I. INTRODUCTION (Purpose and Intent)

A. The University of South Florida System (USF System) is dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, and public service. All relationships between faculty, staff and students should be guided by the principles of professionalism, integrity, mutual trust and respect. Any relationship that calls these principles into question jeopardizes the ability of the USF System to effectively carry out its mission and maintain public trust.

B. Consensual relationships between persons who differ in actual or perceived power create a potential for:

1. A conflict of interest that undermines the mutual trust between faculty and students, supervisors and subordinates, or any individual in a position of direct authority over another.

2. Actual or perceived abuse of power.

3. Allegations that the relationship resulted from coercion, exploitation and/or harassment.

4. Allegations of sexual harassment once the consensual relationship ceases (refer to USF Sexual Misconduct/Sexual Harassment Policy 0-004).

5. Allegations of favoritism and/or unfair treatment.

C. The USF System has a special responsibility toward students as members of the USF System community. The academic success of students is central to the USF System’s educational mission. The unequal institutional power inherent between students and particular members of the USF System community must be protected from influences or activities that can interfere with the learning experience. Such influences or activities are
not consistent with the ideals of a learning community that fosters collaboration, open communication, mutual respect and inclusiveness among students, faculty and staff engaged in the education process.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. For purposes of this Policy, the term employee includes, but is not limited to: all faculty, Administration employees, Staff employees, Temporary employees, all graduate assistants and other student employees, or any other employee classifications that may be developed by the Florida Board of Governors or the University of South Florida Board of Trustees.

B. For purposes of this Policy, the term student includes, but is not limited to, any individual who is enrolled in an on or off campus program leading to the award of academic or course credit from the USF System. Such enrollment may be for day or night programs whether full time or part time, regardless of the number of hours or days attending classes.

C. For purposes of this Policy, consensual relationship is defined as a relationship in which two persons are engaged by mutual consent in an amorous and/or physically intimate relationship.

D. For purposes of this Policy, direct authority is defined as the direct supervision, direction, oversight, evaluation, advisement, or substantial influence over the employment or educational status of another.

III. STATEMENT OF POLICY

A. It is a violation of USF System policy for a faculty member, academic administrator or employee to engage in an amorous, dating or sexual relationship with a student or employee whom he/she instructs, evaluates, supervises, or advises, or over whom he/she is in a position to exercise authority in any way.

B. The USF System prohibits the exercise of supervisory power by one partner in a consensual relationship that has direct authority (as defined in section [II.D.] of this policy) over the individual circumstances of the other partner in the USF System.

Accordingly, consensual relationships of the following nature that may exist prior to establishing a direct authority relationship require disclosure, management of potential conflicts of interest and the protection of professional and educational environments as described in this policy:
1. Faculty, graduate assistant, coach or other authority figure with any student that is currently under their supervision, evaluation or advisement and/or that is under their influence as to his/her employment or educational status.

2. A direct-line supervisor (e.g., Vice President, Dean, Chair, Director) or any person in a position with the authority to hire, supervise or influence the employment or salary status of an employee.

3. In addition to these circumstances, employees of the USF System that are licensed professionals in their area of employment are also prohibited from engaging in professional behavior as a USF System employee that is in violation of any specific licensure standards addressing consensual relationships.

C. Employees involved in a consensual relationship where direct authority between the individuals may exist have an obligation to disclose the existence of that relationship, as outlined in this Policy.

D. The USF System has the obligation to manage the potential conflicts of interest created by consensual relationships where direct authority between individuals exists to ensure the integrity of the work and educational environments in the USF System. Steps that may be taken to manage such conflicts of interest are listed in section [IV.C.] below.

E. A USF System employee who violates this policy is subject to disciplinary action, as appropriate. Violations of this policy may include:

1. Entering into a consensual relationship when a direct authority relationship currently exists.

2. Not disclosing the existence of a consensual relationship when a direct authority relationship is established.

3. Not establishing a plan to manage and/or resolve the conflict of interest.

IV. CIRCUMSTANCES FOR DISCLOSURE AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST MANAGEMENT OF CONSENSUAL RELATIONSHIPS

A. Should individuals who are involved in a consensual relationship where no direct authority exists, subsequently be placed in a direct authority relationship, the existence of the consensual relationship must be disclosed to the individuals’ immediate supervisor (i.e., Chair, Director, Dean, Vice President) or, if necessary, the next higher level supervisor not involved in the relationship. Impermissible relationships between a
Graduate Assistant and a student should be reported by the faculty that advises/oversees the student to that faculty’s immediate supervisor.

B. The immediate supervisor to whom a consensual relationship is disclosed is responsible for advising the individuals and determining the appropriate method to manage and/or resolve the conflict of interest that may exist due to this relationship. The immediate supervisor may choose to confer with an advisory group to assist him/her in determining the appropriate conflict resolution for the reported relationship.

C. Methods to manage and/or resolve the perceived or actual conflict of interest created by an impermissible consensual relationship may include, but are not limited to:

1. Removing the employee in a position of authority from any evaluative decision concerning the other individual.

2. Assignment of an additional, objective individual or individuals to ensure the integrity of the direct authority actions of the individuals involved in a consensual relationship.

3. Removing an advisor from their involvement as advisor or committee member with an advisee.

4. Relocation of an employee to another supervisory area.

*Current Responsible Office: USF System Services

*Refer to the appropriate Responsible Office website for a current name of the Vice President or other Responsible Officer.