Columbia College, School of the Arts
Romantic Relationship Advisory

This Advisory supplants the University Romantic Relationship Advisory.

Columbia University’s educational mission is advanced by professionalism and respect in relationships among all of its members. Consensual romantic relationships are not expressly prohibited by the University, but can prove problematic where they involve a power differential between the parties. Faculty and persons with supervisory academic responsibility who are romantically involved with students are not permitted to participate in any evaluative or supervisory activity and decisions with respect to that student.

Faculty, department chairs, graduate group chairs and teaching assistants need to be sensitive to the potential for conflicts in interest in personal relationships with students. When significant disparities in authority are present between two individuals, questions about professional responsibility and the mutuality of consent may well arise. The personal relationship may impair, or be perceived as impairing, a person’s ability to make objective judgements about that student.

School of the Arts

Because of the unique nature of the environment at the School of the Arts, we have adopted a more restrictive policy than the University. Faculty of the School of the Arts are forbidden from engaging in romantic or sexual relationships with undergraduates at Columbia College, the School of Engineering, and Barnard College. This prohibition extends to undergraduates on leaves of absence, on temporary withdrawals, and on summer or other breaks. Faculty of the School of the Arts are expected to refrain from romantic involvement with any graduate student under their jurisdiction, i.e. students enrolled in their classes or students who will have their work evaluated by the faculty member.

In the School of the Arts, students are encouraged to draw upon their deepest feelings for subject matter and to freely exhibit aspects of their inner lives in their work. Under these circumstances, commonplace emotional interactions can quickly intensify. Furthermore, because the majority of our programs and courses are collaborative in nature, students not directly involved in a relationship may nevertheless be adversely affected if favoritism is being shown. Since faculty members are regularly required to sit on review panels of a Division’s entire student body, it is extremely difficult to remove oneself from decisions affecting any student’s academic, financial or professional advancement. Relationships that might otherwise be private and consensual may compromise the ability of the faculty to teach and to evaluate all students’ work objectively and fairly. To retain an atmosphere of trust and free inquiry in the educational process, those in positions of academic authority must studiously avoid associations or activities that abuse or even appear to abuse the power that they have been granted.
All members of the University community have a right to complain about conduct that they believe to be in violation of the University Advisory and/or the University’s Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Policy. The University has an obligation to investigate any and all of such charges in accordance with the applicable policies and grievance procedures.

This Advisory supplements the University’s Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Policy. Questions regarding this advisory statement may be directed to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 402 Low Library, 535 West 116th Street, New York, N.Y. 10027, (212) 854-5511.

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