

Standard Eleven: Integrity

OVERVIEW

Northeastern University was chartered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as an institution of higher education in 1916 and is dedicated to upholding the highest standards of professional conduct and compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and ordinances that may apply to university activities. The University embraces the principles of honesty, integrity, respect, and professionalism in its own conduct and the conduct of those acting on its behalf.

The University expects these principles to be upheld by all administrators, faculty, staff, and students; by outside contractors providing services to the University; and by the Board of Trustees.

DESCRIPTION

Northeastern subscribes to the statement on academic freedom promulgated by the American Association of University Professors, which is substantially incorporated into the *Faculty Handbook* (<http://www.facultysenate.neu.edu/documents/facultyhandbook.pdf>). Undergraduate and graduate student handbooks (http://www.northeastern.edu/admissions/pdfs/NEU_Student_Hdbk.pdf, <http://www.neu.edu/gradhandbook/complete.pdf>, http://CPS.neu.edu/homepage_pdfs/Bulletin_and_Student_Handbook_2007-08.pdf) further affirm that “the University and its community exist for the pursuit of truth, the exchange of knowledge, the intellectual development of students, and the general good of society. Freedom of inquiry and expression are inextricably bound with these goals.”

Northeastern is dedicated to maintaining a free, open, and welcoming academic community. The Office of Affirmative Action and Diversity, Human Resources Management, the Office of the Provost, the Office of University Counsel, the Faculty Senate, and the Division of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs are among the administrative units seeking to ensure that Northeastern adheres to nondiscriminatory practices in recruitment, admissions, employment, evaluation, disciplinary action, and advancement.

Northeastern’s Equal Opportunity Policy, circulated to the University annually by the dean of Affirmative Action and Diversity and posted in administrative and academic offices, affirms the University’s commitment to providing equal opportunity without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, religious creed, genetics, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin, ancestry, or veteran or disability status. The Equal Opportunity Policy also forbids retaliation for complaints of discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment. The Office of Affirmative Action and Diversity investigates discrimination and harassment complaints. Consequences of violating the nondiscrimination policy may include, in addition to a range of lesser sanctions, the termination of employment for faculty and staff and expulsion from the University for students, as outlined in the appropriate handbooks.

The Office of Affirmative Action and Diversity, in concert with the Office of University Counsel, sponsors workshops for Northeastern faculty and administrators aimed at informing them about their legal rights and responsibilities for preventing discrimination and harassment under the

Equal Opportunity Policy. With the Provost's Office, the Office of Affirmative Action and Diversity offers workshops for deans and unit heads on strategies for recruiting a diverse faculty. The Office of Affirmative Action and Diversity also works with the Student Affairs and the Residential Life offices on initiatives aimed at improving the campus climate for all Northeastern community members and, with Public Safety and other offices as necessary, to coordinate Northeastern's response to incidents of bias and hate on campus.

Northeastern employees are expected to maintain high standards of ethical conduct in research. The Division of Research Integrity ensures University-wide compliance with federal, state, and University statutes and regulations related to the protection of human subjects, the care and use of animal subjects in research and teaching, and research and scholarly integrity. The division has two primary units responsible for the oversight of research involving the use of human or other live animal research subjects: the Institutional Review Board, which oversees research involving human subjects, and the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, responsible for research involving the use of laboratory animals. Northeastern currently has an Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare Assurance, a requirement to receive federal funding, and is accredited by the Association for the Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC) International. AAALAC accreditation is voluntary; to be accredited is considered the "gold standard" for a laboratory animal program. To retain accreditation, programs and facilities are evaluated by outside professionals every three years.

Comprehensive policy manuals outlining the requirements for Northeastern research involving human and other live animal subjects are available through the website maintained by Research Integrity (http://www.research.neu.edu/research_integrity/). The Vice Provost for Research is responsible for investigating allegations of research misconduct under the University's Policy on Misconduct in Scholarship and Research.

All faculty and staff members are required to sign an annual conflict-of-interest form that indicates compliance with policies related to research and consulting activities that fall outside of Northeastern's direct supervision and control. At other times, employees are required to disclose any potential conflict of interest as soon as a situation arises that may create concerns about their objectivity. Members of the Boards of Trustees and Overseers also fill out annually a conflict-of-interest disclosure form.

The conflict of interest and commitment policy published in the *Faculty Handbook* (Section III.D of the current edition) and on the Provost's Office website treats in detail the ways in which Northeastern's mission as a research university emphasizing translational research may give rise to complex situations for faculty engaged in consulting, technology transfer, and other efforts aimed at bringing academic research to bear in the world outside the University's walls. The policy was most recently updated in April 2005 and transmitted to the appropriate government agencies to ensure compliance with federal regulations. The Division of Technology Transfer assists faculty researchers in forging relationships with outside partners that prevent conflicts of commitment and interest and that are compatible with Northeastern's dedication to the development and dissemination of knowledge.

A comprehensive policy on intellectual property — published in the *Faculty Handbook* (Section III.B of the current edition) and on the Provost's Office website — addresses faculty inventions, patents, and copyrightable material as well as the use of such material by faculty and students in the classroom and in their own research, scholarship, and creative work. Student handbooks also inform students of their rights and responsibilities under University policy on intellectual property.

The Student Code of Conduct (updated most recently in March 2008) is included in the *Student Handbook* and posted online at the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR) website (at www.osccr.neu.edu). The Code of Conduct seeks to foster a positive learning environment for Northeastern students. It outlines behaviors that are harmful to the campus environment, such as physical, verbal, and sexual abuse; illicit drug and alcohol consumption; and academic dishonesty. Alleged code violations are investigated by OSCCR. If evidence warrants, the case is referred to a Northeastern Student Conduct Hearing Board, composed of students selected in collaboration with the Student Government Association, the Resident Student Association, and current hearing board members. If a student is found responsible for violating the code, the hearing board may impose a range of sanctions, from deferred suspension up to expulsion in the case of repeated violations. Students may appeal the hearing board's judgment to an appeals board and benefit from a variety of other procedural protections outlined by the OSCCR website and in the *Student Handbook*.

Faculty members have access to formal grievance procedures (set forth in the *Faculty Handbook*) in disputes involving allegations of inequitable treatment, academic-freedom violation, or violation of University policy or procedures affecting the faculty member. They also have access to separate appeals processes in connection with decisions around tenure or discipline.

Tenured and tenure-track faculty members may file formal grievances with the Senate Agenda Committee; the procedure includes the option of early review and resolution by the Provost's Office, mediation by a three-person faculty committee appointed by the Senate Agenda Committee, and the faculty member's right to request arbitration if mediation does not resolve the grievance. Grievances filed by full-time non-tenure-track faculty members are heard by a three-person mediation committee constituted by the Provost's Office; this procedure does not include the option of requesting arbitration.

Staff members who have concerns, whether about their working conditions or differences with supervisors that are not resolved informally, have recourse to procedures in Human Resources Management.

All University employees are required to familiarize themselves with Northeastern's *Professional Standards and Business Conduct Policy* (<http://www.northeastern.edu/neuhome/adminlinks/prostand.pdf>), which outlines fundamental responsibilities with respect to managing University assets, overseeing appropriate use of computer and network resources, maintaining confidential data, and avoiding conflicts of interest and commitment.

The University recently established a phone and e-mail Compliance Helpline, maintained by the Office of Institutional Audit, Compliance, and Risk Services, which serves as a confidential reporting mechanism for concerns related to noncompliance, acts outside University policy,

unethical conduct, conflicts of interest, working conditions inconsistent with University policy and values, and incidents of fiscal misconduct.

APPRAISAL

Northeastern's commitment to academic freedom is well embedded in the University's culture. Over the past ten years, no formal complaints over faculty members' or students' rights to freedom in teaching, research, or scholarship have been lodged.

In the broader sphere of freedom of speech and opinion, the campus community in recent years has been enlivened by two new Northeastern student publications — the *Times New Roman*, publishing comedy and satire, and the *Northeastern Patriot*, which began publishing in 2006 as an outlet for students holding politically or socially conservative views. These new publications join the *Onyx Informer*, founded in 1972 and published bi-monthly “by and for students of color”; NUTV; and the *Northeastern News*, which as of September 2008 became the *Huntington News*. In addition, to serve a growing body of residential students, Northeastern's offerings of campus speakers and intellectual and political events have likewise grown, so far without encountering the controversies over speakers seen on some campuses.

The University is making progress on its commitment to fostering an open academic community of equal opportunity. As reported in Standards Three, Five, and Six, Northeastern's governing boards, senior administration, faculty, and student body have become more diverse over the period of the reaccreditation self-study, although in some areas — particularly the recruitment and retention of African-American faculty, students, and administration — progress remains slower than the University wishes to see. The representation of people of color on the Northeastern staff as a whole in recent years has remained fairly steady, at 18 to 20 percent.

Although Northeastern has moved forward in some dimensions, the campus community has not been free of bias incidents. In January 2007, a racist phone call directed at a faculty member helped prompt the formation of a campus-wide Committee on Harmony, Inclusion, and Justice. In addition, Affirmative Action and Diversity began working on a revised protocol for addressing hate crimes.

The Campus Climate Survey, conducted in January 2008, suggests that faculty, staff, and students generally regard Northeastern as a community respectful of differences: Mean scores on questions rating the University as “respectful of diversity,” “nonracist,” “nonsexist,” and “nonhomophobic,” among other indices, hovered around 4 (on a 5-point scale). Survey responses showed that troubling differences persist among groups, with women and people of color giving the University lower marks across the board. But mean scores also improved almost uniformly across the board since the survey's last administration in 2001, with the strongest improvements in ratings of the climate among students.

OSCCR is dealing with increasingly complex issues, especially in the areas of student-community relations and academic integrity. Northeastern's rising full-time undergraduate student numbers and the increasing concentration of students living on or near campus have made student behavior in the neighborhoods around Northeastern a matter of growing awareness.

Allegations of academic dishonesty have become more frequent: The web makes it easier for students to plagiarize or purchase coursework, while it also provides faculty with new means of

detecting dishonesty. At the same time, students live in a mashed-up world filled with serious disputes about the boundaries of authorship and intellectual property.

With these conditions in mind, the Faculty Senate's Academic Policy Committee was charged in 2006–2007 to examine issues around academic integrity at Northeastern. Their final report incorporated the recommendations of the 2006–2007 Student Government Association for revising the Academic Integrity Policy, providing students with a more explicit perspective on what constitutes academic dishonesty, and reaffirming the student government's strong commitment to academic integrity. (http://www.facultysenate.neu.edu/committees/20062007/special_committee/documents/APCRpt200607Fnl.pdf) In Spring 2008, the Faculty Senate voted to adopt the new policy. The collaboration and shared sense of purpose demonstrated here by the faculty, the academic administration, the student government, and Student Affairs underlines OSCCR's effectiveness in winning broad community support for its sometimes difficult work.

PROJECTION

The most recently updated versions of Northeastern's policies governing conflict of interest and commitment, and intellectual property will be published in academic year 2008–2009 as part of the revisions to the *Faculty Handbook*.

The University will issue and implement by Fall 2008 a new protocol for dealing with hate crimes and bias incidents on campus, and in 2008–2009 will consider for implementation the recommendations of the Committee for Harmony, Inclusion, and Justice, which seek to make the campus community more widely inclusive and increase the recruitment and retention of a more diverse faculty, staff, administration, and student body.

The Faculty Senate's Academic Policy Committee will return to its 2006–2007 report on academic integrity to develop specific proposals for improving the reporting of academic dishonesty and arriving at an appropriately sensitive and constructive range of sanctions for students found responsible for academic dishonesty.

The Institutional Review Board was audited in 2007 by an internal process at Northeastern. That audit resulted in only minor comments on such issues as education and training for faculty members involved in human subject research. As a result of those findings, all researchers who have approved human subject protocols will be asked to take IRB training. This process should be in place by Fall 2008. No for-cause audits of the IRB have been conducted by the U.S. government's Office of Human Research Protections.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Northeastern has a longstanding commitment to high ethical standards in the management of its affairs and a record of successfully administering these standards in practice. As evidenced by the intensive collaborative process of reviewing and revising the *Faculty Handbook*, the joint attention of the Faculty Senate and the Student Government Association to issues of academic integrity over the past two years, and the institutional self-examination represented by the Campus Climate Survey and the work of the Committee on Harmony, Inclusion, and Justice, the University continues to review and improve its policies for ensuring institutional integrity.