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'Enthusiastic yes': Melbourne Uni makes sexual consent course mandatory

By [Henrietta Cook](#)

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Undergraduate students must now pass an online course on sexual consent if they wish to enrol at the University of Melbourne. This begs the question, how do you teach young people about consent?

Undergraduate students must now pass an online course about sexual consent if they want to enrol at the prestigious University of Melbourne.

In the wake of a damning Australian Human Rights Commission report into sexual harassment and assault on campuses, Australian universities are rolling out training to teach students about respectful relationships.

As part of the enrolment process for the University of Melbourne, students have to complete 'Consent Matters', an animated online course and quiz that teaches students about boundaries, misconceptions about consent and how to intervene when witnessing sexual harassment or assault.

"This year, all new undergraduate students are expected to complete the 60- to 90-minute module at the final stages of accepting their course offer," a university spokeswoman said.

In one scenario, students Louise and Alex are "getting friendly" in a bar while their classmates gossip about how they both have a reputation.



One of scenarios from the Consent Matters course

As the night progresses, an intoxicated Louise struggles to stand. Students sitting the course are asked whether Louise can consent to sex with Alex.

The answer is no.



The training moves away from the mantra of "no means no" to a definition of affirmative consent where "yes means yes".

Students are told they need an “enthusiastic yes” before they engage in sexual activity, including kissing.

While many universities are offering the course to students, the University of Melbourne is believed to be the first Victorian institution that has made it compulsory for all new students.

The University of Sydney has also made Consent Matters mandatory for new students, while the Australian National University has made it compulsory for those living in residential colleges.



A screengrab from the Consent Matters online module. EPIGEUM

University of Melbourne Student Union president Desiree Cai said the course was an important first step in addressing sexual harassment and assault.

“Discussions about what consent is didn't exist a couple of years ago,” the third-year university student said. “There has been a real shift but we would like to see more action in the future.”

But National Union of Students women's officer Kate Crossin said the Consent Matters course was not based on evidence. “It hasn't been found to reduce sexual harassment or assault. Face-to-face training is much better.”

Around one quarter of new students at the University of Melbourne have completed the training.

It requires them to pass a quiz, which they can repeat as many times as necessary.

The university said it was “investigating options” to ensure every incoming undergraduate student had completed the course as enrolments settled.

The training was created by developer Epigeum with input from academics, independent consultants and sexual health professionals.

Universities Australia chief executive Belinda Robinson said a progress report by the Australian Human Rights Commission identified more than 800 initiatives and commitments that universities had adopted to address sexual assault and harassment.

"There's a significant amount of activity occurring and a comprehensive effort is very much in evidence," she said.

But Ms Robinson said no single program would combat sexual assault and harassment.

"The specific mix of services, resources and programs may vary between universities – but all of them are engaged in a comprehensive program of work to enhance a culture of respect and ensure student safety," she said.

The commission's report found that [one in two university students](#) were sexually harassed at least once in 2016, with 21 per cent of these incidents taking place in a university setting.



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