

Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors for Faculty and Academic Staff

Preamble

The Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors is intended to describe and encourage behaviors that will foster an equitable, safe, and respectful workplace for faculty and academic staff at Michigan State University. MSU's mission statement prioritizes creating an inclusive community that promotes the well-being of the community. This Code is rooted in many of the standards essential to the mission of the University. The Code complements rather than supersedes existing policies that address sexual misconduct, relationship violence, racial and ethnic bias, LGBTQIA+ bias, and other forms of harassment or discrimination against protected classes. The free and honest exchange of ideas requires mutual respect and collegiality, and in their absence we are left with freedom for a privileged few rather than for all. The need for a code of professional conduct is illustrated clearly by the KNOW MORE@MSU Survey, which collected over 15,000 responses from members of the MSU community in the Spring semester of 2019.¹ Substantial majorities of faculty and staff reported experiencing at least one type of behavior that the survey describes as workplace incivility.

This Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors is an important step towards creating a more inclusive workplace for everyone.

This Code was created and 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 supportive living, learning, and working environment for all students, faculty, academic staff, and support staff in service of the University's mission. To foster a productive and rich academic community, it is essential to recognize and adhere to the principles of courtesy, respect, and professionalism.

The University and its faculty must balance respect for academic freedom,² and freedom of speech with maintaining a respectful learning and working environment. Faculty members encourage and maintain the exchange of ideas vital to institutions of higher learning. 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 conflict. In doing

¹ The terms, "faculty" or "faculty members," as used in this document, apply to all faculty and academic staff. "Academic staff" refers to employees primarily responsible for carrying out the academic activities of MSU's mission, including but not limited to the titles of: academic specialist, lecturer, assistant instructor, research associate, postdoctoral fellow, or librarian. This includes those in a continuing appointment system and those with fixed-term and visiting status.

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

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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 professionally and respectfully.³

II. Purpose

The purpose of this Code is to set forth shared expectations of how faculty and academic staff interact with one another, students, support staff, and administrators with the goal of maintaining a respectful learning and working environment. The faculty handbook identifies existing mechanisms for resolution in those instances in which a MSU community member⁴ believes they have been subject to behaviors or interactions contrary to the Code.

III. Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors

The Code is intended to: (1) address behaviors rather than thoughts or beliefs, (2) balance professional debate and disagreement, ensuring a respectful environment for all faculty, academic staff, students, support staff and administrators, and (3) be aspirational and constructive rather than punitive.

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

We the Faculty:

- 1) Recognize that respectful discussion and disagreement is central to the academic life of the University. This means:
 - a. We respectfully listen to each other.
 - b. We create constructive and respectful environments in which individuals are free to express themselves without fear of disrespect, abuse, reprisal, interruption or belittlement.
 - 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.
 - d. When we perceive a discussion to be disrespectful, we reserve the right to decline further engagement.

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

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, and administrators) and students.

- 2) Recognize our shared interest in the success of one another as well as the University as a whole. This means:
 - a. We foster respectful and supportive interactions with faculty, academic staff, students, support staff, and administrators.
 - 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 the diverse ways in which our colleagues 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 untenured colleagues or their colleagues in the continuing or fixed term systems. This means:
 - a. We are always mindful of power imbalances in our interactions with one another and with other members of the University, such as students, staff, and administrators to ensure that all voices are heard.
 - b. We resolve conflict and disagreement in ways that acknowledge the potential impact of differences in rank, position, and authority.

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 anyone. We do not abuse privileges of rank and authority to harass or intimidate, and we will address these behaviors directly and constructively.

- 4) Recognize that respect must be central to our interactions. This means:
 - a. We model constructive behaviors in all our communications with one another, whether in person, via electronic communications or elsewhere.
 - b. We avoid personal attacks, derogatory statements, and subtle behaviors targeting identities.
 - c. We use the names and pronouns that others ask us to use for them.
 - d. We reject bullying behaviors designed to intimidate or silence.
 - e. We respect our colleagues' time and priorities.

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

IV. Resources

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Resources are available to faculty and academic staff who need support related to concerns addressed in the Code. Most concerns can likely be resolved informally through the model of conflict resolution offered by theories of restorative justice. 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>.