

## Synopsis of “Policy 6.x”: Consensual Relationships (3/12/2018)

Romantic or sexual relationships between faculty and students can jeopardize the integrity of the University’s mission. Professional and institutional power differentials are part of academic life, but it is unacceptable when they become instruments of coercion, making it difficult for a student to refuse an advance or leave a relationship. Even where fully consensual, romantic or sexual relationships between faculty and students can adversely affect the research/learning climate for others because of rumored or actual favoritism.

Policy 6.x is concerned with relationships in which one individual (the authority) can influence the academic or professional progress of the other (the subordinate). It applies only to those situations where the subordinate is an undergraduate student, a graduate student, or a postgraduate. The authority is typically a faculty member, but it can also be a postgraduate, a graduate student, an undergraduate student, or a staff member.

Policy 6.x is not about the policing of morals. It is about guaranteeing the right of Cornell students to pursue their academic and professional interests in an environment that is free of preferential treatment, unfair advantage, discrimination, and coercion. Therefore,

- All romantic or sexual relationships between faculty and undergraduates are prohibited. Anything less would interfere with the principle of “any person, any study.”
- All romantic or sexual relationships with the property that one party has authority to make decisions that can directly affect the academic progress or professional advancement of the other party are prohibited. This would include authority-subordinate pairings where the subordinate is either a graduate student or a postgraduate and the authority is a faculty member who plays the role of advisor, special committee member, course instructor, degree-program director, department chair, etc. Prohibitions would also apply if the subordinate is an undergraduate and the authority is (say) a coach, an undergraduate grader, or a graduate TA.

Consensual relationships that are not prohibited may require disclosure with a recusal plan in order to protect the subordinate and preserve the integrity of the academic workplace. An example would be a faculty-student relationship where both belong to the same graduate field. The plan would likely prohibit participation by the faculty member in field decisions that would affect the student’s financial support or academic standing.

Policy 6.x details both the disclosure process and the processes that are invoked when there is a policy violation. As written, the implementation of these procedures requires the creation of a “6.x Office” in central HR. This office (perhaps just a single person) would serve as a resource for authorities who may need help with disclosure and for subordinates who may need help with a difficult situation. These roles square with the idea that Policy 6.x is as much about harassment prevention as anything else. The 6.x Office would also coordinate with department chairs, degree program directors, college deans, the dean of faculty, and others to ensure that enforcement procedures are evenly applied and faithfully executed. Timeliness, confidentiality, and due process are essential if the policy is to be effective.