

POLICY TITLE: Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationship
EFFECTIVE DATE: February 7, 2018
SCOPE: Faculty and Staff

Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationship and Evaluative Authority

Lake Forest College strongly discourages romantic and/or sexual relationships between individuals in positions of unequal power at the College. Power is unequal between faculty and students, staff members and students, supervisors and their supervisees, coaches and student-athletes, advisors and advisees, peer mentors and their mentees, and resident assistants or directors and student residents. Power may also be unequal in other contexts, and the foregoing list is not intended to be exhaustive.

Romantic and/or sexual relationships between individuals in inherently unequal positions, even when both parties consent, raise concerns/suspicious that the person with greater power or authority may be abusing that authority, and can potentially subject that person to complaint of sexual harassment or other misconduct. The relationship may also give rise to the perception on the part of others that there is favoritism or bias in academic or employment decisions affecting the involved student or employee. Moreover, given the uneven balance of power within such relationships, consent by the student or employee is suspect and may be viewed by others or, at a later date, by the involved student or employee, as having been the result of coercion, intimidation, or fear of retaliation.

To protect the integrity of the College academic and work environment, Lake Forest College requires that when a consensual romantic or sexual relationship exists or has existed between individuals in positions of unequal power at the College, the person with the greater power must not hold any supervisory or evaluative authority over the other person in the relationship. See below for a special rule that applies to faculty-student, staff-student and coach-student relationships.

For purposes of this policy, the term “romantic and/or sexual relationship” is defined by the nature, not the duration of the relationship. Any contact of a sexual nature or a single date would be considered a “romantic and/or sexual relationship” under this policy even if it does not recur. This policy is not intended to restrict purely platonic social interactions. However, members of the College community are cautioned that the line between platonic and romantic or sexual interactions may not always be clear, even to those involved. Where there is any doubt as to whether a relationship falls under this policy, the individuals involved should err on the side of complying with this policy.

“Supervisory or evaluative authority” is the power to control or influence another person’s employment, academics, or extracurricular participation, including but not limited to, hiring, work conditions, compensation, promotion, discipline, admission, grades, assignments, recommendations, financial support, or participation in extracurricular programs.

In the event of a romantic and/or sexual relationship between individuals in positions of unequal power at the College as defined above, it is the responsibility of the person with more power or authority to notify his/her own supervisor or department chair – or the Director of Human Resources or the Dean of Faculty – immediately upon the commencement of the relationship so that the College may make evaluative, scheduling and/or other appropriate modifications to protect the integrity of the academic and work environment. The supervisor or department chair will develop an appropriate plan in consultation with the Director of Human Resources (in case of a staff member) or the Dean of Faculty (in case of a faculty

member). Failure to comply with this requirement is a violation of this policy, for which the person with more power or authority in the relationship may be subject to disciplinary action.

Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationships Between Faculty and Students, Staff Members and Students, or Coaches and Students

No faculty, staff member or coach shall enter into or maintain a romantic or sexual relationship with a Lake Forest College student, regardless of whether there is a supervisory or evaluative relationship between them and regardless of whether the individuals involved believe the relationship is consensual. There is an unacceptable, inherent risk of coercion in such a relationship due to the inevitable, substantial difference in institutional power between a student and a faculty member, staff member, or coach. Even absent any supervisory or evaluative authority, this risk exists and could lead to conflicts of interest because (i) the influence of a faculty member, staff member, or coach extends beyond a classroom, department, or team, and (ii) there is an ongoing possibility that the faculty member, staff member, or coach may be placed in a position of power over the student. This paragraph does not apply to the spouse or domestic partner of a faculty member, staff member, or coach who becomes a student at Lake Forest College. In such situations, the College policy on the employment or evaluation of relatives applies.

Consequences of Violations of this Policy

Violations of this policy constitutes grounds for disciplinary action in accordance with the procedures contained in the applicable staff or faculty handbook.