Consenting Relationships

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Contact: Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost

Introduction

Consenting relationships that are of concern to Iowa State University are those romantic, sexual, or intimate relationships in which both parties appear to have consented, but where there is a reporting or evaluation relationship between the two parties.

Policy Statement

Consenting relationships between teachers and students, supervisors and employees, or colleagues when one is, or likely will be, involved in the evaluation of the other are inappropriate.

In the case of the instructor and student, for example, the respect and trust accorded the instructor by the student, as well as the power exercised by the instructor in giving grades, thesis advice, evaluations, recommendations for further study and future employment, may greatly diminish the student's actual freedom of choice concerning an amorous or sexual relationship. Similarly, supervisors are in positions of assigning and evaluating the work of employees who report to them, and senior colleagues often provide advice and support to junior colleagues and are involved in decisions concerning promotion and tenure, course and committee assignments, and salary increases.

Because of these reporting and evaluation relationships and the uneven power inherent in such relationships, it will be very difficult to prove immunity from a subsequent charge of sexual harassment on grounds of mutual consent. It is the instructor, supervisor, or senior colleague who, by virtue of his/her position, will bear a special burden of accountability if charges of sexual harassment arise.

It is the responsibility of the faculty member, supervisor, or other staff member who becomes involved in a personal relationship with a student or employee to avoid any conflict, or apparent conflict, of interest between personal and professional concerns. Thus, a faculty member must not participate in the evaluation of a student, colleague, or staff member with whom a romantic or sexual relationship exists or has existed. In the case of a supervisory relationship, it is the responsibility of the parties involved to take appropriate actions to change the work and reporting relationship to remove the possibility of a conflict of interest. Failure to do so is a violation of professional ethics and may result in disciplinary action.

Resources

Links

- Discrimination and Harassment Policy
- Faculty Handbook 7.2.2.1.1.
- Conflicts of Interest and Commitment
- Nepotism