

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I. Policy Section

6.0 Human Resources

II. Policy Subsection

6.7 Conflict of Interest

III. Policy Statement

Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) employees must adhere to ethical standards and principles to preserve the College's reputation and integrity in the community. As outlined herein, conduct or activities that create a conflict between the interests of the College and an employee are impermissible.

A. Conflicts of interest may arise in many areas, including but not limited to:

1. Personal or financial interests;
2. Nepotism and personal relationships in the workplace;
3. Use of College resources in connection with private business, consulting or for unauthorized personal purposes or to give improper advantage to another person or business;
4. Supplemental employment;
5. Conduct in the community that impacts the College's reputation in a negative way;
6. Misuse of confidential information; and/or
7. Misconduct.

A potential or actual conflict of interest occurs whenever an employee is in a position to influence a decision that may result in a personal gain for the employee or a family member (i.e., spouse or significant other, children, parents, siblings, or other individuals related by blood or marriage).

The ethical standards outlined in this policy shall apply to all persons employed by GRCC regardless of title or position.

GRCC employees shall adhere to all laws, regulations, and policies that provide equal opportunity for all persons regardless of age, race, color, religion, marital status, sex /gender, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, height, weight, national origin, disability, political affiliation, familial status, veteran status, genetics, or any legally protected characteristic.

GRCC employees shall endeavor to avoid any actions that would create the appearance that they are violating the law or the ethical standards of GRCC.

B. Prohibition on Consensual Relationships with Students or Subordinates:

Employees are prohibited from entering into personal relationships where an employee's position provides the employee with actual institutional responsibility or authority over an individual, or the employee is involved in the evaluation of an individual. Relationships involving a reasonable perception of a power differential are also prohibited. GRCC considers such relationships to constitute a professional ethical violation, and expressly forbids them unless the College, within its discretion, and both parties agree to alternate arrangements for the supervision, evaluation, teaching, grading, and/or advising of an individual.

Violations of this policy may result in discipline, up to and including termination.

IV. Reason for the Policy

The purpose of the Conflict of Interest Policy is to outline and identify certain employee activities which constitute a conflict of interest that might jeopardize the College's mission and contrast with GRCC's standards and values. This policy also serves to notify employees of the potential consequences for violating the policy, which may include discipline, up to and including termination.

V. Entities Affected by This Policy

All employees
Board of Trustees
Independent Contractors
Students
Vendors
Community members accessing services
Volunteers

VI. Who Should Read This Policy

All employees
Board of Trustees
Independent Contractors
Students
Vendors
Community members accessing services
Volunteers

VII. Related Documents

- A. Employee Collective Bargaining Agreements
- B. Meet and Confer Employee Handbook
- C. Statement of Principles of Good Practices, National Association of College Admissions Counseling.
- D. Statement of Ethical Principles, National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.
- E. Statement of Professional Ethics and Practice, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
- F. Association of Fundraising Professionals Code of Ethical Standards
- G. National Academic Advising Association Statement of Core Values for Academic Advising
- H. American Counseling Association Code of Ethics
- I. Council for Advancement of Standards Guidelines for Academic Advisors
- J. Acceptable Use Agreement
- K. Board Member's Code of Conduct
- L. GRCC Foundation Conflict of Interest Policy
- M. Contracting Authority Policy

VIII. Contacts

Policy Owner: General Counsel
Executive Director of Human Resources
Human Resources Generalists
Ethics Hotline (616) 234-3169

IX. Definitions

- A. Personal or Financial Conflict of Interest:
A conflict of interest may arise whenever an employee is in a position to influence college business, research, or other decisions in ways that could lead to any form of personal gain for the individual or their relative, or give improper advantage to someone, including suppliers and vendors. Such conflicts include, but may not be limited to, situations where:
 - 1. A GRCC employee's personal or financial interests conflict or could conflict with the employee's exercise of judgment or performance of duties in the College's best interest.
 - 2. A GRCC employee profits at the expense of the College because of advantages resulting from their status as a College employee.
 - 3. A GRCC employee holds financial interests that are in conflict with the conscientious performance of their official duties and responsibilities.

4. A GRCC employee engages in any financial transaction in order to further any private interest using nonpublic information which they obtain in the course of their employment.
5. A GRCC employee discloses non-public information they have access to in their official capacity for personal gain or financial benefit.
6. A GRCC employee solicits or accepts for personal benefit directly or indirectly any gift, loan, or any item of substantial monetary value (over \$25) from any person or company that is seeking to conduct or currently conducting business with the College (see Purchasing Policy for additional guidance). Exceptions may be made for invitations to events or other business-related functions if authorized in advance by the Executive Budget Control Officer (or the Director of Purchasing, or if the event is a fundraiser for GRCC). Meals of a reasonable value provided to employees on College business may be accepted. Supervisors should not accept gifts from those under their supervision of more than minor value.
7. A GRCC employee with authority for an investment or control of funds for the procurement of goods and services for the College enters into any contract, commitment, or agreement on behalf of the College with any entity in which they or a member of their family has a financial interest, except after prior report to the President of the College of such financial interest and potential conflict of interest and prior approval of the proposed transaction by the President.
Financial interest is defined as employment by another business entity, or the ownership or control of more than 1% of any firm or institution doing business with GRCC by an administrator or a member of their immediate family.
8. Employees, who are authorized to select or to participate in the selection of a vendor and/or to award a contract, accept valuable gifts, including reimbursement for travel expenses, meals, or sample text books, which can reasonably be expected to influence their judgment. Sample texts may be accepted on behalf of the College by department heads as appropriate for faculty consideration. Sample textbooks may not be sold to textbook buyers.
9. Employees invite vendors to campus to sell products or to solicit funds from students and employees without prior authorization from the Director of Purchasing or Executive Director of Human Resources. Exceptions may be made for student fundraising events.

B. External Codes of Conduct:

1. A GRCC employee who holds responsibilities for any aspect of administering financial aid is required to adhere to the Statement of Ethical Principles established by the Title IV Loan School Code of Conduct and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.

2. A GRCC employee who holds responsibilities for any aspect of recruitment and admissions is required to adhere to the Statement of Professional Ethics and Practice, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and the Statement of Principles of Good Practice established by the National Association of College Admissions Counseling.
3. A GRCC employee who holds responsibilities for any aspect of academic advising and/or counseling (personal and career) is required to adhere to the Council for Academic Standards guidelines for academic advising and the NACADA Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising and/or the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics for Counseling.
4. A GRCC employee who holds responsibilities for any aspect of fundraising for the GRCC Foundation or for the College is required to adhere to the Association of Fundraising Professionals Code of Ethical Standards.

C. Conduct in the Community that Negatively Impacts the College's reputation:

Conflicts of interests arise when a GRCC employee engages in an action or decision that compromises the integrity of their employment, or that places the institution at risk of harm, including reputational damage.

D. Use of College resources in connection with private business, consulting or for unauthorized personal purposes:

GRCC employees shall protect and conserve College property and shall not use College property for unauthorized activities.

E. Supplemental Employment:

GRCC recognizes the right of employees to engage in activities outside of their employment, which are of a private nature and unrelated to GRCC's business, and shall not exercise control over personal activities, provided that such supplemental employment does not conflict with their duties as an employee of GRCC, and provided that such supplemental employment conforms to the following provisions:

1. The supplemental employment is performed outside of the employee's regular hours of work and does not interfere with the employee's assigned duties and responsibilities.
2. No promotion or solicitation of students or College employees with respect to any outside employment shall be permitted.
3. If the employee's supplemental employment interferes with performance of the employee's College duties, the employee may be requested to end or modify such supplemental employment as a condition of continued employment by the College.

- F. Confidential Information: The unauthorized revelation or use of any confidential information, data, decisions, plans, or any other information, that might be contrary to the interest of the College is prohibited. The misuse, unauthorized access to, or mishandling of confidential information, particularly student or personnel information, is strictly prohibited and will subject an employee to discipline up to and including termination.
- G. Nepotism and Personal Relationships in the Workplace:
1. Grand Rapids Community College believes that an environment where employees maintain clear boundaries between employees' personal and business interactions is most effective for facilitating the College's mission. Individuals in supervisory relationships or other influential roles are subject to more stringent requirements under this policy due to their status as role models, their access to sensitive information, and their ability to influence employment decisions.
 2. Family members of current GRCC employees may become employees of the College. To determine whether any conflict of interest exists because of the relative positions of the individuals involved, any such appointment must be approved by the President or the appropriate Executive Leadership Team member, in consultation with the Executive Director of Human Resources.
 3. An employee who is related to, or involved in a personal relationship with another employee may not work directly for, hold a position involving decision-making that may influence conditions of employment (e.g., Program Director, Department Head, Head Custodian) or directly supervise an employee with whom they are involved in a personal relationship or whom they are related to by blood or marriage.
 - a. A "personal relationship" is defined as a relationship between individuals who have or have had a continuing relationship of a romantic or intimate nature. GRCC reserves the right to take prompt action if an actual or potential conflict of interest arises concerning individuals who occupy positions at any level (higher or lower) in the same line of authority that may affect employment decisions. Matters such as hiring, firing, promotions, performance management, compensation decisions, financial transactions, etc., are examples of situations that may require reallocation of duties to avoid any actual or perceived reward or disadvantage.
 - b. For purposes of this Policy, an employee shall be considered to "directly supervise" another employee if the subordinate employee works in the same direct line of reporting, no matter how far removed.

Note: A limited number of related employees were hired prior to the implementation of this policy and/or subsequent revisions. Those employees were not required to change positions or seek alternative employment opportunities. However, the College continues to monitor their employment status to eliminate any concerns regarding favoritism or nepotism.

X. Procedures

- A. Although it is not possible to specify every action that might create a conflict of interest, this policy sets forth the ones that most frequently present problems. If an employee has any question whether an action or proposed course of conduct would create a conflict of interest, he or she should immediately contact the Office of General Counsel and/or Human Resources to obtain advice on the issue.
- B. Disciplinary action for failure to observe any of the above guidelines may include, without limitation (but not necessarily in progressive order):
 - 1. Verbal reprimand
 - 2. Written reprimand
 - 3. Suspension without pay
 - 4. Termination from Employment
 - 5. Legal action to recover any financial loss suffered by the College as a result of the activity of the employee.
- C. The College reserves the right to impose discipline it deems appropriate, given the facts and circumstances of each occurrence involving a violation of this policy. All discipline resulting from a violation of this policy will be imposed consistent with the requirements of any applicable collective bargaining agreement, employment contract, or employee handbook.
 - 1. Grand Rapids Community College reserves the right to search, at any time and without consent, unlocked and/or publicly used College property, including emails or any other communications using College resources. The College may request a search of personal property located within locked College property assigned to an individual if there is reasonable suspicion that evidence of illegal or prohibited activities resides therein. Refusal of such a request may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

XI. Forms

Corrective Action Form

XII. Effective Date

September 20, 2005

August 8, 2012

XIII. Policy History

Revised - December 2007 (revised “relatives as Employees” section)

Revised - March 26, 2007

Revised - April 18, 2008

Revised - August, 2012 (removed Misconduct section and made it a separate policy)

Revised - September, 2013 (added provision allowing student workers to be employed in the same department as a family member)

Revised - May, 2015

Revised - November, 2019 (added prohibition on consensual relationships, this was moved from the Sexual Misconduct Policy to the Conflict of Interest Policy)

Revised - March, 2024

XIV. Next Review/Revision Date

November, 2027