

The University of South Carolina School of Medicine

Guidelines for Conduct in Teacher/Learner Relationships

I. Statement of Philosophy

The University of South Carolina School of Medicine is committed to fostering an environment that promotes academic and professional success in learners and teachers at all levels. The achievement of such success is dependent on an environment free of behaviors which can undermine the important mission of our institution. An atmosphere of mutual respect, collegiality, fairness, and trust is essential. Although both teachers and learners bear significant responsibility in creating and maintaining this atmosphere, teachers also bear particular responsibility with respect to their evaluative roles relative to student work and with respect to modeling appropriate professional behaviors. Teachers must be ever mindful of this responsibility in their interactions with their colleagues, their patients, and those whose education has been entrusted to them.

II. Responsibilities in the Teacher/Learner Relationship

A. Responsibilities of Teachers

1. Treat all learners with respect and fairness
2. Treat all learners equally regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, disability, or sexual orientation.
3. Provide current material in an effective format for learning.
4. Be on time for didactic, investigational, and clinical encounters.
5. Provide timely feedback with constructive suggestions and opportunities for improvement/remediation when needed.

B. Responsibilities of learners

1. Treat all fellow learners and teachers with respect and fairness.
2. Treat all fellow learners and teachers equally regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, disability, or sexual orientation.
3. Commit the time and energy to your studies necessary to achieve the goals and objectives of each course.
4. Be on time for didactic, investigational, and clinical encounters.
5. Communicate concerns/suggestions about the curriculum, didactic methods, teachers, or the learning environment in a respectful, professional manner.

III. Behaviors Inappropriate to the Teacher-Learner Relationship

These behaviors are those which demonstrate disrespect for others or lack of professionalism in interpersonal conduct. Although there is inevitably a subjective element in the witnessing or experiencing of such behaviors, certain actions are clearly inappropriate and will not be tolerated by the institution. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- unwanted physical contact (e.g. hitting, slapping, kicking, pushing) or the threat of the same;
- sexual harassment (including romantic relationships between teachers and learners in which the teacher has authority over the learner's academic progress) or harassment based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, disability, or sexual orientation;
- loss of personal civility including shouting, personal attacks or insults, displays of temper (such as throwing objects), use of culturally insensitive language;
- discrimination of any form including in teaching and assessment based upon age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, disability, or sexual orientation;
- requests for another to perform inappropriate personal errands unrelated to the didactic, investigational, or clinical situation at hand;
- grading/evaluation on factors unrelated to performance, effort, or level of achievement.

IV. Avenues for Addressing Inappropriate Behavior in the Teacher/Learner Context

A. Learners' Concerns

Learners may address situations in which they feel that they have been the object of inappropriate behavior at various levels. At the most basic level, the most effective way to handle a situation may be to address it immediately and non-confrontationally. Oftentimes, a person is simply unaware that his/her behavior has offended someone, or even if aware, will correct the behavior appropriately if given the opportunity to do so in a way that is not threatening. The way to raise such an issue is to describe the behavior factually ("When you said...") describe how the behavior made you feel ("I felt..."), and state that the behavior needs to stop or not be repeated ("Please, don't do that again.")

Sometimes, such a request is not successful, or the person repeats the behavior, or the learner does not feel comfortable speaking directly to the teacher about his/her behavior. In those cases, it may be helpful to discuss the behavior with course/clerkship directors, laboratory mentors, program directors or department chairs. Students may also elect to speak to any one of the Assistant Deans or the Associate Dean in the Office of Medical Education and Academic Affairs, the Assistant Dean for Minority Affairs, the Director of Student Services, or one of the School of Medicine's three Ombudspersons for informal advice and counsel

about these issues. These individuals may offer additional suggestions for resolving the matter informally, such as, for example, speaking to the individual on the learner's behalf or on behalf of an entire class, raising the general issue in a faculty meeting, assisting the learner with writing to the individual teacher or even direct intervention to get the behavior to stop.

If no satisfactory resolution is reached after these discussions or the learner does not feel comfortable speaking to these individuals, he/she may bring the matter formally to the attention of the School of Medicine administration. The avenues for this more formal reporting vary depending upon the status of the reporting individual. In either case the learner always has the option of submitting a formal complaint to the University's Student Grievance Committee through the procedure outlined in the *Carolina Community*. (Website link below)

<http://www.sa.sc.edu/carolinacommunity/housing.htm#Grievance%20Policy%20-%20Non-Academic>

1. If the person reporting the behavior is a medical student:

The student should speak with the Director of Student Services, the Associate Dean for Medical Education and Academic Affairs, or one of the school's Ombudspersons.

2. If the person reporting the behavior is a graduate student or MD/PhD student pursuing their graduate studies:

The student should speak with the Director of Student Services or the Director of the Graduate Studies Program.

B. Teachers' Concerns

If a teacher feels that a learner has engaged in inappropriate behavior, it is likewise most effective to address the situation immediately and non-confrontationally. If the matter is not resolved satisfactorily, the teacher should contact the course/clerkship director, program director, or laboratory mentor to discuss the matter. If the teacher wishes to make a formal allegation of misconduct, they should contact the following members of the administration:

1. If the matter involves a medical student, contact one of the Assistant or Associate Deans in the Office of Medical Education and Academic Affairs;

2. If the matter involves a graduate student, contact the Director of the Graduate Studies Program.

These allegations will be handled on an individual basis by the appropriate School of Medicine official in consultation with the Dean and where applicable according to established School of Medicine and University policies.

V. Procedures for Handling Allegations of Inappropriate Behavior in the Teacher/Learner Context

- A. Upon being notified of alleged inappropriate behavior, the Associate/Assistant Dean or Program Director will notify the Dean and other appropriate senior administration officials in a written report within 5 business days of the allegation.

If the complaint is lodged against a faculty member, other than those matters referred to the Office of Equal Opportunity Programs, the matter will be handled by the Dean in consultation with the appropriate Associate Dean and Department chair and, where established, the appropriate School of Medicine and University policies. The Dean may also choose to appoint an ad hoc committee to investigate the complaint.

- B. If the behavior involves unlawful discrimination or sexual or other forms of unlawful harassment, the matter will be referred to the Office of Equal Opportunity Programs and be handled through University policies established for that office. The student may also directly contact that office.
- C. If the behavior involves unwanted physical contact or other forms of violent or threatening acts, the matter may be referred to the University's campus police or appropriate hospital security.
- D. The School of Medicine is committed to the fair treatment of all individuals involved in this process. All efforts will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the resolution process to the extent possible and subject to the overriding concern of a prompt fair investigation and/or resolution of the complaint.

- E. The School of Medicine will not tolerate any form of retaliatory behavior toward learners who make allegations in good faith. Individuals who believe that action has been taken against them in retaliation for raising concerns under this policy, may address those concerns through the procedures described in this policy or through the Student Grievance Committee.
- F. Records of all communications as well as written reports of the Associate/Assistant Deans, Program Directors, and any ad hoc committee (if formed) will be kept in the Dean's Office.
- G. If it is determined that the allegations from the complainant were not made in good faith, the student will be referred for disciplinary action to the Student Academic Responsibility Committee.

Approved: Curriculum Committee (September 11, 2008)

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