

## **CONSENSUAL ROMANTIC AND SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP POLICY BETWEEN FACULTY AND STUDENTS**

### **Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action**

March 2012

It is the policy of Columbia University that no faculty member shall have a consensual romantic or sexual relationship with a student over whom he or she exercises academic or professional authority. It is also the policy of the University that no faculty member shall exercise academic or professional authority over any student with whom he or she has or previously has had a consensual romantic or sexual relationship. This policy applies to all officers of instruction, research and the libraries, including students with appointments as student officers of instruction and research and graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants. The use of the term “faculty” in the policy statement is not meant to restrict the policy’s application in any way but to underscore its special relevance to the faculty because of the roles they play in the education and development of the University’s students.

Should a faculty member enter into a consensual romantic or sexual relationship with a student in violation of the policy, he or she shall promptly act to recuse himself or herself from all academic and professional decisions and activities affecting the student. Additionally, the faculty member must promptly alert his or her chair, dean or other head of unit to the existence of that relationship and cooperate in making alternative instructional and supervisory arrangements necessary to protect the student against academic, professional or financial hardship. If a faculty member fails to disclose a consensual romantic or sexual relationship, the University will, on discovering it, take all necessary steps to ensure compliance with this policy, including, where appropriate, disciplinary action.

Students in a consensual romantic or sexual relationship with a faculty member are encouraged to consult with the chair, dean or other head of the unit in which they are working to help with the arrangements for alternative instruction and supervision. Students, faculty, and staff concerned about consensual romantic relationships involving others in their programs or classes are encouraged to speak with their dean, chair or other head of unit or the Associate Provost for Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA).

Columbia University’s educational mission is promoted by the professionalism of its faculty-student relationships. This professionalism is reflected not only in the quality of the intellectual exchange between faculty and students but also in the nature of their interactions as members of a community of scholars. The academic freedom traditionally accorded to members of the faculty imposes a correlative obligation of responsible self-discipline, one which acknowledges the power they exercise over students and the importance of protecting against its abusive or exploitative use.

Consensual romantic and sexual relationships between faculty and students pose a threat to academic professionalism in situations where they compromise, or appear to compromise, the faculty members’ judgment of students. A similar threat exists when they lead or are perceived to lead to preferential treatment of one student over another. In these circumstances, they can be detrimental to the affected individuals, including students outside of the relationship, and can injure

the University and its reputation. Further, because of the power differential, consensual romantic and sexual relationships between faculty and students are susceptible to being characterized as non-consensual or coercive, especially when they end, opening up the possibility of a charge of sexual harassment or sexual assault.

A faculty member exercises academic or professional authority over a student by:

- enrolling the student in a course given by the faculty member;
- evaluating the student outside of a course by, for example, grading qualifying exams or serving on defense committees;
- supervising or advising the student on a project such as a thesis or independent research;
- formally mentoring the student;
- co-authoring papers or working collaboratively on a project;
- supervising any administrative assignment given to the student, either for compensation or without pay;
- providing the student with a recommendation for a job, internship, clerkship, fellowship, prize, award or other honor;
- participating in departmental or school decisions affecting the student on admissions, financial aid, teaching assignments or access to institutional resources available for academic purposes, such as travel funds or study carrels; or
- otherwise, participating in any program or activity with respect to the student that judges performance, recognizes achievement, confers benefits, rewards work, or sanctions conduct.

For advice or assistance on the appropriate course of action, the faculty member or the student may consult the Associate Provost, (EOAA), as well as his or her chair, dean or other head of unit. Insofar as it is possible, the chair, dean, unit head or Associate Provost (EOAA) shall honor a request for confidentiality from a student or faculty member seeking recusal, and all students and faculty involved in inquiries shall be asked to observe confidentiality. At all times, the institutional response shall keep the student's educational aims and needs foremost.

In light of the power differential, consensual romantic and sexual relationships between faculty and students are highly susceptible to being characterized as non-consensual or coercive and regarded as sexual harassment or sexual assault in violation of the University's *Employment Policies and Procedures on Discrimination and Harassment*, a copy of which may be found on line at: <http://eoaa.columbia.edu/employment-nondiscrimination-policies>. Should a romantic or sexual relationship with a student lead to a charge of sexual harassment or sexual assault against a faculty member, the University is obligated to investigate and resolve the charge in accordance with these policies and procedures. Questions regarding this policy should be directed to the Associate Provost, Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 103 Low, 212-854-5511, [sr534@columbia.edu](mailto:sr534@columbia.edu).