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# SOUTHEASTERN

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L O U I S I A N A U N I V E R S I T Y

## **Consensual Relationships**

The integrity of the relationship between faculty/staff and students is the foundation of Southeastern's educational mission. This relationship places considerable trust in the faculty/staff member, who bears responsibility and accountability as mentor, educator, evaluator or supervisor. The unequal institutional power inherent in this relationship heightens the vulnerability of the student and the potential for coercion. Whenever a faculty/staff member is responsible for academic or administrative supervision of a student, a personal relationship of a romantic nature, even if consensual, is inappropriate. Any such relationship jeopardizes the integrity of the educational process.

These relationships between members of the Southeastern community, where the faculty/staff member has academic, administrative, or other evaluative authority over the student are highly suspect, even when consensual. The consensual relationship may create a real or perceived conflict of interest that tarnishes the objectivity of evaluations by the faculty/staff member of the student. Others may perceive that the relationship creates favoritism. There is risk of exploitation and coercion. Over time the line between consensual and non-consensual relationships may change, especially in the freedom of the student to end the relationship without fear of adverse consequences. This may create exposure of the faculty/staff member and the University administration to charges of sexual harassment. These problems are particularly grave when the student is an undergraduate, who may because of age and inexperience be vulnerable.

These problems may arise in a variety of situations, including instructors and students, counselors and students, coaches and student athletes, sponsors and students in an honorary society or club, teaching or laboratory assistants and students in their sections, and residence hall staff and student residents. Other examples might include a student for whom the faculty member is an advisor or a member of the student's thesis or dissertation committee or a student who is serving as the faculty member's graduate assistant.

Members of the Southeastern community are strongly advised to refrain from entering into such consensual relationships with persons over whom they have authority or from obtaining authority over those with whom such a relationship exists. If despite this policy, the faculty/staff enters into such a relationship, he/she shall report the situation to the relevant supervisor, who

shall act to determine the best means of resolving the actual or potential conflicts and shall maintain confidentiality of the information reported to the extent possible under the circumstances. The supervisor shall consult with the appropriate dean or division head regarding the situation and proposed actions to resolve it. Should the nature or circumstances of the relationship change, the supervisor will be promptly informed. If a faculty/staff member follows this procedure and the supervisor's recommendations, there shall be no sanctions made against the faculty/staff member pursuant to this policy.

If a faculty/staff member engages in a consensual relationship with a student over whom he or she has authority without taking the appropriate steps to resolve the conflict, including reporting such a relationship to his/her immediate supervisor, he/she may be subject to disciplinary action under the policies and procedures specified in the appropriate handbook covering charges of unprofessional conduct. Sanctions will be commensurate with the severity of the offense.