

GENERATING A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS

A safe learning environment is a key pre-requisite for student success. It is one where every student feels not just unthreatened but actively welcomed.

Facilitating a safe learning and teaching environment

Existing practices at USQ, including learning, teaching and interpersonal communication, must contribute towards an environment where every student has an equal opportunity to achieve their learning goals.

Facilitating respectful communication in the classroom and on USQStudyDesk

- Establish a protocol of respectful interpersonal engagement – preferably at the start of semester but also as required.
- Link this protocol to your role as a teacher and the obligation to facilitate a safe learning environment; also link the protocol to the role and obligation of students at USQ.
- Ensure that you and your teaching team model established rules of engagement in your teaching practice and in your communication with each other and students.
- Use traditional concepts of academic rigour and the need for evidence as a means of encouraging students not to make unsupported claims or generalisations about sensitive issues, or each other.
- On StudyDesk set up a ratings system for forum posts so students can rate each others' interpersonal communication skills. See [Digital Tools for Learning and Teaching Brilliantly](#) community for help.

Developing a course protocol

Ask students, in class or on purpose-named Study Desk forum, how they would be preferred to be communicated with; what they would consider as appropriate communication. Compile a list and add some of your own if you think they are missing. Explain why you are adding them. This type of exercise generates greater buy-in from students. Encourage students to let each other know, respectfully, if the protocol has been breached.

Encouraging academic rigour and the use of evidence

During discussions about disciplinary topics in class, and on Study Desk, emphasise the importance of presenting claims with supporting evidence, rather than generalisations that may misrepresent any issue or group. Encourage an atmosphere of friendly debate.

What to do when students breach established protocol

- Consistently and calmly remind students of the established protocol of respectful engagement, without prejudice, *on each occasion* these have been breached.
- Don't blame the student but focus on their communication and why it may be in breach of the agreed – upon protocol.
- In more serious breaches, such as racial or sexual stereotyping, it may be preferable to briefly remind the student that you believe they are in breach of the agreed upon protocol,

but speak to them in more detail after class, or via personal email. Invite those affected to speak with you if they need to debrief.

- Refer students to relevant policies that outline their responsibilities.
- Establish agreed-upon processes and contacts in your discipline, department or school for dealing with instances of unintentional group stereotyping that do not warrant formal disciplinary action.

Relevant policies and processes

C2 Anti-Discrimination and Freedom from Harassment policy. Retrieved June 28, 2010 from <http://www.usq.edu.au/hr/polproc/partc/c2.htm>

Policy on Learning and Teaching. Retrieved June 28, 2010 from <http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/75.pdf>.

Policy on multiculturalism. Retrieved June 28, 2010 from <http://www.usq.edu.au/legaloffice/Legislation>

Student Charter (under construction).

University of Southern Queensland (Student Discipline) Policy. Retrieved June 28, 2010 from <http://www.usq.edu.au/.../~media/USQ/Policy/Calendar/Student%20Discipline%Policy%20-%20interim%20policy.ashx>.

Current Students guideline, 'Using discussion forums':

<http://www.usq.edu.au/currentstudents/studydesk/usqstudydesk/discussion.htm>

Resources

Digital Tools – Learning/Teaching:

<http://usqstudydesk.usq.edu.au/course/view.php?id=14723&sso>