

Q6: What About Faculty-Undergraduate Relationships

Some Discussion Points for Meeting 4 (12/4)

Reminder

- 6.1 Some universities have outright strictly prohibit relationships between faculty and undergraduate students. Is that advisable?
- 6.2 If relationships between faculty and undergraduate students are not prohibited, then should there be specific language calling attention to the enhanced vulnerability of that group of students?
- 6.3 Are there strategies to follow that would guard against the formation of relationships between faculty and undergraduate students?

Other Schools

Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Brown, Princeton, Northwestern, Chicago, Stanford have outright bans. [Read their prose.](#)

Columbia and UPenn policies say nothing in particular about undergraduates.

Notes From the Failed 2015 Senate Resolution

Full details [here.](#)

The Ugrad Part of the Resolution Itself

No **faculty member** shall engage in romantic or sexual relationships with undergraduate students. Unusual situations, such as but not limited to, the recruitment of a faculty member with an undergraduate partner or spouse, enrollment by a faculty partner or spouse as an undergraduate, or a relationship between a member of the faculty and an undergraduate student of non-traditional age, must be disclosed and remedies sought to avoid real or apparent conflict of interest.

For the purposes of this policy, "Faculty member" includes tenured and tenure-track faculty as well as academic professionals consisting of the following titles in all ranks: professor-of-the-practice, research professor, clinical professor, professor-at-large, university professor, senior scholar, senior scientist, instruction lecturer, teaching associate, research scientist, research associate, extension associate, librarian, archivist, postdoctoral associate/fellow, visiting fellow, visiting critic, visiting scientist and visiting scholar. Additionally, "Faculty member" shall include all academic titles modified with adjunct, acting,

courtesy or visiting. **“Faculty member” does not include graduate students or undergraduate students who may serve as teaching assistants or graders.**

From the Slides of the Presentation in the Senate

Pro:

The gross power imbalance is incompatible with the notion of consent. Such relationships create a poor learning environment for all students.

Con:

Cornell should not be judging and regulating the personal choices of consenting adults. For FERPA etc. students are considered adults.

Excerpts from the November 2015 Transcript

Q. Who felt the need to change the undergraduate policy from what it was to what is being proposed here. How did it come up? Under what circumstances?”

A. I assume that the need was identified. In fact, I know this from their visits to CAFPS meetings by the committee that drafted this document that you have seen, the dean of the faculty, the dean of students, Alan Mittman, the Title IX coordinator, those folks. Yes, they were consulted. The head of the student assembly was consulted, and also the Graduate and Professional Students Association, and the dean of the graduate school as well.

“If there was a young or old assistant professor in our department, Communication, who falls in love with a senior in Architecture, we want them to be open about their relationship. We don't want the relationship to be in secrecy. Because once secrecy happens, if there are issues of assault or if there are issues of harassment, they could be also kept in secret; and that to force these things in secrecy promotes secrecy, and that is not a good thing.”

“I would just say that some people would counter that by saying yes, but our students are here and have paid to be here to learn and be taught and mentored, not to be viewed as a giant dating pool by the faculty.”

“If it is justified to forbid relationships with undergraduates, and I think it probably is, it's completely confusing that if the undergraduate is not of a traditional age, then it's okay and has remedies. The idea that somebody returning to school at 32 or 42, but somehow less vulnerable to the power differential and all the stuff going on in someone who's 22 just doesn't stand the test of my observation and experience. I think, unless you want this thing to look silly, I think you need to drop that bit out. If you are going to forbid relationships with undergrads, it has to be all of them, not just the ones between 18 and 21. Certainly below 18, yeah, they ought to go to jail. But it just doesn't make any sense.”

“I don't think we have to have a blanket moral judgment that such relationships are bad, but rather that this reflects a concern that there is an abuse of power sometimes. This policy really is about consent in one sense, and the claim that this policy's making is that an undergraduate, under circumstances, even when they give explicit consent, is not of the right mental state to be giving consent. And I think we should focus it on that issue, because that's what's at heart here. I don't think -- I don't feel the language states that we are predatory by nature, so I'm not offended by that. The question is simply if a 21-year-old undergraduate wants to date a faculty member of any age, are we granting that this is a consensual relationship. And this policy is saying no, it is not consensual, even though both of them may jump up and down and say no, we consent, we consent.”

I like to see language similar to that in Paragraph 2 [graduate students] apply to all students, without drawing this artificial bright line between undergraduates and graduates.”