

Policy Name: 3.05.02 Medical Student Professionalism Policy



Policy Name: 3.05.2 Medical Student Professionalism Policy

Scope

Educating competent physicians relies on devotion to the highest standard of professionalism. Therefore, the University of Texas at Tyler School of Medicine (UT Tyler SOM) will nurture students to develop and maintain interpersonal skills, ethics, and integrity consistent with the SOM mission and vision. Further, the UT Tyler SOM will evaluate student performance with the expectation of full compliance with standards of professionalism and with all rules and regulations of student conduct at The University of Texas at Tyler ("University"), UT System rules and regulations, and any local, state, or federal laws and statutes applicable.

Policy

Physicians and physicians-in-training recognize the expectation to develop and demonstrate an impeccable level of professional conduct. Therefore, the UT Tyler SOM will implement and augment efforts to promote professionalism with a cyclical and ongoing evaluation; this approach provides timely feedback to support medical students' development of professionalism in a fair and impartial process and offering remediation for lapses when possible. This policy provides a framework that codifies the expectation of professionalism and associated behavior within the UT Tyler SOM. Further, this policy prioritizes education, remediation, and ongoing support for students with lapses that may be the precursor for more imminent concerns that could jeopardize safety, student success, learning environment, or organizational culture. In cases where a student's conduct warrants examination for possible corrective action, the situation may receive a referral to the UT Tyler SOM Office of Student Affairs or the appropriate UT Tyler SOM committee.

Professionalism Domains

Professionalism encompasses several realms including (but not limited to):

1. Altruism and Patient Centered Care

- Commitment to patient confidentiality
- Commitment to prioritizing patient care
- Commitment to advocate for one's patients

2. Honesty and Integrity

- Commitment to truthfulness and honesty with all, and at all times
- Commitment to integrity in all aspects (e.g., clinical, academic) of one's work
- Commitment to understanding and implementing appropriate limitations and boundaries in personal relationships with one's patients and their families

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3. Reliability and Accountability

- Commitment to the understanding and fulfillment of all of one's responsibilities
- Commitment to maintaining excellence in all aspects of one's work
- Commitment to timeliness

4. Respect

- Commitment to respectful interactions with all patients, families, and other team members
- Commitment to tolerance of views that one may not agree with
- Commitment to avoiding bias and discrimination

5. Self-Improvement and Adaptability

- Commitment to understanding the limitations of one's knowledge and level of expertise and to seeking assistance when necessary
- Commitment to maintaining one's own well-being and seeking help when necessary

Professionalism also encompasses academic and clinical actions and behaviors students demonstrate. Examples of unprofessional academic actions may include, but are not limited to, academic misconduct, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication/misrepresentation in research and academic work, falsification of information, lying, bribery, unauthorized distribution of academic materials, attendance fraud, and misrepresentation of oneself.

Medical Student Professionalism and Conduct Committee (MSPCC):

The UT Tyler SOM has established a Student Progress and Promotions Committee (SPPC) that makes decisions regarding student adverse actions. The Medical Student Professionalism and Conduct Committee (MSPCC) is a subcommittee of the SPPC that convenes to review instances that violate the Medical Student Professionalism Policy as necessary. The MSPCC subcommittee consists of three (3) appointed faculty members who are not on the SPPC.

Faculty are appointed to the MSPCC subcommittee by the Dean. The term of appointment is for three years, and terms can be consecutive. If there is a conflict of interest for a specific case, the faculty must recuse themselves, and the Dean or designee may temporarily appoint another faculty member for the case.

All members of the MSPCC will act as expeditiously as diligence will permit to ensure that conduct issues receive timely review and escalation, if necessary. The MSPCC reviews all Level 2 and Level 3 concerns (see below); the MSPCC reviews instances where students have repeated Level 1 concerns. A member of the MSPCC shall attend meetings of the SPPC, as appropriate, to present their findings of the situation and to answer questions. However, the MSPCC shall not be present when a specific student is being discussed during a SPPC meeting. They shall not vote on any SPPC matters.

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Identification of Professional and Non-Professional Behavior

The electronic Professionalism Observation Reporting System (“Reporting System”) is the mechanism for reporting concerns or commendations in professional conduct for medical student behavior. That is, students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to share instances of students’ exceptional and admirable professional conduct, as well as lapses in professional conduct or judgement. The reporting system is open to anyone to use. Anonymous submissions are not accepted; confidentiality and anonymity will be protected to the greatest extent possible.

Rapid Response Process

All Professionalism Observation Reporting System reports are forwarded by automated process to the Associate Dean of Student Affairs. After a submission to the Reporting System, a confirmation email will be sent to the reporter within 48 hours notifying the reporter that the report has been received and the review is being processed. The Associate Dean of Student Affairs and Learning Environment Council (LEC) Chair(s) in instances of a lapse(s) in professionalism, will review the report from the Reporting System within three (3) business days of receipt, and assign the incident to a pathway: Commendation, Early Concern, Level 1 Concern, Level 2 Concern, Level 3 Concern, or Emergent Concern. The MSPCC only receives notification of repeated Level 1 concerns or Level 1 concerns not addressed within a course, and all Level 2-3 concerns.

Definitions:

Commendation

Reports of exceptional and admirable professional conduct and behavior are essential to develop a culture of high standards. The Office of Student Affairs shall send an anonymized notice of the commendation with specific details, as appropriate and available, to the student(s) receiving the commendation and to the School of Medicine Dean. The commendation will also be added to the students’ academic profile.

Commendations will remain on file and may be included in the Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE) and/or to support the student in pursuing honor society nomination/membership. A list of students receiving commendations and truncated associated details will be shared with the UT Tyler SOM listserv in December and June.

Each time a student receives a commendation, they receive an email (with the Dean copied) outlining the anonymized information from the commendation.

When a student receives three (3) commendations, they will receive a Professionalism Commendation certificate that highlights their outstanding professional behavior; this will be included in the MSPE letter.

When a student receives five (5) commendations, they will receive a signed letter from the School of Medicine Dean for their dedication to a culture of high standards; this will be included in the MSPE letter.

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Early Concerns

Early concerns encompass professional conduct that does not directly affect patients and/or the classroom/clerkship learning environment. These concerns are characterized by behaviors, or lack of behaviors, which warrant attention but are not egregious. Examples include, but are not limited to, inappropriate and/or unprofessional language, inappropriate conversations within the classroom that do not interrupt the learning environment, conversations in the hallway characterized by excessive information, unprofessional behavior outside the classroom or in an extracurricular setting.

Early concerns result in a conversation with the student regarding the concern, and how/why that concern may be considered a professionalism lapse. The goal of early concern conversations is to allow the student to reflect on and learn from the situation. The Office of Student Affairs will typically defer to the academic house leader(s) to have a conversation with the student about the situation, although the Office of Student Affairs may designate a different faculty/staff member. The faculty or staff leading the conversation cannot be individuals at the decanal level. Early Concerns are not reviewed formally by the MSPPC but are recorded in a secure file that may be reviewed by MSPPC/SPPC members when needed.

Level 1 Concerns

(Designee: Course and Clerkship Faculty)

Level 1 Concerns encompass conduct that occurs within a course that directly affects the classroom/clerkship learning environment and/or patient interactions and is subject to evaluation and grading impact within the syllabus policies of that course.

Examples of Level 1 concerns include, but are not limited to, unexcused absence; tardiness; failure to complete assignments; communication lapses with patients, faculty, staff, members of health care team, or peers; and engaging in conduct disruptive to an effective learning environment.

Initial concerns during the course/clerkship are the responsibility of faculty to address within the course/clerkship and faculty must address concerns early in the course/clerkship when possible. Although faculty/staff address these concerns within the classroom, they are still encouraged to submit these concerns via the Reporting System to allow for monitoring of professionalism lapses across courses and phases. In the instances that the behavior does result in significant grade impact (i.e., the student's end of course or clerkship evaluation has a professionalism rating that is below the threshold outlined in the syllabus), the information will be forwarded to the MSPCC as a Level 2 Concern. All reports remain in a secure file.

Role of MSPCC for Level 1 Concerns: The MSPCC does not meet to review Level 1 concerns on a case-by-case basis; however, all professionalism concerns are recorded in a secure file that may be reviewed by MSPPC members. A student who accrues two (2) or more Level 1 concerns (over any period of time) will have their file reviewed by the MSPCC to determine if the incident is ongoing and/or warrants rising to a Level 2 or Level 3 concern. Students who are reviewed due to two or more Level 1 concerns will receive a letter from the MSPCC outlining their review of the situations, recommendations for the student to improve (if applicable), and indication of if the situation(s) have been escalated to a Level 2 or 3 concern. The letter will also outline what

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may potentially occur if there are future professionalism lapses. In the instance of escalation, the MSPCC will follow the steps outlined in the level to which the concern is escalated.

Level 2 Concerns

Designee: Assistant Dean, Foundational Sciences, Assistant Dean Clinical Experiences) in which the student is currently enrolled.

Level 2 Concerns encompass conduct that violates the professionalism standards in this policy; *or* the core competencies of the medical curriculum; *or* Level 1 matters that occur in more than one course; *or* Level 1 matters that do not receive adequate resolution within a given course; *or* violations of UT Tyler SOM policies not relating to a specific course. Examples include, but are not limited to, compromising patient confidentiality, academic dishonesty, failing to prioritize patient care, failure to complete compliance requirements, failure to behave with tolerance for cultures, beliefs, or views differing from one's own, accruing two or more days of unexcused leave within a semester during Phase 2/3, and failing to complete 80% of course evaluations per Phase as determined at the end of each Phase.

Role of MSPCC for Level 2 Concerns: Upon receiving a Level 2 concern, the Associate Dean of Student Affairs will email the MSPCC and Level 2 Designee. Upon receipt, the Level 2 designee shall investigate the concern and report findings from the investigation and propose a remediation plan for resolution (with outcome requirements and individual responsible for ensuring those requirements are met) to the MSPCC. The proposed plan may include, but is not limited to, a performance improvement plan for the student, academic probation, and/or identification of relevant resources to address the situation. The MSPCC will review the details of the investigation and proposed plan for appropriateness and consistency across cases. If the proposed plan is approved by the MSPCC it will be presented to the SPPC for final review and approval. If the MSPCC does not approve the plan, they will outline why they do not agree with the proposed plan and will submit a modified plan to the SPPC; the SPPC will then vote on the modified plan.

Once a situation has been sufficiently resolved, per the plan outcomes, the situation is retained in a secure file for the SPPC and MSPCC to monitor and respond to any repeated concerns. If the SPPC does not feel the matter is adequately resolved, they may refer to the Level 2 designee for further action or elevate the matter to a Level 3 concern.

Level 3 Concerns

Designees: Chair of SPPC and Level 2 designee

Level 3 Concerns encompass conduct that is an egregious violation of professionalism standards and may impact the student's opportunity to obtain licensure and/or, Level 1 or 2 Concerns that are repeated or referred to the SPPC by the MSPCC or the Level 2 designee. Examples include, but are not limited to, failure to comply with a remediation plan, substance misuse or abuse, criminal activity, falsifying any record, or violence in any form.

All Level 3 concerns shall be fully and clearly documented. These records shall be kept in a secure file and will be referenced in any future concerns about the student. This may impact SPPC decisions in any future concerns.

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Role of MSPCC for Level 3 Concerns: Upon receiving a Level 3 concern, the Associate Dean of Student Affairs will email the MSPCC and Level 3 Designees (SPPC Chair and Level 2 Designee). The MSPCC and Level 2 Designee shall work together to investigate and create a report on the matter. This investigation process will include meeting with the student to discuss the situation and any other individuals with knowledge of the situation. Upon conclusion of the investigation, the MSPCC and Level 2 Designee will co-create a report of findings from the investigation and propose multiple remediation plan options (if possible) that is to be shared with the SPPC. Next, The SPPC shall hear the report from the MSPCC and the Level 2 designee and determine the remediation plan/adverse action for the situation.

Given the egregious nature of Level 3 violations, the adverse action will be determined by the SPPC and may include adverse actions ranging up to dismissal. Examples of actions that may be taken by the SPPC include, but are not limited to:

- Further investigation of the event to gain understanding and proceed with a better-informed direction
- Formal discussion with Clerkship/Course Director, Academic Advisor, Associate Dean for Student Affairs, or other UT Tyler SOM faculty/staff familiar with the student and situation
- Require the student to complete a substance use assessment
- Require a fitness for duty evaluation
- Require a repeat administration(s) of the Criminal Background Check or Urine Drug Screen required at matriculation (may modify the drug panel to assess for specific drugs)
- Documented coaching sessions with designated persons, in which expectations are made explicit
- A behavioral mentoring contract with designated persons
- A required mention of the incident in the MSPE
- An academic sanction including probation, suspension, or expulsion

Students may submit a Non-Grade Academic Grievance for any decision made by the SPPC in accordance with the UT Tyler SOM Non-Grade Academic Grievance Policy.

Emergent Concerns

Should a situation involve a threat to the safety of the student(s) or others, the UT Tyler SOM Office of the Student Affairs shall work with the UT Tyler Campus Assessment, Response, and Evaluation (CARE) Team who are trained to engage in proactive and collaborative approaches to identify, assess, and mitigate risks associated with students exhibiting concerning behaviors. The UT Tyler SOM Office of Student Affairs will act in accordance with the University's policy and procedures.

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