NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

Responsible University Officials: Provost; Senior Vice President for Business & Finance; Vice President for Student Affairs
Responsible Offices: Office of the Provost; Office of Human Resources; Office of Student Affairs
Origination Date: January 13, 2014

CONSENSUAL ROMANTIC OR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FACULTY, STAFF AND STUDENTS

Policy Statement

When individuals involved in a consensual romantic or sexual relationship are in positions of unequal power at the university, there is the potential for a conflict of interest, favoritism, and exploitation. In order to protect the integrity of the university academic and work environment, this policy outlines limitations on consensual romantic or sexual relationships between faculty, staff and students at Northwestern University.

Reason for Policy/Purpose

The purpose of the Policy on Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationships between Faculty, Staff, and Students is to ensure that Northwestern's academic and work environment remains free from real or apparent conflicts of interest when individuals in positions of unequal power at the university are involved in consensual romantic or sexual relationships.

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Who Approved This Policy

Provost
Senior Vice President for Business and Finance

Who Needs to Know This Policy

All faculty, staff and students at Northwestern University

Website Address for This Policy

https://policies.northwestern.edu/docs/Consensual_Relations_011314.pdf

Contacts

If you have any questions on the Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationships Between Faculty, Staff and Students Policy, you may:

1. Call the Title IX Coordinator at (847) 467-6165.

2. Send an e-mail to titleixcoordinator@northwestern.edu.

Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, *consensual romantic or sexual relationships* means relationships of a romantic, dating, and/or sexual nature entered into with consent of both parties.
For the purpose of this policy, *supervisory or evaluative authority* is the power to control or influence another person's employment, academic advancement, or extracurricular participation, including but not limited to, hiring, work conditions, compensation, promotion, discipline, admission, grades, assignments, supervision of dissertations, recommendations, financial support, or participation in extracurricular programs.

Policy/Procedures

1.0 Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationships and Evaluative Authority

When individuals involved in a consensual romantic or sexual relationship are in positions of unequal power at the university, such as faculty-student, graduate assistant-student, supervisor-supervisee, advisor-advisee, coach-student, senior faculty-junior faculty, senior staff-junior staff, or faculty-staff, there is the potential for a conflict of interest, favoritism, and exploitation. These relationships may be less voluntary than the person with greater power perceives, or circumstances may change and conduct that was once welcome may become unwelcome. The fact that a relationship was initially consensual does not insulate the person with greater power from a claim of sexual harassment. Further, a party's professional or academic reputation may suffer due to perceptions of favoritism or exploitation. Moreover, such relationships may lead to restricted opportunities, or a perception thereof, for others in the work or academic environment.

To protect the integrity of the university academic and work environment, Northwestern requires that when a consensual romantic or sexual relationship exists or has existed between people in positions of unequal power at the university, the person with the greater power must not hold any

supervisory or evaluative authority over the other person in the relationship, except as provided below. A special rule applies for faculty-student and coach-student relationships, see 2.0 below.

If such a consensual relationship exists or develops, the person in the position of greater power must immediately report the relationship to his or her department chair, dean, or the Office of the Provost (in the case of a faculty member), or the Office of Human Resources (in the case of a staff member). It is the responsibility of both the person with the greater power in the relationship and the individual to whom the relationship is reported to ensure that the party with the greater power is removed from any supervisory or evaluative authority over the other party to the relationship. In extraordinary circumstances where removal of supervisory or evaluative authority is not practicable, the parties must work with the department chair, dean, and the Office of the Provost (in the case of a faculty member), or the Office of Human Resources (in the case of a staff member) to determine whether a written management plan can be developed to manage the conflict of interest. Failure to comply with the notification, removal, or management plan requirement is a violation of this policy.

2.0 Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationships Between Faculty and Students and Coaches and Students

Consensual romantic or sexual relationships between faculty and students or coaches and students, even absent any supervisory or evaluative authority, may lead to unanticipated conflicts of interest since a teacher's or coach's influence and power may extend beyond the classroom, department, or team. There is always the possibility that the faculty member or coach may unexpectedly be placed in a position of power over the student. Due to the institutional power differential in faculty-student and coach-student relationships, there is the inherent risk of coercion and the perception by others of exploitation.

When undergraduate students are involved, the difference in institutional power and the inherent risk of coercion are so great that no faculty member or coaching staff member shall enter into a romantic, dating, or sexual relationship with a Northwestern undergraduate student, regardless of whether there is a supervisory or evaluative relationship between them.

Romantic or sexual relationships between faculty and graduate/professional students are also problematic. No faculty member shall enter into a romantic, dating, or sexual relationship with a Northwestern graduate/professional student under his/her supervision. Should such a relationship begin, the department chair must be notified promptly so that arrangements for alternative supervision and removal of evaluative authority can be made.

If the faculty member and graduate/professional student are in the same department or affiliated with the same graduate or professional program, the possibility exists that the faculty member may influence evaluation or academic or career advancement of the student even if the faculty member does not directly supervise the graduate/professional student. Relationships between a faculty member and a current student within the same department or affiliated with the same graduate or professional program as the faculty member must be disclosed by the faculty member to his/her department chair promptly upon the beginning of the relationship. Should such relationship be in existence as of the effective date of this policy, it must be disclosed by the faculty member to his/her department chair within 30 days of the effective date. Management of such relationships

will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and, when possible, will lead to development of an appropriate plan in consultation with the department chair, dean, and the Office of the Provost.

Accommodations for pre-existing relationships between a faculty member and a prospective student will also be considered on a case-by-case basis, and, when possible, will lead to development of a management plan in consultation with the department chair, dean, and the Office of the Provost. Failure to comply with the required notification, removal of evaluative authority or management plan is a violation of this Policy.

3.0 Consequences of Violations of this Policy

If any faculty, staff, or student of Northwestern violates the terms of this Policy, disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with relevant disciplinary procedures contained in the relevant handbooks, policies, procedures, practices, or contracts. Violations of this policy will result in disciplinary actions, which can include, but are not limited to, written warnings, loss of privileges, mandatory training or counseling, probation, suspension, demotion, exclusion, expulsion, and termination of employment, including revocation of tenure.

Forms/Instructions

N/A

Appendices

N/A

Related Information

N/A

History/Revision Dates

Origination Date: January 13, 2014
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