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Faculty Senate - Resolution On Romantic Relationships: Proposed for Adoption at October 21, 2013 Meeting

Faculty Senate

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**RESOLUTION FROM THE FACULTY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
OF THE FACULTY SENATE
PROPOSED FOR ADOPTION AT A MEETING OF THE
FACULTY SENATE TO BE HELD ON
October 21, 2013**

WHEREAS, under Article III, Section 2.G. of the Bylaws of the Faculty Senate, the Faculty Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate “is responsible for reviewing proposed revisions and recommending changes to the *Faculty Handbook* in accordance with the amendments procedures set forth in the *Faculty Handbook*,” and for reviewing proposed revisions and recommending changes to the *Manual for Faculty Evaluation* in accordance with the amendments procedures set forth in the *Manual for Faculty Evaluation*,” and

WHEREAS, romantic and/or sexual relationships between faculty and students can be damaging to the student, constitute a conflict of interest for the faculty member, expose the faculty member and the University to charges of sexual harassment, and poison the learning atmosphere; and

WHEREAS, the numbering of the sections in Section 2 of the *Faculty Handbook* is inconsistent with the other sections; and

WHEREAS, under Section 8.3 of the *Faculty Handbook*, the Faculty Senate Faculty Affairs Committee “is responsible for recommending changes, which should have input from the chancellor, the vice president, and their administrative staff including deans for consideration by the Faculty Senate Executive Council and final consideration by the full Faculty Senate;” and

WHEREAS, the Faculty Senate Faculty Affairs Committee has reviewed —and sought (i) input from the chancellors of UTK and UTIA and (ii) consideration by the Faculty Senate Executive Council on— the various sections of the *Faculty Handbook* and the *Manual for Faculty Evaluation* related to this issue; now, therefore it is

RESOLVED, that the language in Section 2 of the *Faculty Handbook* be changed as follows:

New language = underlined

Deleted language = ~~strikethrough~~

- ~~2.11~~2.1.1 Academic Freedom
- ~~2.12~~2.1.2 Tenure
- ~~2.13~~2.1.3 Freedom as a Citizen
- ~~2.21~~2.2.1 The Importance of Scholarship
- ~~2.22~~2.2.2 Teaching
- ~~2.23~~2.2.3 Research / Scholarship / Creative Activity
- ~~2.24~~2.2.4 Service
- ~~2.25~~2.2.5 Professional Conduct

2.2.6 Romantic and/or Sexual Relations between Faculty and Students

UTK's educational mission requires an atmosphere of professional behavior based upon mutual trust and respect between faculty and students. Relationships between students and their teachers, advisors, and others holding positions of authority over them should be conducted in a manner that avoids potential conflicts of interest or exploitation. Given the inherent differences in power between faculty and students, all members of the university community should recognize the possibility of intentional or unintentional abuse of that power.

Commonly accepted standards of professional behavior and ethics require that faculty members not hold advisory or mentoring, evaluative, or supervisory power over any student with whom they have a romantic and/or sexual relationship; such a relationship constitutes an inherent conflict of interest. Faculty members who engage in these relationships also leave themselves vulnerable to charges of sexual harassment. Incidents of harassment and discrimination will be met with appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. Even when both parties initially have consented, such a relationship renders both the faculty member and the institution vulnerable to possible later allegations of sexual harassment in the light of the significant power differential that exists between faculty and students. In addition, even an amicable romantic relationship can be damaging to the institution due to instances of or even the appearance of favoritism. Such relationships bear the potential to undermine the atmosphere of trust that is essential to the educational process. Thus, a faculty member must not initiate or accept such a relationship with a student over whom such faculty member has an advisory, mentoring, evaluative or supervisory role. Should such a relationship exist between a faculty member and a student, the faculty member must establish alternate evaluative or supervisory arrangements. In addition, faculty who are in the position to influence academic or employment decisions about students with whom they are in a romantic and/or sexual relationship must recuse themselves from such decisions.

Violations of this policy should be immediately reported to the Office of Equity and Diversity, which will take appropriate action.