

Policy on Consensual Intimate Relationship with Undergraduate Students

Questions and Answers

In addition to the following responses, the accountable units for this policy established cirpolicy@andrew.cmu.edu as a means for receiving specific questions regarding the policy and/or its implementation.

1. **Q: What relationships does this policy affect?**

A: This policy focuses on consensual intimate relationships between undergraduate students and other members of the Carnegie Mellon community who may hold, or be perceived to hold, positions of authority over them.

2. **Q: Why is this policy even necessary?**

A: The purpose of this policy is to assure healthy professional relationships. This policy is not intended to discourage consensual intimate relationships unless there is a conflicting professional relationship in which one party has authority over the other. Intimate relations (even if consensual) between undergraduates and those in a position of authority over them compromise the integrity of the academic and professional relationship.

3. **Q: What does the policy prohibit?**

A: Consensual intimate relationships between undergraduate students and senior administrators, faculty, and academic instructional staff of the University are prohibited, as are actions intended to solicit such relationships. Similarly, such relationships between undergraduate students and staff or post-doctoral researchers are prohibited when the staff member or post doc is in a position of authority over the undergraduate student (as are actions intended to solicit such relationships).

Finally, the University does not prohibit consensual intimate relationships between students. However, where one student is in a position of authority over another: (a) neither student should solicit or initiate an intimate relationship with the other; and (b) any consensual intimate relationships must be disclosed and mitigated. Please consult the policy directly for definitions of the above roles and more detail regarding positions of authority.

4. **Q: Who is expected to report possible violations of this policy?**

A: In order for this policy to be meaningful and the intended purpose realized, all members of the university community are expected to act in good faith. Persons in positions of authority are explicitly expected to disclose or report relationships contemplated as either prohibited or for which mitigation would be required in the Policy. Supervisors and managers (including faculty who supervise teaching assistants for their own courses) are required to report any disclosure made to them in their supervisory role.

5. **Q: In conversation with my advisee they shared that they are currently dating an undergraduate student who is enrolled in a course where my advisee serves as a grader. Am I obligated to report this to someone? How should I respond?**

A: You should ask your advisee if they have shared the existence of this relationship with the course instructor or other responsible party (which is required of them by the Policy). If they have not done so you should advise them of the expectation outlined in the Policy and offer

support (as needed) to assist them in making this disclosure. They can disclose directly to the course instructor or via the [online disclosure form](#). You can also refer them to the Associate Vice President in Student Affairs who, in addition to supporting mitigation of the conflict, can answer questions and offer guidance as indicated in the Policy. Their disclosure to you is not sufficient to meet their obligations under the policy. While you are not required to disclose the relationship to the university, you may report the relationship by directly contacting the faculty instructor for the course, head TA, academic department head, associate dean or the supervisor or by submitting a report through the [online form](#).

6. Q: I usually hire student Teaching Assistants for my course, how can I eliminate or alleviate any possible conflicts of interest or positions of authority for these students?

A: We encourage instructors to discuss possible conflicts of interest and this Policy explicitly with their TAs prior to the beginning of the course. Many instructors and/or departments have created processes through which student TAs, graders, or RAs who are in positions of authority over undergraduate students can proactively identify possible conflicts and allow for preemptive mitigation of such conflicts. If positions of authority are preemptively removed such that the policy no longer applies to the consensual intimate relationship because neither student has authority over the other, its disclosure is not required. Many departmental TA coordinators and faculty set the expectation that Teaching Assistants in the course will disclose all possible conflicts before the start of the course and will not form new close personal relationships (of any kind) with students enrolled in the course.

7. Q: There are many possible relationships that a TA might have with an enrolled student. Which require disclosure and reporting under this policy?

A: Only consensual intimate relationships require disclosure or reporting to the University under the policy. Departments and colleges may require disclosure of other possible conflicts of interest, which could include family relationships (e.g., parent, sibling, cousin), friend relationships (e.g. roommate, fraternity or sorority members, teammate), past romantic, family or friend relationships, current formal academic relationships (TAs in a course a student is currently enrolled in). You should consult your department head or dean to determine if your unit requires TAs to disclose other possible conflicts of interest associated with enrolled students in your course.

8. Q: My department has a process for TAs and RAs to acknowledge possible conflicts of interest at the beginning of each semester but I just learned from a student in my class that they are dating one of the TAs. Do I have to report this to someone?

A: This is a situation that requires reporting and action. You can start by either reporting to your department head or by completing the [online reporting form](#). Since your department has a process in place for proactive intervention, there may also be departmental or College guidance about how possible violations of the Policy will be managed. By completing the reporting form or engaging your department head you can ensure appropriate notification and also support for you and the students involved as we investigate and address any violations.

9. Q: Are certain people or roles at the university considered “mandatory reporters” under this Policy? If I learn about a relationship that would be prohibited by the Policy, do I have an obligation to report it?

A: While the term “mandatory reporter” is not used in the Policy, there are individuals who are identified as ***expected to report*** under this Policy. First, individuals in positions of authority (as defined in the Policy) who are engaged in a relationship with an undergraduate student hold the primary responsibility for disclosing the relevant relationship. Also, supervisors and managers (including faculty who supervise teaching assistants for their own courses) are required to report any disclosure made to them in their supervisory role.

10. Q: If a TA in my class discloses a relationship by submitting the online form, how will I as the instructor learn that mitigation needs to take place?

A: When a form is submitted via the online system it is routed to the appropriate resource coordinator as identified in the Policy. The resource coordinators are positioned to work individually with the parties involved and ensure that necessary mitigation strategies are enacted. In this instance the report would be routed to the Associate Vice President for Community Standards and Diversity Initiatives in Student Affairs (Holly Hippensteel). The instructor will be notified and involved in the mitigation planning but the specifics for who and how that notification will happen would be determined via consultation with the TA who self-disclosed the relationship.