
CONSENSUAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS POLICY DISCUSSION



OUR PURPOSE

At the University of Southern California, our mission is to achieve excellence in education, research, and community.



EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Our priority is the education of our students through a broad array of academic, professional, extracurricular and athletic programs of the first rank. All of us, faculty and staff, strive constantly for excellence in teaching, advising and imparting knowledge and skills to our students



BUILDING A COMMUNITY

The academic success of students is central to our mission. The university community must strive to reduce influences or activities, stemming from our behaviors and interactions, that can interfere with learning and development of our students.



Our students are central to the universities' mission and purpose

ALIGNING OUR POLICIES TO OUR PURPOSE

Over the past 20 years, many institutions of higher learning have sought to align their policies about interacting with students with their missions, goals, and objectives.



ADOPTING POLICIES TO PREVENT INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS OF FACULTY AND STAFF WITH UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS:



Acknowledges the serious issues that can stem from such relationships for the impacted student and for other students (perceptions of bias, pressure, unfairness)



Reflects the reality that between undergraduate students and faculty and staff have natural power/influence issues



Provide assurance to our students that excellence in education and research is our number one priority and that every faculty member is a potential guide for each and every one of our undergraduate students



Prevent situations where student accomplishments and successes are undermined by perceptions of unfairness

PROHIBITING INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS - PEER INSTITUTIONS

A compelling number of our peer institutions prohibit intimate, consensual relationships between faculty and/or staff and undergraduate students.

Examples:

- Boston College
- Bradley University
- Brandeis University
- Brown
- East Tennessee State University
- George Washington University
- Georgetown
- Harvard
- Michigan State
- New York University
- Princeton
- Rutgers
- Stanford
- Tufts
- Tulane
- University of Illinois
- University of Missouri
- University of Texas Austin
- University of Vermont
- University of Michigan
- Washington University St. Louis
- William & Mary
- Caltech
- Columbia
- Dartmouth
- Duke
- MIT
- Northwestern
- UPenn

Why focus on undergraduates?

- The inherent imbalance of power between USC employees and undergraduate students can undermine principles of affirmative consent and welcomeness
- Intimate relationships between faculty and undergraduate students may impact the perceptions of other students, parents, or community members.
- Title IX may be implicated when there are intimate personal relationships between USC employees and students because of the potential to create a hostile environment.

Per longstanding policy consistent with our peers, USC expressly prohibits Personal Relationships between faculty, staff (including student advisors) and undergraduate and graduate students where there is a supervisory, advisory, or evaluative relationship between them.

THERE CAN BE EXCEPTIONS, IF APPROPRIATE

Disclosure and conflict management can allow for flexibility in certain situations:

- ✓ A faculty or staff member's current partner enrolls at USC as an undergraduate student
- ✓ Faculty or staff are hired and their partner is an undergraduate level student
- ✓ A consensual relationship formed before the university issued a policy –require disclosure upon policy approval



DISCUSSION



APPENDIX: 2022 FACULTY HANDBOOK LANGUAGE

Section 3-F of the Faculty Handbook already contains several statements addressing the power differential between faculty and students

*There is an inherent power differential between faculty and students, and there are also power differentials between faculty and non-students they supervise or evaluate...**Sexual relationships between these parties may lack meaningful consent.** These relationships may put either party at risk. They can create a perceived lack of freedom to give meaningful consent about the relationships. **The University does not tolerate non-consensual sexual relationships** within its work and academic environment.*

*Because of the power differential, including the inherent power differential between faculty and students, **all faculty are prohibited from having an intimate, romantic, or sexual relationship, even a consensual one, with any person that the faculty member teaches, supervises, or evaluates,** including any student, resident, or fellow of the university or an affiliated institution as well as any visiting student, resident, or fellow.*

*...**the University strongly discourages sexual relationships and sexual advances between faculty and any students, residents, or fellows, or between faculty and any employees where there is a power differential.** There is an inherent power differential between faculty and students, and there are also power differentials between faculty and non-students they supervise or evaluate. This can create a perceived lack of freedom to give meaningful consent about the relationships.*

**A clear policy statement
would benefit faculty by
reducing ambiguity around
what is and is not an
appropriate faculty-
student relationship**