

Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationship Policy

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

I. Summary

When individuals involved in consensual romantic or sexual relationships are in positions of unequal power, there is the potential for conflict of interest, favoritism, exploitation, and bias. In order to protect the integrity of the SAIC's learning and work environment, this policy outlines limitations on the consensual romantic or sexual relationships that faculty, teaching assistants, graduate assistants, staff, and administrators may have with students.

II. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, *consensual romantic or sexual relationships* are defined as relationships, dates, or encounters of a romantic or sexual nature.

Supervisory or evaluative authority is defined as the power to control or influence another person's employment, academic advancement, experience, or extracurricular participation, including but not limited to, hiring, work conditions, compensation, promotion, discipline, admission, instruction, grades, assignments, critique, supervision of theses, recommendations, grant and prize review, financial support, or participation in extracurricular programs.

III. Background

Consensual romantic or sexual relationships between individuals in inherently unequal positions of power entail unique risks. Because of the potential for conflict of interest, favoritism, exploitation, and bias, such relationships can undermine the real or perceived integrity of the supervision and evaluation provided. Where the relationship involves an SAIC staff member, access to institutional resources or services may also be called into question. Further, these relationships are often less consensual than the individual whose position confers greater power or authority believes. In addition, circumstances may change, and conduct that was previously welcome may become unwelcome.

Such relationships may also have unintended, adverse effects on the climate of an academic program or work unit, thereby impairing the learning or working environment for others. Relationships in which one party is in a position to evaluate the work or influence the career and/or experience of the other, or where one party controls access to institutional resources or services, may provide grounds for complaint by third parties when that relationship gives undue access or advantage, restricts opportunities, or simply creates a perception of these problems. Even when a relationship ends, there may be bias for or against the former partner, or there could be an ongoing impression of such bias; in other words, the effects of a romantic or sexual relationship can extend beyond the relationship itself.

For all of these reasons, romantic or sexual relationships between individuals in inherently unequal positions should be avoided and in some circumstances are prohibited by this policy.

While this policy concerns consensual relationships, it is important to note that in the absence of consent, sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other conduct of a sexual nature may violate the School's policies on [harassment, discrimination, and retaliation](#) and may also constitute sexual harassment or sexual assault.

IV. Prohibition on All Faculty-Undergraduate Student Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationships

Given the ethical and pedagogical stakes outlined above, romantic or sexual relationships between faculty of any status, including but not limited to full-time, adjunct, lecturer, and visiting, with undergraduate students are prohibited.

The only exception to this prohibition is for relationships that predate either the student's enrollment or the faculty member's hiring at SAIC.

V. Prohibition on Certain Faculty-Graduate Student Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationships and Caution

Faculty members of any status, including but not limited to full-time, adjunct, lecturer, and visiting, are prohibited from having supervisory or evaluative authority over graduate students with whom they have, or have had, a romantic or sexual relationship.

While faculty are not expressly prohibited from having romantic or sexual relationships with graduate students other than as set forth above, they are strongly cautioned against doing so. Given the School's clear and unambiguous caution to avoid such romantic or sexual relationships because of the serious risks to those who enter into them, as well as to the School, SAIC assumes no obligation to indemnify any faculty member for legal or other costs or expenses arising out of such a romantic or sexual relationship.

VI. Prohibition on All Staff-Student Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationships

Given that the vast majority of staff across the School are in a position to withhold or extend access to resources and services, including but not limited to funding, coeducational opportunities, advising, and other sundry support, and in order to avoid unequal access to SAIC resources and services, either actual or perceived, romantic or sexual relationships between SAIC staff and students (graduates and undergraduates) are prohibited.

The only exception to this prohibition is for relationships that predate either the student's enrollment or the staff member's hiring at SAIC.

VII. Prohibition on Certain Romantic or Sexual Relationships

- I. Graduate and undergraduate students (including Postbacs.) are prohibited from having supervisory or evaluative authority over any other student with whom they have, or have had, a romantic or sexual relationship.
- II. Prohibition on Administrator-Student Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationships

Senior administrators in the School, such as Deans, Vice Presidents, Provosts, and the President, have broad influence and authority over undergraduate and graduate students and their experience at SAIC. For this reason, romantic or sexual relationships between such administrators and all students are prohibited.

VIII. Retaliation

In addition to prohibiting certain conduct, this policy prohibits retaliation. Retaliation is defined as adverse or negative action (or threats of adverse or negative action) against an individual because that individual (1) in good faith, made a report of a policy violation; (2) participated as a party to or witness in an investigation or a proceeding relating to such allegations; or (3) is thought to have participated in a good-faith report of a policy violation, or is thought to have participated as a party to or witness in an investigation or proceeding relating to such allegations.

IX. Timeline for Reporting

While there is no time limit for reporting, reports of prohibited conduct should be brought forward as soon as possible, since prompt reporting will better enable the School to respond, investigate, and, if appropriate, provide an apt remedy to the student and impose discipline on the respondent.

X. Reporting Process

Alleged violations of this policy should be reported to the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator will make a determination as to whether or not a policy violation occurred, refer violations to the appropriate authority for consideration of discipline, and develop any needed remedies for students.

If the Title IX Coordinator finds a policy violation, the matter will be referred for discipline and remedy to the following administrators: faculty violations are referred to the Dean of Faculty; graduate student violations are referred to the Dean of Students who will, in turn, consult with the Dean of Faculty; senior administrator violations are referred to the President; presidential violations are referred to the General Counsel for presentation to and decision by the Board of Governors.

If the Title IX Coordinator finds a policy violation, the Coordinator will develop any needed remedies in consultation with relevant parties.

XI. Disciplinary Consequences

Violations of this policy will result in disciplinary actions, which can include, but are not limited to, written warnings, loss of privileges, mandatory training or counseling, probation, suspension, demotion, exclusion, expulsion, and termination of employment, including revocation of tenure.

The imposition of any sanction imposed on a faculty member under this policy may be subject to review under grievance procedures or, if applicable, the appeal process applicable to termination set forth in the Faculty Handbook and Supplement.

XII. Effective Date

This policy is effective 08/24/2022. It supersedes all prior policies on consensual romantic or sexual relationship issued by the School.