Wake Forest University Health Sciences
Consensual Relationship Policy

A. Statement of Values

Wake Forest University Health Sciences ("WFUHS") is committed to maintaining a professional environment for its faculty, staff, and students. Employees with direct teaching, supervisory, advisory, or evaluative responsibility over other employees, students, student employees, or volunteers recognize must respect the ethical and professional boundaries that must exist in the organization. Consensual romantic or sexual relationships among these employees are strongly discouraged. Consensual romantic or sexual relationships, as defined in this policy, create conflicts of interest or appearances of impropriety that impair the integrity of academic and employment decisions. Such relationships have the potential for exploitation of the subordinate individual, may professionally or academically disadvantage third parties, and can subject both WFUHS and individuals to the risk of liability. Sexual harassment claims sometimes result when a consensual relationship ends, becomes nonconsensual, or when third parties perceive that a consensual relationship creates discriminatory favoritism. This policy is intended to protect both the supervising and the subordinate partners in a consensual relationship, and to provide the means for managing the conflicts that arise from such relationships.

WFUHS has a special responsibility towards students as members of the School of Medicine community. The academic success of students is central to our educational mission. The unequal institutional power inherent between students and particular members of the WFUHS community must be protected from influences that can interfere with fair treatment, and thus compromise learning. Consensual relations between teacher and student can adversely affect the academic enterprise, distorting judgments or appearing to do so in the minds of others, and providing incentives or disincentives for student-faculty contact that are equally inappropriate.

B. Definitions

1. For purposes of this policy, the term supervisor includes any employee, including faculty, in a position to supervise, grade, evaluate, or influence the academic progress, employment or professional advancement of a student or employee, including employees of North Carolina Baptist Hospital.

2. A consensual relationship, for purposes of this policy, is defined as a voluntary dating, sexual or romantic relationship.

3. The parties in the consensual relationship are referred to as supervising partner and subordinate partner.

C. Policy Statement

It is the policy of WFUHS that the supervising partner in a consensual dating, romantic or sexual relationship disclose the relationship in order to manage the resulting conflict of interest. Disclosure of consensual relationships should occur whether the relationship is currently ongoing or has ended.

The supervising partner in an academic department should disclose the relationship to the department chair and the Associate Dean of Faculty Services & Career Development; the supervising partner in an administrative department should disclose the relationship to the vice president, department director or dean, and to the Director of Employee Relations.

Both partners are expected to cooperate fully in making acceptable and enforceable alternative arrangements to resolve or manage the conflict of interest. A violation of the policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

D. Procedure

A chair, dean or administrator who is notified of or becomes aware of a consensual relationship should take immediate steps to manage the conflict of interest or the appearance of impropriety caused by the relationship. After determining through individual interviews that the relationship is in fact consensual, the conflict will be managed in collaboration with the appropriate Associate Dean or the Director of Employee Relations. In most instances this can be done by providing an alternative means for the supervision, teaching, advising, or evaluation of the subordinate partner. The individuals involved in the consensual relationship should be notified that the Director of Employee Relations and the Associate Dean for Faculty Services & Career Development or the Associate Dean for Student Services, as appropriate, will be informed confidentially of the relationship and will be available if either party needs further assistance. In the case in which the consensual relationship involves a resident, the residency program director and department chair will be informed of the relationship and participate in the plan for management of any conflict of interest or appearance of impropriety. In any case in which an Employee of NCBH is involved in a consensual relationship with a WFUSM faculty member, the NCBH Director of Employee Relations will be informed and will participate in the management plan.

The Associate Dean for Faculty Services & Career Development or the Director of Employee Relations, as appropriate, will develop a conflict management plan in collaboration with the chair, dean, or administrator. If further assistance is needed, the Associate Dean and Director of Employee Relations may convene a committee of faculty or staff, as appropriate, to develop a plan to manage the conflict. Consensual relationships are often sensitive and consideration should be given to the privacy of the individuals involved.

This policy does not apply to employees who are married to each other or who have notified their supervisors that they are living in the same household, as these individuals are subject to the policy on nepotism (see the section on "Nepotism" in the WFUHS Human Resources Department Policy Manual and Section IV of the Organization and Policies Handbook "Employment of Relative or Other Closely Affiliated Persons (Nepotism)".