

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee for Developing a Statement on Faculty Ethics and Professional Responsibilities

13 April 1995

Summary: The following is a proposed *Statement on Faculty Ethics and Professional Responsibilities*. This is a **working document**, and thus subject to revision as per the suggestions of the Senate and the faculty of Western Kentucky University.

According to our mandate, this committee addressed the general principles which should guide professional behavior of faculty, as well as specific obligations toward students and colleagues. We did not consider issues regarding faculty to administration relations, or ethical responsibilities involved in research and publishing. Neither does this draft include anything on implementation or enforcement. The section entitled "References" at the end of the *Statement* indicates those primary sources consulted in drafting our document and adapting it to the unique situation of WKU.

Finally, should this *Statement* be adopted or accepted, the Senate will need to promote faculty ownership of this document. A plan for campus-wide discussion and revision of the *Statement* ought to be considered.

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**STATEMENT ON FACULTY ETHICS
and
PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

Preamble

This *Statement on Faculty Ethics and Professional Responsibilities* indicates the aspirations of the faculty of Western Kentucky University and provides standards by which to conduct our professional lives. Because we are guided by a deep conviction of the worth and dignity of the advancement of knowledge, we recognize the special responsibilities placed upon us. Our primary responsibility to our students and to our disciplines is to seek and to state the truth as we see it. To this end we devote our energies to developing and improving our scholarly competence. We accept the obligation to exercise critical self-discipline and judgment in using, extending, and transmitting knowledge. And we seek to practice intellectual honesty.

Based on the *Statement on Personal Ethics*
adopted by the American Association of University
Professors in June 1987

Responsibilities to Students

The educator strives to help students realize their potential as worthy and effective members of society. The educator therefore works to stimulate the spirit of inquiry, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the thoughtful formulation of worthy goals.

In fulfillment of our obligations to students, we as educators:

1. Shall encourage the pursuit of student learning.
2. Shall provide students with professional education services in a non-discriminatory manner and in consonance with accepted best practice.
3. Shall demonstrate respect for students as individuals and shall adhere to appropriate roles as intellectual guides and counselors of students while helping students help themselves.
4. Shall make every reasonable effort to foster academic conduct and to ensure that evaluations of students reflect each student's true achievements.
5. Shall make reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions harmful to learning or to health and safety.

6. Shall provide accurate and current information for which the educator bears responsibility, and shall clearly distinguish between personal and professional opinion.
7. Shall seek to be effective teachers and respond to responsible criticisms.
8. Shall offer students informed guidance in planning their academic performance.
9. Shall present to students and make all reasonable efforts to follow a course syllabus that includes course objective(s), requirements, a grading scale and office hours, and shall arrive on time and begin class promptly.
10. Shall keep in confidence information about students which has been obtained in the course of professional service, unless disclosure serves professional purposes or is required by law.
11. Shall not knowingly make false or malicious statements about students nor embarrass them.
12. Shall maintain a professional relationship with students and not use one's position for personal advantage, while especially adhering to the existing policy on sexual harassment.

Responsibilities to Colleagues

Membership in the academic community of Western Kentucky University bestows both rights and responsibilities upon the faculty of this institution. Among those obligations, is the duty to uphold professional and ethical standards in relations with all colleagues, including full- and part-time faculty and staff. The following statements should be adopted as guiding principles in this area.

1. It is the responsibility of all faculty to treat associates with respect and fairness. Members of this community shall refrain from discriminating against or harassing colleagues. As fellow scholars we defend the free inquiry of associates, and show due respect for others in the exchange of criticism and ideas. It is incumbent upon us all to acknowledge academic debt. We strive to be objective in our professional judgment and sensitive in our treatment of colleagues.
2. In the interest of privacy, we should safeguard confidential *personnel matters* and avoid disclosing opinions expressed, attribution of statements, and voting behavior and outcomes. Information obtained about colleagues in the course of professional service shall be kept confidential unless it serves a compelling professional purpose or is required by law.

3. Parties involved should make every effort to settle *misunderstandings* or conflicts quickly and directly to prevent divisions within the academic community. Especially in the classroom, we should avoid speculative criticism that might damage the reputations of individuals or groups. As the primary units of communal responsibility, department members should work to promote a healthy and supportive working environment.
4. Senior faculty have special responsibilities to junior colleagues. As experienced professionals, senior professors should provide appropriate advice and support in matters of teaching, research, and service. All professors accept their share of faculty responsibilities for the governance of this institution. We must accurately represent the qualifications of a candidate for a professional position.

Concluding Statement

Behavior not addressed in the ethical code implies nothing about whether that behavior is ethical or unethical. The code is not meant to be exhaustive. The expected standard of conduct may be higher than that required by law or less explicit. The faculty member should try to resolve any conflict between the law and the ethical code in a responsible manner.

The ethical code may be modified by resolution of the Faculty Senate after a period of debate before the faculty as a whole.

References

- Academy of Management Code of Ethical Conduct*, pp. 38-41.
- Cahn, Steven M. *Saints and Scamps: Ethics in Academia* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1986).
- "Code of Ethics of the Education Profession," adopted by the National Education Association, July, 1975.
- "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct," adopted by the American Psychological Association, cited in *American Psychologist* (December 1992).
- Keith-Spiegel, Patricia, et al., *The Ethics of Teaching: A Casebook* (Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University Press, 1993).
- "Kentucky School Personnel Code of Ethics," adopted by the Education Professional Standards Board, 1990.
- May, William W., ed. *Ethics and Higher Education* (New York: American Council on Education and Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990).
- "Statement on Professional Ethics" and "A Statement of the Association's Council: Freedom and Responsibility," in *AAUP Policy Documents and Reports*, 1990 edition, pp. 75-78.