

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY AND MEDICAL CENTER

HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

SUBJECT: RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORKPLACE

Policy # HR-033

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2001

POLICY

Vanderbilt University strives to be a family-friendly workplace and is committed to maintaining an environment in which members of the University community can work together to further education, research, patient care and community service. This policy provides guidelines for visitors in the workplace, family members working at Vanderbilt and relationships at work

PROCEDURE

I. VISITING THE WORKPLACE

Children, family members, associates or friends are welcome for occasional, brief visits in the workplace. However, children may not visit the workplace if their presence conflicts with department policy, federal or state law. Staff may bring children to appropriate University-sponsored programs and activities. Supervisors may approve non-routine visits that do not interfere with a staff member's ability to perform his/her work functions or the productivity of a work unit.

II. FAMILY MEMBERS WORKING AT VANDERBILT

As a large employer, Vanderbilt does have members from the same family who work at the University. However, employment of family members in situations where one family member has direct influence over the other's conditions of employment (i.e., salary, hours worked, shifts, etc.) is inappropriate.

For the purpose of this policy, family members are defined as spouse, domestic partner, daughter, son, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sister, brother, mother-in-law or father-in-law.

In some cases, a concern over conflict of interest [1] may arise involving other close relatives - such as aunts, uncles, cousins, or relatives by marriage. In any case, when staff are unsure about a potential conflict, they should fully disclose the circumstances in writing to their supervisor.

If one family member has influence over another family member's conditions of employment, the following should occur:

- In collaboration with the supervisor, the involved employees will be provided thirty days to make a decision regarding a change. Options include, but are not limited to:
 - one employee may apply to transfer to another area, or
 - the reporting structure in the department is revised so that one employee no longer has direct influence over the other employee's conditions of employment.
- If a decision is not reached by the end of the thirty-day period, the department head, or next level of administrator, will resolve the situation.

III. **RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK**

- A. Staff are encouraged to socialize and develop professional relationships in the workplace provided that these relationships do not interfere with the work performance of either individual or with the effective functioning of the workplace. Staff who engage in personal relationships (including romantic and sexual relationships) should be aware of their professional responsibilities and will be responsible for assuring that the relationship does not raise concerns about favoritism, bias, ethics and conflict of interest. In cases of doubt, advice and counsel should be sought from the next level of administrator, Employee Relations or the ODC.
- B. Romantic or sexual relationships between staff members where one individual has influence or control over the other's conditions of employment are inappropriate. These relationships, even if consensual, may ultimately result in conflict or difficulties in the workplace. If such a relationship currently exists or develops, it must be disclosed:
 - The supervisor or staff member who has influence or control over the other's conditions of employment has an obligation to disclose his/her relationship to the department head or next level of administrator.

- The other staff member involved in the relationship is encouraged to disclose the relationship to either the next level of administrator, Employee Relations or the ODC.

C. Refer to previous page

IV. **RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS**

When staff members interact with students, staff are in a position of trust and power. These relationships must not jeopardize the effective functioning of the University by the appearance of either favoritism or unfairness in the exercise of professional judgment. In relationships with students, the staff member is expected to be aware of his/her professional responsibilities and to avoid apparent or actual conflict of interest, favoritism or bias.

Consensual sexual relationships are prohibited between a student and a staff member who is in a position to exercise power or authority over that student. Efforts by staff members to initiate these relationships are also prohibited. Violations of this policy by a staff member is grounds for performance improvement counseling, up to and including discharge.

Consensual sexual relationships between a student and a staff member who is not in a position to exercise direct power or authority over that student may also be inappropriate. Any staff member who engages in such a relationship must accept responsibility for assuring that it does not result in a conflict of interest or raise other issues of professionalism. In cases of doubt, advice and counsel should be sought from the ODC or Employee Relations.

V. **GENERAL**

If a relationship is deemed to be inappropriate under these guidelines, the appropriate department head or next level of administrator, after consultation with the ODC and Employee Relations, will take appropriate action. Actions taken may include, but are not limited to, an agreed upon transfer, a change in shift, a change in reporting structure, performance improvement counseling or discharge.

If staff, whether or not involved in the relationship, believe they have been, or are being, adversely affected, they are encouraged to contact the ODC or Employee Relations.

When relationships develop into situations that may be viewed as harassment or discrimination, staff members should refer to the [Anti-Harassment Policy \(#HR-002\)](#) and the [Equal Opportunity and Affirmative](#)

[Action Policy \(#HR-001\)](#). If questions or concerns arise regarding potential harassment or discrimination, the staff member should contact the ODC.

[1] Please refer to the Conflict Interest Policy

Approved by Darlene Lewis, Associate Vice Chancellor, Human Resources

Approved by Lauren J. Brisky, Vice Chancellor, Administration

Approved by Harry Jacobson, M.D. Vice Chancellor, Health Affairs