CHAPTER 6. NJIT INTEGRITY

STANDARD ADDRESSED: This chapter addresses Standard 6 of the Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Integrity.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Integrity at NJIT permeates at two levels. At a macro-level, integrity is included as a core value in the NJIT strategic plan; as such, the university has embraced the state-mandated Uniform Code of Ethics for faculty, administration and staff, and student integrity is guided by the University Code of Academic Integrity. At the micro-level NJIT fosters, assesses and maintains integrity through ethics training, conflict of interest disclosure, and online sexual harassment training, and by providing events highlighting women’s issues, cultural diversity, and sexual orientation. NJIT’s policies and procedures are designed to ensure integrity in faculty selection, promotion, tenure, retention, compensation, and administrative review.

INTRODUCTION: Adhering to the institutional assessment framework defined in the Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education, in the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, NJIT has demonstrated adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom.

NJIT is an integrity-driven university. NJIT has integrated, iterative initiatives designed to notify the NJIT community of their rights and responsibilities under the law. The Faculty Handbook provides clear guidelines on the practice of hiring employees, both administrators and faculty. The university avoids conflicts of interest by requiring employees to fill out personal business disclosure forms, attendance at events forms, and scholarly capacity disclosure forms. It is known that NJIT does not discriminate against any applicant regardless of age, gender and national origin; it is equally well known that NJIT fosters a diverse working environment and is deeply committed to the welfare of all shareholders.

NJIT CORE VALUES: The core values of NJIT resonate with its mission and vision, analyzed in Chapter 1. The core values of NJIT reflect the community’s beliefs, guide its behaviors, and shape its culture; in doing so, the core values establish a sense of community and purpose. The university’s core values emphasize the following:

• In its service orientation, the NJIT community takes pride in being an engaged partner in enhancing constituent communities;
• In its pursuit of excellence, NJIT is satisfied with nothing less than meeting and sustaining the highest standards of performance;
• In its commitment to integrity, NJIT strives to be honest and ethical in all actions, to keep promises, and to acknowledge mistakes;
• In its devotion to students, NJIT cares for students as individuals and makes every effort to build enduring relationships by responding to student needs;
• In its commitment to civility, NJIT ensures that everyone is treated with respect and with dignity, and that communication is frequent and conducted with candor;
• In its celebration of diversity, NJIT is sensitive to cultural and personal differences. NJIT does not tolerate discrimination in any form.
The mission of NJIT drives its activities, and the vision provides a path for the future. The core values assure a culture of integrity for the NJIT community.

ETHICS LIAISON OFFICER: In March of 2008, NJIT created the position of Ethics Liaison Officer, Jean Feeney, who holds this post, has the following responsibilities: to coordinate and manage the ethics program; to review and investigate ethics concerns or allegations of violations; to develop and implement ethics policies and procedures; to assist the NJIT community in compliance of statutory mandates and regulations; to provide guidance on ethics related matters; and to serve as liaison to the State of New Jersey Ethics Commission. NJIT is strict in its requirement of disclosure forms from faculty and instructional staff to remain in compliance with the Uniform Code of Ethics from the NJ State Ethics Commission.

Under New Jersey State Act 52.34-10.9, ethics training is required of all employees involved in the procurement process. An “Attendance at Events” disclosure is required of each employee prior to attending an event to obtain prior approval. The form specifies that employees are not permitted to accept an honorarium or fee for any activity in which they participated. Yearly disclosure is required of all employees serving at NJIT in a scholarly capacity for all benefits received for engaging in scholarly activity from all sources except benefits received from NJIT. Outside activities, too, whether compensated or voluntary, must be disclosed by completing the State of New Jersey Outside Activity Questionnaire and receiving permission to engage in such activities from the supervisor and the NJIT Ethics Liaison Officer.

The president of NJIT completes a mandatory Financial Disclosure Statement, and the members of the Board of Trustees must complete an annual Conflicts of Interest Disclosure Form. NJIT regularly provides information to employees on an ongoing basis updating them on issues involving ethics. Ethical regulations are prominently posted on the NJIT website, and orientations for new faculty and instructional staff assure their implementation. The Human Resources website further publishes newsletters relevant to ethics and conducts an awareness campaign to notify the NJIT community of rights and responsibilities under the law, regulations, and executive orders. Periodic ethical training is provided by the Department of Human Resources. Such communications and feedback serve as a constant reminder to the NJIT community of the core value of integrity.

UNIVERSITY CODE ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: While the Ethics Liaison Officer attends to faculty and instructional staff, the University Code on Academic Integrity focuses on students. The university strives to develop and maintain a high level of ethics and honesty among all members of its community. Imperative to this goal is the commitment to truth and academic integrity. This commitment is confirmed in the NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity.

The Code, revised and updated during the 2008-2009 academic year by NJIT administrators and the Student Senate, requires that each student demonstrates honesty and integrity in the completion of all assignments and in the participation of the learning process. Adherence to the University Code on Academic Integrity promotes the level of integrity required within the university and professional communities and assures students that their work is being judged fairly with the work of others. The updated Code defines those behaviors that violate the principles of academic integrity, describes a
range of appropriate sanctions for offenses, and identifies a method for promoting the principle of academic integrity on campus. The Code creates clear and effective consequences for code violations through the creation of the **XF grade** that appears on the student’s transcript with the notation “Failure due to academic dishonesty.”

In addition to specification of violations and consequences, the Code explicitly defines the responsibilities of students, faculty, department chairs and advisors, and others involved in the process to create an environment conducive to academic integrity. Responsibilities of the faculty include communicating the integrity policy and its expectations, assisting in training of new faculty and instructional staff in the policy, providing an environment that contributes to ethical behavior, and reporting violations to the Dean of Students. The Dean of Students maintains anonymity for students who report violations, coordinates gathering of information, and brings reports of violations to the **Committee on Professional Conduct**, which handles integrity violations along with many other forms of professional conduct violation. The Code also creates an Honor Commission, whose members are students, faculty, and administrators, specifically for the purpose of creating programs and publicity to promote academic integrity, to assist in an annual seminar on academic integrity, and to keep issues of academic integrity in the forefront of faculty and student organizations. In intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA places great emphasis on academic integrity as one of the operating principles of the **NCAA Certification Self-Study**. The organization of the NJIT Athletics department was built around ensuring high academic standards for its student athletes.

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD:** In areas of research, NJIT maintains and promotes ethical conduct through the efforts of the **Institutional Review Board** (IRB) and the **Office of Sponsored Research**. The NJIT IRB works to assure that researchers fulfill public trust in the research enterprise by putting the welfare of research participants ahead of the interests of the institution or of the researcher’s personal financial interests. Any conflicts of interest with the rights or welfare of research participants must be disclosed to the IRB, which determines whether a conflict exists and manages any conflicts in accordance with the best interests of research subjects. Human subjects’ protection training is required for all members of research teams. The Office of Sponsored Research ensures that funds provided from external sources to support research and other projects are administered in accordance with university policies as well as those of the sponsor. Promotion of ethical conduct also extends to the intellectual property arena through a contract that university-employed inventors must sign.

**FOSTERING DIVERSITY:** In 2009, 82% of the graduating class of 2013 rated the importance of cultural and life choice diversity from moderately important to very important in their choice to come to NJIT. To support such celebration of diversity among students, NJIT actively engages its diverse population with an array of social events focusing on women, culture, and sexual orientations. Integral to this investment is the **ADVANCE** initiative analyzed in **Chapter 10**. The NJIT Campus Center has a **Diversity Programs Office** that coordinates and funds programs with student clubs. In addition, the Campus Center’s Women’s Center, home to the **Committee on Women’s Issues**, coordinates on-campus women’s groups, such as the Society of Women Engineers, to ensure a balance in campus programming. As evidence of NJIT’s expanded programs, student satisfaction with the campus community and the availability of cultural events has improved from 58% satisfaction in 2006 to a 67%
satisfaction in 2010. Students on campus also feel as though they are being dealt with fairly by administration and faculty. This rating has increased from 69% to 72%.

To ensure NJIT’s diversity both the Strategic Plan, 2004-2010 and the Strategic Plan, 2010-2015 focus on diversity. In the Strategic Plan, 2004-2010, specific enrollment targets were established for the following student populations: women (the goal of 15% and enrollment of 17% in 2010), African-American (the goal of 15% and enrollment of 13% in 2010), and Hispanic (the goal of 15% and the enrollment of 22% in 2010). This diversity initiative—to be nationally recognized for attracting high achieving students and faculty from diverse populations—has been continued in the Strategic Plan, 2010-2015. NJIT remains committed to attracting and enrolling the best and the brightest from all backgrounds to ensure a rich diverse experience for students and faculty. To that end, in 2006 NSF awarded NJIT a three-year ADVANCE grant aimed at advancing women faculty by facilitating collaborative research networks. An important focus area of the grant is to ensure that women faculty and instructional staff members are not isolated in the workplace, thus improving their potential for developing leadership roles at the university. Integration of studies conducted by the ADVANCE team has fostered a climate of diversity at NJIT. (An analysis of the ADVANCE initiative is provided in Chapter 10.)

A COHESIVE FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRITY AND TRANSPARENCY: Leveraging its status as one of the nation’s most digitally advanced universities since 1999, NJIT maintains a wide variety of reporting formats—featuring print, web, and podcasts—to inform shareholders. Copies of all key documents—from student enrollment and graduation rates to forms for compliance with the Ethics Liaison Officer—are available in print formats. Current catalogues are updated and available for web access, and archived catalogues—beginning in 1991 for undergraduate students and 2002 for graduate students—are readily available. The self-study re-accreditation effort has been presented in a podcast series that is often visited and frequently referenced in the NJIT community.

Integrity in the process of promotion and tenure is reflected in published and widely available criteria and policy statements in the Faculty Handbook and in documents on the provost’s web page. In keeping with the designation of integrity as a core value of NJIT, key sections of the Faculty Handbook have been updated to reflect current practice, high standards, and commitment to a transparent process. The updated Faculty Handbook provides guidelines for the selection and appointment of faculty and key administrators. The Equal Employment Opportunity Policy is stated in the Handbook and is also included on all advertisements for open positions. The Handbook assures that tenure and promotion policies are rigorous, clear, and consistent across the university. Similar guidelines to assure integrity in the faculty review process are followed in a rigorous third-year review of all tenure-track faculty members as specified in the Faculty Handbook and conducted by the department, dean, and provost.

Equally transparent, performance-based compensation is based on NJIT mission fulfillment. During the period 2002-2009, the merit process was conducted by individual departments based on internally defined criteria agreed to by the department promotion and tenure committee in consultation with the dean. To improve the process and augment equity, in 2010-2011 a new, more centralized system, the Performance Based Salary Increase Distribution System for faculty [PBSIDS] was instituted as part of
contract negotiations between the administration and the Professional Staff Association. This current process is more rigorous, adheres to strict criteria that are more uniform across all departments, schools and colleges, and uses a uniform scoring rubric according to set formulas. To ensure the integrity of the process, the detailed reports and results are shared with faculty, who are allowed to make corrections; there is also a process available for appeal. The final summary results are openly available. It is expected that this pilot program will become the model for future years.

Undergraduate and graduate courses are well-planned in sequence by academic departments, and that process is monitored by NJIT Program Review, analyzed in Chapter 14. Course schedules, including syllabi and textbooks, are available on the web page of the Office of the Registrar.

EXTERNAL REVIEW OF INTEGRITY AT NJIT: As further evidence of integrity at NJIT, in October of 2007 the State Commission on Investigation released an extensive report examining the governance, oversight, and accountability of post-secondary institutions in the state. The investigation was extensive, and billions of dollars of transactions were reviewed. In the report—Vulnerable to Abuse: The Importance of Restoring Accountability, Transparency, and Oversight to Public Higher Education Governance—NJIT emerged as an institution with a capable administrative structure in place, one that maintained effective, efficient, and ethical operating practices. While the Commission noted that additional state oversight would be beneficial across post-secondary institutions, NJIT emerged as a leader in sound, ethically-based fiscal management.

CONCLUSIONS: Working Group 3 was charged to determine compliance with MSCHE Standard 6: Integrity. The Working Group found that NJIT had achieved exemplary performance in creating a climate of academic inquiry and engagement supported by widely disseminated policies regarding academic and intellectual freedom.

Emerging excellence, the Working Group found, was achieved in the following areas: fair and impartial processes, published and widely available, to address alleged violations of institutional policies; an environment, coordinated by Dean of Students, that ensures that student grievances are addressed promptly, appropriately, and equitably; fair and impartial practices in the hiring, evaluation and dismissal of employees coordinated by the Department of Human Resources; sound ethical practices and respect for individuals; avoidance of conflict of interest or the appearance of such conflict in all its activities and among all its constituents achieved through the Ethics Liaison Officer; equitable and appropriately consistent treatment of all shareholders; an institutional commitment to principles of protecting intellectual property rights; a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration; honesty and truthfulness in announcements, advertisements, and recruiting and admissions materials and practices; continuing student access to updated, state-of-the art electronic catalogs, including archived catalogues; institutional information provided in a manner that ensures student and public access in a wide variety of communication formats; and periodic assessment of institutional policies, processes, and practices.

The Working Group found that NJIT has met the standard in the following areas: required and elective courses that are sufficiently available to allow timely graduation; web-based, timely communication of changes and issues affecting institutional mission; availability of factual information about the
inaccurately reported and made publicly available; information on institution-wide assessments available on the web to prospective students; and fulfillment of reporting requirements of MSCHE.

**STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE:** After extensive deliberation on the university’s commitment to integrity, NJIT has identified the following areas of improvement. These two areas will be integrated into the strategic planning process:

1. NJIT will build on best practices to implement a uniform plan to recruit, mentor, and retain faculty and students from diverse backgrounds;
2. NJIT will re-conceptualize strategies to ensure consistent application of the University Code on Academic Integrity.