

PVA Guiding Principles for Faculty, Staff, and Student Interactions

Approved October 15, 2018

Many areas of focus within PVA carry unique challenges and circumstances related to potential discrimination and harassment complaints. The arts often deal with sexually charged content, nudity, and physical contact. Faculty, staff, and students in these areas spend a great deal of time in proximity to one another and after hours at rehearsals, productions, in studios, and club activities. Close relationships between faculty, staff, and students within the college contribute to the overall success and strength of the programs. These same relationships can lead to a softening of professional and educational boundaries that faculty and staff have an obligation to maintain.

Due to the inherent power differential between students, faculty, and staff, the responsibility falls upon faculty, staff, and administrators to maintain appropriate and professional relationships. It is incumbent upon faculty and staff to acknowledge that their positions of power and authority remain the framework even during friendly social interactions, as power structures involved within the academic setting may influence assumptions of consent or agreement.

Social Media

Enter into connections via social media, such as 'friending' or sharing, with caution and awareness of the potential risks and impacts on all parties. When using social media as a venue for publicizing and promoting professional activities and opportunities, faculty and staff should consider establishing professional profiles. A Facebook Artist Page, for example, provides the ability to minimize the potential negative impact of connecting through personal accounts. Utilizing a professional social media profile is also an opportunity for faculty and staff to set a positive professional example for students.

Classroom, Club, and Production Content

We acknowledge that discussion of sensitive issues (i.e. gender, sexuality, race, political, and social issues) in the classroom is a vital role of academic discourse in the arts. The discussion can and should provide space for multiple viewpoints and be conducted in a scholarly manner. Approach sensitive or provocative material deliberately and carefully. As we convey that the nature of art deals with all forms of human emotion and experience, we also teach that we, as artists, need to approach art from every aspect, even art that might make us uncomfortable.

Instructional Contact

Always establish consent for instructional physical contact. Be sure that students are aware of any physical contact that may be necessary for individual instruction, and be sensitive to each student's individual tolerance for this. Physical instruction in the arts is often necessary, and can be addressed in a syllabus statement (see example below). When it is practical, during staging, choreography, and studio teaching, ask students for

permission to touch them before adjusting their posture, arms, etc. Model behavior that explicitly and consistently asks for consent in any physical touch.

Conversation and Verbal Conduct

How we speak to one another is central to our interactions. Establishing an atmosphere of respect should be of primary importance, acknowledging the inherent power differential between students, faculty, and staff. Any verbal expressions that have the potential to directly demean another, especially in the public forum of an academic activity, should be avoided. Conversational approaches that engage and challenge an alternative viewpoint and do so free of sarcasm, dismissiveness, or authoritarianism, will foster far more effective reflections on a given issue. Faculty and staff should be aware of tolerances for teasing – we need to be sensitive to when that level of informality is appropriate and when it is not. Educating artists requires freeing their creative voice and that, in turn, requires a trusting, nurturing, and challenging relationship, one that we must establish, maintain, and honor.

Sample Syllabus Statement

On Instructional Contact

Occasionally “hands on” work in the form of touching students is used to assist the learning process and make corrections; most commonly those related to alignment issues. While this is an accepted and effective teaching aid in dance training, some students may find the process uncomfortable. If this is you please let me know at your earliest convenience. (DNCE 170)