Expectations of Ethical Conduct

Policy Type: Board of Visitors
Responsible Office: Integrity and Compliance Office, Audit and Compliance Services
Initial Policy Approved: New
Current Revision Approved: 12/07/2018

Policy Statement and Purpose

As members of the university community, the responsibilities to educate, innovate and inform, alongside the expectation of ethical conduct, are taken seriously. Each member of the university community is responsible for developing and educating others in an environment that is supportive, collaborative and safe. To achieve VCU’s goals, each member of the university community must foster an environment that celebrates and supports the university community and its members.

The values and ethical principles of Virginia Commonwealth University are outlined in the university’s Code of Conduct. This framework helps to articulate behaviors expected in an environment in which all individuals have the opportunity to thrive and feel respected, engaged, innovative and productive and are encouraged to lead by example. All individuals must conduct themselves in accordance with the university’s ethical standards outlined in this policy and the Code of Conduct, which are central to and in support of VCU’s mission. These standards serve as a lens for every decision. Employee conduct that falls below these standards may result in VCU taking steps to improve performance through the performance evaluation process. Certain conduct may warrant disciplinary action that accords with the nature and severity of the conduct.

In everything VCU undertakes, it sets its expectations high. VCU’s commitment to the highest standards helps attract and retain great people, inspire student success, create and innovate, and build a strong and supportive university community that is singularly focused on excellence.

The purpose of this policy is to emphasize the conduct expected to best uphold the university’s commitment to its ethical standards, which were first approved by the Board of Visitors in 2005 as the Code of Ethics and thereafter outlined in the Code of Conduct as the ethical standards. This policy is not intended to replace, and may be supplemented by, other more specific university policies that currently exist or that may be adopted in the future.

Recognizing the various and complex ethical questions that may arise while engaged in university activities, this policy can serve only as a general set of rules. When faced with ethically unclear situations, individuals are expected to consider the university’s commitment to the highest ethical standards and seek
guidance from their managers, supervisors or other appropriate resources to ensure that this commitment to ethical conduct is maintained at all times.

Exceptions:
The VCU Board of Visitors and students (not also employed by VCU) are not covered by this policy. Instead, students follow the Student Code of Conduct and Honor System policy and the Board of Visitors follows BOV Bylaws and a specialized Board of Visitors' Ethical Leadership policy that sets forth the ethical expectations for executing the member’s service role.

Noncompliance with this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment. VCU supports an environment free from retaliation. Retaliation against any employee who brings forth a good faith concern, asks a clarifying question, or participates in an investigation is prohibited.

Who Should Know This Policy

All employees (referred to herein as “individuals” and includes administrators, faculty and staff) are responsible for knowing this policy, familiarizing themselves with its contents and practicing VCU’s ethical standards.

Definitions

Misconduct
Failing to meet VCU expectations (laws, regulations or university policies) whether intentional or inadvertent

University Resources
Include, but are not limited to: equipment; technologies/software; network/electronic systems; records (both paper and electronic); funds (both cash and cash equivalents such as checks, postage and purchasing cards); facilities; and vehicles.
VCU’s Ethical Standards:
In carrying out VCU’s mission to advance knowledge and student success, all individuals are expected to promote and contribute to an organizational culture of respect, honesty, excellence, accountability and responsibility, stewardship and compliance with all applicable laws, regulations and university policies. The VCU Code of Conduct outlines the ethical standards discussed in this policy and also provides guidance for making ethical business decisions and supporting the university’s commitment to compliance and integrity. All individuals are expected to adhere to VCU’s ethical standards, which are the following:

We are committed to an environment of uncompromising integrity and ethical conduct. Our ethical standards are the foundation for our decisions and actions. As members of the faculty, staff and administration of VCU, our actions are guided by these principles:

- **Respect - We respect individuals, diversity and the rights of others.**
  - Individuals are expected to treat everyone in the VCU community with respect. This means prioritizing professionalism and civility and not engaging in behavior that could be reasonably viewed as harassing, hostile, intimidating or disrespectful and refraining from using offensive or inflammatory or aggressive language. It also means being inclusive and embracing diverse perspectives and treating others fairly and courteously. This fosters an environment where everyone can contribute, innovate, and excel, and demonstrates an appreciation of the value each person brings to the VCU community.

- **Honesty - We act and communicate honestly and candidly. We do not mislead others.**
  - Individuals are expected to be objective, truthful, forthcoming and accurate when interacting and communicating with members of the VCU community.

- **Excellence - We strive for excellence in all that we do.**
  - Individuals are expected to strive for the highest quality, seek continuous improvement and follow through on work-related commitments while upholding the VCU Code of Conduct, VCU’s policies and procedures, and applicable laws and regulations.

- **Responsibility & Accountability - We are responsible and accountable for our decisions and actions.**
  - Individuals are expected to:
    - Demonstrate VCU’s ethical standards in everyday decisions and activities
    - Become familiar and comply with all applicable university policies and procedures and applicable laws and regulations
Support others, including third parties, in remaining compliant when performing duties and meeting the same expectations placed on a VCU employee.

Ask questions and raise concerns when clarity is needed.

Assist and provide accurate and thorough information related to investigations of misconduct, ethics and compliance reviews, and audits.

- Managers and supervisors have the additional responsibilities to:
  - Be a professional role model and support team members by:
    - Facilitating or fostering an environment that is inclusive and respectful
    - Encouraging the raising of concerns and asking of questions
    - Listening to and addressing concerns that are raised in a timely manner
    - Ensuring that retaliation for asking questions, raising concerns or cooperating in an investigation is not tolerated
  - Help others, for whom they are responsible, understand all expectations related to their position.
  - Communicate frequently and clearly about responsible business practices and their alignment with VCU's mission and core values.
  - Treat all individuals fairly and be consistent when holding individuals accountable for their behavior at work.
  - Appropriately address any reported concern.
  - Seek appropriate assistance when faced with a question or concern the manager or supervisor finds difficult to resolve.

**Stewardship - We are good stewards of the resources entrusted to the university.**

- Individuals must always obtain, use and dispose of university resources in accordance with the legitimate and intended business or academic purpose demonstrating that VCU is in support of the public’s trust as custodian of its resources. Individuals are expected to protect university resources from fraud, waste, theft, loss, abuse and damage.

**Compliance - We understand and comply with the codes, laws, regulations, policies and procedures that govern our university activities.**

- Individuals must comply with all applicable policies and procedures, laws and regulations. Any act that violates university policy or procedure, or any law or regulation, or any effort to conceal violations, is also a violation of VCU’s ethical standards and of this policy.

- Individuals have a duty to know the requirements of their position and to ask questions and raise concerns if they:
  - Are unsure about a decision or course of action
  - Believe that misconduct has occurred or is about to occur
  - Believe they may have committed misconduct

- Managers and supervisors are responsible for educating, training, answering questions and motivating individuals to understand and comply with all requirements.
We recognize that our decisions and actions reflect not only upon our individual reputations but also upon the reputation of the university. Our actions will be guided by these ethical principles even when confronted by personal, professional, social or economic pressures.

Reporting Suspected or Known Violations:
Raise concerns in accordance with VCU’s Duty to Report and Protection from Retaliation policy.

Upholding the Ethical Standards:
When an individual has a concern or needs guidance regarding these ethical standards, they are expected to consult with any of the following entities for guidance:

a. Their immediate supervisor or department management
b. The responsible individual for the related area of compliance
c. The VCU Ombudsperson
d. The Integrity and Compliance Office
e. The VCU Helpline

Forms
There are no forms associated with this policy.

Related Documents

1. VCU Code of Conduct
2. VCU Board of Visitors Policy: Board of Visitors’ Ethical Leadership
3. Student Code of Conduct
4. VCU Policy: Honor System
5. VCU Policy: Duty to Report and Protection from Retaliation

Revision History

This policy supersedes the following archived policies: VCU Code of Ethics – reclassified as Ethical Standards in 2013 and incorporated, unaltered, into the VCU Code of Conduct (initial version).

NOTE: This policy is considered New as it is significantly different than the original Code of Ethics approved by the Board, August 25, 2005 and incorporated into the VCU Code of Conduct in 2013. In time, it was determined more elaboration was needed on the basic ethical standards and illustrated expected behaviors, hence this policy.
1. If I have knowledge of or suspect misconduct, am I expected to report it?

Yes. In accordance with the Duty to Report and Protection from Retaliation policy, all individuals are expected to report any known or suspected misconduct as soon as possible. Remaining silent and not reporting concerns or issues is not in concert with VCU’s expectations and permits misconduct to occur.

2. Who determines discipline of employees once misconduct has been determined?

It depends. Misconduct is defined as violations of laws, regulations or our own policies. Overall, the appropriate management function in the area determines final disciplinary actions. This policy does not supersede any other existing policies addressing employee discipline or due process afforded to employees. VCU’s established procedures related to management’s authority and discipline remain intact and apply.