

Year 1 Public Description of Work for
Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Michigan State University

University Code of Professional Standards and Behavior

This Action Applies to Rubric Item(s): 2, 8, 16

Chapter 6 of the 2018 report, *Changing the Culture and Climate in Higher Education*: cultivating respect and civility; improving transparency and accountability when handling formal reports, engaging academic community in policy and practices reviews.

Description of Work:

In the wake of the grief and trauma experienced by every member of the Michigan State University (MSU) community as a result of the Nassar scandal in 2018, it was clear that immediate steps had to be taken to restore trust in our leadership, to rebuild our community, and to institute policies that promote transparency and accountability. Our awakening to the terrible consequences of an institutional climate that tolerates and permits sexual harassment coincided with the publication of the 2018 NAS report on sexual harassment of women in the academy, and we were compelled to become an institutional member of the Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education when it was launched in 2019.

A group of academic leaders (deans, associate deans, directors) representing the 22 colleges and major academic units at MSU began meeting regularly to share experiences as they developed shared community values and norms of behavior within their units, and to support each other in their efforts. This group committed to: 1) developing policies and procedures that instantiate the values of inclusion, equity, transparency, and accountability; 2) holding themselves and others accountable for upholding and advancing these values, 3) being courageous in calling out actions by others that are inconsistent with these values, and 4) working toward positive behavioral and cultural change both in their individual units and across MSU. As this dean-level group began to do the work on community values and norms within their own units, it became clear that having a university-level policy on standards of behavior would be critical to support policies being developed within the colleges. Toward that end, the MSU Academic Human Resources (AHR) leadership team, which includes Melissa Sortman (MSU's representative on the Action Collaborative Prevention Workgroup), began working with academic governance groups to develop such a policy. A draft "Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors for Faculty and Academic Staff" was endorsed in April, 2020, by the MSU University Committee on Faculty Affairs (UCFA). This draft policy was presented by AHR to the deans community norms group and the MSU Council of Faculty Affairs Deans in May, 2020; these groups provided feedback that will be shared with the UCFA for their consideration when they resume meeting in fall semester. The draft policy will then be discussed by the Faculty Senate, and ultimately gain approval from the Provost to be enacted. Below is an excerpt from the April 2020 draft of the Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors for Faculty and

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Academic Staff that outlines the code of professional standards and mechanisms for resolution when instances of behavior contrary to the code are reported.

The University Committee on Faculty Affairs (UCFA) Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors

The University Committee on Faculty Affairs (UCFA) developed *The Code of Professional Standards and Behaviors* in April of 2020. The Code is intended to: (1) address behaviors rather than thoughts or beliefs, (2) balance professional debate and disagreement with ensuring a civil, respectful, and safe environment for all faculty, academic staff, students and support staff, and (3) be aspirational, constructive, and positive rather than punitive or paternalistic. The Office of the Provost has adopted the Code in its entirety.

We the Faculty:

- 1) Recognize that informed discussion and respectful disagreement are central to the academic life of the University. This means:
 - a. We listen to diverse viewpoints, even when they differ from our own.
 - b. We create constructive and respectful environments in which individuals are free to express themselves without fear of disrespect, abuse, reprisal, interruption, or denigration.
 - c. We solicit and encourage input from our colleagues while ensuring that power dynamics and imbalances neither silence nor amplify the ideas of some at the expense of others.

When we engage in respectful and professional dialogue, we listen and respond to others with open-mindedness and civility. We do not interrupt or otherwise silence others, engage in personal attacks, comment on others' appearance, or abuse positions of authority and power.

- 2) Recognize our shared interest in the success of one another as well as MSU. This means:
 - a. We foster respectful and supportive interactions with faculty, staff, and students.
 - b. We recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of others, giving credit where it is due.
 - c. We understand and respect that our colleagues may have priorities and responsibilities that differ from our own.

When we support one another, we create an environment in which everyone is acknowledged, valued, and respected. We do not ignore or minimize the contributions of others. Instead, we recognize and appreciate the diverse ways in which our colleagues (faculty, staff, students and administrators) contribute to our own successes and the success of MSU.

- 3) Recognize the impact of differences in rank, authority, privilege, and power, such as those that exist between tenured faculty and their colleagues who are untenured or outside the tenure system. This means:

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- a. We are always mindful of power imbalances in our interactions with one another and with other members of the University, including students, staff, and administrators.
- b. We resolve conflict and disagreement in ways that acknowledge differences in rank, position, and authority. We ensure that all relevant voices are heard while recognizing that these voices may belong to staff, students, and administrators.

When we acknowledge power imbalances and dynamics in our interactions with one another, we are mindful of how others might perceive our actions and words. We strive to ensure that these dynamics do not disenfranchise, isolate, or silence others. We do not abuse privileges of rank and authority to harass, bully, denigrate, or intimidate others, and we will address contrary behaviors directly and constructively.

- 4) Recognize that respect must be central to our interactions with others, whether on MSU's campus or elsewhere. This means:
 - a. We model respectful and constructive behaviors in all our communications with one another, whether in person, via email, or elsewhere.
 - b. We avoid personal attacks and derogatory statements while respecting the time and priorities of others.
 - c. We understand that we represent our colleagues and the University as a whole in our interactions with communities beyond campus.
 - d. We recognize the power of social media to amplify speech and resolve to use it in ways that demonstrate our commitment to positive and respectful dialogue.

When we place respect at the center of our interactions with others, we are mindful of the values, beliefs, identities, and experiences of those around us. We commit to modes of expression and dialogue that promote inclusive, safe, and positive environments. We do not denigrate or attack others.

Behavior or Interactions Contrary to the Code

Behaviors or actions by a member of the faculty that are contrary to the Code include those that, in the judgment of a reasonable person, create a hostile, disrespectful, intimidating, and/or offensive climate that affects or has the purpose of affecting an individual's employment, academic pursuits, professional or educational performance, or participation in university activities.

A person who believes they may have been subject to behavior or interactions contrary to the Code may wish to address the matter with the faculty or academic staff member either on an informal or formal basis. An individual may wish to seek advice from a colleague, an assistant/associate dean, a department/school or college HR representative, or from other resources within the University before seeking either form of resolution. (See a list of resources in Section VII).

1) Informal Resolution

Ideally, a community of normative behavior as well as a unit-defined process for responding to concerns is well-established within each unit which allows for impacted individuals

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and/or observers to address the behavior with the individual in an informal manner. Recognizing that misunderstandings do occur, an attempt at informal resolution may provide opportunities for dialogue and discussion that are sufficient to address the complaint.

If the aggrieved individual is comfortable in doing so, they may consider utilizing one of the following informal approaches:

- Directly approach the individual whose behavior is of concern either in-person or in writing. To be effective, describe the behavior with facts, convey the impact of the behavior, how you believe the behavior is contrary to the “the Code,” and state your expectations going forward (i.e., you’d like for the behavior to stop).
- Recruit an intermediary person -- a trusted colleague at the department, school, college, or university level – to approach the individual on your behalf.

Prior to employing either of these informal approaches, they may wish to review tools and resources on conflict management strategies. These resources may be found in Section VII.

2) Formal Resolution

Utilizing formal procedures may be a matter of personal preference for the aggrieved individual. Formal procedures may also be utilized in cases where an attempt to address the complaint informally is not successful or the individual believes they have experienced particularly egregious behavior. To initiate formal resolution, an individual may file a written complaint to the applicable unit administrator. In cases where the complaint is against a unit administrator, the complaint should be made to the next-level administrator (e.g., if the complaint is against a Chairperson/School Director, the complaint should be made to the Dean. If the complaint is against a Dean, the complaint should be made to the Provost). A unit administrator is charged with taking each complaint seriously, although they must take care not to assume the charged individual is in violation based on allegations alone. The unit administrator is responsible for ensuring that appropriate action is taken to address the situation, which includes undertaking a prompt inquiry. The faculty member must be afforded the opportunity to respond to the allegations against them prior to the unit administrator making a determination of a policy violation. Such information must be taken into consideration before the unit administrator makes a determination.

If disciplinary action or dismissal is proposed by a unit administrator in response to a violation of the Code, that action will proceed in accordance with existing University policies.

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