

## **POLICY ON ROMANTIC AND SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FACULTY/STAFF AND GRADUATE STUDENTS**

### **Background**

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 that acknowledges the power they exercise over students and the importance of protecting against its abusive or exploitative use.

Romantic and sexual relationships between faculty and students pose a threat to academic professionalism as they compromise the faculty members' judgment of students. More importantly, because of the power differential, romantic and sexual relationships between faculty and students are highly susceptible to being experienced as non-consensual or coercive.

The University adopted a policy prohibiting relationships between faculty and undergraduate students in 2018. The policy below addresses romantic relationships between faculty and graduate students.

### **Policy Text**

#### *Rule*

No faculty member may initiate or accept sexual or romantic advances or engage in a romantic or sexual relationship with any graduate student (1) who is enrolled in any school, department or program in which the faculty member has an appointment, teaches, participates in research or is otherwise engaged as part of his or her University activities or (2) with whom he or she engages in any type of direct or indirect academic, professional, supervisory or advisory activities. No faculty member shall engage in any academic, professional, supervisory or advisory activities with any student with whom he or she has or previously has had a romantic or sexual relationship.

These restrictions against romantic and/or sexual relationships with graduate students apply to all officers of instruction, research, administration, and the libraries. This policy also applies to any member of the Columbia community who has authority over a student, such as faculty or staff directors or advisors of student organizations, athletic coaches, or supervisors of student employees, in addition to all staff and other members of the community who may mentor, advise or evaluate students. The use of the term "faculty" in the policy is not meant to restrict the policy's

application in any way but to underscore its special relevance to faculty because of the roles they play in the education and development of the University's students.

In applying this policy, the institutional response shall keep the student's educational aims and needs foremost at all times.

"Graduate student" includes all students enrolled in any masters, PhD, professional, post-baccalaureate degree, non-degree or certificate program at the University or an affiliate, visiting graduate students, any graduate student employee or volunteer and any student in an executive education program at the University.

As used in this policy, academic, professional or supervisory authority over a graduate student includes but is not limited to:

- teaching, co-teaching or guest teaching the student in any class or clinical program;
- evaluating the student outside of a class by, for example, grading qualifying exams or serving on defense committees;
- supervising or advising the student on a project, including a thesis, independent research or clinical program;
- formally or informally mentoring or advising the student;
- 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 (or asking someone else to provide a student with) a recommendation or introduction for a job, internship, clerkship, fellowship, prize, award, speaking engagement or other academic opportunity or honor;
- participating in any decision affecting the student on admissions, financial aid, teaching assignments, fellowship, academic or research honor or access to institutional or outside 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 evaluates performance, recognizes achievement, confers benefits, rewards work, or sanctions conduct.

### *Sanctions*

Failure to comply with this policy may lead to disciplinary action against the person exercising academic, professional or supervisory authority, up to and including termination and may adversely affect decisions on promotion and tenure.

### *Reporting*

Faculty or staff who observe, learn of, or otherwise know about a romantic or sexual relationship in violation of this policy must report what they know to the University's Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA) ([eoaa.columbia.edu](http://eoaa.columbia.edu)). Students concerned about romantic relationships involving others in their programs or classes are encouraged to speak with EOAA. For the avoidance of doubt, students do not have an obligation or duty to report such relationships.

Faculty, staff and students concerned about romantic relationships involving others in their programs or classes may also speak with their dean, chair or other head of unit in which they are working to ensure that they are able to complete their academic and/or professional work without issue.

For advice regarding disclosure, reporting or assistance on the appropriate course of action, any faculty member, staff member or student may consult with EOAA, consistent with University policies and federal regulations.

### *Responsibilities*

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 the Columbia University Employee Policy and Procedures on Discrimination and Harassment, Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking, a copy of which may be found online at: <http://eoaa.columbia.edu/>. Questions regarding the Romantic and Sexual Relationship Policies or the Employee Policy and Procedures on Discrimination and Harassment, Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence and Stalking should be directed to EOAA, 103 Low Memorial Library, 212-854-5918, [eoaa@columbia.edu](mailto:eoaa@columbia.edu).

### **Special Provisions**

#### *Special Provisions for Graduate Students Acting as Teaching Assistants, Advisors or Otherwise Overseeing Other Graduate Students*

The University recognizes that in certain circumstances graduate students have graduate student teaching assistants, advisors or mentors or are otherwise supervised or overseen by other graduate students. In order to avoid conflicts that may arise in these circumstances, graduate students acting as teaching assistants, or in an advisory, mentoring, supervisory or oversight role (such role, hereafter an "oversight role") for other graduate students should not initiate or accept sexual or romantic advances or engage in a romantic or sexual relationship with a graduate student whom they are teaching or for whom they act in an oversight role. Should graduate students find themselves in a situation where such a relationship exists (or has in the past existed), the graduate

students should promptly notify the faculty member(s) to whom the students report and/or the University's Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action so that the situation can be appropriately managed.

#### *Requests for Exceptions*

In certain unusual circumstances, faculty or staff and the relevant graduate student may request a policy exception from EOAA to engage in a relationship that would otherwise be prohibited by this Policy. Requests must be made by both parties in person or, if initially made by phone or in writing, with an in person follow-up. EOAA will promptly review each such request, including by speaking individually with each party, consult with other University offices as necessary, and respond in writing to both parties as to whether the request can be granted. EOAA shall not grant any exception to a faculty or staff member (including a graduate student acting as a teaching assistant or in an oversight role) who is supervising, teaching or otherwise acts in an oversight role for the relevant graduate student unless appropriate alternatives, acceptable to the relevant graduate student, can be made for the supervision, teaching and/or oversight of the student.

#### *Policy Review*

EOAA will review the effectiveness of this policy regularly consistent with applicable law and regulations (and no less than every three years) and will consult with The Commission on the Status of Women, the Student Affairs Committee and the Faculty Affairs Committee in connection with such review.