

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Faculty of Education
Department of Educational Studies

Fostering an Inviting and Inclusive Academic Climate
(Approved at Department Meeting, September 20, 2007, revised
May 15, 2008)

Preamble

This document was produced and approved by the faculty, staff and student representatives in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. It presents a set of principles that we believe should govern our work and suggests a process for addressing issues related to climate.

No document can address all possible issues and concerns related to academic climate that may develop within a diverse department in a large, research-intensive university. We consider this a work in progress because it will continue to evolve as we strive to find ways to make the academic climate as inviting, inclusive, stimulating and productive as possible.

Like many universities and departments across North America, the Department of Educational Studies at UBC has found it useful to define for itself its values and goals for our “academic climate” – the environment in which staff, students and faculty do their shared work. The value of such a statement is that it provides an explicit set of expectations and values to which we can refer in judging our own behavior and in supporting our colleagues. Used properly, it can foster the creation of an academic climate in which we all feel valued and able to pursue our work in a supportive and positive environment. The risk of such a statement, of course, is that, on the one hand, it may seem to restrict behavior too explicitly or, on the other, it may seem to neglect to discuss important areas of conduct and climate. No document can include all the factors affecting climate and no document can presume to dictate precisely how people should act toward one another. What we attempt here is to identify principles that are important to observe in order to develop and sustain an academic climate that supports the varied work undertaken by the members of the department’s community, fosters a collegial environment and promotes the academic and intellectual development of all members.

This document supplements university, provincial and federal human rights policies and legislation and applies to all personal and social interactions related to the work of the department, whether on or off campus. Section III of this document quotes some key parts of these university policies. There are formal departmental, Faculty and University procedures for addressing many of the situations covered in this document. To the extent possible, procedures are listed in Section II of this document, and individuals are encouraged to use these procedures when they seem appropriate.

The Context of Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is at the heart of the university’s life and the principles contained in this statement are not intended to restrict the freedoms enjoyed by anyone associated with the department. We believe that the essence of responsible scholarship is to engage in work that challenges conventional wisdom and

provides alternative ways of thinking about and addressing historical and contemporary social issues and educational practices. Doing these things may indeed make some members of the department uncomfortable, but we believe that it is possible to pursue excellent and challenging scholarship and ideas respectfully and in ways that promote understanding – not necessarily acceptance – of alternative viewpoints. This position is reflected in the University’s statement on Academic Freedom found in the University Calendar (see Note 1).

Faculty have a major role to play in fostering a hospitable climate because they make many of the decisions related to the work done in the department, enjoy relatively more power and privilege within the university than staff or students, and are responsible for evaluating the work of students in classes, research projects, and in competitions for financial aid and jobs. Faculty also help create the working environment of the department through their relations with one another. But students and staff are also vitally important members of the community who share responsibility for fostering a hospitable climate through their interactions with one another and with faculty.

Behaving in a manner consistent with these principles is both an individual and collective responsibility. It is an individual responsibility because only individuals can control their own actions. Holding each other accountable for behaviours that are inconsistent with these principles enacts our collective responsibility to developing and maintaining a hospitable climate. Our academic climate is a central element of providing genuine academic and scholarly freedom to all members of this community.

Section I Principles Concerning Departmental Climate

- **Respect for Place and Sustainability**

Our classrooms, social spaces, offices and other facilities are here to support our work. We have individual and collective responsibility for ensuring that our spaces, equipment and other resources are maintained in a clean, safe, serviceable condition so that all those who use them can benefit. This means that we share responsibility for securing rooms and equipment against theft and damage, for maintaining acceptable noise levels, for respecting privacy and property, and for cleaning up after ourselves in instructional and social spaces.

The Department acknowledges that it is located within the traditional territories of the Musqueam peoples. These lands and waters have been occupied by Musqueam peoples for thousands of years and continue to be integral to Musqueam culture and land use today. The land, the trees and other plants growing here have spiritual significance to many people, so we have a collective obligation to recognize these values and to protect the integrity of the environment in which we work.

There is growing concern—even alarm—about the ecological impact of humans on the environment. As a department, we are committed to understanding the impact of our activities on the physical environment and to reducing the negative impacts in as many ways as possible. This means reducing waste, reusing and recycling whenever possible. We also encourage all members of the community to think carefully about how they get to and from campus and, whenever possible, to use forms of transportation with the least negative impacts on human health and the planet.

- **Discrimination and Harassment**

University faculty and departments must regularly engage in differentiating between individuals and making decisions about recommendations, awards, grades and other academic matters based on individuals' merit and performance. Discrimination and harassment interfere with learning and studying, with the judicious carrying out of the university's educational roles, and with properly selecting candidates for opportunity, reward and recognition. Discrimination occurs when individuals are improperly treated differently because of characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, country of origin, ethnic heritage, age or religion. Harassment occurs when individuals are subjected to unwanted and offensive or threatening physical or verbal behaviour. Favouritism may occur or appear to occur in the context of personal relationships. When any of these elements affect or appear to affect the opportunities for individuals to learn and to access opportunities and rewards, the sense of our academic community as a fair and equitable one is undermined.

Sexual relationships between persons in supervisory/subordinate relationships undermine the working and learning environment both for the person in the subordinate relationship and for his or her colleagues. Such relationships create the potential for discrimination, harassment and favouritism. Faculty should not be in intimate or sexual relationships with students whom they instruct in classes or whose research or scholarly work they supervise or might evaluate. Inappropriate sexual relationships have the potential to negatively affect the learning and working environment not just of the individuals involved but also of other individuals – in the department, in classes, or in other university environments. Such relationships may seem to be private but their location in the university means that when they interfere with the working and learning environment they are the university's business. The university explicitly requires that individuals who are in sexual or intimate relationships with persons in subordinate relationships report the relationship to the Head of their Unit; it also provides mechanisms for complaints from individuals who feel they are the subject of discrimination or harassment and from individuals whose working and learning environments are affected by inappropriate intimate relationships.

Although all members of our community are adults, sexual and intimate relationships between supervisors and subordinates cannot automatically be assumed to be consensual. The university explicitly recognizes this difficulty by stating that persons who are in "consensual" sexual relationships across power divides may be unable to defend themselves if charges of sexual harassment are filed.

Harassment and discrimination take other forms as well. We hold ourselves to the highest standards of respectful interpersonal conduct. Faculty in the department explicitly recognize our responsibility to be continually mindful of the way our relative power and privilege within the university environment may silence or intimidate students and staff. It is inappropriate for faculty to use their power in any way for personal gain, to influence students in their personal relationships with us, or to threaten students with academic or professional consequences when we are in interpersonal conflict with them. Although faculty may easily forget or dismiss their ability to have an influence on the learning experiences and professional prospects of students, staff, and colleagues, this is an area for ongoing vigilance and mutual support.

Discrimination and harassment are not acceptable anywhere in the University and anyone who believes she or he has been discriminated against or harassed should make full use of departmental and university policies and procedures to lodge a complaint. Faculty, staff and students are obligated to take all steps necessary to ensure that discrimination and harassment do not occur in the department and that all members of the community are aware of their rights and responsibilities. The

university's policies on harassment, discrimination, and intimate relations are laid out in the University's Policy Handbook (see Notes 2 & 3).

- **Favouritism**

We believe that all students should have equal opportunity to participate in the academic life of the department and to reap the benefits of being associated with its programs. Faculty and students have an obligation to make opportunities to participate and acquire resources known to all eligible students using whatever means are available. We also recognize that students vary in their interest in the academic life and their willingness to participate in class discussions, and informal and extracurricular activities. Faculty have an obligation to invite and facilitate student participation while respecting differences in students' interest and availability.

Faculty often control the amount of "air time" that various students get in class discussions and often it is the students who are quick to identify themselves who get more opportunities to participate. Faculty have an obligation to ensure that no single student dominates discussion or receives more invitations to contribute than others in the class.

Faculty are—on occasion and often with little or no advance notice—asked to recommend the names of students who may be best able to complete a specific task or project. In these cases a faculty member makes judgements about the capabilities and availability of students based on what she or he knows about the student. Students who are better known to the faculty member and whose skills match the task will often be suggested. Whenever possible, faculty should make these opportunities known to those who may wish to apply since the appearance of favouritism in such matters diminishes the climate in the program.

The Department has a policy on hiring teaching assistants and sessional instructors, that is governed by the collective agreements between the university and the unions representing teaching assistants and sessional instructors (available at edst.educ.ubc.ca/policies.html) that describes the process used to post position announcements and to fill vacant positions. We are committed to following this policy carefully; it ensures fair and equal access to employment opportunities.

- **Conflict of Interest and Conflict of Commitment**

The Department has an interest in seeing that its members refrain from relationships within their university work or between their university work and their commitments outside the university that puts them in a position of conflict. Conflicts may arise, for example, when members of the department have commercial or consulting activities that intersect with their university work, when researchers have a financial interest in their research activities, or when faculty derive personal benefit from their relationships with students. Although the simple fact of a conflict does not immediately imply wrongdoing on anyone's part, conflicts of interest must be managed through avenues provided by university policy.

Conflicts of interest and commitment may interfere with the work done in the department and must be disclosed and managed appropriately. Members of the community have the right and the responsibility to inform one another when they believe a conflict is occurring. Those who believe they—or others associated with the department—have been or may be harmed by such a conflict should make full use of the policy and its procedures to lodge a complaint. Policy 97 can be found online at www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies (see Note 4).

- **Demeaning Comments**

Mutual respect is an essential element in any academic environment. We spend a great deal of time honing our skills as critics and critical thinkers, and applying these skills to our own ideas and to the ideas of others. We learn academically-acceptable forms of critique. Being critical about ideas is an important part of our work, but making demeaning or callous comments about individuals or groups in classes or in other public conversations is not. Such comments may reflect long-held stereotypes, may be about personality or character, or about appearance, gender, ethnicity, religion, race, class, disability, health status, or sexual orientation. Describing people and groups as part of a conversation or analysis is clearly part of our work, but making comments about them that are demeaning or callous is not. Faculty, staff, and students have an obligation to avoid making such comments, to intervene in a respectful way when such comments are made, and to point out statements that can be interpreted as demeaning or callous and are not consistent with the kind of academic community we wish to promote.

- **Sexist Language**

We acknowledge that the English language, like many others, contains constructions and conventions that are today considered sexist. Currently, responsible academic work requires the use of gender-inclusive language whenever possible in classes, in our writing and in informal interactions. This shift to gender-inclusive forms is a relatively recent development and it will take some time for the remaining vestiges of sexist language to disappear. Extinguishing sexist language is a long-term educational process that we hope will be approached with understanding and respect for those schooled or socialized in a time or place where sexist constructions were the norm. Using gender-inclusive forms in our discourse is a sign of respect and should be encouraged.

- **Physical Contact**

Touching, kissing, hugging and other forms of physical contact in public are means of nonverbal communication that can be very effective at expressing friendship, caring and joy. Substantial cultural and individual differences exist in the use of physical contact. In some cultures and for some people, physical contact is an expected form of communication, while for others it is neither offered nor welcomed. We also realize that those who observe physical contact between two people may interpret the behaviour as acceptable, benign or offensive, depending on their own preferences and whether they interpret the contact as welcomed or not. We believe that genuine expressions of friendship, caring and joy through physical contact are a healthy part of our community when they are clearly welcome and reciprocal and in a context where they will not be misinterpreted. It is the obligation of the person who initiates physical contact to make sure it is welcome. When it is unclear whether it is welcome—or where there is any indication that it is not welcome—then physical contact is not acceptable.

- **Duty to Accommodate**

As part of our commitment to inclusiveness, we also recognize the importance of academic and workplace accommodation. The duty to accommodate is often raised in terms of accommodation for persons with disabilities, but it is an important principle that requires that we be willing to examine habitual practices for ways they may prohibit or limit participation of members of certain groups. The duty to accommodate may require changes in instructional and evaluation approaches, in location and scheduling of classes and departmental events, and in other aspects of our work together. Our commitment to a hospitable academic and working climate extends to our understanding that no

arrangement is equally accessible and comfortable for every member of our community. Sometimes groups' or individuals' contributions are best made in ways that are not the customary ones; each of us is benefitted when our academic community makes it possible for all persons to participate as easily and equitably as possible. Accommodation is not a matter of providing "special" services out of pity but comes from our recognition of the importance of examining our practices to ensure that fundamentally irrelevant ways of organizing our lives together do not unnecessarily exclude individuals with disabilities or members of specific religious or cultural groups. This commitment is embedded in University policy (see Note 5) and provincial and federal law.

- **Scheduling Classes and Other Academic Events**

Scheduling classes and events so that they are accessible to the greatest number of full-time and part-students is a constant challenge. We recognize that every time a scheduling decision is made, some students will be unable to attend because of work, family or other obligations. As a general principle, we are committed to scheduling events so that no single group of students (i.e., full-time employed, single parents) is consistently prevented from attending.

On occasion—because of schedule conflicts or for convenience—a faculty member or student may propose holding class sessions or events at irregular times or locations. We want an environment where it is possible to make such changes as long as they do not disadvantage or inconvenience students or faculty. Class sessions and other events may occasionally be rescheduled or relocated as long as a large majority of students agree and as long as the faculty member involved makes acceptable arrangements for those who may be unable to attend at the new time or location.

- **Scheduling Departmental Social Events**

Scheduling departmental social events so that they are accessible to the greatest number of faculty, staff, and students is a constant challenge. We recognize that every decision about time of events is made, some individuals will be unable to attend because of work, family or other obligations. We also recognize that every venue has the possibility of excluding some individuals because of health or disability challenges – such as barriers presented by animal and environmental allergies, mobility limitations, religious principles, or lengthy commutes. As a general principle, we are committed to scheduling events so that department social events serve the purpose of increasing a sense of collegiality and common purpose within the department and so that no one group is consistently excluded.

The department values opportunities to schedule social events in a variety of locations and at varying times, including, but not limited to, the UBC campus and the formal workday. Different venues support a variety of kinds of social interaction and opportunities for enriched social relations; varying times ensure that access to social events does not systematically exclude certain members of the EDST community (e.g., parents who need to be home at dinnertime; individuals who commute long distances).

- **Scholarly Integrity**

The integrity of academic work depends on the honesty and good will of all those who toil in this environment and the observance of accepted conventions concerning such practices as acknowledging the work of others. The university's policy on Scholarly Integrity lists a number of prohibited practices that undermine the intellectual and ethical integrity of scholarly work. Department members are responsible for knowing the university's expectations for scholarly integrity, consulting the policy and supervisors when in doubt, and adhering to these expectations. Here we specifically address

concerns with plagiarism, fabrication or falsification of research data, and violating the university's guidelines for research with human subjects. Plagiarism occurs when a writer or scholar presents the ideas of others as his or her own or quotes or cites the work of others without properly attributing the ideas according to the norms of scholarly reference. Fabrication relates to inventing or forging research data or scholarly citations; falsification refers to altering, selectively omitting or misrepresenting one's own or others' research data or reports (see Note 6) The university has clear guidelines for the conduct of researchers working with human subjects; neither students nor faculty should engage in any research activity that involves other people without becoming familiar with and following the university's requirements for the ethical treatment of human subjects (see Note 7)

- **Advising/Supervisory Relationships**

Students have the right to timely, accurate and respectful advising. Students can request a change of advisor/supervisor at any time for any reason. Students have the right to expect their advisor to do the following:

- Prepare and file a written program of studies that includes all required courses.
- Meet periodically to review progress and identify appropriate elective courses.
- Keep their file up to date and process required paperwork in a timely fashion.
- Explain University policies related to the student's program.
- Respond in a timely way to questions and concerns.

Meetings between students and advisors are normally held in the faculty member's office, but meetings may take place in other locations if it is mutually agreeable to both the faculty member and student. Students and faculty have the right to insist that faculty/student meetings be held at the University in a mutually-agreeable space. Students have an unequivocal right to decline offers from faculty to expand the relationship beyond the scope of an academic work relationship

Faculty have the right to expect students to fulfil certain obligations related to their role as advisees. Faculty expect students to:

- Be aware of and observe deadlines and policies related to their program of study described in the University Calendar.
- Provide periodic reports (at least annually) on their progress and identify anything that is impeding progress toward degree completion.
- Follow an approved program of study and seek approval for any deviations from that program.
- Observe agreed-upon schedules for completing program requirements.

Students and faculty have a joint obligation to clarify expectations and responsibilities in the advising relationship and to hold one another accountable for commitments made in that relationship.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies (grad.ubc.ca) has produced an online Handbook of Graduate Supervision that is very helpful in clarifying roles and responsibilities and in identifying those aspects of the student-supervisor relationship that should be negotiated.

Section II Process for Addressing Concerns about Climate

Raising Concerns about Climate

Anyone with concerns about the climate in the Department should bring them to the attention of those best able to address the concerns. If the concern involves a suspected violation of university policy, then the relevant policy should be consulted for appropriate steps to take. If the concern is not addressed in an existing policy, then it should be raised with an appropriate member of the department. The sections below provide general advice about where to go for assistance. When in doubt about how to raise a concern within the department, please discuss it with the Head, Deputy Head or Graduate Advisor.

Seeking Solutions Directly

If the concern is with the behaviour of a particular individual, the first option is to talk to that person directly about the concern. This is the preferred way to resolve issues because those directly involved know the most about the issue and have the most control over the behaviours involved. If doing this is not considered safe or likely to produce the desired outcome, then there are several options that are described below.

Seeking Assistance within the Department

Student Representatives. Each year students in the Department elect representatives who attend department meetings and participate on most standing committees. Concerns about climate can be raised with the student representatives who may assist in resolving the concern or who may bring the issue to a departmental committee or faculty meeting for discussion.

Peer Academic Advisor. The Peer Academic Advisor is an advanced graduate student hired by the department to assist students with their academic concerns. The advisor knows about various policies and procedures related to climate and can offer advice on how to proceed. The Peer Academic Advisor can provide advice and can communicate concerns to the department via the Graduate Advisor, but he or she cannot otherwise act on behalf of a student.

Academic Advisor. Students may also seek advice from their academic advisors. Each student has an advisor and this person can offer another perspective on the concern, suggest ways to proceed, or may offer to bring the issue on the student's behalf to committees or administrators in the department.

Graduate Advisor. The Graduate Advisor has administrative responsibility for graduate matters within the department. He or she can offer advice on how to proceed, explain policies and can also act on behalf of students.

Department Head. The Head is administratively responsible for all matters in the department and is obligated to take action if it is suspected that any university policy has been violated. The Head chairs all department meetings and has many options available for addressing concerns about climate including referring the matter to standing committees, communicating concerns to all faculty, staff and students, and recommending that action be taken by other university officials.

Seeking Assistance outside the Department

If the concern is not resolved within the department or if the person with the concern does not feel safe raising the issue within the department, there are other options available. The nature of the concern determines the best course of action to follow. Any of the people identified below can provide advice on how best to proceed outside of the department.

Faculty of Education Equity Advisors. Each year there is one faculty member and one student appointed to serve as Faculty of Education Equity Advisors. These Advisors talk with those who have concerns related to equity issues—particularly discrimination and harassment—and suggest ways to resolve the concerns. Their role is an informal one, to listen to concerns from students, staff or faculty, to give advice, to help individuals decide what they want to do about their concerns and how they can best deal with university structures. While the advisors will make every effort to keep what they are told confidential, UBC policy requires that equity problems that come to the attention of responsible persons be addressed by the administrative units involved.

Associate Dean for Graduate Programs and Research. The Associate Dean is administratively responsible for graduate matters in the Faculty of Education and chairs the Faculty's Equity Committee.

Dean of Education. The Dean becomes involved in climate-related matters when concerns cannot be resolved within the Department or with the intervention of the Associate Dean.

Dean of Graduate Studies. All graduate students are admitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies so the Dean becomes involved in matters that relate to the administration and operation of graduate programs

UBC Equity Office Advisors. The Equity Office is responsible for addressing concerns related to the University's policy on Discrimination and Harassment and to related matters that fall under the Province's Human Rights Act. The Equity Office offers assistance in resolving concerns informally and handles formal complaints following university policies.

Section III Notes

1. **Academic freedom:** *"The members of the University enjoy certain rights and privileges essential to the fulfilment of its primary functions: instruction and the pursuit of knowledge. Central among these rights is the freedom, within the law, to pursue what seem to them fruitful avenues of inquiry, to teach and to learn unhindered by external or non-academic constraints, and to engage in full and unrestricted consideration of any opinion. This freedom extends not only to the regular members of the University but to all who are invited to participate in its forum. Suppression of this freedom, whether by institutions of the state, the officers of the University or the actions of private individuals, would prevent the University from carrying out its primary functions. All members of the University must recognize this fundamental principle and must share responsibility for supporting, safeguarding and preserving this central freedom. Behaviour that obstructs free and full discussion, not only of ideas that are safe and accepted, but of those which may be unpopular or even abhorrent, vitally threatens the integrity of the University's forum. Such behaviour cannot be tolerated."* (pp. 47-48, UBC Vancouver Calendar 2007/08)
2. **Discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment:** *"The University of British Columbia is committed to providing its employees and students with the best possible environment for working*

and learning, an environment that allows friendship and collegiality to flourish. Every student and member of faculty and staff has the right to study and work in an environment free from discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment. The University therefore does not condone discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment, of any kind. Indeed, the University regards discrimination and harassment as serious offences that are subject to a wide range of disciplinary measures, including dismissal or expulsion from the University.” (UBC Policy 3, Section 1.1)

3. **Consensual relationships across professional power differentials:** *“Anyone who enters into a sexual relationship with a person where a professional power differential exists must realize that, if a charge of sexual harassment is subsequently lodged, it will be extremely difficult to defend the conduct on grounds of mutual consent.” (UBC Policy 3 Section 4.7.2.)*
4. **Conflict of interest and conflict of commitment:** Policy 97 can be found online at www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies.
5. **Duty to accommodate:** The university’s policy on academic accommodation for students, Policy 73, can be found at www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies as can Policy 2 on employment equity.
6. **Scholarly integrity:** Policy 85 can be found online at www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies
7. **Research involving human subjects:** Policy 89 can be found online at www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies.