



**Responsible College Official:** Assistant Vice President of Human Resources  
**Responsible Offices:** Office of Academic Affairs, Office of Student Affairs, and Office of Human Resources Services  
**Policy Implementation Date:** August 19, 2019

## Consensual Relationships Policy

### Policy Statement

Any perceived abuse of authority diminishes trust and respect among members of the College community; therefore, all members of the College community are expected to maintain appropriate professional relationships with one another. The College does not wish to interfere with private choices regarding personal relationships when these relationships do not interfere with the goals and policies of the College. However, a consensual relationship policy serves an important purpose in protecting the integrity of the academic and work environment.

Persons in positions of power or authority over others should be aware of and sensitive to the problems that may arise from apparently consensual relationships with their subordinates. There are inherent risks in any romantic or sexual relationship between individuals in unequal positions (such as faculty-student, staff-student, senior faculty/staff-junior faculty/staff, administrator to staff or faculty, coach-student, supervisor-supervisee, counselor-student, mentor-mentee, advisor-advisee, etc.). These relationships may be less consensual than perceived by the individual whose position confers power. The power differential inherent in such relationships may compromise free choice, produce conflicts of interest, or encourage favoritism and/or exploitation, and consensual relationships can turn into *quid pro quo* harassment. The relationship also may be viewed in different ways by each of the parties, particularly in retrospect. Furthermore, circumstances may change, and conduct that was previously welcome may become unwelcome. Even when both parties have consented at the outset to a romantic or sexual involvement, this past consent may not remove grounds for a later allegation of a violation of applicable College policies.

### Relationships with Students

There are potential risks arising out of romantic or sexual relationships between students and faculty, staff, or administrators in a higher education setting, where differences in power and authority are substantial and there is potential for coercion or perceptions of favoritism or exploitation. For the personal protection of members of the College community, the College specifically prohibits all faculty, and staff whose roles include, but are not limited to, teaching, coaching, advising, counseling, mentoring, supervision of research, supervision of student employees, or participation in disciplinary actions, sanctions or remedies involving a student, from entering into or inviting a consensual sexual, romantic, and/or physically intimate relationship. Any sexual involvement between a faculty and/or staff member and a student who is aged 17 or younger, can never be considered consensual and violates the Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Misconduct policy and potentially state law.

## **Relationships between Faculty and Staff**

An individual may be found to have professional influence or authority over a faculty or staff member when one individual supervises or evaluates performance, or recommends/awards salary, is responsible for reappointment, mentorship, promotion, or tenure of another individual. The existence of professional influence or authority is determined on a case-by-case basis.

When a consensual sexual, romantic, and/or physically intimate relationship exists or develops between faculty or staff and individuals over whom they have professional influence or authority, the person with professional influence or authority must promptly report the existence of the relationship to the College. The College will take steps to address the professional influence and authority between the two individuals, take action to remove potential conflicts, and minimize the potential detrimental impact on the individual who is in the subordinate position.

The College cautions faculty and staff to carefully consider the potential costs before entering into sexual, romantic and/or physically intimate relationships with each other. Such relationships may adversely affect the subordinate person in the relationship, may jeopardize the position at the College of the person with influence or authority, and/or may inconvenience or cause undue hardship to other members of the College community.

## **Reporting to the College**

Faculty and staff are required to report all relationships that are covered by this policy to the College. Once notified, the College may inform relevant College officials including the Vice President for Student Affairs and Strategic Initiatives for reports that involve students, Provost and Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs for reports that involve faculty, and/or Assistant Vice President of Human Resources for reports that involve staff.

There may be occasions in which a faculty or staff member has or had a consensual relationship with an individual who becomes a student. Faculty or staff should not accept authority over a student with whom they have had a consensual relationship, without first seeking authorization from the College. In this circumstance, the pre-existing relationship should be promptly disclosed to the College. The College will take steps to remove the conflict in a manner that causes the least detrimental effect for the student.

It is important to note that the submission of tuition remission forms do not act as notice of a pre-existing relationship to the College. Failure to comply with this policy or to self-report the existence of a relationship as required by this policy is considered employee misconduct and will be subject to the appropriate disciplinary action in collaboration with Human Resources, which may include suspension without pay or dismissal/termination of employment.

## **Retaliation**

Retaliation is defined as any materially adverse action taken against an individual because of their participation in a protected activity such as reporting a violation of the Consensual Relationships policy, supporting a party bringing an allegation, or participating in an investigation. Retaliatory actions include, but are not limited to, threats or actual violence against the person or their property, adverse

educational or employment consequences, ridicule, intimidation, bullying or ostracism. Retaliation is a serious violation of College policy and will be treated as another possible instance of harassment or discrimination that is investigated, with violations resulting in additional sanctions. Acts of alleged retaliation should be reported immediately to the appropriate College Official listed below and the matter will be promptly addressed. The College is prepared to take appropriate steps to protect individuals who fear that they may be subjected to retaliation.

**If you want to report a consensual relationship or potential violations of this policy, contact:**

Sharon Merrill  
Assistant Vice President of Human Resources (Staff)  
508 Old Main, Human Resources  
30 N. Brainard  
630.637.5718  
[Semerrill@noctrl.edu](mailto:Semerrill@noctrl.edu)

Dr. Abiodun Goke-Pariola  
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs (Faculty)  
530 Old Main, Academic Affairs  
30 N. Brainard  
(630) 637-5356  
[agokepariola@noctrl.edu](mailto:agokepariola@noctrl.edu)

**If you want to report violations of this policy that have created a hostile environment based on sex or gender, contact:**

Cortney Matuszak, JD  
Title IX Coordinator  
524 Old Main, Student Affairs  
30 N. Brainard  
(630) 637-5156  
[Cmatuszak@noctrl.edu](mailto:Cmatuszak@noctrl.edu)