



## HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

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Subject: Ethics  
Applies To: All campus employees  
Sources:

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### **1.0 Purpose**

The USG is committed to the highest ethical and professional standards of conduct in pursuit of its mission to create a more educated Georgia. Accomplishing this mission demands integrity, good judgment and dedication to public service from all members of the USG community.

### **2.0 Policy**

While the USG affirms each person's accountability for individual actions, it also recognizes that the shared mission and the shared enterprise of its institutions require a shared set of core values and ethical conduct to which each member of the USG community must be held accountable. Furthermore, the USG acknowledges that an organizational culture grounded in trust is essential to supporting these core values and ethical conduct.

The following Statement of Core Values and Code of Conduct are intended to build, maintain and protect that trust, recognizing that each member of the USG community is responsible for doing his/her part by upholding the highest standards of competence and character.

### **Applicability**

The USG Ethics Policy applies to all members of the USG community. The USG community includes:

1. All members of the Board of Regents;
2. All individuals employed by, or acting on behalf of, the USG or one of the USG institutions, including volunteers, vendors, and contractors; and,

3. Members of the governing boards and employees of all cooperative organizations affiliated with the USG or one of its institutions.

Members of the Board of Regents and all individuals employed by the USG or one of its institutions in any capacity shall participate in USG Ethics Policy training, and shall certify compliance with the USG Ethics Policy on a periodic basis as provided in the USG Business Procedures Manual. Cooperative organizations, vendors, and contractors shall certify compliance with the USG Ethics Policy by written agreement as provided in the USG Business Procedures Manual.

The USG Ethics Policy governs only official conduct performed by or on behalf of the USG. Violations of the USG Ethics Policy may result in disciplinary action including dismissal or termination.

### **Statement of Core Values**

Every member of the USG community is required to adhere to the USG Statement of Core Values – Integrity, Excellence, Accountability, and Respect – that form and guide the daily work of the organization.

1. **Integrity** – We will be honest, fair, impartial and unbiased in our dealings both with and on behalf of the USG.
2. **Excellence** – We will perform our duties to foster a culture of excellence and high quality in everything we do.
3. **Accountability** – We firmly believe that education in the form of scholarship, research, teaching, service and developing others is a public trust. We will live up to this trust through safeguarding our resources and being good stewards of the human, intellectual, physical and fiscal resources given to our care.
4. **Respect** – We recognize the inherent dignity and rights of every person, and we will do our utmost to fulfill our resulting responsibility to treat each person with fairness, compassion and decency.

## **Purpose of the Code of Conduct**

The USG recognizes that each member of the USG community attempts to live by his or her own values, beliefs and ethical decision-making processes. The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to guide members of the USG community in applying the underlying USG Statement of Core Values to the decisions and choices that are made in the course of everyday endeavors. Each USG institution must ensure that its institutional ethics policies are consistent with this USG Ethics policy.

## **Code of Conduct**

### **We will:**

- I. Uphold the highest standards of intellectual honesty and integrity in the conduct of teaching, research, service and grants administration.**
- II. Act as good stewards of the resources and information entrusted to our care.**
- III. Perform assigned duties and professional responsibilities in such a manner so as to further the USG mission.**
- IV. Treat fellow employees, students and the public with dignity and respect.**
- V. Refrain from discriminating against, harassing or threatening others.**
- VI. Comply with all applicable laws, rules, regulations and professional standards.**
- VII. Respect the intellectual property rights of others.**
- VIII. Avoid improper political activities as defined in law and Board of Regents Policy.**
- IX. Protect human health and safety and the environment in all USG operations and activities.**
- X. Report wrongdoing to the proper authorities; refrain from retaliating against those who do report violations; and cooperate fully with authorized investigations.**
- XI. Disclose and avoid improper conflicts of interest.**
- XII. Refrain from accepting any gift or thing of value in those instances prohibited by law or Board of Regents policy.**

**XIII. Not use our position or authority improperly to advance the interests of a friend or relative.**

**Interpretation and Sources**

The Statement of Core Values and Code of Conduct do not address every conceivable situation or ethical dilemma that may be faced by members of the USG community. Members of the USG community are expected to exercise good judgment absent specific guidance from this policy or other applicable laws, rules and regulations.

Specific questions pertaining to the Statement of Core Values or Code of Conduct should be directed to a supervisor or other competent authority at the University System Office or at the institution's office of Legal Affairs, Internal Audit, Compliance, Human Resources, Academic Affairs, or other appropriate office.

There are also multiple sources of authority that address specific questions or situations. Examples include:

1. [Board of Regents Policy Manual](#)
2. [Board of Regents Business Procedures Manual](#)
3. [Board of Regents Human Resources Administrative Practice Manual](#)
4. Institutional policies, handbooks and procedures
5. State Laws and Regulations
6. Federal Laws and Regulations

Further specific explanatory notes and references may be found on the USG's website at <http://www.usg.edu/audit/compliance/ethics/> or its successor reference (BoR Minutes, November 2008).

**Explanatory Notes and References**

**1. Uphold the highest standards of intellectual honesty and integrity in the conduct of teaching, research, service and grants administration.**

Members of the USG community engaged in research are expected to do so in accordance with institutional, governmental and professional standards while upholding the highest standards of integrity, intellectual honesty and scholarship. Unacceptable violations of research integrity include, but are not limited to: (a) plagiarism defined as using another's ideas, writings, research, or intellectual property and representing it as your own original work, (b) falsification of data, which includes direct alteration of findings or failing to disclose data that would substantively change the research findings and (c) fabrication of research data. Research integrity requires that principal investigators and others with a fiduciary obligation for grant funds use those funds in a manner consistent with the grantor's terms and conditions and applicable laws, rules and regulations. Finally, research involving human subjects shall be conducted only after appropriate review and approval by institutional review boards (IRBs) and should be conducted in accordance with IRB principles.

**2. Act as good stewards of the resources and information entrusted to our care.**

USG property is intended for use in support of the USG mission and legitimate public purposes.

USG property shall not be used for personal gain or purposes except for incidental personal use of email, a telephone to make a local telephone call or incidental Internet use that is not inconsistent with applicable laws and policies. However, members of the USG community should note that such use must not interfere with the performance of official functions or that individual's own job performance. Additionally, members of the USG community should understand that there is no expectation of privacy once any personal material is placed on a government system.

Members of the USG community are required to maintain the integrity and accuracy of the documents and records for which they are responsible. No employee may alter, falsify or destroy any original record or document absent valid authority to do so.

Members of the USG community must also comply with the USG Records Retention Series that can be found at the following URL:

<http://www.usg.edu/usgweb/busserv/series/search.phtml>.

The USG is the custodian of many types of information, including that which is confidential, proprietary and private. Individuals who have access to such information are expected to be familiar and to comply with applicable laws, policies, directives and agreements pertaining to access, use, protection and disclosure of such information.

Computer security and privacy are also subject to law and USG policy.

USG employees are required to maintain the integrity and accuracy of all documents and records relative to sick leave, vacation/annual leave and all other forms of leave.

The following policies should be read in concert with this section of the code of conduct:

- [BOR Policies 8.2.7.1-8.2.7.8](#) regarding leave,
- [BOR Policy 7.11.9](#) for information on removing laptops and similar items off site,
- [BOR Policy 9.10.6.4](#) for information on removing other institutional property from campus for personal use,
- [BOR Policy 7.7.2](#) for information on prohibited personal use of institutional purchasing channels,
- [BOR Policy 7.11.2](#) for information on the operation of private business enterprises on a USG campus,
- [BOR Policies 9.10.6.3-9.10.6.4](#) for information pertaining to use of a campus facility by an outside party and

- USG Appropriate Use Policy number 2009-014 regarding use of information technology resources.

**3. Perform assigned duties and professional responsibilities in such a manner so as to further the USG mission.**

All members of the USG community are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of scholarship, public service and integrity. This requirement encompasses both a responsibility to understand and to further organizational missions and goals. Individuals in positions of greater authority bear a greater responsibility for achieving organizational missions and goals in an effective and efficient manner.

However, all members of the USG community should contribute to the success of the USG in a manner consistent with their duties and responsibilities.

Effective internal controls are one method that can be employed to assist the USG in achieving its mission. Internal controls are the processes employed at all levels to help ensure that USG business is carried out in accordance with BOR policies and procedures, institutional policies and procedures, applicable laws and regulations and sound business practices. Good internal controls promote efficient operations, accurate financial reporting, safeguarding of assets and responsible fiscal management.

**4. Treat fellow employees, students and the public with dignity and respect.**

Members of the USG community are required to maintain a professional work environment. Therefore, unprofessional conduct may result in disciplinary action. See [BOR Policy 12.2](#) for additional information pertaining specifically to disruptive activities.

A romantic or sexual relationship between a member of the USG community and a student or patient is prohibited in those instances where the individual has the responsibility for directly supervising, evaluating, instructing, treating or otherwise

overseeing the student or patient. Romantic or sexual relationships between employees and people in positions of authority are strongly discouraged.

**5. Refrain from discriminating against, harassing or threatening others.**

The USG Statement of Core Values emphasizes the “inherent dignity and rights of every person and ... our resulting responsibility to treat each person with fairness, compassion and decency.” As such, any form of discrimination or harassment is inconsistent with USG core values. Additionally, discrimination on the grounds of race, color, gender, religion, creed, national origin, age, disability and status as a veteran is specifically prohibited by state law and BOR policy. See [BOR Policy 8.2.1](#) for additional information on Equal Employment Opportunity within the USG.

Sexual harassment of members of the USG community or students in the USG is prohibited and shall subject the offender to dismissal or other sanctions after compliance with procedural due process requirements. Unwelcome sexual advancements, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when: (A) Submission to such conduct is made explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual’s employment or academic standing; or (B) Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for employment or academic decisions affecting an individual; or (C) Such conduct unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work or academic performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive working or academic environment. See [BOR Policy 8.2.16](#) for additional information on Sexual Harassment.

The University System of Georgia is committed to the prevention of workplace violence and the maintenance of a respectful working environment. A safe and secure environment is a fundamental prerequisite for fulfilling an institution’s mission of teaching, research and public service. The University System of Georgia will not tolerate

any type of workplace violence committed by or against students or members of the USG community. Workplace violence is defined as any threats, threatening conduct or any other acts of aggression or violence in the workplace. Violations of the workplace violence policy will be met with appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. USG employees bear a special responsibility to remain aware of potential acts of violence on campus as evidenced by, but not limited to, unusual statements, writings or any other unusual behavior. Members of the USG community who, in good faith, report what they believe to be workplace violence or who cooperate in any investigation will not be subjected to retaliation.

**6. Comply with all applicable laws, rules, regulations and professional standards.**

Compliance with laws, rules and regulations governing USG institutions is both a legal and an ethical mandate. The risks associated with non-compliance can be significant. Significant risks include loss of reputation, loss of external funding, financial penalties, loss of accreditation and potential criminal prosecutions. Members of the USG community shall seek the advice of USG legal counsel to clarify the laws, rules and regulations impacting official duties.

Failure to comply with applicable laws, rules and regulations by a member of the USG community may result in disciplinary action. Members of the USG community may be governed by ethical codes or standards of their professions or disciplines. It is expected that those USG community members will comply with applicable professional standards in addition to laws, rules and regulations.

It is the policy of the USG to conduct its business in an open and transparent manner consistent with the privacy rights of members of the USG community and Open Government laws. USG employees have a responsibility to ensure that any requests made pursuant to the Open Records Act are immediately routed to the office charged

with that responsibility. USG institutions that accept grants from public or private organizations to perform as outlined in the grant have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that the grant funds are expended in a manner consistent with the grantor's guidelines and applicable laws, rules and regulations. The submission of false or misleading documentation in connection with a federal grant may result in both employment action and criminal prosecution. Members of the USG community must exercise due care and avoid any personal use of grant funds.

Compliance with the rules and regulations governing athletics is a multi-faceted and challenging demand for the USG institutions that maintain athletic programs. Members of the USG community are expected to comply with athletic conference and association rules.

Requests for reimbursement for expenses incurred on behalf of the USG must be accurate and in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. Submission of false or misleading expense reimbursement documents subjects the member of the USG community submitting the documents to the risk of both termination of employment or contractual relationship and criminal prosecution.

#### **7. Respect the intellectual property rights of others.**

USG employees associated with the production of intellectual property have the responsibility to comply with the BOR and institutional policies governing intellectual property. Extensive BOR and institutional policies have been developed governing intellectual property. See [BOR Policy 6.3](#) for a detailed description of the BOR policies governing intellectual property.

Employees who use software licensed to the USG or a USG institution must abide by applicable software license agreements and may copy licensed software only as permitted by the license.

It is also the practice of the USG to comply with copyright laws. USG employees or any individual using USG resources should not violate copyright laws to include publications, recordings and other electronic media. It should be noted that the © copyright notice is no longer required by law. This means that individuals copying material must take extra steps to ensure that the material is in the public domain or may be copied under the “Fair Use” doctrine. USG employees are encouraged to consult with institutional legal counsel for additional guidance on this topic.

**8. Avoid improper political activities as defined in law and Board of Regents Policy.**

USG employees are encouraged to participate as responsible and interested citizens in our democratic society. However, there are “political” activities that are inconsistent with the roles and responsibilities of USG employees. Employees may not participate in a political campaign which interferes with performance of official duties. Employees are restricted from holding state or federal elective office and must obtain a leave of absence prior to qualifying as a candidate for state or federal elective office in a primary or general election and ending after the general or final election. Appointive offices and locally elected offices may be held by a USG employee if there is no conflict or interference with the employee’s USG duties and responsibilities.

See [BOR Policy 8.2.15.3](#) for additional information on employee participation in the political process. See [BOR Policy 9.10.6.1](#) for information on use of campus facilities for political purposes.

**9. Protect human health and safety and the environment in all USG operations and activities.**

The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia is strongly committed to protecting the environment and human health and safety in all of its operations. In working to meet this commitment, the Board of Regents recognizes that pro-active

efforts must be made to ensure that sound environmental, health, and safety planning is integrated into every level of University System decision making. Additionally, all members of the USG community bear a responsibility for protecting human health and safety and the environment in those areas for which they are responsible. See [BOR Policy 9.12.4](#) for detailed guidance pertaining to environmental compliance.

**10. Report wrongdoing to the proper authorities; refrain from retaliating against those who do report violations; and cooperate fully with authorized investigations.**

All members of the USG community have a responsibility to follow university policies and procedures, adhere to applicable laws and regulations and speak up when they see or suspect misconduct. Members of the USG community with concerns about possible unethical behavior or noncompliance with Board of Regents policy are encouraged to speak to their supervisor or to use the Ethics and Compliance Hotline. Retaliation against a member of the USG community for reporting wrongdoing is strictly prohibited by federal law, state law and BOR policy.

Members of the USG community are required to cooperate fully with authorized internal investigations. Failure to cooperate may subject the individual to disciplinary action to include termination of employment or contractual relationship. Members of the USG community who are unsure as to the legitimacy of an investigation should consult a supervisor or institutional counsel.

**11. Disclose and avoid improper conflicts of interest.**

USG employees are expected to devote their primary efforts to the USG's mission. Outside employment or activities must not interfere with performance of official duties. Additionally, outside activities may create conflicts of interest or of commitment that must be properly disclosed and managed. See [BOR Policy 8.2.15](#) for additional information. Other members of the USG community who are not USG employees are

subject to other conflict of interest provisions as contained in various laws, rules and regulations.

**12. Refrain from accepting any gift or thing of value in those instances prohibited by law or Board of Regents policy.**

No member of the USG community shall directly or indirectly solicit, receive, accept or agree to receive a thing of value by inducing the reasonable belief that the giving of the thing will influence his/her performance or failure to perform any official action. The acceptance of a benefit, reward or consideration where the purpose of the gift is to influence a member of the USG community in the performance of his/her official functions is a felony under state law. See [BOR Policy 8.2.13](#) for a detailed description of the prohibition on receiving gifts.

**13. Not use your position or authority improperly to advance the interests of a friend or relative.**

No member of the USG community will use his or her position or authority improperly to advance the interests of a friend or relative. Any benefit granted to an individual will be based on merit and/or written procedure. No individual shall be employed in a department or unit which will result in the existence of a subordinate-superior relationship between such individual and any relative of such individual through any line of authority. See [BOR Policy 8.2.3](#) and O.C.G.A. § 45-10-20 et seq. for detailed information on this topic.