

## **PROFESSIONAL ETHICS STATEMENT**

**Approved by the Faculty Senate on January 12, 2016**

Approved by Faculty Senate Executive

Committee on January 5, 2016

### **Preamble**

Faculty members in U.S. higher education are members of a self-governing profession and they must hold themselves and their colleagues to high standards of conduct in research, teaching, and service.<sup>1</sup> The general standards of the academic profession are codified in the American Association of University Professors on Academic Freedom, Due Process, and Professional Standards and Conflicts of Interest; the “Statements of Professional Ethics” promulgated by organizations representing the academic disciplines; and the Bylaws of the University of Nebraska Board of Regents.

The ethics of the academic profession obligate its members to observe the following principles:

- Faculty members should pursue knowledge, publish results, and address public issues. To perform these tasks, they must be free to research and publish without sanction arising from any controversy their investigations may incite. This claim presupposes that faculty members adhere to high standards in research, teaching, and service.
- Faculty members reserve the right to make judgments about the quality of intellectual work of colleagues, and about the granting of privileges and rewards within the community. Faculty members accept that honest error and sincere differences of opinion in the interpretation of data are natural consequences of the free pursuit of knowledge.

- Faculty members should provide their students with information and experiences that are challenging and shaped by the best scholarship available at the time. This obligation entails the further duty to make judgments about the quality of student work.
- Faculty members should be free to share the results of their research with the general public through outreach and service, including publication of their views in the popular press.

The ethical performance of these general rights and responsibilities presupposes that faculty members' judgments are made without discrimination. The faculty fully endorses the University's notice of non-discrimination and accepts that adherence to this policy represents the minimum that must be done to create a vibrant and diverse community. To restate the policy, "The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive work and learning environment free from discrimination and harassment. UNL is dedicated to creating an environment where everyone feels valued, respected and included. UNL does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy), religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, veteran's status, marital status, and/or political affiliation in its programs, activities and employment. UNL complies with all local, state and federal laws prohibiting discrimination, including Title IX, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex."

The faculty is dedicated to acting affirmatively to maintain a community atmosphere where all members, including faculty, staff, and students, are treated with dignity and respect, and where discourse and interaction are cooperative and constructive even when there is disagreement. The faculty recognizes that tradition and societal norms have limited the access of

some groups to participate in higher education as either students or faculty. As such, the faculty actively pursues diminishing these barriers so that qualified candidates may participate in the university. The faculty continues on a course of critical examination to identify these biases and to eliminate them from interfering with our obligations as faculty members. The faculty promotes adherence to these values because through promotion of diversity of thought and opinion the entire academic community is strengthened.

The following sections elaborate on the application of the general principles to specific issues and situations. Together with the Regents and UNL Bylaws, they are appropriate to guide the preparation of departmental and college policies; the deliberations of decision-makers handling complaints, appeals, grievances, and other actions brought before University committees; and the explanations of the University's internal procedures and public role. This statement does not exhaust the issues associated with academic and professional standards, but it does alert faculty to the realization that their academic freedom is associated with greater responsibility to the academic community.

### **Elaboration and Application of Principles**

#### **1. RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY**

The goal of research is to expand human knowledge and understanding. University faculty members are expected to conduct research and creative activities in their respective disciplines. This obligation requires faculty to conduct their research and creative activity in an ethical manner, to recognize the contributions others have made to their work, to evaluate the work of their colleagues in a rigorous yet fair manner, and to disseminate the results of their efforts.<sup>2</sup>

*Ethical research and creative activity* are defined by the following points:

- Faculty members will exercise the highest standards of intellectual honesty and accuracy in the gathering and interpretation of research data.
- All research involving the use of human subjects must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Faculty members must employ methods that protect human test subjects from harm. Further, human subjects must be informed of the procedures that will be used in the research, its potential outcomes, and the results.
- Faculty members must employ research methods that will protect animal research subjects from abuse and unnecessary suffering and follow the guidelines established by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC).
- Faculty members should acknowledge, when appropriate, the sources of the ideas and insights upon which they are building.
- Faculty members must recognize the contributions of collaborators including colleagues, students, and staff.
- Faculty members, when acting as reviewers, referees, or editors, must evaluate with fairness, open-mindedness and discipline whether research and creative products should be presented or published.
- Faculty members bear an obligation to serve the welfare of the general community. The results of research conducted in the publicly supported facilities of a land-grant university should be made accessible to others for replication, review, and potential benefit.

## 2. TEACHING

Faculty members should be committed to nurturing the intellectual growth of students at

all levels of their undergraduate and graduate careers. Fulfilling this commitment requires faculty members to make sure the material they present represents the best scholarship in their disciplines. The materials should challenge students and stimulate critical thinking. At times, the material may be controversial, but the controversy must be relevant to the subject matter. The topics and assignments should be appropriate for the level of the class. Decisions about what topics should be covered in a class often are the responsibility of the individual faculty member, but where a course is a prerequisite for later courses, the decision may be one in which all faculty members in a program have a voice.

Although addressing different audiences, Extension Educators have similar ethical obligations as the classroom instructor. Extension faculty members should offer educational experiences that are based on sound research and delivered in ways appropriate to various community constituencies.

*Ethical teaching* is defined by the following points:

- Faculty members must treat students with respect even as they challenge them intellectually. Students who hold views different from those of the faculty member should not be subject to ridicule or disapproval by the faculty member or other students simply for their opinions.
- Faculty members are also responsible for preserving a classroom climate that does not denigrate students. Discrimination against and harassment of students constitutes professional misconduct.
- Faculty evaluations of student work must be based on criteria that are relevant to the curriculum and to the material the students are expected to master. The criteria on which they will be evaluated should be made clear to the students in advance.

- Faculty members must foster academic honesty among students.
- Faculty members must respect the confidential nature of personal information that is communicated to them by individual students and not disclose it to others, unless under a legal obligation to report.
- Faculty members have a responsibility to students when they supervise honors or graduate thesis projects and commit a proper level of attention and time to them.
- Faculty members avoid any exploitation of students for personal advantage.

### 3. SERVICE

Faculty members should be committed to making service contributions to enhance the quality of the university, their academic disciplines, and the wider community.

- As members of the university community, faculty members should accept their share of responsibility for the governance of their institution. They should undertake various administrative tasks, committee assignments, and advisory responsibilities as part of their service to the institution.
- As members of academic disciplines, faculty members should provide service to their respective professional societies to further the intellectual goals in their areas of expertise.
- Faculty members have the same rights and obligations as other residents in the wider community. They measure the urgency of these obligations in the light of their responsibilities to their subject, to their students, to their profession, and to their institution. When they speak or act as private persons, they avoid creating the impression of speaking or acting for their college or university. As participants in a profession that depends upon freedom for its health and integrity, faculty members

have a particular obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom.

#### 4. COLLEGIAL AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Faculty members owe their colleagues respect both as fellow scholars and as human beings possessed of dignity. They value shared power, authority, and responsibility in the pursuit of common goals and have the expectation that these values are shared and promoted by administrative leadership. They protect faculty rights as a whole and support the rights of individual colleagues. They participate in cooperative interaction for the sake of the Department, College, University, and their academic fields. Cooperative interaction includes, but is not limited to, giving due consideration of diverse viewpoints and willingness to influence and be influenced by others. They recognize cooperative interaction as a process essential to academic integrity.

Furthermore, faculty members respect the rights of staff members and graduate assistants to a healthy and productive work environment, a clear work description, fair compensation for their services, and acknowledgment of both their work priorities and significant contributions. When serving in an administrative capacity, they insure that each member of the University community is fairly and objectively evaluated, accorded fair access to opportunities, rewards, and desirable conditions of work, and afforded due process.

Faculty members make decisions concerning tenure and promotion with fairness, open-mindedness and discipline. They evaluate professional performance of colleagues, staff, and graduate assistants based on sound criteria and established institutional procedures. Where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy, they respect confidentiality of information given by or about others with whom they share a working environment.

## 5. FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND CONSENSUAL INTIMACY

Faculty members must not participate in decisions involving a direct benefit, including hiring, promotion, salary, performance appraisals, work assignments, or other working conditions for family members or those in the same household, or partners not living in the same domicile.

Such authority or influence includes, but is not limited to, employment-related decisions such as hiring, evaluations or discipline, and academic-related decisions such as grading, transfers, evaluations, formal mentoring or advising, supervision of research, employment of a student as research or teaching assistant, exercising substantial responsibility for honors or degrees, or considering academic disciplinary action involving the student.

Any faculty member who is a spouse or partner of a student at the time of the student's enrollment or of an employee at the time of employee's hiring must not evaluate the performance of that student or employee, or otherwise exercise authority, supervision or influence over that person. Faculty members involved in such a relationship must disclose the existence of the relationship to the head of their unit (or other suitable entity) at the time of the student's enrollment or the employee's hiring.

## 6. HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Faculty members are susceptible to all of the physical, mental, and social maladies that are part of the common human experience. Faculty members should recognize that their overall well-being might affect their judgment, their ability to perform their job, and the reputation of the university. The ethical faculty member also recognizes that demonstrating empathy for others who are struggling to maintain their wellness is both noble and desirable.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The University Faculty is comprised of instructional and administrative staff members holding one of the following academic appointments: Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Extension Educator, Extension Specialist, Instructor, Lecturer, and including those appointments to these ranks that carry the title prefix “Research,” “Clinical,” “Adjunct,” and/or “Visiting” or the title suffix “of Practice.” Also, the category “faculty” includes those positions that include the term “Courtesy,” “Affiliated,” or “Emeritus.”

<sup>2</sup> Faculty research is presumed to be open to the dissemination of findings through publication and public presentation. In some circumstances, however, research contracts may involve restrictions on the dissemination of classified or proprietary data. In these special cases, research restrictions must be in compliance with the *University of Nebraska Board of Regents Policies*, Ch. 4 Intellectual Property, 4.4.1 Ownership of Intellectual Property, Sec. 7 Contractual Works (Sponsored Research).