

## REVISED POLICY ON ROMANTIC AND SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH UNDERGRADUATE 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.

Undergraduate students are particularly vulnerable to the power asymmetry of the student-teacher relationship. In recognition of that, this policy modifies the current policy of the University with respect to undergraduate students, which states that no faculty member is to have a romantic or sexual relationship with any student over whom he or she has or might reasonably expect to have academic or professional authority. The current University policies with respect to romantic relationships between faculty and other students (including but not limited to graduate students, and/or executive students) remain in effect.

### Policy Text

#### *Rule*

No faculty member may initiate or accept sexual or romantic advances or engage in a romantic or sexual relationship with any undergraduate student enrolled in Columbia College, the Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science, the School of General Studies, or Barnard College or other affiliate of Columbia, regardless of whether the faculty member has a supervisory role over the student.

These restrictions against romantic and/or sexual relationships with undergraduate students apply to

all officers of instruction, research, administration, and the libraries.

The restrictions also apply to graduate students with appointments as student officers of instruction and research and to graduate students with appointments as teaching assistants, and tutors, during any period of time they are teaching, advising or supervising an undergraduate student.

“Undergraduate student” includes undergraduates enrolled in any program at the University or an affiliate, visiting undergraduate students and any undergraduate student employee or volunteer at the University. This policy is also applied to any member of the Columbia community (other than an undergraduate student) 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 or evaluate students.

### *Sanctions*

Failure to comply with this policy may lead to disciplinary action 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 Institutional Equity (OIE) ([institutionalequity.columbia.edu](http://institutionalequity.columbia.edu)). Students concerned about romantic relationships involving others in their programs or classes are encouraged to speak with OIE.

Faculty, staff and students concerned about consensual 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 OIE, consistent with University policies and federal regulations. At all times, the institutional response shall keep the student’s educational aims and needs foremost

### *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 *Anti-Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment Policies & Procedures for Faculty & Staff*, a copy of which may be found online at: <http://institutionalequity.columbia.edu/>. Questions regarding the Romantic and Sexual Relationship Policies or the *Anti-Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment Policies & Procedures for Faculty & Staff* should be directed to OIE, 80 Claremont Avenue, 212-854-5511, [institutionalequity@columbia.edu](mailto:institutionalequity@columbia.edu).

## Exceptions & Special Situations

### *Special Provisions for Undergraduate Teaching Assistants*

The University recognizes that undergraduate classes often have undergraduate teaching assistants. In order to avoid conflicts that may arise in these circumstances, undergraduate teaching assistants should not initiate or accept sexual or romantic advances or engage in a romantic or sexual relationship with a student in a class where they are the teaching assistant. Should undergraduate teaching assistants or students find themselves in a situation where such a relationship exists (or has in the past existed), the teaching assistant or student should promptly notify the faculty member to whom the teaching assistant reports and/or the University's Office of Institutional Equity so that the situation can be appropriately managed.

### *Other Exceptions*

In certain unusual circumstances, faculty or staff and the relevant student may request a policy exception from OIE. Requests must be made by both parties in person, or if initially made by phone or in writing, with an in-person follow-up. OIE 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. OIE shall not grant any exception to a faculty or staff member (including a graduate student or teaching assistant) who is supervising or teaching the relevant student unless appropriate alternatives, acceptable to the undergraduate student, can be made for the supervision and/or teaching of the student.

## Policy Review

The Commission on the Status of Women and the Student Affairs Committee will review the effectiveness of this policy annually in consultation with OIE, reporting to the University Senate in their annual reports.

*Adopted April 2018*