



To All Members of the Department:

We strive to create a welcoming, safe, and collegial community of scholars, not only in our department but also in our broader UConn workplace. We affirmed such in our Mission Statement, adopted in 2019: “We endeavor to pass on our knowledge and our understanding of the value of science and its application to successive generations of psychological scientists. We strive to use research findings to benefit the public, and we encourage and respect diversity in all aspects of our work. We strive to educate the public to the power of science as a tool for the public good.”

Having these goals is important; they give us guideposts for our conduct and our thinking. In practice, of course, we sometimes do not live up to these goals. Partly for that reason, and partly because the university itself lives in a complex regulatory environment, a number of resources are available to manage issues of discrimination and harassment, sexual harassment, compliance with state, federal, and UConn policies, and general civility.

The purpose of this paper is to share some of the resources and responsibilities of various offices and individuals at UConn.

UConn’s Code of Conduct

There is a [Code of Conduct](#) for all members of the UConn community. The Code sets expectations for Civility, Inclusiveness in Education, Research Principles, Patient Care, Outreach, and other areas of our complex organization. It was developed under the guidance of former President Phil Austin and originally published in 2006.

As the President said in the Code’s opening letter:

A key element in assuring University-wide compliance is a system for reporting potential violations. In an institution this large and active, there may be areas of confusion; regrettably, there may also be instances in which individual behavior does not meet appropriate ethical expectations. *Any University employee who observes a possible violation of law, regulation, policy or approved procedure has an obligation to report it.* [my emphasis] While a key element is reporting inappropriate activity, I want to emphasize that the most important element of any compliance or ethics program is working cooperatively to assure a positive climate of openness and integrity. Great universities function as true communities in which faculty, administrators, staff and students collaborate to achieve common goals. That holds true for instruction, research, public engagement, service and, at the most fundamental level, ethical compliance.

Office of University Compliance

UConn's Office of University Compliance serves as a place to raise concerns about violations of the Code of Conduct or any other UConn policy. The Office of University Compliance also serves as a clearinghouse of sorts; it coordinates with many other, more specialized offices on campus (e.g., Office of Institutional Equity, Research Compliance, Public Safety). A matrix of [reporting offices and concerns](#) is available on their website.

This office maintains an [anonymous report line](#) to report violations University policies. When using the report line, the concern is assigned a pin number in order that anonymous access to communications to and from the Office of University Compliance can be accessed at a later point. It is acceptable to use the report line to ask whether an incident constitutes a violation of policy. An alternative to the web-based report line is the anonymous phone report system at (888) 685-2637. It is staffed by a third party and can be useful in reporting violations or in seeking guidance about whether a report should be filed. Prior to raising a concern on the report line, it might be helpful to read through the [Reporting Overview](#) put up by the Office of University Compliance, especially the [FAQs](#) on that page. Note that an anonymous report made to the hotline is assigned a number and the status of the response can later be checked by entering that number on the web site.

It is also worth emphasizing that the university maintains a clear "[Non-Retaliation Policy](#)" available on those pages; *retaliating against someone who makes a good faith report is forbidden*. Good examples of prohibited behavior are provided in the policy, e.g., work-related retaliation such as writing bad reference letters and social-related retaliation such as bullying or creating a hostile environment.

However, there can be gray areas about whether a behavior or practice is a violation of the Code. The anonymous report line (above) is available to discuss concerns and help the reporter decide whether there is a possible violation to report. Staff at the [Office of University Compliance](#) can also help. Again, though, it is acceptable to use the report line to ask whether an incident may constitute a violation of policy. Further discussion about this issue is below.

Confidentiality and Privacy. The privacy of students, faculty and staff is important to all university departments and offices. Whether the information is about a health matter, educational or personnel records, conflicts, or harassment, everyone has a right to keep that information private and to expect freedom from intrusion into personal matters. UConn now has a [privacy office](#) to offer guidance and training on matters of privacy.

Confidential information is personal information shared with others with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others unless permission is given. An everyday example is a student's grade in a class. Instructors are not permitted to divulge this confidential information to others, even parents, unless the student has given permission to do so. Grades are covered under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ([FERPA](#)).

In some instances, though, it is *required* that a report be made. More information about that situation is offered below.

Office of Institutional Equity

This office has special duties, as outlined on their [homepage](#):

Our work focuses on administering the University's non-discrimination policies, as well as ensuring compliance with state and federal laws and regulations related to equal opportunity and affirmative action, including but not limited to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Connecticut Fair Employment Practices Act. This includes OIE serving as the office of the ADA Coordinator and Title IX Coordinator.

For example, the OIE might be the office one is referred to after consulting with the Office of Compliance if the complaint is about discrimination or sexual harassment.

UConn updated its [Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment, and Related Interpersonal Violence](#) in August of 2020. This policy defines Prohibited Conduct (which includes discrimination, discriminatory harassment, sexual and gender-based harassment, Title IX Sexual Harassment, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, intimate partner violence, stalking, complicity, retaliation, and inappropriate amorous relationships), and outlines employees' responsibilities with respect to reporting Prohibited Conduct. It is a long and detailed policy -- fortunately, there is a good set of [FAQs](#) relating to the policy.

Please note that, based on your position at UConn, you likely have responsibilities to report concerns about alleged incidents of Prohibited Conduct to OIE. Information about these responsibilities can be found in the Policy and the FAQs.

The OIE has a helpful [guide](#) on what to do when a student reports sexual assault, stalking, or interpersonal violence. These incidents must be reported. If you are receiving such information from a student, it is important *not* to tell the student that the information being reported will remain confidential because you must report to the OIE. The Title IX office also has a helpful guide on [how to offer support](#). If you have questions or concerns about conduct potentially covered by the Policy Against Discrimination, or about reporting responsibilities, you are strongly encouraged to contact OIE for assistance.

Definitions and Gray Areas

The Office of University Compliance expects, and respects, ‘good faith’ reporting of violations of the Code of Conduct, namely “a report made with an honest and reasonable belief that a university-related violation of law or policy may have occurred.” To help make this reporting easier, they have set up an anonymous reporting structure, [outlined above](#).

Although the Office of Institutional Equity has good definitions of [discrimination and harassment](#), there is a large academic literature on “Gray Areas” (just search Gray Areas of Harassment on Google Scholar). As with all academic literatures, no one is *the* expert on what constitutes discrimination or harassment or civility. One reason the Office of University Compliance exists is to sort through the legal and ethical definitions and connotations and render a judgment about whether an incident should be investigated.

Our department and our broader university community is pluralistic, on many dimensions. Universities are structured as hierarchies, meaning one important dimension is power. Faculty have power over students, administrators have power over faculty, and so on. Power differentials enhance the potential for discrimination, harassment, and incivility. Relationships in which two individuals have differential power are ones that must be approached with care. For example, one of the reasons there is a policy on [amorous relationships](#) is because of the risk involved when the two persons have differential power.

Importantly, our positions are only one of the many identities that we hold. Our identities include our race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability status, nationalities, socioeconomic status, and many others. Our identities are interrelated and are experienced within hierarchical systems that assign status to different groups.

In these systems of status and power, we may sometimes say or do something that is hurtful or offensive, intentional or not. Unfortunately, ambiguity of intention and differing attributions of harm and offense create disagreements or gray areas when it comes to determining if a violation of the University’s Code of Conduct occurred.

After discussion with the Office of University Compliance and with the Office of Institutional Equity, they suggest that *any concern be brought to them for comment*, either by contacting their offices directly, or by using the anonymous mechanisms [reviewed above](#).

Other Resources

Navigating all the offices at the university and finding out how to get information about conduct concerns can be daunting. The university has set up a central clearinghouse called [Inform](#). This resource pulls together all the offices and departments, forms, and processes (including what to expect if a concern is raised) in one place. It is important to remember that there is a strict [non-retaliation](#) policy that protects anyone who raises a concern in good faith. And, of course, *if there is a risk to health and safety, please call 911*.

The Code of Conduct also has a series of questions after each section that can be helpful in monitoring one's own conduct and whether it conforms to the expectations in the code. Here are just a few examples of questions from various sections of the code:

- Have I treated others as they wish to be treated?
- Have I used my position to intimidate or isolate others?
- Do I maintain appropriate professional relationships with students, colleagues, patients, clients and customers?
- Do I foster an environment that is conducive to learning?
- Am I providing each student an equal opportunity to learn?
- Do I react negatively when students challenge or critique my interpretation of source material?
- Am I a role model for my students regarding professional values?
- Do I maintain clear boundaries between my professional role and my personal activities that are unrelated to the University?

Self-monitoring is a small but important part of improving our interactions with each other and the extent to which we are meeting our expressed goals of encouraging and respecting diversity and inclusion. We also need to continually refresh our aspirations in this regard and to have clear and transparent processes for monitoring progress and for reporting our missteps. It is my hope that this document makes a small step towards those outcomes.