Brandeis University: Policy on Faculty and Staff Relations with Students

Introduction

Brandeis University is committed to maintaining a fair and professional work environment in which members of the faculty and staff carry out their responsibilities in a way that is both respectful to those over whom they have authority and conducive to the development of a just and flourishing academic community. Romantic and sexual relationships between faculty members and their students, as well as romantic and sexual relationships between members of the staff and students---even if consensual---undermine the possibility of such a community by introducing the specter of favoritism, abuse of power, and conflict of interest, all of which compromise the ability of faculty and staff to carry out their responsibilities to both students and the University as a whole. Such a relationship, which the University views as impermissible, may also cause harm. A student in such a relationship may suffer undue pressure as a result of the need to maintain or end the relationship. Other students may see themselves as disadvantaged by the relationship and claim unfairness. The relationship itself may cast doubt on the integrity of the institution, damage morale, threaten the quality of education, and place the university in a legally vulnerable position. Moreover, it may do so even in cases where the relationship is consensual.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy:

• an “Instructor” is any faculty member (regardless of rank or permanent or visiting status), post-doctoral fellow or associate who supervises or evaluates students. Student teaching assistants also are considered to be “Instructors” with respect to students over whom they have academic responsibility.

• a “Staff member” is any person who is not an Instructor but who has authority over students, including deans of any rank, athletic coaches, advisers and directors of student organizations and residential living, and others who advise, mentor or evaluate students.
• Undergraduate student-to-student relations are governed by the student handbook, 
  *Rights and Responsibilities*.

*Instructor-Student Relationships*

Brandeis University is committed to providing an educational environment where learning can flourish. Romantic and sexual relationships between Instructors and students, even if consensual, negatively impact this environment. Power differentials between students and those in a position to instruct, advise, supervise, evaluate, mentor, or coach them bring into question the student’s ability to give consent meaningfully to such relationships. An Instructor’s ability to teach, advise, and evaluate a student impartially is compromised when the Instructor and student have a romantic or sexual relationship. Even when the Instructor and student act with integrity, others may perceive partiality and bias. Dissolution of such relationships can also have adverse effects on the learning environment, as well as harm the student.

The pedagogical relationship between Instructor and student must be protected from influences or activities that can interfere with learning and fair evaluation. Accordingly, no Instructor shall enter into a romantic or sexual relationship with a student whom he/she instructs, evaluates, supervises, advises or over whom he/she is in a position to exercise authority in any way. Conversely, no Instructor shall exercise authority over a student with whom the Instructor has or has had a romantic or sexual relationship.

*Staff-Student Relationships*

The Brandeis community often encourages students and Staff members to work together. Trust and fairness in these relationships are essential. Given the inherent power differential, Staff members in such positions might not perform their duties effectively if they become romantically or sexually involved with students for whom they are responsible. Accordingly, no Staff member shall enter into a romantic or sexual relationship with a student for whom that Staff member has responsibilities of advising,
mentoring, evaluating, coaching or supervising. Similarly, no Staff member shall exercise such responsibilities with respect to a student with whom that Staff member has had a romantic or sexual relationship in the past.

Disclosure
If marriage or a prior romantic relationship exists such that circumstances would bring an instructor or staff into conflict with this policy, this would need to be disclosed to the direct supervisor who would resolve the conflict of interest.

Policy Violation
A violation of this policy may result in disciplinary action. Cases involving faculty will go to the appropriate Dean and will follow Faculty Handbook procedures in Section VII. Dispute Resolution.

Reporting
If the person involved in a possible policy violation is an Instructor, the issue should be brought to the attention of the Dean of the appropriate School. If the person involved is a Staff member, the issue should be brought to the attention of the Vice President for Human Resources.

Questions
If students have concerns or questions about a relationship between a student (you or someone else) and an Instructor or Staff member, assistance can be provided for undergraduate students by the Department of Student Rights and Community Standards at (781-736-5070) and for graduate students by the Office of Graduate Student Affairs at (781-736-3546).

If faculty members have concerns or questions, they should consult with their Dean; staff should consult with their supervisor or Human Resources.