operating with police in their investigations of this behaviour.

Our expectations

As we have stated repeatedly, we do not tolerate any form of racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, threats to safety, hate speech, intimidation, threatening speech, bullying or unlawful harassment, or breaches of privacy including photography in classes without permission. As previously communicated, the following is unacceptable conduct:

- disruption of lectures and classes, preventing other students from learning
- entering buildings without authorisation
- harassing or intimidating staff and students who may hold a different view or simply do not wish to engage in protest or debate
- preventing free movement around campus
- damage to property
- creating and/or refusing to control a serious safety risk.

If you witness or experience an incident, I encourage you to [lodge a complaint via our online form](#). If you are feeling unsafe on campus, you can call protective services on 9351 3333.

Working towards a resolution

I know that many in our community have passionate and long-held views on Israel and Palestine and are legitimately concerned about what is taking place, and the University upholds the right of our community to express these views provided they do not unreasonably infringe on the rights of others to come to campus and engage in their usual activities.

Senior University representatives have had productive and open conversations with representatives from the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA), and the student-led University of Sydney Union (USU).

I'm disappointed we haven't yet been able to have constructive engagement with the Students' Representative Council (SRC) and Sydney University Muslim Students' Association (SUMSA) organisers to discuss their views, and I have written to them today inviting them to meet with me and Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Annamarie Jagose in a private and neutral place where meaningful discussions can take place.

Likewise, the Sydney Branch of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), one of our staff unions, recently passed a motion outlining concerns similar to those of the encampment, and I've written to them today inviting them to meet with me and Annamarie next week.

Around the world, we have seen universities and encampments come to mutually-acceptable agreements following good-faith dialogue. The concerns of the encampment and the NTEU are worthy of consideration, but we can only progress towards any resolution through genuine two-way discussions and I hope that both the students and the NTEU will accept our offer to meet next week.

In these troubling times, I encourage you to be thoughtful and considerate when expressing your views and have empathy for others who may be affected in different ways by current events.

Kind regards,

Mark

Professor Mark Scott
Vice-Chancellor and President

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