Academic and administrative staff and students of ACU have a responsibility to act ethically at all times and to maintain professional boundaries with students and other individuals with whom they come in contact through community engagement and research activities. Typically, the relationship between university staff or students and the disadvantaged is not one of equal status. This is particularly true for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who are seeking guidance and may reveal physical and emotional needs stemming from experience of abuse, neglect, mental illness, drug addiction, or homelessness. Without appropriate training, academic and administrative staff or university students involved in community engagement activities with the disadvantaged may not be aware of this disparity in status or of the perceived difference in power between themselves and disadvantaged persons. Such lack of awareness could result in behaviour by university staff that may be considered an abuse of power, putting the vulnerable individual at risk of harm such as violation of personal boundaries, and the University at risk of litigation.

Adequate professional training using such techniques as case scenarios, professional mentoring, and critical opinion should be provided to the University’s staff and students in community engagement settings to ensure that they know how best to manage and document difficult situations. This is especially important for staff or students isolated from scrutiny by distance or professional practice area.

The University has an obligation to ensure that all staff and students in community engagement settings understand the boundaries of “safe,” “risky,” and “illegal” professional practice or relationships. In the literature on professional/client relationships these three areas are typically referred to as “green light” “orange light” and “red light” behaviour. By ensuring that its staff and students working with the disadvantaged receive adequate training in professional boundaries, the University seeks to protect vulnerable individuals and communities from any adverse, risky, or abusive behaviour by its staff or students and to minimize complaints.

University staff or students can also be at risk of complaints being made against them not necessarily because they have done anything wrong but because they have failed to notice risky behaviour by a vulnerable individual they are working with during community engagement and do not respond appropriately to that behaviour, or appear to ignore it. The vulnerable person may then misconstrue the response of the staff member or student, feel threatened or distressed, and react with anger or make a complaint. Such a reaction often results in a vicious circle that may require professional intervention to overcome. Training in professional boundaries aims to forewarn the University’s staff and students of such situations and prevent them.

Training in professional boundaries also focuses on establishing policies and reporting mechanisms requiring University staff and students to document any concerns they may have using an "Incident Form." This form must receive a response from an appropriate person within the University within a prescribed time determined by the severity of the incident. Such policies and forms are part of the organization’s protection and risk management framework.