

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley™

Standards of Conduct Guide

Integrity, Accountability, Transparency, and Respect should guide each of us in all actions and decisions.

UTRGV is committed to responsible and ethical conduct in the classroom, the workplace and the laboratory. This commitment is reflected in many of UTRGV's policies and procedures. It is important for all members of the UTRGV community be aware of these policies and procedures and for individuals and organizations outside of the UTRGV community to know UTRGV's dedication to responsible and ethical practices and conduct. This document serves as a guide to the expectations and standards of behavior and provides basic principles to assist the UTRGV Community to always "do the right thing."

More comprehensive information is available in the Handbook of Operating Procedures which is accessible on-line at: www.utrgv.edu/hop/ or by request from the Compliance Office at: compliance@utrgv.edu.

President's Message:

UT Rio Grande Valley strives to provide an educational and professional environment in which everyone can realize his or her greatest potential. Essential to our success is an absolute commitment to conduct university activities with honesty, integrity and fairness. Please share in this commitment to act according to these ethical principles and to comply with all laws, regulations and policies. When we all "do the right thing" as a UTRGV community, we can achieve our goals, fulfill our mission, and promote the public's trust and confidence in our institution.

-- Guy Bailey, Founding President

1. Individual Responsibility and Accountability

All members of the UTRGV community (employees, faculty, students, vendors, contractors, and volunteers) are expected to exercise responsibility appropriate to their positions and delegated authorities. They are responsible to each other, to UTRGV and to the public for their actions and decisions. Each person is expected to conduct business using sound judgment and serving the best interests of the UTRGV community.

The guiding principle of "Do the Right Thing" is simple to write and say, but sometimes difficult to determine in real-life situations. If you are faced with a tough ethical decision, ask yourself three questions:

Is it legal? Will you be violating UTRGV rule, institutional policy or federal or state laws or regulations? If so, don't do it.

Is it fair, honest and balanced? Will all parties be treated fairly? You should avoid unfair, one-sided decisions. Would your decision still feel right if you were in the other person's shoes?

How will I feel when it is done? Does the decision go against your own innate sense of what's right? If your actions were published in the newspaper, would you feel good about it?

The above three questions constitute a quick and simple “ethics check.” The legal question focuses on existing standards; the balance question activates your sense of fairness and rationality; and the last question focuses on your own standards of morality. If an ethical decision fails the ethics check, don’t do it. If you are unsure, seek guidance from your supervisor, Human Resources or Institutional Compliance before you act.

Management’s Responsibility: While everyone is responsible for conducting themselves in an ethical manner, those in management have a special responsibility. Those in management positions must create a departmental culture that promotes the highest standards of ethics and compliance. This culture must encourage everyone in the department to raise concerns when they arise.

2. Compliance with Laws, Regulations, and Standards

Because academic institutions are subject to many laws and regulations, all UTRGV employees are expected to become familiar with regulations bearing on their areas of responsibility. Failure to comply can have serious consequences both for the individual and for UTRGV, affecting reputation, finances, or the health and safety of employees, students and others.

3. Scientific Integrity

At the core of UTRGV’s research program is a strong commitment to research integrity and ethical scientific methodologies. As members of an academic community that values truth and the pursuit of knowledge, scientific misconduct or fraudulent activities are unacceptable. Examples of misconduct/fraud in research are fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or other practices that materially deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic community for the conduct and reporting of research.

4. Safe and Healthy Workplace

UTRGV strives to create a safe and healthy environment for employees, students and visitors. It is our policy to comply with all environmental laws and regulations pertaining to our operations. We will act to preserve our natural resources, comply with all environmental laws and operate each of

our facilities with the necessary permits, approvals, and controls. Safety practices are in place to reduce the likelihood of accidents and to minimize exposure to hazardous or infectious material.

All employees should become familiar with and understand how these safety policies and practices apply to their specific job responsibilities and seek advice from their supervisor whenever there is a question or concern.

Employees must immediately report workplace injury or unsafe or unhealthy working conditions to their supervisors or to the appropriate oversight office.

5. Respect for Others

We should make an effort to understand the perspectives of others and take those perspectives into account. Courtesy, understanding and respect for others should guide our actions and decisions.

UTRGV prohibits discrimination and harassment against all students, employees or applicants. We provide equal opportunities for all regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identify, gender expression, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, medical condition, marital status, citizenship, or status as a veteran. Degrading or humiliating jokes, insults or slurs, intimidation, or other harassing behaviors are not acceptable. We promote an atmosphere of courtesy and respect.

The educational and working environment of UTRGV should be free from inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual misconduct and sexual harassment, which includes sexual advances or requests for sexual favors is prohibited. Verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that interferes with work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment will not be tolerated. Additionally, romantic or sexual relationships between faculty and their students are prohibited.

6. Responsible Use of Resources

It is the responsibility of each UTRGV employee to preserve the institution's assets including time, materials, supplies, equipment, and information. Institutional assets are to be maintained for business related purposes. As a general rule, the personal use of any UTRGV asset without prior supervisory approval is prohibited. The occasional use of items, such as telephones, fax machines, or email, provided the use complies with UTRGV policies and does not result in additional cost to UTRGV, is permissible.

Any use of UTRGV resources for personal financial gain unrelated to the institution's business is strictly prohibited.

7. Avoiding Conflicts of Interest and Conflicts of Commitment

Our primary responsibility as employees of the University is the accomplishment of the duties and responsibilities assigned to us.

A conflict of interest occurs when an individual is involved in multiple interests, one of which might compromise objectivity or professional judgment. Conflicts of interest can arise in the contexts of business relationships, purchasing decision, use and appropriation of UTRGV assets, or research activities. The existence of a conflict of interest can create a real or perceived impropriety that can undermine confidence in the individual or the institution.

It is common to assume that we would readily recognize activities or interests that would be in conflict with our institutional duties or would impair our judgement. Conflicts of interests and commitment have the potential to influence our thinking and decision making both consciously and unconsciously. Even if an outside activity does not actually impair our ability to act in the best interest of UTRGV, it may appear to the public that independence of judgment has been affected.

All actual and potential conflicts of interest must be reported and evaluated so that, when necessary, steps can be taken to reduce, manage, or eliminate the conflict.

UTRGV has policies and procedures related to Conflicts of Interest, Conflicts of Commitment and Outside Employment/Activities.

8. Declining Gifts, Gratuities, and Kickbacks

Faculty and staff should not personally accept any material gifts, gratuities, or other payments, in cash or in kind, from any vendor currently doing or seeking to do business with UTRGV. Material gifts are those of more than nominal value. Nominal value means an item of little or no marketable value such as a keychain, notepad or pen with a vendor's name on it.

9. Accuracy of Records

Employees are required to maintain the integrity and accuracy of business documents and records for which they are responsible. No one may alter or falsify information on any record or document.

10. Privacy and Confidentiality

Many employees have access to sensitive, confidential, or proprietary information. Federal laws and UTRGV policies prohibit the unauthorized seeking, using, or disclosing of such information, including confidential information contained in student, employee or patient records. Such information is to be accessed, used, or disclosed only when authorized and required to complete assigned job duties.

11. Patient Rights and Quality of Care

UTRGV recognizes and supports the rights of all patients to high-quality care without discrimination due to race, creed, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, payer source, or any other protected status under relevant law. UTRGV will always treat patients and their families with consideration, respect, and recognition of their dignity and right to privacy.

12. Billing and Coding Integrity

UTRGV makes every effort to prevent the submission of inappropriate or inaccurate bills or claims to Medicare, Medicaid, other third-party payers, the Federal Government, the State of Texas, clinical trial sponsors, or to

patients. All claims for professional services made by, or on behalf of, UTRGV must adhere to applicable billing and coding requirements.

13. Professional Behavior

All members of the UTRGV workforce are expected to behave in a manner that is consistent with professional, courteous conduct and supportive of excellence in the workplace. Unacceptable behavior includes demeaning, disruptive, or threatening actions or any actions that interfere with the ability of others to do their jobs. Any such behavior will not be tolerated and should be reported to management.

14. Voicing Concerns

External standards or policies are no substitute for an individual's internal sense of fairness, honesty, and integrity. Employees who encounter a situation or a course of action that does not feel right are encouraged to discuss the situation with management, the Office of Human Resources, the Compliance Office, or the *Hotline* at 877-882-3999.

The *Hotline* service is provided by an external company with operators available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. *Hotline* calls are taken in English or Spanish. *Hotline* users may choose to remain anonymous. There will be no retribution or discipline for anyone who reports, in good faith, a possible violation or misconduct.

A report in good faith means one that is made with a reasonable belief that the reported activity occurred or may have occurred.

Employees should not assume that management is aware of a situation or that it is someone else's responsibility to bring attention to an issue. Maintaining the highest ethical standards is everyone's responsibility.

No UTRGV employee may retaliate against any individual for making a good faith report of known or suspected misconduct or wrongdoing or for assisting in an authorized investigation of such reports.