

PROTOCOL ON MANAGING OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STAFF AND STUDENTS and BETWEEN STAFF¹

1. Introduction

In formulating guidelines on close relationships between staff and students, Rhodes University is mindful of the need to protect the integrity of the academic process and the residential system and to create an environment in which all students may reach their full academic potential and in which all members of the university community may perform at the highest levels of competence, integrity, and security.

Close relationships between staff and students (including, but not limited to, romantic relationships, sexual relationships, familial relationships, relationships with a history of severe interpersonal conflict, and relationships of a commercial nature) may undermine this integrity. They may compromise fairness or objectivity or be perceived to be doing so.

Close relationships between staff in the same department may also raise challenges.

These guidelines apply to all staff.

2. Guidelines

Members of staff should employ suitable measures to avoid or appropriately deal with any situation or relationship in which they may have or be seen to have a conflict of interest that could, directly or indirectly, compromise the performance of their duties, the reputation of the University and/or the well-being of students and/or staff.

2.1 Relationships with students:

2.1.1 Staff members who have close relationships to or with a student in the academic department of which they are members or with whom they have job-related interaction shall disclose the relationship to the Head of the Department. The Head of Department shall keep a confidential written record of this. A Head of Department who has a close relationship with a student shall disclose this to the Dean of the Faculty, who shall keep a confidential written record of this. A Dean in such a position will disclose this to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs, who shall keep a confidential written record. The Head of Department or Dean of the Faculty or Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs shall also notify the Director: People and Culture of this disclosure, who shall keep a confidential written record.

2.1.2 Members of the wardening staff who have close relationships to or with a student in the

¹ The policy on “Special Relationships between staff and students” of the University of Cape Town and the “Policy on managing conflict of interest in staff & student interrelationships” of the University of Kwazulu-Natal on which these guidelines are based are gratefully acknowledged.

residence or hall in which they are employed shall disclose the relationship to the Hall Warden. The Hall Warden shall inform the Director: Student Services and Development and keep a confidential written record. A Hall Warden with a close relationship with a student shall disclose this to the Director: Student Services and Development, who shall keep a written record. The Director: Student Services and Development, in such a position, shall disclose this to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs, who shall keep a confidential record of this. The Hall Warden or Director: Student Services and Development or Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs shall also notify the Director: People and Culture of this disclosure, who shall also keep a confidential written record.

- 2.1.3 Members of staff who previously reported a close relationship to, or with, a student in the academic department of which they are members or with whom they have job-related interaction and who now have terminated such close relationship must disclose such termination to the Head of Department or Dean of the Faculty or Deputy Vice-Chancellor, as the case may be. The Head of the Department, Dean of the Faculty, or Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs shall also notify the Director: People and Culture of this disclosure, who shall also keep a confidential written record.
- 2.1.4 Members of the wardening staff who previously reported a close relationship to, or with, a student in the residence or hall in which they are employed and who now have terminated such close relationship must disclose such termination to the Hall Warden or Director: Student Services and Development or Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs, as the case may be. The Head of Department or Dean or Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs shall also notify the Director: People and Culture of this disclosure, who shall also keep a confidential written record.
- 2.1.5 Members of staff who are unsure of whether a relationship constitutes a close relationship are encouraged to discuss the matter with the Head of Department or Hall Warden, the Dean of the Faculty, the Director: Student Services and Development, or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs.
- 2.1.6 Following the disclosure by the member of staff, the Head of Department or Dean of the Faculty, or Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs shall take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the academic process is not compromised, that fairness in access to resources, opportunities and/or services are not damaged, and that bias, or perceptions of bias, in dealing with students are avoided. In assessing student work, the guidelines as contained in Appendix A: Assessment of Student Work shall apply.
- 2.1.7 Following disclosure by the member of the wardening staff, the Hall Warden or Director: Student Services and Development or Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs shall take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the wardening system is not compromised that fairness in access to resources, opportunities and/or services are not damaged, and that bias, or perceptions of bias, in dealing with students are avoided. Except under exceptional circumstances, the student shall be moved to another residence in the same or a different hall.
- 2.1.8 Failure to report such a close relationship to, or with, a student in terms of these principles constitutes a breach of conduct, and any member of staff who contravenes these guidelines may be subject to disciplinary action.

- 2.1.9 To withhold a right or grant special privileges to a student based on a close relationship, disclosed or undisclosed, is a contravention of these guidelines.
- 2.1.10 No academic staff member may usually supervise the research of a post-graduate student with whom they are in a close relationship. It is acknowledged that, at times, there may be no other alternative.
- 2.1.11 Any student in a close relationship with a staff member in the department in which s/he is studying is also encouraged to report this to the Head of Department, who shall keep a confidential written record of this, disclosing this to the Dean of the Faculty. Where the student has a close relationship with the Head of Department, the Dean of the Faculty must be advised of this by the student. Where the student has a close relationship with the Dean of the Faculty, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Student Affairs must be advised. In all cases, a confidential written report is kept. The Head of the Department, Dean of the Faculty, or Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs shall also notify the Director: People and Culture of this disclosure, who shall keep a confidential written record.
- 2.1.12 Any student in a close relationship with the warden of the residence in which s/he is accommodated is also encouraged to report this to the Hall Warden, who shall keep a confidential written record of this, disclosing this to the Director: Student Services and Development. Where the student has a close relationship with the Hall Warden, the Director: Student Services and Development must be advised of this by the student. Where the student has a close relationship with the Director: Student Services and Development, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs must be advised. In all cases, a confidential written report is kept. The Head of Department or Dean of the Faculty or Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs shall also notify the Director: People and Culture of this disclosure, who shall keep a confidential written record.
- 2.1.13 Should a Head of Department or Director of a department or division wish to temporarily employ the children (who are students) of academic and support staff members of that department, this must be authorized by the Director: People and Culture. The Director shall require the HoD to indicate that either this is the only suitable person available or that the People and Culture Division) having also been considered.
- 2.1.14 Where anyone in a very senior position, e.g., Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Chief Finance Officer, or Registrar, is required to decide or approve a dispensation that will impact a student with whom they have a close relationship, they must advise the Director: People and Culture who together with the Chair of the University Council will decide.

2.2 Relationships between staff:

- 2.2.1 Individuals tasked with people management responsibilities must disclose any relationship with a staff member within that department/section/unit to their immediate line manager. The line manager shall keep a confidential written record and provide a copy to the Director: People and Culture.
- 2.2.2 Such individuals can recommend personal promotion and/or merit awards for staff with whom they have a close relationship, given that such recommendations should be supported by evidence and decisions are taken by a committee.

- 2.2.3 Individuals tasked with people management responsibilities who have a close relationship with a staff member are held responsible for ensuring an environment within the department/section/unit where there is transparency in decision-making and perceptions of favouritism are minimized. The line manager or Director: People and Culture should be consulted on how best to navigate this situation.
- 2.2.4 Should a Head of Department or Director of a department or division wish to temporarily employ anyone to whom there is a familial or close relationship, this must be authorized by the Director: People and Culture. The Director shall require the HoD/Director to indicate that either this is the only suitable person available or that the individual is the most suitable with other temporary staff applications (those registered with the People and Culture Division) having also been considered.
- 2.2.5 Individuals sitting on decision-making bodies should recuse themselves from such fora when decisions are being taken about individuals with whom they have a close relationship.
- 2.2.6 Where anyone in a very senior position, e.g., Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Chief Financial Officer, or Registrar, is required to decide or approve a dispensation that will impact a staff member with whom they have a close relationship, they must advise the Director: People and Culture who together with the Chair of the University Council will decide.

3. Contraventions

Contraventions of these guidelines should be reported to the Director: People and Culture and handled within the University's disciplinary procedures as they apply to staff. The extent of the disciplinary action (level 1, 2, or 3 as per the disciplinary code) shall depend on the nature of the omission and the implications thereof for the department, Faculty, and University, as well as any related misconduct.

Written: Director, HR with input from the Deans

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Appendix A: Assessment of Student Work

Student work comprises both work submitted as part of formative assessment (so-called classwork) and summative assessment (formal examinations).

Formative Assessment

Projects, essays, or other coursework that count towards the final mark achieved by a student may not be assessed by a staff member with whom that student has a close relationship. The staff member concerned must notify the Head of Department, who will seek out another staff member to undertake this assessment.

Summative Assessment

Once an examination has been written by a student with whom the examiner has a close relationship, the following procedure must be adopted:

1. On receipt of the examination scripts, the relevant script must be withdrawn from the pile and set aside. Under no circumstances should examiners mark the script of a student with whom they have a close relationship or where a possible conflict of interest or duty could arise.
2. That script must be handed to another member of staff who might be able to mark the script – together with the marking memo and if requested, a few other scripts to give the member of staff a feel of how the examiner has marked the other scripts.
3. If no other suitable staff member is available to mark the script, the script must be sent unmarked to the external examiner with a request to mark it.
4. After the second staff member has marked the script, the script must be sent to the external examiner with a note that it should be looked at specifically to ensure consistency. The reason for the request must not be disclosed.
5. When the examination involves a group of assessors, a staff member who has a close relationship with a student may not participate in assessing that student's work.
6. The principles above apply to all work, not just written examination scripts. Any practical or creative work submitted for examination may also not be assessed by an individual with whom the candidate has a close relationship, and an alternative arrangement must be made.
7. A staff member with a close relationship with a student may not discuss that student's examination submission with the external examiner.

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