



Policy Number: IV.22
Policy Level: Operating Policy
Originally Issued: February 25, 2019
Reviewed: April 15, 2021
Reviewed: June 28, 2023
Policy Owner: President
Policy Implementation: Vice President for Financial Affairs
Chief Human Resources Officer

Consensual Relationships

I. Policy Statement and Purpose

Athens State University is committed to providing a safe, equitable, and hospitable academic and work environment for all members of the University community. Professionalism in interpersonal relationships between University employees and between employees and students is vital to the mission and proper functioning of the University.

While the University normally has no interest in private, romantic, or sexual relationships between individuals, this policy serves to protect members of the University community and the integrity of its academic and work environment from conflicts of interest and disruptions that can arise from consensual sexual or romantic relationships.

II. Relationships and Disclosure

The University does not wish to interfere with private choices regarding personal relationships so long as these relationships do not interfere with the goals and policies of the University. However, consensual romantic or sexual relationships in an academic and/or work environment pose a threat to professionalism in situations where they compromise, or appear to compromise, an employee's judgment of those subject to his/her direct supervision or authority. Where there is a power differential, romantic or sexual relationships are susceptible of being characterized as non-consensual or coercive.

For the purposes of this policy, "supervision" or "authority" includes the power to control or influence another person's employment, academic advancement, or extracurricular participation, including but not limited to, hiring, work conditions, compensation, promotion, discipline, admission, grades, assignments, supervisions of dissertation, recommendations, financial support or participation in extracurricular programs.

Violations of this policy may lead to a presumption of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence and can lead to disciplinary sanctions including termination and/or expulsion.

Relationships between Employees



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A University employee shall not invite, initiate, or engage in, and is prohibited from, consensual relationships with another employee whenever one employee has supervision or authority over another employee.

Should a consensual relationship exist prior to the beginning of the period of direct supervision or authority, or develop while an employee is, or would be, in a position of direct supervision or authority of another employee, the employee exercising direct supervision or authority shall immediately report such relationship to his/her immediate supervisor and initiate steps to avoid or terminate the direct supervision or authority.

Relationships Between Employees and Students

The integrity of the employee-student relationship serves as the foundation of the University's educational and service mission. For faculty members, these relationships require responsible behavior from those who have authority and accountability as educators, mentors, and evaluators. For staff members, these relationships also require responsible conduct from employees who frequently serve as facilitators, counselors, and evaluators.

The unequal authority inherent in these relationships can heighten the vulnerability of the student and the potential for coercion or other inappropriate conduct by employees. The pedagogical relationship between a faculty member and student, and the support relationship between a staff member and a student, must be protected from influences or activities that can interfere with learning or with the services and mission of the University.

A University employee shall not invite, initiate, or engage in, and is prohibited from, consensual relationships with students whenever the employee has direct supervision or authority with respect to the student.

Should a consensual relationship exist prior to the beginning of the period of direct supervision or authority, or develop while an employee is, or would be, in a position of direct supervision over the student, the employee exercising direct supervision or authority shall immediately report such relationship to his/her immediate supervisor and initiate steps to avoid or terminate the direct supervision. Avoidance or termination includes but is not limited to the student not enrolling in a course; a qualified alternative employee taking the position of direct supervision; assigning or transferring the student to, or the student selecting another academic advisor; or the student dropping or withdrawing from a course.



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III. Responsibility for this Operating Policy

Policy Owner

As part of the initial approval of this policy by the President and subsequent to the original dissemination of the policy, the President is the policy owner for the ongoing evaluation, review, and approval of this policy. Subsequent reviews and revisions to this policy must be in accordance with approved operating policy procedures and processes.

This policy will be reviewed every two years or more frequently as needed by the Policy Owner. Revisions will be reviewed/affirmed by the Faculty Senate and the Cabinet and approved by the University President. This policy will be updated/published in the University's Policy Library.

Responsibility for Policy Implementation

The President has assigned the responsibility of implementing this policy to the Chief Human Resources Officer, under the direction of the Vice President for Financial Affairs.