



The University of Texas at Austin

School of Social Work

Standards for Social Work Education

Criteria for Evaluating Academic Performance, Policies & Procedures for Review of Academic Performance, and Academic Grievances. 1997, Revised 1998, 1999, 2005, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2020.

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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 Texas at Austin, beginning Summer 1997.

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.

Since becoming a professional is a gradual process, not all criteria are expected to be met at all times. Persons who teach and supervise students, along with program Assistant/Associate Deans, 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 and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. Students will then be asked to sign an acknowledgment that they have read, are aware of the contents of, and will abide by the documents. The form will be kept in students' files.

2.0 Criteria for Evaluating Academic Performance in BSW, MSSW & PhD 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 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 developing supportive relationships with colleagues, peers, and others.

2.2.2 Emotional and Mental Capacities

Uses sound judgment. Seeks and effectively uses help for medical or emotional problems that interfere with scholastic and professional performance. Engages in counseling or seeks out 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 by the National Association of Social Workers and the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners for Social Work Licensure).

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 Conduct for Social Work Licensure in Texas. Demonstrates commitment to the essential values of social work that includes the 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 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 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 use 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 Conduct for Social Work Licensure in Texas. Ethical behaviors include:

- Adherence to the NASW Code of Ethics and the Code of Conduct for Social Work Licensure in Texas.
- No history of charges and/or convictions of an offense that is contrary to professional practice.
- 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, 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

Students are considered to be in academic difficulty if their GPA drops below 2.25. Students may be advised to withdraw from the program if their grade point average falls below 2.0 overall or 2.5 in major. Failure to maintain a passing grade in field placement will result in dismissal. A review may be called if a student earns a D or F in any required social work courses. An overall GPA of 2.0 is required for graduation.

Students must complete the prerequisites outlined in their appropriate courses of study, as outlined in the course catalog.

2.4.2 Graduate Students

MSSW students are considered to be in academic difficulty if their GPA drops below 3.0. Students may be advised to withdraw from the program if their grade point average falls below 2.5. Failure to maintain a passing grade in field placement will result in dismissal. A review may be called if a student earns a grade of C or below or X in any required social work course. An overall GPA of 3.0 is required for graduation.

PhD students must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or better and successfully complete a comprehensive examination that demonstrates mastery of the theory and research for the broad subject area in which the student proposes to conduct his or her dissertation research. The comprehensive exam has both a written and an oral component. If performance on either the written or oral exam is judged to be deficient, the student has one additional opportunity to redo the paper and repeat the oral defense. If they fail either the written or oral exam twice, they lose their eligibility to remain in the program.

2.5

Sources of Information for Academic Performance Criteria

Information about students' meeting academic performance criteria in the School of Social Work may include but is not limited to any of the following:

- Feedback or reference letters 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 (UT 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 Office of Students with Disabilities and provide documentation as needed. The 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 the 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's academic performance. The level of review depends upon the potential severity of the concern. Information disclosed during student meetings with faculty, Assistant/Associate Deans, or school administrators will not be kept confidential if the information raises concerns about professional performance. Faculty and/or Assistant/Associate Deans 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 university guidelines. For complete University policy and procedures, see *General Information Bulletin*, Appendix C, Section 11-802.)
- Behavior judged to be in violation of the current NASW Code of Ethics
- Any threat or attempt to harm oneself or someone else
- Commission of a criminal act that is contrary to professional practice, occurring during the course of study or occurring prior to admission to the School of Social Work 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.
- Apprise the appropriate BSW, MSSW, PhD, and/or Field Assistant/Associate Dean of the concerns in order to identify potential patterns and issues related to the student
- Document dates and content of meetings with students.

If a problem arises in field, the agency-based field instructor will discuss concerns directly with the student and with the faculty liaison. It is the responsibility of the faculty liaison to apprise the appropriate Assistant/Associate Dean(s) of the concerns.

In many instances, meetings between faculty and students resolve the concerns and do not necessarily lead to further reviews, pursuant to this section.

Level 2

A Level 2 review involves the faculty member, student, and Assistant/ Associate Dean(s). Faculty and Assistant/ Associate Dean(s) will meet with the student when the student is not meeting or following program or university standards, policies, and procedures or when concerns have not been resolved at Level 1. If a problem arises in field, the agency-based field instructor, faculty liaison, and Assistant Dean for Field Education will conduct the review with the student.

In this information gathering process, the Assistant/ Associate Dean will determine the nature of the concern and gather sufficient information to develop a plan to address that concern, if one is needed. No further action may be required, or the student may be asked, in writing, to modify his or her behavior and/or seek appropriate help. This process is designed to assist students in dealing with identified concerns that have an impact on their performance.

The BSW, MSSW, PhD, or Field Assistant/ Associate Deans will assess the nature of these concerns with appropriate faculty, consult with the Graduate Adviser (if a graduate student) and with the Senior Associate Dean and/or Dean, maintain documentation, and decide if it is necessary to conduct a more comprehensive review, pursuant to Level 3.

Level 3

A Level 3 review involves the Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs (Graduate Adviser), faculty member, student, Assistant/ Associate Dean(s), and faculty who have had direct experience with the student in classroom or field. Generally, this level review is called when problematic patterns are identified with students or when the issues are serious enough to require formal consultation with other faculty and the student. A Level 3 review more often is 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 discontinuance in the program.

In most instances, a Level 3 review is sufficient to deal with student performance and is the last decision-making step in the review process at the School of Social Work.

When a Level 3 review is called, the Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs (Graduate Adviser) and the appropriate Assistant/ Associate Dean(s) will convene a meeting with the appropriate faculty and the student to gather information, determine the nature of the problem (if one is confirmed to exist), and identify alternatives for its remediation. Appropriate faculty to be involved in a review will include but are not limited to those who have direct knowledge of and experience with the student.

The student will be notified in writing of the concerns and meeting date, with sufficient time to prepare for and attend the meeting.

After the review meeting has occurred, the Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs (Graduate Adviser) will consult with the Dean of the School of Social Work to discuss the

problem situation and make recommendations regarding the student. Based on the review, conference with the Dean, and an objective assessment of the information provided, the Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs (Graduate Adviser) will inform the student of the decisions, which can include one or more of the following actions:

- *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. Situations which may result in referral to the Office of the Dean of Students include scholastic dishonesty, hazing, racial or sexual harassment, unlawful possession or use of firearms or other weapons on University property, damage or destruction of University property, and/or 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 may be counseled to voluntarily change majors or degree programs and/or the student will be discontinued from 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 clear, concise documentation of the problem areas as well as verification that these concerns have been discussed with the student and attempted to be ameliorated, where appropriate. Students must be notified of the decision in writing within ten business days of the review. It is the responsibility of the Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs (Graduate Adviser) to communicate the decision to the student.

4.0 Academic Grievances

Pursuant to the student grievance procedures for undergraduate students provided in the General Information Catalog and for graduate students in the Handbook of Operating Procedures, students enrolled in the Social Work Program have the right to redress grievances related to academic matters, including decisions 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.

4.1 Procedures for Handling Grievances

Procedures for handling grievances at the School of Social Work are as follows:

4.1.1 Undergraduate Student Grievances General Information Catalog

<http://registrar.utexas.edu/docs/catalogs/gi/ut-catalog-gi-11-12.pdf>

Academic Related Grievances. Academic grievances involving grade disputes should be discussed with the course instructor. Grade disputes that are not resolved and all other academic grievances of undergraduate students should be submitted in writing to the department chair or other designated administrator of the academic program to which the grievance relates.

Appeals may be directed to the appropriate academic dean, who will render the final decision. A grade will not be changed by the department chair (or other designated administrator) and/or the dean without first consulting with and considering fully the position of the course instructor. The course instructor will be advised by the department chair, other appropriate administrator, or dean of the resolution of the grievance.

Procedures for the resolution of grievances of graduate students are specified in the revised *Handbook of Operating Procedures*, Policy 1.C.2. The dean of the college or school in which a student is enrolled has jurisdiction over the student's program of study, degree requirements, and all other academic matters, including grievances, except as described below. A student pursuing simultaneous majors in two colleges is considered to be enrolled in both colleges and is under the jurisdiction of both deans. Students taking a course in a college or school other than the one(s) in which they are enrolled are subject, so far as the course and academic grievances regarding the course are concerned, to the dean of the college or school in which the course is offered. Procedures for cases of alleged academic dishonesty are given in Appendix C, chapter 11, Student Discipline and Conduct, page 203.

Student Program and Student Activity Related Grievances. Grievances related to nonacademic student programs and activities should be submitted in writing to the dean or director of the specific student affairs area. Appeals may be directed to the vice

president for student affairs, and then to the president for final disposition.

Appendix C of this catalog (pages 161–241) describes the institutional rules on student services and activities and includes provisions for formal hearings. Additional information on these provisions is available from the Office of the Dean of Students.

Disability related grievances. No qualified disabled student shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any academic program or activity at the University of Texas at Austin. Complaints alleging discrimination on the basis of disability should be submitted according to the procedures outlined in the Nondiscrimination Policy, Appendix I, pages 260–265. The policy is in accord with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).

4.1.2

Graduate Student Grievances

Handbook of Operating Procedures

<http://www.utexas.edu/policies/hoppm/01.C.02.html>

1. Adjudicating Grievances of Graduate Students

a. A graduate student has the right to seek redress of any grievance related to his or her academic affairs.

b. Every effort should be made to resolve grievances informally between the student and the faculty member most directly involved or, such efforts failing, by the graduate adviser, the chair of the graduate studies committee of the student's degree program, and/or the chair of the department (or the director of the academic program if there is no department). When serious issues cannot be resolved informally, the graduate student will have recourse to the formal grievance procedure as outlined below in Subsections 2-4. It should be noted that the precise procedure to be followed in adjudicating a given grievance will depend on the particular circumstances surrounding the case.

Grade disputes are handled according to departmental review policies by the department offering the course in question. The order of review for grade disputes is the course instructor, graduate adviser, department chair (or the director of the academic program if there is no department), and dean of the college or school offering the course. The decision of the college or school dean is final.

Non-academic grievances submitted to the Graduate School will be referred by the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies to the appropriate University administrative office, normally the Office of the Dean of Students, the Office of Human Resources, or the college/school dean in which the incident of grievance occurred. Only in cases of multiple points of grievance will the complaint be reviewed by more than one administrative unit of the University.

Grievances related to nonacademic issues and scholastic dishonesty are handled according to the procedures outlined in the General Information Catalog.

c. A graduate student may express a formal grievance through the following procedures with the assurance of timely and thorough consideration. Grievants are assured freedom from reprisals for the filing of their grievances.

d. All complaints must be submitted in writing to the Office of Graduate Studies, which will notify the chair of the graduate studies committee, the department chair (or the director of the academic program if there is no department), and the dean of the college or school that a grievance has been filed and of the procedures for handling the grievance.

e. A student must initiate his or her complaint within six months of the incident that is the subject of the grievance.

2. First Level of Adjudication: Graduate Studies Committee

a. The first level of consideration is the appropriate graduate studies committee. If the chair of the graduate studies committee, having received formal notification of the grievance from the Office of Graduate Studies, cannot resolve the matter himself or herself, he or she will convene an ad hoc panel normally consisting of three to five members of the graduate studies committee to review the complaint and render a decision to the graduate studies committee. The student will be granted the right to exclude one person from the panel.

b. After consideration of the student's grievance, including a meeting with the student if requested, the ad hoc panel will report its findings to the graduate studies committee, the student, and the faculty member in writing. A copy of the findings will be retained in the files of the chair of the graduate studies committee. The graduate studies committee will ratify, reverse, or change the decision of the ad hoc panel.

3. Second Level of Adjudication: Office of the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

a. If the issues cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties concerned at the level of the graduate studies committee, the grievance and the decisions of the previous review panel and the graduate studies committee will be forwarded to the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies. The Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies in consultation with the college or school dean(s) may decide the case on his or her own review and authority, or if he or she deems it appropriate, convene an ad hoc committee to review the case and provide advice.

b. The Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies will review the facts of the case, including any recommendations received from an ad hoc committee, and render a

ruling. This ruling will be sent to the student, the ad hoc panel, the chair of the graduate studies committee, the graduate adviser, the department chair, and the college or school dean(s).

4. Third Level of Adjudication: Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost: The decision of the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies may be appealed in writing to the Executive Vice President and Provost for a final decision.

4.2 Non-Academic Grievances

Student-initiated grievances that are not academic in nature are addressed further in other documents. Students should refer to the University Undergraduate Catalog, University Graduate School Catalog, and University General Information Bulletin for more detailed discussion of specific grievance procedures.