



Public Comment

Vision

The University actively encourages and facilitates high quality contributions by staff to public debate and deliberation on issues spanning local, national and international boundaries.

The University's Charter of Academic Freedom, in particular, provides that the University "*supports the responsible transmission of ...knowledge...openly within the Academy and into the community at large, in conformity with law and the policies and obligations of the University*".

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the responsibilities and obligations of staff when making public comment and simultaneously identifying themselves as staff members of the University.

The policy differentiates between academic freedom of staff as members of a learned profession and their personal or professional comments as University officers.

Public Comment policy applies to all full-time, part-time and casual staff of the University of Sydney, including staff on fixed term contracts and holders of Honorary, Adjunct or Clinical titles.

Scope

Academic staff are encouraged to contribute to public comment in their area of expertise. The University encourages the ideal of the "public academic" willing and able to comment on matters.

All staff have a professional responsibility to uphold the outstanding reputation of the University in the community and to exercise good and ethical judgement in any public comment.

All staff have an obligation to respect the confidentiality and privacy of information entrusted to them in the course of their employment.

Related Documents

- The University of Sydney Code of Conduct (2002)
- University of Sydney Strategic Directions, 2006 – 2010
- Charter of Academic Freedom (2008)

Policy

Objectives

- To provide guidance to staff in contributing to public commentary.
- To clarify the distinction between public and private comments.
- To prevent abuse or misuse of privilege arising from academic and administrative positions.
- To provide guidance to external parties (eg the media) as to the principles under which staff are obliged to conduct themselves in this matter.

Guidelines

- a) The University encourages academic staff to participate in public debate and be available to the media for comment in their field of expertise.
- b) Staff contributing to public commentary should identify themselves using their University title, appointment and/or qualifications when they are writing or speaking publicly on a matter within their academic or professional field of expertise or specialisation.
- c) Statements should be accurate, professional and exercise appropriate restraint.
- d) Staff making public comment or submissions to for example, parliamentary or government inquiries or similar, on matters within their academic or professional field of expertise or specialisation may identify themselves using their University title, appointment and/or qualifications. Staff should make clear that their comments or submissions are not made on behalf of or represent the views of the University. Staff may make such comments or submissions using University letterhead and/or a University address.
- e) Consistent with the University's Code of Conduct, only those staff officially appointed by the Vice-Chancellor to represent the University should comment publicly for the University on University policies, management or operational issues. Examples of such issues include, but are not limited to, the University's relationship with government; funding arrangements; student fees and quality of learning and teaching.

- f) When commenting in public, staff are expected to act in good faith and not misrepresent their expertise.
- g) Staff commenting publicly on an issue not in their field of expertise should:
- do so from a private address (whether postal or email)
 - not use University letterhead
 - if they wish identify themselves as a university staff member they must also indicate unambiguously that they are expressing their personal opinion and not presenting the opinion or position of the University.
 - follow the University's policy on use of its Information and Communication Technology resources
 - be mindful that they show respect for the options of others, do not injure a person's reputation or create a basis for defamation action.

In such cases, the University cannot be responsible for any claims in defamation or otherwise that may follow such comment.

- h) Staff should maintain the highest professional and ethical standards when they associate themselves with the University in public statements. Any public statement made by a member of staff should not bring the University into disrepute.
- i) Staff should be aware that the University may take disciplinary action where this policy or the Code of Conduct have been breached.
- j) Training is available for staff who are or will be dealing with the media. Staff wishing to develop their media skills should contact the Media Office for further information.
- k) Staff requiring guidance on this policy or dealing with the Media should contact the Media Office.
- l) If a member of Staff is concerned that a statement they have made or are about to make may be defamatory or if they receive a claim or an intimation of a claim that a statement which they have made is alleged to be defamatory they should contact the Office of General Counsel (65277) for advice as to the options which are available to them.

Administration

1. Background/Context

This policy is designed to assist and protect staff by making clear the University's expectations regarding the basis on which University staff may comment publically.

2. Authority/Consultation

This document has been developed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Community) in conjunction with the Senior Executive Group; the Media Manager; the Chair of the Academic Board; the Academic Staffing Committee; the Office of the General Counsel; the Director, Community Engagement and the *SydneyPeople* Director's Office.

3. Management Responsibility

Vice-Chancellor and Principal

4. Implementation Responsibility

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Community)

5. Dates

Approval (version 1)

Effect

Review

Approval (version 2)

Effect

6. Approval

Version 1

Version 2

7. References

- The University of Sydney Code of Conduct (2002)
- The University of Sydney Strategic Plan (2006-2010)