

**Arab Open University  
Code of Professional Conduct**

**Version 3**

Policy Title:	Arab Open University Code of Professional Conduct
Version Number:	3
Executive Owner:	AOU President
Approving Authority	University Council # 75, March 2022
Policy Review:	Quality Assurance Accreditation, Academic and Institutional Standards Committee (QAAAIS)
Policy Implementation:	Senior management of AOU HQ and AOU Branches
Policy Monitoring and Compliance:	VPPD Office HQ Branch Rectors Quality Assurance and Accreditation Units at AOU Branches
Next Review Date	2025

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## **Aim**

Code of Ethics and Standards of Professional Conduct are fundamental to the AOU values. The main purpose of the Code of Conduct is to maintain a professional and safe environment in which all AOU Participants can work and learn and to promote a culture of fair and ethical behavior to ensure that the University meets its obligations.

## **Scope**

The Code outlines the standards of behavior expected from all members of the University Community. It is intended to help and guide AOU community to conform to the highest professional standards and work ethics. The Code should be read in conjunction with AOU bylaws, policies and procedures. It requires compliance by all members of AOU Community: These include the following categories:

- Academic, administrative and support staff members who are employed by AOU under regular or special employment contracts.
- Contractors, consultants, sub-contractors, volunteers or any other individuals who perform services to AOU.
- Registered AOU Students.

## **Standards of Integrity**

AOU community members must maintain high standards of integrity by upholding basic values that include, respect for the rights, differences and dignity of others, honesty and integrity in all dealings, accountability for actions and conduct in the workplace and compliance with the University bylaws and contractual obligations.

## **Academic Integrity**

The University strives to maintain the highest standards in all the teaching and research staff members must not conduct themselves in ways that may undermine the academic standards of its

awards or the integrity and dissemination of its research.

Examples of inappropriate conduct and breaches of Academic Integrity include but not limited to the following:

- Awarding undue favours to students.
- Receiving undue favours from students in exchange of University favours.
- Disclosing personal information related to staff or students without their consent.
- Taking due advantage of one's position to influence academic judgment of a staff member.
- Using position of power to make requests that create personal or administrative problems for any member of staff.
- Making evaluations of faculty members or students by criteria not directly reflective of professional or academic performance.
- Violation of University policies applying to research and academic honesty including policies related to conduct of tutorials, office hours, examinations and assessment.
- Engaging in plagiarism evidenced in published or unpublished research manuscripts.

### **Confidentiality and Privacy**

Staff members receive and generate various types of confidential and private information on behalf of the University. Some members through their positions as members of committees, or line managers become aware of confidential information, either personal or in connection with the University's financial, administrative or academic activities. In such cases, they have an ethical responsibility to handle information appropriately and to safe guard its security and confidentiality. Therefore, they are required to comply with AOU confidentiality policy.

## Conflict of Interest

Conflict of Interest is defined as “A situation in which an individual’s financial, professional or other personal considerations may directly or indirectly affect, or have the appearance of affecting, his or her professional judgment in exercising any official duty or responsibility.”

Conflict of interest should be identified so that individuals are not involved in decisions where their actions could be seen as biased. Employees of the University and other community members shall conduct themselves in an honest and fair manner. They shall not make any personal use or gain from University property or knowledge gained from their position. They are expected to disclose to their administrative offices and faculties or to any other appropriate senior manager, any potential conflict of interest of which they are aware of. Staff members with other professional or financial interests shall disclose them in compliance with the University contractual policies and relevant bylaws including:

- 1) Academic Staff Members Regulations for Disciplinary Action appeals and grievances.
- 1) Internal Regulations for staff Members of AOU.

The following activities are examples of situations that may raise questions regarding an apparent or real Conflict of Interest:

- Undue personal gain from University funds or resources.
- Excessive or unauthorized use of University time or resources for personal services.
- Exploitation of students for private gain.
- Compromise of University priorities due to personal financial considerations.
- Selection of an entity as a University vendor by an individual who has a personal or economic interest in that entity; this includes engaging a relative or personal friend as an independent contractor, subcontractor or consultant.

## Use of University Resources & Assets

AOU members have an obligation to act in its best interest and not let outside activities or interests interfere with that obligation. AOU expects its staff to observe the relevant regulations and guidelines as per article 13 of the Internal Regulations for staff Members of AOU. As part of this responsibility, faculty and staff are expected to apply their time and effort appropriately and to use University resources towards University ends. All AOU resources must be utilized for business purposes only and may not be used for personal gain or use. These include systems and equipment (e.g. telephone systems, information, communication and networking services, computers, software, audiovisuals, laboratories, motor vehicles); and the time and effort of staff, students. All resources are to be used in the conduct of University programmes and activities at University owned or leased locations.

Examples of inappropriate use of University resources includes, but not limited to the following:

- Offering inappropriate favours to outside entities in an attempt to influence them in their dealings with the AOU.
- Granting external entities access to AOU resources, and information technology services for purposes outside the University's mission.
- Granting others unauthorized access to confidential information acquired through conduct of the AOU business or research activities.
- Faculty member assigning his or her students or AOU staff tasks to advance the Faculty member's own monetary benefit.

## University Agreements and Contractual Obligations

Agreements with a second party and contractual obligations, may lead to a legal obligation on the part of AOU. Therefore, only individuals who have authority delegated by the AOU's President can enter into agreements on its behalf of the University and with accordance with the University bylaws and internal regulations.

## Discrimination and Harassment

AOU is committed to providing a healthy and safe environment in which the rights and dignity of all its participants are respected. AOU policy of equal opportunity and respect for diversity states that all participants must be treated fairly and with respect. It prohibits discrimination, harassment and victimization and provides equal opportunities for all community participants and applicants regardless of their gender, religion, marital status, social or economic background, ethnic origin, age, or disability.

Consistent with this policy, all AOU participants have the right to expect professional ethical behavior from others and a corresponding responsibility to behave ethically and professionally toward others. All are expected to refrain from any form of discrimination or harassment (physically, verbally or electronically).

***Discrimination*** refers to any form of unequal treatment based on the policy stated grounds, whether imposing extra burdens or denying benefits. It may involve direct actions that are discriminatory or may involve practices or procedures that have the effect of disadvantaging certain groups of people.

***Harassment*** may take many forms, obvious or subtle. It can involve verbal, written or physical conduct that are considered offensive, demeaning or unwelcome based on a grounds of discrimination set in the above mentioned policy.

Examples of Discrimination and Harassment include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Abuse of power or authority to undermine, or intimidate a staff member or student.
- Verbal or physical threats.
- Abusive behavior or comments.
- Offensive comments or body language.
- Open hostility.

- Persistent unjustified criticism.
- Deliberately undermining a competent person by overloading him/her with work and constant negative criticism.
- Unfair allocation of work.
- Racially oriented jokes and remarks.
- Words or actions that target an individual's race, sex, disability, creed, age or any other ground.

Sexual harassment: is gender-based form of harassment that can include the following examples:

- Offensive remarks about members of a specific gender.
- Inappropriate sexual gestures.
- Gender-related verbal abuse or threats.
- Offensive or sexual comments about appearance, clothing or body characteristics of a staff member or student.
- Vulgar comments related to gender.
- Propositions of physical intimacy.
- Inappropriate behavior (staring or unwelcome physical contact).
- Sending suggestive letters, emails or obscene message.
- Publishing, circulating or displaying sexually offensive inappropriate images, posters, videos or other materials.

Some of the above-mentioned acts may occur with the internet, e-mail, social media or telephone. All of the above examples may amount to bullying particularly when the conduct is coupled with the inappropriate exercise of power or authority over another individual or a subordinate.

### **Payment of Personal Compensation by a State or Private Sector**

Every AOU participant who anticipates personal remuneration for special work for the public or private sector shall submit a written statement to the President of the University through his or line manager covering the following points:



- 1) Description of the service to be provided.
- 2) Statement of time required to finish the service.
- 3) Amount of personal compensation expected.

### **Health & Safety**

AOU participants must be committed to protecting the health and safety of the workplace and should comply with the AOU health and safety Policy. AOU is liable to provide at all times to its community members a working environment that does not jeopardize their health and safety in any manner.

### **Reporting of Violations**

It is the responsibility of AOU staff members to report any breach of compliance to the Code to the relevant concerned as stipulated by regulations.

### **Compliance with the Code**

All Members of the AOU community are accountable for their actions and as members of the University community, are collectively accountable for upholding professional standards of behavior and for compliance with all applicable Bylaws. They must conduct their duties in compliance with the University Rules & Regulations, Policies and Code of Professional Conduct. Any conduct that departs from the stated AOU Code of Professional Conduct is unacceptable and is subject to appropriate actions.

### **Related Documents/Policies**

- AOU Internal Regulations Handbook
- Health & Safety Policy
- Students' Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures
- Equal Opportunity and Respect for Diversity Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Safe Recruitment Policy
- Confidentiality Policy

## Acknowledgements

The Code of Conduct is based on the AOU bylaws, administrative regulations, student s code of conduct and disciplinary procedures, AOU s Equal opportunity and Health & safety policies. Relevant literature and guidelines from and International Regional Universities are consulted when drafting this code. These include:

- The Open University data protection code of practice
- The Open University code of practice for research
- The Open University code of practice for student discipline
- Oxford University Code of Conduct for Staff
- Stanford University Code of Conduct.
- Berkeley University Code of Conduct
- Kuwait University Code of Conduct.
- American University of Kuwait Code of Conduct.