



Reviewed by the University Community: Dec. 2013 - Jan. 2014  
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Policy Owner: President  
**SACSCOC Standard: 6.4**

## **Employee Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities**

### **I. Statement and Purpose**

The University seeks to provide and sustain an environment conducive to collaboration, mutual respect and trust, critical examination of knowledge and values, furthering the search for knowledge, and successfully allowing all employees to work towards the common purpose of achieving the University's mission. A collaborative environment requires that all employees be responsible in the performance of their duties within their respective areas of competence, and educate or assist students and colleagues using appropriate standards of conduct that support the principles of diversity, collegiality, and academic freedom.

In particular, the Faculty's privileges and protections, including that of tenure, rest on the relationships between the Faculty's professional competence and expertise, academic freedom, and the programs and services of the University. These relationships generally drive the expectations and professional responsibilities for faculty members and, in many cases, those of staff members. Many of these expectations and responsibilities derive from accepted standards and practices for professional conduct, such as those expressed in the 1966 *Statement on Professional Ethics* (and subsequent revisions) by the American Association of University Professors, the practice and policy statements of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and/or the National Association of College and University Business Officers, and the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines for the professional conduct of financial aid professionals.

The primary function of the University is the discovery, improvement, transmission, and dissemination of knowledge by means of research, teaching, discussion, and debate. To fulfill that function, the University will strive to encourage intellectual freedom and free expression.

This document establishes goals, standards of responsibility, and core principles which the University regards as best practices for its employees. This document applies to all employees, whether probationary, non-probationary, non-tenure track, tenure-track, tenured, full-time, part-time, or temporary.

### **II. The University's Commitment to Employees**



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This portion of the Code specifies the commitment of the University to maintain conditions that support each employee's ability to fulfill their duties in working towards the common purpose of achieving the University's mission, especially related to providing excellence in postsecondary learning.

In support of the University's central functions and mission as an institution of higher learning, a major responsibility of the Board of Trustees, President and administration is to promote a collaborative and supportive working environment, and to protect, encourage, and recognize faculty and staff in the performance of their duties related to teaching, learning, student and institutional support, professional development, scholarly work/research, and community service.

All employees can expect the Board of Trustees and administration to support:

- Free inquiry and collegial exchange of ideas;
- Enjoyment of freedom of expression, including on public controversies; and freedom to engage in expressive activity in outdoor areas of campus;
- Academic freedom when acting as a faculty member, including the right to present controversial material when it is relevant to a course of instruction;
- Freedom to address, in an open and constructive fashion, any matter of institutional policy or practice, whether or not as a member of an established committee of institutional governance;
- Freedom to question the action(s) of an individual, if done with respect and following appropriate due process for that individual, with the understanding that only the individual's supervisor or executive administrators can take any disciplinary action;
- Participation of employees in the shared governance of the University, as provided for in official University statements related to shared governance and in any other related policies and practices; and
- The establishment of fair procedures, policies, and due process, that allow for the voice of one's colleagues to be heard as recommendations in matters of promotion, faculty tenure, and discipline, with the understanding that such recommendations should be based on the employee's professional qualifications, professional contributions and accomplishments, and professional conduct.

It is not the role of the University to shield individuals from free speech by federal and state law protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and Article I, Section 4 of the Constitution of Alabama of 1091, including without limitation, ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or offensive.



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### III. Professional Responsibilities of Employees

The principles driving the professional responsibilities of faculty and staff encompass major areas traditionally found and reflecting best practices in higher education.

The responsibilities listed below are organized around an employee's responsibilities to colleagues (both faculty and staff) and the University community, and to students in teaching and support services. The general standards of responsibility listed below are not exhaustive.

#### Responsibilities of Employees as Members of the University Community

The Employee Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities asserts that all Athens State University employees have certain key responsibilities as professionals and as members of the University community. Included are the responsibilities to:

- Observe and follow all duly established local, state and federal laws;
- Respect the rights, opinions, privacy, and property of individuals, groups, the University, and the neighboring community;
- Refrain from actions that deny other members of the University community their rights as described or provided for in policies of the University;
- Refrain from engaging in conduct that materially and substantially disrupts another person's protected expressive activity or infringes on the rights of others to engage in or listen to a protected expressive activity;
- Be knowledgeable of and follow all published University policies;
- Report violations of University policies, including the [Student Code of Conduct](#), the [Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures](#), and the [Harassment and Discrimination](#) policy, to the appropriate office or administrator;
- Carry out one's responsibilities and duties and understand the need for accountability;
- Recognize that, as an employee of the University, one's primary focus should be on achieving the University's mission and goals, and that secondary employment should be limited, particularly if it interferes with one's primary responsibilities and duties or is contrary to the best interests of the institution;
- Collaborate and assist other University employees acting within the scope of their employment and duties as appropriate;



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- Exhibit behavior that does not interfere with academics, professional development, scholarly work and research, or any University services, operations or activities;
- Promote a collaborative culture, and participate and be proactive in consensus-building problem solving within the institution's shared governance structure;
- When disagreeing with a decision, do so in an open and constructive manner, and understand that not all decisions will have full agreement;
- Be accountable for one's actions and the subsequent consequences;
- Adhere to all employee procedures, including but not limited to those for conflict resolution, providing accurate information to the University, and the completion of any disciplinary sanctions imposed for misconduct;
- When appropriate and following set policies and procedures, evaluate the professional competence of colleagues by criteria reflective of professional qualifications, performance, conduct, and contributions;
- Exhibit appropriate behavior both on and off campus when acting as a University representative; and
- When speaking or acting as a private person, avoid creating the impression that one is speaking or acting for a University area, sector, or College, or for the University as a whole.

### **Responsibilities to Students in Teaching and Support Services**

The integrity of the employee-student relationship serves as the foundation of the University's educational and service mission. For faculty members, these relationships require responsible behavior from those who have authority and accountability as educators, mentors, and evaluators. For staff members, these relationships also require responsible conduct from employees who frequently serve as facilitators, counselors, and evaluators.

The unequal authority inherent in these relationships can heighten the vulnerability of the student and the potential for coercion or other inappropriate conduct by employees. The pedagogical relationship between a faculty member and student, and the support relationship between a staff member and a student, must be protected from influences or activities that can interfere with learning or with the services and mission of the University.

In this section, the term "student" refers to all individuals under academic supervision by members of the faculty, or under student support supervision/guidance by members of the staff.



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Members of the Athens State University faculty and staff will:

- Encourage the free pursuit of learning and promote the principles of academic and intellectual honesty;
- Encourage students to study varying points of view and respect the rights of students to form and express their own views;
- Demonstrate respect for the student as an individual and adhere to the proper role as an educator, counselor, mentor, or facilitator;
- Deal justly and considerately with each student;
- Not engage in discrimination or harassment in violation of University policy or state and federal laws, or in any arbitrary denial of access to programs and/or services;
- Respect the confidential nature of the relationship between faculty/staff member and student;
- Avoid exploitation of students for private advantage;
- Recognize and avoid situations with students where conflicts of interest may arise;
- Give recognition and acknowledgement of significant contributions by students to the faculty or staff member's work and research;
- Respect the rights of students to pursue individual life styles;
- When necessary, share with appropriate individuals, information about students' educational needs; and
- Seek constantly to improve learning, services, and the opportunities for learning and services.

#### **IV. Relationship of this Code to Possible Disciplinary Action**

The need and authority to discipline employees for misconduct in appropriate cases derives from the shared recognition by employees and the administration that the purpose of discipline is to preserve conditions that support the common purpose of achieving the University's mission.

In some instances, conduct that is contrary to the aforementioned standards and responsibilities may be considered unacceptable, and may result in disciplinary action where the alleged misconduct is investigated and resolved in a fair, responsible and timely manner. Official University-level discipline and sanctions, as distinguished from mentoring, reprimand, or action at the department/area level, should be reserved for employee misconduct that is either serious in itself or is made serious through its repetition and/or its consequences.



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Employees may be subject to disciplinary action for conduct which, while not specifically contrary to one of the standards or responsibilities listed above, meets commonly recognized standards for unacceptable behavior. Specific information on employee discipline can be found in the policy on [Employee Disciplinary Procedures](#).

## **V. Responsibility for this Document**

### **Document Owner**

As part of the initial approval of this document by the President and subsequent to its initial dissemination, the President remains the owner for the ongoing evaluation, review, and approval of this document. Subsequent reviews and revisions to this document must be approved by the President.

This document will be reviewed every three years or more frequently as needed by the Policy Owner. Revisions will be reviewed/affirmed by the Cabinet and approved by the University President. This policy will be updated/published in the University's Policy Library.

### **Responsibility for Oversight**

The President has assigned the responsibility for the day-to-day oversight concerning the provisions of this document to the Chief Human Resources Officer, under the direction of the Vice President for Financial Affairs.