

Standards of Conduct and Government Ethics Course (Self-Paced)

Three hours of self-paced federal ethics across six modules — General Principles, conflicts of interest, gifts, misuse of position, employment restrictions, and the Hatch Act.

Group classes in Live Online and onsite training is available for this course. For more information, email onsite@graduateschool.edu or visit: <https://www.graduateschool.edu/courses/standards-of-conduct-and-government-ethics-self-paced>



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Course Outline

Module 1

- Introduction to Public Service Ethics & Core Principles (25 min)
- Public service as a public trust
- Where the rules come from, covering the criminal conflict-of-interest statutes, the Standards of Ethical Conduct, the Hatch Act and agency supplemental regulations
- The 14 General Principles
- The appearance standard
- What changed in the 2024 modernization
- Who to contact

Module 2

- Conflicts of Interest & Financial Interests (25 min)
- The criminal conflict-of-interest statute at 18 U.S.C. 208
- Conflicting financial interests
- Impartiality and personal relationships beyond money
- Resolving a conflict through recusal, divestiture, waiver or a blind trust
- Public and confidential financial disclosure

Module 3

- Gifts: From Outside Sources and Between Employees (30 min)
- What makes a prohibited source
- The de minimis exception and the annual aggregate limit
- Common exceptions including widely attended gatherings, nominal promotional items, personal relationships and honorary awards
- Gifts between employees and the rules on superiors and subordinates
- What to do about an inadvertently accepted gift. Includes a sort-the-gift drag-and-drop activity

Module 4

- Misuse of Position and Use of Government Time & Property (20 min)
- Using public office for private gain, endorsement or preferential treatment
- Using nonpublic information for private gain
- Directing subordinates to personal errands
- Personal social media and official title
- Use of government time, equipment and property

Module 5

- Outside Activities, Seeking Employment, and Post-Government Employment (25 min)
- When outside employment or activities conflict with official duties
- Compensated teaching, speaking and writing
- What counts as seeking employment and when disqualification obligations begin
- Post-government restrictions under 18 U.S.C. 207 including the permanent bar, the two-year restriction and senior-official cooling-off periods

Module 6

- Political Activity (the Hatch Act) and Reporting Ethics Concerns (30 min)
- The purpose of the Hatch Act and who enforces it
- Standard versus further-restricted employee categories
- What is generally prohibited and generally permitted
- Reporting waste, fraud, abuse and corruption, and the protections for good-faith disclosures. Includes a permitted-or-prohibited drag-and-drop activity