



Consensual Relationships

POLICY STATEMENT

Romantic or sexual relationships between students or postgraduates (as defined by this policy) and faculty members, staff members, or others in positions of authority over them are prohibited whenever those relationships have the potential to interfere with an individual's right or ability to pursue academic, training, research, or professional interests.

REASON FOR POLICY

The university strives to protect the integrity of the university experience of students and postgraduates, with the freedom to pursue academic, training, research, and professional interests in an environment without preferential or unfair treatment, discrimination, harassment, bias, or coercion. In addition, the university expects faculty, staff, and others in positions of authority to manage their responsibilities appropriately and with sound professional judgment and impartiality. Finally, the university supports an overall educational environment that is free from conflicts of interest.

ENTITIES AFFECTED BY THIS POLICY

- Ithaca-based locations
- Cornell Tech campus
- Weill Cornell Medicine campuses, which administer this policy under Weill Cornell Medicine procedures.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS POLICY

- All members of the university community

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MOST CURRENT VERSION OF THIS POLICY

– <https://policy.cornell.edu/policy-library/consensual-relationships>

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RELATED RESOURCES

University Policies and Information Applicable to All Units of the University

[University Policy 4.6, Standards of Ethical Conduct](#)

[University Policy 4.14, Conflicts of Interest and Commitment \(Excluding Financial Conflict of Interest Related to Research\)](#)

[University Policy 6.4, Prohibited Bias, Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual and Related Misconduct](#)

[President Pollack's Statement on Consensual Relationships](#)

[FAQs for Policy 6.3: Consensual Relationships](#)

University Policies and Information Applicable to Only Ithaca-Based Locations and Cornell Tech

[SHARE](#) (Sexual Harassment and Assault - Response and Education)

[Faculty Handbook](#)

University Policies and Information Applicable to Only Weill Cornell Medicine Locations

Academic Staff Handbook

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CONTACTS – ITHACA-BASED LOCATIONS AND CORNELL TECH

Direct any general questions about this policy to your college or unit administrative office or human resources representative. If you have questions about specific issues, contact the following offices.

Contacts, Ithaca-Based Locations and Cornell Tech

Subject	Contact	Telephone	Email/Web Address
Policy Clarification and Interpretation	Local administrative office or human resources representative	Unit-specific	
	Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX	(607) 255-2242	titleix@cornell.edu
	Office of Dean of Faculty	(607) 255-4963	deanoffaculty@cornell.edu
	Office of Dean of Students	(607) 254-8598	dean_of_students@cornell.edu
	Office of Dean of Graduate School	(607) 254-7374	dean_gradschool@cornell.edu
	Office of Vice President of Human Resources	(607) 255-3621	vp_of_hr@cornell.edu
Counseling and Psychiatry (for all students)	Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) – Cornell Health	(607) 255-5155	cornellhealth@cornell.edu
LGBT+ Health and Sexuality	LGBT Resources Center	(607) 254-4907	lgbtrc@cornell.edu
Reporting Criminal Behavior	Cornell University Police Department (CUPD)	(607) 255-1111	cu_police@cornell.edu
Sexual Harassment	Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX	(607) 255-2242	titleix@cornell.edu
Support for Faculty and Staff	Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (FSAP)	(607) 255-2673	fsap@cornell.edu
Women’s Health and Sexuality	Women’s Resources Center	(607) 255-0015	wrc@cornell.edu

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CONTACTS – WEILL CORNELL MEDICINE CAMPUSES

Direct any general questions about this policy to your college or unit administrative office. If you have questions about specific issues, contact the following offices.

Contacts, Weill Cornell Medicine Campuses

Subject	Contact	Telephone	Email/Web Address
Policy Clarification and Interpretation	Human Resources Office of Institutional Equity (OIE)	(646) 962-3734 (646) 962-3099	anc2035@med.cornell.edu jal2058@med.cornell.edu
Counseling and Psychiatry (for students)	Student Mental Health	(914) 997-8691 (646) 962-6942 (after-hours answering service)	pam2029@med.cornell.edu studentmentalhealth@med.cornell.edu
Counseling and Psychiatry (for any WCM community member)	Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	(212) 746-5890	eapc@med.cornell.edu
Sexual Harassment	Title IX Office (OIE)	(646) 962-9796 (646) 962-3096	bsb4002@med.cornell.edu moj4003@med.cornell.edu

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DEFINITIONS

These definitions apply to terms as they are used in this policy.

Consensual Relationship	Romantic and/or sexual relationship willingly undertaken by the parties.
Faculty	Academic titleholder who is not a postgraduate, including, but not limited to, those whose titles are modified by “visiting,” “courtesy,” “acting,” “adjunct,” “clinical,” “affiliate,” or “emeritus.” Includes librarians, lecturers, senior lecturers, research associates, senior research associates, and any other Cornell academic titleholders.
Staff	Employee of Cornell University who is not a faculty member or a student.
Position of Authority	<p>Position that exercises authority over students or postgraduates, including, but not limited to, a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course instructor, course grader, or teaching assistant for a course, training, or program attended by a student or postgraduate • Principal investigator or other supervisor in a laboratory or research project • Special committee member or other position of evaluation, including an academic, dissertation, research, or thesis advisor • Supervisor (including a student or postgraduate working as a supervisor) of a student interning or employed on campus (work-study or otherwise) • Member of a student athlete’s coaching staff • Residential life staff member in a student’s living unit • Director or associate director of a degree program, field, laboratory, research group, or center • Chair or associate chair of a department • Dean, associate dean, or any other position that makes decisions that affect a student’s or postgraduate’s academic or professional progress • Faculty member in a graduate student’s field or degree program who has direct academic authority or is likely to exercise direct academic authority in the graduate student’s future <p>◆ Note: Position titles and responsibilities may differ from those on the list above; for clarification on whether authority may exist, contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX.</p>
Postgraduate	Postdoctoral fellow, postdoctoral associate, visiting critic, or visiting fellow; veterinary intern or resident; or medical intern, resident, or fellow.
Student	Undergraduate student, graduate student, high school student, student intern, or other individual engaged in an educational or academic program at Cornell.

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RESPONSIBILITIES

The major responsibilities each party has in connection with this policy are as follows:

All University Community Members	Refrain from exercising academic or professional authority over any student or postgraduate with whom the community member has, or has had, a sexual or romantic relationship.
Faculty Member, Staff Member, or Other in Position of Authority	Disclose existing relationships, as directed under this policy, to the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX. Refrain from engaging in romantic or sexual relationships that are prohibited under the provisions described in the Prohibited Relationships section of this policy.
Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX (For Weill Cornell Medicine, all references to "Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX" refer to Weill's Human Resources and the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE))	Serve as the primary resource to the university community for guidance and enforcement of this policy. Receive disclosures of relationships, as required by this policy. In consultation with appropriate campus colleagues, determine whether recusal plans are necessary. Assist in the development of recusal plans, where appropriate.

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PRINCIPLES

Overview

As an institution where any person can find instruction in any study, Cornell demands ethical behavior from all who are engaged in its mission of learning, discovery, and engagement. Every person should have the freedom to pursue academic, training, research, and professional interests in an environment without preferential or unfair treatment, discrimination, harassment, bias, or coercion. Romantic or sexual relationships between students or postgraduates and faculty members, staff members, or others in positions of authority over them can jeopardize the integrity of that mission for the individuals involved and for those around them.

Even where they are fully consensual, romantic or sexual relationships between students or postgraduates and faculty members, staff members, or others in positions of authority over them can affect more than just the parties in the relationship:

- They can harm the overall academic environment by compromising professional judgment and impartiality then and in the future, affecting grading, distribution of resources, academic or professional recommendations, and more.
- They often undermine collegial dynamics among the students and postgraduates themselves because of rumored or actual favoritism.
- They can tarnish the academic reputation of the faculty members or others in position of authority and of the university itself.
- They can lead to complaints of harassment and other legal claims.
- They undermine the university's mission to educate the next generation and enhance the lives and livelihoods of students and postgraduates.

Regardless of their outcome, relationships between students or postgraduates and faculty members, staff members, or others in positions of authority over them can linger within the careers of all parties, potentially driving the student or postgraduate from a discipline or hampering the student's or postgraduate's academic and professional progress.

Terminology and Scope

This policy is about sexual and romantic relationships that are consensual and have a dynamic that involves power imbalance. This means that one individual in the relationship (the person in a position of authority) can or could influence the academic or professional progress of the other (the person in the subordinate role).

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[University Policy 6.4, Prohibited Bias, Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual and Related Misconduct](#), addresses bias, discrimination, harassment, and sexual and related misconduct. Some situations may implicate both this policy and University Policy 6.4. The university has the discretion to determine which policy and procedures best apply to a situation, and it will notify affected parties promptly regarding the applicable policy and as relevant, procedures.

Prohibited Relationships

Romantic or sexual relationships between students or postgraduates and faculty members, staff members, or others in positions of authority and are prohibited under these provisions:

Provision 1

Any member of the Cornell community who has, or has had, a sexual or romantic relationship with a student or postgraduate is prohibited from exercising academic or professional authority over that student or postgraduate.

Provision 2

Sexual or romantic relationships between undergraduate students and faculty members are strictly prohibited regardless of the department, school, or college affiliation of either party.

Provision 3

Sexual or romantic relationships are prohibited whenever a faculty member, staff member, or other individual holds a position of authority over the student or postgraduate or is likely to do so in the foreseeable future.

Provision 4

Sexual or romantic relationships between undergraduate students and staff members are prohibited regardless of the work unit or location of either party.

Relationships That Are Not Prohibited, but That Require Disclosure

Because a graduate or professional student's educational pursuits may evolve and that student may become academically aligned with a large number of faculty members or others who are affiliated with the same graduate field or degree program, the university discourages all intra-field/degree program relationships that are romantic or sexual in nature. When a sexual or romantic relationship develops under these circumstances that may not directly violate Provisions 1-4 (see the previous section), it is nonetheless important that the faculty member, staff member, or other person in authority promptly disclose the relationship to the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX and that an appropriate recusal plan is developed.

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Relationships Requiring Disclosure

Faculty members, staff members, or others in positions of authority must disclose a sexual or romantic relationship with a student or postgraduate under any of these circumstances:

- A sexual or romantic relationship existed prior to one or more of the parties coming to Cornell.
- A sexual or romantic relationship exists between a student or postgraduate and a faculty member, staff member, or other in a position of authority, and both parties are affiliated with the same graduate field or degree program but have no academic or working relationship with one another and do not expect to in the future.
- An individual finds themselves in a sexual or romantic relationship that is otherwise in violation of this policy.

Promptly disclosed relationships in violation of this policy are handled on a case-by-case basis by the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX, with a focus on protecting the student's or postgraduate's educational and professional opportunities and addressing conflict of interest concerns for all parties. Prompt and honest disclosure is the only method to mitigate such violations of this policy, but does not provide immunity from discipline for violations.

◆ **Note:** If clarification is desired regarding whether a sexual or romantic relationship requires disclosure, contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX.

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PROCEDURES, ITHACA-BASED LOCATIONS AND CORNELL TECH

The Disclosure Process

If a student or postgraduate has any concern that a sexual or romantic relationship may be impacting their educational or employment environment, the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX can offer guidance and resources. Employees who are aware of a relationship in violation of this policy are encouraged to disclose that information to the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX.

The Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX is an important part of the disclosure process and serves as the primary resource to the university community for guidance and enforcement of this policy. The Dean of the Faculty is an advisory resource along with the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX for those seeking guidance on whether to report a suspected policy violation.

The individual in a position of authority is responsible for disclosure, and that individual should inform the student or postgraduate beforehand. Students and postgraduates are not obligated to inform the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX of prohibited relationships or those requiring disclosure. However, any party may make the disclosure.

◆ **Note:** Any party with knowledge of a prohibited relationship may make a disclosure to the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX.

◆ **Note:** After any disclosure, the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX will first contact and notify the parties in the relationship.

If a student or postgraduate is the individual in a position of authority (for example, because of a teaching, laboratory, or other supervisory role over a student), then timely disclosure should be made to the individual's supervisor (or the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX). Thus, a graduate student working in a laboratory or serving as a teaching assistant in a course must disclose the potential for conflict of interest to the director of the laboratory or to the faculty member who is teaching the course. The individual and the supervisor must develop a Recusal Plan and promptly seek approval of the plan from the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX.

The purpose of disclosure is to set in motion a Recusal Plan that protects the individuals involved and the university environment. Disclosures reveal personal and potentially private information. The university will carefully consider the privacy and other interests of persons affected by disclosures when taking action under this policy.

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The Recusal Plan

When a disclosure is made, the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX, in consultation with appropriate campus colleagues (department chair, college human resources, Dean of the Faculty, etc.), develops a Recusal Plan or determines that one is unnecessary. The Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX (or other appropriate office, in consultation with the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX) contacts the student or postgraduate in order to inform them of the disclosure, to seek their input on the proposed Recusal Plan, and to advise them of relevant resources.

The Recusal Plan identifies and addresses conflict of interest and other problems inherent in sexual or romantic relationships where one individual has authority over another. It identifies the individuals responsible for its enforcement and the terms for its review and as necessary, renewal. The plan also specifies the individuals (in the department, lab, or other environment) who will be advised of the plan. The Recusal Plan should be approved and signed by both parties. It is filed at the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX and in the college or unit Human Resources office.

Violations of This Policy

Violations of this policy include: failure to make a required disclosure in a timely manner, failure to adhere to a Recusal Plan, participation in a prohibited relationship, and retaliation against any person who, while acting in good faith, provides information about a suspected violation of this policy.

The university may take disciplinary action as appropriate if an individual is found to have violated this policy. Violations of this policy are subject to discipline up to and including termination or expulsion. The Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX serves as the point of contact for complaints regarding, and investigation of, alleged violations of this policy. This policy is implemented consistent with existing Human Resources and disciplinary processes for faculty and staff.

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PROCEDURES, WEILL CORNELL MEDICINE CAMPUS UNITS

The Disclosure Process

If a Weill Cornell Medicine (WCM) student or postgraduate has any concern that a sexual or romantic relationship may be impacting their educational or employment environment, the associate dean, student affairs or associate dean, graduate school (hereinafter referred to as “associate dean”) and the WCM Human Resources (HR) office can offer guidance and resources. Employees who are aware of a relationship in violation of this policy are encouraged to disclose that information to WCM HR. The associate dean is an advisory resource along with WCM HR for those seeking guidance on whether to report a suspected policy violation.

If a WCM student or postgraduate is the individual in a position of authority (for example because of a laboratory or other supervisory role over another student), then timely disclosure should be made to the individual’s supervisor (or the associate dean or WCM HR). Thus, a graduate student working in a laboratory must disclose the potential for conflict of interest to the director of the laboratory or to WCM HR. The individual and the supervisor should develop a Recusal Plan and promptly seek approval of the plan from WCM HR.

Disclosures reveal personal and potentially private information. WCM will carefully consider the privacy and other interests of persons affected by disclosures when taking action under this policy.

The Recusal Plan

When a disclosure is made, WCM HR, in consultation with appropriate campus colleagues (department chair, associate dean, vice dean, etc.), develops a Recusal Plan or determines that one is unnecessary. WCM HR contacts the WCM student or postgraduate in order to inform them of the disclosure, to seek their input on the proposed Recusal Plan, and to advise them of relevant resources.

The Recusal Plan identifies and addresses conflict of interest and other problems inherent in sexual or romantic relationships where one individual has authority over another. It identifies the individuals responsible for its enforcement and the terms for its review and as necessary, renewal. The plan also specifies the individuals (in the department, lab, or other environment) who will be advised of the plan. The Recusal Plan should be approved and signed by both parties. It is filed in WCM HR.

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Violations of This Policy

Violations of this policy include: failure to make a required disclosure in a timely manner, failure to adhere to a Recusal Plan, participation in a prohibited relationship, and retaliation against any person who, while acting in good faith, provides information about a suspected violation of this policy. Pursuant to this policy, all reports of allegedly nonconsensual relationships will be referred to the associate dean. WCM may take disciplinary action as appropriate if an individual is found to have violated this policy. Violations of this policy are subject to discipline up to and including termination or expulsion. WCM HR serves as the point of contact for complaints regarding, and investigation of, alleged violations of this policy. In consultation with the vice dean and university counsel, WCM may develop and publish protocols and procedures to implement this policy.