



Medicine Hat College Policy WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

Policy #:	HR-05
Policy Authority:	Director, Human Resources
Executive Sponsor:	Vice-President, Administration and Finance
Approved by:	President and CEO
Effective Date:	24 August, 2022
Next Mandatory Review Date:	24 August, 2027
Frequency of Review:	Every 5 years

1. OBJECTIVE

This policy promotes a safe and respectful college environment and expects employees to observe and respect the boundaries of workplace relationships.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all MHC employees.

3. DEFINITIONS

- **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 employed by MHC or who provides services to MHC under an employment contract.
- **MHC or the College:** Medicine Hat College.
- **Personal Relationship(s):** a relationship of an intimate, romantic, or sexual nature which is beyond the scope or boundaries of a workplace relationship.
- **Positions of Authority:** 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.

4. PRINCIPLES

MHC is committed to providing a positive work and learning environment, and expects its employees 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.

5. DIRECTIVES

5.1 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 relevant government legislation.

5.2 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 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, regulations, or legal proceedings.

5.3 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 the 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.

5.4 **Supervisor-Employee**

5.4.1 The unequal power relationship inherent in supervisor-employee relationships increases the vulnerability of the employee. To maintain appropriate professional boundaries with employees, supervisors must be mindful of the development of workplace relationships with an employee, where the employee is likely to misunderstand the terms of the relationship.

5.4.2 To maintain professional boundaries with employees, supervisors will not engage in a personal relationship with any employee over whom they have influence or could be perceived to have influence, unless the relationship is pre-existing and disclosed to Human Resources who in turn will report the relationship to the relevant Vice-President as soon as the unequal power relationship occurs.

5.5 **Employee-Employee**

5.5.1 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.

5.5.2 Employees who are in positions of authority who engage in personal relationships must disclose the relationship to their supervisor. Supervisors and Human Resources will consult to ensure that

- (a) the employee in the position of greater authority is removed 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. Employees must avoid any situation where there could be a real or perceived conflict of interest.

5.6 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 declaring personal relationships (existing or new) as outlined in section 5.4.2 and 5.5.2 to their immediate supervisor.

6.2 **Supervisors, in consultation with Human Resources**, are responsible for reviewing and evaluating direct reports' declarations of personal relationships and taking appropriate action.

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: Public Interest (Whistleblower Protection)

HR-10: Code of Conduct

HS-01: Occupational Health and Safety
SD-01: Sexual Violence
6.10: Workplace Violence

9. RELATED PROCEDURES

PR-HR-01-01: Respectful Work and Learning Environment Complaint Resolution
PR-HR-03-01: Disclosure of Wrongdoings
PR-SD-01-01: Sexual Violence – Reporting and Responding

10. RELATED INFORMATION

SD-01: Appendix A: Criminal Code of Canada Definition of Consent
SD-02: Appendix B: Myths and Misconceptions
SD-03: Appendix C Guide for Individuals Impacted by Sexual Violence
SD-04: Appendix D Guide for Employee Responding to a Disclosure of Sexual Violence

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.

ORIGINAL COPY SIGNED

Kevin Shufflebotham
President and CEO

Date: August 24, 2022

ORIGINAL COPY SIGNED

Wayne Resch
Vice-President, Administration and
Finance

Date: August 24, 2022

DOCUMENT HISTORY

August 2016: Policy approved
August 2022: Revised policy approved