



School of Social Work

Challenging Minds, Leading Change, Transforming Lives

## **School of Social Work Policy Regarding Student Professional Performance Standards and Procedures for Handling Violations of Professional Performance Standards**

### **I. Introduction and Relevant Professional Standards**

Every student in a program in the School of Social Work (SSW), whether at the graduate or undergraduate level, must meet the professional standards set forth by The National Association of Social Work's (NASW) ***Professional Code of Ethics (PCE)***. This Code is part of the academic requirements of each program and can be found at the following website:

<http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>.

Professional ethics are at the core of social work. The NASW PCE sets forth the values, principles, and standards for decision-making and conduct when ethical issues arise. It does not provide a set of rules that prescribe how social workers should act in all situations. Specific applications of the PCE must take into account the context in which it is being considered and the possibility of conflicts among the PCE's values, principles, and standards. Ethical responsibilities flow from all human relationships, from the personal and familial to the social, educational and professional.

Section II below represents a summary of the core values and corresponding ethical principles and the six major categories of ethical standards presented in the PCE. All social workers and social work students should refer to the full PCE for detailed descriptions and explanation.

In addition to meeting the professional standards set forth in the PCE, students enrolled in the SSW must also adhere to standards for admission to the programs of the SSW and to the professional standards specified in the Field Manual.

For admission to the program, students are required to disclose any criminal history when they apply to the program and are required to report additional criminal violations that occur while they are enrolled in the school.

The Field Manual describes professional standards that all students enrolled in field are expected to meet. The professional standards include integrity, exercise of

professional judgment in communication, dress appropriate to the field setting, maintaining confidentiality, meeting attendance requirements, actively engaging in the field placement, and demonstration of self-awareness and self-regulation. Students should consult the field manual for complete descriptions of these standards.

For purposes of this Policy and Procedures for Handling Violations, both the PCE and the SSW's admissions standards and Field Manual professional standards will be collectively referred to herein as "Professionalism Standards".

## II. Relevant Ethical Values, Principles and Standards

The ethical values and corresponding principles that are relevant to the professional activities of all social workers include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Value: Service**
- Ethical Principle: Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.
  
- **Value: Social Justice**
- Ethical Principle: Social workers challenge social injustice.
  
- **Value: Dignity and Worth of the Person**
- Ethical Principle: Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.
  
- **Value: Importance of Human Relationships**
- Ethical Principle: Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.
  
- **Value: Integrity**
- Ethical Principle: Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner
  
- **Value: Competence**
- Ethical Principle: Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.

The ethical standards that are relevant to the professional activities of all social workers include, but are not limited to, the following:

### **Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Clients**

- **Commitment to clients:** Social workers' primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of clients.

- **Self-Determination:** Social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination and assist clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals.
- **Informed Consent:** Social workers should provide services to clients only in the context of a professional relationship based, when appropriate, on valid informed consent.
- **Competence:** Social workers should provide services and represent themselves as competent only within the boundaries of their education, training, license, certification, consultation received, supervised experience, or other relevant professional experience.
- **Cultural Competence and Social Diversity:** Social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures and should be sensitive to differences among people and cultural groups.
- **Conflicts of Interest:** Social workers should be alert to and avoid conflicts of interest that interfere with the exercise of professional discretion and impartial judgment.
- **Privacy and Confidentiality:** Social workers should respect clients' right to privacy. Social workers should not solicit private information from clients unless it is essential to providing services or conducting social work evaluation or research. Once private information is shared, standards of confidentiality apply.
- **Access to Records:** Social workers should provide clients with reasonable access to records concerning the clients. Social workers who are concerned that clients' access to their records could cause serious misunderstanding or harm to the client should provide assistance in interpreting the records and consultation with the client regarding the records.
- **Sexual Relationships:** Social workers should under no circumstances engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with current clients. Nor should they engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with clients' relatives or other individuals with whom clients maintain a close personal relationship when there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. Social workers should not engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with former clients because of the potential for harm to the client. Social workers should not provide clinical services to individuals with whom they have had a prior sexual relationship

- **Physical Contact:** Social workers should not engage in physical contact with clients when there is a possibility of psychological harm to the client as a result of the contact (such as cradling or caressing clients).
- **Sexual Harassment:** Social workers should not sexually harass clients. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- **Derogatory Language:** Social workers should not use derogatory language in their written or verbal communications to or about clients. Social workers should use accurate and respectful language in all communications to and about clients.
- **Payment for Services:** When setting fees, social workers should ensure that the fees are fair, reasonable, and commensurate with the services performed. Consideration should be given to clients' ability to pay.
- **Clients Who Lack Decision-Making Capacity:** When social workers act on behalf of clients who lack the capacity to make informed decisions, social workers should take reasonable steps to safeguard the interests and rights of those clients.

### **Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues**

These responsibilities include treating colleagues with respect, and appropriately handling confidential information about clients that is shared with colleagues. Social workers also must uphold ethical standards related to interdisciplinary collaboration and handling disputes involving colleagues. Social workers must consult with colleagues when necessary to uphold the best interests of clients, and make referrals that include an orderly transfer of responsibility when necessary. Social workers in a supervisory role should not engage in sexual activity or contact with supervisees. They should avoid engaging in sexual relationships with colleagues where there is a potential for conflict of interest. Social workers should not sexually harass their supervisees, students, trainees, or colleagues.

Social workers also have responsibility to act if they are knowledgeable about impairment, incompetence, or unethical conduct of their colleagues, first by addressing the issue with the colleague. If not addressed, they should take action through appropriate channels (e.g., licensing and regulatory bodies) to address the impairment, incompetence, or unethical conduct.

### **Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Practice Settings**

These responsibilities include standards relevant to the social workers' obligation to their place of employment. The ethical standards address social workers' provision

of supervision and their obligations when they serve in an educational role such as field instruction. They also address the obligation to fair performance evaluation, accurate and timely documentation that is safeguarded with respect to confidentiality, and accurate billing practices. Ethical standards addressing client transfer, agency administration, and provision of continuing education at agencies are also included. This section also describes ethical standards related to commitments to employers or employing organizations while at the same time taking reasonable steps to ensure that practices are consistent with the PCE and that employing organizations uphold the PCE.

### **Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities as Professionals**

Among the important ethical responsibilities as professionals are a commitment to practice with competence and to base practice on recognized professional knowledge. Social workers must practice without discrimination. The standard on social worker impairment spells out the responsibility to address personal problems such as legal issues, substance abuse, or mental health so that they will not interfere with professional judgement or jeopardize clients.

### **Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Social Work Profession**

Social workers should work toward maintaining the integrity of the social work profession and engage in research and evaluation in an ethically responsible manner to enhance the knowledge base of the profession.

### **Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Broader Society**

These responsibilities include promoting the general welfare of society and the development of people, their communities, and their environments. Social workers should facilitate participation of the public in shaping social policy, provide services during public administration. They should engage in social and political action that will enhance access to resources, expand choice and opportunity, increase respect for cultural and social diversity, and work toward elimination of oppression and discrimination.

More detailed explanations of these standards are available to students in the PCE.

## **III. Professional Development Is Part of the Academic Requirements of all SSW Programs**

Since the Professionalism Standards articulated herein are part of the academic development of a student in the SSW, responsibility for determining whether a particular student has developed the necessary Professionalism Standards during his/her academic education falls within the autonomous, academic decision-making of the SSW faculty.

Consistent with this principle, issues as to whether a particular student has violated the Professionalism Standards during his/her academic education also falls within the autonomous, academic decision-making of the SSW faculty.

#### **A. Intersection with WSU's Student Code of Conduct**

It is important to note here that some of the values, principles and standards set forth in the Professionalism Standards, if violated, may also fall within the provisions of the University's Student Code of Conduct (SCOC), which can be accessed at:

<http://doso.wayne.edu/assets/student-code-of-conduct-brochure.pdf>

The SCOC is the university's code governing student behavior. It is the officially-adopted Board of Governors document that applies to all schools and colleges of the university. One purpose of the SCOC is to "provide a framework for the imposition of discipline in the university setting". The Code gives general notice of prohibited conduct and of the sanctions to be imposed if such conduct occurs in the university setting.

Section 10.1A and Section 10.1B of the SCOC describe procedures for academic misbehavior as defined under Section 2.1 of the Code. This includes cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, academic obstruction, enlisting the assistance of a substitute in the taking of examinations, and violation of course rules as contained in the course syllabus or other written information provided to the student.

Under Section 10.1A, when a faculty member is persuaded that academic misbehavior has occurred, the faculty member may, without filing a charge, adjust the grade downward... In implementing this section of the Code, the faculty member must follow the procedures set forth in this section, which provide proper notice to the student and an opportunity to appeal the downgrade.

In addition, the SCOC delineates both academic and non-academic misbehavior, as described in Section 4.0, for which students may be sanctioned if found in violation of the Code. Any misbehavior delineated under Section 4.0 of the Code should be processed through the SCOC by the filing of a charge with the Student Conduct Officer (SCO).

The SCOC does not specifically address the various values, principles and standards that are established by the SSW Professionalism Standards as described above, all of which apply to the academic development of students in the SSW.

Therefore, any conduct that falls within the Professionalism Standards as discussed in Sections I and II above, shall be handled exclusively by the Professional Performance Review Committee (PPRC), which is described in Section B below, and shall be handled pursuant to the procedures established in Section V below.

## **B. Professional Performance Review Committee (PPRC)**

CSWE accreditation standards require that social work programs address violations of social work professional performance ethical standards. For this purpose, the SSW has established a Professional Performance Review Committee (PPRC) which consists of:

1. the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs (ADAA), as Chair, (in consultation with the SSW Dean),
2. the Director of the Field Education (DFE) or Assistant Director (determined by the status of the student involved with unprofessional behavior),
3. the BSW or MSW Program Coordinators (determined by the status of the student involved with unprofessional behavior),
4. the SSW Staff member who serves as Assistant to the Associate Dean (as a non-voting member),
5. a student member, who will have an advisory vote only.

The PPRC, in consultation with the SSW Dean, is: a) the decision-making body for the SSW with regard to issues of Professionalism Standards for all students in the SSW; b) responsible for promoting the development of these Professionalism Standards within the SSW; and c) responsible for monitoring these Professionalism Standards for all students in the SSW.

The PPRC has the authority to address all student professionalism issues that fall within the Professionalism Standards without referring the matter to the University's Student Conduct Office (SCO). The PPRC has the authority to engage in fact finding, decide whether a violation has occurred, and to recommend to the Dean of the SSW sanctions and consequences that include termination from the program.

In each case where the PPRC has rendered a final determination, a copy of that final determination, along with a copy of the notification provided to the student regarding the final determination, shall be sent to the SCO as the central repository of all student conduct records.

## **IV. Reports of Unprofessional Behavior**

Any person may file a report of unprofessional behavior where he/she believes a social work student has violated any of the Professionalism Standards.

### **A. Contents of Written Reports of Unprofessional Behavior**

All written reports of unprofessional behavior must contain the following information:

1. Name of the student being reported as unprofessional.
2. Reporting party and relationship to the student.
3. Date and location of the incident(s).
4. A description of the unprofessional behavior(s) and the relevant Professionalism Standard(s) involved.
5. Names and contact information of individuals who can provide supporting information.
6. Name and contact information of any student who was accessory or witness to the unprofessional behavior(s).
7. Documentation of any communication with the reported student(s). This includes but is not limited to e-mails and meeting notes.
8. Any supporting documentation pertinent to the unprofessional behavior(s).

The report must be made within a reasonable time after the alleged unprofessional behavior has occurred or within a reasonable time after the reporting individual learns of the unprofessional behavior.

#### **B. Reports from A Field Agency Supervisor**

Where a Field Instructor (Agency-based Supervisor) (who is not a WSU employee) makes a verbal and/or written complaint/report regarding the alleged unprofessional behavior of a student under his/her supervision, to the Faculty Field Liaison (FFL), the FFL is responsible for the following:

1. Obtaining a written summary from the Field Instructor;
2. Informing the student of the complaint/report, meeting with the student in person to discuss the relevant Professional Standards involved, allowing the student to review the FI's written summary, and providing the student with a reasonable period of time to submit a written response from the student addressing the complaint/report; and
3. Preparing a written report of the unprofessional behavior along with the written statements and a recommendation. This report and recommendation shall be submitted to the Director of Field Education (DFE).

The DFE will then make a recommendation to the ADAA specifying one of the following options:

1. The complaint requires no additional action and is resolved. If the complaint requires no additional action and is resolved, written documentation of the complaint and its resolution will be maintained by the ADAA until said student graduates.
2. The student be given an appropriate internal sanction for the unprofessional behavior, along with a reasonable deadline for completion of the sanction.



Examples of appropriate internal sanctions include writing a comprehensive literature review in the area of an ethical violation, writing a professional paper that focuses on the ethical topic from which the complaint has arisen, attending several mentoring sessions with a program administrator, etc., or presenting a workshop to a local agency on ethical responses in challenging practice situations. If the student accepts the sanction, the matter is resolved upon completion of the sanction. Written documentation of the complaint, sanction and completion of the sanction will be maintained by the ADAA until said student graduates.

- a. If the student does not accept the sanction, or fails to complete the accepted sanction within the time provided, the matter is referred to the ADAA for a decision on a sanction. The ADAA has the discretion to consult with members of the PPRC as deemed necessary. A copy of the final resolution will be given to the DFE and maintained by the ADAA until said student graduates. The DFE shall be responsible for ensuring that the sanction is complied with and that the student is warned that any further repeat of this type of unprofessional behavior will automatically be referred to the PPRC for handling pursuant to Section V. below.
3. If it is determined that a sanction of suspension, expulsion/dismissal and/or a transcript notation may be warranted, the matter shall be referred to the PPRC and shall be handled pursuant to the provisions set forth in Section V. below.

### **C. Reports from Faculty Members**

Faculty members may verbally report complaints to Program Coordinators or the Director of the Office of Admissions and Services for SSW (OASS) who shall prepare the report pursuant to the policies and procedures noted in Section A. above and send it to the ADAA.

The Program Coordinator and/or Director of the OASS will initially do the following:

1. Inform the student of the complaint/report;
2. Meet with the student in person to discuss the relevant Professional Standards involved,
3. Allow the student to review the written report or summary of the complaint, and
4. Provide the student with a reasonable period of time to submit a written response addressing the complaint/report.

The Program Coordinator and/or Director of OASS will then make a recommendation to the ADAA specifying one of the options listed under Section B. above (i.e., no additional action, appropriate internal sanction, or referral to PPRC).

**V. Procedures for Handling Reports of Unprofessional Behavior Where the Matter Is Referred to the PPRC.**

In all instances where it has been determined that a sanction of suspension, expulsion/dismissal and/or a transcript notation may be warranted for the alleged unprofessional behavior, either because of the seriousness of the allegation<sup>1</sup> or because there have been repeated instances of unprofessional behavior, the student shall be notified of a hearing before the PPRC, which shall be conducted pursuant to the following procedures:

**A. Procedures**

1. The student shall be given written notice of the hearing date at least five (5) school days prior to the hearing.
2. The student shall have access to the case file prior to the hearing date.
3. The student and the person who made the report of unprofessional behavior (hereinafter referred to as the charging party) should both be present at the hearing. If the student fails to appear, the hearing may proceed without him/her, and if the charging party fails to appear, the hearing may proceed without him/her.

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<sup>1</sup>Exception: If the charge of unprofessional behavior involves any type of “sexual misconduct” or “sexual harassment”, the SSW must refer the matter to the SCO, who is responsible for coordinating all such matters with the University’s Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator, who are responsible for investigating all such matters regardless of whether the complainant files a formal charge.

If a formal charge is filed by the complainant under the SCOC, the matter will proceed under the Code to resolution, and if the student is found responsible for the charge, the Dean of Students shall formally notify the PPRC of the fact that the student was found responsible and of the sanction imposed. The PPRC has the discretion to impose additional sanctions where, in its academic judgment, the adjudicated behavior is also a serious violation of the Professionalism Standards.

If no formal charge is filed under the SCOC, upon completion of the Title IX investigation, any findings or recommendations of the Title IX investigator shall be provided to the PPRC, who then has the discretion to impose sanctions based upon its academic judgment.

4. The Chair of the PPRC shall have the discretion to exercise control over the hearing process to avoid needless consumption of time and to prevent the harassment or intimidation of witnesses.
5. Both the student and the charging party shall have an opportunity to be heard. The student may not be required to testify against herself/himself. Both sides shall have the opportunity to call appropriate witnesses and the opportunity to question opposing witnesses.
6. Any party may bring an advisor or an attorney, provided that in order to be permitted to do so, the party must notify the Chair of the PPRC, in writing, of the name of the advisor or attorney at least 48 hours prior to the hearing. The role of the advisor or attorney during the hearing is solely to counsel and assist the party; the advisor or attorney may not participate actively in the conduct of the hearing.
7. In making its determination, the PPRC may take into consideration all relevant factors, including the nature of the alleged violation, the egregiousness of the behavior, its context and its purported intent; the student's perspective; the reporting individual's perspective; and any prior instances where the student has been found responsible for unprofessional behavior.
8. A decision by the PPRC that the charge of unprofessional behavior is sustained must be based upon a preponderance of the evidence standard. A preponderance of the evidence is that which is sufficient to convince the Committee that it is more probable than not that the student's alleged misconduct occurred.
9. Within ten (10) school days of the hearing, the PPRC shall prepare and send to the SSW Dean, its decision, including a summary of the hearing and the relevant facts upon which the decision was made. If the PPRC sustains the charge(s), it shall recommend a sanction or sanctions.

## **B. Sanctions**

If the PPRC sustains the charge(s), the SSW Dean shall decide appropriate sanctions as specified in Section 5.0 of the SCOC. The Dean may adopt the sanctions recommended by the PPRC or may impose sanctions more or less severe than those recommended by the PPRC. The Dean shall notify the student, the charging party, and the University's SCO<sup>2</sup> of the decision and the sanctions, in writing, within five (5)

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<sup>2</sup> As noted in Section III above, in each cases where the PPRC has made a final determination, a copy of that determination and any sanctions imposed by the Dean, along with a copy of the notification provided to the student, shall be sent to the SCO as the central repository of all student conduct records.

school days. The Dean shall also notify the student of his/her appeal rights as discussed below. In those cases in which the nature of the sanctions requires notice to the Registrar, the SCO shall forward the dean's notice to the Registrar.

### **C. Appeal Rights**

Where the PPRC sustains the charges and sanctions are imposed, the student may file an appeal to the Provost pursuant to the procedures set forth in Section 18.0 of the SCOC.

## **VI. Student Notifications**

All student notifications pursuant to this policy shall be by email and by a letter delivered by the U.S. Postal Service to the student's address of record.

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Approved as to form:  
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