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The University of Windsor's proposed Faculty-Student Intimate Relations Policy could produce serious consequences for faculty and staff entering into relationships with students.

The document, currently under review, states that any professor or person with decision making authority involved in a sexual relationship or deep emotional bond with a student may ultimately be subject to dismissal.

"We have been putting a lot of these policies into place and this is just part of a larger trend," said Academic Affairs vice-president, Bruce Tucker. The policy will contextualize the conduct professors should already be using.

"What we are concerned about is that the professional relationship is maintained so the student can have a fair and objective assessment of his or her work," asserted Tucker.

This school year has produced no reported instances, so far. However, multiple incidents have occurred in past years. The University's Human Rights Commission reported that up to seven cases have been filed in one year, which is a trend that the institution is looking to curtail.

"I think [the policy] is really good because sexual harassment is very prevalent in post-secondary education. I think it is great to have a specific, express-written document that sets out obligations [of the professors]," said Human Rights commissioner, Cheryl Henshaw.

The policy was developed to hold professors, and other staff members in positions of authority, accountable for their actions. If a professor has previously engaged in, or is going to enter into, an intimate relationship with a student, the professor must report the affair to the department head.

"Some female students who got involved with professors have left the University and not finished their program," Henshaw stressed. "The psychological impact can be really devastating."

Students and professors who are attracted to each other cross into dangerous territory.

Essentially, when a student-teacher relationship is visibly active, other students may hold objections that the professor is giving the intimate partner preferential treatment. This sentiment has been echoed by multiple faculty members, including psychology professor Jill Jackson.

"Once, I had a student who told me she was very disgusted with (a male professor) because she believed he was involved with another female in the class, and that this female was receiving preferential treatment from him," claimed Jackson.

However, Jackson was quick to add she believes the majority of the University's faculty members conduct themselves in a professional manner.

This message characterized what may become a sticky issue for students — where the policy draws the line between friendship and relationship.

Even though the policy serves to protect students from subjective grading and moral compromising, it still allows students and professors to converse on a social basis outside the classroom, so long as they are not extending themselves beyond the reasonable bounds of friendship.

This mixed message has left some individuals scratching their heads about in what manner professors should interact with students. Many students, however, trust professors and others in authority to behave responsibly.

"If the (professor) is mature enough to have (a relationship), they should be mature enough to act in an orderly fashion. I think the first thing I would want, if I were a student in a relationship, is to make sure it doesn't affect what happens in class," said second-year Fine Arts student, Jon Ryan.

Jackson agreed. "[A relationship] is hard to define, but easy to recognize when it's gone too far."

The university is looking to introduce the policy later this fall.