

Unprofessional Relationships and Abuse of Authority

Consensual romantic relationships that might be appropriate in other circumstances have inherent dangers when they occur between any HMS or HSDM faculty member, fellow, or officer and any person over whom he/she has a professional responsibility, e.g., as a teacher, advisor, preceptor, or supervisor. Such relationships are fundamentally asymmetric, and are considered to be unprofessional under this policy because, among other things, they may create an impression within the Harvard community of inappropriate or inequitable academic or professional advantage or favoritism that can be destructive of the learning or working environment. Depending on the circumstances, such relationships also may be considered an abuse of authority.

HMS and HSDM faculty, fellows, and officers should be aware that any romantic involvement with students, other trainees, junior colleagues, or staff members over whom they have a professional responsibility makes them liable to complaint and formal action. Even when both parties have initially consented to such a relationship, it is the more senior individual, who, by virtue of his/her special responsibility, is accountable for the unprofessional relationship or abuse of authority. If a romantic relationship develops in this context, the person in the position of greater authority – whether as supervisor, teacher, preceptor, or advisor – promptly must notify the Chief Human Resource Officer or the Dean of Faculty Affairs to evaluate the situation and ensure that alternate reporting or evaluative arrangements are put in place.