

# **CONSENSUAL RELATIONSHIPS POLICY**

**Responsible Office: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION/EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OFFICE**

## **I. POLICY STATEMENT**

Consensual relationships that are of concern to Auburn University are those romantic, intimate, or sexual relationships in which both parties appear to have consented, but where there is a reporting or evaluation relationship between the two parties.

## **II. POLICY PRINCIPLES:**

Consensual romantic, intimate, or sexual relationships have inherent risks when they occur between a faculty member, supervisor, or other member of the University community and any person over whom he or she has a professional responsibility. Consequently, such relationships are strongly discouraged. The risks include a student or subordinate's feeling coerced into an unwanted relationship to ensure they receive a proper educational or employment experience; potential conflicts of interest in which the person is in a position to evaluate the work or make personnel or academic decisions with respect to the individual with whom he or she is romantically involved; a perception by students or employees that a fellow student or coworker who is involved in a romantic, intimate, or sexual relationship with his or her supervisor or professor will receive an unfair advantage; either or both of the parties engaging in behavior destructive to the other or their academic or working environment if the relationship ends; and the potential that university resources are used inappropriately to further the romantic, intimate, or sexual relationship.

### **A. Faculty/Student Relationships**

#### **1. Within the Instructional Context**

It is considered a serious breach of professional ethics for a member of the faculty to initiate, pursue, or participate in a romantic, intimate, or sexual relationship with a student who is enrolled in a course being taught by the faculty member or whose academic work (including work as a teaching assistant) is being supervised by the faculty member.

#### **2. Outside the Instructional Context**

Romantic, intimate, or sexual relationships between faculty members and students occurring outside the instructional context may lead to difficulties. Particularly when the faculty member and student are in the same academic unit or in units that are academically allied, relationships that the parties view as consensual may appear to others to be exploitative. Further, in such situations, the faculty member may face serious conflicts of interest and should be careful to distance himself or herself from any decisions that may reward or penalize the student involved.

### **B. Staff/Student Relationships**

Consensual romantic, intimate, or sexual relationships between staff and students are prohibited in cases in which the staff member has authority or control over the student.

C. Staff/Subordinate Relationships

Supervisors, or those with professional responsibility, over someone with whom they have or have had a romantic, intimate, or sexual relationship must notify their direct supervisor that a management-control plan needs to be implemented. The supervisor should be transferred so that they are no longer in a position of professional responsibility over the affected individual. The junior person in the relationship should not be transferred. To avoid the severe risks noted, supervisors in such relationships may not manage, supervise, evaluate, or make other employment decisions concerning the individual with whom they are engaged in a romantic, intimate, or sexual relationship. If the relationship ends, the management-control plan must remain in effect. Failure to notify a supervisor to ensure a plan is in place may result in disciplinary action, including termination, for that supervisor.

### **III. EFFECTIVE DATE**

April 1, 2019

### **IV. APPLICABILITY**

This policy applies to all students, staff, and faculty of Auburn University.

### **V. POLICY MANAGEMENT**

**Responsible Office:** Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Office  
**Responsible Executive:** Chief Operating Officer  
**Responsible Officer:** Director and Title IX Coordinator, Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Office

### **VI. DEFINITIONS**

Faculty or Faculty Member - all those who teach at the University and include graduate students with teaching responsibilities and other instructional personnel.

Staff or Staff Members - all employees who are not faculty and include academic and nonacademic administrators as well as supervisory personnel.

Romantic Relationship - includes romantic, intimate, or sexual relationships and is intended to indicate conduct that goes beyond what a person of ordinary sensibilities would believe to be a collegial or professional relationship.

## **VII. POLICY PROCEDURES**

See policy principles above.

## **VIII. SANCTIONS AND ENFORCEMENT**

A faculty or staff member who fails to withdraw from participation in activities or decisions that may reward or penalize a student with whom the faculty member has or has had romantic, intimate, or sexual relationship will be deemed to have violated his or her ethical obligation to the student, to other students, to colleagues, and to the University. Failure to abide by this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

## **IX. EXCLUSIONS**

Not applicable.

## **X. INTERPRETATION**

These regulations shall be interpreted, administered and enforced by the Director and Title IX Coordinator, Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Office.