

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE GUIDELINES ON RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS

PURPOSE

The integrity of the instructor-student relationship is at the heart of the department's educational mission. This relationship vests considerable trust and power in instructors, who, in turn, bear authority and accountability as mentors, educators, and evaluators. The unequal institutional power inherent in this relationship can heighten students' vulnerability. Instructors have a professional responsibility to act in the best pedagogical interests of their students. When educators take a personal, self-directed interest in students, for example an interest in a student as an intimate friend or a romantic or sexual partner, they may no longer be able to ensure that their actions promote the best interest of students as learners. In such cases, unacceptable risks including favoritism and bias, both actual and perceived, impair the integrity of the student-instructor relationship and the trust on which it depends. For these reasons, the department regards intimate friendships as well as sexual and romantic relationships between instructors and students as generally incompatible with educators' professional responsibility. Such relationships not only compromise instructors' pedagogical responsibility toward the students directly involved but they may also jeopardize the professionalism and reputation of the department as a whole. The department therefore strongly discourages intimate friendships as well as romantic or sexual relationships between instructors and students.

SCOPE

These guidelines set out the department's values and principles and highlights some best practices in regard to instructor-student relationships. They clarify the department's expectations of professional integrity in the interactions between members of its community. These institutional expectations are oriented toward maintaining a safe and respectful environment to conduct the educative mission of McGill.

These Guidelines complement and do not supersede the University's [Guidelines on Intimate Relationships Between Teaching Staff and Students](#), the [Policy on Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Discrimination Prohibited by Law](#), the [Policy Against Sexual Violence](#), the [Student Code of Conduct](#), the [Charter of Students' Rights](#), and the [Regulation on Conflict of Interest](#).

It is the obligation of every member of the teaching staff to read, understand, and follow the University regulations, policies, and guidelines on this matter.

These guidelines concern all members of our community in their professional interactions in the department. "Instructor" includes members of the teaching staff, including faculty members, course instructors/lecturers, postdoctoral fellows, and teaching assistants responsible for teaching, advising, supervising, or allocating resources for students. "Student" includes undergraduate and graduate students, visiting students, and postdoctoral fellows who are currently enrolled in programs or courses in the department (including students who are on temporary leaves or graduate students who have reached time limitation). For the purposes of these guidelines, the terms "instructor" and "student" designate an asymmetric relation of power and authority (e.g. professor-student or TA-student relationships). The guidelines do not apply to horizontal relationships between department members of the same status (e.g. relationships between graduate students or between faculty members).

GUIDELINES

Intimate relationships (including sexual and romantic relationships) between instructors and students over whom the instructor exercises pedagogical, supervisory, financial, or administrative authority constitute a conflict of interest and should be avoided. Sexual and romantic relationships should also be avoided in situations where an instructor can expect to be responsible for teaching, advising, supervising, or allocating resources for that student in the future.

Intimate relationships between members of the teaching staff and students towards whom they have responsibilities as educators constitute a conflict of interest. Such relationships, whether ongoing or concluded, must be disclosed pursuant to the [Regulation on Conflict of Interest](#). The department chair (or the Dean of Arts, in situations where the conflict of interest involves the chair) is responsible for developing a plan to manage the conflict of interest. Department members must adhere to this plan, failing which a disciplinary process at the University level will ensue.

BEST PRACTICES

The department is a professional environment in which professional standards of behaviour apply. The department suggests that its teaching staff adopt the following general practices when interacting with students:

- It is the instructor's responsibility to maintain professional standards in their relationships with students. Err on the side of professionalism in the departmental environment. Maintain a certain level of formality in relation with students, whether in office hours, in social contexts such as departmental receptions, dinners, or over email. Preserve professional standards when meeting with students at academic or social events that take place off-campus and outside of business hours.
- Be aware that students often have obligations outside business hours. Generally hold office hours and meet with students on campus, during business hours (8.00 am to 6.00 pm).
- When meeting with students, ensure that your office door is left ajar unless specifically requested otherwise by the student.
- Respect students' privacy. In general, avoid asking or inviting overly personal questions.
- Be considerate in your electronic communication with students. Use the official McGill email. Social media use for communication with students is discouraged except for strictly professional purposes. Avoid class assignments that require students to invite instructors and/or fellow students into their social media circles. Consider how the power asymmetry in the instructor-student relationship may affect social media communications. It may be difficult for students to refuse invitations, such as "friend" requests. If you use alternate modes of communication, such as text message, consider doing so only during business hours.
- Be aware of classroom dynamics such as the role of implicit bias and the need for respectful and constructive behavior in the classroom and in all learning contexts (e.g., office hours, online discussion boards on myCourses, etc.).
- Generally speaking, faculty members should refrain from participating in social events designed by and for students (e.g., grad student society social events, undergraduate Halloween parties).

DUTY TO REFER

Instructors have a responsibility to refer students in distress to on-campus or off-campus resources. When dealing with students in distress, follow these [Guidelines](#) developed by the Dean of Students.

- Establish proper rapport by listening.
- Do not ask too many questions.
- Do not overstep boundaries.
- Ask if the student is already connected to a McGill Student Service, and if you may call that service (e.g. [Counselling Services](#), [Student Health Services](#), [Office for Sexual Violence](#)

[Response, Support, and Education](#), [SACOMSS \(Sexual Assault Center of the McGill Students' Society\)](#), [Legal Information Clinic at McGill](#), [Senior Equity and Inclusion Advisor](#), the department's equity officers).

- In case of an emergency or a crisis involving McGill students, as individuals or as a group, on campus, or anywhere in the world, the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) is the main contact.