



THE SYDNEY UNIVERSITY POSTGRADUATE REPRESENTATIVE ASSOCIATION (SUPRA) STUDENT ADVICE AND ADVOCACY OFFICER POLICY

POLICY AND OPERATING PROCEDURE	
MANUAL	Human Resources
POLICY	Student Advice and Advocacy Officer Policy ¹
SCOPE	Student Advice and Advocacy Officers & Clients
RESPONSIBILITY	Advocacy Coordinator
LAST REVIEW	July 2013

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the SUPRA Staff Enterprise Agreement and Duty Statement of the Student Advice and Advocacy Officer role.

1: The role of SUPRA in casework and advocacy work

SUPRA provides an advice, advocacy, casework, and referral service that is available to all Sydney University postgraduates. The aim of the service is to inform, empower and resource students to assert their rights, resolve disputes and assist students to achieve the most beneficial outcomes for their circumstances. The advocacy service operates in a framework of support and respect for the

¹ Passed by SUPRA Council at a meeting of 15 August 2013

student's control over his/her own life, and the student's ability to make decisions in light of their own beliefs and values. The service provides confidential one-to-one advocacy for individual students, as well as providing input and feedback to the organisation's broader advocacy imperatives by monitoring trends and statistics arising out of the service's casework database.

2: Student Advice And Advocacy Officers

2.1 Within the organisational objectives and values of SUPRA, within reasonable capacity to provide service, and consistent with SUPRA's Safer Spaces Policy:

- A)** SUPRA employs Student Advice and Advocacy Officers (henceforth SAAOs) to assist students.
- B)** SAAOs shall provide to the best of their ability, and within the limits of SUPRA's resources, accurate, timely and appropriate advice and advocacy services.
- C)** SAAOs will respect the student's right to self-determination.
- D)** SAAOs will work within the stated aims of SUPRA, contribute to the development of casework policy and other relevant policies, and work towards the best possible standards of service to its members.

3: Conduct

3.1 SAAOs must maintain a high standard of professional and personal conduct whilst assisting students and providing casework and advocacy services.

3.2 DISCRIMINATION

In providing this service, SAAOs will not discriminate against students on any grounds, including but not limited to: race, disability, age, gender, sexuality, religion or political beliefs. Furthermore, SAAOs will actively work with and facilitate the participation of disadvantaged groups.

3.3 CAPACITY TO PRACTICE

SAAOs must act with integrity and impartiality. The SAAO must not undertake any casework or advocacy if their ability to do so is impaired. This is including, but not limited to, impairment by alcohol or drugs, or if there are personal circumstances that may affect the SAAOs capacity or impartiality.

3.3 PROFESSIONALISM

SAAOs will not exploit relationships with students or professional relationships for personal advantage or use unethical processes.

3.4 SAAOs will commit to using accountable and transparent processes and adhering to the established protocols and procedures.

3.5 SAAOs must refer to an appropriate service those people with issues, disputes or grievances whose needs or requests are beyond their training.

4: Intake

- 4.1** Intake refers to initial contact by the student, whether it is by drop-in to the service, via phone, via e-mail, or approach at outreach and other SUPRA events.
- 4.2** Appointments are to be made by either the SAAOs themselves or relevant administrative staff.
- 4.3** Students will be required to become SUPRA subscribers, by giving the organisation their contact details, in order to access ongoing service from a SAAO.
- 4.4** If a student requests a preference for a specific SAAO (for example, based on gender), every effort will be made to fulfil that request.
- 4.5** Requests for assistance from former students, prospective students, and non students will be considered on a case by case basis, with the principle being that they should not normally be able to obtain assistance, and where exceptions are made there is a reasonable rationale and current students are normally given priority in accessing service.
- 4.6** All initial contact enquiries will be responded to within one working day, where possible.
- 4.7** SAAOs will rotate 'on-call' and 'drop in' days, so there is always a SAAO available to see any students who 'drops in' during designated drop in times, and a SAAO allocated to respond as appropriate to enquiries made at all other times.

4.8 If a SAAO is unable to take on any more cases, they will make arrangements to refer other incoming students to another caseworker.

5: Outline of Service

5.1 Upon initial contact with a student, the SAAO will outline:

- A)** Their commitment to privacy & confidentiality consistent with the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998;
- B)** The limits of the SAAO service (for example, not providing legal, migration or counselling support or advice).

6: Development of Knowledge

6.1 SAAOs will receive induction and basic training regarding the service and the University before commencing casework and should receive ongoing professional development.

6.2 SAAOs will participate in education programmes on issues that will enhance their advocacy and case work skills, including, but not limited to, training in: sector-wide changes and trends; advocacy and conflict resolution skills; welfare issues that may affect students.

6.3 SAOs will also monitor and update their own knowledge by keeping up to date with recent developments via research and relevant reports. They will also continue the development of their own knowledge by maintaining and participating in networks with colleagues within SUPRA, within the university, and from other similar student organisations at other Australian or international universities, and relevant community groups.

7: Record Keeping

7.1 SAOs should record information in an impartial and accurate manner taking care to:

- A)** Report only essential and relevant details;
- B)** Not use emotive or derogatory language;
- C)** Acknowledge subjective opinions; and
- D)** Protect the privacy of all those involved.

7.2 Records should include:

- A)** Details of the dates of contact and sessions;
- B)** Details of the facts of the case;
- C)** Details of phone calls, letters, e-mails and any other follow-up to matters discussed; and
- D)** Details of casework and/or advocacy resolution if applicable.

7.3 Records should be kept in a neat and chronological order.

- 7.4** Should records be passed on to another person or organisation only relevant information shall be made available and this will only be done with the express permission of the student.
- 7.5** records will be stored in a secure cabinet or storage area at all times.
- 7.6** Records will be kept in SUPRA for a period of seven years.
- 7.7** After a period of seven years paper records will be burnt or shredded and computer records will be wiped.
- 7.8** Students have the right to view their own records.

8: Confidentiality

- 8.1** SAAs must not divulge identifying personal and private information about a student case unless:
- A)** The student or their legal representative gives written permission for that information to be released;
 - B)** The release of information will protect people from harm; or
 - C)** It is legally required that the information be released.

8.2 All students accessing the advocacy service have the right to trust the privacy and confidentiality of their information and to the responsible use of their information. This involves:

- A)** Determining what information and to whom the person consents their information be released to; and
- B)** Treating information obtained from relatives or friends of students in the same manner as information obtained by the person themselves.

9: Communication

9.1 Without breaching the confidentiality requirements of Section 8, SAAOs will regularly communicate issues and trends arising out of casework to SUPRA Council. This communication will occur in three ways:

- A)** Regular communication between SAAOs
- B)** Regular communication with SUPRA Council
- C)** Communication with members on broader issues through publications and the website

10: Closing of Cases and Termination of Service

10.1 SAAOs should reasonably anticipate the termination or interruption of services to student clients (for example, if the SAAO is taking leave or working hours alter) and notify them appropriately. The SAAO will seek the transfer, referral, or continuation of services in relation to the student's needs and preferences. Casework that continues beyond the employment

of the particular staff member should be transferred to another SAAO. Student clients shall be informed of this transfer.

10.2 Before closing a case the SAAO will ascertain whether the student client needs any further assistance. Where a decision has been made to close the case the SAAO should arrange for any post-casework support as necessary, provide appropriate referrals, and close and archive the file.

10.3 In special circumstances, it may not be appropriate for a SAAO to continue assisting a student. These circumstances may include:

- A)** Where the student's grievance is beyond the capacity of SUPRA expertise and authority.
- B)** Where the SAAO feels all reasonable avenues to assist the student have been pursued.
- C)** Where the student has behaved inappropriately and/or engaged in conduct that has threatened the health and safety of SUPRA staff or postgraduate students.
- D)** Where the student has failed to provide information necessary for pursuing the case.

10.4 In such circumstances, the SAAO will inform the student of the reasons for the termination of service. The SAAO will also inform the SUPRA President of this decision if it is as a result of circumstances involving inappropriate student conduct. If the student seeks an appeal against this decision, they can invoke the complaints process (see below) which falls under the authority of the SUPRA President.

11: Feedback from Student Clients

- 11.1 Once a case has been closed SAAOs will provide student clients with anonymous feedback surveys to complete and return to SUPRA's Admin Officer or via the designated email address in order to monitor client satisfaction and seek suggestions on how to improve the service.

12: Debriefing

- 12.1 SUPRA shall ensure that all staff are given the opportunity to debrief.
- 12.2 Debriefing shall occur in a quiet, confidential place, and can occur between staff members who are recognised as SAAOs under Section 2 of this policy, or appropriate staff from another relevant organisation.
- 12.3 All SAAOs have access to and are encouraged to use confidential external professional supervision services.
- 12.4 All debriefing sessions shall be confidential and ensure that the rights of student clients are upheld and protected.

13: Complaints

13.1 SUPRA recognises the right of all students to make a complaint if they have reason to be dissatisfied with the advocacy services SUPRA is providing.

13.2 SUPRA is committed to:

- A) Treating the complaint seriously;
- B) Dealing with the matter promptly;
- C) Maintaining the privacy and rights of all individuals concerned.

13.3 In the first instance, SUPRA hopes that complaints should be resolved, in most cases, through informal discussion and consultation.

13.4 Complaints may concern, but are not limited to:

- A) The ending of assistance; or
- B) Confidentiality issues; or
- C) Inappropriate behaviour; and
- D) Conflicts of interest.

13.5 COMPLAINTS PROCESS

If a student has a complaint about the assistance given by a SAAO the following steps should be followed:

13.6 INFORMAL RESOLUTION

Where possible, the student should discuss the complaint with the staff member involved and attempt to resolve the matter. The student should be given the option of being referred to another SAAO without prejudice. The SUPRA President should be informed by the SAAO of the complaint.

13.7 If the student still expresses dissatisfaction, the SAAO should give a copy of this policy to the dissatisfied student and advise them that they may make a complaint to the SUPRA President.

13.8 FORMAL RESOLUTION

If the matter remains unresolved or the student feels they are unable to approach the staff member concerned the student should be directed to the SUPRA President who will attempt to resolve the complaint. At this time, the President should give the student a copy of this policy if they have not already received one.

13.9 The President will consider the complaint seriously and in strictest confidence. In the case of a written complaint a copy of the complaint will be provided to the SAAO involved. The President should discuss the matter

with the student and SAAO concerned separately. The President will undertake to investigate the complaint before making a determination.²

13.10 In the case of a conflict of interest involving the President, the SUPRA Vice-President will fulfil the role of the President in relation to these procedures. In the case of a conflict of interest concerning the Vice-President, the SUPRA Secretary, or a delegated authority from Council, will fulfil the role of the President as per these procedures.

13.11 The President, or delegated authority as above, should then make a decision regarding appropriate action to be taken. This includes, but is not limited to, one or more of the following:

- A)** Refer the student back to the same SAAO;
- B)** Refer the student to a SAAO not involved with the complaint;
- C)** Make an appropriate referral;
- D)** Take no further action about the complaint.

13.12 The President should provide reasons for any recommendations or decisions made in respect of the matter to the staff member and student. This process should be completed within fifteen (15) working days.

13.13 Both the staff member and the student have the right to notify and have the issue considered by SUPRA Council. In this case, any submissions should be in writing.

² The President may wish to obtain external legal advice and assistance in investigating the matter.

SUPRA shall consider all matters regarding complaints *in camera*.

13.14 Copies of all documents regarding the complaint should be retained in the student's case.

14: Version History

Version	Description of changes	Author	Effective Date
1	Initial Policy		September 2007
2	Revised Policy	Advocacy Team	July 2013