

# Consensual Relationships

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The University's educational mission is promoted by professionalism in the faculty-student and supervisor-employee relationships. This professionalism is fostered by an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Actions of faculty or supervisors that harm this atmosphere undermine professionalism and hinder fulfillment of the University's mission. The roles of educator and supervisor include authority to direct other persons for educational and operational purposes of the University.

**A. Faculty-Student Consensual Relationships:** Faculty may not engage in sexual or romantic relationships with students subject to their supervision, even if both parties have consented to the relationship. The potential for a power differential exists in any relationship involving students and faculty. This may happen in the context of grades, praise or criticism, evaluations; in making recommendations for future employment; or conferring other benefits. Given the fundamentally asymmetric nature of and the "power differential" inherent in such relationships, any appearance of voluntary consent on the part of the student is suspect. Moreover, other students and faculty members may be affected by such unprofessional behavior because it places the faculty member in a position to advance or favor one student's interests at the expense of others, and implicitly makes obtaining benefits contingent on sexual favors.

The University views it as unethical and a violation of this Policy for faculty members to engage in sexual or romantic relationships with students who are enrolled in their classes or subject to their supervision, even when both parties appear to have consented to the relationship.

Sexual or romantic, consensual relationships between students and faculty members occurring outside the instructional context are also suspect by nature and may lead to difficulties. Particularly when the student and the faculty member are in the same academic unit or in units that are academically allied, relationships that both parties view as consensual may appear to others as exploitative. Further, in such situations (and in others that may occur in the future, which neither party can anticipate), the faculty member may face serious conflicts of interest. In certain instances, it may be necessary for a faculty member to withdraw from participation in activities or decisions that tend to reward or penalize the student involved. A faculty member who fails to recognize such conflicts of interest and fails to withdraw accordingly risks rewarding or penalizing a student with whom the faculty member has had a sexual or romantic relationship. In such cases, a faculty member's ethical obligations to the student, to colleagues and to the institution have been violated. Moreover, actions that occur after the breakup of such relationships may cause problems (e.g., the lack of favorable recommendation for the student from the faculty member) and therefore may be viewed as retaliation for "breaking up" and may be actionable.

**B. Supervisor-Employee Consensual Relationships:** Supervisors may not engage in sexual or relationships with employees subject to their supervision, even when both parties appear to have consented to the relationship. Supervisors exercise power over employees in all terms and conditions of employment, including the evaluation of performance or making recommendations for future employment. Sexual or romantic relationships between a supervisor and an employee reporting either directly or indirectly to the supervisor are prone to abuse because the supervisor has professional responsibility for and thus power over the employee. Such situations greatly increase the potential for abuse of this power and sexual exploitation of the employee.

Given the fundamentally asymmetric nature of and the "power differential" inherent in such relationships, any appearance of voluntary consent on the part of the employee is suspect. Moreover, other employees may be affected by such unprofessional behavior because it places the supervisor in a position to advance or favor one employee's interests at the expense of others, and implicitly makes obtaining employment or other terms and conditions of employment contingent on amorous or sexual favors.

**C. Other Consensual Relationships:** When administrators, support staff or students assume instructor roles or other responsibilities that include the exercise of influence and/or power over other individuals, consensual relationships with those individuals may be prohibited. Examples of these types of situations may include but are not limited to:

1. a lab assistant or graduate assistant (GA) who assigns grades
2. residential assistants (RAs) who report policy violations
3. a student teacher or tutor
4. an administrator who serves as an advisor to a student organization