

## Consensual Relationships Involving Employees with Authority

### Policy Statement, Scope and Intent

It is the policy of Gadsden State Community College that certain consensual relationships involving certain employees are prohibited. This policy applies only to Consensual Relationships involving Employees with Authority, as defined below. It is not the intent for this policy to intrude on the privacy of employees or students of the Gadsden State Community or to interfere with appropriate mentoring relationships.

Employees should recognize and respect the ethical and professional boundaries that must exist in the College atmosphere and need to be aware of the potential for sexual harassment as well as conflicts of interest that exist with such relationships. Gadsden State's policies on *Policy Against Harassment and Discrimination* and *Conflicts of Interests and Ethics and Procedures* should be referred to and complied with regarding such relationships.

### Definition: Consensual Relationships Involving Employee with Authority

Consensual Relationship is defined as a romantic, intimate, or sexual relationship that is mutually acceptable between the parties.

Employee with Authority is defined as any employee who has supervisory, teaching, evaluating or advising roles or authority over the other party in the consensual relationship.

### Prohibited Conduct

Consensual Relationships involving Employees with Authority are prohibited. These relationships generally take on two forms, those between two employees in the College workforce and those between employees and students.

#### Employee/Employee

Consensual relationships between employees with supervisory, evaluative, or advisory authority over the other party in the consensual relationship are expressly prohibited. These types of consensual relationships have the potential for risk to both parties and for interfering with the ability of the employee to act and make decisions without the appearance of bias. Even in situations where the participating employee can avoid being biased, other employees may perceive that they are being treated negatively or are being put at a disadvantage because of the relationship.

In the event that a consensual relationship exists or begins to develop, the employee must immediately disclose the relationship to his/her immediate supervisor (or another supervisor when the consensual

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relationship is with the immediate supervisor), who will take steps to resolve the matter in accordance with Gadsden State's Conflict of Interests and Ethics Policy and Procedures.

Except where approval has been obtained from the President, no employee of the College may participate in an employment action for an employee with whom they have or have had a consensual relationship.

### **Employee/Student**

Consensual relationships between employees and students are not recommended or advised. Such consensual relationships are, in fact, prohibited between students and employees with authority. The employee-student relationship represents a special case, because the integrity of this relationship is often of such fundamental importance to the mission of the College. Students look to employees such as instructors, coaches, guidance counselors, and others, for guidance and depend upon them for assessment, advancement, and advice. These types of consensual relationships create an obvious potential for abuse of authority and conflict of interest, whether the conflict is actual or perceived. An employee should not accept authority over a student with whom they have had a consensual relationship without disclosure to the employee's immediate supervisor. If such disclosure is made, the immediate supervisor shall then inform the appropriate Cabinet member. Absent the appropriate approval, the employee should not allow the student to enroll in his/her class, should not supervise, coach, teach, instruct, advise, or counsel the student, and should not participate in any decisions affecting the student. If a consensual relationship exists or begins to develop between a student and an employee with authority, that situation of authority must be terminated.

### **Reporting of Violations**

Persons with information regarding suspected violations of this policy should report the information to an appropriate Cabinet member. The College will take reported violations seriously, by promptly investigating and taking action as necessary.

### **Confidentiality and Assurance against Retaliation**

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of information received as a part of this policy and to protect the privacy of all parties involved. Adverse action will not be taken against those making good faith reports of suspected policy violations. Retaliation against employees and/or students who report concerns about consensual relationships is strictly prohibited and may be grounds for disciplinary action.

### **Disciplinary Sanction**

Employees found in violation of this policy will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the Employee Conduct Code as stated in the Employee Handbook and Alabama Community College System Board of Trustees Policies.