



Policy Name:	Conflicting Employment Relationships and Favoritism Policy		
Associated Forms:	N/A	Policy Number:	2024-24
Reviewed:	Non-Academic Policy Committee	Approved:	December 20, 2024
Approval Authority:	President <i>Susan Parish</i>	Adopted:	December 20, 2024
Responsible Executive:	Executive Director of Human Resources	Revised:	2007, 2022
Responsible Office:	Human Resources	Contact:	Associate Director of Human Resources

I. Policy Statement

This policy outlines Mercy University's (the "University") expectations for maintaining equal employment opportunities by preventing the occurrence of, appearance of (whether real or perceived), or potential for nepotism or favoritism in employment decisions. The University is committed to upholding standards that ensure Mercy is a fair and ethical workplace.

II. Nepotism

A. Definition of Family Member

For purposes of this Policy, "Family Member" is defined broadly as:

- Spouse.
- Domestic partner.
- Parent.
- Son or daughter.
- Brother or sister.
- Grandparent or grandchild.
- Aunt or uncle.
- Niece or nephew.
- Cousin.
- Guardian or ward.
- Step, half, or in-law relation.
- A person living in one's household.
- Any other person with such a close bond as to suggest conflict in the employment relationship (for example, a fiancé).

B. Hiring Family Members

Family members seeking employment at Mercy must use standard application channels. To avoid creating any barrier to equal employment opportunity, hiring of family members based exclusively on referrals is prohibited.

If the qualifications of any non-family member seeking employment are demonstrably superior to those of a family member of a current employee, the family member may not be considered for employment.

Mercy is committed to being an equal employment opportunity workforce. All hiring decisions of family members must be reviewed by the Human Resources department to ensure compliance with Mercy policies and applicable non-discrimination laws.

C. Working Relationship of Family Members

Family members may not directly supervise another family member, or occupy a position that has influence over a family member's:

- Employment.
- Transfer or promotion.
- Salary considerations.
- Other management or personnel considerations.

Such influence may include, but is not limited to, participation as a member of a screening committee or other committee that recommends personnel actions or employment decisions of the related person.

Family members may not be employed within the same department (i.e., a subunit of a Mercy division that supports a specific function) without certification by the Human Resources department that the employment will not result in supervision of one family member over another.

D. Change in Family Status

If two employees marry, cohabit, or become otherwise related, so as to qualify as family members under this policy's definition, they must report the change in status to the Office of Human Resources. The Office of Human Resources will work with the employees to devise a working solution to avoid nepotism problems under this policy. The Office of Human Resources may determine that only one of the employees may be permitted to remain within the particular department, depending on the circumstances. The two employees may not remain in any reporting relationship where one has influence over the other unless accommodations can be made to eliminate the potential conflict. The choice of which employee will remain in the previous role and which employee will modify the role as necessary to be in compliance with this policy, is to be made by with the University.

III. Favoritism in the Workplace

Favoritism in the workplace is when an employee receives preferential treatment over others for reasons that are not related to job performance. Favoritism can stem from any number of factors including but not limited to personal relationships, such as shared connections or hobbies, or on unconscious bias.

Favoritism can be unethical and can have negative consequences for the workplace, including:

- **Reduced productivity:** Employees may become less motivated if they feel their hard work isn't being recognized.

- Disengagement: Employees may feel they are not being given a fair chance to advance, which can lead to them looking for other jobs.
- Erosion of Trust and Respect for Leadership: Once employees begin to question whether their supervisors will make fair decisions and manage effectively, low morale, negative dialogue and a collapse in teamwork can create a toxic work environment.

Favoritism is not always illegal, but it can be if it leads to discrimination, harassment, retaliation, or other prohibited behavior. For example, favoritism is illegal if it's based on an employee's race, gender, age, disability, religion, or other protected characteristic. Even when favoritism is not illegal, it can have deleterious consequences across the institution, and it must be avoided at all times.

Any employee who believes that a supervisor is displaying preferential treatment or “playing favorites” should report their concern to their supervisor’s supervisor or the Office of Human Resources.