



What UNSW Expects of Sessional Teachers

Sessional teachers play a critical role in helping students achieve the desired learning outcomes of their University courses. It is sessional teachers who do most to create an environment that encourages learning. For many students, particularly undergraduates, sessional teachers are the personal face of the University.

Sessional teachers at UNSW are not a uniform group. They are employed for a number of different purposes and in a variety of contexts. Apart from teaching in lectures, tutorials and laboratories, your duties may also include online development, writing course materials and supervision. You may also have some responsibility for planning and developing course units and assessing student work. Clarify what your role is with your supervisor in your contract at the time of your appointment.

Expectations and responsibilities

Below, we describe some of the people and units you will interact with, and their different expectations and responsibilities:

- **Students**
- **Supervisor or Coordinator**
- **Colleagues**
- **School**
- **Faculty**
- **UNSW**
- **Yourself**

Students

Teaching requires careful planning, monitoring of student progress, assessing students' work, providing feedback and evaluating your own effectiveness. As a teacher you are responsible for creating a good learning environment. This requires a clear understanding of the principles and practices of teaching and learning in higher education.

One of the most important things teachers do for a student is provide relevant, effective and timely feedback, so that students can manage their learning effectively. This is only possible if you get to know the students in your class. Create a classroom atmosphere that is inviting, stimulating and non-threatening; encourage student interaction and friendships; be aware of the available University student services; and refer students when necessary.

According to research, students expect from their teachers:

- clear statements of what they are expected to achieve
- constructive feedback on their work, in particular what can be done to improve it
- fair grading and an explanation of the grades awarded
- respect for their ideas and efforts
- encouragement and reassurance from time to time
- critical but constructive comments and advice, offered with concern for their feelings.

Students themselves are obliged to contribute to the creation and maintenance of effective learning environments. They do this by:

- collaborating with other students
- respecting the viewpoints of others
- being reflective, creative, open-minded and receptive to new ideas
- actively participating in discussion and debate
- seeking support and guidance from staff when necessary
- taking responsibility for their own movement towards intellectual independence
- complying with the conventions of academic scholarship, e.g. following anti-plagiarism guidelines
- providing considered feedback to the University and its staff on the quality of teaching and University services.

In addition, teachers have a general responsibility for student welfare—students' emotional, social and intellectual wellbeing is your concern, as well as their conduct and behaviour while in your classes.

Supervisor or coordinator

To satisfy the needs of both the students and your supervisor or coordinator, you need to know what is expected of you. Meet with your supervisor before you start classes and discuss this in detail. In general, sessional academic staff are expected to perform to a satisfactory standard in:

- teaching in accordance with the curriculum and topic for which they are engaged
- attending promptly to administrative and assessment requirements
- fulfilling the School's expectations with regard to student consultation.

At the end of the teaching period for which you are employed, your supervisor will assess your overall performance.

Use these **Checklists** to help you make the most of your supervisor meetings. The more information you gather at the start, the more confident and better prepared you will be.

Colleagues

Few students learn from a single teacher. You are most likely part of team responsible for the delivery of your course. As such, you have collegial responsibility to work with the goals and values of others in your school. Keep communication channels open, through email, attendance at formal School or course meetings or informal contact

with others who work on your course. Remember, you are part of a team. Colleagues share your responsibilities and can often help with difficulties.

School

As sub-sections of Faculties, Schools are often organised around knowledge disciplines (accounting, pathology, mathematics), reflecting the discipline expectations and standards or conventions. You will need to become familiar with those conventions through interactions with your colleagues and supervisors. Mentors are particularly effective in communicating the long-term School expectations of teachers.

Your responsibilities at the School level include:

- attending classes
- starting and ending classes on time
- making up any cancelled classes
- keeping office hours
- keeping accurate records
- handing back assignments within a reasonable length of time
- being available for consultations with students at specific times each week.
- attending staff meetings in connection with the subject. Sessional academic staff are encouraged but not required to attend Departmental, School or Unit meetings.
- the health and safety of your students. Familiarise yourself with the University's **Occupational Health and Safety Policies** and the general and specific health and safety issues in your discipline.

Faculty

Each discipline has its own methods and guidelines. You are responsible for maintaining reasonable standards of conduct for your students and also for helping them to meet these standards. This can be difficult at first as you try to understand what you can reasonably expect of others. Ask your supervisor or Head of Department about Faculty-specific and departmental policies and procedures.

UNSW

The letter notifying you of your University appointment will include a description of your position. This instrument of appointment will contain such details as:

- your classification, level and salary on commencement
- whether the appointment is on a full-time or part-time basis
- specific information about days, times and times of the year for which the appointment is made
- the length and terms of any probation period that applies to your employment
- your duties and reporting relationships, relevant to the position.

You have a responsibility to become familiar with UNSW policies and the code of conduct.

The **UNSW Code of Conduct** relates to the integrity and ethical behavior of all staff in their dealing with students,

each other and the wider community.

UNSW policies include:

- intellectual property
- fraud and corruption
- equal employment opportunities
- occupational health and safety
- drug and alcohol use
- workplace bullying
- privacy

Yourself

Finally, you are responsible to yourself as a professional.

The first few weeks of sessional teaching will pass quickly, filled with many issues and concerns about your students and your performance as a teacher. Do take time in these first weeks to reflect on your role and how you can manage its demands. Before you start teaching, write yourself a short statement describing your course and how you approach student learning. Ask yourself: What are my students learning and how will I help them achieve the course outcomes? Return to this statement at the end of the first session to see how things have changed. This provides a sound base for **Reflective Practice**.

Take care of your health, both physical and mental. Like the students, you will also tire as the session progresses and the focus of your efforts grows from preparation to also include marking. Monitor your **Time Management** and stress levels. Familiarise yourself with the **Support Services** available to support you as a staff member at UNSW.

Importantly, maintain relationships and dialogue with your supervisor and colleagues. Don't let issues accumulate to the point where they become unmanageable; discuss and address them as they arise.

The Role of the Tutor

Tim talks about the role of the tutor in the tutorial meeting.

Reference

James, R. and Baldwin, G. (1997). *Tutoring and Demonstrating: A Guide for the University of Melbourne*. Melbourne: Centre for the Study of Higher Education.

What UNSW Expects of Sessional Teachers

Document Version Date 04/04/2018

UNSW CRICOS Provider Code: 00098G

<https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/what-unsw-expects-sessional-teachers>