

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 (SOM) will nurture students to develop and maintain human interpersonal skills, ethics, and integrity consistent with the SOM mission and vision. Further, the 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 University of Texas at 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, offering remediation of lapses when possible. This policy provides a framework that codifies the expectation of professionalism within the SOM. Further, this policy prioritizes education, remediation, and ongoing support for students with minor or demonstrable 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 SOM Office of Student Affairs or the appropriate 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 & 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
- 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

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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.

Ad-Hoc Medical Student Professionalism and Conduct Committee (MSPCC):

The SOM has established a Student Progress and Promotions Committee (SPPC) who make decisions regarding student adverse actions. An ad hoc committee, the Medical Student Professionalism and Conduct Committee (MSPCC), will be convened to review instances that violate the Medical Student Professionalism Policy. The ad-hoc MSPCC will convene as necessary and consist of three (3) appointed faculty members who are not on the SPPC.

Faculty shall receive appointment to the ad-hoc MSPCC 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 may recuse themselves and the Dean or designee will 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 shall attend meetings of the SPPC, as appropriate, to present their findings of situation and participate in the training and process development discussions. 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.

Identification of Professional and Non-Professional Behavior

A virtual Professionalism Observation Reporting System ("Reporting System") will provide a mechanism for reporting concerns or commendations in professional conduct for medical students. 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.

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The reporting system is open to anyone to use. Anonymous submissions are not acceptable, but confidentiality and anonymity will be protected to the greatest extent possible. These reports are forwarded by automated process to the Office of Student Affairs. The Office of Student Affairs reviews the reports and determines if the report warrants being sent to the MSPCC (see below). Any end of course or clerkship evaluation of professionalism with a rating as “marginal pass” or lower will be forwarded to the MSPCC as a Level 1 Concern.

Rapid Response Process

After submission to the Reporting System, a confirmation email will be sent to the reporter no later than 48 hours notifying the reporter that the report has been received/triage is in process. The Office of Student Affairs will review all reports from the Reporting System within three (3) business days of the report, 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 Level 1-3 concerns.

Commendation

Reports of exceptional and admirable professional conduct are essential to develop a culture of high standards. The Office of Student Affairs shall send a notice of the commendation with specific details, as 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 and/or to support the student in pursuing honor society nomination/membership. A list of students receiving commendations and the associated details will be shared with the SOM listserv in December and June.

When a student receives three (3) commendations, they will receive a certificate that highlights their effort.

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.

Early Concerns

Early concerns encompass professionalism matters that occur outside of the classroom and are not directly affecting patients or the classroom/clerkship learning environment. These concerns are characterized by behaviors, or lack of behaviors, that warrant attention but are not egregious. Examples include, but are not limited to, inappropriate/unprofessional language, conversations in the hallway characterized by excessive information, and unprofessional behavior outside of the classroom.

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 conversations regarding early concerns is allowing 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

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faculty/staff member. The faculty or staff leading the conversation cannot be an administrator or director.

Level 1 Concerns

Level 1 Concerns encompass conduct that occurs within a course and is subject to evaluation and grading impact within the syllabus policies of that course. Examples include, but are not limited to, inexcusable absence, tardiness, failure to complete assignments, communication lapses with patients, faculty, members of health care team, or peers, engaging in conduct disruptive to an effective learning environment.

These concerns will have algorithm for automation of a “professionalism flag” whenever a student receives a professionalism evaluation of marginal pass or lower. Level 1 Concerns solely encompass end of course/clerkship evaluations.

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. The reports will remain in a secure file to allow for monitoring of future professionalism lapses. In addition to monitoring by the MSPCC, the secure file may transfer to the Level 2 designee or the SPPC, should the MSPCC determine that the incident is ongoing and/or warrants rising to a Level 2 or Level 3 concern.

Level 2 Concerns

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 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.

The MSPCC shall notify the Level 2 designee of any Level 2 Concerns. The Level 2 designee is the Director of the Phase (i.e., Phase 1, Phase 2, or Phase 3) in which the student is currently enrolled. The Level 2 designee shall investigate and either develop a remediation plan for the student or refer the matter to the SOM Office of Student Affairs. The Level 2 designee will report findings from the investigation and proposed plan for resolution to the SPPC. If the situation has sufficient resolution, the SPPC will retain a secure file 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

Level 3 Concerns encompass conduct that is an egregious violation of professionalism standards and may impact the student’s opportunity to obtain licensure, 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 Level 2 remediation plan, substance misuse or abuse, criminal activity, falsifying any record, or violence in any form.

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The MSPCC shall notify the Chair of the SPPC and the Level 2 designee who shall investigate the matter. This investigation process shall include meeting with the student to discuss matters of fact. The SPPC shall hear the report from the MSPCC and the Level 2 designee and may determine a sanction. 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 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
- Referral to the SOM Office of Student Affairs
- An academic sanction including suspension or expulsion

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.

The SPPC can recommend appropriate action, up to and including dismissal. The student may appeal academic decision to the SPPC, and subsequently to the Dean, in accordance with the SOM academic grievance policy.

Emergent Concerns

Should a situation involve a threat to the safety of the student(s) or others, the 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 SOM Office of Student Affairs will act in accordance with the University's policy and procedures.

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