

## **Statement of Ethical Principles and Standards**

### **PREAMBLE**

ACPA – College Student Educators International is an association whose members are dedicated to enhancing the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of each individual within post-secondary educational institutions and, thus, to the service of society. ACPA members are committed to contributing to the comprehensive education of students, protecting human rights, advancing knowledge of student growth and development, and promoting the effectiveness of institutional programs, services, and organizational units. As a means of supporting these commitments, members of ACPA subscribe to the following principles and standards of ethical conduct. Acceptance of membership in ACPA signifies that the member understands the provisions of this statement.

This statement is designed to address issues particularly relevant to college student affairs practice. Persons charged with duties in various functional areas of higher education are also encouraged to consult ethical standards specific to their professional responsibilities.

### **USE OF THIS STATEMENT**

The principal purpose of this statement is to assist student affairs professionals (individuals who are administrators, staff, faculty, and adjunct faculty in the field of student affairs) in regulating their own behavior by sensitizing them to potential ethical problems and by providing standards useful in daily practice. Observance of ethical behavior also benefits fellow professionals and students due to the effect of modeling. Self-regulation is the most effective and preferred means of assuring ethical behavior. If, however, a professional observes conduct by a fellow professional that seems contrary to the provisions of this document, several courses of action are available. Suggestions to assist with addressing ethical concerns are included in the Appendix at the end of this document.

### **ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS**

No statement of ethical standards can anticipate all situations that have ethical implications. When student affairs professionals are presented with dilemmas that are not explicitly addressed herein, a number of perspectives may be used in conjunction with the four standards identified in this document to assist in making decisions and determining appropriate courses of action. These standards are: 1) Professional Responsibility and Competence; 2) Student Learning and Development; 3) Responsibility to the Institution; and 4) Responsibility to Society.

Ethical principles should guide the behaviors of professionals in everyday practice. Principles are assumed to be constant and, therefore, provide consistent guidelines for decision-making. In addition, student affairs professionals should strive to develop the virtues, or habits of behavior, that

are characteristic of people in helping professions. Contextual issues must also be taken into account. Such issues include, but are not limited to, culture, temporality (issues bound by time), and phenomenology (individual perspective) and community norms. Because of the complexity of ethical conversation and dialogue, the skill of simultaneously confronting differences in perspective and respecting the rights of persons to hold different perspectives becomes essential. For an extended discussion of these aspects of ethical thinking, see Appendix B.

## **ETHICAL STANDARDS**

Four ethical standards related to primary constituencies with whom student affairs professionals work, colleagues, students, educational institutions, and society – are specified.

- 1.0 ***Professional Responsibility and Competence.*** Student affairs professionals are responsible for promoting and facilitating student learning about students and their world, enhancing the quality and understanding of student life, advocating for student welfare and concerns, and advancing the profession and its ideals. They possess the knowledge, skills, emotional stability, and maturity to discharge responsibilities as administrators, advisors, consultants, counselors, programmers, researchers, and teachers. High levels of professional competence are expected in the performance of their duties and responsibilities. Student affairs professionals are responsible for the consequences of their actions or inaction.

As ACPA members, student affairs professionals will:

- 1.1 Conduct their professional activities in accordance with sound theoretical principles and adopt a personal value system congruent with the basic tenets of the profession.
- 1.2 Contribute to the development of the profession (e.g., recruiting students to the profession, serving professional organizations, advocating the use of ethical thinking through educational and professional development activities, improving professional practices, and conducting and reporting research).
- 1.3 Maintain and enhance professional effectiveness by continually improving skills and acquiring new knowledge.
- 1.4 Monitor their personal and professional functioning and effectiveness and seek assistance from appropriate professionals as needed.
- 1.5 Maintain current, accurate knowledge of all regulations related to privacy of student records and electronic transmission of records and update knowledge of privacy legislation on a regular basis.

- 1.6 Represent their professional credentials, competencies, and limitations accurately and correct any misrepresentations of these qualifications by others.
- 1.7 Establish fees for professional services after consideration of the ability of the recipient to pay. They will provide some services, including professional development activities for colleagues, for little or no remuneration.
- 1.8 Adhere to ethical practices in securing positions: [a] represent education and experiences accurately; [b] respond to offers promptly; [c] interview for positions only when serious about accepting an offer; [d] accept only those positions they intend to assume; [e] advise current employer and all institutions at which applications are pending immediately when they sign a contract; [f] inform their employers before leaving a position within a reasonable amount of time as outlined by the institution and/or supervisor; and [g] commit to position upon acceptance.
- 1.9 Provide an honest, accurate, and respectful reference. If it is not deemed possible to provide a positive reference, contact the 'searching employee' to inform them of such. It is not appropriate to provide a positive reference to move an individual beyond a department or institution.

2.0 ***Student Learning and Development.*** Student development is an essential purpose of higher education. Support of this process is a major responsibility of the student affairs profession. Development is complex and includes cognitive, physical, moral, social, emotional, career, spiritual, personal, and intellectual dimensions. Professionals must be sensitive to and knowledgeable about the variety of backgrounds, cultures, experiences, abilities, personal characteristics and viewpoints evident in the student population and be able to incorporate appropriate theoretical perspectives to identify learning opportunities and to reduce barriers to development. Multicultural competence is a fundamental element of ethical practice.

As ACPA members, student affairs professionals will:

- 2.1 Treat students with respect as persons who possess dignity, worth, and the ability to be self-directed.
- 2.2 Avoid dual relationships with students where one individual serves in multiple roles that create conflicting responsibilities, role confusion, and unclear expectations (e.g., counselor/employer, supervisor/best friend, or faculty/sexual partner) that may involve incompatible roles and conflicting responsibilities.
- 2.3 Abstain from all forms of harassment, including but not limited to verbal and written communication, physical actions and electronic transmissions.

- 2.4 Abstain from sexual intimacy with clients or with students for whom they have supervisory, evaluative, or instructional responsibility.
- 2.5 Inform students of the conditions under which they may receive assistance.
- 2.6 Inform students of the nature and/or limits of confidentiality. They will share information about the students only in accordance with institutional policies and applicable laws, when given their permission, or when required to prevent personal harm to themselves or others.
- 2.7 Refer students to appropriate specialists before entering or continuing a helping relationship when the professional's expertise or level of comfort is exceeded. If the referral is declined, professional staff is not obliged to continue the relationship nor should they do so if there is not direct benefit to the student.
- 2.8 Inform students about the purpose of assessment and research; make explicit the planned use of results prior to assessment requesting participation in either.
- 2.9 Comply with the institutional guidelines on electronic transmission of information.
- 2.10 Provide appropriate contextual information to students prior to and following the use of any evaluation procedures to place results in proper perspective with other factors relevant to the assessment process (e.g., socioeconomic, gender, identity, ethnic, cultural, and gender related).
- 2.11 Discuss with students issues, attitudes, and behaviors that have ethical implications.
- 2.12 Develop multicultural knowledge, skills, competence, and use appropriate elements of these capacities in their work with students.
- 2.13 Faculty should inform prospective graduate students of program expectations, predominant theoretical orientations, and skills needed for successful program completion, as well as positions received by recent graduates.
- 2.14 Assure that required experiences involving self-disclosure are communicated to prospective graduate students. When the preparation program offers experiences that emphasize self-disclosure or other relatively intimate or personal involvement (e.g., group or individual counseling or growth groups), professionals must not have current or anticipated administrative, supervisory, or evaluative authority over participants.
- 2.15 Provide graduate students with a broad knowledge base consisting of theory, research, and practice.
- 2.16 Educate graduate students about ethical standards, responsibilities and codes of the profession. Uphold these standards within all preparation programs.

- 2.17 Assess all relevant competencies and interpersonal functioning of students throughout the preparation program, communicate these assessments to students, and take appropriate corrective actions including dismissal when warranted.
- 2.18 Assure that field supervisors are qualified to provide supervision to graduate students and are informed of their ethical responsibilities in this role.
- 2.19 Support professional preparation program efforts by providing assistantships, practical field placements, and consultation to students and faculty.
- 2.20 Gain approval of research plans involving human subjects from the institutional committee with oversight responsibility prior to the initiation of the study. In the absence of such a committee, they will seek to create procedures to protect the rights and ensure the safety of research participants.
- 2.21 Conduct and report research studies accurately. Researchers will not engage in fraudulent research nor will they distort or misrepresent their data or deliberately bias their results.
- 2.22 Cite previous works on a topic when writing or when speaking to professional audiences.
- 2.23 Comply with laws and standards common in the helping professions related to citation and attribution of information accessed electronically where public domain status may be ambiguous.
- 2.24 Acknowledge major contributions to research projects and professional writings through joint authorships with the principal contributor listed first. They will acknowledge minor technical or professional contributions in notes or introductory statements.
- 2.25 Co-authorship should reflect a joint collaboration. When involvement was ancillary it is inappropriate to pressure others for joint authorship listing on publications.
- 2.26 Share original research data with qualified others upon request.
- 2.27 Communicate the results of any research judged to be of value to other professionals and not withhold results reflecting unfavorably on specific institutions, programs, services, or prevailing opinion.
- 2.28 Submit manuscripts for consideration to only one journal at a time. They will not seek to publish previously published or accepted-for-publication materials in other media or publications without first informing all editors and/or publishers concerned. They will make appropriate references in the text and receive permission to use copyrights.

3.0 ***Responsibility to the Institution.*** Institutions of higher education provide the context for student affairs practice. Institutional mission, goals, policies, organizational structure, and culture, combined with individual judgment and professional standards, define and delimit the nature and extent of practice. Student affairs professionals share responsibility with other members of the academic community for fulfilling the institutional mission. Responsibility to promote the development of students and to support the institution's policies and interests require that professionals balance competing demands.

As ACPA members, student affairs professionals will:

- 3.1 Contribute to their institution by supporting its mission, goals, policies, and abiding by its procedures.
- 3.2 Seek resolution when they and their institution encounter substantial disagreements concerning professional or personal values. Resolution may require sustained efforts to modify institutional policies and practices or result in voluntary termination of employment.
- 3.3 Recognize that conflicts among students, colleagues, or the institution should be resolved without diminishing respect for or appropriate obligations to any party involved.
- 3.4 Assure that information provided about the institution is factual and accurate.
- 3.5 Inform appropriate officials of conditions that may be disruptive or damaging to their institution.
- 3.6 Inform supervisors of conditions or practices that may restrict institutional or professional effectiveness.
- 3.7 Refrain from attitudes or actions that impinge on colleagues' dignity, moral code, privacy, worth, professional functioning, and/or personal growth.
- 3.8 Abstain from sexual intimacies with colleagues or with staff for whom they have supervisory, evaluative, or instructional responsibility.
- 3.9 Assure that participation by staff in planned activities that emphasize self-disclosure or other relatively intimate or personal involvement is voluntary and that the leader(s) of such activities do not have administrative, supervisory, or evaluative authority over participants.
- 3.10 Evaluate job performance of subordinates regularly and recommend appropriate actions to enhance professional development and improve performance.
- 3.12 Define job responsibilities, decision-making procedures, mutual expectations, accountability procedures, and evaluation criteria with subordinates and supervisors.

- 3.13 Provide fair and honest assessments and feedback for colleagues' job performance and provide opportunities for professional growth as appropriate.
- 3.14 Seek evaluations of their job performance and/or services they provide.
- 3.15 Disseminate information that accurately describes the responsibilities of position vacancies, required qualifications, and the institution.
- 3.16 Adhere to ethical practices when facilitating or participating in a selection process by [a] representing the department and institution honestly and accurately [b] periodically notify applicants of their status; [c] adhere to established guidelines, protocol, and standards for the selection process; and [d] provide accurate information about the resources available to applicants once employed.
- 3.17 Provide training to student affairs search and screening committee members.
- 3.18 Refrain from using their positions to seek unjustified personal gains, sexual favors, unfair advantages, or unearned goods and services not normally accorded in such positions.
- 3.19 Recognize their fiduciary responsibility to the institution. They will ensure that funds for which they have oversight are expended following established procedures and in ways that optimize value, are accounted for properly, and contribute to the accomplishment of the institution's mission. They also will assure equipment, facilities, personnel, and other resources are used to promote the welfare of the institution and students.
- 3.20 Restrict their private interests, obligations, and transactions in ways to minimize conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest. They will identify their personal views and actions as private citizens from those expressed or undertaken as institutional representatives.
- 3.21 Evaluate programs, services, and organizational structure regularly and systematically to assure conformity to published standards and guidelines. Evaluations should be conducted using rigorous evaluation methods and principles, and the results should be made available to appropriate institutional personnel.
- 3.22 Acknowledge contributions by others to program development, program implementation, evaluations, and reports.
- 3.23 Maintain current knowledge about changes in technology and legislation that are significant for the range of institutional responsibilities in their professional domain (e.g., knowledge of privacy and security issues, use of the internet, and free speech/hate speech).

4.0 ***Responsibility to Society.*** Student affairs professionals, both as citizens and practitioners, have a responsibility to contribute to the improvement of the communities in which they live and work and to act as advocates for social justice for members of those communities. They respect individuality and individual differences. They recognize that our communities are enhanced by social and individual diversity manifested by characteristics such as age, culture, class, ethnicity, gender, ability, gender identity, race, religion, and sexual orientation. Student affairs professionals work to protect human rights and promote respect for human diversity in higher education.

As ACPA members, student affairs professionals will:

- 4.1 Assist students in becoming productive, ethical, and responsible citizens.
- 4.2 Demonstrate concern for the welfare of all students and work for constructive change on behalf of students.
- 4.3 Not discriminate on the basis of age, culture, ethnicity, gender, ability, gender identity, race, class, religion, or sexual orientation. They will actively work to change discriminatory practices.
- 4.4 Demonstrate regard for social codes and moral expectations of the communities in which they live and work. At the same time, they will be aware of situations in which concepts of social justice may conflict with local moral standards and norms and may choose to point out these conflicts in ways that respect the rights and values of all who are involved. They will recognize that violations of accepted moral and legal standards may involve their clients, students, or colleagues in damaging personal conflicts and may impugn the integrity of the profession, their own reputations, and that of the employing institution.
- 4.5 Report to the appropriate authority any condition that is likely to harm their clients and/or others.

APPENDIX A

**Suggestions for Resolving Ethical Misconduct**  
**USE OF THIS STATEMENT**

- ***Initiate a private conversation.*** Because unethical conduct often is due to a lack of awareness or understanding of ethical standards as described in the preceding document, a private conversation between the target of inappropriate action(s) and the individual being inappropriate is an important initial line of action. This conference, if pursued in a spirit of collegiality and sincerity, often may resolve the ethical concern and promote future ethical conduct.
- ***Pursue institutional resources.*** If a private conference does not resolve the problem institutional resources may be pursued. It is recommended individuals work with mentors, supervisors, faculty, colleagues, or peers to research campus based resources.
- ***Request consultation from ACPA Ethics Committee.*** If an individual is unsure whether a particular behavior, activity, or practice falls under the provisions of this statement, the Ethics Committee may be contacted in writing. A detailed written description (omitting data identifying the person(s) involved), describing the potentially unethical behavior, activity, or practice and the circumstances surrounding the situation should be submitted to a member of the ACPA Ethics Committee. Members of the Committee will provide the individual with a summary of opinions regarding the ethical appropriateness of the conduct or practice in question, as well as some suggestions as to what action(s) could be taken. Because these opinions are based on limited information, no specific situation or action will be judged “unethical.” Responses rendered by the Committee are advisory only and are not an official statement on behalf of ACPA. Please contact the ACPA Executive Director for more information.

## APPENDIX B – ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THIS DOCUMENT

The principles that provide the foundation for this document are:

- ***Act to benefit others.*** Service to humanity is the basic tenet underlying student affairs practice. Hence, the student affairs profession exists to: [a] promote cognitive, social, physical, intellectual, and spiritual development of students; [b] bring an institution-wide awareness of the interconnectedness of learning and development throughout the institution in academic, service, and management functions; [c] contribute to the effective functioning of the institution; and [d] provide programs and services consistent with this principle.
- ***Promote justice.*** Student affairs professionals are committed to assuring fundamental fairness for all persons within the academic community. The values of impartiality, equity, and reciprocity are basic. When there are greater needs than resources available or when the interests of constituencies conflict, justice requires honest consideration of all claims and requests and equitable (not necessarily equal) distribution of goods and services. A crucial aspect of promoting justice is demonstrating respect for human differences and opposing intolerance of these differences. Important human differences include, but are not limited to, characteristics such as ability, age, class, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, race, religion, or sexual orientation.
- ***Respect autonomy.*** Student affairs professionals respect and promote autonomy and privacy. This includes the rights of persons whose cultural traditions elevate the importance of the family over the importance of the individual to make choices based on the desires of their families if they wish. Students' freedom of choice and action are not restricted unless their actions significantly interfere with the welfare of others or the accomplishment of the institution's mission.
- ***Be faithful.*** Student affairs professionals make all efforts to be accurate in their presentation of facts, honor agreements, and trustworthy in the performance of their duties.
- ***Do no harm.*** Student affairs professionals do not engage in activities that cause either physical or psychological damage to others. In addition to their personal actions, student affairs professionals are especially vigilant to assure that the institutional policies do not: [a] hinder students' opportunities to benefit from the learning experiences available in the environment; [b] threaten individuals' self-worth, dignity, or safety; or [c] discriminate unjustly or illegally. Student affairs professionals are expected to understand that students from non-dominant cultures and groups that differ from the majority may feel harmed by attitudes and processes that are considered harmless by members of the dominant (i.e. majority) group.

**Virtues: Habitual behavior.** The virtues that student affairs educators should work to develop are based on widely accepted ideas about the characteristics of people in helping professions who are consistently ethical in their choices and behavior. Virtues differ from principles in that they are related to specific contexts and demonstrate personal characteristics that people in that context, in this case the student affairs profession, value. Virtues balance principles in that they are somewhat flexible and reflect the means by which a person acts on values. The four virtues associated with this profession are prudence, integrity, respectfulness, and benevolence.

- **Self-regarding virtues.** *Prudence* and *integrity* are virtues related to the behavior of a person in a particular situation. Prudence signifies thoughtfulness and unwillingness to jump to conclusions. Integrity signifies consistency and wholeness; a lack of dramatic behavioral differences from one situation to another.
- **Other-regarding virtues.** *Respectfulness* and *benevolence* are virtues that describe a person's treatment of others. Respectful persons are prudent - they take time to think about appropriate responses to others in unfamiliar situations. Respectfulness is also connected to benevolence, the consistent habit of taking other people's well-being into consideration.

### **Context: Finding patterns of meaning and developing ethical perspectives**

Because our campuses are comprised of people from all over the world, have official connections with institutions in many countries, and also serve people who are Americans with significant allegiance to non-dominant cultures, it is important to take context into account when addressing ethical concerns. There are three frames of reference that should be considered: culture, temporality, and phenomenology.

- **Culture.** Every culture has its own ideas about values, virtues, social and family roles, and acceptable behavior. Cultures may be grounded in ethnicity, faith, gender, generation, sexual orientation, physical ability, or geographic area to name a few. Every campus also has a range of cultures based on work status or location as well as a dominant culture of its own. Ethical dilemmas often arise among or between people from different cultures. Ethical decision-making suggests that the values of relevant cultures be examined when dilemmas arise and overt conversations about conflicting values take place, if necessary.
- **Temporality.** This term suggests that an awareness of time-related issues be present. These include the duration of the problem, the urgency of its resolution, the time of the academic year, the duration of the relationships among the people involved, and the "spirit of the times" or *Zeitgeist*.
- **Phenomenology.** All persons have both cultural roots and individual attributes that shape their perspectives. Phenomenology refers to the personal and individual points of view of the persons involved in the situation. Both justice and prudence require that decision-makers do not assume anything about a person's perspective based on cultural background until that perspective is understood in both its individual and its cultural contexts.

*References for additional information*

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