

# Pepperdine University, College of Health Science Professionalism Policy

## Introduction

The Professionalism Policy is designed to establish expectations for students enrolled in the College of Health Science at Pepperdine University. The policy is applicable to students in all degree programs, including those in the School of Nursing, School of Speech Language Pathology, and the School of Physician Assistant Studies. The policy arises from the University's Christian [mission](#), aligns with the standards across a wide range of healthcare disciplines, and is grounded in the Pepperdine University [Code of Ethics](#).

As a Christian University with its heritage in the Churches of Christ, the professionalism policy encourages all members of the College of Health Science, including students, to respect the teachings of Jesus and historic, biblical Christianity. It is expected that all students will maintain the highest standards of personal honor, morality, and integrity at all times.

Adherence to the policy is essential for fostering a culture of respect, accountability, and excellence within the college's academic and clinical environments, and in those of all clinical partners.

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the standards of professionalism expected from students in all College of Health Science programs. It aims to promote ethical behavior, effective communication, respect for all people, and commitment to lifelong learning.

## Definition of Professionalism

Professionalism encompasses a range of behaviors, attitudes, and values that students in health science programs must embody. These include:

1. **Honesty & Integrity:** Conducting oneself with the highest degree of honesty and integrity. This includes avoiding, by action or implication, attempting to create an incorrect impression of one's abilities or an unfair advantage over a colleague.
2. **Ethical Conduct:** Adhering to the ethical standards and guidelines relevant to the respective profession, including patient confidentiality, informed consent, and practicing within one's scope of competence. Ethical behavior also demands that lapse in ethical behavior, in self or others, be reported to the appropriate individual(s).
3. **Respectful Communication:** Engaging in clear, honest, and respectful interactions with peers, faculty, patients, and healthcare team members. This includes active listening and being open to feedback.

4. **Accountability:** Taking responsibility for one's actions, including academic performance and clinical practice. Students are expected to meet deadlines, attend scheduled classes and clinical placements, and communicate proactively regarding any challenges.
5. **Cultural Intelligence:** Demonstrating an understanding and appreciation of people across a wide range of backgrounds, perspectives, and values. Students should strive to provide care and support that respects and dignifies all individuals.
6. **Commitment to Lifelong Learning:** Engaging in continuous professional development, remaining current in evidence-based practices, and seeking out opportunities for further education and training.

## Expectations

1. **Academic Integrity:** Students must uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of cheating, plagiarism, or dishonest behavior will not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action. *See the College of Health Science Code of Academic Integrity for additional information and expectations.*
2. **Professional Appearance:** Students are expected to adhere to the dress code established by their respective programs during academic and clinical activities. This includes maintaining cleanliness, appropriateness, and professionalism in personal grooming and attire. *See the College of Health Science Dress Code for more details.*
3. **Punctuality and Attendance:** Students should attend and arrive prior to the start for all classes, clinical placements, and meetings. In the event of an unavoidable absence, students must notify the appropriate faculty or clinical supervisor as outlined by program policies.
4. **Collaboration and Teamwork:** Students are expected to work cooperatively with classmates, faculty, and healthcare professionals. Respecting the contributions of others and managing conflicts constructively is essential.
5. **Feedback and Reflective Practice:** Students should actively seek and reflect on constructive feedback from peers, instructors, and clinical supervisors. They are encouraged to use reflection as an integral part of their learning process.
6. **University Policies:** Students will abide by the policies of Pepperdine University, the College of Health Science, and their degree program as reported in the academic catalog, student handbook, Code of Conduct, and other program and University documents.
7. **Adherence to Requirements:** Students will demonstrate timely completion and adherence to all administrative, health, and immunization requirements.
8. **Responsibility and Competence:** Students will take responsibility for their actions, including the self-reporting of violations of the professionalism policy. Students will strive to complete all responsibilities to their highest level of ability and competence.
9. **Professional Behavior and Communication:** Students will treat all individuals with whom they interact in a collegial and respectful manner, including the use of respectful, professional communication. Students should avoid the use of profanity or any other forms of derogatory or disrespectful communication in all academic and clinical settings.
10. **Adherence to School or Program Policies and Procedures:** Students will comply and adhere to all policies and procedures documented in their respective school or program

Student Handbook, the CHS academic catalog, and other applicable school or program publications.

## **Consequences of Unprofessional Behavior**

Failure to adhere to the Professionalism Policy may result in the following range of outcomes.

### **Professionalism Verbal or Written Warning**

A student may be given a verbal or written warning of a professionalism violation by any faculty or staff member in the College of Health Science. All warnings are to be reported to the Student Professionalism Committee (SPC) and accumulated warnings may result in a student being designated the status of Professionalism At-Risk at the sole discretion of the SPC or the Dean of their academic program. Professionalism warnings are intended to be formative in nature and are not included in a student's permanent Pepperdine University record. Warnings not associated with Professionalism Probation or Dismissal are deleted upon the student's graduation from Pepperdine. Examples of behaviors that may result in a professionalism warning are listed below. The list is not intended to be exhaustive.

1. Failure to adhere to the school or program dress code.
2. Use of inappropriate or profane language in a University or clinical setting.
3. A pattern of disrupting classes, such as side conversations or joining a virtual/online class with your microphone on in a noisy environment.

### **Professionalism At-Risk Status Designation**

A student may be designated the status of Professionalism At-Risk at the sole discretion of the SPC or the Dean of their academic program based on a specific behavior or pattern of behaviors that demonstrate a lapse or lapses in the student's professionalism. The status of Professionalism At-Risk alerts the student to the concerns regarding their lack of compliance with the College of Health Science's professional standards and indicates that they are vulnerable to be placed on Professionalism Probation if their adherence to professional standards does not improve within the time frame communicated in the At-Risk notice. At-risk status is intended to provide the student with an opportunity to address their professional behaviors going forward to reduce their risk of placement on Professionalism Probation.

The status of Professionalism At-Risk is not included in the student's permanent Pepperdine University record. At-Risk notices or designations not associated with Professionalism Probation or Dismissal are deleted upon the student's graduation from Pepperdine.

The following is a list of behavioral patterns that may warrant a designation of Professionalism At-Risk status. The list is not exhaustive and any lapses in professionalism may result in a student being designated as Professionalism At-Risk status.

1. Submitting assignments after their posted due dates.
2. Non-compliance with the absence policy.
3. Non-compliance with the official correspondence policy.
4. Documented pattern of tardiness for required activities (3 or more in a semester).
5. Documented disrespect toward a peer, faculty, staff, or patient.
6. Not meeting the expected compliance threshold of assigned evaluations.
7. Not meeting health and immunization requirements.
8. Not completing administrative requirements (e.g., required trainings, timely registration, attendance at required meetings).
9. Noncompliance with clinic procedures, such as equipment use, cleaning, and storage.

## **Professionalism Probation**

A student may be placed on Professional Behavior Probation for violations of the College of Health Science Professionalism Policy for any of the following reasons: (a) student has received two or more verbal or written warnings for behavior that has not been appropriately resolved; (b) student has an “At-Risk” status designation and problematic behavior has not been appropriately resolved; (c) problematic behavior is deemed by the SPC or the Dean, in their sole discretion, to be of such a level to warrant Professional Behavior Probation as an initial step.

The following is a list of behaviors that may warrant a designation of Professionalism Probation status without prior receipt of a Professionalism Warning or being designated as Professionalism At-Risk status. The list is not exhaustive and any severe lapses in professionalism may result in a student being placed on Professionalism Probation.

1. Failure to report a medication error or minor patient injury.
2. Engaging in unsafe behaviors on campus or clinic.
3. Failure to log-out of the EMR appropriately.
4. Failure to complete clinical documentation accurately and on time.
5. Failure to follow the instructions of your clinical site supervisor/preceptor.

The status of Professionalism Probation is included in the student’s Pepperdine University record. Once a student has been designated to be on Professionalism Probation, any additional violations of the Professionalism Policy or other Pepperdine University policy, including the Academic Integrity Policy or the Student Code of Conduct, may constitute the sole reason for any further disciplinary action, including a Professionalism Dismissal from Pepperdine University. This section is not intended to

limit, in any way, any other policies of Pepperdine University, including those which may allow for or require immediate dismissal from the University.

## **Professionalism Dismissal**

A student may be dismissed from any CHS program for violations of the College of Health Science Professionalism Policy for any of the following reasons: (a) student has failed to satisfactorily resolve the terms and conditions of their Professionalism Probation; (b) problematic behavior is deemed by the SPC or the Dean, in their sole discretion, to be of such a level to warrant Professional Behavior Dismissal as an initial step.

The following is a list of behaviors that may warrant a Professionalism Dismissal without prior receipt of Professionalism Probation, being designated as Professionalism At-Risk status, or a Professionalism Warning. The list is not exhaustive and any severe lapses in professionalism may result in a student being dismissed.

1. Assault or any type of aggressive behavior towards, staff, faculty, or clinical facility staff and patients.
2. Theft of clinical facility items, medications etc.
3. Failure to report a serious patient injury or sentinel event.
4. Any HIPPA violation or inappropriate use of confidential patient information (e.g. media posting, unauthorized recording, inappropriate use of AI, glasses etc).

The status of Professionalism Dismissal is included in the student's permanent Pepperdine University record. This section is not intended to limit, in any way, any other policies of Pepperdine University, including those which may allow for or require immediate dismissal from the University.

## **Professionalism Hearing Procedures**

### Pre-Hearing Procedures

1. Students accused of a professionalism violation and being considered for professionalism probation or dismissal will receive written correspondence from the SPC chairperson detailing the following:
  - i. Date and time of the hearing. The hearing will be scheduled not less than five business days or more than thirty calendar days after the student has been notified.
  - ii. The alleged violation(s) of professionalism.
  - iii. Possible sanctions for the alleged violation(s).
  - iv. The URL to the College of Health Science Professionalism web site and the hearing procedures.
  - v. The ability of the student to bring a student, faculty or staff advisor.

- vi. The ability of the student to call witnesses and/or submit documents during the hearing.
- vii. A statement that the SPC hearing is confidential.
- viii. The opportunity to appeal the resulting decision of the SPC.
- ix. Contact information for the SPC chairperson.

2. The student may provide a written response, including supplemental information, not to exceed 5 pages in length to the SPC Chairperson up to 24 hours prior to the SPC hearing.

3. The student and the accusing faculty/staff member(s) shall notify the SPC chairperson and the SPC committee of the names of the witnesses they choose to testify on their behalf. They must provide a copy of all pertinent documents at least twenty-four hours prior to the hearing, and they also shall assume responsibility for the presence of their witnesses at the hearing. The SPC may, at its sole discretion, limit the number of witnesses and documents considered at the hearing.

4. All hearings will be closed to the College of Health Science community. Only the SPC chairperson, the members of the SPC, the accused student, advisors involved in the hearing, and accusing faculty/staff member(s) involved in the case may be present at the hearing. Authorized witnesses will be present to testify individually and each witness must leave the hearing as soon as his or her testimony is completed.

### Hearing Procedures

1. Professionalism proceedings are not analogous to criminal court proceedings. No particular model of procedural due process is required. However, the procedures are structured in order to facilitate a reliable determination of the truth and to provide fundamental fairness. Procedures can be informal in cases involving professionalism at-risk warnings; more procedural formality is observed in serious cases involving violations that may result in professionalism probation or more severe sanctions, including professionalism dismissal. In all situations, fairness requires that students be informed of the nature of the charges and be given a fair opportunity to respond to them.

2. The hearing committee will consist of the SPC and will be chaired by the SPC Chairperson. No member of the SPC who is otherwise interested in the particular case brought before the committee, whether bringing charges against the student, or who is placed in a position of developing or prosecuting the case against the student, shall sit in judgment during the proceedings. This committee member will be replaced as stipulated in No. 3 of the procedures.

3. All SPC members involved in the case being presented before the committee must recuse themselves from the committee. An alternate committee member shall replace each recused member prior to the hearing. When possible, the alternate committee member should be from the same academic school or program as the recused committee member. If the SPC chairperson must be recused, the SPC will elect an alternate chairperson from among its current membership.
4. The hearing will be called to order at the time specified. The hearing cannot begin without the SPC (or alternate) chairperson, at least three SPC members and/or alternates (see #3 above), the accused student, and the accusing faculty/staff member(s) (or an appointed representative) in attendance.
5. The hearing will begin with the SPC Chairperson providing a summary of the procedures to be followed at the hearing and the charges asserted against the accused student.
6. The accusing faculty/staff member will present to the committee any evidence the faculty/staff member wishes to have under consideration. The faculty/staff member may call witnesses and/or present documents, if deemed pertinent to the case. At the close of any witness's presentation, the witness may be questioned by the committee on any points of evidence on which the committee is unclear. The witness will then be asked to leave the hearing. The faculty/staff member(s) also may be questioned by the committee on any points of evidence on which the committee is unclear.
7. The accused student will be given an opportunity to rebut the charges. The accused student may call witnesses and/or present documents, if deemed pertinent to the case. At the close of any witness's presentation, the witness may be questioned by the committee on any points of evidence on which the committee is unclear. The witness will then be asked to leave the hearing. At the close of the accused student's presentation, the student may be questioned by the committee on any points of evidence on which the committee is unclear. In addition, the committee may ask the student about points of evidence which are unclear.
8. After all evidence has been presented, the accused student and the accusing faculty member(s) will be asked to leave the hearing room while the SPC deliberates. At this time, the committee will review and discuss all evidence it deems pertinent to the case. The SPC will make its determination according to a preponderance of the evidence standard (i.e., whether it is more likely than not that the student violated the Professionalism Policy). When deliberation has been completed, a ballot will be taken to decide whether the accused student violated the Professionalism Policy. The ballots will be counted by the secretary and reported to the committee. The results (and original ballots) will be retained and presented to the Dean of the College of Health Science.

9. The accused student will be found in violation or not in violation of the Professionalism Policy based upon a vote of at least three-fourths of the SPC members present, with no more than two members dissenting. If the accused student is found in violation of the Professionalism Policy, the SPC will make a sanction recommendation to the SPC chairperson. The SPC chairperson shall consider the committee's recommendation in determining the sanction(s), but is not bound to adhere to the committee's recommendation.

10. The accused student will be informed of the committee's decision and any applicable sanction(s) by letter within three (3) business days following the hearing. Formal written notice of the decision will be sent to the student, the accusing faculty member(s), and the Dean of the College of Health Science.

10. If found in violation, the student will be advised of their opportunity to appeal the decision to the Dean of the College of Health Science (or their designee within the College of Health Science). See "Appeal Procedures" below.

11. All notes and written records of the hearings shall be given to the Dean of the College of Health Science to be retained by the College in accordance with the University's Records Retention Policy.

12. To maintain a record of the hearing, the secretary will prepare a single written record of the hearing. The record shall consist minimally of:

- i. A list of all hearing participants
- ii. A statement of the alleged misconduct and violation(s);
- iii. A summary of information presented in the hearing, including a chronological outline of the proceedings;
- iv. A summary of the statement of the accused student;
- v. A statement of the decision; and
- vi. The sanctions issued.

13. Any member of the SPC may attach a statement to the secretary's report of the hearing indicating his or her dissent.

14. If the accused student fails to appear at the hearing, the SPC may make a decision based on the available information. If the SPC chairperson determines that good cause exists for the accused student to not appear at the hearing, a new date may be set for the hearing.

#### Appeal Procedures

1. A student who wishes to appeal the SPC's decision and/or the SPC Chairperson's sanction(s) may submit a written appeal to the Dean of the College

of Health Science. The appeal letter must be submitted within seven calendar days of the date on the written notice of the sanction.

2. The written appeal must specify grounds that would justify consideration. General dissatisfaction with the outcome of the decision or an appeal for mercy is not an appropriate basis for an appeal. The written appeal must specifically address at least one of the following criteria:

- i. Insufficient information to support the decision.
- ii. New information, sufficient to alter a decision, or other relevant facts not brought out in the original hearing, because such information and/or facts were not known to the person appealing at the time of the original hearing.
- iii. Procedural irregularity that undermined the student's ability to present a defense (see "Hearing Procedures" above).
- iv. Inappropriateness of the sanction for the violation of the Professionalism Policy.

3. The appellate process does not require a hearing, nor does it require the Dean to make personal contact with the student or the SPC. The Dean may, but is not required to, convene an ad hoc appeals committee to assist in considering the appeal. The Dean is not bound by the decision of the ad hoc appeals committee.

4. The Dean may affirm, reverse, or modify either the decision or sanction. The Dean may also return the case to the SPC for further consideration. The Dean's decision shall be final and effective immediately.

## **Program Continuation**

In addition to maintaining the required levels of academic and clinical performance necessary for graduation and complying fully with the College of Health Science Professionalism Policy, students should demonstrate appropriate levels of maturity in all professional interpersonal engagements and avoid interpersonal-emotional behaviors that may constitute a potential threat to the welfare of the the University community, patients and healthcare providers, and the public. At all times, students are expected to comport themselves in a manner that aligns with the generally accepted behavioral standards for healthcare professionals.

The applicable school dean or program director, in concert with faculty and staff members, may require discussions with a student who has presented significant behavioral concerns to University or clinical faculty or staff. These discussions may result in requirements of student improvement, behavioral modification, or participation in faculty or peer mentoring, or other requirements as determined by the applicable

school dean or program director. Additionally, specific evidence of improvement may be required in order for the student to continue in the program. There may also be a requirement for ongoing monitoring of the student's behavioral modifications or improvement to ensure the successful resolution of the underlying concerns.

If the efforts to resolve the underlying concerns are unsuccessful or the initial concerns are of a nature or degree that suggests a student is unable to meaningfully participate in and complete didactic or clinical coursework or other program requirements, the student may then be required to participate in a more formal assessment of the problems with a panel of University faculty and staff. The SPC or faculty/staff panel will review all relevant information, including feedback from faculty and staff concerning the student, and make their recommendations to the school dean or program director, who will make the final determination in the matter. Whereas every attempt will be made to resolve problems or concerns, it is possible the outcome of the process could lead to dismissal from the academic program and University. If a student is recommended for either probation or dismissal from their academic program, they may request a hearing of the case before the SPC in accordance with the Professionalism Hearing Procedures detailed in this policy document.

## **Academic Integrity**

A student violating the College of Health Science Code of Academic Integrity shall be subject to the policies and procedures detailed in the code. Violations of the Code of Academic Integrity shall also be considered as a violation of the Professionalism Policy. Depending on the nature and seriousness of the violation, students found guilty of an academic integrity violation may face the following consequences:

1. Level One Violation - Academic Integrity and Professionalism Warning.
2. Level Two Violation - Course grade reduction or a grade of "F", Professionalism Probation, and University Probation.
3. Level Three Violation - Level two sanctions and possibly, suspension from the University for a period of one or more semesters/trimesters. Students with a Level Three violation will be placed on University and Professionalism Probation for the remainder of their enrollment upon returning to the University.
4. Level Four Violation - Permanent expulsion from Pepperdine University.

## **Student Code of Conduct**

A professionalism violation that also violates the [Student Code of Conduct](#) will be referred to the Office of Community Standards and may result in additional disciplinary action based upon the policies and procedures detailed in the code. [Sanctions](#) for students violating the Code of Student Conduct may include warning, loss of privileges, fines, restitution, educational sanctions, dismissal from University housing, University probation, suspension, expulsion, dismissal, revocation of admission and/or degree, and/or the withholding of a degree.

## **Reporting Procedures**

Concerns regarding unprofessional behavior may be reported to faculty members, program directors, or designated student conduct officers. All reports will be taken seriously and investigated promptly, following institution guidelines.

## **Conclusion**

By adhering to the Professionalism Policy, students in Pepperdine Health Science programs reflect the values and standards of the University and those expected in the healthcare profession. Upholding these principles prepares students for their roles as compassionate and competent healthcare providers. The commitment to professionalism is integral to success in both academic and clinical environments and ultimately contributes to improved patient care and community health outcomes.

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This policy is reviewed annually to ensure relevance and compliance with current best practices and standards in health science education.