

Employee Professional Standards and Conflict of Interest

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PURPOSE

This policy is designed to foster a positive, inclusive, and ethical work environment where all Employees can thrive while upholding the values and reputation of Coquitlam College (the College). It also serves to promote fairness, accountability, and compliance with applicable laws and regulations in British Columbia.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all Employees of the College and governs all College-related activities, whether conducted on or off-campus, and whether in person or online.

This policy is supported by other College policies and procedures that set out additional Employee expectations and responsibilities. Refer to Related Policies for a complete list.

POLICY STATEMENTS

Employee Conduct

1. The College is committed to fostering an environment that is supportive of fair and equitable treatment of all members within its diverse community. Employees must treat each other with dignity, fairness and respect.
2. College Employees must perform their work-related duties in a manner consistent with the vision, values and ethical business practices of the College.
3. Employee conduct must contribute to a respectful, professional, and positive work environment and not compromise the integrity or reputation of the College.
4. Employees are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the expectations outlined in College policies and avoiding behaviour that constitutes a real or perceived violation of ethical or legal obligations.
5. Any form of retaliation and/or spreading or providing of malicious or false information against individuals who report concerns or participate in investigations is explicitly prohibited. If an Employee is found to have engaged in this behaviour, they will be subject to sanctions and/or discipline up to and including termination of employment.
6. Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Conflict of Interest

7. Employees must not engage in any activities where their personal interests may interfere with their professional responsibilities to the College.
8. Employees must avoid situations where their private affairs or financial interests are in conflict, or could be perceived to be in conflict, with their obligations to act in the best interests of the College.
9. Employees must not participate in the hiring, supervision, or evaluation of an individual they have a familial relationship with.
10. If a promotion or transfer puts an Employee in a direct reporting relationship with another Employee that they have a familial relationship with, an alternate supervisor will be designated for the evaluation, future promotion, re-appointment, and/or discipline of the Employee being supervised.
11. Employees must not influence financial transactions or decision-making for personal gain, for the gain of another College Employee, or any individual they have a familial relationship with. Employees must disclose to their Supervisor any personal, financial, or business relationship that may constitute a real or potential conflict of interest in writing at the earliest opportunity.
12. Supervisors will review disclosures to determine if mitigation measures, such as recusal from decision-making or reassignment, are necessary.
13. Failure to disclose a conflict of interest may result in disciplinary action.
14. Employees uncertain about whether a situation constitutes a conflict of interest must seek guidance from their supervisor.

Confidentiality and Privacy

15. Employees must not access, disclose or misuse confidential College information in an unauthorized manner or for unauthorized purposes.
16. Confidential or privileged information obtained through employment must not be disclosed, released, or transmitted to anyone other than persons who are authorized to receive the information.
17. Employees who in the course of their employment handle personal information must take due care to protect that information, accessing such information only as necessary for the performance of their duties.
18. Any suspected or actual breaches of confidentiality must be immediately reported to a Supervisor or a Senior Administrator.
19. Employees uncertain about whether certain information is confidential must seek guidance from their Supervisor before sharing that information.

Outside Activities

20. Employees may use their professional skills and expertise to participate in job-related activities or community projects provided these activities do not:
 - a) interfere or impede the performance of their duties to the College;
 - b) conflict or compete with College interests or operations; and
 - c) create financial or reputational burden for the College.
21. Employees working outside the College must ensure their external roles do not interfere or conflict with their College responsibilities.
22. Employees engaging in compensated or non-compensated external activities must ensure these activities:

- a) could not reasonably be perceived as activities that compete directly with activities or interests of the College;
- b) will not interfere or conflict with, or negatively affect their performance or duties at the College;
- c) are not performed in such a way as to use the College's name or appear to be official College business;
- d) do not use College premises, services, equipment or supplies to which the Employee has access by virtue of College employment; and
- e) do not solicit College students or Employees for private business.

23. Employees with questions or concerns about external employment or activities must seek guidance from a Senior Administrator.

Use of College Property

24. Employees must treat all College Property with care and respect.
25. Any property that belongs to the College (including, but not limited to properties, equipment, vehicles, furnishing, computers, office machines and supplies) are to be used for Coquitlam College related purposes. Limited personal use of college property is permitted, provided it does not hinder an employee's performance or result in additional costs to the college.
26. Refusal to return College Property or removal of College Property without prior approval from a Supervisor may be considered theft and subject to disciplinary action at the discretion of the President or Designate.

Gifts and Benefits

27. Employees must not solicit or accept gifts or benefits on behalf of themselves or other Employee(s) that could influence their decision or create the appearance of impropriety. Exceptions include:
 - a) the normal exchange of hospitality between persons doing business together;
 - b) gifts exchanged as part of cultural or diplomatic protocol; and
 - c) the exchange of gifts or hospitality between friends.
28. When a gift or benefit is (or is about to be) offered to an individual Employee or a department, the recipient(s) must discuss the situation with a Senior Administrator. In all cases the College President has the final authority to determine what is, or is not, appropriate and acceptable.

Prohibition of Relationships with Current Students

29. Employees must recognize their power dynamic over Students and avoid personal relationships that could compromise ethical boundaries.
30. Personal relationships (platonic, romantic, or sexual) between Employees and current students are strictly prohibited.
31. Employees may engage with students socially at official College-related events, such as a College organized functions, social gatherings, classes, groups, or clubs.
32. Employees must not invite students to their home unless it is part of a College Homestay Agreement or other College related activity approved by the President or Designate.
33. Employees must not communicate with students via personal social media accounts unless required for academic purposes and with prior written approval from the President or Designate.

34. Employees must not share personal contact information to students unless necessary for College-related activities, such as safety on field trips and with prior written approval from the President or Designate.
35. Employees uncertain about their personal relationship with students must seek guidance from their Supervisor.
36. If an Employee is in a current relationship with a prospective student, they must inform the President or Designate as soon as possible. The President or Designate may, at their discretion, choose to waive this policy for a pre-existing relationship. This must be documented in writing with Human Resources.

PROCEDURES

Reporting Violations

37. Employees have a duty to report any situation they believe constitutes a wrongdoing; is a deliberate act of commission or omission of College-related duties; and/or is dishonest, unethical, or involves a conflict of interest including but not limited to:
 - a) abuse of trust;
 - b) endangering any person or the environment;
 - c) fraud or financial misconduct;
 - d) breach of College policy;
 - e) violation of a legal or regulatory requirement;
 - f) gross or systemic mismanagement or abuse of authority;
 - g) any other act or omission that could seriously damage the College's operations, reputation, or financial standing;
 - h) knowingly directing or counselling a person to commit a wrongdoing or colluding with another to commit wrongdoing;
 - i) obstructing a person's right to disclose wrongdoing ;
 - j) any reprisals or retaliation for seeking advice about or reporting wrongdoing or participating in an investigation of wrongdoing.
38. Employees will not be subject to discipline or reprisal for bringing forward, in good faith, disclosures of policy violations or wrongdoings.
39. Employees unsure whether an action or issue constitutes a violation of this or other College policy must seek guidance from their Supervisor or a Senior Administrator.
40. Workplace violence and safety concerns must be reported in accordance with *WorkSafeBC Occupational Health and Safety Regulations*.

Dispute Resolution

41. Employees are encouraged to resolve disputes informally where possible and where they feel comfortable.
42. If either party is uncomfortable discussing or resolving the dispute informally, Employees should escalate concerns to their Supervisor.
43. If the dispute remains unresolved, or the Employees are uninterested in informally resolving the issue, a formal complaint may be submitted in writing to the Human Resources Coordinator for an investigation.
44. Reports of alleged violations of this policy will be investigated in a fair and confidential manner, with appropriate corrective actions taken if necessary.

45. Employees who are alleged to have violated the policy will be advised of the alleged violation and provided the opportunity to respond.
46. The Human Resources Coordinator will select one other individual who has been trained in investigation processes to assist with conducting an impartial investigation. A written report and resolution will be submitted to the Employee alleged to have violated the policy within ten (10) business days.
47. Employees who are dissatisfied with the outcome may appeal to the College President, who will review the case and issue a final decision.
48. Where the complaint involves the President, another member of Senior Leadership Team, or the Human Resources Coordinator, or is a circumstance that the College deems requires external participation, the College may engage a neutral third party to conduct the investigation and facilitate resolution.
49. The Employee who was alleged to have violated this policy will receive a final copy of the investigation report and decision. A record of the investigation and decision will be included in the Employee's personnel file.

Disciplinary Action

50. Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary measures, including but not limited to written warnings, performance improvement plans, accommodations, suspension, or termination.
51. Serious misconduct, such as fraud, violence, harassment, or gross negligence, may result in immediate termination for just cause.
52. Employees may request a review of disciplinary decisions through the dispute resolution process.

DEFINITIONS

College Property: All items, objects, or things both tangible and intangible, whether contributed or otherwise acquired, that are owned by the College.

Conflict(s) of Interest (COI): A real or potential situation in which the activities of a College Employee may reasonably be perceived to have the intention or effect of advancing the Employee's interests or the interests of any individual(s) they have a familial relationship with in a way that may be detrimental or potentially harmful to the normal operations, integrity or fundamental mission of the College.

Real Conflict of Interest: When an individual has a direct conflict between their personal interests and their professional duties.

Potential Conflict of Interest: When a conflict *could* arise in the future due to changing circumstances.

Current students: A student who is presently attending the College, has been accepted for an upcoming term, or who is awaiting their final grades before graduating.

Disciplinary Action: Action taken to address confirmed instances of wrongdoing.

Employee: An individual who is employed by the College on a full-time, part-time, permanent, temporary, or contract basis.

Familial relationships: For the purposes of this policy, familial relationships refer to any relationship a College Employee or representative may have with a relative/family member.

Performance Improvement Plan (PIP): A document to help Employees who are not meeting job performance expectations, created collaboratively by an Employee and their supervisor. A PIP is intended to outline specific areas of improvement required for the Employee, create goals and milestones as measurable indicators of improvement, and establish how the College will support the Employee through this process.

Suspension: A disciplinary action taking the form of an imposed absence from work.

Termination: An involuntary ending of employment which may be imposed for:

- major transgression or gross misconduct.
- multiple transgressions.
- unsatisfactory performance (culpable and non-culpable).
- other non-culpable circumstance.

Written Warning: A formal notice given to an Employee by the College intended to address either poor performance or conduct issues, and which outline steps to rectify the behavior.

RELATED RESOURCES

- [Cash Payment Policy 1.3.8](#)
- [College Communications Policy 1.4.9](#)
- [Diversity and Inclusiveness Policy 1.4.1](#)
- [Information Security Policy 1.2.3](#)
- [Instructor Hiring Policy 1.3.6](#)
- [Occupational Health & Safety Policy 1.4.4](#)
- [Personal Information and Protection of Privacy Policy 1.2.1](#)
- [Prevention of Bullying and Harassment Policy 3.1.4](#)
- [Records Management Policy 1.2.2](#)
- [Sexual Misconduct Policy 1.3.3](#)
- [Employment Standards Act](#), RSBC 1996, c 113
- [Occupational Health and Safety Regulation](#), BC Reg 296/97,
- [Workers Compensation Act](#), RSBC 2019, c 1
- [Criminal Code](#), RSC 1985, c C-46
- [Personal Information Protection Act](#), SBC 2003, c 63
- [WorkSafe BC](#)