

[SVPA Barbara Lee's June 15, 2020 email to the Rutgers Community on the new University Policy on Consensual Relationships in Academic Settings.]

Dear Members of the Rutgers Community:

I am pleased to announce for your information a new Policy 60.1.32 – Policy on Consensual Relationships in Academic Settings. This policy is a result of the recommendations of the Rutgers University Committee on Sexual Harassment Prevention and Culture Change. The committee was charged by President Barchi in the fall of 2018 with formulating a plan for the University to operationalize the findings of a study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine determining that sexual harassing behavior is experienced by 20% to 50% of female students, and 50% of female faculty and staff in the STEM and medical fields. The Rutgers committee divided into six subcommittees to review operations, policies, and procedures within Rutgers, and our peers in the Big Ten Academic Consortium and the Association of American Universities in addressing the problem of harassment and discrimination, and to develop recommendations for Rutgers to consider adopting or adapting across six focal areas.

This new policy comprises the recommendations of the Subcommittee on Consensual Relationships, focusing particularly on those within the academic setting of the University. The policy prohibits the following relationships: (i) “any Academic Supervisor [as defined by the policy] from engaging in a consensual relationship with any student currently enrolled as an undergraduate at the University”; (ii) “any Academic Supervisor from engaging in a consensual relationship with any graduate or professional student, Postdoctoral Associate or Fellow, or Clinical Resident or Fellow which creates a conflict of interest” in areas specified in the fuller policy; and (iii) “any Internship Supervisor [as defined by the policy], Student Employee (including but not limited to Residence Life Advisors/Assistants, Teaching Assistants, Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates), and Postdoctoral Fellows from engaging in a consensual relationship with any student, intern, or Postdoctoral Fellow, which creates a conflict of interest because the Internship Supervisor/Student Employee/Postdoctoral Fellow teaches, manages, supervises, advises, or evaluates in any way the other party in an academic setting or living or learning environment, or might reasonably be expected to do so in the future.”

Additionally, the policy includes a reporting structure for alleged violations of the policy, and includes a mitigation process to be utilized in the event of a relationship between consenting members of the Rutgers community that may result in a conflict with the policy, as well as a process to handle exceptions. As outlined in the policy, “individuals who wish to engage in a relationship [that is considered prohibited] are required to immediately submit a request for an exemption to the Policy’s prohibition of such relationships. If a request for an exemption is submitted timely and approved, the parties’ relationship will not be considered to violate this Policy.” More information regarding the mitigation plan can be accessed at <https://academicaffairs.rutgers.edu/mitigation-plan-0>.

Lastly, the policy provides protection for those who report policy violations, documents a process for the investigation of policy violations, and maintains confidentiality in all processes and materials involved in the implementation of the policy.

The policy went into effect on June 2, 2020.

We are proud of the work of the committee that has resulted in this important policy. Rutgers is committed to maintaining an academic community free from harassment, discrimination, conflicts of interest, favoritism, and exploitation. We encourage you to read the full policy via <https://policies.rutgers.edu/view-policies/human-resources-hr---section-60>.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Lee
Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs