

University of Houston
Graduate College of Social Work
MSW STUDENT STANDARDS POLICY
Adopted May 5, 2000, revised 3/1/2002, 2/6/2004, 3/5/2004,
1/9/2012, 3/11/2014, 4/8/2014, 12/12/2014, 5/14/2015

The Graduate College of Social Work (GCSW) faculty and professional staff are responsible for determining whether students demonstrate the required level of classroom, field, professional, and ethical achievement appropriate for professional interactions with colleagues, faculty, field instructors, administrators, staff, and clients.

The College is committed to the treatment of students with fairness and equity throughout the program. This policy is applied to students' enrollment in the MSW program at any point in time, from admission to program entry, program entry to candidacy, and candidacy to graduation. Each admitted student is required to read, comprehend and complete the Student Standards Policy Contract. Students are required to adhere to MSW program policies, GCSW and University of Houston (UH) policies.

1.1 STUDENT STANDARDS

Due to the professional nature of social work practice, the GCSW has different expectations of students than do non-professional programs. In order to meet its responsibilities to provide quality professional social work education and to ensure that its graduates are able to function in a broad array of professional activities, GCSW faculty evaluates the academic performance of students in five general areas: professional readiness, professional commitment and ethical conduct, professional behavior, scholastic performance, and attendance and punctuality. Meeting the criteria for scholastic performance is necessary, but not sufficient to ensure continued enrollment in the program. Demonstration of professional and ethical behavior, commitment, and readiness is also required. Below are the fundamental requirements for successful completion of a degree from the GCSW.

- 1.2 Professional Readiness:** Demonstrates generally accepted standards of personal integrity, health and emotional stability, self-care, stress management, communication skills, interpersonal skills and self-awareness.
- a. Personal Integrity:** Is open to learning and is honest with oneself and colleagues.
 - b. Health & Emotional Stability:** Uses thoughtful judgment in professional situations. Responsibly addresses one's own health and emotional challenges that may interfere with scholastic and professional performance.
 - c. Self Care & Stress Management:** Seeks and effectively practices self-care, uses help, and demonstrates ability to deal with current life stressors through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms.
 - d. Communication Skills:** Communicates responsibly, sensitively and with respect toward colleagues, faculty, field instructors, administrators, staff, and clients.
 - e. Interpersonal Skills:** Expresses ideas and feelings which can be heard and

- understood by others. Demonstrates willingness and an ability to listen to others.
- f. 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 on an ongoing basis. Shows a beginning level of self-awareness and of how one is perceived by others. Reflects on one's own limitations as relate to professional capacities. Is willing to examine and change behavior when it interferes in working with clients and other professionals.

1.3 Professional Commitment and Ethical Conduct:

- a. Exhibits a strong commitment to the essential values of social work and the pursuit of promoting social, economic and political justice:
- b. Adheres to the NASW Code of Ethics and the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners Code of Conduct.
- c. Appreciates the value of diversity. Works with and relates to others who are different from oneself, regardless of the student's own personal, religious, and/or cultural values. Provides 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.
- d. Comprehends other individuals' ways of life and differing values. Uses empathic communication and support of the client as a basis for a productive professional relationship.
- e. Shows respect for the rights of others. Commits to the clients' and human rights to freedom of choice and self-determination.
- f. Maintains the professional standard of confidentiality as it relates to: human service, classroom and research activities, and field placement.
- g. Demonstrates consistent honesty and integrity by being truthful about one's own background, experiences, and qualifications.
- h. Demonstrates clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. Refrains from sexually harassing others, making verbal or physical threats, being involved in sexual relationships with clients, abusing others in physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual ways, or participating in dual relationships where conflicts of interest may exist.
- i. Evaluates clients and their situations in a systematic, factual way. Refrains from imposing personal biases during interactions with others.

1.4 Professional Behavior:

- a. Exhibits behaviors that are in compliance with program policies, institutional policies, and professional ethical standards in classroom, field, and community settings.
- b. Shows appearance and demeanor that are appropriate to the roles and settings encountered during the educational experiences.
- c. Shows potential for responsible and accountable behavior by knowing and practicing within the scope of social work ethics, respecting others, being

- punctual and dependable, prioritizing responsibilities, observing deadlines, completing tasks on time, and keeping appointments or making alternate arrangements.
- d. Works effectively with others, regardless of level of authority or academic position.
 - e. Advocates for one's self in a constructive manner and first uses established channels for conflict resolution.
 - f. Shows a willingness to acknowledge constructive feedback or supervision, as well as uses such feedback to enhance professional development.
 - g. Takes responsibility in following through with referrals to campus resources to enhance the probability of academic success, professional development and self-care.

1.5 Scholastic Performance:

- a. Demonstrates and maintains a professional standard of writing in all courses, does one's own work, gives credit for the ideas of others, and provides proper citation of source materials.
 - i. Adheres to the UH "Academic Honesty Policy": http://www.uh.edu/provost/policies/honesty/_documents-honesty/academic-honesty-policy.pdf, and
 - ii. Adheres to the explicit Academic Honesty policies detailed on the College website: <http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/current-students/policies/index.php#Honesty>
- b. Maintains a 3.0 grade point average (GPA) and satisfactory performance in all courses, including field practicum. Is aware that not meeting this standard will result in academic probation.
- c. Understands that removal from academic probation is granted when the student's GPA is raised to B (3.0) or above. The student has 12 semester credit hours to raise the G.P.A. to a 3.0.
- d. Understands that any course in which a grade of less than C- or a U is received does not earn credit towards a degree.
- e. Automatic Academic Dismissal: Whether or not in repeated courses, a student is automatically dismissed from the program for the following reasons:
 - i) Receives a grade of C+ or lower and/or a grade of U in 3 graduate courses attempted at this institution, whether or not in repeated courses, is ineligible for any graduate degree at this institution and will not be permitted to re-enroll for graduate study, or
 - ii) Receives 2 Us in field practicum courses;
- f. Knows that the University of Houston will not award or honor a degree with a cumulative GPA below 3.0, despite successful completion of coursework.
- g. Understands that the grade of I (Incomplete) is a conditional and temporary grade given when students are passing a course but, for reasons beyond their control, have not completed a relatively small part of all requirements. Students are responsible for informing the instructor immediately of the reasons for not submitting an assignment

- on time or not taking an examination as scheduled. The grade of I must be changed by fulfilling the course requirements by the deadline set by the instructor, but no more than one year from the date awarded, or, in conformance with university policy, it will be changed automatically to F or U (in S-U graded courses).
- h. Maintains satisfactory performance in all field practicum courses.
 - i. If a student is unable to competently perform within a field agency and/or there are documented concerns about the student's professional behavior, the student can be suspended from field education and required to meet with the field liaison and/or Director of Field Education to assess and address the documented concerns.
 - ii. A student may be removed from the field agency, at any time, by the field instructor and/or the field agency for documented unprofessional conduct or for documented demonstrable lack of progress in achieving field practicum learning objectives. A written statement attesting to this action will be prepared by the field instructor in consultation with the field liaison, if applicable, to be sent to the Director of Field Education.
 - iii. If a student is terminated from a field agency, based on the student's actions, a U will automatically be assigned for the field course currently enrolled. The student will be required to meet with the Director of Field Education to assess the student's readiness for participating in future field education courses.
 - iv. A student may not voluntarily terminate with an agency, without prior consultation and approval from the field liaison and/or the Director of Field Education.
 - v. A student who receives more than one unsatisfactory (U) in a field practicum course will be dismissed from the MSW program.
 - i. Understands that the maximum graduate student MSW course load in the Fall or Spring semesters is limited to 15 semester credit hours (SCHs) and 6 SCH in the Summer semester (including all summer sessions).
 - i. The Director of Student Affairs can limit a MSW student's course load based on the individual student's academic program and/or academic performance.
 - ii. The Dean of the College and Director of Student Affairs can approve a course overload for any one semester under necessary circumstances. A student must submit a written proposal to the Director of Student Affairs explaining the explicit reason the course overload is requested.
 - iii. There is no minimum SCH requirement for course enrollment in a given semester. If no courses are taken in a semester, the student must complete and submit a Leave of Absence Form to the Office of Student Affairs.

1.6 Attendance and Punctuality: Understands that all courses, including field practicum, will be attended and that students will be punctual.

- a. This expectation is a reflection of the student's responsibility to the social work profession and to the clients whom social workers will serve.

- b. All students, regardless of class format (traditional, hybrid, or completely online), must adhere to the attendance/make up and participation policies stated in each course syllabus.

2.1 MSW CANDIDACY PROCESS

2.2 Definition of Candidacy: Candidacy is a mandated process, based on the Student Standards Policy, by which an M.S.W. student is formally admitted into the Advanced Curriculum. Students must demonstrate completion of the Foundation Curriculum and show progress in their acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, judgment, and behaviors to assume the responsibilities of a competent social worker.

2.3 Eligibility for Candidacy

- a. Successful completion of the Foundation Curriculum (15 SCH) including satisfactory completion of Field Practicum I
- b. Meeting all student standards regarding professional readiness, professional commitment, scholastic performance, attendance and punctuality, professional behavior, and ethical conduct.

2.4 Candidacy Review Process

- a. At the completion of the Foundation Curriculum, each student's candidacy status will be reviewed and presented to faculty for final approval. Review criteria are based on the eligibility requirements listed in the Student Standards Policy.
- b. Students who do not meet all eligibility requirements may be asked to have an Action Plan in place prior to or at the time of the Candidacy Review. (See Appendix A.)
- c. Upon satisfactory review of the student's candidacy and/or pending Action Plans, the student will be admitted into candidacy.

3.1 VIOLATIONS OF STUDENT STANDARDS

3.2 In-Person Meeting: When a faculty member or field instructor has a **concern** in the field or classroom regarding a MSW student's professional readiness, professional commitment and ethical conduct, professional behavior, scholastic performance and/or attendance and punctuality, an in-person discussion should be held with the student and the faculty member or field instructor expressing the concern. Faculty or field instructors should inform the Academic Advisor or Director of Field Education when there is a concern that needs monitoring, but does not require an Action Plan.

3.3 GCSW Student Action Plan

- a. When a faculty member has a **serious concern** in the classroom regarding a MSW student's professional readiness, professional commitment and ethical conduct, professional behavior, scholastic performance, and/or attendance and punctuality, the faculty member must inform the Academic Advisor. The faculty member or

Academic Advisor may initiate an Action Plan in consultation with each other, if applicable (Appendix A).

- b. When a field liaison or field instructor has a **serious concern** in the field regarding a MSW student's professional readiness, professional commitment and ethical conduct, professional behavior, scholastic performance, and/or attendance and punctuality, the field instructor and/or field liaison must inform the Director of Field Education. The field liaison, field instructor or Director of Field Education may initiate an Action Plan in consultation with each other, if applicable.
- c. The individual who initiates an Action Plan is required to meet with the student to discuss and document the plan.
- d. An Action Plan will establish formal conditions that must be met by the student. These may include, but are not limited to: reduced course load; resource or support referrals; delayed enrollment in a field practicum course; leave of absence, probation or suspension; or termination from the program.
- e. Should the student fail to meet the specified outcomes identified and agreed to in the Action Plan, the faculty member and the Academic Advisor or Director of Field Education will make a recommendation to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs to establish formal conditions for the students continuance or to dismiss the student. The Associate Dean will notify the student, the faculty member, and the Academic Advisor or Director of Field Education of the decision in writing.

3.4 Direct Referral to the Dean

- a. In some instances, a Student Standards violation may result in direct referral to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Situations which may result in direct referrals to the Dean include, but are not limited to, racial or sexual harassment, use of firearms or other weapons on University property or in a field placement, damage or destruction of University property, and behavior that threatens health, safety, or well-being of any University student or employee or field agency staff or client.
- b. If a referral is made to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, the student will be notified.
- c. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs may establish formal conditions for the student's continuance or to dismiss the student.

3.5 Automatic Dismissal: As stated in section 1.5, students will be automatically dismissed from the program on academic grounds for receiving a grade of C+ or lower or Unsatisfactory (U) in 3 graduate classes or 2 Us in field practicum courses.

3.6 Student-Initiated Appeal: The student may appeal the written Action Plan through the Student Grievance Policy as outlined in the GCSW Handbook.

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STUDENT STANDARDS POLICY CONTRACT

I, _____, have received, read and comprehend the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work Student Standards Policy, and agree to be bound by the provisions therein. I understand that my enrollment in the MSW program is contingent upon my signing and submitting this contract.

Date: _____

Student's Signature: _

Student's Name (PRINT OR TYPE)_

Student I.D. Number _____

Email Address: _____

Each student must deliver this signed Contract to the GCSW Dean's Office no later than the 12th class day of the student's first semester enrollment. Failure to do so may result in a \$50 late fee.

Initial Review Date: _____
Filing Date: _____

Appendix A

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STUDENT ACTION PLAN

When a faculty member has a serious concern regarding a MSW student's professional readiness, professional commitment and ethical conduct, professional behavior, scholastic performance, and/or attendance and punctuality, he/she should inform the Academic Advisor or the Director of Field Education before initiating the GCSW Action Plan. A mandated meeting must occur in the presence of the student to discuss and document the plan. All parties must sign the Action Plan.

Student Name: _____

Student I.D.#: _____

Identified Concern:

Date *Concern*

Plan of Actions, Expected Outcomes and Target Dates:

Expected Date for Plan Completion _____

Faculty signature & date

Student signature & date

Academic Advisor & date

The above student has successfully completed the Action Plan.

Faculty signature & date

Student signature & date

Academic Advisor & date
Please return this form to the Academic Advisor's office