University Collegiality Policy

1.1 PREAMBLE

1.1.1. Northern Illinois has a tradition of collegiality and shared governance and strives to maintain these standards that as a mainstay of its institutional culture. The Preamble to the Northern Illinois Constitution declares “Respect for the intrinsic dignity of each member of the University community, both by the University itself and by each member of that community, is the basic cornerstone governing all community activities.” This university is a community whose varied functions, responsibilities, and contributions are supportive of the instructional, research, and service mission of the institution. Collegial interactions as referenced throughout this policy are those interactions that occur among and between colleagues, subordinates, supervisors, administrators, and students. Collegial interactions are essential to support that mission in an effective, efficient, and ethical manner.

1.1.2. Collegiality represents a reciprocal expectation of a professional relationship among colleagues with a commitment to sustaining a positive and productive environment as critical for the progress and success of the university community. Collegiality is a multi-dimensional construct that permeates the successful execution of all parts of the tripartite: scholarship, learning, and service. It consists of collaboration and a shared decision-making process that incorporates mutual respect for similarities and for differences in background, expertise, judgments, and points of views, in addition to mutual trust. Central to collegiality is the expectation that members of the university community will be individually accountable to conduct themselves in a manner that contributes to the university's academic mission and high reputation. Collegiality among associates involves a similar professional expectation concerning constructive cooperation, civility in discourse, and engagement in academic and administrative tasks within the respective units and in relation to the institutional life of the university as a whole. Collegiality is not congeniality nor is it conformity or excessive deference to the judgments of colleagues, supervisors and administrators; these are flatly oppositional to the free and open development of ideas. Evidence of collegiality is demonstrated by the protection of elementary principles of academic freedom, the capacity of colleagues to carry out their professional functions without obstruction, and the ability of a community of scholars to thrive in a vigorous and collaborative intellectual climate.

1.1.3. Allegations or complaints of a documented pattern of frequent and pervasive uncollegial activity that clearly interferes with the professional working environment, or a severe uncollegial act resulting in the same circumstances, if found to be supported, will constitute a violation of this policy. Such allegations will be examined in a reasonable, objective, and expedient manner, and in accordance with applicable federal and state employment laws and university due process procedures. This policy is intended to be consistent with the Preamble to Article 11 of the Northern Illinois Bylaws, which states: “Therefore, it is crucial for the University to ensure the right of all faculty and staff (supportive professional and operating staff) to perform their individual and collaborative roles in an environment that is free from incivility, misuse of authority, intimidation, retaliation, and infringement upon personal and academic freedoms.”
1.2. DISPOSITION OF COMPLAINTS

1.21. The consequences of uncollegial activity may be the creation of a chilly, unprofessional and/or hostile environment that alters the conditions of the employment/academic environment. Unlike discrimination or harassment, uncollegial activity does not need an identified target to have a negative impact on the employment/academic environment. Nor does an occasional uncivil comment or unprofessional action constitute uncollegiality unless such conduct is severe, pervasive, and/or occurs on a frequent basis.

1.22. Any administrator, faculty, staff member, or student who experiences and/or witnesses possible uncollegial conduct has the right to report this activity and all supporting evidence to the applicable university administrator, especially if the effect of the conduct could be shown to have created an intimidating, hostile, or obstructive work environment.

1.23. The University encourages the maintenance of a positive employee-relations environment that includes effective communication and feedback and attempts to informally resolve complaints. The University strongly encourages attempts to resolve issues through informal procedures, beginning at the unit, departmental or college level lowest appropriate level. Initial attempts will normally include discussions with those alleged to have committed the action or conduct. A request for mediation assistance with different options for resolution may be made to the office of the appropriate dean, divisional vice president, or Human Resources and/or the executive vice president and provost.

1.24. In the absence of a successful mediation resulting in resolution, the allegation or complaint may be submitted for formal examination according to the university's Grievance Procedures for Faculty and Staff, Bylaws, Article 11, in which a documented pattern of frequent and pervasive uncollegial activity shall be treated as "the grievable act," unless the complaint alleges a single but severe uncollegial act. The failure to act within 30 days of the failed mediation concludes any further consideration of the allegations or underlying conduct.

To be submitted to the UC Steering Committee for consideration on Wednesday, April 15, 2009.

Language drawn from Bylaws, Article 11: Grievance Procedures for Faculty and Staff.

Language drawn from Affirmative Action and Diversity Resources (AADR), Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy and Complaint Procedures for Employees and Students. [http://www.niu.edu/aadr/policy.pdf]

AADR, 1

Bylaws, Article 11, Item 11.4; Language in the 4th sentence is drawn from the Bylaws, Article 10, Item 10.2
Rationale for a University Collegiality Policy

Maintenance of a Collaborative and Cooperative Community:
“Few, if any, responsible faculty members would deny that collegiality, in the sense of collaboration and constructive cooperation, identifies important aspects of a faculty member's overall performance. A faculty member may legitimately be called upon to participate in the development of curricula and standards for the evaluation of teaching, as well as in peer review of the teaching of colleagues. Much research, depending on the nature of the particular discipline, is by its nature collaborative and requires teamwork as well as the ability to engage in independent investigation. And committee service of a more general description, relating to the life of the institution as a whole, is a logical outgrowth of the Association’s view that a faculty member is an “officer” of the college or university in which he or she fulfills professional duties.”
AAUP, "On Collegiality as a Criterion for Faculty Evaluation."

“As colleagues, professors have obligations that derive from common membership in the community of scholars. Professors do not discriminate against or harass colleagues. They respect and defend the free inquiry of associates. In the exchange of criticism and ideas professors show due respect for the opinions of others. Professors acknowledge academic debt and strive to be objective in their professional judgment of colleagues. Professors accept their share of faculty responsibilities for the governance of their institution. AAUP Statement of Professional Ethics 1987

Provision of a Positive Work Environment:
A collegial department figures heavily in faculty satisfaction; ahead of the institution's work and family policies, ahead of clear tenure policies, and even ahead of compensation, according to national survey data collected between 2005-2007 for the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE), a research center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Reported in the Chronicle of Higher Education, November 4, 2008.

Protection of Academic Freedom:
“Universities remain perhaps the only sanctuary for the relatively unbridled and unfettered search for truth and for profoundly new, but important ideas. Without a climate of free inquiry where faculty members can challenge existing orthodoxies and dogma and can dare others to rebut their ideas, creativity and discovery will suffer . . . If academic freedom is compromised, it won’t be long before the engine of innovation slows and our great centers of academic excellence lose their preeminence.” Jonathan Cole, John Mitchell Mason Professor and Provost 1989-2003, Columbia University

“Professors, guided by a deep conviction of the worth and dignity of the advancement of knowledge, recognize the special responsibilities placed upon them. Their primary responsibility to their subject is to seek and to state the truth as they see it. To this end professors devote their energies to developing and improving their scholarly competence. They accept the obligation to exercise critical self-discipline and judgment in using, extending, and transmitting knowledge. They practice intellectual honesty. Although professors may follow subsidiary interests, these
interests must never seriously hamper or compromise their freedom of inquiry. AAUP Statement of Professional Ethics 1987

“Holding faculty accountable to professional norms exemplifies academic freedom because it highlights the narrow scope of that freedom, which does not include the right of faculty ‘to research and publish in any manner they personally see fit.’” Stanley Fish, “An Authoritative Word on Academic Freedom.” The New York Times, November 23, 2008.

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Resource Bibliography

(** indicates direct use of text or concept)


