

# 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 environment 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 need for a code of professional conduct is illustrated by the KNOW MORE@MSU Survey, which collected over 15,000 responses from members of the MSU community in the Spring semester of 2019.<sup>1</sup> 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, since respectful debate is an intrinsic part of the academic enterprise.

*This Code was created and endorsed by the University Committee on Faculty Affairs in consultation with stakeholder groups and academic governance. This Code was issued by the Office of the Provost on \_\_\_\_\_.*

## I. Introduction

Michigan State University and its faculty<sup>2</sup> 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.

A respectful learning and working environment is paramount for upholding the University mission. Faculty members participate in the exchange of ideas vital to institutions of higher

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<sup>1</sup> <https://civilrights.msu.edu/knowmore>

<sup>2</sup> 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.

learning, and the University and its faculty must balance respect for academic freedom<sup>3</sup> and freedom of speech with professional, respectful behavior. The freedom to challenge and openly discuss ideas may cause conflict, especially where participants hold varying degrees of power. 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.<sup>4</sup>

## 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.

## III. Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors

The Code addresses behaviors rather than thoughts or beliefs.

### We the Faculty:

- 1) Recognize that respect must be central to our interactions and to the academic life of the University. This means:
  - a. We respectfully listen to each other.
  - b. We model constructive behavior in both writing and speech.
  - c. We do not make derogatory statements. We do not engage in personal attacks or subtle behaviors targeting identities.
  - d. We use the names and pronouns that others ask us to use for them.
  - 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. 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.*

- 2) 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. We work to ensure that all voices are heard.

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<sup>3</sup> Academic Freedom policy: [https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/academic\\_freedom.html](https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/academic_freedom.html)

<sup>4</sup> 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](https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/faculty_rights.html)

- b. We resolve conflict and disagreement in ways that acknowledge the potential impact of differences in rank, position, authority, and privilege.
- c. We do not engage in bullying or abusive behaviors designed to intimidate or silence.
- d. When we perceive a discussion to be disrespectful, we reserve the right to decline further engagement.

*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.*

- 3) Recognize our shared interest in the success of one another as well as the University as a whole. This means:
  - a. We all thrive in working environments shaped by respectful and supportive interactions.
  - b. We understand and value that our colleagues may have priorities and responsibilities that differ from our own.
  - c. We recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of others, giving credit where it is due.

*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.*

#### IV. Behavior or Interactions Contrary to the Code

To address behaviors or interactions that are contrary to the code, each unit should have a process that allows for impacted individuals and observers to address these incidents in an informal manner. We recognize that misunderstandings do occur, and initial attempts at informal resolutions may provide opportunities for dialogue and discussion that are often sufficient to address the complaint.

Behaviors or interactions that are contrary to the Code include those that, in the judgment of a reasonable person, create a hostile, disrespectful, intimidating, 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 such behavior or interactions may address the matter with the faculty or academic staff member either on an informal or formal basis. Prior to seeking any form of resolution, they may consider seeking advice from a colleague, an assistant/associate dean, a department/school or college HR representative, or from other resources within the University. (See a list of resources in Section V).

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 would 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, an individual may wish to review tools and resources on conflict management strategies. These resources may be found in Section V.

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.

If disciplinary action 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. Resources

Resources are available to faculty and academic staff who need support related to concerns addressed in the Code. An individual may contact any of the campus administrative offices identified here for advice, consultation, and support on matters involving problematic behavior:

- [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](#)
- [Employee Assistance Program](#)
- Or seek assistance from affinity groups

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

#### VI. 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.

VII. 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.