

**REPORT**  
**OF THE**  
**CONSENSUAL RELATIONSHIP POLICY COMMITTEE**

**BY CO-CHAIRS**

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## Summary

As an institution where any person can find instruction in any study, Cornell demands ethical behavior from all who are engaged in its mission of teaching, research, service, and outreach. It is the responsibility of the institution to guarantee that every student has the freedom to pursue their academic and professional interests in an environment without preferential or unfair treatment, discrimination, or bias. Romantic or sexual relationships between instructors and students can jeopardize the integrity of that mission for the individuals involved and also for those around them.

The [Consensual Relationships Policy \(CRP\) Committee](#) was charged by President Pollack to develop a policy, dubbed “Policy 6.X”, that addresses this issue. The policy is to be concerned with relationships where one individual (the *authority*) can influence the academic or professional progress of the other (the *subordinate*). It is to apply only in those situations where the subordinate is either a student or a postgraduate. The authority can be a member of the faculty (broadly construed), an employee, a postgraduate, or a student. The proposed policy must identify conflict-of-interest situations that require prohibitions and it must include a plan for effective disclosure and enforcement.

After extensive research and broad consultation, the CRPC recommends three prohibitions:

*P1. Any member of the Cornell community who has, or has had, a sexual or romantic relationship with a current student or current postgraduate is prohibited from exercising academic or professional authority over that student or postgraduate.*

*P2. Sexual or romantic relationships between faculty members and undergraduate students are prohibited regardless of department, school, or college affiliation.*

*P3. Sexual or romantic relationships between faculty members and graduate or professional students are prohibited whenever both parties are affiliated with the same graduate field or degree program.*

The proposed policy requires the creation of a “Policy 6.X Office” (located in central HR) that serves as a resource for both subordinates and authorities. The Office would work with department chairs, degree program directors, college deans, the dean of faculty, and others to ensure that effective recusal plans are put into practice and that enforcement procedures are properly executed. An effective Policy 6.X Office is essential to our proposed policy.

Across all constituencies there is universal support for P1 and broad 4-to-1 support for P2. (The Faculty Senate rejected a version of P2 in 2015.) The community is clearly divided on P3 based on votes in the Assemblies and the Senate. However, the Committee was ultimately persuaded to support P3 based on what it learned from the on-line postings and the associated commentary from the Assemblies and the Senate.

## **Undergraduate/Faculty Prohibition**

*P2: Sexual or romantic relationships between faculty members and undergraduate students are prohibited regardless of department, school, or college affiliation.*

An undergraduate degree involves experiencing the university broadly. This expectation of breadth is manifested in distribution requirements and the foundation of the liberal arts education. As a result, any faculty member is a potential course instructor, research supervisor, or academic mentor. This is amplified by the common practice of delaying or changing the selection of one's undergraduate major(s). A prohibition on faculty-undergraduate relationships helps ensure that all undergraduates have full access to any study they choose, based on academic ability and inclination alone, by eliminating the conflicts of interest that arise from past or ongoing romantic or sexual relationships with an academic authority figure.

The undergraduate members of the Committee collectively requested the undergraduate/faculty prohibition. The undergraduates also urged further attention to non-romantic relationships. The Student Assembly registered support for P2 by a 17-5 margin and the undergraduates on the CRPC were unanimous in support of P2.

No one who articulated opposition to P2 offered practical suggestions for navigating disclosure and recusal in such situations: Who would determine sufficient academic distance between authority and subordinate? Who would monitor the Recusal Plan? Apart from the reasons given above, we came to support P2 because we could not develop satisfactory answers to these questions.

## **Graduate Field or Degree Program Faculty/Student Prohibition**

*P3: Sexual or romantic relationships between faculty members and graduate or professional students are prohibited whenever both parties are affiliated with the same graduate field or degree program.*

Graduate and professional students apply and are accepted to specific fields of study. Unlike undergraduates, their degrees typically only require coursework within their chosen field(s), and they are not expected to change fields. While coursework and research outside of their fields may augment their studies, neither is usually a precondition of successfully completing the program. In addition, graduate and professional students are experienced members of academia and can more accurately gauge the extent of conflicts of interest. Therefore, a blanket ban is unnecessary outside of the field, although more limited restrictions are advisable.

Within their fields, graduate and professional students must take courses from and are subject to formal and informal evaluation by field faculty, even when those faculty are not teaching required courses or directly supervising the student. For graduate students, any field faculty member may challenge the validity of a student's dissertation defense to the Dean of the Graduate School. Despite varying practices by field, graduate students enter the university without having formally assembled their special committees; prior or ongoing relationships with faculty members restrict the student's potential opportunities for that committee. While special committees, primary

investigators, laboratory supervisors, and so forth may not be part of the graduate student's field, those roles are significantly more likely to be filled by faculty within the field. While professional student programs lack many of the formal structures of the graduate field and special committee, faculty in professional programs are overwhelmingly selected for expertise in a specialized area. Accordingly, relationships with faculty members in the professional field would preclude a student from pursuing certain careers. Graduate and professional students apply to programs with a reasonable expectation of being able to access faculty based on their academic merits.

The Committee considered compromises between CRP-A, with a field ban, and CRP-B, without; differentiating direct and indirect authority; a ban within department confines; and a field ban only up until the A exams. We found these compromises to either not meet a sufficient threshold or to be too ambiguous and complicated. We considered more stringent bans, such as one on minor fields, and discarded those. Typically, those in favor of a field ban were concerned about the most vulnerable. Many comments against the field ban did not account for the academic environment or misinterpreted the proposed policy.

### **The Policy 6.X Office**

Central to our proposal is the creation of a new office, the Policy 6.X Office. We propose that this be housed within Human Resources and closely aligned with the Title IX Office. For the following reasons, we do not believe this policy or any functional consensual relationship policy can succeed without a dedicated 6.X Office external to the academic hierarchies:

1. Students, particularly graduate students, do not trust faculty to act impartially in enforcing policies against one another and guarding against retaliation.
2. Faculty rightly value their workplace privacy and dislike the prospect of Chairs or Deans possessing lists of personal relationships (as demonstrated in the 2015 Faculty Senate discussion).
3. A central office can minimize the number of academic or workplace colleagues who need to be informed of a relationship.
4. Authorities found to be in violation of Policy 6.X deserve review of the investigation's decisions, enabled by keeping Academic Deans separate up until the implementation of sanctions.
5. Chairs and directors of graduate studies (DGS) are not trained in handling sensitive matters of this nature.
6. A central office is better equipped than faculty to direct subordinates to appropriate resources on campus, especially in complex situations.
7. A central office ensures consistent and fair application of the policy, as opposed to variation by department/field and Chair.
8. A central office is the only way to guarantee a violation of the policy is dealt with only once, and to ensure that repeat violations of the policy are taken into consideration when determining sanctions.

9. A central office better ensures even application of the policy across authorities of varying academic ranks, including undergraduates and graduate students.
10. A central office is better equipped to safeguard and provide privacy for LGBTQ+ and other marginalized communities.

The Policy 6.X Office should have these attributes:

1. It should support anonymous reporting similar to that already available for bias, harassment and hazing.
2. It should respect the wishes of the reporter as much as possible.
3. It should provide explicit online documentation indicating the timeline and process of what happens when a report is filed.
4. It should respond to the reporter in a timely fashion with information about resources and, as matters progress, steps that are being taken.
5. It should support multiple avenues of reporting.
6. It should support the intelligent sharing of information among relevant staff.
7. It should be able to handle intra-departmental tensions.
8. It should provide guidance to Chairs, degree-program directors and others involved in the process.

We envision the Office's role as a central disclosure and recordkeeping location; a custodian of resources for all parties; a partner for unit leaders on campus; and a repository of expertise in investigation, mediation, and navigating personal relationships in the academic/professional sphere. The investigatory component of its work suggests alignment with the Title IX Office, as does the possibility of cases that appear to belong to the purview of one office and end up concerning the other.

It is difficult to predict the cost of maintaining an effective 6.X Office. The caseload may vary depending upon reception and utilization of this policy. We believe that the Office can "pay for itself" if it has an effective educational agenda that builds Policy 6.X awareness across campus.

We recommend that the Policy 6.X Office maintain and publish anonymized statistics on the number and type of violations of Policy 6.X. These will help assure community members that the policy is actively utilized and raise awareness among current and prospective Cornell affiliates of the university's commitment to fairness and accountability in personal relationships as in other areas.

We propose a thorough review of the policy and the 6.X Office three years after their implementation. It should review 6.X violation statistics and related data, respecting confidentiality from start to finish. The review process should include fully transparent interactions with the community in the same style as practiced by the CRP Committee.

### **Disclosure and Enforcement Parameters**

We chose to provide enough detail so that the processes set in motion are transparent. The procedures we outline for disclosure, recusal, and enforcement are more substantial and detailed

than those of most peer institutions. “Step-by-step” clarity is required if a CRP is to be effective. Lack of clarity and “black boxes” discourage adherence to and use of a university CRP.

A recurring concern from LGBTQ+ individuals and groups was the tension between transparency and privacy. Specifically, people feared that by disclosing, one must “out” oneself or, worse, be involuntarily outed by the authority. This led us to explicitly include the opportunity for either the authority or the subordinate to request that the Policy 6.X Office formulate the recusal plan without involving either party’s academic unit, thereby protecting those who may, for reasons of safety or career prospects, not be “out.” We also narrowed our original radius of disclosure — automatically including deans in disclosure and Recusal Plans appeared too large a trade-off of privacy (without even taking into account the additional workload issues).

It is important that the Policy 6.X Office make contact with the subordinate *before* notifying any other individual in their department, program or field.

Having an unusually restricted radius of disclosure in sensitive cases poses difficulties for resolving the conflicts of interest. We leave it in as a safeguard for those cases where an individual would face substantial risk of harm to their career, their well-being, or their safety *on account of bias*. In most cases, we expect the radius of disclosure to be limited to those necessary to ensure adherence to a Recusal Plan (such as a Chair, DGS, or alternative evaluators), and those most affected in the case of failure to adhere to the Recusal Plan (such as other members of a lab).

Other recusal plans have been proposed, but lack comparable safeguards. We have included them in the full report.

In enforcement, we wish to ensure that the consequence for an undisclosed relationship (prohibited or not) is greater than that for a disclosed but prohibited relationship, to encourage disclosure, and that consequences scale for repeated infractions. Our primary concern is the amelioration of harm to students.

## **Further Recommendations**

Over the year, we have come to realize how ill-equipped the campus is to talk about these issues, and how uncomfortable the conversations can be. Where conversations have occurred, there is no consensus on acceptable practices.

As the goal of the proposed Policy 6.X is to inspire ethical behavior, we regard prevention and culture change as key. Accordingly, we recommend adoption of an educational outreach plan that includes these components:

It establishes Policy 6.X awareness:

- a. During orientation for incoming faculty, staff, postgraduates, and graduate and professional students
- b. During teaching assistant orientation
- c. During the first week for any operation that has graders who are students

It maintains Policy 6.X awareness:

- a. Dean of Faculty start-of-semester announcements
- b. Graduate School Newsletter at the start of semester

- c. A check-box on the annual graduate Student Progress Report acknowledging that they have read and understand the policy *or* have arranged a meeting with their DGS to discuss it
- d. A comparable mechanism for the professional schools and all masters programs
- e. A comparable mechanism for faculty and staff, perhaps modeled after the financial disclosure form

It promotes Policy 6.X conversation:

- a. At least once a year in department meetings and degree-program/field organization meetings
- b. At least once a year amongst the chairs and their colleges' deans
- c. At least once a year amongst the deans and the provost

In discussing and implementing this policy, we hope that all offices consider the language we have used. We have put particular thought into gender neutral language, acknowledgement that relationships may involve within themselves more than two parties, “power imbalances,” and “recusal”—an active, volitional step towards a better environment, as opposed to the passive “management.”

We understand “relationship” to mean any romantic, sexual, and/or emotionally intimate contact between or among individuals. Furthermore, it may be of any duration, from a single incident or occurrence to a long-lasting partnership, either continuous or intermittent. It is distinguishable from a friendship or acquaintanceship by its potential to move any person involved to abuse any power imbalance it contains. We suggest continued attention to changing definitions and evolving social norms.

We urge that future work on this policy omit reference to age. While we diverge from peer institutions in this, the CRPC feels that other than the legal age of consent, age is irrelevant for purposes of a consensual relationship policy; it is demeaning to limit the agency of those ages 18-22. Our undergraduate-faculty prohibition stems from the nature of the undergraduate degree and applies without regard to the undergraduate’s age.

We ask that future work on this policy continue to include representation from all affected communities, with particular attention to undergraduates, graduate and professional students, postdocs, and junior faculty.

Where possible, we suggest aligning this policy with existing university policies regarding financial conflicts of interest, nepotism, and academic or research misconduct.<sup>1</sup> The favoritism and bias that can arise out of undisclosed romantic or sexual relationships create issues of academic integrity that mirror or overlap with the issues that those policies aim to prevent. An authority can compromise academic integrity on behalf of a subordinate ignorant of the interference, and such actions (or merely the appearance thereof) can harm the subordinate throughout their career.

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<sup>1</sup> Policy 1.7, Financial Conflict of Interest ([https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/policy/vol1\\_7.pdf](https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/policy/vol1_7.pdf)); Policy 4.14, Conflict of Interest and Commitment ([https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/policy/vol4\\_14.pdf](https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/policy/vol4_14.pdf)); Policy 4.6, Standards of Ethical Conduct ([https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/policy/vol4\\_6.pdf](https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/policy/vol4_6.pdf)); and Policy 6.4, Prohibited Bias, Discrimination, and Harassment and Sexual and Related Misconduct ([https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/vol6\\_4.pdf](https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/vol6_4.pdf)).

## Proposed Policy

### Reasons for Policy

As an institution where any person can find instruction in any study, Cornell demands ethical behavior from all who are engaged in its mission of teaching, research, service, and outreach. It is the responsibility of the institution to guarantee that every student has the freedom to pursue their academic and professional interests in an environment without preferential or unfair treatment, discrimination, or bias. Romantic or sexual relationships between instructors and students can jeopardize the integrity of that mission for the individuals involved and also for those around them.

Professional and institutional power differentials are part of academic life. These power differentials may cause harm and it is imperative that these risks be minimized. These risks can be magnified if the individuals involved hold differing perceptions of the underlying power imbalance. Negative outcomes from such a relationship, whether professional, academic, or personal, are more likely to affect the student.

Even where fully consensual, romantic or sexual relationships between instructors or other authority figures and students affect more than just the parties in the relationship. These relationships can harm the overall academic environment by compromising the instructor's professional judgment and impartiality (then and in the future), impacting grading, distribution of resources, academic or professional recommendations, and more. They often undermine collegial dynamics among the students themselves because of rumored or actual favoritism. They can tarnish the academic reputation of the instructor, the student, the field, and Cornell itself. Regardless of their outcome, a relationship's presence can linger within the careers of all parties, potentially driving the student from their discipline or hampering their lifelong academic and professional progress.

### Terminology and Scope

This policy is about sexual and romantic relationships that are *consensual* and have a dynamic that involves *power imbalance*. This means that one individual in the relationship (the *authority*) can or could influence the academic or professional progress of the other (the *subordinate*).

The policy applies only to those situations in which the subordinate is a student or postgraduate. The authority is typically a faculty member, but it can also be a student, postgraduate, or member of the non-academic staff.

For purposes of this policy, post-docs, visiting critics, visiting fellows, and veterinary interns/residents are *postgraduates*. All other academic title-holders are *faculty* from the standpoint of this policy, including those whose titles are modified by "visiting," "courtesy," "acting," "adjunct," or "emeritus."



The Policy 6.X Office is an important part of the disclosure process. This is a section within the Office of Human Resources serving as the primary Policy 6.X resource for subordinates, authorities, and those who are responsible for enforcement and adjudication.

This policy only pertains to consensual relationships. The university's Policy 6.4 addresses bias, discrimination, harassment, and sexual and related misconduct.

### **Prohibited Relationships**

The freedom to choose courses, fields of study, and advisors is essential to education and research at Cornell. Students and postgraduates have the right to pursue their academic and professional interests in an environment free from preferential or unfair treatment, discrimination, or bias, and the potential for coercion. Romantic or sexual relationships between academic authorities and subordinates are prohibited whenever those relationships interfere with that right. Specifically:

*Any member of the Cornell community who has, or has had, a sexual or romantic relationship with a current student or current postgraduate is prohibited from exercising academic or professional authority over that student or postgraduate.*

*Sexual or romantic relationships between faculty members and graduate or professional students are prohibited whenever both parties are affiliated with the same graduate field or degree program.*

*Sexual or romantic relationships between faculty members and undergraduate students are prohibited regardless of department, school, or college affiliation.*

Positions of academic or professional authority include, but are not limited, to: course instructors; course graders; teaching assistants; special committee members; and other positions of evaluation, including academic, dissertation, research or thesis advisors; work-study supervisors; coaches; residential life staff in the student's living unit; the director or associate director of a degree program, field, laboratory, research group, or center; the chair or associate chair of a department; and deans.

Any member of the university community who finds themselves in a relationship prohibited by this policy must contact the Policy 6.X Office so that it may begin implementing safeguards for the subordinate as soon as possible.

Exceptions to these prohibitions can be made in cases of preexisting relationships or where the prohibition restricts educational or research opportunities or induces economic hardship for the subordinate. Exceptions require disclosure, approval, and recusal.

### **Relationships Requiring Disclosure**

Disclosure is required whenever:

- (a) an exception is made to a prohibition because of a pre-existing relationship.
- (b) the authority (i.e. the subordinate's partner) is in a professional or academic relationship with a third party who has academic influence over the subordinate.
- (c) unbiased treatment of the subordinate or their peers requires that the subordinate's partner be recused from specified duties.

The Policy 6.X Office can be used to clarify whether a relationship requires disclosure.

### **Disclosure Process**

The purpose of disclosure is to set in motion a Recusal Plan that protects the authority, the subordinate, and the academic environment by mitigating conflicts of interest. The authority is responsible for disclosure, but it is strongly recommended that the authority inform the subordinate prior to disclosing. Subordinates and third parties are not obligated to inform the Policy 6.X Office of prohibited relationships or those requiring disclosure. If a relationship is impacting their academic workplace, however, they may choose to do so.

When the authority is a faculty member or employee, they must disclose in a timely manner:

1. The disclosure shall first be made to the Policy 6.X Office to ensure protection of the subordinate. Faculty may also consult with the Dean of Faculty.
2. In consultation with the authority, the Policy 6.X Office develops a Recusal Plan or determines that one is unnecessary. The Recusal Plan identifies situations where participation by the authority is to be limited because of the potential for conflict of interest, thus mitigating the academic power imbalance. The plan must also specify who in the workplace needs to be informed of its existence.
3. The subordinate is contacted by the Policy 6.X Office shortly after the disclosure is made to inform them of the disclosure, the proposed Recusal Plan, and of relevant resources.
4. The Recusal Plan is signed by the authority and the subordinate and filed in the Policy 6.X Office. The Recusal Plan identifies those who are responsible for its enforcement and the terms for its renewal.

If a postgraduate or student is the authority, then disclosure should be made in a timely manner to the supervisor of the affected workplace or the Policy 6.X Office. Thus, a graduate student working in a laboratory or serving as a teaching assistant in a course would disclose the potential for conflict of interest to the director of the laboratory or to the faculty member who is teaching the course. The authority and the authority's supervisor must agree on a Recusal Plan. The Policy 6.X Office must be informed by the supervisor if the authority fails to comply with the Recusal Plan.

In cases where disclosure beyond the Policy 6.X Office could endanger any party, the Policy 6.X Office will prioritize the safety and freedom of those involved.

### **Enforcement Procedures**

Violations of Policy 6.X by an authority include: failure to disclose in a timely manner, failure to adhere to the Recusal Plan, participation in a prohibited relationship, and retaliation against any person who, while acting in good faith, provides information about a suspected violation of Policy 6.X.

The Policy 6.X Office initiates an investigation to determine whether a violation of the policy has occurred. This investigation will include an opportunity for all interested parties to be heard. If no violation is found, the complainant is informed and no further action is taken. Otherwise, the following steps are carried out under the auspices of the Policy 6.X Office:

1. A panel is formed to determine the sanctions. If the authority is a faculty member, then the panel includes a member of the Policy 6.X Office, the Dean of Faculty, and the chair of the authority's department. (If the faculty member is part of a center and not a department, then the center director plays the role of chair. If the chair or center director is involved in the allegation, then suitable substitutes must be found.) If the authority is not a faculty member, then the panel consists of a member of the Policy 6.x Office, the authority's immediate supervisor, and the individual responsible for the affected workplace.
2. If the violation involves a failure to disclose or noncompliance with the recusal plan, then corrective steps without sanctions may be appropriate. If the panel is unanimous in this belief, then those corrective steps are communicated in a letter to the authority with a copy sent to the Dean of the authority's college or equivalent. The Policy 6.X Office will ascertain through periodic check-ins that these corrective steps are being followed and may re-initiate this process if necessary.
3. Unless the option in the previous step is exercised, the panel recommends a sanction and conveys it to the Dean of the authority's college or equivalent in writing. Possible sanctions include mandatory training, suspension for a specified period of time, limitations of power over students, and dismissal.
4. The Dean of the authority's college or equivalent enacts those sanctions, or enacts alternative sanctions providing a written rationale that is communicated to the panel.
5. The authority may initiate an appeal procedure.

These procedures should conclude as promptly as possible so as to give the authority and the subordinates and/or complainants involved a timely resolution. The Policy 6.X Office shall keep the parties apprised of progress and the nature of any delays.

The Policy 6.X Office will maintain records of policy violations. Sanctions will be proportionate to the amount of harm rendered by the violation. Prior violations of the policy as recorded by the

Policy 6.X Office will be taken into account. In all cases, the authority must be removed from power over the subordinate. Any harm rendered to a subordinate that results from a violation of this policy must be remedied by the authority's academic unit under the guidance of the Policy 6.X Office.

## FAQ for Policy

**Q: I am a faculty member and my romantic partner wishes to enroll in an undergraduate degree program. Is that allowed?**

A: Yes. This situation is covered by the exception clause. A prohibition does not apply if it limits the educational opportunities of the subordinate which would be the case in this example. Disclosure with a Recusal Plan would be required before matriculation in order to protect the academic environment. Note that if you became involved with a current undergraduate, then the exception clause would not apply. That is because lifting the ban does not increase educational opportunity.

**Q: I am a faculty member and my romantic partner wishes to enroll in a graduate or professional degree program with which I am affiliated. Is that allowed?**

A: Yes. This situation is covered by the exception clause. A prohibition does not apply if it limits the educational opportunities of the subordinate, which would be the case in this example. Disclosure with a Recusal Plan would be required before matriculation in order to protect the academic environment. Note that if you became involved with a student who is currently enrolled your degree program, then the exception clause does not apply. That is because lifting the ban does not increase educational opportunity.

**Q: I am a faculty member and do not belong to my romantic partner's graduate field. I am not on my partner's special committee. Is it necessary to disclose the relationship?**

A: You should disclose if you have a graduate field colleague or a department colleague who is a member of your partner's special committee. Another situation where you should disclose is if you and your partner share the same workplace.

**Q: I am a TA/grader in a course and I have a romantic partner who is enrolled in the course. What should I do?**

A: You must disclose the relationship to the faculty member who is responsible for the course. A Recusal Plan needs to be developed so that you do not participate in any evaluation of your partner. If the course involves multiple TAs and graders, then it is usually easy to adjust your role in the course so that this is possible. If not, then you must exit the course.

**Q: I am a graduate student/postgraduate who works in a faculty member's lab with somewhat informal academic authority over other students who work in the lab. What should I do if my romantic partner is among those students?**

A: Disclose the relationship to the supervising faculty member and develop a Recusal Plan that treats informal authority as formal authority.

**Q: I am a faculty member and my romantic partner is a student in a professional degree program with whom I have no academic connection. Is it necessary for me to disclose the relationship?**

A: No.

**Q: I am a graduate/professional student and have to take a course in another department/field that is taught by my romantic partner. What should I do?**

A: If the course is required by your program or essential to your research, then disclosure is required and a workaround needs to be developed with the director of your degree program. Possibilities include just auditing the course or taking it when it is taught by someone else.

**Q: I am a postdoc. Am I prohibited from being in a relationship with a faculty member or graduate student in my field?**

A: Postdocs are not members of graduate fields; they are neither students nor permitted to serve on special committees. As such, the graduate field prohibition does not apply. However, ascertain whether you have an academic or professional relationship with that person and, if necessary, consult the Policy 6.X Office for guidance.

**Q: The policy requires disclosure when the subordinate's partner is in a professional or academic relationship with a third party who has academic influence over the subordinate. What relationships might this cover?**

A: This includes faculty in the subordinate's minor field of study or in the subordinate's department but not field. It could also include faculty who share research projects with the subordinate's supervisor(s), staff in the same office that oversees resource distribution, or others.

**Q: I have a concern that relates to Policy 6.X. Who can I contact for help and/or information?**

A: There are a number of "local options" that can be pursued at the discretion of the subordinate:

1. If the authority is a faculty member, then the director of the subordinate's degree program or the chair of the authority's department can be contacted.
2. If the authority is a member of the staff, then the authority's supervisor can be contacted.
3. If the authority is not faculty or a member of the staff, then the individual who is the supervisor or advisor of the authority can be contacted.
4. If these options are unattractive for any reason, then the 6.X Office should be contacted.

**Q: Who counts as an undergraduate, a graduate, or a professional student?**

A: *Undergraduates* are students enrolled in, on leave from, or suspended from an undergraduate degree program; non-degree-seeking students enrolled in only undergraduate classes; and undergraduate special students. *Graduate/professional students* are students enrolled in, on leave from, or suspended from a graduate or professional degree program and non-degree-seeking students enrolled in any graduate or professional classes.

**Q: What is the 6.X Office?**

A: This office is situated within Central Human Resources and serves as a resource for subordinates, authorities, and those responsible for enforcement of the policy. It is responsible for the faithful execution of all 6.X-related procedures. It can be reached anonymously, by email, or in person. The 6.X Office is NOT a confidential resource, although it maintains privacy as much as possible. A list of confidential resources is available on the [SHARE](#) website.

A third party who believes that their academic or professional pursuits are in jeopardy because of proximity to someone else's consensual relationship should contact the 6.X Office.

**Q: What if an attraction develops between an authority and subordinate, *e.g.*, a TA in a large course and student, freshman writing instructor and student, or special committee member and graduate advisee?**

A: Where possible, we would encourage removing the power imbalance, whether by asking the supervisor of a large course for another TA to take on grading the subordinate's work or by finding a new special committee member (perhaps as an external committee member from an institution outside Cornell). When removing the power imbalance is not possible, the policy does require waiting to initiate a relationship, in these examples either until after the relevant course is completed or the dissertation has been defended.

**Q: A graduate or professional student has a preexisting relationship (outside their field) and then wishes to take a course with the authority. Is this possible?**

A: Normally, such a course will not be required, and it will not be possible to take it with the authority teaching. If the course is required for their degree, the relationship should already have been disclosed, if not prohibited.

**Q: What happens if I notice a relationship that might fall under this policy?**

A: You are under no obligation to report. You may choose to, especially if you feel that the relevant educational environment is being disrupted. You may contact the 6.X Office anonymously through the bias reporting form, in person, or via email.

**Q: How does this policy apply to visiting faculty?**

A: Visiting faculty are held to the same standards as all other Cornell faculty. It is incumbent upon the unit hiring the individual to communicate the applicability of Policy 6.X.

**Q: Would the spouse of a faculty member be ineligible to enroll as a Cornell undergraduate?**

A: No. This is covered both by grandfathering in preexisting relationships and also by the exception for those relationships where a ban would in fact hinder the subordinate's education.

**Q: What happens if I allege that a relationship is non-consensual, but the 6.4 investigation does not come to the same conclusion?**

A: Policy 6.X is separate from Policy 6.4. An investigation of a violation of any university policy may prompt an investigation into a violation of any other university policy.

**Q: When does a relationship become romantic or sexual?**

A: We expect people to exercise their judgment: would a reasonable individual who heard about this relationship consider it to be romantic or sexual? If there is uncertainty, then the recommendation is to err on the side of disclosure or consult with the Policy 6.X Office.

**Q: Why notify the subordinate when a relationship is disclosed?**

A: The subordinate has a right to know that such a disclosure concerning them has been made. In addition, if they are surprised to learn that the authority considers them to be in a romantic or sexual relationship, we see this information as critical for the subordinate to be aware of. This provision also ensures that lines of communication between the Policy 6.X Office and the subordinate are open to provide the subordinate with resources for managing the conflict of interest.

**Q: Upon disclosure, will the Policy 6.X Office be investigating or asking about my private romantic or sexual relationship?**

A: The Office will ask only about such aspects of the situation as are necessary to formulate a recusal plan. They will never address the intimate details of the relationship: its existence and the circumstances of the workplace are sufficient.

**Q: Won't disclosure endanger some individuals, especially LGBTQ+ students who may not be public about their sexuality?**

A: We recognize that, in certain cases, disclosure could be extremely risky. Where the safety of a student is at stake, there is a provision for disclosure to be made only to the trained professionals in the 6.X Office rather than a broader group that includes faculty.

**Q: What does the department, field or degree program ban mean for units like the Law School, the Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management, and the multitude of professional master's programs across the university?**

A: For units like the Law School and Johnson, the coursework requirements are such that the whole school needs to be treated as a field of study and is therefore subject to the field-wide ban. Being unable to work with specific faculty in these units may well prevent the student from pursuing a specific specialization or even career path. With respect to faculty associated with a given master's program, they are prohibited from having romantic/sexual relationships with students enrolled in the same master's program.

**Q: What would be some examples of retaliation against an individual who in good faith reported a violation of the policy?**

A: Examples include making it difficult for the reporter to obtain (a) funding, (b) access to resources, (c) fair TA assignments, or (d) an objective letter of recommendation. Retaliating by bad-mouthing the reporter to an influential colleague is also a violation.

**Q: Who forms the panel for adjudication of sanctions?**

A: When the authority is a student, their immediate supervisor is their supervising faculty member and the individual responsible for the affected workplace would be the chair of the relevant department or director of the center. When the authority is a veterinary resident/intern, the relevant parties are their supervisor and the Dean of Students of the Veterinary College. When the authority



is another postgraduate, the relevant parties are their supervising faculty member and the chair of the department or director of the center. When the authority is a staff member, the relevant parties are their supervisor and their unit head.