

UW-EXTENSION ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY UWEX STATEMENT ON CONSENSUAL RELATIONSHIPS

It is the policy of UW-Extension that romantic and/or sexual relationships involving conflict of interest of a University employee or student are unacceptable. Further, UW-Extension warns of the potential for abuse in power differential relationships even where the conflict of interest issue is resolved.

1. Conflict of Interest

Conflicts of interest may arise in connection with consensual romantic and/or sexual relationships between faculty or other instructional staff and students, or between supervisors and subordinates. UW-Extension policy and more general ethical principles preclude individuals from evaluating the work or academic performance of others with whom they have intimate familial relationships, or from making hiring, salary or similar financial decisions concerning such persons. The same principles apply to consensual romantic and/or sexual relationships, and require, at a minimum, that appropriate arrangements be made for objective decision-making with regard to the student, subordinate or prospective employee.

2. Abuse of Power Differential

Although conflict of interest issues can be resolved, in a consensual romantic and/or sexual relationship involving a power differential the potential for serious consequences remains. Individuals entering into such relationships must recognize that:

- a. the reasons for entering such a relationship may be a function of the power differential;
- b. where power differentials exist, even in a seemingly consensual relationship, there are limited after-the-fact defenses against charges of sexual harassment; and
- c. the individual with the power in the relationship will bear the burden of accountability.*

Procedures relating to this statement are included in UWEX Chapter Sections 6.01, 8.07, and 13.01.

* An instructor's or supervisor's liability protection under Wisconsin statutes may not apply to protect the individual in subsequent litigation arising out of the relationship's effect on the student or employee. It is the instructor, supervisor, or other employee who, by virtue of his or her special power and responsibility, will bear a special burden of accountability.