

## Policy on Consensual Relationships

<b>Policy Title</b>	<b>Policy on Consensual Relationships</b>
<b>Policy #</b>	01.003.2
<b>Policy Owner</b>	University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees
<b>Contact Information</b>	Questions about this policy should be directed to the Office of Human Resources, (401) 874-2416
<b>Approved By</b>	University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees
<b>Effective Date</b>	January 1, 2026
<b>Next Review Date</b>	No later than January 31, 2031
<b>Who Needs to Know About this Policy</b>	All University of Rhode Island ("University" or "URI") faculty, staff, and students; as well as University Affiliates and any vendors/contractors with Academic or Supervisory Authority.
<b>Definitions</b>	<p><b>Academic or Supervisory Authority.</b> The authority to grade, evaluate, advise, award, recommend, appoint, classify, assign, promote, manage, enforce, oversee, transfer or discipline, or otherwise exert influence over the outcomes of another individual's academic or work performance at the University. Related roles include but are not limited to teaching, research, academic advising, coaching, service on evaluation or thesis committees, grading, housing assignment, work assignment, performance evaluation, supervising, managing, and/or recommending an individual in an institutional capacity. In some instances, University vendors/contractors may have Academic or Supervisory Authority.</p> <p><b>Academic Program.</b> A program of academic study at the University as listed in the University Catalog.</p> <p><b>Covered Relationship.</b> Any relationship that may reasonably be defined as sexual, romantic, amorous, and/or dating. Physical contact is not a required element of such relationships.</p> <p><b>Employee.</b> Any person employed by the University, including faculty, staff, postdoctoral research fellows, and athletic coaches. Student workers, including but not limited to work-study students, graduate assistants, resident assistants, resident academic mentors, and graduate hall directors, are considered Employees for the purposes of this policy. University Affiliates with Academic or Supervisory Authority over any Learners or Employees are also considered Employees for the purposes of this policy.</p> <p><b>Learner.</b> All undergraduate, graduate, professional, non-degree, and/or visiting students enrolled in an Academic Program at the University.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Undergraduate Learner.</b> A Learner who is enrolled in a baccalaureate program or is registered for baccalaureate instruction for academic credit, non-credit, or as a visiting or exchange student. Students in accelerated programs will be considered Undergraduate Learners until the conferral of a baccalaureate degree; students in accelerated programs that confer a final graduate degree without the intermediate conferral of a baccalaureate degree will be considered Undergraduate Learners until the student has completed 120 academic credits.</li> <li>• <b>Non-Undergraduate Learner.</b> Any Learner who is not an Undergraduate Learner.</li> </ul> <p><b>Management Plan.</b> A written understanding of the situation that gives rise to a conflict of interest, and the management mechanisms developed and overseen by the Office of Human Resources that will be implemented to eliminate the conflict.</p> <p><b>Supervisor.</b> For the purposes of this policy, either an Employee's immediate supervisor, or any person in a direct line above that immediate supervisor in the University's organizational hierarchy.</p> <p><b>University Affiliate.</b> Any individual who is not a faculty member, staff, or student who otherwise has a formal relationship with the University, including but not limited to visiting scholars, visiting students, research fellows, professional program participants, club sports coaches, and volunteers, as well as employees and associates of the URI Foundation and Alumni Engagement, URI Research Foundation, and members of the University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees. Vendors and contractors are not considered University Affiliates, except for those with an ongoing presence on the University campus as regular operations support staff.</p>
<b>Statutes, Regulations, and Policies Governing or Necessitating This Policy</b>	<p>Rhode Island Code of Ethics, R.I.G.L. §36-14</p> <p>University of Rhode Island Policy on Conflict of Interest and Commitment</p>
<b>Reason for Policy/Purpose</b>	To ensure a learning and working environment characterized by professional and ethical behavior with respect to consensual romantic relationships, in compliance with the Rhode Island Code of Ethics, where Learners and Employees are protected from associated conflicts of interest or uneven power dynamics.
<b>Forms Related to this Policy</b>	Self-Disclosure Form

## Policy Statement

The University of Rhode Island strives to create and maintain a community that enables each person to reach their full potential. Doing so requires an environment of trust, openness, civility, and respect. The University is firmly

committed to a policy of prohibiting behaviors that adversely impact a person's ability to fully and fairly participate in the scholarly, research, educational, administrative, and service missions of the University. The Educator–Learner relationship lies at the foundation of the educational process. As a matter of sound judgment and professional ethics, University Employees including faculty and staff have a duty to avoid any actual or apparent conflict between their professional responsibilities and personal relationships with Learners. A similar need exists in the relationships between Employees and their subordinates, in which even the perception of favoritism or bias can be detrimental to the effective functioning of the workplace.

In general, except as otherwise stated in this policy, Covered Relationships are prohibited 1) between Employees and Undergraduate Learners, regardless of Academic or Supervisory Authority, and 2) between Employees and Non-Undergraduate Learners (e.g., graduate students) when both parties are in the same Academic Program (or any program for which the appearance of favoritism or bias might reasonably be considered detrimental to the program's effectiveness). Additionally, in any situation not specified by the above prohibitions, any Employee (faculty, staff, or otherwise) shall be prohibited from having direct or indirect Academic or Supervisory Authority over any Employee and/or Learner with whom they have, have had, or may in the foreseeable future have a Covered Relationship. In situations where an uneven power dynamic exists due to one party in the Covered Relationship having Academic or Supervisory Authority over the other, the party with greater authority has a duty to report and disclose the relationship per the terms of this policy and its accompanying Procedures.

NOTE: Some individuals may be regarded as a combination of faculty, staff, and/or Learner. In such instances, the more restrictive provisions of this policy shall apply.

## **I. Employee–Learner Relationships**

The University is committed to putting Learners' interests first in addressing the challenges and competing interests that arise when defining limitations on certain types of Employee-Learner relationships. To that end, except as provided for under Exceptions below, Employees are prohibited from pursuing or having a Covered Relationship with:

- A.** any Undergraduate Learner regardless of Academic or Supervisory Authority; unless that Employee is *also* an Undergraduate Learner (e.g. work study student, teaching or laboratory assistant, Helpdesk or Dining Supervisor, etc.), in which case that Employee/Undergraduate Learner is prohibited from having any Academic or Supervisory Authority relative to the other Undergraduate Learner.
- B.** any Learner in a class, lab, field, worksite, or other setting (e.g. thesis evaluation committee) in which they have Academic or Supervisory Authority over the Learner.
- C.** a Non-Undergraduate Learner who is in the same Academic Program in which the Employee is appointed or teaches, regardless of Academic or Supervisory Authority.

If an Employee has Academic or Supervisory Authority and has in the past had a Covered Relationship with any Learner who subsequently is in the Employee's class, lab, field, worksite, or other such setting, the Employee must disclose the prior relationship immediately (see Section IV).

## **II. Employee–Employee Relationships**

When an Employee is involved in a Covered Relationship with another Employee over whom they exercise Academic or Supervisory Authority, an uneven power dynamic exists between them. The University strongly discourages such relationships as they often have negative consequences for one or both Employees, as well as their coworkers and the overall functioning of their department. Therefore, except as provided for under Exceptions below, Employees are prohibited from having direct or indirect Academic or Supervisory Authority over any Employee with whom they have, have had, or may in the foreseeable future have a Covered Relationship.

If an Employee is or has been involved in a Covered Relationship with another Employee over whom they exercise direct or indirect Academic or Supervisory Authority, the Employee with the Academic or Supervisory Authority must immediately report the relationship (see section IV below).

### **III. Vendor/Contractor–Learner Relationships**

University vendors/contractors and their employees are prohibited from pursuing or having a Covered Relationship with any Learner for whom they have direct or indirect Academic or Supervisory Authority. University vendors/contractors who exercise any Academic or Supervisory Authority over any Learner (e.g. study abroad programs) must explicitly acknowledge and agree to observe this policy as a component of their contract with the University.

### **IV. Duty to Report and Policy Enforcement**

All Covered Relationships referenced in this policy must be reported without exception, including past Covered Relationships as outlined above. Even in rare circumstances where an exception to the prohibitions in this policy may be granted (see Exceptions below), that process begins with the mandatory reporting of the relationship.

**A. Employee-Involved Covered Relationships (see Sections I and II):** The duty to report a Covered Relationship rests with the party who has Academic or Supervisory Authority over the other party or is the Employee in an Employee-Learner relationship.

Disclosure of the Covered Relationship must be made promptly to the Office of Human Resources and to the reporting Employee's supervisor. The preferred method of disclosure is the disclosure form included in the Procedures accompanying this policy. If an alternate method of disclosure is used, the Office of Human Resources or the reporting Employee's supervisor may at their discretion require a formal written disclosure using that form.

Following disclosure, the Office of Human Resources will conduct a conflict review, with participation from the reporting Employee's supervisor. Additional parties advising or participating in a review may optionally include, but are not limited to, the relevant division VP, academic dean, the Office of the Provost, and/or the Director of Enterprise Compliance who serves as the University's Conflicts Advisor. The University will conduct a conflict review regardless of how a conflict is discovered.

The results of a conflict review will be recorded in the form of a Management Plan, detailing the measures that must be undertaken to remove the conflict, and any performance review or disciplinary action taken. The Office of Human Resources will create and maintain the Management Plan, oversee its implementation, ensure compliance with the RI Code of Ethics, and may at its discretion conduct reviews of the plan or otherwise confirm implementation and/or the successful removal of the conflict. Measures adopted to remove a conflict may include, but are not limited to, staff reorganization, altered supervisory structures or work assignments, or other outcomes as directed by the Management Plan.

Enforcement of this policy for Covered Relationships involving one or more Employees shall rest with the Office of Human Resources and the Employee's Supervisor. Non-disclosure, failure to abide by the conflict removal measures detailed in a Management Plan, or other non-compliant actions may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination for the individual required to report the Covered Relationship.

**B. Vendor/Contractor-Involved Covered Relationships (see section III):** All Covered Relationships between a Vendor/Contractor and a Learner must be reported to the contract owner and authorized signatory who will conduct a conflict review to determine if the contract terms have been violated. Non-compliant actions may result in termination of the contract.

## Exceptions

This policy does not prohibit consensual relationships between Learners at the University, provided neither party exercises Academic or Supervisory Authority over the other.

During a conflict review (see section IV), the reporting Employee may request in writing to the Office of Human Resources an exception to the prohibitions in this policy. Exceptions are rarely granted, they require extraordinary circumstances, and they must nonetheless result with neither party having Academic or Supervisory Authority over the other. If an exception is granted, it will be recorded and overseen in accordance with a Management Plan.

## Policy Review and Revisions

(Versions earlier than the first policy number may be paper only)

Policy #	Effective Date	Reason for Change	Changes to Policy
01.003.1	June 25, 2021	n/a	n/a
01.003.2	January 1, 2026	Updates Needed	Removed table; greater detail on reporting and enforcement