### *Departmental Recommendations for Best Practices*
(Approved by departmental vote, May 2018)

The Philosophy Department at the University of Guelph values an inclusive, respectful, and supportive environment for all its students, faculty, staff, and visitors, and we are committed to cultivating and sustaining a departmental 'climate', which is to say, social norms, professional practices, institutional structures, attitudes, beliefs, professional hierarchies, and privileges, that promotes these values.

The Philosophy Department operates within the constraints and regulations articulated by the University of Guelph, and we are committed to adhering to and enforcing the U of G and UGFA's policies on such matters as:

- UGFA policy on Discrimination and Harassment (article 42);
- UFGA Conflict of Interest policy (section 8; recently updated);
- University of Guelph's Human Rights Policies and Procedures;


In an attempt to address concerns beyond those articulated in the University and UGFA policies, the Philosophy Department has established a Diversity and Climate Committee (DCC) which is concerned with identifying barriers to inclusiveness for members of groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in philosophy, including racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, women, individuals who are disabled, and those who are LGBT. The DCC will support and advise the Department in its efforts to become an inclusive, safe, and welcoming place for everyone who works and studies in it.

To this end, the DCC has developed a set of 'Departmental Recommendations for Best Practices'. These recommendations are based on the input we received from our philosophical community via the DCC Survey (April, 2017) and the DCC Workshop on the Survey (June, 2017). In addition to what we've learned from our own community, we have borrowed from the good suggestions put forward by various other departments and associations committed to improving the social climate within our discipline.

These are *departmental recommendations* that cover a range of activities not covered by the University of Guelph and UGFA guidelines, which address traditionally problematic areas, including: Social Events, Social Media, Speaker Series, Faculty-Student Relationships, and Respectful Communication. [Still to come: Teaching (e.g. diversifying syllabi, inclusive classroom practices) and Hiring Practices].

Please keep in mind that these are not binding rules, but instead are meant to be a helpful guide for faculty, staff, and students as we navigate in the direction of an increasingly inclusive, supportive, and well-functioning community of philosophers. No doubt there will be exceptions to the following recommendations, in which case faculty and students should use their best judgment on how to proceed, and if uncertain, should see either the Department Chair (Mark McCullagh) or one of the Philosophy Department's 2 HIPPOs (Karyn Freedman and Maya Goldenberg).

**1. Social Events**

Social events foster engagement and connection and are an important part of the well-being and morale of any philosophical community, including ours here at Guelph. The DCC Survey illustrated that students deeply value informal socializing with faculty and would like to see more and diverse opportunities to do so.

*1.1. Departmental Social Events*

The Department wants to encourage socializing by hosting regular events throughout the year. The Department is also aware of the importance of maintaining professional standards of behaviour at social events, especially when there are unequal power dynamics at play, such as between faculty and students. The Department is aware that events involving alcohol can provide an easy opportunity for nonprofessional relationships to develop, and it is mindful to take measures to minimize these opportunities. The Department is also aware that there are people who don't drink alcohol and who might not be comfortable at events where alcohol is being consumed. We recommend the following guidelines:

- The Department should aim to have regularly scheduled events throughout the year, including a start-of-term gathering, a holiday party, and an end-of-term gathering;
- In order to ensure accessibility and promote safety and inclusiveness, where possible Department-sponsored events should be held either on campus or in accessible public venues;
- Some of these events should be alcohol-free, for example, First Fridays Lunch in the Department Lounge;
- Events that do serve alcohol should also serve non-alcoholic beverages;
- Faculty should make a good effort to attend these events, in cases where they do not have any conflicting obligations;
- These events should be inclusive and open to all members of the philosophical community;
- There should be no obligation or pressure on students to attend social events.

*1.2. SUP and PGSA Social Events*

The Department encourages, supports, and often sponsors events held by its Undergraduate Society (SUP) and its Philosophy Graduate Student Association (PGSA). The Department believes that these events are important to the well-being of the Department and contribute to a positive climate. We recommend the following guidelines:

- In order to ensure accessibility and promote safety and inclusiveness, where possible SUP and PGSA events should be held either on campus or in accessible public venues;
- These events should be inclusive, well-advertised, and normally be open to all members of the philosophical community;
- There should be no obligation or pressure on students to attend SUP or PGSA events.

*1.3. Graduate Courses and Reading Courses: End-Of-Study Social Events*

It can be important and meaningful to celebrate the end of a graduate course (or upper-level undergraduate course) or a reading course by gathering as a group outside of class and having informal discussions about the readings and other matters. These kinds of social events can foster mentorship, community, and facilitate networking among students. Although these events are not typically sponsored by the Department, it is recommended that they follow some of the guidelines itemized above, specifically:

- In order to ensure accessibility and promote safety and inclusiveness, where possible these events should be held either on campus or in accessible public venues;
- These events should be held at a time that can accommodate the majority;
- These events should be inclusive and open to all members of the group in question;
- Faculty who host social events should ensure that there is no pressure on students to attend.

## 2. Social Media

There are many benefits to using social media to promote Department events, and certainly it is the case that for students, social media (e.g. Facebook or Instagram) are viewed as important ways of staying connected. Twitter can also be an important networking tool among philosophers. But in cases where there exists a power differential between individuals (e.g. between TAs and undergraduate students and between faculty and students), the use of social media can be problematic. We encourage individuals in positions of power and authority to consider the following:

- If a faculty member asks to 'friend' a student, this can put undue pressure on that student, who might feel obliged to say yes and might wonder whether saying no will impact her or his professional advancement; the same holds for TAs who ask to 'friend' their students;
- This behaviour may be interpreted (rightly or wrongly) as overly direct or overly friendly, or worse, it may be interpreted as romantic, which would create a possible conflict of interest, a problem that the Department and the University of Guelph take very seriously (see link above, and elaboration below);
- If faculty are 'friends' with some students on social media but not others, this could lead to favouritism, bias, and exclusivity, or at the very least, it could generate a *perception* of favouritism, bias, and exclusivity.

## 3. Speaker Series & Other Guest Lectures

It is part of the life of a vibrant philosophy department that it hosts a regular Speakers Series and brings in guest lecturers for other public talks. Our Department values an environment in which all members of its community, including visitors, are treated with collegiality. We are

encouraged when our students, staff, and faculty display basic norms of civility (see **Respectful Communication**, below) and show open-mindedness and respect to others, especially in a public context like a guest lecture. It is further recommended that:

- Invited speakers are representative of a diverse community;
- Times for the talks vary in an attempt to ensure that all the members of the philosophical community have opportunities to attend;
- Where possible, social gatherings following a talk should be held either on campus or in an accessible public venue;
- Faculty should make a good effort to attend these events, in cases where they do not have any conflicting obligations;
- These events should be inclusive, well-advertised, and open to all members of the philosophical community.

## 4. Faculty-Student Relationships

Close relationships between faculty and students can be fraught in a number of ways, predominantly because faculty are in a position of power and authority over students – in some cases over their grades, but also over their future professional advancement and career prospects, and, less obviously and tangibly, their self-esteem. When it comes to these sorts of relationships, it is up to faculty (i.e. those with power) to set appropriate boundaries with students.

The University of Guelph has a conflict of interest policy that is premised on the idea that it can be very difficult for faculty to be fair and impartial to those students with whom they are closely involved, and that these kinds of relationships can undermine the authority of faculty members to give equal consideration to *all* of their students. It should be noted that even if there is no bias or favouritism at play in these relationships, there is often the *perception* of bias or favouritism. This, in and of itself, is problematic, since other students may rightly feel discouraged if they believe that a peer is being granted an unfair advantage with respect to their grades or professional advancement. This problem can arise in both romantic and non-romantic close relationships, though these relationships bring with them distinctive concerns. This is also true of romantic relationships between TAs and their students, insofar as the same unequal power dynamics obtain.

Recently, the Department received some guidance on this issue from Tracey Jandrisits, the Assistant Vice President Faculty and Academic Staff Relations, who advised that, with respect to the Conflict of Interest policy in Article 8 in UGFA's collective agreement (linked above):

- Article 8 contains a requirement to disclose potential conflicts of interest, and the University considers this to include a sexual or otherwise intimate relationship between a student and a person in a position of power (e.g. a faculty member);
- Once a potential, perceived, or existing conflict of interest is disclosed to the chair and/or dean, the dean would then discuss viable options with the faculty member for addressing and remedying the conflict of interest;

*4.1. Faculty-Student Friendships:*

The Department recognizes that it is natural for personal relationships to develop between individuals who are working closely with one another, as is the case in many advisor/advisee relationships. These relationships often develop into ones of care and concern for students by professors. There is no one right way of maintaining these relationships, but it is important for those in the position of power in these relationships to keep in mind that the uneven power dynamic may translate into uneven levels of comfort that may be felt by the advisee vis-à-vis the adviser. For instance, students who are approached by faculty to be friends might feel that they are obliged to reciprocate the friendship, even if they do not want to do so. Here again, we encourage individuals in positions of power and authority to consider the following:

- Faculty should keep in mind that individuals have different comfort levels with sharing personal stories and hearing intimate details of each other's lives;
- Faculty should keep in mind that greetings (both welcome and farewell) vary culturally and from person to person, and should not engage in physical touching (kisses hello and goodbye, or hugging) without the consent of a student;
- Faculty should keep in mind that students might not know how to interpret social invitations for lunch or coffee, or invitations to gather at a faculty member's home, and should be aware that students might feel obliged to say yes for fear of repercussions;
- Faculty should keep in mind that developing close friendships with some students may have the unintended consequence of leaving other students feeling excluded.

*4.2. Faculty-Student Romantic Relationships*

There is a lot of literature on the potential perils of faculty-student romantic relationships (the DCC has compiled a list of resources here). The Department recognizes these potential perils and endorses the University of Guelph's conflict of interest policy on the matter. Although the Department does not (and cannot) prohibit these relationships, it strongly discourages them for reasons already articulated above, and would further like to emphasise the following:

- A sexualized workplace can negatively impact everyone who works and studies in this shared environment;

- The discovery by a student that a professor's interest in him or her is romantic, and not based on his or her academic achievements or promise, can be confusing for the student and can seriously undermine the student's self-worth, both while in graduate school and often long after that;
- Unwanted romantic attention from a faculty member can have a detrimental impact on a student and discourage him or her from fully participating in the philosophical community (e.g. attending social events or talks), or worse: it can impact their desire to continue their studies;
- Faculty should be aware that even if a romantic relationship with a student was initially consensual, the student may not feel like he or she is in a position to leave this relationship without negative repercussions to his or her academic reputation;
- Faculty should keep in mind that engaging in a romantic relationship with one student may have the unintended consequence of leaving other students feeling ignored or unimportant.

## 4.3. Graduate Student TA-Undergraduate Student Romantic Relationships

Conflicts of interest can also arise in cases between TAs and undergraduate students, in particular in those cases where a TA is responsible for grading a student. In this case the University has a general policy which is applicable to *all* employees and which states:

- All Employees have an obligation to disclose to their Supervisor any Conflict of Interest. The Employee must disclose in writing as soon as she/he could reasonably be aware that a Conflict of Interest exists. https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/node/4128/

## 5. Respectful Communication

An inclusive, welcoming, and well-functioning Department is one in which basic norms of civility are upheld and respectful communication between individuals is valued and maintained. How we treat each other and how we speak about each other matters. This is true when it comes to peer-to-peer relationships (e.g. faculty to faculty, graduate student to graduate student, staff to staff), and also in those relationships that are marked by power differentials (e.g. faculty to staff and faculty to graduate student – qua student, qua TA, qua advisee, etc.). Basic norms of civility dictate that we speak about each other and to each other – in person and electronically – in ways that are respectful, responsible, and kind. Maintaining respectful communication will help us achieve a social climate in which people are treated with mutual respect. We ask all members of our philosophical community to consider the following:

- Norms of civility prohibit communication that is offensive, rude, slanderous, and demeaning;
- Communication that takes the form of gossip about members of our philosophical community can be hurtful and divisive;

- More generally, talking about members of the Department in ways that are disparaging and accusatory can create a toxic environment and can have a negative impact on the overall morale of our philosophical community;
- There are damaging consequences felt by those on the receiving end of offensive communication or gossip. Not only is this harmful to a person's self-worth and can exacerbate feelings of isolation or estrangement from the Department, but it can have long-term consequences on a person's mental health.