



FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IMPACTS ON CAMPUS CULTURE GUIDANCE NOTE

WHAT ARE FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IMPACTS ON CAMPUS CULTURE?

Foreign interference is an issue that can have deep and personal impacts on campus culture. It can negatively impact university staff and students and impose enduring impacts on university culture and reputation. **The impact on universities from foreign interference includes:**

- Risks to physical and mental health of students and staff.
- Risks to a university's ability to provide a safe and welcoming environment for their students and staff.
- Compromise of academic freedom and freedom of speech, and the ability to deliver critical and open education opportunities.
- Associated reputational risks to the university, including for students, staff and researchers.

Foreign interference on university campuses can include foreign powers or their proxies seeking to inappropriately influence course content, research directions, and staff and student actions. **Foreign interference targeted at universities, their staff and students can manifest in different ways, including:**

- Threats, intimidation, or harassment of students or university staff, either online or in person.
- Online disinformation campaigns through social media.
- Stalking and unwanted physical or electronic surveillance.
- Censorship or self-censorship to avoid harassment or being reported to a foreign actor.
- Coercion through threatening family or friends overseas.
- Attempts to covertly influence how topics are perceived, including interference with discussion on campus.

WHAT TO CONSIDER FOR YOUR STUDENTS AND STAFF

Global engagement and sharing of ideas between people is a fundamental strength of Australian universities and supports the world leading research and innovation that Australian universities are known for. Further, the success of our universities is premised upon academic integrity, freedom of speech and value in diversity. Therefore, it is important that mitigation responses to foreign interference are balanced with these fundamental elements of the learning environment and do not impinge upon Australian values.

- Responses to foreign interference should reduce the ability of foreign actors to undertake foreign interference activities, in a way that does not target or demonise individuals or groups based on their country of origin.
- Actions that result in racism or negative sentiment to any group are counter-productive to maintaining a collaborative campus culture and to Australian values. Welcoming and inclusive Australian campuses also act to counter racial discrimination and promote the contributions of international students and staff.
- The onus is on us to listen and understand what a supportive and comprehensive response looks like from the perspective of university students and staff.
- Better responses will be informed by the student population. For example, understand what domestic and international students wish to gain from their university experiences and understand students are concerned about when it comes to foreign interference.

ON-CAMPUS COUNTERING FOREIGN INTERFERENCE CONSIDERATIONS FRAMEWORK

This framework outlines key actions, behaviours or responses that universities could consider in order to combat foreign interference on campus. Universities are encouraged to use this resource in conjunction with their own risk management policies and procedures.

Key Theme	Consideration
Raising Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how to introduce the issue of foreign interference to students and staff in a way that supports their understanding and awareness of indicators that foreign interference could be occurring. Consider if your university population is appropriately informed that foreign interference activities are unacceptable on campus, and aware of the consequences. Actions may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying opportunities to discuss behavioural expectations and consequences of misconduct with students and student associations, and support staff to facilitate those discussions. Considering if your messaging is inclusive for culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Discussing foreign interference issues with teaching and research staff to explain university policy and reporting mechanisms. Consider how to demonstrate the university's commitment to freedom of speech and academic freedom on an ongoing basis. Consider the approach to discussing sensitive topics in class. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outlining behavioural expectations upfront Allowing alternatives to group work or discussions Implementing rules about class recordings Enhanced monitoring of online discussion forums. Consider engaging with student groups to investigate how the university can support students encountering foreign interference. Consider engaging with the eSafety Commissioner to ensure student support services address emerging forms of online intimidation and harassment.
Reporting Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review whether existing mechanisms for complaints about bullying, harassment, intimidation, or other threats are fit for purpose for foreign interference threats. Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementing a secure contact mechanism (e.g., encrypted messaging or email) for reporting. Allowing the reporting system to accept anonymous reports. Allowing staff to report issues on behalf of students and implementing a protocol for responding to reports made by third parties. Consider having multiple mechanisms in place to receive reports or complaints, recognising some people may prefer speaking to someone in person or reporting anonymously. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There may be value in having a 'no wrong door' approach. Consider that sometimes reports or disclosures may come through trusted personal relationships. Know when to escalate reports to law enforcement and/or to the National Security Hotline or the Notifiable Incidents, Threats or Reportable Observations (NITRO) portal.
University Response	<p>Responses to threatening, harassing, bullying, or intimidating behaviours will be context dependent and (if they do not meet the threshold of police action) at the discretion of the institution. However, potential responses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education to make the student aware the conduct is inappropriate. Warning to the individuals involved in the conduct. Senior officials from the university publicly acknowledging serious incidents to clearly articulate expectations and offer support. Support for the affected individuals including information about internal and external appropriate counselling, security, and health services. Consider if foreign interference and threatening behaviour violates existing codes of conduct or university policies and if your institution is able to appropriately respond. Consider having clear lines of approval and action with policies and protocols clearly indicating who is responsible for each step of the response. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider providing clear and transparent information about navigating the university reporting and investigation process, and regular and timely communication about the process and its resolution. Consider establishing a secure central repository for disclosures and formal reports.