

# Conflict of Interest in Relationships

## Standard of Conduct – Expectations

### CWU Policy 701-06

**Effective:** January 6, 2017

**Policy Review Date:** YEAR

**Policy Executive:** Senior Vice President – Finance and Administration

**Responsible Office/Unit:** Human Resources

#### Policy Statement:

#### Applicability:

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#### Content:

Policy

Appendix A – Conflict of Interest in Relationships Procedure

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(1) Central Washington University (CWU) is committed to the integrity of professional relationships among employees and students. Professional integrity fosters an environment of respect, mutual trust, and inclusiveness in which the principles of fairness and objectivity are honored. The educational mission of the university is dependent on the establishment of close working relationships between employees and students. While these relationships are encouraged, even required, inherent power differential exists and potential conflicts of interest may result. Because of the potential for conflicts of interest, consensual relationships, with or without inherent power differential, may undermine the real or perceived integrity of any supervision and evaluation provided. Trust and respect are diminished when those in positions of authority abuse or appear to abuse their power or appear to favor a student or employee based on a personal relationship. Consensual relationships can undermine fulfillment of the university's educational mission.

#### (2) Definitions

- A. **Employee:** An individual, including faculty, staff, administrators, and student employees, who is compensated for providing services to CWU and whose duties are under the control of the university.
- B. **Student:** An individual who is enrolled, or applying for admittance, in a course or program offered by the University for Credit.
- C. **Conflict of interest (related to relationships):** When a reasonable possibility exists that a consensual relationship between an employee and a student or another employee may give, or perceive to give, one of them an unfair advantage or disadvantage.

- D. **Consensual Relationship:** Relationships that are familial, romantic, amorous, or sexual in nature, legal in the State of Washington, in which both parties are willing participants and in which no inherent power differential, perceived or real, exists.
- E. **Consensual Relationship with Inherent Power Differential:** A familial, romantic, amorous, or sexual relationship between participants one of whom is a university employee with supervisory, teaching, evaluation or advisory authority and the other of whom is either an employee or a student who is in a real or perceived subordinated position to the employee.
1. Such relationships include, but are not limited to:
    - a. Close family relationships such as those between spouses or spousal equivalents, parents and children, siblings, in-laws, grandparents and grandchildren;
    - b. Relationships between persons whose economic interests are closely interrelated;
    - c. Professional relationships outside the classroom, e.g., consultant-client, therapist-client.
  2. It is not possible to specify all those situations in which there may be a conflict of interest or appearance of fairness.

### (3) Examples of Potential Conflicts of Interest

- A. **Faculty-student:** Faculty members exercise power over students, including praise and criticism, evaluation, and recommendation for future education or employment. Romantic or sexual relationships between faculty members and students create conflicts of interest when the faculty member has any professional responsibility for the student. Consent by the student in such a relationship is regarded as questionable due to the fundamentally unequal nature of the relationship. Other students and faculty may be affected by such behavior because it places the faculty member in a position to favor or advance one student's interest at the expense of others.
- B. **Faculty-faculty:** Faculty members may exercise power over their colleagues including praise and criticism, evaluation, and recommendation. Romantic or sexual relationships between faculty members may create inherent conflicts of interest when faculty members exercise any professional responsibility for their colleagues. Other faculty may be affected by such behavior because it places the faculty member in a position to favor or advance one colleague's interest at the expense of others.
- C. **Staff-student:** Staff members and administrators may exercise power over students including praise and criticism, supervision, and recommendation for future education, employment, or other benefits. A conflict of interest may be present in a consensual relationship between a staff member or administrator. The consent of the relationship is questionable due to the power differential in the relationship. Other students may also be adversely affected by the relationship.
- D. **Employee-employee:** A consensual relationship between any two employees creates a conflict of interest when one person in the relationship has responsibility for evaluation or recommendation or in conferring other university benefits. The consent of the relationship is questionable due to the power differential in the relationship. Other co-workers may be adversely affected by the relationship.

### (4) Responsibility

- A. When a potential conflict of interest exists, it is expected that the employee who is involved in a consensual relationship with a student or another employee with whom there is an inherent power differential will take personal responsibility for eliminating the conflict of interest. This can be done by discontinuing the relationship or eliminating the conflict by finding an alternative means for supervision, teaching, advising, or evaluation of the student, faculty or staff member.

**History:**

*Exec Group: 4/15/91; Faculty Senate: 5/96; Pres Cab: 6/96; PAC: 9/99; Cabinet/UPAC: 11/02/2011; 06/06/2012; Responsibility: CFO/BFA; Authority: Cabinet/UPAC; Reviewed/Endorsed by: Cabinet/UPAC; Review/Effective Date: 01/06/2017; Approved by: James L. Gaudino, President*  
*Reformatted and Assigned new Policy Number - Previous Policy CWUP 2-40-070, June 2025*  
*Attached Procedure CWUR 3-45-080 as Appendix A, June 2025*

## Appendix A - Conflict of Interest in Relationships Procedure

- (1) Central Washington University policy [CWU 701-08 Ethical Conduct Standards](#), and the Washington State Ethics in Public Services law (RCW 42.52) provide guidance on ethical standards for university employees. These procedures give specific guidance on the management of conflicts of interest which may occur. See corresponding policy (CWU 701-06 Conflict of Interest in Relationships).
- (2) Faculty and staff should avoid a conflict of interest in relationships. If a conflict occurs, the first possibility for eliminating the conflict of interest is to discontinue the consensual relationship with an inherent power differential. If discontinuing a personal relationship or eliminating the conflict of interest is unachievable, the employee will disclose to his/her supervisor (such as director, chair, director, or dean) the nature of the conflict of interest. Other persons who perceive a conflict of interest may also bring the matter to the attention of the appropriate supervisor.
- (3) The employee, in consultation and cooperation with the supervisor, will eliminate or manage the power differential in the relationship to prevent or eliminate a conflict of interest. Alternative means for supervision, teaching, advising, or evaluation of the subordinate employee or student is generally required.
- (4) Supervisors are responsible for documenting the disclosure and resolution of the conflict of interest. This documentation should be signed by the employee with the power differential over the subordinate employee or student. The supervisor will inform the director of equal opportunity of the conflict of interest and resolution.
- (5) Failure to comply with these guidelines constitutes unprofessional conduct.
- (6) Responsibility for implementation, monitoring and execution of the conflict of interest policy and procedures rests with the Associate Vice President Human Resources, [hr@cwu.edu](mailto:hr@cwu.edu).