

Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors for Faculty and Academic Staff

This policy was endorsed by the University Committee on Faculty Affairs and issued by the Office of the Provost on _____.

I. Introduction

Michigan State University and its faculty,¹ together, are committed to maintaining a safe and respectful learning and working environment for all students, faculty, academic staff, and support staff in support of their mission. To achieve and maintain such an environment requires a diverse and inclusive academic community that values the principles of civility, respect, and professionalism.

The University and its faculty must balance their respect for the preservation of academic freedom² and freedom of speech with their interest in maintaining a respectful learning and working environment. Faculty members, as central to this environment, serve as scholars pursuing the search for knowledge and its free expression, as teachers instructing students, and as professionals and citizens contributing special knowledge and skills through public service and community participation. In such an environment, the exchange of ideas must be encouraged and maintained through open and reasoned discourse as well as with mutual respect. The University and its faculty recognize that, inherent within the University's structure, faculty are afforded the freedom to challenge and openly discuss ideas which may cause individuals to feel discomfort. In doing so, and as articulated more fully in the *Faculty Rights and Responsibilities* policy, faculty members carry a responsibility to students, colleagues, the scholarly community, and the public to carry out their duties in a professional, respectful, and collegial manner.³

II. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is intended to: (1) create, foster, and promote a shared understanding of behavioral values with respect to how faculty and academic staff interact and engage with one another and with others within the MSU community **including support staff and students** (i.e., "the Code"), with the overarching goal of maintaining a safe and respectful learning and working environment, and (2) identify informal and formal methods for resolution in those instances in which an MSU community member⁴ believes they have been subject to behaviors or interactions contrary to the Code.

¹ The terms, "faculty" or "faculty members," as used in this document, apply to all faculty and academic staff.

² Academic Freedom policy: <https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/academic-freedom.html>

³ These responsibilities are more fully articulated in the *Faculty Rights and Responsibilities* policy: <https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/faculty-rights.html>

⁴ "MSU community member" as used in this document includes all employees (faculty, academic staff, support staff), undergraduate students, and graduate students.

III. The University Committee on Faculty Affairs (UCFA) Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors

The University Committee on Faculty Affairs (UCFA) developed *The Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors* in April of 2020. The Code is intended to: (1) address behaviors rather than thoughts or beliefs, (2) balance professional debate and disagreement with ensuring a civil, respectful, and safe environment for all faculty, academic staff, students and support staff, and (3) be aspirational, constructive, and positive rather than punitive or paternalistic.

The Office of the Provost has adopted the Code in its entirety.

We the Faculty:

- 1) Recognize that informed discussion and respectful disagreement are central to the academic life of the University. This means:
 - a. We listen to diverse viewpoints, even when they differ from our own.
 - b. We create constructive and respectful environments in which individuals are free to express themselves without fear of disrespect, abuse, reprisal, interruption, or denigration.
 - c. We solicit and encourage input from our colleagues while ensuring that power dynamics and imbalances neither silence nor amplify the ideas of some at the expense of others.

When we engage in respectful and professional dialogue, we listen and respond to others with open-mindedness and civility. We do not interrupt or otherwise silence others, engage in personal attacks, comment on others' appearance, or abuse positions of authority and power.

- 2) Recognize our shared interest in the success of one another as well as MSU. This means:
 - a. We foster respectful and supportive interactions with faculty, staff, and students.
 - b. We recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of others, giving credit where it is due.
 - c. We understand and respect that our colleagues may have priorities and responsibilities that differ from our own.

When we support one another, we create an environment in which everyone is acknowledged, valued, and respected. We do not ignore or minimize the contributions of others. Instead, we recognize and appreciate the diverse ways in which our colleagues (faculty, staff, students and administrators) contribute to our own successes and the success of MSU.

- 3) Recognize the impact of differences in rank, authority, privilege, and power, such as those that exist between tenured faculty and their colleagues who are untenured or outside the tenure system. This means:

- a. We are always mindful of power imbalances in our interactions with one another and with other members of the University, including students, staff, and administrators.
- b. We resolve conflict and disagreement in ways that acknowledge differences in rank, position, and authority. We ensure that all relevant voices are heard while recognizing that these voices may belong to staff, students, and administrators.

When we acknowledge power imbalances and dynamics in our interactions with one another, we are mindful of how others might perceive our actions and words. We strive to ensure that these dynamics do not disenfranchise, isolate, or silence others. We do not abuse privileges of rank and authority to harass, bully, denigrate, or intimidate others, and we will address contrary behaviors directly and constructively.

- 4) Recognize that respect must be central to our interactions with others, whether on MSU's campus or elsewhere. This means:
 - a. We model respectful and constructive behaviors in all our communications with one another, whether in person, via email, or elsewhere.
 - b. We avoid personal attacks and derogatory statements while respecting the time and priorities of others.
 - c. We understand that we represent our colleagues and the University as a whole in our interactions with communities beyond campus.
 - d. We recognize the power of social media to amplify speech and resolve to use it in ways that demonstrate our commitment to positive and respectful dialogue.

When we place respect at the center of our interactions with others, we are mindful of the values, beliefs, identities, and experiences of those around us. We commit to modes of expression and dialogue that promote inclusive, safe, and positive environments. We do not denigrate or attack others.

IV. Behavior or Interactions Contrary to the Code

Behaviors or actions by a member of the faculty that are contrary to the Code include those that, in the judgment of a reasonable person, create a hostile, disrespectful, intimidating, and/or offensive climate that affects or has the purpose of affecting an individual's employment, academic pursuits, professional or educational performance, or participation in university activities.

A person who believes they may have been subject to behavior or interactions contrary to the Code may wish to address the matter with the faculty or academic staff member either on an informal or formal basis. An individual may wish to seek advice from a colleague, an assistant/associate dean, a department/school or college HR representative, or from other resources within the University before seeking either form of resolution. (See a list of resources in Section VII).

1) Informal Resolution

Ideally, a community of normative behavior as well as a unit-defined process for responding to concerns is well-established within each unit which allows for impacted individuals and/or observers to address the behavior with the individual in an informal manner. Recognizing that misunderstandings do occur, an attempt at informal resolution may provide opportunities for dialogue and discussion that are sufficient to address the complaint.

If the aggrieved individual is comfortable in doing so, they may consider utilizing one of the following informal approaches:

- Directly approach the individual whose behavior is of concern either in-person or in writing. To be effective, describe the behavior with facts, convey the impact of the behavior, how you believe the behavior is contrary to the “the Code,” and state your expectations going forward (i.e., you’d like for the behavior to stop).
- Recruit an intermediary person -- a trusted colleague at the department, school, college, or university level – to approach the individual on your behalf.

Prior to employing either of these informal approaches, they may wish to review tools and resources on conflict management strategies. These resources may be found in Section VII.

2) Formal Resolution

Utilizing formal procedures may be a matter of personal preference for the aggrieved individual. Formal procedures may also be utilized in cases where an attempt to address the complaint informally is not successful or the individual believes they have experienced particularly egregious behavior. To initiate formal resolution, an individual may file a written complaint to the applicable unit administrator. In cases where the complaint is against a unit administrator, the complaint should be made to the next-level administrator (e.g., if the complaint is against a Chairperson/School Director, the complaint should be made to the Dean. If the complaint is against a Dean, the complaint should be made to the Provost).

A unit administrator is charged with taking each complaint seriously, although they must take care not to assume the charged individual is in violation based on allegations alone. The unit administrator is responsible for ensuring that appropriate action is taken to address the situation, which includes undertaking a prompt inquiry. The faculty member must be afforded the opportunity to respond to the allegations against them prior to the unit administrator making a determination of a policy violation. Such information must be taken into consideration before the unit administrator makes a determination.

If disciplinary action or dismissal is proposed by a unit administrator in response to a violation of the Code, that action will proceed in accordance with existing University policies.

V. Retaliation

The University prohibits retaliation (including retaliatory harassment) against individuals who report alleged violations of this policy, or who participate in good faith in an inquiry of alleged violations. Where a determination has been made that retaliation occurred, the individual will be subject to disciplinary action. Individuals who believe they are being subjected to retaliation, including retaliatory harassment, should promptly contact the appropriate administrator.

VI. Relation to other University policies

This policy is not intended to replace or circumvent other established University policies such as the [Anti-Discrimination Policy](#) and the [Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct Policy](#). Behavior falling under the purview of these policies must follow the procedures as outlined within the applicable policy.

VII. Resources

Resources are available to faculty and academic staff within the University. An individual may contact any of the campus administrative offices identified here for advice, consultation, and support on matters involving problematic behavior:

- [Employee Assistance Program](#)
- [Office of the University Ombudsperson](#)
- [Office of Postdoctoral Affairs](#)
- [Office of the Associate Provost and Associate Vice President for Academic Human Resources](#)
- [The Faculty Grievance and Dispute Resolution Office](#)
- [MSU WorkLife Office](#)
- [Campus Equity Navigator](#)

Additionally, conflict management tools and resources can be found on the Faculty Grievance and Dispute Resolution website here: <https://fgo.msu.edu/other-resources>.