

Staff and Student Professional Boundaries

What are professional boundaries?

Professional boundaries are an essential part of maintaining appropriate relationships between staff and students. They exist where staff hold a position of power relative to a student. Staff who engage and interact with students in the delivery of their role with the University hold a position of influence, assumed trust, and power relative to students. Staff must exercise their own judgement and common sense in navigating appropriate interactions with students. It is not the responsibility of the student to set appropriate boundaries.

Behavioural guidance:

- Always deal with students in a way that is open and transparent. For example, ensure meetings with students are held at the University in appropriate settings. Meetings should be held during business hours only and not behind a fully closed door.
- Only communicate with students via the university staff and student email accounts and telephone, and official social media channels.
- If you communicate with a student in a telephone call it is preferred practice to provide the student with a written summary of the conversation to ensure there is a record of the communication.
- Ensure written and oral communications with students are conveyed in a professional manner. Always remember communications sent to a student or a colleague about a student may be disclosed to a student or their legal representative in some circumstances (e.g., Right to Information process).
- Maintain appropriate physical and emotional distance from students. If students require counselling or support refer them to UQ's [student support services](#).

What to avoid:

- Engaging with students on social media sites e.g., Facebook, Snapchat and TikTok.
- Providing your personal mobile phone number to a student, particularly an undergraduate student. Sometimes it may be unavoidable (for example, organising conferences or field trips). Sharing personal phone numbers with students should always be for communicating for university purposes and never for social reasons.
- Entering friendships or social interactions with students you teach or supervise, as this may lead to close relationships and potentially favouritism/bias (sometimes unknowingly), or alternatively may be seen by others as favouritism or bias. Having both a professional relationship and a personal friendship with a student can make it difficult to avoid bias or a conflict of interest.
- Meeting with a student at a private residence, irrespective of whether this is authorised as a place of work.
- Social events with students you teach or supervise, that are not University authorised events.
- Travelling alone in your private vehicle with a student.
- Offering, borrowing, or accepting money or other gifts from a student or otherwise having a financial interest with a student.

[The University of Queensland Acceptable Behaviour towards Students Procedure](#) outlines the standards expect of Leadership, Staff and Contractors with respect to Professional Boundaries and Intimate Relationships with Students. The [Acceptable Behaviour towards Students Guideline](#) provides practical and illustrative guidance that supports the interpretation and application of the procedure.