Student Support Policy

Purpose

This Policy establishes the Sydney International School of Technology and Commerce's (SISTC's) commitment and approach to student support services. The purpose of these services is to help students to realise their full academic potential.

This Policy provides staff with guidance on their responsibilities and to ensure adequate support for students with additional academic or personal needs. It also aims to assist staff to identify students who may require additional support and ensure appropriate interventions are implemented. The Policy is available to prospective and enrolled students as a clear outline of the support arrangements in place and any responsibilities on their part under the Policy.

Principles

SISTC is committed to providing an innovative and supportive teaching and learning environment, where students benefit from a rich and personalised educational experience. This commitment is embedded in the *SISTC Strategic Plan 2020-2024* and underpins this Policy and related services.

SISTC's approach to student support operates within the context of a mutual responsibility framework. Students take responsibility overall for their own learning, with active support from SISTC in a range of important support areas. The School aims to foster an environment which encourages student independence in learning, while taking steps to identify and respond to personal and academic issues that may negatively impact students' educational outcomes.

SISTC student support services are designed to provide help to students "at risk" but these services in no way compromise the integrity of the School's academic standards. Interventions to provide additional support are respectful, timely, and consistent. All mechanisms used to identify and manage students who may have specific support needs comply with privacy and confidentiality requirements.

SISTC recognises that in addition to students with individual needs or who have difficulties through English being their second language, there are particular support requirements for cohorts of students who have faced systemic barriers to their preparation for higher education, including those from priority access and equity groups. Strategies are based on identifying and responding to potential barriers to learning as early as possible.

Policy Statement

SISTC support services encompass academic, language, financial, and personal support in a framework of mutual responsibility. A range of complementary initiatives operate to promote the safety and wellbeing of SISTC's student body under the *SISTC Health and Safety Policy and*

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Support Policy v1.5
TEQSA: PRV14311
CRICOS: 03836J

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P a g e | 1

Framework. The *SISTC Critical Incident Policy and Procedures* is in place to address student safety and support incidents.

SISTC provides dedicated staffing resources for student support. Where specialist support services are required beyond this capacity, SISTC staff are encouraged to assist students to link with service providers including medical, welfare, financial or housing support services that already exist in the community. International students are required to have private health insurance under their student visa provisions

Information about available support across all support domains is promoted and made readily accessible to students.

SISTC Staff are encouraged to identify students with other (non-academic) support needs under the policy, and to instigate action to address these.

SISTC Staff are trained and supported to inform and promote understanding and awareness of effective practices in relation to student support

Students at SISTC are expected to:

- be aware of student conduct and behaviour requirements under the *SISTC Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy*
- make informed and considered choices in relation to course and unit selection, with assistance and advice from SISTC Academic Advisors
- seek out relevant support where a personal issue is impacting or is likely to impact their educational progress
- seek and follow advice from academic staff and fulfill academic requirements, including expectations for progression
- inform SISTC of any impediments to completing their academic requirements in a timely way;
- contact SISTC in a timely manner if they receive any formal notifications to do so from the School concerning their progress and/or meeting SISTC requirements.

Identification of Students 'At-Risk' Academically

The School's approach to identifying and addressing the needs of students 'at risk' academically involves strategies which apply at both pre-commencement and during the course of study.

1. PRE-COMMENCEMENT

The following suite of activities applies in the pre-commencement of study phase.

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P a g e | 2

1.1 Access and Equity Groups

The *SISTC Equity and Diversity Policy* establishes the principles relating to support for the priority equity group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In operationalising this support, emphasis is placed on identifying the particular academic and support needs of individual students before commencement of studies, and ensuring appropriate resources and infrastructure are in place to meet these needs. The full suite of support provisions is set out in the *SISTC Equity and Diversity Policy*. However, in the specific area of the pre-commencement of study phase, there is a strong emphasis on assessment of existing skill levels in areas of learning, cognition, language, expression and mathematics. Establishing support requirements at this stage facilitates the planning associated with having these provisions in place before study commences, rather than having to respond to them once study has commenced.

The *SISTC Equity and Diversity Policy* refers to support in a holistic sense, including personal support, mentoring and community support. The School's approach is to develop a suite of support arrangements on a student-by-student basis, rather than to manage this group on a generic cohort basis, under arrangements set out in detail in the policy.

Resourcing for the access and support arrangements outlined is provided by the School through its financial scholarships and respective budgets for language, maths and study support.

1.2 English Language Support

Students are required to meet minimum IELTS requirements for entry to the School's programs. However, to facilitate their learning and academic success, the School also offers 100 hours of English language training for students commencing in its diploma programs and in Level 1 of its bachelor programs at no additional cost to the student. Because IELTS measures overall language proficiency, all students are assessed individually before they commence their studies to ascertain their relative areas of existing language proficiency as it relates to the demands of higher education study. Students are then offered additional training which best meets their needs for the 100 hours of tuition.

Students who are joining the School in Level 2 of their bachelor program may also be offered the opportunity for English language training if this is considered to be of assistance to them in successfully undertaking their studies. This assessment would normally be undertaken as part of the broader diagnosis of a student's additional support needs to meet the requirements of their course of study. In such situations the appropriate intervention may be the provision of one trimester or 50 hours of intensive IELTS support.

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P a g e | 3

More detailed information on this program can be found in the *SISTC English and Mathematics Support Framework*.

1.3 Mathematics and Study Support

As with English language proficiency, the School also provides structured support arrangements for Diploma level students in study skills and Mathematics proficiency (where applicable). Students receive 25 hours of this support during their first trimester of study, provided at no additional cost as part of the student fee. Attendance at these training/tutorial sessions is strongly recommended for Diploma-level students. Commencing Bachelor-level students studying at Level 1 are also encouraged to approach the School in the pre-commencement phase if they believe these tutorials would be of relevance to them. There is an on-going provision for students to be referred to these support programs if it becomes apparent through the early intervention in trimester monitoring programs that they require additional help.

More detailed information on this program can be found in the *SISTC English and Mathematics Support Framework*.

1.4 Additional Support for Students with Special Needs

The *SISTC Reasonable Adjustment Policy* is relevant in this context and provides the mechanisms for considering the flexibilities required in a range of existing (as well as emergent) student situations which justify formal consideration.

1.5 Access to Teaching Staff

SISTC ensures that for every unit of study, each teaching staff member (lecturer and tutor) makes one hour available per week during which students can 'drop in' and seek their advice, or answer questions about academic, assessment and study matters. The consultation times and location for each unit are advised to students at the beginning of each teaching period. The School also provides a booking system through which students may book an appointment with their lecturer or tutor (in person or by a phone conversation) at a time convenient to both parties.

Teaching staff are also required to respond to all student e-mails promptly and within timeframes prescribed by the School.

Students have the option of meeting with a more senior academic staff member if they are unable to resolve questions with the teaching staff for their units, or if they are not satisfied with a response or proposed course of action. These escalation and review provisions are set out in the *SISTC Student Complaints, Appeals and Grievances Policy and Procedures*.

2. DURING THE COURSE OF STUDY

A student may be identified as requiring additional academic support if they are not progressing satisfactorily in their studies (or are at significant risk of not progressing

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P a g e | 4

satisfactorily), or where their welfare is reasonably considered to warrant some form of staff intervention. The *SISTC Course Rules, Progression and Completion Policy* sets out the mechanisms for handling unsatisfactory progress, including the use of Conditional Enrolment where this is warranted.

The *SISTC First Year Transition and Orientation Policy* establishes a structured regimen for monitoring, early detection and intervention in relation to academic matters during each trimester. This framework is managed by a specialist academic staff-member (nominally *Academic Advisor*) who also has responsibility for academic advising. It is considered that having these functions vested in the same position provides a natural synergy between advising students about their study loads and monitoring their study progress. At all times these functions are carried out in close liaison with relevant Unit Coordinators and the Associate Dean, Academic Programs, who approves any additional academic support where appropriate. The same approach applies in the second and subsequent years for students placed on Conditional Enrolment, or who are at risk for other reasons.

A student may require additional academic support due to a number of factors, such as:

- medical illness, injury, psychological condition or disability;
- changes in family or carer responsibilities;
- factors in their private lives which disrupt their ability to study and/or attend teaching sessions;
- behaviour of fellow students which is consistently disruptive, volatile or otherwise in breach of SISTC's values and code of conduct;
- English language proficiency;
- concerns regarding academic capacity or achievement which might be reflected by:
- conditional enrolment or pattern of deferral;
- change to a new field of study that may challenge previously successful approaches to learning;
- failure to access on-line teaching site;
- failure of 50% or more of credit points attempted in the trimester;
- failure to attend compulsory teaching and assessment components;
- failure to complete a mandated assessment element or practicum;
- unsatisfactory attendance record; or
- minimal class participation/engagement.
- difficulties associated with the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic (or similar) including, but not limited to, financial problems, housing stress or adherence to Government requirements.

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P a g e | 5

2.1. Identification and Assessment

The requirement for intervention is identified, categorised and referred through a framework which includes:

- student reports throughout the trimester which support identification, including:
    - academic action lists /students placed on warning
    - academic progress reports collated, reported and reviewed every trimester;
- advice from the Academic Advisor or teaching staff about concerns in the pattern of student contact/study/attendance;
- surveys or diagnostic tools, including first year diagnostic tasks and English language assessment;
- informal mechanisms such as advice from teaching staff based on multiple requests for extensions, absences, and low levels of class engagement;
- student self-reporting - students who are aware that they are finding it difficult and need additional academic support and bring this to the attention of staff;
- where financial difficulties are occurring to the student and this is brought to the attention of the Academic Registrar.

2.2 Academic Support Services

SISTC provides a range of academic support services to assist students who are struggling with their study demands. These include:

- academic advisory support (an Academic Advisor appointed by the Dean);
- additional computing support (IT services);
- additional library support (Library services);
- academic integrity or misconduct advisory support (through Academic Advisor position and/or Student Support Officer position).

Students may be referred to these additional services by a staff member or be a self-referral. Students who are identified as potentially benefitting from additional support based on academic performance are not compelled to access a particular support service.

However, all students who are identified as being "at risk", including those students who have made unsatisfactory progress in their studies, are required to have an agreed plan (a Program of Support and Supervision) which may include additional group or (in some cases) one-on-one tutoring; access to English language training and/or mathematics tutorials; provision of practice assessment; and consideration of reasonable adjustment variations to the learning arrangements/requirements for the student. In all cases, the Program details are recorded and signed by the student and the Academic Advisor with arrangements for further monitoring and review set out clearly. The Associate Dean, Academic Programs takes overall responsibility for the cohort of students who are receiving assistance under such arrangements. The Director of Operations approves the provision of resources where such support is likely to require additional funding.

Doc: Student Support Policy v1.5
TEQSA: PRV14311
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P a g e | 6

The tailored Program of Support and Supervision is intended to facilitate an identifiable improvement in the actual academic performance of a student, or in the prognosis for/likelihood of performance improvement. Normally such an improvement would be expected to be in evidence within 6-8 weeks, in line with when the student's next assessment task is due.

Where the student is at risk of failing multiple units, the Program of Support and Supervision takes on additional importance in ensuring the student's enrolment is not varied to Conditional Enrolment. If the student has failed multiple units, a variation to Conditional Enrolment status would indicate that the School believes the student is significantly at risk of not meeting the progression requirements of their program and/or the terms of their student visa. In this situation, conferral of Conditional Enrolment status would indicate a clear intention by the School that the student's ability to continue their studies has become conditional on a level of measurable improvement. Such conditions would be discussed with the student and set out in writing in the advice to them about Conditional Enrolment. Such advice would indicate the timeframes and details for a suite of performance improvements and outcomes, achievement of which would lead to a reinstatement of full enrolment.

Failure to achieve these improvements may lead to either a revision of the Conditional Enrolment terms if there has been measurable improvement in some aspects of their performance OR to suspension of their enrolment. The suspension status would include the student being invited to show cause why their enrolment should not be cancelled. The suspension stage also provides the student with an opportunity to access the internal and external review facilities set out in the *SISTC Student Complaints, Appeals and Grievances Policy and Procedures 2020-2024*, including access to external advocacy through The Resolution Institute. A final step in the event of a student exhausting such appeal processes without a changed determination about their student status would be to cancel their enrolment.

The intention of the arrangements set out for student intervention is to support students to the greatest extent possible in keeping their academic performance on track and ensuring success in their studies. The relevant immigration authorities would be kept informed at all points from when the student has been made the subject Conditional Enrolment.

SISTC ensures that all new students will have an opportunity to meet with an Academic Advisor and academic and professional staff (e.g. the Student Support Officer). All commencing students at SISTC attend an orientation/welcome/transition week. The purpose of this week is to advise students of their obligations, apprise them of support services, introduce them to academic and professional staff and familiarise them with campus facilities and learning resources, such as the library.

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P a g e | 7

Identification and Provision of Personal Support

A student may be identified as requiring personal support and assistance where their psychological or medical welfare is reasonably considered to warrant this action.

All staff and students are encouraged to be alert to the possibility of students in personal difficulty, and the School provides training in this area for staff, as well as maintaining current awareness through mechanisms such as notices, posters and screen reminders.

Students identified as requiring additional personal support care able to be referred to the SISTC Student Support Team who will provide advice and assistance for students in accessing the following support areas:

- counselling and psychological services;
- medical services;
- disability support;
- international student support.

All staff should take action in cases where students are exhibiting signs of distress. However how staff respond to an individual student will depend upon the nature and level of their distress. Staff should be aware of their own personal and professional limitations. Academic and professional staff members are encouraged to consult with the Student Support Officer for advice about the appropriate action to be taken in respect of a student who may be experiencing distress. If a staff member is seriously concerned about the personal welfare or mental health of a student after an interaction, they should notify the Student Support Officer, Academic Registrar or the Director of Operations.

Financial Support

SISTC provides financial support by way of full fee scholarships for the priority equity group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

All students are also able to access the generous financial assistance provided in the form of scholarships, associated with achieving and sustaining academic achievement benchmarks (typically Grade Point Average). The quantum and benchmarks for these scholarships are reviewed annually by the Board of Directors (though not applied retrospectively) in the context of student achievement, student environment, market and related factors.

Students suffering from financial difficulties associated with the loss of income due to the COVID-19 Pandemic (or similar) are to be referred to the Academic Registrar.

The CEO approves the provision of financial support within this framework on the basis of advice from the Academic Registrar (through the Director of Operations).

The SISTC web site at all times has up to date information about the availability of financial assistance.

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P a g e | 8

Support for Resolution of Complaints, Appeals and Grievances

SISTC provides students with access to a comprehensive internal and external review facility, which they can access in relation to any decision, action or matter which affects them as students. These provisions are set out in detail in the *SISTC Student Complaints, Appeals and Grievances Policy and Procedures 2020-2024*.

The policy provides that in the majority of cases, an internal review would first be conducted confidentially by an Investigating Officer. The Investigating Officer would be a School staff member who has had no involvement in the matter which is the subject of the complaint, appeal or grievance. During the internal review process, students may approach the School about providing them with access to external advocacy services to help them present their case. This would normally happen if the Investigating Officer was not able to resolve the matter on an initial review of the evidence after preliminary discussions with the student and the relevant parties.

Students may also apply for an external review if they are not happy with the outcome of an internal review. In this situation, students are provided with access to assistance from The Resolution Institute, which <u>automatically</u> includes advocacy services. These are provided at no cost to the student.

Access to advocacy services paid for by the School is designed to provide the student with every opportunity to have their complaint, appeal or grievance resolved fairly and equitably. Access to advocacy services paid for by the School does NOT extend beyond the point where an external review has been completed through The Resolution Institute under the SISTC Student Complaints, Appeals and Grievances Policy and Procedures.

Legal Services

SISTC does NOT offer a provision to pay for student legal services in respect of any matters, including independent legal advice in relation to complaint, appeal and grievance matters. SISTC will assist students to identify providers which may best meet their personal legal service needs, and may facilitate initial introductions. SISTC takes no responsibility for the choice of legal service provider made by the student, or for the process and outcome of that service.

Other Support Services

Other services available to students include assistance with accommodation and with career development services (e.g. for part time/ casual work in a relevant professional area), as well as career advisory services. The *SISTC First Year Transition and Orientation* Policy also describes the SISTC Peer Assisted Learning Program.

Doc: Student Support Policy v1.5 TEQSA: PRV14311 CRICOS: 03836J

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P a g e | 9

Monitoring and Review

The *SISTC Student Participation and Feedback Policy* sets out the arrangements for the operation of the Student Support Committee and the Student Feedback Survey Framework, which enables students to provide structured feedback on the operation of support services to help inform the future development of these services.

The *SISTC Compliance, Review and Quality Assurance Strategy and Plan 2020-2024 (Attachment A)* sets out the program of review and improvement of the strategies outlined in this Policy.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Directors has oversight of this Policy, with input from the Academic Board.

The Director of Operations - in close consultation with the Academic Registrar - is responsible for leading the development and review of the policy and for overall management of student support services, systems and processes for the School.

Unit Coordinators will include an early assessment component or other diagnostic task in all first-year undergraduate units. Unit Coordinators will identify students who may benefit from additional support based on performance in assessment or other diagnostic tasks. These students will be contacted by the Unit Coordinator, a member of the teaching staff for the unit, or, at the request of teaching staff, a relevant professional staff member to ensure they are aware of support services they may find useful to access.

Academic Advisors are required to implement processes for monitoring the progress of students in all units including:

- English language and mathematics proficiency;
- attendance at lectures, tutorials, workshops and other scheduled activities that are part of their academic program;
- attempts at assessment;
- overall progress towards completion of course;
- failure to attend or to complete units, practical placements, assessments; and

Teaching staff in any unit who form the view that a student may benefit from additional support due to factors such as poor class attendance, participation, progress or behaviour, or due to issues raised by the student, will ensure that the student is aware of support services available to assist the student.

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P a g e | 10

Relevant Legislation and Standards

Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act (NSW) 1998 (as amended)
Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 Domains 1 and 2
National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018
Standards: Part D; Standard 6.

Key Related Documents

SISTC Compliance, Review and Quality Assurance Strategy and Plan 2020-2024 (Attachment A)
SISTC Strategic Plan 2020-202
SISTC Teaching and Learning Plan 2018-2022
SISTC Course Rules, Progression and Completion Policy
SISTC Critical Incident Policy and Procedures
SISTC English and Mathematics Support Framework
SISTC Equity and Diversity Policy
SISTC First Year Transition and Orientation Policy
SISTC Health and Safety Policy
SISTC Privacy Policy
SISTC Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy
SISTC Student Participation and Feedback Policy

Notes

Responsible Officer	Academic Registrar
Approval Authority /Authorities	Board of Directors via the Academic Board
Date Approved	10 June 2020
Date of Commencement	10 June 2020
Date for Review	Annual
Documents Superseded by this Policy	None
Amendment History	**V1.0-V1.2** updated 6 March 2019; 30 July 2019; 2 August 2019. **V1.3** updated with support for students impacted by pandemic/infectious diseases outbreaks on **5 February 2021** **V1.4** updated with the approved senior management structure **28 April 2021.** **V1.5** updated with the changes to the HESF 21 **1 July 2021.**

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P a g e | 11