

# Policy 228 - Employee Relationships

As a matter of sound judgment, all employees of Lower Columbia College shall accept responsibility to avoid any apparent or actual conflict of interest between their professional responsibilities as employees of the College and their personal relationships with students or employees that they supervise, evaluate, or exercise other relationships or power of authority over. Romantic and/or sexual relationships between a faculty member and a student, or a supervisor and subordinate, may potentially pose risks to the faculty member, student, supervisor, subordinate, third parties, and department morale.

In such relationships, voluntary consent by the student or subordinate is suspect because of the inherently unequal nature of the relationship. A romantic and/or sexual relationship between a faculty member and a student or a supervisor and subordinate can lead to a sexual harassment complaint when the student or subordinate perceives they were exploited. In addition, other faculty or staff, supervisors, or students may express concerns about undue access or advantage, favoritism, restricted opportunities, or unfavorable treatment as a result of the relationship. These concerns have a damaging impact on the College, whether the favoritism occurred or not. Concerns also arise in cases where the relationship between the faculty member and student, or supervisor and subordinate, remains amicable, as well as in cases that lead to allegations of exploitation. To ensure that the advising, mentoring, evaluation, and supervision of students and subordinates is conducted equitably, romantic and/or sexual relationships between faculty and their students and supervisors and subordinates are prohibited as set forth in this policy.

## 228.1 Policy

Employees are prohibited from having supervisory authority over a student or employee with whom they currently have a romantic and/or sexual relationship. For purposes of this policy, "currently" is defined as within the last two years, or a reasonable anticipation that an evaluative role may exist in the near future.

The term "supervisory authority" is defined as any supervisory role perceived as a position of power or authority or influence, which is not limited to: instruction, academic advising, club advising, coaching, service on tenure committees, assignment of grades, evaluation, and recommendation in an institutional capacity for employment, scholarships, or awards. Supervisory authority goes beyond direct supervision. It includes any supervisory authority over a subordinate, even if it is a second or third level of supervisory authority.

This policy does not apply to romantic and/or sexual relationships that are prohibited by criminal law under [RCW 9A.44](http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=9A.44) (app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=9A.44) or relationships that violate discrimination or sexual harassment laws and policies.

## 228.2 Professional Guidelines

Some professionals employed by the College (i.e., Counselors, Nursing Faculty, and others) may have more stringent guidelines that they must abide by to maintain their certification. This policy does not preclude or replace any guidelines published by a particular professional association. Professionals who have more stringent rules related to relationships are expected to follow those rules in addition to what is outlined in this policy.

## 228.3 Relationships without Supervisory Authority

Faculty and staff of Lower Columbia College who engage in romantic and/or sexual relationships with another College employee or student over whom they do not have supervisory authority are expected to use good judgment in those relationships and remain professional in their role with the College. These relationships must not negatively impact the employee's work at the College or the College's service to students.

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## Historic Information

- Reviewed - No Changes Needed: July 13, 2022
- Reviewed by the Executive Leadership Team: June 19, 2019
- Adopted: January 2, 2019

## Resources

Resource/Reference/Procedure	Unit Responsibility
<a href="http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=9A.44">RCW 9A.44 Sex Offenses (app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=9A.44)</a>	Human Resources
<a href="http://lowercolumbia.edu/publications/administrative-policies/_assets/documents/228.1A.pdf">Procedure 228.1A Employee Relationships (lowercolumbia.edu/publications/administrative-policies/_assets/documents/228.1A.pdf)</a>	Human Resources