

## Ethical guidelines – for maintaining ongoing ethical discussion

<b>Type of document</b>	Policy
<b>Approved by</b>	Vice-Chancellor
<b>Date of approval</b>	2008-01-10
<b>Ref. no.</b>	SU 609-2721-07
<b>Period of validity</b>	2008-01-10 - until further notice
<b>Replaces document</b>	–
<b>Responsible administrative unit</b>	Human Resources Office
<b>Responsible administrator</b>	Ulf Andersson

**Description:**

The policy describes ethical approaches for staff and students at Stockholm University.

## ETHICAL GUIDELINES

### - for maintaining ongoing ethical discussion

The work carried out at Stockholm University should be characterised by unrestricted knowledge-seeking and research, and by critical thinking. To this end, the University strives to protect the integrity and independence of its research. The organisation should be permeated by a scientific approach.

The University should also be a culture-bearer, a protector of democratic values and an arena for unrestricted debate. Equal opportunities and equality should prevail, and everyone should be treated equally and with respect regardless of their role.

#### • Core values

Vice-Chancellor Kåre Bremer:

*I want to promote and maintain a culture that is based on consideration, fairness and openness between staff and students. I am convinced that such a culture promotes a creative environment for research and study. It goes without saying that every one of us has a moral responsibility for our own actions.*

*I hope that these guidelines can serve as a basis for discussion concerning ethical approaches relating to our workplaces with their varying conditions. The University's ethical guidelines can also provide support for people who feel vulnerable and encourage everyone within the organisation to stand up for their beliefs, irrespective of their position, work location and circumstances. An ethical approach strengthens our professionalism and can promote our development and contribute to a positive work and study environment.*

The University places great emphasis on promoting the following qualities in both staff's and students' relations:

#### *Consideration*

All staff members and students must show respect for each other's differences and views, and our approach must be characterised by tolerance. To this end, we must be sensitive to the wishes and needs of those around us. Show support and appreciation when somebody does something well, and give objective criticism when something is not done as well. We must also respect the need for peace and quiet to ensure a positive and productive work environment.

### *Fairness*

It is the University's fundamental belief that everyone is of equal worth. Each of us has the right to be assessed on equal grounds. When authority is exercised, e.g. concerning admissions, marking and appointments, decisions and standpoints must be objective and impartial. Neither students nor staff may gain benefits through cheating or dishonest use of other people's ideas or work.

### *Openness*

The exchanging of views and unconditional seeking of knowledge enriches our whole organisation. The University must question and critically assess. Critical assessment requires the giving and receiving of views. An important starting point is that the criticism is formulated professionally and that people and issues are kept separate. The University should be a transparent organisation characterised by participation.

## • **Working within the University**

Being a public sector employee has a moral dimension with an especially strong duty to act ethically. Official powers must "be exercised with respect for the equal worth of every individual"; the community should "strive to ensure that democratic ideas serve as guiding principles"; "secure men and women equal rights" (quotes from Sections 1 and 2 of the Constitution). Public sector employees have an obligation and a responsibility with respect to taxpayers to manage and use resources in the optimum way. Correspondingly, students have a right and obligation to manage and utilise these resources to the best of their ability.

Various hierarchies exist within the organisation in which power is exercised, both formally and informally, between managers and staff members and between lecturers and students. An actual difference in authority is often perceived in different ways by the superior and the subordinate. What is perceived from one perspective as a friendly joke could be perceived as insulting from the subordinate perspective. In light of this, you should be careful how you express yourself in a situation that could be perceived as hierarchical. Power must be exercised with awareness and respect for the individual.

Freedom of expression has a special dimension for public sector employees. Staff members can express opinions regarding the University in the capacity of either an employee or a citizen. Freedom of expression is sometimes cited as justification for saying anything one likes without restriction. However, this is a misconception. Laws exist against slander, discrimination and confidentiality. The value of freedom of expression must not stand in the way of respectful and constructive behaviour. Research and development often involve forms of working that are relatively unrestricted. For both staff and students, this relative freedom must be handled with responsibility and respect for decisions taken.

## • **Good teaching practice**

### *Educational responsibility*

Lecturers have an educational responsibility as regards the student's development process, and must strive to mediate scientifically acquired knowledge and create a positive and critically investigative study environment. An open, supportive approach

contributes to a positive discussion climate and gives students space to grow according to their own personal circumstances.

#### *Role models*

Lecturers are role models for their students and must show honesty in their teaching and in the presentation of their own and others' research. Be generous and acknowledge people who have helped you in your teaching in various ways, for example with the preparation of teaching material.

#### *Sensitive or taboo subjects*

Handle sensitive and taboo subjects carefully and avoid subjective statements that could be perceived as taunting or insulting. Be clear, and demonstrate how academic freedom allows room for even sensitive and controversial subjects to be studied scientifically. Show an open attitude to non-conformist views. Respond to questioning professionally.

#### *Lecturers' responsibilities during and outside teaching hours*

Supervision of different kinds makes demanding requirements on lecturers' professional behaviour. The same applies to lecturers' participation in fieldwork and student activities. A lecturer's role does not end when he or she stops teaching; it applies during all meetings and all contact with students, and during shared departmental activities such as staff parties.

Lecturers must always respect the students' integrity. Lecturers must not exploit their position of power. If a personal relationship arises between a lecturer in the capacity of tutor and a student, it is the tutor's responsibility to withdraw from the position of tutor.

#### *Examinations and marking*

Examinations and marking entail a position of power that requires a professional approach. Individual students must be neither favoured nor discriminated against. In the case of family relationships or other personal relations, bias can also arise. In such situations, you should leave the decision to another lecturer. The same applies if a personal conflict arises between a lecturer and a student.

#### • **Good study practice**

Every student has a co-responsibility to create a good study atmosphere. A good attitude involves, for example, not interrupting someone who is speaking during a seminar, discussing something objectively without making personal attacks and presenting criticism so that it is constructive and enriches the research environment. Arriving for lessons and other group activities in time is one way of showing fundamental consideration for lecturers and study colleagues and contributing to meaningful studies.

Disparaging jokes and insulting comments are inappropriate in a good study environment. This also applies to contact via e-mail and to all study-related activities such as gatherings in student pubs, open lectures and meetings organised by the Student's Union.

- **Good management practice**

A leadership position entails special ethical demands. A leader is a role model. The further up in the hierarchy you go and the more people who are dependent on the leader, the more important it is that the leader shares the University's ethical views. Every leader must set a good example and live up to the core values expressed in these guidelines in their behaviour.

Leadership – from an ethical perspective – is about more than knowing what the staff are doing. An important task for leaders is to strive to create an atmosphere for independent staff members who can put forward their critical and constructive thoughts freely. In this context, common ethical values are important and contribute to an organisation that offers sufficient independent space for its staff.

An academic superior should, without favouritism or negative prejudice, develop the abilities of his or her subordinates to achieve certain qualifications and respect the acknowledgements they receive for their performances.

- **Good administrative practice**

The University's administration is multifaceted and in many ways represents the University to the outside world. This could for example concern information to the press, students and staff or support provided by administrators and technicians to students and staff. In his or her key role, the administrator has a special responsibility for the wellbeing of students and staff. In his profession, the administrator must stand for an ethical approach, fight prejudice and promote an equal university. Sensitive information concerning students and staff must be treated with discretion and where appropriate confidentiality.

- **Good research practice**

Within the research community, ethical rules and guidelines have been prepared which the Swedish Research Council has collated: <http://www.codex.vr.se>. These guidelines must also be followed by students in connection with essay work at both undergraduate and advanced levels. It is the responsibility of both lecturers and tutors to ensure that students are aware of these ethical guidelines.

- **Points to consider**

Group discussions with this document as a starting point can be a good idea. A common understanding of how we create respect for both each other and the organisation on the basis of an ethical perspective is of great value. The purpose of such discussions is not to create a complete set of shared core values, which is neither desirable nor possible.

An ethical approach and a positive work environment are interlinked. In the University's [working environment policy](#), emphasis is placed on ensuring that the psychosocial work environment is brought up as a theme for open discussion. One tip is to also discuss ethical issues on the basis of these guidelines in the work relating to the work environment.

If you have any questions or need help and support, please contact the Human Resources Office or Student Services.