Information

Intimate Relationships

Effective

June 24, 2021

Applicability

This policy applies to all University employees (administrators, faculty, staff) and students.

Administrative Authority

Executive Vice President and University Provost; Vice President for Human Resources

Responsible Unit

Executive Vice President and University Provost
Phone: 502-852-5726
Email: provost@louisville.edu

Human Resources
Phone: 502-852-6258
Email: hrpbsvcs@louisville.edu

History

This policy supersedes the Consensual Sexual Relations Policy adopted by the Board of Trustees on September 27, 1999. Approved by the President's Cabinet June 15, 2021 and the University of Louisville Board of Trustees on June 24, 2021.

Revision Date(s): June 23, 2026 (minor revisions)

Reviewed Date(s): June 23, 2026

Categories

Reason for Policy:

The University of Louisville is committed to fostering an environment that is fair, psychologically healthy, respectful, safe, and free of sexual and discriminatory harassment. It is fundamental to the University's mission that the professional responsibilities of its employees be carried out in a manner that is free of conflicts of interest, favoritism, and situations that create unfair advantages.

Intimate relationships have inherent risks when they involve one member of the University community who has supervisory or other evaluative responsibility over another individual; further, such relationships create perceived or actual conflicts of interest and perceptions of unfair advantage. There are also inherent risks in any intimate relationship between individuals in unequal positions of power (such as teacher and student, supervisor and employee). Such relationships may undermine the real or perceived integrity of the supervision and evaluation provided, and the trust inherent in such relationships. Moreover, presently or retrospectively, the relationship may be less consensual than what is believed by one or both parties, especially by the individual whose position confers power.

Furthermore, such relationships may harm or injure others in the academic or work environment. Relationships in which one party is in a position to review the work or influence the career of the other may provide grounds for complaint when that relationship gives, or creates the appearance of, favoritism or unfair advantage to the person involved in the relationship, or when it restricts opportunities or creates a hostile environment for others.

In circumstances when sexual harassment is alleged as the result of an intimate relationship, the existence of the intimate relationship is not a per se violation of the Title IX Employee Sexual Misconduct Policy, Title IX Student Sexual Misconduct Policy, or Reports of Bias, Discrimination, and Harassment Policy. However, the

apparent consensual nature of the relationship is inherently suspect due to the fundamental asymmetry of power. Past consent does not remove grounds for or preclude a charge or subsequent finding of sexual harassment based upon subsequent unwelcome conduct.

Statement:

For the foregoing reasons, the following types of intimate relationships are prohibited:

a. An instructor, staff or administrator (including but not limited to a faculty member, part-time lecturer, academic advisor, athletic coach, residence hall professional staff) and an undergraduate student;

b. An instructor, staff or administrator and a graduate or professional student, when the instructor, staff or administrator has a current or expected supervisory or instructional role with the student or when the instructor, staff or administrator and student are in the same academic school, college, program or department;

c. A graduate or professional student and an undergraduate, graduate, or professional student when there is a supervisory or instructional role; and

d. A supervisor and the supervisor's direct report.

Moreover, any employee (faculty, administrator, or staff) or other person in an instructional or supervisory role, who was in a past intimate relationship with a student is prohibited from serving in a supervisory or instructional role, directly or indirectly, of that student.

Other intimate relationships in which one party has power or authority over the other may also violate this policy.

For definitions of "intimate relationship", "instructor", "staff", "student", "direct report", "instructional role", and "supervisory role", refer to the Definitions section below.

EXCEPTIONS OR EXCLUSIONS

In circumstances where there is no supervisory or instructional role, requests for exceptions to this policy may be approved by the Executive Vice President and University Provost or designee in cases involving faculty or administrators; by the enrollment unit dean or designee in cases involving graduate or professional students; or by the Vice President for Human Resources or designee in cases involving staff. No exception will permit continuation of a supervisory or instructional role between a faculty member and a student who are, or were, in an intimate relationship, or between a supervisor and the supervisor's direct report. Further, exceptions should not adversely affect the student's academic progress or the direct report's opportunity for advancement within the University.

This policy does not apply to relationships involving family, marriage, or domestic partnership in the employment context. Such relationships are governed by the University's Nepotism policy.

Complaints alleging sexual harassment or sexual misconduct directed at a student, faculty, or staff member are resolved under the University’s Title IX Employee Sexual Misconduct Policy, Title IX Student Sexual Misconduct Policy, and/or the Reports of Bias, Discrimination, and Harassment Policy, which prohibits unwanted behavior of a sexual nature. Conduct that may have initiated in an intimate relationship can be determined to be sexual harassment at any time the behavior becomes unwelcomed. In its sole discretion, the University reserves the option to review and address conduct and reports under more than one of these policies in order to address a complaint. The highest priority and deference will be given to the resolution of complaints of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct.

REPORTING CONDUCT COVERED BY THIS POLICY

Any employee (faculty, administrator, or staff) or other person in an instructional or supervisory role who is engaged in an intimate relationship as defined by this policy must report the relationship to the appropriate responsible officer as outlined in the Procedures section below. Upon receipt of the report, the responsible officer will evaluate whether the relationship is a violation of the policy and will determine a response after appropriate consultation. Failure to self-disclose such relationships may constitute a violation of this policy.

Any employee who becomes aware of conduct that may be prohibited by this policy should report the conduct as outlined in the Procedures section of this policy, which includes the option to report anonymously through the University's compliance hotline.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In order to encourage self-disclosure of intimate relationships and to empower members of the University community to report perceived policy violations, the University will make every reasonable effort to treat all information received in the course of addressing a self-disclosure or concern in a manner that protects, to the extent permissible by law, the confidentiality of all parties.

FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THIS POLICY

Employees who fail to abide by this policy and associated procedures will be subject to remedial and/or disciplinary action in accordance with the Redbook and other University policies and procedures. Employees and students may grieve such action or initiate a formal complaint in accordance with provisions of the Redbook and other University policies and procedures.

RETALIATION

Retaliation against persons reporting concerns about conduct that may violate this policy is prohibited and constitutes a violation of this policy and the University's policy on Duty to Report and Non-Retaliation (ICO-1.01).

Related Information:

Reports of Bias, Discrimination, and Harassment (PER 1.10) (https://louisville.edu/policies/policies-and-procedures/pageholder/pol-reports-of-bias-discrimination-and-harassment)

Title IX Employee Sexual Misconduct Policy (https://louisville.edu/policies/policies-and-procedures/pageholder/pol-title-ix-employee-sexual-misconduct)

Title IX Student Sexual Misconduct Policy (https://louisville.edu/policies/policies-and-procedures/pageholder/pol-title-ix-student-sexual-misconduct-policy)

Nepotism Policy (PER 2.11) (https://louisville.edu/policies/policies-and-procedures/pageholder/pol-nepotism)

Duty to Report and Non-Retaliation Policy (ICO 1.01) (https://louisville.edu/policies/policies-and-procedures/pageholder/pol-duty-to-report-and-non-retaliation)

Definitions:

For the purposes of this policy, the terms set forth below are defined as follows:

a. "Intimate relationship" means any romantic or sexual relationship between individuals, regardless of sex or gender, who are not married to, or domestic partners with, one another.

b. "Instructor", means an individual, paid or unpaid, who teaches; advises; coaches; evaluates; or supervises, including but not limited to:

1. Board of Trustees-appointed faculty members;
2. Part-time lecturers;
3. Any instructor of record;
4. Graduate students and post-doctoral fellows with teaching responsibilities;
5. Academic advisors;
6. Athletics coaches;
7. Residence hall professional staff; and
8. Medical and dental residents with teaching responsibilities.

c. "Student" means individuals who receive instruction, coaching, evaluation or supervision under the auspices of the University, including but not limited to:

1. Those who have enrolled into an educational program at the University;
2. Postdoctoral fellows;
3. Medical and dental residents; and
4. Participants served by internships, practicum experiences, outreach, and summer programs and camps.

d. "Staff", as defined in Redbook Section 5.1, means all employees of the University who do not hold faculty appointments, are not full-time students enrolled in the University, are not graduate assistants at the University, or are not administrators as defined in Redbook Section 2.3.1.

e. "Direct report" means an employee whose position at work is directly below that of another person, and who is supervised by that person.

f. "Instructional role" and "supervisory role" mean any context that involves instruction, evaluation or supervision - direct or indirect, face-to-face or remote - of a student's academic work or participation in University programs. These terms include employment situations where the primary purpose for participation by the employee is instructional, as well as situations involving medical and dental residents, postdoctoral fellows, teaching assistants, and student research assistants in their instructional capacity.

Procedures:

a. Self-disclosure.

Instructors and staff are expected to make a good faith effort to report within ten business days the existence of an intimate relationship that may be in violation of this policy. Such notification may be made to any of the following:

1. the supervisor of the employee;
2. the chair/director/head of the department;
3. the dean/vice president of the college/school in which the individual is employed;
4. the Office of the Provost (if faculty or administrator);
5. the Office of Faculty Affairs (if faculty); or
6. the Human Resources Employee Relations Office (if staff).

b. Bringing a complaint.

1. A complaint alleging a violation of this policy may be brought by any person, including a third party.
2. Complaints alleging a violation of this policy may be made to any of the following:

i. the supervisor of the employee;
ii. the department chair;
iii. the dean/vice president of the college or school in which the individual is employed;
iv. the Office of the Provost;
v. the Office of Faculty Affairs;
vi. the Human Resources Office;
vii. the Dean of Students Office;
viii. the Office of Legal Compliance and Investigations;
ix. the University Integrity and Compliance Office; or
x. the University's compliance hotline (Call toll-free 1-877-852-1167 or submit a web-based report).

c. Resolution of a complaint or self-disclosure by an employee.

1. Once a recipient receives a complaint or a self-disclosure, the recipient will forward the information to the University Integrity and Compliance Office who will evaluate the complaint allegations and route them to the Office of Legal Compliance and Investigations for appropriate outreach and determination if the allegations are within the scope of one of the University's Title IX policies. If the complaint allegations are within the scope of one of the University's Title IX policies, then the Title IX policy and investigative procedures will take precedent over any other review. If outside the scope of the Title IX policy, then the appropriate responsible officer will review and determine if there is a violation of the Intimate Relationship Policy, and if so, after appropriate consultation, any corrective and/or disciplinary action. Responsible officers are:

i. The academic unit dean and Executive Vice President and University Provost, or designees, if the matter involves faculty;
ii. The Executive Vice President and University Provost or President, as appropriate, or designees, if the matter involves an administrator;
iii. The Vice President for Human Resources, or designee, if the matter involves staff;
iv. The dean of the student's academic unit, or designee, if the matter involves a graduate or professional student in an instructional or supervisory role.

2. If the responsible officer determines that the policy applies and there is a potential violation, the individual against whom concerns have arisen will be provided an opportunity to respond.

3. In consideration of all information received, the responsible officer shall then implement the remediation and/or discipline. That individual will also maintain a record of such action.
4. An employee may request an exception to the policy, although exceptions will be granted only in rare and unusual circumstances. No exception will permit continuation of a supervisory or instructional role between a faculty member and a student who are, or were, in an intimate relationship, or between a supervisor and the supervisor's direct report. Exceptions should not adversely affect the student's academic progress or the direct report's opportunity for advancement within the University. If the responsible officer supports the exception request, that individual may forward a recommendation for final approval as follows:

i. to the Executive Vice President and University Provost (in the case of faculty and administrators).
ii. to the appropriate department chair or chair's designee (in the case of graduate or professional students).
iii. to the Vice President for Human Resources (in the case of staff).

5. Faculty members, staff and students may grieve remedial and/or disciplinary actions in accordance with provisions of the Redbook and other university policies and procedures.

Responsibilities:

Regardless of who initiates the intimate relationship, the administrator, faculty, staff or graduate/professional student is responsible for complying with this policy. In a case involving a student, the employee or other individual in an instructional role is responsible for disclosing the existence of the relationship. In a case involving employees engaged in an intimate relationship, the employee holding the position or role of higher rank or power at the University is responsible for disclosing the relationship.