

# Conscientious Objections Policy

## Section 1 - Background and Purpose

- (1) La Trobe University values the diversity of the ethics, culture and religions of the members of its community.
- (2) It recognises that some students may have conscientious beliefs that conflict with University requirements and aims, where possible, to facilitate students completing their studies without compromising their ethical, religious or cultural convictions, thus providing for an individual student to request a reasonable adjustment to the requirements when that student has conscientious objection to a requirement of a subject or course.
- (3) The University also endeavours to provide an optimal learning environment and sound pedagogy.
- (4) Nothing in this Policy or Procedure may be taken as allowing less than optimal scholarship including defence and critique of scholarly research and knowledge.

## Section 2 - Scope

- (5) Applies to:
  - a. All campuses;
  - b. All courses and subjects;
  - c. All students and staff.

## Section 3 - Policy Statement

- (6) The University will endeavour to include sufficient detail in official University publications for students to identify requirements and activities that may give rise to conscientious objections.
- (7) A student concerned that he or she may be required or expected to participate in activities that compromise his or her ethical, religious or cultural commitments should raise the matter with the relevant teaching staff at the earliest opportunity.
- (8) Where a student has conscientious objections to participation in a requirement of a course or subject, the University will endeavour to make reasonable adjustments on a case by case basis. Adjustments will not be made in the following circumstances:
  - a. it is an objection to an inherent requirement of the course and unless the requirement is met staff are unable to certify that the graduate has the basic competencies of the course or competencies required for external professional registration;
  - b. the only adjustment available would be in breach of legislation or expose the University to legal liability;
  - c. the only adjustment available will disadvantage the quality of education of other students;

- d. the resources (including time) required for adjustments are not available; and
- e. it is an objection to a requirement of an external body, compliance with that external body's requirement is necessary to complete the course and that external body does not allow the objection.

## Section 4 - Procedures

### Official Publications

(9) All reasonable attempts will be made to ensure that official publications provide sufficient information for students to determine if they can complete any course without compromising their ethical, religious or cultural convictions.

### Course and Subject Descriptions

(10) In so far as it can be reasonably anticipated, course and subject information will provide sufficient information (highlighting inherent requirements) for students to determine that they can complete the requirements of the course without compromising their ethical, religious or cultural convictions.

(11) Course and subject descriptions will provide advice about the use of animals (alive or dead), human bodies or parts, human tissue or fluids, interaction with people who are not normally staff or students of the subject, interactions that are not commonly part of university teaching and learning (for example, if students will be requested to touch one-another), attendance at cultural places or use of cultural objects, or any other matter that may be reasonably anticipated to give rise to a student's conscientious objections.

### Students' Objections

(12) Students should not enrol in courses or subjects when they have objections to core requirements that are inherent in the course or subject. Students should also be aware that some courses require study of, and prepare students for professional work with, diverse people, cultures and religions. Students may be required to work within cultural or religious constraints of other peoples (e.g. to provide a health service).

(13) A student should provide the Course Coordinator with written objections as soon as she or he determines that a requirement conflicts with her or his ethical, religious or cultural convictions. The objection should include description of the ethical, religious or cultural reasons.

### Adjustment of Requirements

(14) When a student conscientiously objects to a subject requirement and it is considered reasonable the coordinator or other teaching staff will endeavour to make a reasonable adjustment that provides an equivalent and equitable learning experience.

(15) The adjustment should satisfy the student's objection without changing the learning experience.

(16) Subject to the exceptions stated in the Policy, alternatives may include substituting observing other students or staff for direct participation, observation by video or other recording, the use of computer simulation, use of models or manikins, substitution of synthetic or vegetable materials, use of extant data or materials, providing greater privacy and opportunities to work with same-sex students.

(17) Adjustments will not normally require significant additional teaching.

### Responses to Objections

(18) The response to the objection will be provided by the subject or course coordinator in writing within 10 working days, clearly stating any adjustment to the subject requirements.

## Supporting Students

(19) When a student informs a staff member that an activity that he or she has undertaken has compromised his or her ethical, religious or cultural convictions, the student should be offered assistance to address the matter and restore their integrity. Referral to particular University staff or religious or cultural authorities may be appropriate.

(20) When a student raises an objection and is unable to articulate ethical, religious or cultural reasons for their objection the student should be offered assistance to resolve the matter. That assistance may include referral to counselling or other appropriate resources.

(21) When a conscientious objection has been raised and an alternative is not provided (for the reasons allowed by this Policy) counselling the student to change subject or course may be necessary.

## Appeals

(22) Where a student is of the opinion that a conscientious objection has not been adequately addressed or a sufficient adjustment has not been made available that student should raise the matter with the relevant Subject Coordinator in the first instance. If the matter cannot be resolved by the Subject Coordinator the student may submit a formal complaint to the Students' Complaints Office or obtain advice and assistance from the University Ombudsman.

## Section 5 - Definitions

(23) For the purpose of this Policy and Procedure:

- a. Conscientious objection: a genuinely held, enduring and considered ethical, cultural or religious conviction that an action or proposed action is morally wrong. Conscientious objections are independent of fear, personal advantage, convenience, and preference.
- b. Inherent requirement: essential requirement of a course that students must satisfy if they are to be granted credit for that course. (Note that some inherent requirements may be quite general and require study or the development of skills relating a wide range of contexts. For example an inherent requirement may refer to 'diverse cultures in Australia').

## Status and Details

<b>Status</b>	Current
<b>Effective Date</b>	15th November 2016
<b>Review Date</b>	1st April 2017
<b>Approval Authority</b>	Academic Board
<b>Approval Date</b>	15th November 2016
<b>Expiry Date</b>	Not Applicable
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