

Minutes
University of Puget Sound
Professional Standards Committee
11 February 2013, Wyatt 226

Members present: Kris Bartanen, Doug Cannon, Jennifer Hastings, Pat Krueger, Andreas Madlung, Doug Sackman, Kurt Walls, and Seth Weinberger (chair).

The meeting was called to order at 8:01 a.m., by Seth Weinberger.

1. Approval of minutes of 2-04-13

The minutes were approved unanimously.

2. Discussion on the draft document about the interpretation on consensual sexual relationships.

Hastings had circulated revised language for the interpretation, following our discussion from the previous week. There was general support for the shape of the revisions. Discussion then focused on the appropriateness of the use of the word "bias" in the revised language. The committee was in agreement that the policy was not directed at "bias" per se, but rather the procedures to follow when there was a "conflict of interest" due to a consensual sexual relationship in which partners were involved in a work related process involving supervision or career or work-impacting decision making. However, it was agreed that the use of the phrase "real or perceived bias" had value in the interpretation in order to point to the potential problem the policy is designed to address. The matter of including explicit sanctions was discussed. It was decided that no such sanctions were needed, as 1) a professional expectation can be set without delineating specific sanctions and 2) sanctions for violating policies can be enacted through other processes, including the grievance process. The committee also decided to include the illustrative scenarios, and additional language at the end of the document to address questions about colleagues' responsibilities in such situations.

The provisional language for the interpretation (as follows) was approved unanimously. (After it is reviewed by legal consul, the committee will then vote on the final interpretation).

Interpretation of Chapter I, Part C, Section 3, Chapter 1, Part D, Section 2 (e), and Chapter I, Part D, Section 4. Professional Ethics of Faculty and Relationships of a Consensual Sexual Nature.

It is in the best interest of the university and all individuals associated with the university that there be no real or perceived bias in situations where one individual exerts influence over another colleague or staff member. Situations of direct supervision or when one has the ability to advance, promote, recommend, or in any other way directly influence the academic or work status of the colleague are the times when transparency is required.

The existence of a consensual sexual relationship constitutes a conflict of interest, and can create a real or perceived bias. Therefore, it is the policy of the university that such relationships should be disclosed when there is any possibility of a supervisory or career influencing role between the parties. When faculty or staff members enter into a consensual sexual relationship where one party has supervisory or career influence over the other, each party is required to promptly disclose the relationship to his/her superior(s) so that reassignment, alternative supervision processes, or other arrangements can be facilitated and documented.

The following scenarios are presented as examples where a faculty member must disclose the existence of a consensual sexual relationship. They are not intended to be exclusive, and faculty members should exercise judgment when faced with a similar situation.

- The evaluation process is clearly a career-influencing relationship. No faculty member should participate in the evaluation of another faculty member with whom he or she is involved in a consensual sexual relationship and all faculty members, including head officers, are expected to recuse themselves from such situations.
- Hiring decisions are also understood to involve the exercise of judgment and may result in a work- or career-influencing relationship. No faculty member should participate in the search or hiring process when a person with whom he or she is involved in a consensual sexual relationship is an applicant and all faculty members, including head officers, are expected to recuse themselves from such situations.
- The responsibilities of serving as department chair or program director may also, at times, require supervising or making decisions about the academic or work status of other departmental members. Departmental chairs should be aware of when their duties place them in a career-influencing relationship to a colleague with whom they are involved in a consensual sexual relationship. If and when such situations should arise, chairs should take care to put alternative processes in place to avoid conflicts of interest or other improprieties.

This policy aligns with the university's conflict of interest provisions in the Code of Conduct as well Section II, Part E ("Consensual Sexual Relationship") of the Campus Policy Prohibiting Harassment and Sexual Misconduct.

If you have concerns regarding obligations under this policy, please refer to Chapter 1, Section 4 of the Faculty Code ("Professional Ethics"), and/or speak with your Department Chair or the Dean.

3. Discussion of time allotted for course/instructor evaluations.

The question had been raised about whether 20 minutes of class time was still needed to administer course evaluations. The committee reviewed a document with comments on the experience administering the evaluations from 17 people. The overall report indicated that a small percentage of students needed the full 20 minutes. Several people expressed concern about shortening the time and affecting these students and the evaluation process, even though it was a small number. The committee considered whether to reduce the time to 15 minutes. Some committee members felt that the potential benefit of cutting the time (i.e. adding five minutes of class time in the semester) did not outweigh the potential negative impact on student evaluators and the evaluation process.

4. The FAC's questions about the review process

The FAC had asked the PSC to consider various areas in the review process, including 1) encouraging electronic submission of file materials, 2) visits to lab sessions, and 3) areas in which time could be saved.

The committee began discussion on item 1, electronic file submission. It was noted that portions of some files had already been submitted in electronic format in recent years. Given that previous attempts to scan evaluations had been unsuccessful, the committee considered the implications of having some parts of the file available electronically (either as a pdf file or online in some fashion) while some parts, including the evaluations, would only be available in a hard copy form. One member raised the issue of whether this would privilege the part of the file that was available electronically in the overall process. It was suggested that the electronic part of the file would often be reviewed first, shaping an overall view of and judgment about the file before the portion of the file that was only available in hard copy was reviewed. Another member felt that greater access to part of the file electronically would be a positive gain, without any compromise of the process in comparison to the current process. Other issues discussed included the way such electronic portions of the file would be available, and if this would be cumbersome and how electronic files would address two goals: improving access and saving paper. The discussion was tabled.

The Chair stated that the committee would consider time saving possibilities at our next meeting, including reviewing the timing and necessity of the 3rd year associate review.

The meeting adjourned at 8:53 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Sackman