



Medicine Hat College Policy WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

Policy #:	HR-05
Policy Authority:	Director, Human Resources
Executive Sponsor:	Vice President – Administration and Finance
Approved by:	President
Effective Date:	8/15/2016
Next Mandatory Review Date:	8/15/2021
Frequency of Review:	Every 5 years

1. POLICY OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this policy is to outline the principles, standards of conduct and reporting obligations in respect to Personal Relationships that may take place within the College community. Medicine Hat College (MHC) will promote and maintain a safe and respectful College environment and expects that employees do not use their position inappropriately in personal relationships with other members of the College community.

In order to promote a positive work/learning environment, employees of MHC are expected to observe and respect the boundaries of workplace relationships by

- acknowledging the personal dignity of each member of the College community;
- accepting responsibility for the influence they may have over the physical, social and mental well-being of other members of the College community;
- avoiding situations in which they could use or be perceived to use their positions of power to unjustly deny benefits or give special advantages to persons under their authority; and
- working with their supervisors to mitigate situations in which such conditions are unavoidable.

2. POLICY SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees of MHC.

The conduct of volunteers, students and independent contractors in the workplace is dealt with in the companion policies HR-01 Respectful Work and Learning Environment Policy and SD-04 Student Non-Academic Misconduct which should be read in conjunction with this policy.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

MHC is dedicated to providing life changing learning through a culture of excellence and an environment where employees are proud to work. To continue to foster these goals, all employees of MHC are accountable for their actions and expected to act in an honest and ethical manner at all times.

4. DEFINITIONS

- **Confidential Information:** information that employees have access to in order to do their jobs that is of a personal, private or sensitive nature.

This type of information includes personal information that may be harmful to personal privacy if disclosed, as well as non-public information that may be of use to competitors of the College or harmful to the College or its stakeholders if disclosed.

- **Contractor:** an individual or company (and its employees) who provides services to MHC under a service contract (i.e. a non-employee-employer relationship).
- **Employee:** any person who is employed by MHC or who provides services to MHC under an employment contract.
- **MHC or the College:** means Medicine Hat College.
- **Personal Relationship(s):** means a relationship of an intimate, romantic or sexual nature which is beyond the scope or boundaries of a Workplace Relationship.
- **Positions of Authority:** means employees in a particular role, function or position that provides them with the right to delegate, make decisions, commit resources, and set priorities and to hold other employees accountable.
- **Supervisor:** anyone in a position of authority over an employee.
- **Student:** person registered in a course with MHC at any location or delivery model.
- **Unequal Power Relationship:** a relationship in which one employee has a greater authority than the other by virtue of their position or their control of or access to resources, e.g. an employee versus a student; a supervisor versus an employee whom they supervise.
- **Workplace Relationships:** relationships which are developed and maintained within the work/learning environment at MHC. This includes but is not limited to, employee to student, supervisor to employee, employee to employee, employee to volunteer/contractor.

5. PRINCIPLES

- 5.1. Employees are expected to adhere to all relevant MHC policies as per Section 8 - Related Policies of this document.
- 5.2. Employees are expected to conduct themselves, and encourage others to conduct themselves, in a manner consistent with respect for the personal dignity of individuals, in compliance with all government legislation, including the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.

5.3. Employees are expected to maintain the confidentiality of information entrusted to them by the College or its stakeholders, and only collect, use or disclose such information in the fulfillment of their duties, as required by college policy, the FOIP Act, regulations, or legal proceedings.

5.4. Employee-Student

The workplace relationships between employees and students support learning. The unequal power relationship inherent in employee-student relationships increases the vulnerability of the student. Employees are expected to establish and maintain appropriate professional boundaries with students. If an employee is unsure about what are appropriate professional boundaries and workplace relationships, they should consult with their supervisor or Human Resources. To maintain professional boundaries with students, employees *will not*

- (a) engage in a personal relationship with any student over whom they have influence or could be perceived to have influence, unless such relationship is pre-existing and disclosed in writing to the appropriate supervisor;
- (b) engage in other potentially problematic relationships with any student over whom they have influence or could be perceived to have influence. Such activities include but are not limited to - excessive socializing with students outside of class either individually or as a group, giving or accepting money and or substantial gifts from students. If there is any doubt of what is acceptable in terms of gifts, the offer will be declined; or
- (c) embroil students in interpersonal difficulties employees may be having.

5.5. Supervisor-Employee

The unequal power relationship inherent in supervisor-employee relationships increases the vulnerability of the employee. To maintain appropriate professional boundaries with employees, supervisors should be mindful of the development of workplace relationships with an employee, where the employee is likely to misunderstand the terms of the relationship. To maintain professional boundaries with employees, supervisors *will not*

- (a) engage in a personal relationship with any employee over whom they have influence or could be perceived to have influence, unless such relationship is pre-existing and disclosed to Human Resources who in turn will report the relationship to the Vice President of the area as soon as the unequal power relationship occurs.

5.6. Employee-Employee

Employees who engage in personal relationships should be aware of their professional responsibilities and are responsible for ensuring that the relationship does not raise concerns about abuse of power, harassment, favoritism, bias or conflict of interest.

Employees who are in positions of authority who engage in personal relationships must disclose the relationship as per PR-HR-05-01 Workplace Relationships Procedure.

- 5.7. Employees who are involved in a personal relationship must make arrangements to ensure that
- (a) the employee in the position of greater authority removes themselves from influence, input, or decision making power over the other employee; and
 - (b) they do not participate in personnel decisions where their objectivity could be compromised to any reasonable extent. Employees must avoid any situation where there could be a perceived conflict of interest.
- 5.8. Substantiated cases of failure to follow this policy may be cause for disciplinary action, up to and including termination for just cause.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.1. **Employees** are responsible for reporting the existence of a personal relationship as outlined in section 5.4 through 5.7 inclusive to their immediate supervisor.
- 6.2. **Supervisors** are responsible for reporting relationships to Human Resources.
- 6.3. **Director Human Resources** is responsible for providing advice and assistance to supervisors.
- 6.4. **Vice President** is responsible for resolving situations that cannot be mutually resolved between the employee and supervisor.
- 6.5. The **President**, is responsible for resolving potential situations where direct reports of the President are involved.
- 6.6. The **Chair of the Board** is responsible for resolving potential situations where the President is involved.

7. APPLICABLE LEGISLATION/REGULATIONS

Alberta Human Rights Act
Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act
Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (Alberta)

8. RELATED POLICIES

HR-01 Respectful Work and Learning Environment
HR-03: Disclosure Protection
HR-04: Conflict of Interest
6.10: Workplace Violence
7.28: Code of Conduct

9. RELATED PROCEDURES

PR-HR-05-01: Workplace Relationships

PR-HR-01-01: Respectful Work and Learning Environment Complaint Resolution

PR-HR-03-01: Disclosure of Wrongdoings

PR-HR-04-01: Conflict of Interest

ORIGINAL COPY SIGNED

Denise Henning
President and CEO

Date: August 15, 2016

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Wayne Resch
Vice-President, Administration and
Finance

Date: August 15, 2016

DOCUMENT HISTORY

August 2016: Policy approved