PROFESSIONAL CODE OF ETHICS

Developed for the Miramar College Academic Senate

The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges adopted the “AAUP Ethics Statement” and in April 1988 released a paper entitled, “Why The Academic Senate Has Adopted The AAUP Ethics Statement.” The AAUP statement and explanation for its adoption have been quite helpful to local senates in discussions of ethics. However, community college faculty face situations which are distinctly different from those faced by university professors. Furthermore, since the time the ethics statement was adopted by the Academic Senate, AB1725 has become law, and the bills redefinition of the community college faculty profession has resulted in an abundance of ethical questions regarding faculty roles, responsibilities, and obligations. Subsequently the educational policies committee of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges developed a supplement to the AAUP ethics statement to offer expanded discussions on several issues which typically face faculty in California’s Community Colleges.

The AAUP ethics document consists of five statements outlining faculty responsibilities to their disciplines, students, colleagues, institutions, and communities. The text of these statements is included in this paper. They serve as an excellent foundation in principles upon which decisions of ethical behavior can be based. This paper expands those principles in the areas of scholarly competence, honest academic conduct of students, cultural and gender sensitivity, the free pursuit of learning, avoiding exploitation of faculty and students, sexual harassment, academic standards, contributing to the profession, and academic freedom.

AAUP STATEMENT, PART I

DEVELOPING SCHOLARLY COMPETENCE

Professors, guided by a deep conviction of the worth and dignity of the advancement of knowledge, recognize the special responsibilities placed upon them. Their primary responsibility to their subject is to and to state the truth as they see it. To this end professors devote their energies to developing and improving their scholarly competence. They accept the obligation to exercise critical self-discipline and judgment in using, extending, and transmitting knowledge. They practice intellectual honesty. Although professors may follow subsidiary interests, these interests must never seriously hamper or compromise their freedom of inquiry.

DEVELOPING SCHOLARLY COMPETENCE

Every discipline requires scholarship. Just as doctors are obligated to keep abreast of new developments in medicine and attorneys are required to know evolving laws, faculty must keep up with new developments in their disciplines and in teaching methods. It is a faculty member’s obligation to pursue professional and academic development enabling them to infuse appropriate changes in curriculum as necessary.
In addition, faculty have academic freedom to pursue the truth as their conscience and reason would lead them. The intellectual virtues of being open-minded, fair, honest and objective in the consideration of differing views, being thorough in research, avoiding the “fudging” of data, reaching a well-reasoned viewpoint, and the like, should all be fostered within the intellectual character of faculty member.

Of course, these attitudes toward learning are precisely what faculty are trying to get their students to acquire, therefore, faculty are obligated to teach and lead by example. Modeling critical thinking and attempting to instill in students intellectual virtues which foster critical thinking is a key responsibility for faculty. Indoctrination, the enemy of critical thinking, must be rejected by faculty.

In other words, modeling a democratic style rather than an authoritarian one is more appropriate. Instead of trying to control to beliefs, opinions and values of our students, encouraging pluralistic dialogue is an ethical necessity. Teaching students, by the example of our classes, to respect differing views and how to benefit from the wisdom often found in ideas with which one disagrees can provide a profound learning experience for students.

AAUP STATEMENT. PART II

As teachers, professors encourage the free pursuit of knowledge in their students. They hold before them the best scholarly and ethical standards of their discipline. Professors demonstrate respect for students as individuals and adhere to their proper roles as intellectual guides, counselors, and mentors. Professors make every reasonable effort to foster honest academic conduct and to ensure that their evaluations of students reflect each student’s demonstrated academic performance. They respect the confidential nature of the relationship between professor and student. Faculty avoid any exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment of students. Faculty acknowledge significant academic or scholarly assistance from students. Faculty protect student’s academic freedom.

MAINTAINING HONEST ACADEMIC CONDUCT

Faculty have an obligation to prevent academic dishonesty among students. Types of dishonesty include copying from others, turning in work that is not the student’s own, and using references without appropriate citation. Faculty must provide a definition of acceptable academic conduct. Setting up testing situations that minimize the potential for misconduct is an essential strategy for preventing academic dishonesty.

Colleges should have a policy on honest academic conduct, developed by the Academic Senate. Faculty are obliged to make sure that these policies are published, maintained, and provide the appropriate due process standards and procedures. In addition, faculty need to openly express a zero tolerance policy toward academic dishonesty. Students who behave dishonestly should face the retributive consequences consistent with the
SDCCD’s policies. (See Miramar catalog, class schedule, and SDCCD’s Faculty Survival Guide).

Finally, there are rules and expectations of proper academic behavior that should be articulated and taught within the framework of the respective academic discipline. Respect for students requires that all be held to the same standards in demeaning, insulting, and discriminatory.

INSURING CULTURAL AND GENDER SENSITIVITY: RESPECTING STUDENTS AS INDIVIDUALS

The ability to respect the student as an individual is an ethical imperative for faculty. All students, as individuals, deserve the respect of faculty regardless of their cultural background, ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, political ideologies, disability, sexual orientation, age, or socioeconomic status.

One of the challenges of being an educator is to reach our students at their current point of understanding. When relating to students as individuals, faculty must recognize the unique circumstances of each student’s life. In particular, some students may possess learning styles which hinder them from benefiting from traditional methods of instruction. Faculty have the responsibility to seek out a variety of pedagogical tools to reach those students.

Students look to faculty as role models. Not only must faculty exhibit an appreciation and respect for students from all backgrounds, but it is imperative that they teach tolerance, appreciation, and respect for others within their respective disciplines. Affirming students’ abilities, strengthening their self identities, and assisting them to reach their full potential is a model worth emulating.

ENCOURAGING THE FREE PURSUIT OF LEARNING: SECURING STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS

One could say that the idea of open access is the quintessential expression of democracy in education and that open access exemplifies the free pursuit of learning. As participants in the development of educational policies at our institutions, we must remain diligent to protect students’ rights to freely pursue their education, watching closely to prevent barriers to access, particularly to those from historically under-represented groups. Faculty have an ethical and legal responsibility as educators to reduce as much as possible all barriers to the pursuit of education and, indeed, to actively seek new methods to assure our students’ success.

AVOIDING EXPLOITATION OF FACULTY AND STUDENTS

Exploitation of faculty and students can take many guises. Be it for personal financial gain, sexual gratification, or any other reason, such exploitation is to be avoided at all
costs. It is a fundamental ethical principle that individuals in power and authority should not use their advantaged position for their own gain or to advance their own self-interest.

In light of the fact that the educational profession is one in which trust between faculty member and student best maximizes the results of the learning experience, it is especially reprehensible for faculty to use their power and authority for such self-gratification.

There is perhaps no greater violation of authority and power in higher education than when a faculty member harasses or exploits students. When students come to college, they are embarking on a new stage in their lives. They have fears and insecurities about their abilities and what the future holds for them. Many tend to view faculty with a greater sense of awe than faculty deserve. They tend to trust faculty beyond areas of others. To take advantage of individuals in those conditions where faculty have more power and resources than the students is ethically inexcusable.

The trading of personal services or favors for grades, privilege or recognition is ethically indefensible. Students must be evaluated solely on the basis of academic standards.

Faculty must become sensitive to even the perception of exploitation or harassment that those with whom they interact may reasonably have. Exploitation includes the perception of the one feeling exploited, not just the intentions of the initiator. The faculty member is obligated to create a learning environment free of hostility and coercion.

AAUP STATEMENT, PART III

As colleagues, professors have obligations that derive from common membership in the community of scholars. Professors do not discriminate against or harass colleagues. They respect and defend the free inquiry of associates. In the exchange of criticism and ideas, professors show due respect for the opinions of others. Professors acknowledge academic debt and strive to be objective in their professional judgment of colleagues. Professors accept their share of faculty responsibilities for the governance of their institution.

ESTABLISHING ACADEMIC STANDARDS

California Community Colleges have the dual mission of preparing individuals for work and citizenship. The competitive society students enter and work within after they leave the campus will reward then with regard to the level of their job performance. Successful depend on being qualified and competent in one’s career field. So, to prepare students for the world of work and to avoid misleading them as to what they can expect once they leave the campus, it is important to evaluate students in a manner which is consistent with the academic standards of the discipline.

Academic standards should not be relative. They are determined in the context of one’s academic discipline by the community of scholars within the discipline. They should not differ significantly from one faculty member to another within the same discipline teaching the same or similar course(s). If, for example, there is significantly variation in
grading criteria and standards among faculty who teach courses that are prerequisites, then clearly the students, the subsequent courses, and the disciplines are harmed.

Additionally, the inculcation of factual data is not the sole, or even primary, purpose of higher education. The acquisition of intellectual skills is much more important.

Title 5 requires writing and critical thinking across the curriculum, but even if this were not so, faculty are ethically obligated to infuse in their courses meaningful writing assignments and critical thinking exercises. Evaluated assignments should aim toward the student developing skills necessary in a world where success is achieved by adaptability and problem solving abilities more than by information mastering. In this age of easily accessible information, students could never memorize all which could be known, and, in fact, there is no need to do so when thinking skills will lead them to the appropriate data bank or reference text. Rather, what is needed is to be able to “learn to learn.”

Finally, the mastery that faculty have of their own discipline and scholarship entitles then to their classroom and the freedom of the presentation of their subject matter. However, it is unethical for a faculty member to persistently intrude unrelated material or fail to offer the subject matter advertised for the course.

AAUP STATEMENT, PART IV

As member of an academic institution, professors seek above all to be effective teachers and scholars. Although professors observe the stated regulations of the institution, provided the regulations do not contravene academic freedom, they maintain their right to criticize and seek revision. Professors give due regard to their paramount responsibilities to the college in determining the amount and character of work done outside the institution. When considering the interruption or termination of their service, professors recognize the effect of their decision upon the program of the institution and give due notice of their intentions.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROFESSION

Being a faculty member is a profession rather than a job or occupation. Being a faculty member involves participating in a profession in which the freedom of expression is of paramount importance to ensure the open exchange of ideas. As a consequence, faculty necessarily are self-directed and, to a certain extent, determine the nature and quantity of their workload. Faculty have the job security that the status of tenure guarantees. To ensure that workload abuses do not occur, it is important for faculty to maintain standards of professionalism.

Not all aspects of professionalism can be discussed here, but the following activities would seem to be required for faculty to fulfill the minimal ethical duties their profession requires.
First, aspiring to excellence in their discipline is the highest goal for a faculty member. (See the topic “Developing Scholarly Competence” under the first ethics statement.) Faculty should spend ample time in developing and perfecting their craft and guard against outside activities that compromise the ability to appropriately prioritize academic and professional activities.

Second, faculty should be participants, when appropriate, in faculty organizations and discipline organizations. It is within these forums that faculty are kept up to date in their fields and are participants in discussions relating to academic and professional matters. These involvements ultimately benefit students in the classroom.

Third, in a post-AB1725 era where faculty, by law, have primary responsibility for determining policy on academic and professional matters, it is important for faculty to take their governance participation seriously. Faculty should attend meetings, study the issues, and make suggestions on how to resolve the issues. Professional and ethical faculty leadership and participation requires forthrightness and truthfulness. Every effort should be made to be inclusionary in policy decisions, even if inclusion creates additional responsibilities.

Finally, faculty leadership in governance carries the obligation of representation. A representative of a college segment or constituency needs to respond to and respect the desires and will of the constituency. A representative should avoid using participation in governance to advance a self-interested agenda. A representative should, first and foremost, think about what is in the best interest of students and what best contributes to a student-centered college environment.

AAUP STATEMENT, PART V.

As members of their community, professors have the rights and obligations in the light of their responsibilities to their subject, to their students, to their profession, and to their institution. When they speak or act as private persons, they avoid creating the impression of speaking or acting for the college. As citizens engaged in a profession that depends upon freedom for its health and integrity, professors have a particular obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom.

MAINTAINING ACADEMIC FREEDOM

By nature and definition, a college campus embraces the value of academic freedom. In order to pursue truth, survey the marketplace of ideas, and acquire knowledge and understanding, both faculty and students must have the freedom to express their views and be safe from reprisals. However, there are obligations which accompany academic freedom.
The first obligation in maintaining academic freedom is to create a learning environment in the classroom which fosters the free exchange of ideas. In other words, we should encourage the expression of diverse views and the appreciation of those views. For example, if in an “Introduction to Philosophy” class, the instructor only permitted the view of theism to be expressed, that instructor would be undermining academic freedom.

The second obligation which is required to maintain academic freedom is to clearly distinguish when one is speaking for oneself and when one is speaking as a representative of the educational institution. The classroom should not be used as a forum for the advancement of personal causes. Our obligation is to inform, not to prejudice. If a stormy political issue arises, we can certainly encourage a lively discussion of all facets of the situation. However, we cannot present just our view or advocate only our own position. As informed private citizens, we certainly should be involved in promoting our views and influencing decision-making but not in the classroom.

Updated and Approved as is April 3, 2007