

Academic Progression Mandatory Interview Guideline

Policy Supported:	<i>Academic Monitoring and Progression Policy</i>		
Procedure Supported:	<i>Academic Monitoring and Progression Procedure</i> <i>Academic Progression Mandatory Interview Procedure</i>		
Regulations Supported:	<i>Coursework Regulations</i>		
Audience:	Staff		
Contact Officer:	Manager Student Records	Phone:	See Campus Directory

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Preamble:

These guidelines provide support to Academic Chairs (or their academic nominees) responsible for conducting mandatory academic progression interviews and reaching decisions about students with unsatisfactory academic progression (i.e. students who have failed more than 50% of their units in two consecutive teaching periods).

Mandatory interviews are a key part of the University's Academic Progression Process, which is aimed at assisting struggling students to address their situation (study load, habits, choices, and/or personal circumstances) and become successful in their studies.

These guidelines directly supplement the [Academic Progression Mandatory Interview Procedure](#). They will help Academic Chairs or their nominees conduct the interview and reach fair and transparent decisions in relation to the outcome of Unsatisfactory Academic Progression. Acting outside these guidelines may constitute grounds for student appeal.

Throughout these guidelines 'Academic Chair' means "Academic Chair or their academic nominee" as provided for in the [Academic Monitoring and Progression Procedure](#).

Guidelines:

1. Purpose of the Interview

The purpose is to examine the reasons for a student's unsatisfactory academic progression and make a decision on whether the student should:

- be allowed a further opportunity to improve their performance; or
- be suspended from their course or major for a period of one trimester/semester.

And, as appropriate, to advise the student of:

- the outcomes of not addressing their unsatisfactory academic progression;
- the steps they can take to improve (which may involve changing study load or study habits, or seeking additional academic support from Student Advisors, or the Student Support Team);

- the options for changing their course or major;
- their study options while under suspension or exclusion, and
- their rights to appeal the decision.

The option of continuing to study other units while suspended from their course/major is intended to allow the student to try another discipline before committing to a transfer to another major; or to take academic skills units. It is not to allow students to simply maintain study while suspended and thereby avoid some of the consequences of their unsatisfactory academic performance.

It is a desirable outcome of the discussion that the student leaves the interview understanding and accepting the reasons for the Academic Chair's decision.

2. Know the relevant University legislation

The University's [Academic Monitoring and Progression Policy](#) governs academic progress. The [Academic Monitoring and Progression Procedure](#) provides additional information about the broader University progression process. Some Disciplines, courses or majors may have additional academic progress rules approved by Academic Council. Any such additional rules are published in the current version of the University Handbook. The Secretary to Academic Council can provide information about the relevant University legislation.

3. Provide a fair hearing

Any student who may be adversely impacted by a decision made by the University must be given a fair hearing before the decision is made. This is an essential component of natural justice or procedural fairness and is also the basis of good decision making.

In the context of determining an outcome for unsatisfactory academic progress this means that:

- (a) the student must be provided with the opportunity to explain their situation and participate in the process in a meaningful way; and
- (b) whilst the onus is on a student to present their case, if an Academic Chair determines that additional information is required to make an informed decision, the student must be given an opportunity to provide this information; and
- (c) an Academic Chair must act fairly and reasonably. Where necessary, it is reasonable to discuss a case with a colleague(s) to help establish what might constitute a fair and reasonable action.

4. Avoid bias

The decision made by the Academic Chair must be made without bias, actual or apprehended. This means that the decision itself should be based on objective criteria and not influenced by prejudice or preconceived notions. Consequently, an Academic Chair should arrive at similar decisions for similar situations. It also means that an Academic Chair should not assess an application in a case where they may have, or appear to have, a vested interest in the outcome (e.g. because they have close personal association with the student and/or a member of the student's family).

5. Consider the circumstances and their implications

In deciding the outcome of unsatisfactory academic progression, an Academic Chair must take into account all of the relevant facts that are available to them. Where there is evidence that the Academic Progress of the student has been affected by mitigating and/or aggravating circumstances, the Academic Chair must take these circumstances into consideration in reaching their decision. However,

the existence of mitigating or aggravating circumstances is not essential for a decision to allow a student a further opportunity to achieve satisfactory academic progress, although a student should at least have a realistic explanation of the reason for their unsatisfactory academic progress. Also, the existence of mitigating and aggravating circumstances does not necessarily mean that an Academic Chair should allow such an opportunity. The likelihood of future impact of any mitigating or aggravating or other circumstances should typically be a major factor in the decision of an Academic Chair. The potential for a particular circumstance to have an impact in the future might be reduced because the circumstance has abated and is unlikely to reoccur and/or because the student has taken steps to better deal with circumstance should it arise again.

The sorts of questions that an Academic Chair should consider when reaching a decision to allow a further opportunity to achieve satisfactory academic progress are:

- What are the circumstances and is the student able to provide evidence of the circumstances?
- What steps has the student undertaken to resolve or address the issues?
- Are the circumstances ongoing or likely to reoccur?
- What support mechanisms are in place to assist the student?
- Is the student likely to achieve satisfactory progress if permitted to continue their enrolment?
- Are there any additional support mechanisms that can assist the student?

Mitigating or aggravating circumstances in this context might include an extended physical or mental illness. They could also include exceptional personal circumstances such as (but not limited to) the breakdown of a relationship, financial hardship, bereavement, serious illness of a close friend or family member, or responsibilities as a caregiver. Supporting documents might be in the form of an explanatory letter from a medical or legal practitioner or a professional counsellor. Grievances about the objectives, content and/or assessment of a unit(s), or about the way in which a unit was taught, are not extenuating circumstances in this regard. Financial, visa or other personal implications associated with being suspended are also not extenuating circumstances in this regard.

Retrospective withdrawal

When interviewing the student, an Academic Chair should be alert to the possibility that the student may be eligible for retrospective withdrawal from one or more of the failed units. This is important for a number of reasons including that the student may no longer be deemed to have made unsatisfactory academic progress. Guidelines for retrospective withdrawal are available at:

<https://goto.murdoch.edu.au/RetrospectiveWithdrawal>

Academic Chairs should direct students who may be eligible for retrospective withdrawal to the University's guidelines for retrospective withdrawal and should proceed to provide a *qualified* decision on the outcome of unsatisfactory performance. The Academic Chair should not avoid making a decision in the expectation that the application for retrospective withdrawal will resolve the issue.

Following semester/trimester has commenced

Where the interview takes place after the student has already commenced study in the following semester/trimester the Academic Chair must consider the implications of suspending or adjusting the student's enrolment. In particular:

- if the student is an international or a transnational student, and there are formal consequences to changing their enrolment, these must be advised to the responsible officer; and
- if a decision to suspend the student is reached after the census date, the student is entitled to a grace period to improve their performance. This is particularly intended to provide for Trimester enrolments where the time period between trimesters is very short; and for other situations in which students' results are finalised very late.

Because satisfactory progress in the grace period will mean a suspension will not be actioned, Academic Chairs should review the student's enrolment for the grace period and may, with the student's agreement, authorise late withdrawal from units. Student Records needs to be advised as soon as practical, as in these circumstances the withdrawal will be adjusted to the census date so that there is no academic or financial penalty involved.

6. Explain how and why a decision was taken

The decision that an Academic Chair makes as a result of the interview is open to scrutiny. As such, in addition to providing a fair hearing, an Academic Chair must be able to demonstrate the basis for their decision. It is not enough to simply advise a student of the decision. An explanation of the basis for decision should include how the decision was reached, which relates to the information that the Academic Chair took into account when making the decision (e.g. the explanation may state that evidence of mitigating circumstances was taken into account). It should also include an explanation of why the decision was reached, which relates to the Academic Chair's assessment of the situation (e.g. the explanation may state that the Academic Chair has decided to suspend the student because there is evidence of long-standing marginal performance that the student has been unable to address).

Effective communication is an essential component of natural justice and can help to prevent complaints or help to deal with complaints more effectively when they do arise. Consequently, in relation to outcome of the interview, this means that both the decision and the basis for the decision must be effectively communicated to the student. This must be done in writing (by completing the proforma attached to the [Academic Progression Mandatory Interview Procedure](#) and providing the student with a copy.

7. Keep good records

The University has a [Recordkeeping Policy](#) which sets out the responsibilities of staff in relation to recordkeeping. In recording the outcome of a mandatory interview, Academic Chairs and any other staff involved should adhere to this policy.

Aside from the need to meet legislative obligations, good recordkeeping is essential because it enhances the transparency and accountability of the process; can help inform any future decisions relating to the student, and protects the University by providing a means to demonstrate how and why a decision was made. It also enables the University to respond efficiently and effectively to any requests for information under the *Freedom of Information Act 1992*. Any decision made in relation to unsatisfactory academic progress is open to scrutiny and the capacity to respond to any queries or complaints is compromised in the absence of good records.

To facilitate record-keeping, a Record of Academic Progression Interview and Academic Performance Plan has been developed for the use of students and staff members (attached to the [Academic Progression Mandatory Interview Procedure](#)).

When completed, a copy of the form should be sent to the student and the original sent to Student Records.

All transactions of communication with a student in relation to a mandatory interview (including email and any other correspondence with the student) must be kept for a period of 12 months. This also includes logging the dates of any phone calls and/or meetings with the student and making a brief summary of what transpired during the associated conversations. Staff must also respect the confidentiality of University records and the privacy of any personal information acquired during the process. Any confidential or private information obtained as a part of the application process should be retained for a period of 12 months and then disposed of in a manner that ensures confidentiality (e.g. via the confidential shredding service offered by the University).

8. Put into place an Academic Performance Plan (APP)

Academic Performance Plans provide the student with a record of the advice provided by the Academic Chair. An APP may include:

- advice about the enrolment conditions that a student must meet in a particular study period(s) in order to be permitted a further attempt at achieving satisfactory performance. For example, the Academic Chair may advise a student to repeat a specified unit(s) and/or to transfer to a different unit(s) and/or reduce the number of units in which they are enrolled; and
- advice about the support services the student should access.

An APP can be an effective way to manage an at risk student for a number of reasons. This includes (but is not limited to) the fact that an APP can be designed to help focus the attention of a student onto the problems they are expected to resolve. It is also advantageous in that, if the University advises a student to take a reduced study load via an APP, a domestic student may still be eligible for Centrelink support, and an international student may be able to vary their visa conditions, even if they are not enrolled full-time. Finally, in any future unsatisfactory progression outcomes, the APP and the advice the student did or did not follow through on, is available to inform the Academic Chair's decision.

The Academic Chair will ensure the details of the APP are suitable in the student's circumstances. The details of the APP must be effectively communicated to the student in writing.

9. Respond in a timely fashion

The mandatory interview should be scheduled and conducted in a timely fashion, following the timelines as set out in the [Academic Progression Mandatory Interview Procedure](#). The decision has the potential to have significant ramifications for the student, and unnecessary delays in the decision-making process may hinder a student's ability to re-enroll/engage in units, or to organise an alternative to study if the decision is to suspend.

References:

Freedom of Information Act 1992 (WA)

Approval:

Approval Authority:	President of Academic Council
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Revision History:

Version	Date Approved	Effective Date (if later than 'Date Approved')	Next Review Date	Resolution No. (if applicable)
Approved by AC	12/03/2019		12/03/2022	AC/16/2019(ii)
Administrative amendment	07/02/2017 by University Secretary			
Approved	06/12/2012	Implementation from 01/01/2013. Will not apply to the Semester 2, 2012 and Trimester 3, 2012 progression periods.	06/12/2015	LTC/56/2012(ii)