

Family and Personal Conflicts of Interests in the Teaching Mission

For the purposes of following this guidance document, “faculty member” includes regular, adjunct and part-time faculty as well as residents, interns, and teaching staff.

The guidance and practices cited in this document is written to help prevent conflict of interest and to best guide unavoidable conflicts in the UTCVM.

INTRODUCTION

Familial and other personal relationships are expected to occur occasionally in a large university setting. In large units, having multiple course sections and a large number of available faculty usually can be leveraged to prevent students from being supervised by a family member or romantic partner in a course or program activity. In the veterinary college, the core/cohort curriculum and limited interchangeable faculty in many areas make complete avoidance of conflict more difficult. Further, the innate benefit of in-state residency status would make applying to, being admitted to, and attending another veterinary school difficult for relatives of faculty or staff (both financially and due to out-of-state acceptance rates).

Unfortunately, when relatives or romantic partners are enrolled in a course or other setting supervised by a UTCVM faculty member, subjective assessments can be difficult, and perceptions of differentiated treatment (favoritism or more demanding behavior) are hard to avoid. The student is placed in a position of conflict as well. Other, peer students in the course may feel advantaged or disadvantaged and may feel uncomfortable raising concerns with the faculty member.

RELEVANT UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE POLICY

Faculty Handbook 2.2.6.3 Prohibited relationships, predominantly relates to amorous or sexual relationships, consensual or not.

Amorous or sexual relationships between a faculty member and a student are prohibited when the faculty member has professional authority over, or responsibility for, the student. This professional authority or responsibility encompasses both instructional and non-instructional contexts as defined below:

1. Relationships in the Instructional Context. A faculty member shall not have an amorous or sexual relationship (consensual or otherwise) with a student who is simultaneously enrolled in a course being taught by the faculty member or whose academic or work performance is subject to supervision or evaluation by the faculty member. The instructional context includes not only classroom teaching and direct instruction, but also academic advising, mentoring, or tutoring.

2. Relationships outside the Instructional Context. Outside the instructional context, a faculty member shall not take any action or make any decision that may reward or penalize a student with whom he or she has, or has had, an amorous or sexual relationship. Faculty members must be especially cautious to avoid taking any action that rewards or penalizes the student, or influences others responsible for taking such action. (Faculty Handbook, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville 2024, p. 12)

UT System HR Policy 0115 Employment of Relatives

Employment of relatives is permitted. However, no employees who are relatives shall be placed within the same direct line of supervision whereby one relative is responsible for supervising the job performance or work activities of another relative.

(<https://policy.tennessee.edu/policy/hr0115-employment-of-relatives/>)

UT Conflict of Interest Information: Managing Relationships with Family, Students and Others

Nepotism is the supervision or influence over an employee by another university employee with whom they have a familial or personal relationship. To avoid favoritism in hiring, promotion, supervision, evaluation, determination of salary, or working conditions, no employees who are relatives may be placed within the same direct line of supervision. This includes direction of work activities and assessment of job performance.

Outside activities that raise questions of favoritism or discrimination in the employment or acquisition of goods or services through a related party, such as a family member, student or another person having a close personal or business relationship with the

University employee, may result in a conflict. Goods or services must not be purchased from an employee or related party of the employee unless there is a specific determination that the goods or services are not available otherwise.

Examples of when relationships may create a conflict:

- *Faculty member provides instruction and grade assignment for student who is their child.*
- *Spouse is a research assistant in spouse's lab and receives work direction and oversight from spouse.*
- *Employee's sister owns a catering company. Employee uses their services for departmental events.*
- *Using graduate students on personal, non-University consulting projects.*
(<https://coi.utk.edu/relationships-with-family-students-and-others/>)

Guidance for UTCVM Preclinical Education

- In the event a faculty member has a familial or personal relationship with any student over whom the faculty member has any assessment, clinical, instructional, or supervisory influence, the faculty member must immediately notify his or her Department Head to coordinate a management plan.
- Familial or personal relationships are most likely to pose unavoidable conflicts in required courses where the relevant faculty member teaches. Most ungraded classroom or lab activities can be managed to avoid significant perception of bias or conflict. The faculty member should avoid calling out or heightening attention to the familial or personal relationship.
 - Individual instructor/course coordinator: Avoid any subjective assessments or practical assessments, if feasible. Have a colleague help with conducting or grading subjective or practical assessments, if necessary. Keep clear records of feedback, grades, and any academic decisions.
 - Team taught courses/course coordinator: If feasible, consider changing the course coordinator role for the semester in question.
- Electronic grading of quizzes and exams (Canvas, ExamSoft) is less likely to contribute to bias. Any post-hoc adjustments to electronically graded assessments must be applied consistently among all students.
- If changing the course coordinator role is not possible when a conflict exists, the Curriculum and Assessment Coordinator will create a mechanism for the Associate

Dean for Academic and Student Affairs or the course coordinator's Department Head to complete grade entry for the student in question.

Guidance for Clinical Education

- Avoid sole supervision of a clinical rotation where a conflict exists. Disclose conflicts to the clinical placement coordinator before the rotation begins.
- Limited interaction, without a supervisory role, is discouraged but allowable. Keep clear records of feedback and assessments.
- On occasion, a faculty shortage will make clinical supervision or interaction with a relative or partner more difficult to avoid. Students seeking or requiring rotations where a single faculty member supervises the rotation should be encouraged to take the rotation course at another veterinary college as an externship but will not be required to do so. For core rotations, approved substitutions for external rotations may be sought from the Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs.
- The relevant faculty member must not have final or sole assessment authority for a student in a clinical rotation. A colleague or alternate supervisor must be asked to review input and feedback and complete the evaluation and Banner grade submission.

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