

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

DRAFT

August 26, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: University Committee on Faculty Affairs
Faculty Senate

FROM: Teresa K. Woodruff, Ph.D., Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors

I write to express my support for the Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors (The Code) that the University Committee on Faculty Affairs developed and approved this past spring. I understand this was a faculty-led initiative and The Code will be presented to the Faculty Senate in early fall for its review and approval. I will adopt and formalize The Code as a policy within the Faculty Handbook upon the recommendation and approval of the Faculty Senate.

As Provost, I am committed to promoting and maintaining a campus community that recognizes the dignity and worth of every person; fosters inclusion, understanding, and mutual respect; and encourages each member of the university enterprise to reach their potential. These aspirations are codified in the Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors. Specifically, The Code enumerates concrete expectations and fundamental standards for all members of the MSU community, regardless of their status as faculty, staff, or student. Moreover, The Code provides avenues for individuals to address behavior they experience which is not concordant with the expectations of The Code.



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We know there are inherent power dynamics built into the structure of human interactions, and therefore within institutions of higher education. Power differentials are not inherently wrong or categorically detrimental to the parties involved. In fact, the vast majority of interactions between those on our campus are good, civil, and enabling to both parties. That said, where there are failures in the system, we have lacked a mechanism by which we can speak to each other and to the system of governing policies and people within the hierarchical structure. The Code is an important step in shifting our thinking and our ability to engage in sub-optimal settings toward a more aware and safer environment for learning and going about our daily work. Importantly, human beings, regardless of label (dominant-subordinate, assistant-full, faculty-student, administrator-staff) do their best work when they are able to engage with each other without fear. The aspiration of The Code is to say to each other that even as we operate within these

necessary structures, we can and must conduct our work in ways that are supportive of all.

I have reviewed [The Know More @ MSU Campus Climate Survey](#)¹ results released in November of 2019. They highlight key indicators about the work that must be done to create a more respectful and inclusive environment at MSU. The results indicate that the majority of all faculty/staff groups had experienced at least one type of workplace incivility (e.g., insulting or disrespectful remarks, interrupting, paying little attention to their statements or showing little interest in their opinions, making jokes at their expense). The survey results also reveal how workplace incivility disproportionately impacts individuals based on sex, race, ethnicity, age, disability status, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Our academic hearts break when we read about these experiences. The data is a clarion call to action, to renewal of purpose, and to confront that within us that can slow the pulse of human pursuits. The Code is a remarkable accomplishment and part of the way toward healing. To ensure that we are all part of the solution and that we effectively institutionalize the principles of The Code, I propose to assemble a task force for “Implementation and Institutionalization of the Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors.” Following approval of The Code by Faculty Senate, I will, at your request, assemble and charge a task force with this important next step.

I recognize that much work remains, but so much good work has already taken place. It is upon us now to continue to move that good work forward.

I commend the working group of the UCFA and its consultants who spent many hours contemplating, discussing, and developing The Code. Thank you for your contribution to the health and well-being of Michigan State University and those who inhabit her halls.

Cc: Mick Fulton
Matthew Comstock
Martha Faner
Mark Waddell
Rebecca Campbell
Andrea Munford
Theresa Kelley
Kara Yermak

¹ See “Faculty’s/Staff’s Experiences with Workplace Incivility” on page 41 – 46 of the Know More @ MSU Campus Climate Survey here: <https://civilrights.msu.edu/assets/documents/MSUreport.pdf>