

GUIDING ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

“The University”, like any other community, is made up of a diversity of populations which have differential relations to one another. Some may be relations of power, as in the connection between employer and employee; some may be relations of kind or of role, as those between academic and non-academic staff, some may share in both, as in the relation between teacher and student. Still others may be relations based on cultural and/or ethnic difference, which may also be differences in power relations and social roles.

Such a community, then, if it wishes to function properly and with due regard to human rights and dignity, ought to have an interest in ensuring ethical behaviour – that is, behaviour which acknowledges and protects principles such as fair representation and just dealing – among all its members. Thus, though all members of a university community may seek and attain certain rights, they also have responsibilities toward other members of the same community, who have their rights. Moreover, the University as an institutional and administrative entity, also has rights and responsibilities. The principles set out below propose ways by which the institution and its members may co-exist, co-operate and collaborate to form a community in which everyone’s rights are observed and protected.

In general, the responsibilities of Curtin University of Technology as a community are to

- encourage and promote ethical behaviour
- defend the rights of individuals within the University community
- observe the duty of care to each member of the University community, with equity and justice
- provide an appropriate environment for all its members so that they may express ideas, theories and beliefs freely
- foster individual abilities and enterprise
- provide equity of access to the learning environment, career development and University management
- ensure that the working environment of the University is a safe and healthy one
- provide mechanisms for safeguarding human rights
- provide fair and open government of University operations
- provide appropriate mechanisms for achieving corporate and individual goals
- promote positive changes in University structure to enhance the well-being of individuals, groups and society
- consider the impact of decisions on the well-being of individuals, groups and society
- respect the intellect and humanity of others
- respect the individual’s right to privacy, and to undertake to keep personal information in confidence unless disclosure is required by legislative or regulatory authority
- encourage individuals to conduct themselves conscientiously

- encourage members to consider the impact of actions on others, on the University and on society
- foster recognition of obligations both as a member of the University and, where relevant and appropriate, as a member of a profession/discipline
- encourage research and teaching according to accepted ethical principles
- acknowledge and encourage equity and justice
- encourage members to defend the rights and dignity of others
- foster loyalty to one's colleagues and co-workers, and thence to encourage collegiality among members of the University community.

Below are some further specific principles.

1. The University

1.1 The Dignity and Value of the Individual

The University is committed to the principles stated in declarations and charters such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and accordingly seeks to foster a working environment that, as well as being safe for all members of the University community, protects the rights of those people. Thus, for instance, individuals should be respected as persons who have the right to make decisions on their own behalf. Indeed, the University has a responsibility to facilitate such autonomous decision-making, but should, at the same time, protect the rights and dignity of all members of the community.

Principles of equity therefore should underpin academic and management decision-making so that both individuals and corporate bodies are encouraged to respect the rights of others. Where there is a conflict because of competing rights, various University instrumentalities may be used to resolve issues.

Freedom of Ideas and Freedom of Speech

Traditionally, universities have been places where members of the community have been encouraged to observe society and all its activities, and to comment on, praise or criticise these. At the same time, individuals have also been encouraged to explore new concepts and to develop these through open discussion. The concept of freedom of thought and speech is that which respects the right of persons to express ideas, theories and opinions without censure or fear of political or religious interference. Such freedom should be extended to all staff and students in order that they be encouraged to develop skills of reasoning and to explore new ideas.

1.2 The Impact of University Activities on Society (Societies)

The University should constantly seek to ensure that all its activities serve to benefit society. For instance, research and development activities include assessments of the short-, medium- and long-term impact of University projects on people, and on environmental and social conditions, so that appropriate judgements and decisions may be made.

1.3 The Impact of University Activities on the Environment

The University should seek to preserve and restore the environment and to minimise any negative or destructive effect thereon.

2. The Individual

2.1 The Autonomous Person

All members of the University have rights and responsibilities which they may exercise according to their designated positions, their role or function within the University, and the policies, regulations and statutes of the University. Each member of the University community, however, should be recognised as a person in her or his own right. Likewise, that person should also recognise the rights and dignity of others.

2.2 Freedom of Ideas and Freedom of Speech

Individuals have the right to express their ideas, theories, beliefs and values and should respect the rights of others, including students, to do likewise. The recognition and exercise of freedom of ideas and of speech are fundamental to the democratic, and especially a university community: it has traditionally been the University's role to challenge held beliefs and structures, as well as to offer new technologies and approaches.

2.3 Individual Responsibility

Members of the University community should demonstrate integrity, objectivity and conscientiousness by an honest approach to their various employment and activities, including teaching, study, research, administration and business activities, by respecting the rights of others, and by ensuring that activities of individuals and groups in the University are in accord with general as well as University ethical principles.

2.4 Scholarly and Professional Practices

Originality of research and publication, appropriate acknowledgement of ideas and material, and fair and honest dealing with the original material and research of others are responsibilities of the members of any university community. The codes of ethical practice set out in specific University and professional documents provide staff with the expected standards of practice and behaviour, both as academics and as members of a particular profession/discipline. These standards, moreover, would thus be demonstrated to students by the example of their instructors. Similarly, staff should behave in such a way as to set a positive example both to other staff and to students.

2.5 Loyalty to the University Community

It is both reasonable and desirable that members of the University be able to question or criticise the philosophy, statement of intent, economic dealings and other activities of the institution. Members of the Curtin community should act at all times in such a way as to uphold the values and principles of the University and seek not to bring it maliciously into disrepute.

2.6 Responsibility to Colleagues/School/Department/Area

Members of the University community should behave in ways which do not cause discredit or unnecessary disquiet to the school, department or area with which they are affiliated. The convergence of loyalties to one's discipline and/or one's affiliation may occasionally conflict with responsibility to the University. Members may resolve such conflict through reasoned argument consistent with both general and University ethical principles.

2.7 Responsibilities towards Others

Relations among staff and between staff and students should be respectful, among other things avoiding language and/or behaviour of a racist, sexist or otherwise prejudicial or demeaning kind. Members of the University community should be sensitive to those from other cultures. Academic staff should ensure, first, that their teaching practice recognises these rights of students and other staff members; second, because students have the right to access staff for assistance and counsel in their studies, staff should also ensure accessibility according to this right. Those staff who undertake to supervise students have special obligations, including accessibility, loyalty, honesty and respect for the ownership of intellectual property.

2.8 Conflict of Interest

Staff should take suitable measures to avoid any situation in which they may have, or be seen to have, a conflict of interest. Staff should avoid situations which may require them to supervise or assess a student or other staff member with whom they have, or have had, a sexual, commercial, familial or other significant relationship.

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[Adopted by Council as a formal expression of University commitment.]*

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