

1 **Consenting Relationships**

2 Effective: Moved to Policy Library from UPM 3.1(12)

3 Updated/Revised: October 14, 2024

4 Contact: [Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost](#), [University Human Resources](#), [Graduate](#)
5 [College](#)

6 **Introduction**

7 Consenting relationships that are of concern to Iowa State University are those romantic, sexual, or
8 intimate relationships in which both parties appear to have consented, but where there is a reporting or
9 evaluative relationship between the two parties, creating a power differential.

10 **Policy Statement**

11 Consenting relationships between individuals of unequal power are inappropriate and may be contrary
12 to professional ethics. Such a relationship may impair the ability to objectively evaluate the
13 performance of the individual being evaluated. All covered employees who currently or previously
14 were engaged in a consenting relationship that now creates a situation of a power differential, are
15 required to declare such a relationship to their supervisor as early as possible. The supervisor will work
16 with their college/department/unit administration, along with seeking assistance from the Office of
17 Senior Vice President and Provost, University Human Resources, and Graduate College, as needed and
18 appropriate, to develop actions to manage the conflict of interest.

19 In the case of an instructor and student, for example, the respect and trust accorded the instructor by
20 the student, as well as the power exercised by the instructor in giving grades, thesis advice,
21 evaluations, recommendations for further study and future employment, may greatly diminish the
22 student's actual freedom of choice concerning a romantic or sexual relationship. Similarly, supervisors
23 are in positions of assigning and evaluating the work of employees who report to them, and senior
24 colleagues often provide advice and support to junior colleagues and are involved in decisions
25 concerning promotion and tenure, course and committee assignments, and salary increases.

26 Because of these reporting and evaluative relationships and the power differential inherent in such
27 relationships, it is very difficult to defend against a subsequent charge of sexual harassment on the
28 grounds of mutual consent. Covered employees, by virtue of their positions, bear a special burden of
29 accountability if claims of sexual harassment arise.

30 **Definitions**

31 **Covered Employee:** Current Faculty (Tenured, Tenure-Track, or Term), Professional and Scientific
32 (P&S), Merit, Contract, Post Doc/Trainee, Temporary, and Hourly Student Employees.

33 **Consenting Relationship:** Any current voluntary relationship, which is romantic, physically intimate,
34 and/or sexual in nature, and to which the parties consent.

35 **Instructor:** An instructor is an individual who serves in instructional roles in relation to students,
36 including, but not limited to, academic instruction, advising, direct or indirect evaluation of a student's
37 work, research collaboration or assistantships, and athletic coaching.

38 **Student:** An individual enrolled in or auditing courses at the university, including undergraduate and
39 graduate students.

40 **Power Differential:** A power differential exists when one individual has control and advantage over
41 another individual.

42 **Resources**

43 **Links**

- 44 • [Consenting Relationships Procedures and Guidance](#)
- 45 • [Consenting Relationships FAQ](#)
- 46 • [Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy](#)
- 47 • [Faculty Handbook 7.2.2.1.1.](#)
- 48 • [Conflicts of Interest and Commitment Policy](#)
- 49 • [Iowa Board of Regents, Board Policy Manual Section 2.1\(4\)\(H\)](#)