CHUKWUEMEKA ODUMEGWU OJUKWU UNIVERSITY

ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

POLICY ON NON-DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

1. PREAMBLE

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU) recognises gender equality and the protection of women's rights as essential elements of institutional development, academic excellence, social justice and sustainable development.

The University is committed to providing an equitable, safe and inclusive environment in which women and men have fair opportunities to participate in teaching, learning, research, administration, leadership, innovation and other institutional activities without discrimination on the basis of sex.

The University acknowledges the contributions of women to academic advancement, institutional governance, scientific research, professional development, entrepreneurship and national development. It also recognises the need to address institutional, social and cultural barriers that may limit women's access to education, employment, career advancement, leadership positions and other opportunities.

This Policy establishes the University's commitment to preventing discrimination against women and promoting equal opportunities in admission, education, recruitment, employment, remuneration, promotion, leadership, research participation and institutional decision-making.

The Policy shall operate consistently with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as amended, applicable federal and Anambra State legislation, the University's enabling law, statutes, regulations and relevant international and regional commitments on women's rights and gender equality.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to:

1. prohibit unlawful discrimination against women within the University community;
2. promote equal access to educational, employment, research and professional development opportunities;
3. ensure fairness in student admission, academic assessment, recruitment, promotion, remuneration and career advancement;
4. eliminate sexual harassment, gender-based violence, intimidation, exploitation and other forms of abuse against women;

5. promote women's participation in institutional leadership, governance, research, innovation and decision-making;
6. protect the educational and employment interests of women during pregnancy, maternity and other circumstances requiring lawful protection or reasonable support;
7. establish appropriate mechanisms for reporting, investigating and addressing complaints of discrimination against women;
8. promote awareness of gender equality, women's rights and applicable legal protections;
9. encourage the collection and use of sex-disaggregated institutional data to identify and address gender inequalities; and
10. establish institutional responsibilities for monitoring, evaluating and improving gender equality practices.

3. SCOPE

This Policy applies across the University and covers:

- female undergraduate and postgraduate students;
- female academic and non-academic staff;
- female researchers, visiting scholars and research fellows;
- female applicants for admission and employment;
- women participating in University-sponsored programmes, conferences, research and other institutional activities;
- members of University Management, Senate, Governing Council, committees and other governance structures;
- contractors, consultants, service providers and other persons undertaking activities on behalf of the University; and
- all campuses, faculties, departments, institutes, centres, administrative units, hostels and other University-controlled facilities.

The Policy also applies to discrimination occurring during University-related activities outside the University's premises, including fieldwork, internships, industrial attachments, conferences, official travel and other institutional engagements.

All members of the University community shall comply with this Policy alongside applicable Nigerian laws and other relevant University regulations.

4. PRINCIPLES OF NON-DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

The University shall be guided by the following principles:

4.1 Equality of Opportunity

Women shall have fair and equitable opportunities to access education, employment, professional development, research funding, institutional resources and leadership positions, subject to established and lawful eligibility requirements.

4.2 Equal Treatment

No woman shall be subjected to unlawful disadvantage, exclusion, intimidation or unfavourable treatment solely on the basis of her sex.

4.3 Merit and Fairness

Admission, recruitment, assessment, promotion, appointment and other institutional decisions shall be based on transparent, relevant and consistently applied criteria.

4.4 Dignity and Respect

Every woman within the University community shall be treated with dignity and respect and protected against harassment, exploitation, violence and degrading treatment.

4.5 Equal Pay and Employment Opportunities

The University shall promote equal remuneration for equal work without discrimination on account of sex and ensure fair access to employment, promotion and professional advancement.

4.6 Protection Against Gender-Based Violence

The University shall take appropriate measures to prevent and address sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, intimidation, violence and other forms of gender-based abuse.

4.7 Inclusion and Participation

The University shall encourage women's meaningful participation in academic, administrative, research, leadership and governance activities.

4.8 Accountability

Allegations of discrimination shall be addressed through fair, transparent and established institutional procedures.

5. AREAS OF APPLICATION

5.1 Admission and Access to Education

The University shall:

a. provide female applicants with equal consideration in admission processes;

b. ensure that admission requirements are transparent, objective and consistently applied;

c. prohibit the exclusion of qualified female applicants solely on the basis of sex;

d. provide women with equal access to academic programmes, laboratories, workshops, libraries, research facilities and other learning resources;

e. encourage female participation in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and other fields where women may be underrepresented;

f. promote scholarship, mentoring and other educational support opportunities for female students; and

g. address institutional practices that create unjustified barriers to women's participation in education.

5.2 Recruitment and Employment

The University shall:

a. provide women and men with equal opportunities to apply for advertised positions;

b. ensure that recruitment and selection processes are based on relevant qualifications, competence, experience and established institutional requirements;

c. prohibit unlawful exclusion of qualified female applicants from employment opportunities;

d. ensure that job descriptions and recruitment criteria do not impose unjustified gender-based restrictions;

e. promote equal access to training, professional development, research opportunities and other employment benefits;

f. ensure that women are not subjected to discriminatory treatment during interviews, appointments or contract renewals; and

g. provide reasonable workplace support consistent with applicable employment laws and University regulations.

5.3 Promotion and Career Advancement

The University shall:

a. ensure that promotion criteria are transparent, objective and consistently applied;

b. provide women with equal opportunities to compete for senior academic and administrative positions;

c. ensure that pregnancy, maternity leave or other legally protected circumstances are not used as grounds for unlawful disadvantage in promotion or career progression;

d. promote equal access to professional training, international collaboration, conferences and research opportunities;

e. ensure that women are fairly considered for appointments to committees, leadership positions and other institutional responsibilities; and

f. monitor gender representation in academic and administrative career progression.

5.4 Remuneration and Employment Benefits

The University shall:

a. promote equal pay for equal work without discrimination on account of sex;

b. ensure that salary determination and employment benefits are based on approved institutional structures and relevant employment conditions;

c. provide equal access to lawful employment benefits and professional allowances;

d. prevent arbitrary differences in remuneration based solely on sex; and

e. periodically review remuneration and employment practices to identify and address unjustified gender disparities.

5.5 Research, Innovation and Academic Participation

The University shall:

a. ensure that female academics and researchers have equal opportunities to participate in research projects and institutional innovation programmes;

b. provide fair access to research grants, laboratory facilities, equipment and other research resources;

c. encourage the participation of women in research leadership and multidisciplinary collaborations;

d. ensure that female researchers receive appropriate recognition and attribution for their scholarly contributions;

e. encourage women's participation in conferences, publications, seminars and international academic collaborations; and

f. support research and innovation initiatives addressing issues affecting women and girls.

5.6 Leadership and Decision-Making

The University shall promote women's participation in institutional governance and leadership by:

a. ensuring that qualified women are given fair consideration for leadership appointments;

b. encouraging female participation in Senate, Governing Council committees, faculty boards and departmental committees, subject to applicable appointment rules;

c. providing mentoring and leadership development opportunities for women;

d. monitoring the representation of women in senior administrative and academic positions;

e. encouraging women's participation in institutional policy formulation and strategic planning; and

f. identifying and addressing institutional barriers that may limit women's advancement into leadership positions.

5.7 Pregnancy, Maternity and Family Responsibilities

The University shall:

a. comply with applicable maternity protection and employment provisions;

b. ensure that pregnancy or maternity leave is not used as a basis for unlawful discrimination;

c. apply approved maternity leave and related employment benefits in accordance with applicable laws and conditions of service;

d. consider reasonable arrangements for pregnant students and staff where necessary and administratively feasible;

e. ensure that female students are not subjected to arbitrary academic exclusion solely because of pregnancy or motherhood, subject to applicable academic, professional and safety requirements;

f. provide appropriate guidance on academic continuity and return-to-study arrangements; and

g. promote a working and learning environment that recognises legitimate family responsibilities without compromising established academic and professional standards.

5.8 Campus Safety and Welfare

The University shall:

a. promote safe learning, working and residential environments for women;

b. take appropriate measures to prevent sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, assault, intimidation and gender-based violence;

c. provide appropriate reporting channels for incidents affecting female students and staff;

d. maintain adequate security arrangements in relevant campus facilities;

e. provide access to appropriate health, counselling and welfare services; and

f. collaborate with relevant government agencies and professional organisations where necessary to protect women from violence and abuse.

6. PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

The University prohibits unlawful discrimination against women in any aspect of its academic, administrative, employment or institutional activities.

Prohibited conduct includes:

a. denying a qualified woman admission, employment or promotion solely because of her sex;

b. excluding women from academic programmes, research projects or institutional opportunities on discriminatory grounds;

c. subjecting women to unequal remuneration for equal work on the basis of sex;

d. denying women access to training, scholarships, professional development or other benefits on discriminatory grounds;

e. subjecting women to intimidation, humiliation, threats or degrading treatment because they are women;

f. denying women fair consideration for leadership positions or committee appointments on discriminatory grounds;

g. imposing unjustified pregnancy-related restrictions on female students or staff;

h. sexually harassing, exploiting or coercing female students or staff;

i. retaliating against women who report discrimination or participate in investigations; and

j. engaging in any other conduct that constitutes unlawful discrimination under applicable laws or University regulations.

Nothing in this Policy shall prevent lawful positive measures designed to address historical disadvantage, improve women's participation or promote substantive gender equality.

7. SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The University shall maintain a zero-tolerance institutional position towards sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, coercion, assault and gender-based violence.

Sexual harassment and related misconduct may include:

a. unwelcome sexual advances or propositions;

b. demands for sexual favours in exchange for admission, grades, employment, promotion or other institutional benefits;

c. unwanted sexual comments, gestures, messages or communications;

d. inappropriate physical contact or sexual assault;

e. threatening or intimidating a woman because she rejects sexual advances;

f. circulating sexually explicit images or information without lawful consent;

g. exploiting a position of authority, supervision or influence to obtain sexual favours; and

h. other conduct prohibited under applicable legislation and University regulations.

The University shall:

i. provide accessible reporting channels for victims and witnesses;

ii. investigate complaints through established procedures;

iii. protect complainants and witnesses against retaliation;

iv. provide appropriate counselling, medical and referral services;

v. take disciplinary action where allegations are established in accordance with University regulations; and

vi. refer suspected criminal offences to appropriate law enforcement authorities where necessary.

8. PROTECTION FROM IMPROPER INTERFERENCE AND RETALIATION

No female student or staff member shall be subjected to intimidation, harassment, discrimination, threats, denial of legitimate opportunities or other adverse treatment for:

a. reporting an incident of discrimination or sexual harassment;

b. participating in an investigation or disciplinary proceeding;

c. requesting equal treatment or access to institutional opportunities;

d. exercising rights provided under applicable Nigerian laws;

e. seeking assistance from relevant University authorities; or

f. supporting another person who has made a genuine complaint.

This protection shall not prevent legitimate disciplinary action arising from independently established misconduct, provided such action follows due process.

9. WOMEN'S WELFARE, HEALTH AND SAFETY

The University recognises that the welfare, health and safety of women are important to their participation and success in academic and professional activities.

The University shall, within its resources and institutional responsibilities:

a. provide access to appropriate health and welfare services;

b. promote awareness of reproductive health, maternal health and other relevant health issues;

c. ensure that female students and staff have access to appropriate counselling and referral services;

d. maintain appropriate safety measures in hostels, laboratories, workshops and other University facilities;

e. address reported cases of violence, abuse and exploitation through established institutional procedures;

f. encourage female participation in sports, recreation and other extracurricular activities; and

g. promote a supportive environment for women with disabilities and other women who may experience multiple forms of disadvantage.

10. WOMEN'S EQUALITY AND UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

The University shall integrate gender equality considerations into its legitimate governance and administrative structures.

Relevant institutional decisions may include:

- admission policies and academic regulations;
- staff recruitment and conditions of service;

- promotion and appointment procedures;
- research funding and resource allocation;
- leadership appointments and committee membership;
- student welfare and accommodation;
- institutional security and safeguarding;
- budget preparation and resource allocation; and
- strategic planning and performance evaluation.

The University shall, as far as reasonably practicable, consider the potential effects of relevant policies and decisions on women and ensure that institutional practices do not create unjustified discriminatory barriers.

11. RESPONSIBILITIES OF UNIVERSITY STAFF AND STUDENTS

All members of the University community shall:

a. respect the dignity and rights of women;

b. comply with this Policy and applicable Nigerian laws;

c. refrain from discrimination, harassment, intimidation, exploitation and violence;

d. promote fairness and equal opportunities in academic and professional activities;

e. report suspected cases of discrimination or abuse through appropriate channels;

f. cooperate with lawful institutional investigations;

g. protect confidential information relating to complainants and affected persons;

h. avoid victim-blaming, retaliation or the deliberate concealment of misconduct; and

i. contribute to maintaining a safe, equitable and respectful University environment.

12. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY

The University shall:

a. communicate its commitment to non-discrimination against women;

b. ensure that relevant institutional policies and procedures are consistent with this Policy;

c. provide appropriate mechanisms for reporting discrimination and gender-based misconduct;

d. ensure that complaints are addressed through fair and established procedures;

e. promote women's participation in education, employment, research and institutional leadership;

f. ensure compliance with applicable maternity protection and employment requirements;

g. provide appropriate welfare, counselling and referral arrangements;

h. collect and analyse relevant sex-disaggregated institutional data;

i. provide gender equality awareness and capacity-building programmes;

j. allocate appropriate institutional resources for implementation; and

k. periodically review the effectiveness of this Policy.

13. REPORTING AND REDRESS

Any female student, staff member or other affected person who believes that she has experienced discrimination, harassment or other prohibited conduct may submit a complaint through the University's established grievance, disciplinary or other appropriate reporting procedures.

Complaints may be submitted to the Office of the Registrar, Student Affairs Division, Human Resources Department, Dean of Faculty, Head of Department, designated gender equality office or other authorised institutional authority.

The University shall ensure that:

a. complaints are received and documented appropriately;

b. allegations are assessed objectively and investigated where necessary;

c. complainants are treated with dignity and sensitivity;

d. confidentiality is maintained to the extent permitted by law and consistent with a fair investigation;

e. persons accused of misconduct are given an opportunity to respond;

f. appropriate interim protective measures are considered where there is a legitimate safety or welfare concern;

g. disciplinary action is taken where allegations are established in accordance with applicable procedures; and

h. complainants are informed of available review or appeal procedures.

Where an allegation concerns a senior officer or an individual who would ordinarily be responsible for handling the complaint, the University shall, where practicable, provide an alternative reporting route.

Where conduct may constitute a criminal offence, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate law enforcement or regulatory authority.

14. GENDER EQUALITY COMMITTEE / OVERSIGHT

The University may designate an appropriate existing committee or establish a Gender Equality and Women's Advancement Committee to:

a. monitor the implementation of this Policy;

b. promote awareness of women's rights and gender equality;

c. review institutional practices that may create barriers to women's participation;

d. monitor women's representation in academic, administrative and leadership positions;

e. review sex-disaggregated institutional data;

f. recommend measures to improve women's access to education, employment, research and leadership opportunities;

g. identify gender-related capacity-building requirements;

h. recommend improvements to relevant institutional policies and procedures; and

i. submit periodic reports to the appropriate University authority.

The Committee shall not replace existing disciplinary, grievance, statutory or investigative procedures.

15. PUBLICATION AND TRANSPARENCY

This Policy shall be made publicly accessible through the official University website and communicated to relevant members of the University community.

The University shall maintain an official version of the Policy showing:

- approval authority;
- approval date;
- effective date;
- review date;
- responsible office; and

- current policy version.

The University may publish periodic institutional gender equality reports containing relevant aggregate information on women's participation, representation, opportunities and policy implementation, subject to applicable data protection and confidentiality requirements.

16. REVIEW AND REVISION

This Policy shall be reviewed at least once every three years or earlier where required by changes in Nigerian legislation, University governance, institutional practices or relevant international standards.

Signature:  Date: 24/10/2024

Prof. Kate Azuka Omenugha, Fnipr
Vice Chancellor