



POLICY TITLE

Code of Conduct and Ethical Behavior Policy

POLICY NUMBER

SUS- 7-013

Responsible Units: <i>System Office of Human Resources</i>	Effective Date: <i>August 15, 2025</i>
Responsible Officials: <i>Chief Human Resources Officer</i>	Last Reviewed Date: <i>June 1, 2025</i>
Policy Classification: <i>Human Resources</i>	Origination Date: <i>January 8, 2025</i>

I. POLICY STATEMENT AND RATIONALE

The Southern University System is committed to fostering an environment grounded in ethical behavior, mutual respect, and personal responsibility. This Code of Conduct outlines the principles and standards of behavior expected of all employees. All personnel are expected to adhere to the highest standards of professional and ethical behavior in accordance with the values of the University, applicable federal and state laws, and System policies.

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for appropriate conduct and ethical behavior to ensure a safe, respectful, and legally compliant workplace that supports the mission of the Southern University System.

II. POLICY SCOPE AND AUDIENCE

This policy applies to all Southern University System employees including full-time, part-time, classified, unclassified, administrative, faculty, student workers, contractors, and affiliates across all campuses and System offices.

III. POLICY COMPLIANCE

The Chief Human Resources Officer, Human Resources Directors as well as individual supervisors, are responsible for the enforcement of this Policy.

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring adherence to this Policy and are required to take

immediate action to ensure compliance.

Sanctions for violations of this Policy may include but are not limited to, disciplinary action up to Termination of employment.

IV. POLICY DEFINITIONS

- a. **Absences Due to Incarceration**: are absences that are due to a University employee becoming incarcerated.
- b. **Absences Without Prior Approval**: are absences that have not been previously approved by the employee's supervisor.
- c. **Computers and Computer Accounts**: is computer equipment, email, and other computing technology provided to University employees to assist them in the performance of their jobs.
- d. **Demotion/Transfer**: is a disciplinary action which occurs in concert with the issuance of the *Letter of Reprimand*, whereby an employee may also be involuntarily moved to a position of lesser (*Demotion*) or equal status (*Transfer*) for which they currently meet the published minimum qualifications when the nature of the infraction makes the employee unsuitable for their current position. Note: *Demotion/Transfer* can occur for reasons other than disciplinary action. For the purpose of this Policy, it is defined as a consequence due to violation of this Policy.
- e. **Discrimination**: is treating a person differently than others based on that person's protected status when it is sufficiently serious to unreasonably interfere with or limit the ability to participate in, access, or benefit from the University's programs and activities. *Discrimination* can include failing to provide reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

Discrimination may also be prohibited by a variety of federal, state, and local laws, including but not limited to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Executive Order 11246, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 402 of the Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994, the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008, and the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, and amendments thereto. This Policy is intended to comply with the prohibitions stated in these statutes.

- f. **Disorderly Conduct**: is conduct which includes displaying blatant or public disrespect; using discriminatory, inappropriate, offensive, abusive, obscene, or

- threatening language; fighting, provoking a fight, or attempting bodily harm or injury to another employee or any other individual; or threatening physical action or injury on University property or during University activities; or other conduct which threatens or endangers the health, safety, or well-being of any person.
- g. **Exclusion**: is socially or physically excluding or disregarding a person in work-related activities.
 - h. **Gesture Bullying**: is the nonverbal threatening gestures; glances that can convey threatening messages.
 - i. **Interference**: is concealing, withholding, obfuscating, or providing false or misleading information during the course of an investigation. *Interference* also includes encouraging, *Intimidating*, or coercing another to conceal, withhold, obfuscate, or provide false or misleading information during an investigation. This includes soliciting or encouraging witness statements or testimony, collecting evidence, or instructing a third party to do so, except when specifically directed by the investigator.
 - j. **Intimidation**: is to place another person in reasonable fear of harm through the use of threatening words and/or other conduct.
 - k. **Leadership Failure**: is the failure of an individual in a leadership role to conduct their affairs in a manner supportive of and consistent with the University's values and mission.
 - l. **Letter of Concern**: is a disciplinary action that provides an employee notice of a minor non-recurrent violation of this Policy. This notification is advisory in nature and has no immediate punitive ramifications. The *Letter of Concern* may, however, serve as the basis for more severe discipline or may be used to establish a pattern of behavior that warrants more severe discipline. *Letters of Concern* are to be maintained in the supervisor's employee file.
 - m. **Letter of Reprimand**: is a disciplinary action that provides an employee notice of significant violations or repeated minor violations of this Policy and is punitive in nature. A *Letter of Reprimand* becomes a part of the employee's permanent record and makes the employee ineligible to apply for positions within the University for a period of six (6) months.
 - n. **Letter of Reprimand with Disciplinary Suspension**: is a disciplinary action that provides an employee notice of severe violations of this Policy and is punitive in nature. A *Letter of Reprimand with Disciplinary Suspension* includes both the notice and suspension without pay. Employees may be suspended without pay for up to five (5) business days with the concurrence of the Vice Chancellor and the Chancellor and the Human Resources Director. The

President must approve disciplinary suspensions. A *Letter of Reprimand with Disciplinary Suspension* becomes a part of the employee's permanent record and makes the employee ineligible to apply for positions within the University for a period of six (6) months.

- o. Physical Bullying:** is the pushing, shoving, kicking, poking, tripping, assault, the threat of physical assault, or damage to a person's work area or property.
- p. Retaliation/Retaliatory:** is acts or attempted acts for the purpose of *Interfering* with any complaint, report, investigation, or proceeding under this Policy, or as retribution or revenge against anyone who has (1) made an allegation of a potential violation of this Policy, (2) lodged a complaint in relation to this Policy, (3) otherwise invoked this Policy, or (4) testified, assisted or is expected to participate in any manner in an investigation pursuant to this Policy. Prohibited *Retaliatory* acts include, but are not limited to, *Intimidation*, threats, or *Discrimination*. For purposes of this Policy, an attempt requires a substantial step towards committing a violation.
- q. Tardiness:** is arriving at work later than the appointed starting time without supervisory approval.
- r. Termination:** is an involuntary separation from the University. It is a disciplinary action that stems from severe violations of University Policy or failure to correct behavioral deficiencies. Single incidents of certain offenses are severe enough to warrant separation from the University.

Examples of the types of offenses that may result in *Termination* include, but are not limited to, the following:

- i. Physical altercations, whether or not injury occurs;
- ii. Sexual assault or engaging in consensual sexual activity in the workplace;
- iii. Possession, use, or being under the influence of illegal substances on University property or while engaged in business;
- iv. Theft of University property or resources;
- v. Viewing, possessing, or distributing child pornography; and
- vi. Falsification of University or public records including the misrepresentation of credentials to gain employment or promotion.

- s. **Unauthorized Absences**: is the failure of an employee to report to their workplace at the beginning of the work period or leaving work before the end of the work period or for extended periods of time without informing the supervisor.
- t. **Unscheduled Absence**: is the failure to obtain approval to be absent from work at least forty-eight (48) hours prior to the absence. Continuous absence for the same reason will be considered one (1) Unscheduled Absence regardless of its duration.
- u. **Verbal Bullying**: Is the slandering, ridiculing, or maligning of a person or his or her family; persistent name-calling that is hurtful, insulting, or humiliating; using a person as the butt of jokes; abusive and offensive remarks.
- v. **Workplace Bullying**: is repeated, malicious, and/or inappropriate behavior, either direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical, or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work, and in the course of employment. Types of *Workplace Bullying* include but are not limited to, *Verbal Bullying*, *Physical Bullying*, *Gesture Bullying*, or *Exclusion*. Examples of *Workplace Bullying* may include, but are not limited to:
 - i. Not allowing the person to speak or express himself or herself;
 - ii. Persistent, malicious singling out of one person for undesirable work or unwanted attention;
 - iii. Personal insults or use of offensive nicknames;
 - iv. Public humiliation in any form;
 - v. Constant criticism on matters unrelated or minimally related to the person's job performance or description;
 - vi. Publicly or privately shouting or raising one's voice at another individual;
 - vii. Ignoring or interrupting an individual at meetings;
 - viii. Public reprimands;
 - ix. Repeatedly accusing someone of errors that cannot be documented;
 - x. Deliberately interfering with mail and other communications;
 - xi. Spreading rumors and gossip regarding individuals;
 - xii. Making or encouraging others to make false or factually unsubstantiated claims or

allegations against another;

- xiii. Encouraging others to disregard a supervisor's lawful instructions;
- xiv. Manipulating the ability of someone to do his or her work (e.g., overloading, under loading, withholding information, assigning meaningless tasks, setting impractical or unreasonable deadlines, giving intentionally ambiguous instructions, etc.);
- xv. Using verbal or obscene gestures;
- xvi. Repeatedly assigning menial tasks inconsistent with the level of responsibility of the position;
- xvii. Taking credit for another person's ideas;
- xviii. Refusing reasonable requests for leave in the absence of work-related reasons not to grant leave;
- xix. Deliberately excluding an individual or isolating him or her from meetings or other work-related activities; or
- xx. Unwanted physical contact, physical abuse, or threats of abuse to an individual or an individual's property.

When an allegation of *Workplace Bullying* is made, the intention of the Respondent is irrelevant, and will not be given consideration when imposing discipline. *Workplace Bullying* can occur regardless of whether the perpetrator is a peer, subordinate, or supervisor. However, not every incident or disagreement is considered *Workplace Bullying*. Typically, isolated incidents, and supervisory acts like honest performance evaluations, including coaching and counseling sessions, will not be considered *Workplace Bullying*.

- w. **Workplace Harassment**: is the unwelcome conduct directed at a person which is so severe or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. Harassing conduct does not need to be based on a person's protected characteristics for the purpose of this Policy. Pursuant to this Policy, all instances of harassment are prohibited behavior. The above examples of *Workplace Bullying*, or other similar behaviors can also be described as harassing conduct if forms of the conduct are so severe and pervasive that they create an intimidating, offensive, or hostile working environment which can result in *Workplace Harassment*.

V. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

All actions by the University related to this Policy shall be based on the findings of

a thorough investigation into the facts supporting an alleged violation of this Policy. The investigation process begins after an initial assessment of the alleged violation. The initial assessment will determine whether the allegations would present a potential violation of this Policy and whether further action is warranted based on the allegations. These procedures are applied at the sole discretion of the University and in no way alters the at-will relationship between the University and its employees.

VI. Reporting Incidences of Misconduct

Any employee who witnesses, becomes aware of, or is a recipient of behavior that is a potential safety, ethical, or law violation in the workplace or scope of employment, or any other misconduct covered by this Policy, is urged to report the misconduct to an appropriate University official or department. Examples of appropriate University officials or departments to whom reports may be made include, but are not limited to, the employee's supervisor and/or the Office of Human Resources. Reports to the Office of Human Resources can be made in person or through the submission of a *Complaint Form*. In addition, appropriate reporting may also be made to any Louisiana or federal agency governing law or ethics. Issues that are of an immediate safety concern should be reported to the campus police department. Any report or complaint potentially related to the Louisiana Code of Ethics will be forwarded to the Office of Compliance for review.

VII. Paid Administrative Leave

Employees may be placed on suspension during investigations of violations of this Policy. If an employee is placed on administrative leave during an investigation, the employee must be notified in writing.

In instances where, after consultation with (1) the appropriate administrator and/or Chancellor and (2) the Human Resources Director, it is necessary to remove one or more parties involved in an alleged violation of this Policy, employees may be placed on paid administrative leave pending the outcome of an investigation of the facts supporting the allegation. The purpose of the leave is to allow the University to conduct a fair and unbiased investigation, free of influence by involved parties.

Suspended employees will be relieved of all duties and will be directed to have no direct or indirect contact with any University employee or other persons involved in or impacted by the investigation other than those conducting the investigation. Any such communication will be considered insubordination and may result in separate disciplinary action, including *Termination*.

VIII. Investigation/Review of Facts

- a. Investigations of possible violations of this Policy should be completed as soon as reasonably possible.

- b.** The following factors should be considered in evaluating the results of an investigation or the facts precipitating the need for corrective action:
- i. The nature and seriousness of the offense, and its relation to the employee's duties, position, and responsibilities, including whether the offense was intentional or technical or inadvertent, or was committed maliciously or for gain, or was frequently repeated;
 - ii. The employee's job level and type of employment, including supervisory or fiduciary role, contacts with the public, and prominence of the position;
 - iii. The employee's past disciplinary record;
 - iv. The employee's prior work record, including the length of service, performance on the job, ability to get along with fellow workers, and dependability;
 - v. The effect of the offense upon the employee's ability to perform at a satisfactory level and its impact upon supervisors' confidence in the employee's work ability to perform assigned duties;
 - vi. Consistency of the penalty with those imposed upon other employees for the same or similar offenses;
 - vii. The notoriety of the offense or its impact upon the reputation of the University;
 - viii. The clarity with which the employee was on notice of any rules that were violated in committing the offense, or had been warned about the conduct in question;
 - ix. The potential for the employee's rehabilitation;
 - x. Mitigating circumstances surrounding the offense; and
 - xi. The adequacy and effectiveness of alternative sanctions to deter such conduct in the future by the employee or others.
 - xii. For corrective action(s) due to leadership failure, the degree to which such failure affects or undermines the reputation of the University or the community's confidence in the University leadership's commitment to its mission and values will be determinative in addressing transgressions of this standard.

IX. Specific Considerations

Job-Relatedness of Criminal Charges. The crime's classification (i.e., felony or misdemeanor) is not as important an issue as the underlying conduct itself. For example, crimes that are related to illegal use and possession of drugs are considered job-related based on this Policy, regardless of whether the offense is classified as a felony or misdemeanor. However, a Driving Under the Influence charge in which an employee is in his private vehicle is not job-related unless the individual holds a position that requires driving as an essential function of the job. Crimes such as shoplifting and theft should be thoroughly evaluated for job-relatedness and discussed with the Human Resources staff. Each criminal charge must be considered on a case- by-case basis.

The employee is disciplined or *Terminated* as appropriate if the conduct underlying the charge of a criminal offense is job-related, and the employee either admits or the evidence establishes the employee engaged in the conduct. Alternatively, the employee will be suspended without pay if the underlying conduct is job-related, and it cannot be concluded that the employee engaged in the conduct, pending resolution of the charges or the acquisition of additional information that will allow management to make a final decision. This initial determination will be made within five (5) business days of the employee being placed on administrative leave.

It is the employee's responsibility to provide management with the disposition/resolution of the criminal matter. If the criminal charges are not resolved within six (6) months of the original charge, the administrator and the Human Resources Director will review the status of the criminal proceeding to determine the action to be taken regarding the employee's employment status.

X. Disciplinary Action/Notifications

The University, through its managers and supervisors, may impose remedial or punitive actions against an employee when a violation of this Policy has occurred.

a. Notification

All disciplinary action should be initiated within five (5) business days of the completion of the investigation/review of facts following a violation of this Policy. All disciplinary actions/notifications must include the following:

- i. The date of the infraction;
- ii. A summary of the facts supporting the discipline as determined through the investigation;
- iii. The specific policy and policy provision violated; and

- iv. Where appropriate, a reference to the employee's right to grieve the discipline.

b. Classified Employees

Classified employees will be subject to the provisions of Chapter 12 of the Louisiana Civil Service Handbook, Discipline; Corrective Actions; Separations.

c. Unclassified Employees

- i. All unclassified employees are subject to the following types of disciplinary actions:
 - 1. *Letter of Concern*;
 - 2. *Letter of Reprimand*;
 - 3. *Letter of Reprimand with Disciplinary Suspension*. In consultation with the Office of Human Resources, the supervisor and his/her chain of authority will make decisions to issue a *Letter of Reprimand with Disciplinary Suspension*.
 - 4. *Demotion/Transfer*. *Demotions/Transfers* occur solely at the discretion of the University. The employee may be *Terminated* when no appropriate position is available and thus, *Demotion/Transfer* is not an option. A new position may be created only upon extraordinary circumstances. In consultation with the Office of Human Resources, the supervisor and his/her chain of authority and Chancellor will make decisions to *Demote* or *Transfer*; and
 - 5. *Termination*. An employee's entire work history must be reviewed before a recommendation regarding *Termination* is made to the Chancellor. The Chancellor will make decisions to terminate in consultation with the Human Resources Director.
- ii. The receipt of three (3) *Letters of Reprimand* or *Letters of Reprimand with Disciplinary Suspension* within a twelve (12) month period will result in *Termination*. Upon the issuance of an employee's third disciplinary notification, if *Termination* is not recommended by the employee's supervisor, the Office of Human Resources must review this decision with the Chancellor.

XI. Training

The Office of Human Resources is responsible for ensuring the appropriate training and socialization of the Southern University System campus community, including

faculty, staff, administrators, and student employees.

XII. POLICY RELATED INFORMATION

- [Chapter 12 of the Louisiana Civil Service Handbook, Discipline; Corrective Actions; Separations](#)
- [Louisiana Ethics Administration Program](#)
- [Southern University System Comprehensive Loss Prevention Plan](#)
- Whistleblower Protection: [LA R.S. 23:967](#) and [LA R.S. 42:1169](#)
- SACSCOC Standards: [5.4, 6.1, 12.5, 13.3](#)

XIII. POLICY HISTORY AND REVIEW CYCLE

This is a new policy developed to outline the principles and standards of behavior expected of all employees. The policy will become effective upon approval by the System Board of Chair and President. It will be reviewed on a five-year review cycle. Additionally, interim reviews may be conducted as needed to address emerging challenges or opportunities.

XIV. POLICY URL

With respect to system policies, the SU System Policy and Planning Committee shall electronically post and archive approved and signed system policies on the system website at <https://www.sus.edu/page/policy-search>.

XV. POLICY APPROVAL

Policy approved at the August 15, 2025, meeting of the Board of Supervisors for the Southern University System.