

***Rutgers SGS-Newark Health Science Campus  
Teacher-Learner Policy in Graduate Education***

Section: SGS - Office of Student Affairs and Admissions

Name: Rutgers School of Graduate Studies (SGS)-Newark Health Science Campus

The Teacher-Learner Relationship and The Learning Environment in Graduate Education

Prepared and Approved by:

Approved by: SGS-RBHS Newark Executive Council Date:

-----

**I. PURPOSE**

The Rutgers SGS Newark Health Science Campus strongly believes that teaching and learning should take place in a climate of mutual respect where students and faculty are equally responsible for maintaining a professional and collegial environment. An environment where students are evaluated based upon accomplishment, professionalism and academic performance. We are committed to maintaining a positive learning environment and the highest standards of behavior in the teacher-student relationship. Rutgers SGS Newark Health Science Campus maintains its commitment to the highest standards of professionalism and preventing student abuse through education, by providing support for those who are subjected to mistreatment, and by responding with corrective action to incidences of abuse and unprofessionalism.

This policy addresses the behaviors required from all those who are involved in educating and research mentoring of our Master's and PhD students, including faculty members, staff, or students in a teaching role. It is intended to ensure an educational environment in which students, staff, volunteers, and faculty may raise and resolve issues without fear of intimidation or retaliation. The Associate Dean for Student Affairs oversees the implementation of this policy.

This policy is applicable to all the didactic courses taught by faculty of the Rutgers SGS-Newark Health Science Campus as well courses taken by graduate students in the Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and the Rutgers School of Dental Medicine. This policy is also applicable to the 2-credit research rotation, the Master's thesis research, the Ph.D. thesis research and to the experiential learning courses (e.g. Pharmaceutical Internship and Teacher Training internship) where instructors are not part of the Rutgers SGS faculty.

This policy on mistreatment prevention and the learning environment has four main components:

1. A statement of the Rutgers SGS-Newark Health Science Campus standards of behavior with regard to mistreatment, including: a definition of mistreatment; examples of types of

## ***Rutgers SGS-Newark Health Science Campus Teacher-Learner Policy in Graduate Education***

mistreatment; persons who may be the object or perpetrator of mistreatment; and the purpose of the policy on mistreatment.

2. A plan for the ongoing education of the Rutgers SGS Newark Health Science Campus community concerning these standards of behavior and professionalism and the process by which they are upheld.
3. A description of the Rutgers SGS Newark Health Science Campus process for responding to allegations of mistreatment.
4. A description of options that are available to all members of the Rutgers SGS Newark Health Science Campus for reporting incidences of unprofessional behavior exhibited by anyone in the learning environment.

### **II. STANDARDS**

The Rutgers SGS Newark Health Science Campus is committed to cultivating an environment with a focus on quality education, fair treatment and ethical conduct. To do so, there are standards of behavior that we must maintain in the teacher-learner relationship. Inappropriate or destructive behaviors that would be considered unacceptable include:

- Verbal abuse (attack in words, or speaking insultingly, harshly)
- Comments and jokes of stereotypic or ethnic connotation, visual harassment (display of derogatory cartoons, drawings or posters)
- Physical contact, including any physical mistreatment or assaults such as hitting, slapping, kicking, throwing objects or threats of the same nature
- Inappropriate or unprofessional conduct that is unwarranted and reasonably interpreted to be demeaning or offensive
- Requiring a student to perform tasks intended to humiliate, control, or intimidate the student
- Unreasonable requests for a student to perform personal services
- Grading or assigning tasks used to punish a student rather than to evaluate or improve performance
- Purposeful neglect or exclusion from learning opportunities as means of punishment
- Sexual assault or other acts of sexual violence
- Sexual harassment
- Disregard for student safety

While constructive criticism is appropriate in the teacher-learning process, it should be handled in such a way as to promote learning and avoid purposeful student humiliation. Feedback that has negative elements is generally more useful when delivered in a private setting that fosters discussion and behavior modification. All feedback should focus on behavior rather than personal characteristics and should avoid derogatory labeling.

## ***Rutgers SGS-Newark Health Science Campus Teacher-Learner Policy in Graduate Education***

### III. EDUCATION AND PREVENTION

The goal of educating the members of the Rutgers SGS Newark Health Science Campus is

- A. To promote an environment respectful of all individuals and provide ongoing education to students, postdoctoral fellows, faculty, and other staff that emphasizes the importance of professional and collegial attitudes and behavior.
- B. To eliminate teaching and training behaviors that do not promote a positive learning environment, characterized by attitudes of mutual respect and collegiality.

The methods for disseminating and providing information and education to specific groups are described below and are subject to annual review by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs:

- i) Graduate (Master's and Ph.D.) Students
  - (1) The policy will be included in the Student Handbook.
  - (2) The topic will be addressed at all orientations.
  - (3) The policy will be added to all course syllabi.
  - (4) Questions to address teacher learner interactions will be added to end of course evaluations.
- ii) Faculty, Staff and Postdoctoral Fellows
  - (1) An informative written message will be sent each year from the Associate Dean for Student Affairs to all departmental chairs.
  - (2) Each year all faculty, teaching assistants, students and staff will complete a training and they will have to complete the attestation of this policy which should be link to the Rutgers portal.
  - (3) Chairs will also direct the course directors and track directors (Master's and PhD level) to convey this information to all adjunct faculty who participate in the teaching process to ensure that all faculty are cognizant of the policy.

### IV. COMMUNICATION OF COMPLAINTS AND RESOLUTION MECHANISMS

Due to the sensitive nature of such complaints and the need to occasionally deal with these issues either without the consent of the reporter or without revealing the identity of the reporter, several mechanisms need to be in place for resolution and communication of the resolution of the issue.

The faculty and administration must be able to assure learners they will be "protected" when making truthful reports of abuse or unprofessional behavior on the part of others, even when their identity must be disclosed. Such reporting is a professional obligation on the students' part as members of our educational community. Members of our educational community including faculty and staff who witness others being abusive to learners or exhibiting

## ***Rutgers SGS-Newark Health Science Campus Teacher-Learner Policy in Graduate Education***

unprofessional behavior are also expected to report these incidents. This will help to create a better learning environment for all.

A complaint should be reported as soon as possible but not more than 90 (ninety) days after the alleged incident. Several avenues (listed below) are open to the student who experiences an incident of inappropriate behavior and mistreatment or is the witness to unprofessional behavior. The same pathways may be used by faculty and staff who witness abusive and/or unprofessional behavior. In situations where the observed behavior does not involve a learner, the faculty and staff members also have the option of addressing the issue with a supervisor of the person exhibiting the behavior.

### **A. Informal Pathway**

#### **1. Addressing the Issue Directly**

The student may consider speaking directly with the person. If the behavior stems from a misunderstanding or a need for increased sensitivity, the person will often respond positively and stop. Open communication may clarify any misunderstanding or issue(s) and lead to a successful, informal resolution.

#### **2. Counseling and Guidance**

A student, who has concerns about the learning environment, may speak with the Course Director, the Associate Dean for Student Affairs or a Faculty Mentor.

#### **3. Reporting to the Rutgers SGS Campus Ombudsperson**

A student who has concerns about the learning environment can also speak with the SGS Newark Health Science Campus Ombudsperson who can provide counsel on how to address the situation and suggest additional resources or people to contact. Interactions with the ombudsperson are completely confidential and are not reported to any other Rutgers University entities or personnel.

#### **4. Consultation with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs**

If Steps 1, 2 or 3 are not successful or appropriate, a student must refer the complaint to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, who may attempt to achieve an informal resolution.

All involved parties must agree upon all informal resolutions. For tracking purposes, a written record of the resolution must be filed with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs; however, this can be done without reference to specific names.

### **B. Formal Resolutions via University Policy**

## ***Rutgers SGS-Newark Health Science Campus Teacher-Learner Policy in Graduate Education***

Once an alleged mistreatment has been identified there are multiple tiers of formal resolution. Resolution of reported actions which are not egregious or reported in an anonymous fashion will be up to the discretion of the course director and other members of SGS administration. For tracking purposes, a written record of the resolution must be filed with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. Any actions identified in the University Policies on sexual assault, sexual harassment, bullying and other types of harassment, or other violations of ethics or codes of conducts, must be reported and handled in accordance with policies that address these violations.

Resolution of reported actions which are recurrent or egregious will be reviewed by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs who will follow the procedures below:

### Initial Inquiry

1. Inquiry into a violation of these standards of conduct committed by any individual will be initiated after a written complaint is filed with the Associate Dean of Student Affairs. The complaint should be filed within 90 (ninety) days of the violation. The complaint should include the following:
  - a) Names of all parties involved
  - b) Approximate dates or date range of the violation(s)
  - c) Detailed and specific description
  - d) Additional documents or proof.
2. The Associate Dean of Student Affairs has the responsibility to protect the position and reputation of the complainant.
3. Upon receipt of a properly documented complaint, which has been made in good faith, the Associate Dean of Student Affairs shall inform the respondent of the nature of the charges and identify the complainant. The Associate Dean of Student Affairs shall also appoint an inquiry officer, who may not be a member of the same department as, or collaborator with, the complainant or respondent. The inquiry officer shall have no conflicts of interest or appearance of conflict of interest in the matter and have appropriate background to judge the issues being raised. He/she must be a faculty member of the Rutgers SGS Newark Health Science Campus. An inquiry officer will be appointed within two weeks of the receipt of a properly documented complaint and the complainant and respondent will be notified. The Associate Dean for Student Affairs shall also make every effort to protect the identities of both complainant and respondent with respect to the larger community.
4. The inquiry officer shall gather information and determine whether the allegation warrants a formal investigation. He/she shall then submit a written report to the Senior Associate Dean, the complainant, and the respondent. The report shall state what

***Rutgers SGS-Newark Health Science Campus  
Teacher-Learner Policy in Graduate Education***

evidence was reviewed, summarize relevant interviews, and include conclusions. This report shall ordinarily be submitted within 30 calendar days of receipt of the written complaint by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. If the inquiry officer finds that a formal investigation is not warranted, the complainant shall be given the opportunity to make a written reply to the officer within 15 calendar days following receipt of the report to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. If the inquiry officer finds that a formal investigation is warranted, the respondent shall be given the opportunity to make a written reply to the report within 15 calendar days following submission of the report to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. Such replies shall be incorporated as appendices to the report. The entire preliminary inquiry process shall be completed within 60 calendar days of the receipt of a properly documented complaint by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs unless circumstances clearly reveal that in the interests of the parties involved the process be expedited or warrant a delay. In such cases the record of inquiry shall detail reasons for the delay.

5. If the report of the inquiry officer finds that a formal investigation is not warranted, the Associate Dean for Student Affairs may:
  - i. initiate a formal investigation despite the recommendation of the preliminary inquiry officer, or
  - ii. not initiate a formal investigation, but may attempt to address the issue through an informal pathway, or
  - iii. drop the matter.

The Associate Dean for Student Affairs ordinarily shall complete the review within 10 days of receipt of the report. The Associate Dean for Student Affairs shall inform the concerned parties of the decision. In the event the Associate Dean for Student Affairs determines not to initiate a formal investigation, the Associate Dean for Student Affairs shall, as appropriate, protect the position and reputation of the complainant if the complaint is found to have been made in good faith.

6. If no formal investigation of the respondent is conducted, sufficient documentation shall be kept on file to permit a later assessment of the reasons that a formal investigation was not deemed warranted.
7. If the report of the inquiry officer finds that a formal investigation is warranted or the Associate Dean for Student Affairs decides the matter should be pursued through a formal investigation the Associate Dean for Student Affairs shall:
  - notify the complainant and respondent
  - initiate a formal investigation as provided below

***Rutgers SGS-Newark Health Science Campus  
Teacher-Learner Policy in Graduate Education***

- Formal Investigation and Resolutions via University Policy (refer to [policies.rutgers.edu](http://policies.rutgers.edu) and <http://uhr.rutgers.edu/policies-resources/policies-procedures> for additional information)

At the present time there are formal University Policies on Prohibiting Discrimination and Harassment, Equal Employment Opportunity and Code of Ethics. There is also an established process for reporting compliance and ethics concerns which outline responsibilities of the student or employee, and the roles of the Office of Human Resources , the respondent, and the supervisor of the respondent. Any formal investigation and resolution process must comply with the guidance offered in these policies. Appropriate investigatory procedures will be utilized in situations where a formal investigation is deemed necessary. All resolutions, including but not limited to the imposition of discipline, shall be approved by the Dean or his designee and will comply with the procedures set forth in University policies and/or applicable collective bargaining agreements. Student complaints against fellow students are governed by the Student Rights, Responsibilities and Disciplinary Procedures Policy.