

Texas A&M University Faculty Code of Conduct

Preamble

Codes of conduct have been widely implemented across universities and professional societies. The intent of a code is to have an agreed upon set of standards among the members of a community that both conveys expectations and protects them from unprofessional behavior within the community.

This code of conduct was developed for Texas A&M University by three faculty committees. The first, convened in Fall 2019 by the Dean of Faculties Office, had 12 members, 10 of whom were faculty.¹ Chaired by an associate dean of faculties, the committee developed a draft of the code, but it never moved to implementation because of leadership changes and disruptions from the pandemic. The second panel, convened in 2022 largely from members of the first committee, revisited and updated it. The third group was the Academic Freedom Task Force, convened in Fall 2023, that considered the proposed code as a needed structural change to protect academic freedom at Texas A&M University.

The Academic Freedom Task Force supported implementing a code of conduct within the university community to clarify behaviors that could be considered unprofessional in the academic context. Many rules and regulations state that unprofessional behavior is grounds for sanctions, but they do not define or put parameters on the types of behaviors that can be deemed unprofessional for faculty.² As a result, the judgment of what constitutes unprofessional behavior is left to the discretion of supervisors or investigators. To remedy this, the task force recommended implementing standards for behavior that had been developed by the academic community and proposed that the Faculty Senate be the body that oversees the code of conduct and any future updates to it. The review and decisions regarding unprofessional conduct would remain with the respective university investigative office and/or the faculty supervisor (often a department head), with appeals of any sanctions available through the Academic Freedom Council and/or the University Grievance Committee (UGC) or Committee for Academic Freedom, Responsibility, and Tenure (CAFRT).

I. Purpose of the Code

This Faculty Code of Conduct is meant to promote and create an academic environment rich with a respect for sharing, critical examination, and the protection of academic freedom in the pursuit of knowledge, while reinforcing core values. This is consistent with the recommendation from the Association of American University Professors (AAUP) that virtues of “collegiality” be reflected in the definitions of teaching, scholarship and service developed by institutions of higher education.

II. Scope of the Code

1. The Code applies to faculty members (defined by University Rule 12.01.99.M1), **including faculty who have administrative appointments**, in all aspects of their professional life at the university, including interactions with other faculty, staff, students, and the public at large, by establishing standards of conduct to which faculty members are expected to adhere. It does not apply to the personal lives of faculty members.
2. Existing regulations, rules, SAPs and guidelines govern the definitions of and processes for unprofessional conduct that violate rules, regulations, or laws. This code is intended to convey expectations for professional behavior and defines unprofessional behavior that is disruptive but does not violate rules, regulations, or laws.

3. Nothing in this Code is intended to limit the rights of faculty members to academic freedom. It does specify expectations for professional conduct as part of the academic responsibility of faculty members.
4. Nothing in this document is intended to abridge the rights of a faculty member to file a grievance or appeal.

III. Duties of Faculty Members

1. By virtue of their employment as competent professionals, the primary duty of faculty members is to advance scholarship, education, and service missions of Texas A&M University; faculty members also have a general duty to act in the interests of the broader academic community as well as those of society as a whole.
2. Faculty members should act on all occasions in accordance with the public trust placed in them by the State of Texas, and to uphold the core values of the university.
3. Faculty members are expected to exhibit professional conduct in teaching, research, and service in relation to their constituencies, which include fellow faculty members, staff, students, the relevant professional community, and the society at large.
4. Faculty members are accountable for their actions to the public and should be held responsible for all professional decisions and actions they take.
5. Faculty members who have an academic leadership role are ultimately responsible for addressing unprofessional behavior that is disruptive.

IV. General Principles of Conduct

1. University faculty members are committed to advancing knowledge and respecting students. They focus on their academic discipline, seek and express truth, improve their expertise, and uphold intellectual honesty.
2. Faculty members promote students' free pursuit of learning, upholding high academic and ethical standards. They respect students as individuals, guide them intellectually, and encourage honesty. They also protect students' academic confidentiality and promptly report any mistreatment or discrimination.
3. As colleagues, faculty members have obligations from their membership in the scholarly community. They reject discrimination and harassment, uphold free inquiry, value **diverse multiple** perspectives including those they disagree with, and participate in shared governance duties.
4. Faculty members observe the stated regulations of Texas A&M University, while maintaining their right to criticize and seek revisions to those regulations.
5. The privilege of academic freedom allows faculty members to pursue academic inquiry without fear of outside interference. However, this privilege should be exercised with respect for others' freedom of inquiry and intellectual differences.
6. Faculty members must uphold academic decorum, showing restraint and respectful communication in all interactions, whether in person or online. This includes refraining from personal insults, abusive language, or misrepresenting others, across all forms of communication.

V. Unprofessional Conduct

1. Unprofessional conduct is any violation of the Duties of Faculty Members (Section III) or of the General Principles of Conduct (Section IV).
2. Examples of unprofessional conduct include, without being limited to:
 - a. Making decisions within the university on a basis other than legitimate academic considerations or inequitably applying standards.
 - b. Failing to appropriately restrict confidential information.
 - c. Not reporting concerns regarding mistreatment of others within the university, including students, faculty, and staff.

- d. Intentionally failing to observe the stated regulations of Texas A&M University.
- e. Engaging in unprofessional interactions in person or online, including personal insults, abusive language, or misrepresenting others. Harassment or bullying of any member of the University community, defined as conduct undertaken with the purpose of detracting from, or interfering with, an individuals' educational or work performance; or conduct creating an environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or offensive;
- f. Abuse of power, defined as any conduct undertaken for professional or personal advantage with knowledge that the action conflicts with the values set forth in this document; particularly concerning are abuses that involve students or junior colleagues;
- g. Engaging in arbitrary, capricious or prejudicial decision making or actions that affect the working conditions, professional status, or academic freedom of others;
- h. Intimidation of any member of the University community, including the use of threats, the promise of rewards unrelated to merit,;
- i. Taking undue credit or not giving due credit for someone else's contributions to a scholarly, pedagogic, or administrative undertaking;
- j. Practicing deceit on the academic community or the public;
- k. Nepotism or conflict of interest that is not properly mitigated and brings direct unearned benefits to the faculty member or to a member of the faculty member's family, personal affinity group, professional affinity group, or faction;
- l. Pervasive or egregious conflicts of commitment, in which the public interests of the university become subservient to the private interests of the faculty member;
- m. Pervasive or egregious disregard for academic decorum in communicating with other members of the university community;
- n. ~~Pervasive or egregious derogatory or denigrating comments about other disciplines, schools of thoughts, paradigms, or scientific methods, particularly when such comments are intended to affect others' working conditions or academic freedom;~~ Pervasive or egregious derogatory or denigrating comments about other disciplines, schools of thought, paradigms, or scientific methods that do not represent good-faith contributions to science and scholarship;
- o. Lack of transparency in academic, budgetary, or administrative decisions, without proper justification;
- p. Failure in an administrative role to act on reports or allegations of unprofessional conduct.

Footnote 1. In the process of developing the Faculty Code of Conduct, the initial committee consulted codes of conduct used by professional organizations and other universities, in addition to departments colleges at Texas A&M that already had codes of conduct in place. Additionally, we considered articles on codes of conduct relevant to faculty in institutions of higher education: UC Berkeley Code of Conduct, <https://vpf.berkeley.edu/faculty-conduct>; American Academy of Religion Code of Conduct, <https://aarweb.org/AARMBR/AARMBR/Who-We-Are-/Board-of-Directors-/Board-Resolutions-/Professional-Conduct-Procedures.aspx>; Texas A&M College of Dentistry, Department of Nutrition and Food Science, Department of Performance Studies

Footnote 2. Unprofessional behavior as a grounds for sanctions is stated in the following: University Rule 12.01.99.M1, sections 2.2 & 3.4.3.4.4 & 5.1 & 6.3. University SAP 12.99.99.M0.01. System policy 12.01, sections 2 & 4.3. Specific types of behavior are also mentioned in 08.01.01.M1, 08.01.01.M1.01, 15.99.03.M1, 15.99.03.M1.03, 15.99.99.M0.05