

	POLICY ON CONSENSUAL STAFF/STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS	
	Adopted: June 14, 2024	EFFECTIVE: July 1, 2024
Warning: This policy formally prohibits staff members from engaging in romantic relationships with students enrolled at Alabama A&M University		

Purpose:

Alabama A&M University (the “University”) is committed to providing an environment for work and learning as free as possible from conflicts of interest, favoritism and exploitation. Where an individual exercises direct supervision to coerce another person to enter into a non-consensual relationship, the harm to that person and to the institution is evident. Even where the relationship is consensual, there is significant potential for harm when there is a power difference between the parties involved - - for example, between a supervisor and an employee or between a staff member and a student. Any evaluation or supervision provided may be suspect in view of such relationship.

A consensual relationship with a subordinate is likely to interfere with the ability of a superior to act and make decisions fairly and without bias. Even if the superior is able to avoid showing favoritism, the other individuals in the learning or workplace environment are likely to see themselves as being less favored and disadvantaged by the personal relationship. Additionally, the damage can continue long beyond the consensual relationship and can make people suspicious of any future professional interactions between the individuals.

The following policy addresses appropriate staff/student relationships.

Policy:

The work and/or educational relationships between employees, volunteers, and students must remain professional at all times. Romantic and/or sexual relationships may create an appearance of impropriety that is contrary to the interests of the University. Even though a relationship may have been consensual at its inception, a significant power differential exists when one party to the relationship has the authority to influence the academic progress, aid, benefits, or services of a student. These are just some examples of influence and in no way is this intended as an exhaustive list. Such relationships are particularly vulnerable to exploitation as well as to claims of exploitation.

Prohibited Relationships:

Employees and/or volunteers shall not engage in or solicit consensual romantic and/or sexual relationships with any student.

No employee and/or volunteer shall exercise any academic, administrative, supervisory, evaluative, counseling, advisory, or extracurricular authority or influence over any student with whom that employee has previously been involved in a consensual romantic and/or sexual relationship.

It is the responsibility of the employee(s) who are or ever have been involved in such a consensual romantic and/or sexual relationship to disclose their relationship in the Conflict of Interest Disclosure system. This disclosure will be reviewed by the Office of Human Resources and forwarded to the Senior Personnel Officer of the division, to report the relationship and begin taking steps necessary to ensure immediate compliance with this policy. The Office of Human Resources will assist the employee and the appropriate parties to ensure compliance. Compliance may be achieved in a number of ways including, but not limited to:

- A. The voluntary transfer or reassignment of one party so the improper student/employee relationship no longer exists; or
- B. Excluding the employee from having any influence over the provision of academic progress, aid, benefits, or services to the student;

Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. Potential violations of this policy should be promptly reported to the Office of Human Resources and the Student Title IX Coordinator.

Definitions:

For purposes of this policy, the following terms are defined as follows:

Employee - For the purposes of this policy, includes staff, graduate/undergraduate student employees and anyone providing services to or on behalf of the University.

Student - A student currently enrolled or seeking enrollment at the University.

Consensual Relationship - Any dating, romantic, sexual, or marriage relationship willingly undertaken by the parties.

Supervisory Authority - Includes but is not limited to the following activities: academic instruction, course teaching, formal mentoring, overseeing, directing, examining, grading, advising (internal and/or external), coaching, supervising, evaluating, recommending, promoting, paraprofessional student staff member duty coverage areas, employing and other employment actions including directly setting of salary or wages, any disciplinary action, including suspension, expulsion and termination, and exercising responsibility for grades, honors or degrees.

Academic/Advisory Influence – The power or authority to evaluate, influence, provide, or control aspects related to a student’s education or professional development. Covered activities include, but are not limited to, teaching, grading, mentoring, advising (internal and/or external), coaching, evaluating research or other academic activity, serving on a student’s dissertation committee, participating in decisions or recommendations regarding

funding or other resources, clinical supervision, and recommending for admissions, employment, fellowships, or awards.

Sanctions/Intent:

University responses to violations of this Policy will vary as appropriate to the facts and circumstances of each case and persons in violation of this Policy shall be subject to sanctions ranging from verbal warnings to dismissal or termination. The University reserves the right to take disciplinary action against members of the University community who make false allegations of unreported consensual relationships. This Policy is not intended to intrude on the privacy of members of the University community but is intended primarily to be instructive and corrective.

A staff member who engages in a prohibited relationship and/or fails to report will be subject to discipline up to and including termination from job duties. Other, lesser sanctions may be imposed depending upon the circumstances.