

Policy Redesign Project

All policies and procedures are being reviewed as part of this project. This document is pending review, but remains in effect until the review is carried out.

Staff/Student Relationships

Establishment:	Council, 26 June 1997
Last Amended:	EDA, September 2010
Nature of Amendment:	Change of terminology - AOU to School
Date Last Reviewed:	
Responsible Officer:	Director, Human Resources

Table of Contents

1. Preamble
2. Policy
3. Principles
4. Procedures

Policy, principles & procedures on management of personal relationships between staff and students in the teaching and learning environment.

1. Preamble

1.1 Flinders University regards relationships between staff and students, where the staff member has or is likely to have some specific academic or other professional responsibility for the student, as an important professional issue. This is particularly so where relationships are with a family member* or are of a close personal or sexual nature. Such relationships may raise serious questions regarding conflict of interest, trust, confidence and dependency in working relations and regarding equal treatment in teaching, learning, selection, assessment and research.

1.2 Relationships between staff and students which involve family or which are of a sexual or other close personal nature may result in serious difficulties arising from the unequal power, and thus unequal choice of the parties concerned, as well as real problems in maintaining the boundaries of professional and personal

life. Some relationships can also disrupt the teaching and learning environment for other students and colleagues.

1.3 The aim of this policy is both to safeguard staff members' work relationships and to secure the interests of students enrolled in academic programs within the University. Emphasis is placed on the ethical responsibility of staff not to abuse power and trust in staff/student relationships, which protects both staff and students and enhances the overall quality of the University's main business, that is, teaching and learning.

*family member: for definition, contact EO Unit.

1.4 The University will advise all academic Heads of Units of this policy and will ensure that there is wide publicity and discussion of the content of this statement so that members of the University community will understand the issue as one of professional conduct and safeguards and not an invasion of privacy. Not only those involved in relationships are affected by them. Fellow students and colleagues as well as the learning and working environment may be affected, especially when real or perceived conflict of interest and unfairness are involved. They may provide cause for formal and informal complaint from other staff and students.

1.5 It is important to recognise that this policy is about the management of personal relationships between staff and students in the teaching and learning environment and is not a grievance procedure with disciplinary outcomes.

2. Policy

2.1 The maintenance of the highest professional and ethical standards is essential to the pursuit of good practice in university teaching and learning. In this context, it is important that staff avoid situations where family, sexual or other close personal relationships with students could influence academic or professional judgements and decisions and the climate in which the learning/teaching process occurs.

2.2 For the protection of staff, students and the University and to promote the University's commitment to quality in its teaching and learning environment, the boundaries and moral obligations of the professional role of staff must be fully recognised and respected. The University expects that all staff will maintain these boundaries and respect those obligations. The conduct of academic staff, in particular, must be based on the following principles:

3. Principles

3.1 Staff should recognise their professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of students, to avoid conflicts of interest, to respect the trust involved in the staff/student relationship and to accept the constraints and obligations inherent in that responsibility.

3.2 Socialising on a friendship basis between staff and students is recognised as part of university life. In particular, postgraduate supervisors who have the responsibility for providing a high level of direct support, academic counselling and encouragement over a number of years will often develop long-term social and professional relationships with their students. Staff members should act responsibly and professionally at all times.

3.3 Personal relationships between staff and students within the teaching and learning environment should be consistent with the University's policies on equal opportunity and sexual harassment.

3.4 In the situation where a staff member is currently or recently involved in a sexual or other close personal relationship or is a family member of a student, then the staff member should not take any part in the following relating to that student:

- selection for any undergraduate or postgraduate course offered by the University;

-
- assessment;
 - selection for any scholarship or prize;
 - honours supervision;
 - selection for a staff post or other employment in the University;
 - decision-making processes regarding academic progress and preclusion; and
 - complaints procedures and disciplinary matters.

3.5 In the situation where a staff member is currently or recently involved in a sexual or other close personal relationship or is a family member of a postgraduate student then the staff member should not be the primary supervisor of that student.

4. Procedures

4.1 Staff members likely to be placed in the position where they will be required to undertake selection of, supervision or assessment of the work of a student with whom they have a family, sexual or other close personal relationship have a duty to declare their interest to the Dean of School, Executive Dean of Faculty or Head of Division, as appropriate, prior to those tasks being undertaken.

Such a declaration will be treated in confidence, and staff will not be required to give details of the nature of the involvement. On receipt of the information, the Dean of School, Executive Dean of Faculty or Head of Division, as appropriate, shall make arrangements to prevent a conflict of interest.

4.2 In the case of supervision of a postgraduate student, the Dean of School or Executive Dean of Faculty should appoint a replacement supervisor and, where this is not possible, appoint the co-supervisor as the primary supervisor to prevent a conflict of interest.

4.3 Failure to declare a relationship with a student in accordance with terms set out above will not, in itself, be a matter for disciplinary proceedings.

4.4 Academic judgements or decisions made with respect to the student may be reconsidered if the intentions and requirements of this policy and concomitant principles and procedures have not been respected, but no student will be disadvantaged by such reconsideration.

4.5 Students who are or have been in a sexual, family or close personal relationship with a staff member may make known any possible conflict of interest in teaching and assessment to the Dean of School or Executive Dean of Faculty.

4.6 Students who are or have been involved in a sexual or other close personal relationship with staff and who believe that the staff member's conduct may have amounted to sexual harassment, have the right of complaint under the University's policy on Sexual Harassment.

4.7 The University has other policies and grievance procedures which may be appropriate to deal with academic matters that might arise for students. The University also has Sexual Harassment and other grievance procedures available for staff which may be relevant in some cases.

4.8 Requests for clarification of the intent and/or application of the terms of the policy by staff or students may be made to the Manager, Equal Opportunity and Diversity (8201 3735), Student Equal Opportunity Advisor (8201 2118)

Strict rules of confidentiality will apply.

