

POLICY ON FACULTY-STUDENT CONSENSUAL RELATIONS

Introduction

Faculty have a professional responsibility to exhibit the best scholarly and ethical standards of their profession; to demonstrate respect for students as individuals; to adhere to their proper roles as intellectual guides and counselors; to make every effort to foster honest, academic conduct, to assure that their evaluation of students reflects each student's true merit; and to avoid any exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment of students ("statement on Professional Ethics," American Association of University Professors (rev. June 1987))

The university normally has no interest in private romantic or sexual relationships between individuals. However, the university does have a responsibility to protect the integrity of the learning environment and evaluation processes. This policy addresses consensual relations only; non-consensual or coerced relationships are dealt with in the university "Policy Prohibiting Sexual Harassment." Amorous relationships between faculty and student in which the faculty member is not in a position to evaluate or supervise the student may lead to difficulties. Such relationships, however, are not within the scope of this policy so long as the instructor does not participate in decisions that may reward or penalize the student.

There exists numerous possibilities for problems ensuing from romantic or sexual relations between faculty and students. A few are noted here for purpose of illustration and admonishment. (1) A student may be unintentionally coerced into a relationship by the difference in power and prestige between the instructor and the student. Thus, what appears to be consensual may not be. (2) A relationship, over time, may degenerate into a case of sexual harassment. Legally, the fact that a sexual relationship seemed to be voluntary or began as voluntary is not necessarily a successful defense to harassment charges. (3) An instructor may favor a student involved in the relationship, sacrificing objectivity, or other students may perceive favoritism and claim sexual harassment based upon an intimidating, hostile, offensive, or otherwise adverse learning environment. Faculty-staff romantic or sexual relationships may appear to be an abuse of the instructor's authority, creating the appearance of a conflict of interest even if no such conflict exists. (4) The instructor may unintentionally create a suspicious, intimidating environment in a class or within a department as other students learn of the relationship and speculate about its effect on themselves, their grades, etc.

Violations of the standards described herein may lead only to university sanctions, but could also subject faculty to legal proceedings initiated by an aggrieved individual and/or by a government agency.

Policy

It shall constitute unprofessional conduct for university faculty to engage in romantic or sexual relationships with students which occur when the faculty member either currently has or foreseeably will be given responsibility for the evaluation (including recommendations for jobs, advancements, etc.) or supervision of the student. In the event the romantic or sexual relationship existed prior to the beginning of the faculty-student relationship, the faculty member shall immediately discuss the relationship with the School Dean with a view towards seeking alternative classes, advisors, etc. for the student. If no alternative classes, advisors, etc. can be identified, either the romantic or sexual relationship must be terminated. University response to violations of this policy will vary as appropriate to the facts of each case. Such actions may include but are not limited to oral and written reprimands, and/or disciplinary action, including suspension, demotion and dismissal.

* For purposes of this policy, the terms "faculty" and "instructor" include any university employee performing in an instructional or supervisory role with students.