

STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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Criteria for Evaluating Academic Performance, Policies & Procedures for Review of Academic Performance

Standards for Social Work Education

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Standards for Social Work Education

1.0 Introduction

This document sets out Standards for Social Work Education that apply to students enrolled at the School of Social Work at the University of Arkansas, beginning Fall 2013.

Because of the nature of professional social work practice, the School of Social Work has different expectations of students than do non-professional programs. The standards are linked to students' abilities to become effective social work professionals and are provided so that students and faculty can be clear about expectations and procedures to address academic performance concerns. The ultimate goal of the Standards is to help students have a successful experience at the School of Social Work.

Persons who teach and supervise students, along with program directors, will assess student academic performance and apply their professional judgment to determine if standards are being met during a student's educational career. Professional judgment is the capacity to assess a situation by applying the values and knowledge of the social work profession, combined with a professional's own experience and practice wisdom. It also represents the application of knowledge, values, and skills to making decisions in a helping process.

All social work students will be provided with and expected to read the *Standards for Social Work Education*, the *National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics*, and the *Ethical Principles and Guidelines for UA Social Work Students*. They will then be asked to sign an acknowledgment that they have read, are aware of the contents and will abide by the documents. The signed form will be kept in the student's files.

2.0 Criteria for Evaluating Academic Performance in BSW and MSW Programs at The School of Social Work

In order to meet its responsibilities to provide quality professional education and to ensure that its graduates are able to function in a broad variety of professional situations, the School of Social Work evaluates the academic performance of its students in four general areas: Basic Abilities to Acquire Professional Skills; Mental

and Emotional Abilities; Professional Performance Skills and Scholastic Performance. Meeting the criteria for scholastic achievement is necessary but not sufficient to ensure continued enrollment in a program. Both professional behavior and scholastic performance comprise academic standards.

2.1 Basic Abilities Necessary to Acquire Professional Skills

2.1.1 Communication Skills

Demonstrates sufficient written and oral skills to comprehend information and communicate ideas and feelings.

a) Written: Writes clearly, uses correct grammar and spelling, and applies appropriate writing style, including American Psychological Association (APA) referencing, appropriate source citation, and documentation. Demonstrates sufficient skills in written English to understand content presented in the program and to complete adequately all written assignments, as specified by faculty.

b) Oral: Communicates effectively and sensitively with other students, faculty, staff, clients, and professionals. Expresses ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrates a willingness and an ability to listen to others. Demonstrates sufficient skills in spoken English to understand content presented in the program, to complete adequately all oral assignments, and to meet the objectives of field placement experiences, as specified by faculty.

2.1.2 Interpersonal Skills

Demonstrates the interpersonal skills needed to relate effectively to other students, faculty, staff, clients, and professionals and to fulfill the ethical obligations of the profession. These include compassion, empathy, altruism, integrity, and demonstration of respect for and consideration of others. Takes appropriate responsibility for own actions and considers the impact of these actions on others.

2.1.3 Cognitive Skills

Exhibits sufficient knowledge of social work and clarity of thinking to process information and apply it to appropriate situations in the classroom and field. Demonstrates grounding in relevant social, behavioral and biological science knowledge and research—including knowledge and skills in relationship building, data gathering, assessment, intervention, and evaluation of practice. Exhibits ability to conceptualize and integrate knowledge and apply that knowledge to professional practice.

2.1.4 Physical Skills

Exhibits sufficient motor and sensory abilities to attend and participate in class and practicum placement, with or without accommodations. (See section on Accommodations for Disabilities for clarification.)

2.2 Emotional and Mental Abilities Necessary for Performance in the Program and Professional Practice

2.2.1 Stress Management

Demonstrates ability to deal with current life stressors through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms. Handles stress effectively by using appropriate self-care and by developing supportive relationships with colleagues, peers, and others.

2.2.2 Emotional and Mental Capacities

Uses sound judgment. Seeks and effectively uses help for health, behavioral health or emotional problems that interfere with scholastic and professional performance. Engages in counseling or seeks support and help if personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties do any of the following:

- compromise scholastic and other performance,
- interfere with professional judgment and behavior, or
- jeopardize the best interests of those to whom the social work student has a professional responsibility (as outlined in the current *Codes of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers and the Arkansas Social Work Licensing Board* and *Ethical Principles and Guidelines for UA Social Work Students*).

2.3 Professional Performance Skills Necessary for Work with Clients and Professional Practice

2.3.1 Professional Commitment

Exhibits a strong commitment to the goals of social work and to the ethical standards of the profession, as specified in the NASW Code of Ethics and the Code of Ethics of the Arkansas Social Work Licensing Board. Demonstrates commitment to the essential values of social work that include respect for the dignity and worth of every individual and his/her right to a just share of society's resources (social justice).

2.3.2 Professional Behavior

Exhibits behaviors that are in compliance with program policies, institutional policies, professional ethical standards, and societal laws in the classroom, field, and community. Appearance, dress, and general demeanor reflect a professional manner. Shows potential for responsible and accountable behavior by knowing and practicing within the scope of social work, respecting others, being punctual and dependable, prioritizing responsibilities, attending class regularly, observing deadlines, completing assignments on time, keeping appointments or making appropriate arrangements, and accepting supervision and criticism in a positive and professional manner.

Works effectively with others, regardless of level of authority. Advocates for him/herself in an appropriate and responsible manner and uses proper channels for conflict resolution. Shows a willingness to receive and accept feedback and supervision in a positive manner, as well as uses such feedback to enhance professional development.

2.3.3 Self Awareness

Exhibits knowledge of how one's values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions and past experiences affect thinking, behavior and relationships. Accurately assesses one's own strengths, limitations, and suitability for professional practice. Shows awareness of self and how one is perceived by others. Reflects on one's own limitations as they relate to professional capacities. Is willing to examine and change behavior when it interferes in working with clients and other professionals.

2.3.4 Ethical Obligations

Current behavior and classroom performance demonstrate adherence to the ethical expectations and obligations of professional practice, noted in the NASW Code of Ethics and the Code of Ethics of the Arkansas Social Work Licensing Board.

- Adherence to the NASW Code of Ethics and the Code of Ethics of the Arkansas Social Work Licensing Board.
- Disclosure of criminal charges and/or convictions occurring prior to admission to the School of Social Work, occurring during the course of study, or occurring prior to admission and becoming known after admission.
- Systematic evaluation of clients and their situations in an unbiased, factual way. Suspension of personal biases during interactions with others.
- Comprehension of another individual's way of life and values. Empathic communication and support of the client as a basis for a productive professional relationship.
- Appreciation of the value of diversity. Effective and nonjudgmental relation to and work with others who are different from oneself. Appropriate service to all persons in need of assistance, regardless of the person's age, class, race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and/or value system. No imposition of personal, religious, sexual, and/or cultural values on clients.
- Demonstration of respect for the rights of others. Commitment to clients' rights to freedom of choice and self-determination.
- Maintenance of confidentiality as it relates to human service, classroom activities, and field placement.

- Demonstration of honesty and integrity by being truthful about background, experiences, and qualifications; doing one's own work; giving credit for the ideas of others; and providing proper citation of source materials.
- Demonstration of clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. Does not sexually harass others; make verbal or physical threats; become involved in sexual relationships with clients, supervisors, or faculty; abuse others in physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual ways; or participate in dual relationships where conflicts of interest may exist.

2.4 Scholastic Performance

2.4.1 Undergraduate Students

A grade of "C" or better must be earned in all core social work courses. If a grade of "D" or "F" is earned in a core social work course, the course must be retaken with a grade of "C" or better prior to taking the course for which that course is a pre-requisite. BSW students must maintain a 2.5 GPA in social work courses and a 2.0 GPA overall. Students who fail a social work course will be allowed to repeat the course one time and can repeat up to two different social work courses. Should a student receive a "D" or "F" in a social work course, the student must notify the BSW program director in writing of the received grade. The student should also identify a plan to retake the course with the approval from his or her advisor and program director.

For additional information see "Continuation and Grading Policies" in the current *BSW Student Handbook* at http://socialwork.uark.edu/BSW_Student_Handbook_8-9-12.pdf

2.4.2 Graduate Students

Students may earn two "C" grades toward the MSW degree, provided maintains a 3.0 GPA is maintained. Students who earn "C" grades are encouraged to meet with their advisor to discuss any academic challenges they may be experiencing. An academic performance review may be called if a student earns two "C" grades in required social work courses. MSW students who earn a "D" or "F" grade or more than two "C" grades, including field, will automatically be dismissed from the MSW program.

For Graduate School policies related to academic requirements, standing, probation and dismissal see "Academic Requirements/Policies" at http://grad.uark.edu/dean/GRADUATE_STUDENT_HANDBOOK.pdf

2.5 Sources of Information for Academic Performance Criteria

Information about students in the School of Social Work meeting academic performance criteria will be solicited by appropriate faculty and may include but is not limited to any of the following:

- Feedback from faculty, work supervisors, or supervisors of volunteer human service activity or other field experiences
- Feedback from agency-based field instructors
- Observation of classroom, volunteer, or field behaviors
- Performance in oral and written assignments, examinations, social work skills labs, or other appropriate coursework
- Student personal statements or self-assessments
- Interviews with faculty or other professionals
- Taped interview situations (audio or video)
- Feedback from students, staff, university (UA or other colleges and universities), helping professionals, or community
- Feedback from faculty in other social work programs that student may have attended
- Signed confidentiality statements, scholastic honesty statements, contract to adhere to NASW Code of Ethics or the Standards, other contracts between the School and the student

2.6 Accommodations for Disabilities

No otherwise qualified student shall, on the basis of disability, be subjected to discrimination or excluded from participation in the School of Social Work. A student with a disability may be protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and be eligible for a reasonable accommodation that will provide an equal opportunity to meet the academic criteria related to professional behavior and scholastic performance.

Any otherwise qualified student with a protected disability who requests a reasonable accommodation must notify the Center for Educational Access (CEA) Office of Students with Disabilities and provide documentation as needed. The CEA Office of Students with Disabilities makes recommendations for accommodations. The School of Social Work will review academic performance criteria in light of individual student circumstances to explore issues of appropriateness and accommodation. An initial assessment, subsequent plan, use of outside experts (including CEA /Office of Students with Disabilities), and periodic checks between the School of Social Work and the student are appropriate courses of action in making accommodations.

3.0 Policies and Procedures for Review of Academic Performance

Three levels of review can occur at the School of Social Work in reviewing student academic performance. The level of review depends upon the potential severity of

the concern. Information disclosed during student meetings with faculty, program directors, or school administrators will not be kept confidential if the information raises concerns about professional performance. Faculty and/or program directors will share pertinent information with each other for the professional purpose of identifying student issues and enhancing problem solving about the concerns. They will follow University procedures related to student performance issues.

3.1 Performance that May Result in a Review and/or Possible Dismissal from the School of Social Work

Student reviews can occur under any of the following circumstances:

- Failure to meet or maintain academic requirements as stated under Scholastic Performance
- Scholastic dishonesty, including cheating, lying, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, or any act designed to give unfair academic advantage to the student (faculty must adhere to the University's Academic Integrity guidelines, policies and procedures)
- Behavior judged to be in violation of the current NASW Code of Ethics
- Any threat or attempt to harm to oneself or someone else
- Failure to report criminal charges and/or convictions occurring prior to admission to the School of Social Work, occurring during the course of study, or occurring prior to admission and becoming known after admission.
- Consistent pattern of unprofessional behavior
- Failure to meet any of the Standards for Social Work Education: School of Social Work Criteria for Evaluation of Academic Performance

3.2 The Three Levels of Review

Level 1

A Level 1 review involves a faculty member and a student. When a faculty member has concerns about a student enrolled in the social work program meeting any of the academic criteria, whether related to professional behavior or scholastic performance, that faculty member will:

- Discuss those concerns directly with the student and seek to work with the student to resolve the difficulties, documenting the dates and content of all meetings. If a problem arises in field internship, the agency-based field instructor will discuss concerns directly with the student and faculty liaison.
- Provide written documentation of the concern to the appropriate program director (BSW, MSW). If problems originate in field, it is the responsibility of the faculty liaison to apprise the field education director.

The field education director will forward documentation to the student's program director in order to help identify potential patterns and issues related to the student. At this point, the documentation will be retained by the program director and does not become a part of the student's permanent file. In many instances, meetings between faculty and students resolve the concerns and do not necessarily lead to the next level of review.

Level 2

A Level 2 review is initiated by the program director (or field education director if problem arises in field) when concerns have not been resolved at Level I, or if multiple reports (indicating a pattern of behavior), or one report of a serious nature, are made. The program director will meet with the student and faculty member(s) to assess the nature of the problem. When the problem arises in field, the agency-based field instructor, faculty liaison, and field education director will conduct the review with the student.

If further action is required, the program director, or field education director, will determine and monitor a plan of action to address the concerns and maintain documentation of all meetings with the student. When resolution is not achieved at Level 2, or a plan of action is not appropriate due to the seriousness of the concern, the program director will inform the student that a request for a Level 3 review is being made. The field education director will consult with the appropriate program director prior to requesting a Level 3 review.

Level 3

In the School of Social Work, the Student Standards and Support Committee, consisting of faculty members appointed by the director, is the entity that conducts Level 3 reviews. A Level 3 review is more often conducted when concerns have not been resolved in prior reviews; when issues relate to a student not meeting the criteria for academic performance (often involving professional or ethical behaviors); or when the student is being considered for withdrawal or dismissal from the program. The purpose of the committee is to gather information related to the concerns, determine the nature of the problem (if one is confirmed to exist), and identify alternatives for its remediation.

When a Level 3 review is called, the committee will convene a meeting within 3 working days to review the referral and may request participation or interviews with appropriate faculty and others with information related to the concerns (see Section 2.5 for possible information sources). The student will be notified in writing of the concerns and a meeting date, with sufficient time to prepare for and attend the meeting. When necessary, the student will be excused from class to attend the meeting, without consequences to attendance grade. The student has the right to be accompanied by a support person, should they choose to do so. Some examples of persons that a student might find helpful are a representative from the Office for Student Affairs, their advisor, or another faculty member. The committee must be

informed of the name and affiliation of the support person prior to the meeting. The support person's role is non-participatory (i.e., does not speak for the student or provide or refute evidence) and serves only as an observer and provider of moral support. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the review, including information related to other students, currently enrolled UA students may not serve as support persons.

Following the review, members will deliberate and make recommendations regarding the student's situation. Outcomes may include:

- Continue the student in the program with no conditions.

In these situations, the concern has been addressed and no further action by the student or program is required.

- Establish formal conditions for the student's continuance in the program.

In these situations, specific conditions must be met in order for the student to remain in the program. Action may include establishing goals, a plan, a timeline, and appropriate monitoring; providing mentoring and support; placing the student on probation and monitoring the student during the probationary period; referring the student to counseling and/or advising services; allowing the student to follow a reduced course load or delay entry to the field practicum; or requiring the student to withdraw from the program with the option of reapplying.

- Consult with and/or refer to the Dean of Students.

In some instances, depending on the nature of the problem, the University's Office of the Dean of Students may be consulted. If a referral is made to that Office after consultation, the student will be notified in writing about the nature of the concern and the fact that the referral is taking place. Situations which may result in referral to the Office of the Dean of Students include scholastic dishonesty, hazing, racial or sexual harassment, possession or use of firearms or other weapons on University property, damage or destruction of University property, and conduct that endangers the health or safety of any University student, employee, or campus visitor.

- Counsel the student to change majors/degree programs and/or discontinue the student in the program.

In some situations, it will be recommended that the student no longer continue in the social work program. The student will be counseled to voluntarily withdraw from the program and change major or degree program. If the student chooses not to withdraw, he or she will be discontinued in the program. In either case, the student will be provided with documentation regarding the specific reasons for their dismissal and the conditions, if any, under which they may re-apply.

In any Level 3 review, there must be documentation of the problem areas as well as verification that these concerns have been discussed with the student and attempted to be ameliorated, when appropriate.

Written recommendations will be submitted to the associate director of the School of Social Work, or his or her designee, who will review the recommendations and related documentation. Based on the review, the associate director may choose to accept the recommendations, or accept with modifications. The associate director will notify the student of his or her decision in writing, within five working days of receiving the recommendation from the committee. When discontinuation in the major or degree program has been recommended, and further advising is deemed appropriate, the student will be offered the opportunity to meet with a social work faculty advisor to discuss alternate majors or degree programs at the University of Arkansas.

Students' Right to Appeal: If a student believes that a decision resulting from an academic performance review is unjust, an appeal may be made to the School's director. The student must notify the director of the intent to appeal within 72 hours of notification of the decision. A written appeal must be submitted to the director within 10 calendar days of notification of intent to appeal. The appeal should include: a clear statement of the reason for the appeal, any documentation supporting the student's claim, and a proposal for an alternate outcome. The director will provide written notification of his or her decision within 5 working days of receiving the written appeal. The director's decision serves as the School of Social Work's final level of appeal.

4.0 Academic Grievances

4.0.1 Graduate Students

Pursuant to the Academic Grievance Procedures for Graduate Students provided in the *Graduate Student Handbook*, students enrolled in the MSW program have the right to redress grievances related to academic matters, including decisions that are the result of reviews outlined in Section 3.0. Students are assured freedom from reprisals for bringing a grievance.

<http://grad.uark.edu/dean/governance/gs-grievanceprocedures.php>

4.0.1 Undergraduate Students

Pursuant to the Student Academic Appeals procedures provided in the current *Undergraduate Catalog*, students enrolled in the BSW program have the right to redress grievances related to academic matters, including those that are the result of reviews outlined in Section 3.0 of these Standards for Social Work Education. Students are assured freedom from reprisals for bringing a grievance.

<http://catalog.uark.edu/undergraduatecatalog/academicregulations/studentacademicappeals/>

4.1 Procedures for Handling Academic Grievances

4.1.2 Undergraduate Students

An undergraduate student who has an academic grievance involving a grade dispute shall discuss the matter with the faculty member involved. If the dispute is not resolved, and for all other academic grievances, the student can appeal the matter to the program director (or field education director if matter arises in field). If not resolved at this level, the student may then appeal to the School of Social Work director. If the dispute remains unresolved, the student will follow the procedures outlined in the *Undergraduate Catalog* "Student Academic Appeals/Grade Appeal Structure for Undergraduate Students".

<http://catalog.uark.edu/undergraduatecatalog/academicregulations/studentacademicappeals/>

4.1.2 Graduate Students

A graduate student who has an academic grievance involving a grade dispute shall discuss the matter with the faculty member involved. If the dispute is not resolved, and for all other academic grievances, the student may appeal the matter to the program director (or field education director if the matter arises in field). If not resolved at this level, the student may then appeal to the director of the School of Social Work. If the dispute remains unresolved, the student will follow the procedures outlined in the current *Graduate Student Handbook*.

<http://grad.uark.edu/dean/governance/gs-grievanceprocedures.php>

4.2 Non-Academic Grievances

Student-initiated grievances that are not academic in nature are addressed in other documents. Social work students should refer to the *Undergraduate or Graduate Catalogs* for more detailed discussion of specific grievance procedures.