

# **CONSENSUAL ROMANTIC AND SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP POLICY** **BETWEEN STAFF MEMBERS AND STUDENTS**

**Effective Date: November 12, 2019**

## **Policy Statement**

No staff member at Columbia should participate in supervision, employment actions, evaluation, advising or mentoring<sup>1</sup> any Columbia University student with whom that staff member has or has had a consensual romantic or sexual relationship, except in unusual circumstances, where explicit authorization has been obtained from the Vice President of Human Resources in consultation with Office of the General Counsel.

In the event that a personal relationship of this kind does exist in a supervisory, advisory or mentoring context, the supervisor must disclose the relationship to the Vice President of Human Resources and initiate arrangements to address any issues of conflict of interest.

A staff member who violates this policy will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination. The University will take all necessary steps to protect a student in such a relationship against academic, professional or financial hardship.

Students, faculty, and staff concerned about a consensual romantic or sexual relationship in violation of this policy are encouraged to speak with their chair, the dean, or other head of unit, the Vice Provost for Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA) or a Human Resources (HR) Senior HR Business Partner.

## **Reason(s) for the Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to address the issue of consensual romantic or sexual relationships between members of our community, prevent any conflict of interest from occurring to the fullest extent possible, and set forth procedures to be followed if such conflict occurs.

## **Responsible University Office & Officer**

Columbia University Human Resources  
Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action

## **Revision History**

N/A

## **Who is governed by This Policy**

This policy applies to all employees.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that this list of actions is intended to be illustrative and not exhaustive.

**Who Should Know This Policy**

All Columbia University employees should review and understand this policy.

**Exclusions & Special Situations**

None

**Policy Text**

Columbia University's educational mission is promoted by the professionalism of its staff-student relationships. This professionalism is reflected not only in the quality of the exchanges between staff members and students but also in the nature of their interactions as members of an academic community. Staff members have an obligation of responsible self-discipline, one which acknowledges the power and authority they exercise over students and the importance of protecting against its abusive or exploitative use.

Consensual romantic and sexual relationships between staff members and students pose a threat to professionalism in situations where they compromise, or appear to compromise, a staff member's judgment of the student. 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, romantic and sexual relationships between staff members 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. Should a romantic or sexual relationship with a student lead to a charge of sexual harassment or sexual assault against a staff member, the University is obligated to investigate and resolve the charge in accordance with the University's Employment Policies and Procedures on Discrimination and Harassment, a copy of which may be found online at: <https://eoaa.columbia.edu/>

**Responsibilities**

Questions regarding the Consensual Romantic and Sexual Relationship Policies or the Employment Policies and Procedures on Discrimination and Harassment should be directed to the Vice Provost, Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 103 Low, 212-854-5511, [jerihenry@columbia.edu](mailto:jerihenry@columbia.edu), or a Human Resources (HR) Senior HR Business Partner at (212) 851-7008.

**Contacts**

Columbia University Human Resources Morningside – Vice President (212) 851-7008

Columbia University Irving Medical Center Human Resources – Chief Human Resources Officer (212) 305-3819

**Cross References to Related Policies**

Consensual Romantic and Sexual Relationship Policy between Staff Members  
<https://eoaa.columbia.edu/content/consensual-romantic-and-sexual-relationships>

Consensual Romantic and Sexual Relationship Policy between Staff Members and Students  
<https://eoaa.columbia.edu/content/consensual-romantic-and-sexual-relationships>

Policy on Romantic and Sexual Relationships Between Faculty/Staff and Graduate Students  
<https://eoaa.columbia.edu/content/consensual-romantic-and-sexual-relationships>

Policy on Romantic and Sexual Relationships Between Faculty/Staff and Undergraduate Students  
<https://eoaa.columbia.edu/content/consensual-romantic-and-sexual-relationships>

Statement of Ethical Conduct and the Administrative Code of Conduct  
<http://policylibrary.columbia.edu/statement-ethical-conduct-and-administrative-code-conduct>

Equal Employment Opportunity and Nondiscrimination Policies and Procedures  
<http://policylibrary.columbia.edu/equal-employment-opportunity-and-nondiscrimination-policies-and-procedures>

Columbia University Human Resources Policy Manual  
<http://hr.columbia.edu/policies/hr-manual>

**Web Address**

<http://hr.columbia.edu/policies/hr-manual>