



**university of victoria**  
**students' society**

# Safer Spaces Policy

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## 1. Purpose

The UVSS is committed to creating safer spaces in our centres, meetings, and events, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, age, race, or religion. We do not tolerate harassment in any form.

**This policy applies to all users of UVSS spaces, which includes physical and online spaces, events, meetings, and resources, clubs and course unions, SUB businesses, Board members, and advocacy and affiliated groups.** Anyone who violates this policy may be sanctioned or removed from these spaces, temporarily or permanently, at the discretion of the relevant group and in consultation with the UVSS Excluded Managers and the Executive Committee.

Some UVSS groups or businesses may have additional guidelines in place, which will be made clearly available to all users. Members and space users of UVSS spaces are responsible for knowing and abiding by the 12 guidelines outlined in Section 2 of this policy and any other specific guidelines or policies of specific groups.

A safer space is created when participants work towards the safety for all people and actively challenge all forms of oppression. We define safety as freedom from oppression and harassment, as outlined in the University of Victoria's *Discrimination and Harassment Policy*.

We recognize that systemic oppression and power structures are pervasive in all spaces. The Student Union Building, as well as the University of Victoria, is located on unceded Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ territories. This land the UVSS exists on was originally a gathering place for camas bulb harvesting, as well as for trade and commerce. As organizations, we operate within a context of ongoing settler colonization and are complicit in this ongoing process.

Decolonization is an integral part of creating safer spaces. Allowing dominant power structures and systems of oppression to be recreated and reaffirmed creates spaces that exclude people who experience those oppressions and we become complicit in actively harming them. For this reason, the creation of safer spaces is prioritized.

This policy provides some guidelines for creating safer spaces through mutually respectful dialogue. We must all act intentionally to create safer spaces. All people who access UVSS spaces and events are asked to uphold these guidelines and our values of anti-oppression.

## 2. Expectations of UVSS Members and Space Users

As people who access the resources available at the UVSS, we are accountable to each other. Each person shares responsibility to create safer spaces and create a welcoming environment. We collectively have the responsibility to uphold the UVSS' anti-oppression policies and any policies unique to each UVSS group. In order to uphold these responsibilities, we require all users to adhere to the following guidelines when accessing UVSS spaces.

**Guidelines for users of UVSS spaces:**

1. **Practice consent:** We prioritize consent and are survivor-centred. Before you touch anyone or discuss sensitive topics, ask if other people in the space are comfortable with that. We cannot assume that our physical and emotional boundaries are the same as other people's.
2. **Be aware of your privileges:** Think about how your words, opinions, and feelings are influenced and who they might exclude or harm.
  - a. If you are seeking resources to help you in this process, contact advocacy group coordinators.
3. **Calling each other in:** If you have acted or spoken harmfully (even if unintentionally), someone may bring this up with you to begin a conversation of how your actions have been harmful. If this happens, listen and reflect on what they are saying.
4. **Prioritize ongoing learning:** None of us have all the answers and knowledge. If you do not understand something, ask someone else in the space or UVSS resources like advocacy groups. We are each responsible for our own learning, but others may be able to help point us to helpful resources.
5. **Community accountability:** When someone is harmed, we aim to hold ourselves to account and find ways to heal, learn, and move forward together.
  - a. You can speak to others in the space or UVSS staff if you would like information or support to work through an issue you have experienced or observed.
6. **Speak from personal experiences,** avoid speaking on the personal experiences of others, and avoid speaking on behalf of others.
  - a. Use "I" statements to share reactions or experiences (ie. "I feel..." "I experience...")
7. **Don't make assumptions** about others' identity or experiences.
8. **Be mindful of how long and often we speak** so that everyone has a chance to contribute.
9. **Share beliefs, opinions, and points of view rather than judgements.**
10. **Oppressive language and clothing is unacceptable** and will not be tolerated.
11. Adhere to each individual group's community agreements and anti-oppression policies.
  - a. Please approach coordinators and staff people supervising respective spaces with questions about these policies, or an Excluded Manager with questions about the UVSS' anti-oppression policy.
12. **Be respectful of each group's space,** including the physical space the group is located and the space the group uses to put on events.

Oppressive behaviour that makes others feel unsafe will not be tolerated.

**Examples of oppressive behaviours include, but are not limited to:**

- Offensive, derogatory, threatening, aggressive, or silencing comments (related to gender, sexuality, disability, physical appearance, language, body size, age, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and more)
- Deliberate misgendering or use of 'dead' or rejected names
- Violence, intimidation, stalking

- Wearing offensive attire including (but not limited to) hate symbols or culturally appropriative pieces
- Persistent, abusive, or non-constructive criticism
- Persistent micro-aggressions in the form of comments, jokes, material, or otherwise
- Non-consensual photography or recording
- Physical contact without consent
- Inappropriate social contact or unwelcome sexual attention
- Advocating or encouraging any of the above behaviour

The UVSS prioritizes marginalized people's safety over privileged people's comfort.

**We reserve the right to not act on complaints regarding:**

- 'Reverse'-isms, including 'reverse racism', 'reverse sexism', and 'cisphobia'
  - 'Reverse racism' and 'reverse sexism' are myths that allow folks with privilege to appropriate anti-racist and anti-sexist language to claim that they are the victims, thereby avoiding accountability and responsibility for their privilege. Since racism and sexism require systems of power to function, those with the relative power in those situations (e.g. White folks and male-identified folks, respectively), are not the victims of racism or sexism.
- Reasonable communication of boundaries, such as "leave me alone", "go away", or "I'm not discussing this with you"
- Communicating in a 'tone' you don't find congenial
- People being held accountable for being racist, sexist, cissexist, ableist, or otherwise oppressive behaviour or assumptions

**3. Reporting Harassment, Oppressive, and/or Harmful Behaviour**

We encourage people to contact campus security or an Excluded Manager at any time, if they feel unsafe or notice another person who is being made to feel unsafe. If people feel unsafe in a club, course union, or Professional Development Union, please contact the Director of Student Affairs ([affairs@uvss.ca](mailto:affairs@uvss.ca)). Being made to feel "unsafe" means that you are experiencing discomfort or harassment due to oppressive behaviours or for other reasons not necessarily listed caused by another individual or group of individuals.

If someone has done something that violates this policy and you were not comfortable bringing it up at the time or want to discuss it further, you can report issues by:

- a. Speaking to the appropriate person of the space through the respective social media channels or via email.
- b. Contacting Excluded Managers (contact information can be found in Section 7 of this policy).
- c. Anonymously reporting via a letter outlining the issue, mailed to the above address or placed in the mailbox of an Excluded Manager in the UVSS General Office (Student Union Building B128).

- d. Filing a complaint with EQHR under UVic's Discrimination and Harassment Policy (GV0205). Please note that the UVSS and EQHR are separate entities, and thus the procedures listed in this policy differ. In situations where a complaint has been both filed with EQHR and reported to a UVSS group, the UVSS will submit to all processes of UVic's policy GV0205. All students and UVic employees are advised they have the right to confidential consultation with the Director of EQHR.

If the person who is harassing you is a staff member, please contact a UVSS Excluded Manager.

Please note that anonymous reports cannot be followed up with you directly, unless you provide contact information. However, we will take all anonymous reports seriously.

**Other useful numbers:**

- Emergencies: 911
- UVic Campus Security: 250-721-7599
- Vancouver Island Crisis Line: 1-888-494-3888
- Victoria Sexual Assault Centre: 250-383-3232
- Men's Trauma Centre: 250-381-6367
- KUU-US Crisis Line (Indigenous specific): 1-800-588-8717
- Anti-Violence Project (AVP): 250-721-8080

**4. Conflict Resolution**

If a person engages in oppressive or harassing behaviour, they will be asked to stop and expected to comply immediately. If the person continues to engage in such behaviour, staff people supervising the space retain the right to take necessary action to keep the event, meeting, or space a welcoming and safer space for everyone.

All incidents will be addressed on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the respective UVSS group and Excluded Managers. All resolutions are at the discretion of the staff people supervising the space, in consultation with Excluded Management and the Executive Committee. **Potential actions can include:**

- a. Speaking to those involved to resolve the issue.
- b. Providing educational resources to the person engaging in the harmful behaviour.
- c. In cases of someone wearing offensive attire, you will be asked to remove the offensive piece(s).
- d. Discussing the issue with an Excluded Manager and taking actions recommended by them.
- e. Contacting the Anti-Violence Project or other local organizations for assistance and/or mediation.
- f. Assisting the person experiencing harassment in submitting a complaint to EQHR, if the issue falls under UVic's Discrimination and Harassment Policy.

- g. In extreme cases, the person engaging in the harmful behaviour may be asked to leave the space, event, or meeting for an outlined period of time.

**Conflict Resolution Timeline:**

- a. The staff person supervising the space and/or UVSS Excluded Managers shall have a limit of two weeks to take initial steps in working to resolve the safer spaces concern. This initial action shall include following up with the individual who made the complaint (unless it was made anonymously) and beginning to take steps to address the situation, which may or may not include an action listed above.
- b. The staff person supervising the space and/or UVSS Excluded Managers shall make every effort to resolve the complaint within 30 days. Resolution can include any of the above actions listed, dependent on the consent of all parties involved.
- c. All members are responsible for creating a safer space. This is a learning process for everyone involved. People will make mistakes, and those who are self-reflective of their oppressive behaviour, who have taken actions towards understanding and implicating their own privilege and power in perpetuating systems of oppression, and who have taken actions towards working against these systems and unlearning their oppressive behaviours will be welcomed back into the space by the appropriate staff person supervising the space.

If you have been asked to leave the space because you engaged in oppressive behaviour, intentional or unintentional, and have not been provided with a timeline for when you can re-enter the space, please contact a relevant staff person before returning to discuss the incident and expectations of the safer spaces policy.

The UVSS will take all reasonable and appropriate action to ensure that confidentiality of all parties to a reported conflict is respected.

This policy shall not be used as a tool for removal of collective members/constituents based on personal issues. All concerns addressed must pertain to safer spaces at UVSS advocacy group spaces and events.

**5. Definitions**

**Harassment** is:

- a. Humiliating someone physically or verbally;
- b. Sexual harassment, as defined in UVic's Discrimination and Harassment Policy (GV0205);
- c. Threatening or intimidating behaviour towards someone; and/or
- d. Making abusive and demeaning comments about someone's disability, race, national or ethnic origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender, marital status, or other marginalized identity.

**Microaggressions** are:

- a. The everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.
- b. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment.
- c. Microaggressions are rooted in ideologies such as racism, classism, sexism, cissexism, ableism, ageism, heterosexism, colonialism, as well as other discriminatory belief systems. (Source: [Anti-Violence Project](#))

**Oppression** is:

- a. Institutionalised power that is historically formed and perpetuated over time that allows certain 'groups' of people to assume a dominant position over 'other groups' and this dominance is maintained and continued at an institutional level.
- b. This means oppression is built into institutions like government and education systems. It gives power and positions of dominance to some groups of people over other groups of people. (Source: [Anti-Violence Project](#))

**Anti-Oppression** is:

- a. The process of making one's views of the world large enough to include everyone—looking for ways to make connections among different people's struggles and finding ways to think about how issues affect different people in different ways.
- b. It means not just not accepting 'norms,' 'isms' and oppressive dynamics, but actively working to make the invisible visible, and challenging the systems that hold them in place.
- c. Also, an anti-oppression analysis acknowledges that all forms of oppression are linked and that the best way to organize against oppression is to take into account that all oppressions are linked. (Source: [Anti-Violence Project](#))

The following additional definitions shall apply in this document:

- a. "UVSS" refers to the University of Victoria Students' Society;
- b. "UVic" refers to the University of Victoria;
- c. "EQHR" refers to the Office of Equity and Human Rights at UVic;
- d. "SUB" refers to the Student Union Building;
- e. "Members" refers to members of the UVSS and/or community members accessing the SUB.

## **6. Background to the Policy**

### **What is a safer space?**

A safer space is a supportive, non-threatening environment that encourages open-mindedness, respect, a willingness to learn from others, as well as physical and mental safety. It is a space that is critical of the power structures that affect our everyday lives, and where power dynamics, backgrounds, and the effects of our behaviour on others are prioritized. It's a space that strives to respect and understand survivors' specific needs. Everyone who enters a safer space has a responsibility to uphold the guidelines of the space.

We use the term 'safer', recognizing that not everyone experiences spaces in the same way as others. Thus, any one set of guidelines established to create safety may not meet the requirements of everyone and there may be complications or lapses in fulfilling those guidelines in practice.

Generally, safer spaces are welcoming, engaging and supportive. Proactively creating safer spaces includes establishing guidelines for conditions that are not acceptable in a space and action plan(s) for what to do if those conditions arise. Safer space policies may address issues like hurtful language and behaviour (both within the space itself, and in patterns extending beyond activities of the space), violence, offensive attire, touching people without their consent, and other behaviour or language that may perpetuate oppression, including but not limited to, racism, colourism, xenophobia, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, transantagonism, ageism, fatphobia, ableism, or classism.

### **Why are 'safer' spaces valuable?**

If we profess to be concerned about issues of race, gender and sexuality, etc., we need to live our lives in a way that proactively seeks to subvert oppression, to undermine the very possibility that someone will feel discriminated against. We need to recognize that assault and abuse are also perpetrated by people who we know and love and share similar anti-oppression ideologies with. (Source: Coalition for Safer Spaces, 2010, <https://saferspacesnyc.wordpress.com/>)

## **7. Questions, Concerns, Feedback**

To report a concern about a business, advocacy or affiliated group, or UVSS staff person, please contact an Excluded Manager:

- Executive Director - [execdir@uvss.ca](mailto:execdir@uvss.ca)
- General Manager - [uvssgm@uvss.ca](mailto:uvssgm@uvss.ca)
- Human Resources and Administration Services Manager - [hradmin@uvss.ca](mailto:hradmin@uvss.ca)

To report a concern about a club, course union, or Professional Development Union, please contact the Director of Student Affairs at [affairs@uvss.ca](mailto:affairs@uvss.ca).

If you have questions about this safer space policy, email the UVSS Executive Director at [execdir@uvss.ca](mailto:execdir@uvss.ca).