



POLICY 2.13
COUNCIL GOVERNANCE

Code of Ethics

POLICY INTENT

This Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility is a statement of the ethical principles, values, and behaviours expected of staff and councillors of AUSU. The Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility is intended to assist staff and councillors to identify ethical issues that may occur during their employment or duties relating to AUSU. This policy does not eliminate or substitute the rights and obligations of staff and councillors under common law or legislation.

POLICY RESPONSIBILITY

Council

POLICY

Definitions

- 2.13.01 A conflict of interest is a situation in which the personal interests of a councillor will benefit or be perceived to benefit because of the councillor's exercise of council duties.
- 2.13.02 Bias describes a circumstance or personal belief that may affect a councillor's views on a group, person or idea. Biases are not considered conflicts of interest but should be understood as an inherent influence on the decision-making processes of all councillors.

Application and Objectives

- 2.13.03 All AUSU councillors and staff are responsible for abiding by and following all applicable laws, regulations, and AUSU policies that relate to their respective positions, including this Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility.
- 2.13.04 All AUSU councillors and staff have the responsibility to raise questions and bring potential problems to the attention of AUSU executive committee, as well as the duty to make appropriate disclosures, such as a conflict of interest, as necessary.
- 2.13.05 While this policy cannot cover every possible situation, it aims to:

- a) provide direction to councillors and staff regarding expected conduct while affiliated with AUSU;
- b) assist councillors and staff in dealing with ethical issues in ways that uphold AUSU's reputation; and
- c) promote professionalism and excellence.

2.13.06 AUSU recognizes that councillors and staff may also be bound by codes of conduct or ethics defined by their professional societies or groups, or by personal beliefs. It is the responsibility of each AUSU councillor and staff member to notify the AUSU president in any circumstances where conflict does or may potentially arise.

Ethics

- 2.13.07 AUSU councillors and staff shall adhere to the following minimum standards of ethical behaviour:
- a) adhere to AUSU policies and procedures to the best of their ability;
 - b) follow the laws and regulations in effect in the jurisdictions where they and/or AUSU carry on activities, and not be either directly or indirectly involved in any illegal or unacceptable practices. If the jurisdiction is in question, Alberta and Canadian laws shall apply;
 - c) not engage in any activities or behavior that would prejudice the interests, image, or reputation of AUSU;
 - d) not use or attempt to use their position to gain personal benefit from gifts, gratuities, or hospitality of any kind; and
 - e) never give the impression that their personal opinion is representative of the official position of AUSU, unless the opinion being expressed is outlined in AUSU's position policies or prior authorization is received to do so.

Professional Responsibility

- 2.13.08 AUSU councillors and staff shall:
- a) conduct themselves with fairness, courtesy, and mutual respect;
 - b) carry out the duties and responsibilities of their role in good faith;
 - c) actively support the goals, objectives, and mission of AUSU;
 - d) respect and support all decisions established through a democratic process;
 - e) place the needs of members at the forefront of all decisions;
 - f) always and in all circumstances act with prudence, diligence, honesty, and professionalism.

Conflict of Interest and Bias

- 2.13.09 Conflict of interest should not be confused with bias. It is understood that all councillors may have personal biases which direct their decision making, and that such biases are not to be interpreted as conflicts of interest unless the councillor may derive personal benefit through exercising their council duties. Significant biases should be declared for information purposes.

- 2.13.10 A councillor must disclose any potential conflict of interest as soon as the issue or motion fostering the conflict arises. Disclosure must be to a member of the executive committee and the executive committee shall disclose potential conflicts to council.
- 2.13.11 Council may determine whether a valid conflict of interest exists, or if the potential conflict constitutes an allowable bias that may be disclosed for information purposes.
- 2.13.12 Whereas AUSU is an entity separate from Athabasca University, and whereas AUSU must be able to perform University level advocacy; no member of AUSU Executive may be employed by AU, except for student research positions. An employee of AU may run for AUSU council, provided that they declare their potential conflict of interest and bias to the rest of council if elected.
- 2.13.13 If a situation is believed to be one of conflict, a councillor shall consider abstaining from voting on that issue, though a Councillor cannot be forced to abstain. However, the minutes shall show that a conflict of interest was disclosed.
- 2.13.14 Abstentions due to conflict shall be noted in the minutes as "councillor X abstained due to Conflict of Interest."

Confidentiality

- 2.13.15 AUSU councillors and staff may, during their duties, access confidential information, both verbal and written, and they shall use this information only for the purposes for which its possession is intended.
- 2.13.16 AUSU councillors and staff shall take care to maintain the integrity and privacy of all confidential information they acquire during their duties and shall never use confidential information for their own benefit or that of a third party.
- 2.13.17 The obligations mentioned in this policy continue to apply even after the relationship of the councillor or staff member with AUSU ends.

Reporting and Resolution

- 2.13.18 Any AUSU councillor or staff who feels that they face an ethical dilemma or who has questions regarding the interpretation and application of this policy should consult the AUSU executive committee as soon as possible.
- 2.13.19 AUSU councillors and staff who have knowledge of a fact that, in their opinion, may constitute a violation of the Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility, shall report it to the AUSU executive committee, unless the issue involves a member of the executive committee, in which case it may be reported to the remaining executive councillors and the executive director.
- 2.13.20 Necessary steps will be taken to maintain confidentiality of any councillor or staff member reporting an issue. No sanctions will be taken against a councillor or staff member who has reported an issue in good faith.

2.13.21 Any violation of this policy shall be handled promptly by the AUSU executive committee by applying Policy 2.04 Council Governance - Discipline.

RELATED REFERENCES, POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND FORMS

This Policy References:

Policy 2.04 Council Governance – Discipline

This Policy is Referenced by:

None

Forms:

None

POLICY HISTORY

Original Approval Date: October 18, 2011

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