



Policy Title:

Guidelines for Conduct in Teacher/Learner Relationships

Policy Identifier:

USCSOMC – STA -1.03

Prepared by: Office of Student Affairs and Career Advising	Creation Date: April 2024
Reviewed by: MD Program Policy and Procedures Committee	Review Date: 6-11-24
Approved by: Executive Committee	Effective Date: 7-9-24
Category: Student Affairs	

LCME Standards

- 3.4 – Anti-Discrimination Policy
- 3.5 – Learning Environment/Professionalism
- 3.6 – Student Mistreatment

Scope

University of South Carolina (USC) School of Medicine Columbia MD students, faculty, and staff.

Policy Statement

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 colleagues, patients, and students.

Reason for Policy

This policy has been created to provide MD students clarity on the responsibilities of their roles and expectations of conduct in the teacher-learner relationship. LCME expects that a medical school ensures that the learning environment of its medical education program is conducive to the ongoing development of explicit and appropriate professional behaviors in its medical students, faculty, and staff at all locations. A medical school should have a policy addressing the standards of conduct in relationships among students, faculty, residents, and other health professionals.

Procedures

I. 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 race, sex, gender identity, transgender

status, age, color, religion, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, genetics, protected veteran status, pregnancy, childbirth, related medical conditions, or any other bases under federal law.

3. Provide current material in a format consistent with best practices 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, sexual orientation, genetics, protected veteran status, pregnancy, childbirth, related medical conditions, or any other bases under federal law.
3. Commit the time and energy 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, see [Prohibited Consensual Relationships Policy \(UNIV 2.10\)](#));
- discrimination or harassment in any form based on age, ancestry, citizenship status, color, disability, ethnicity, familial status, gender (including transgender), gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, pregnancy (false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, childbirth, recovery therefrom or related medical conditions, breastfeeding), race, religion (including religious dress and grooming practices), sex, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other bases under federal, state, local law, or regulations is prohibited;
- loss of personal civility including shouting, personal attacks or insults, displays of temper (such as throwing objects), use of culturally insensitive language;
- requests for other 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, 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, the Associate Dean for Medical Education, the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, 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 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 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 via a [SAFE form](#). The avenues for this more formal reporting vary depending upon the status of the reporting individual. In any 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. (<http://www.sc.edu/policies/staf627.pdf>) The student may speak with the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, the Associate Dean for Medical Education and Academic Affairs, or one of the school’s ombudspersons.

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 fill out the [Professionalism Concern Form](#). These allegations will be handled on an individual basis as outlined in the Honor Code.

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

A. If the complaint is lodged against a faculty member, other than those matters referred to the Office of Civil Rights & Title IX, 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 polices. The Dean may also choose to appoint an ad hoc committee to investigate the complaint.

B. If a complaint is lodged against a student, it will be handled in the manner as spelled out in the Honor Code.

C. If the behavior involves unlawful discrimination or sexual or other forms of unlawful harassment, the matter will be handled through University policies established for that office. The student may also directly contact that office.

D. 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.

E. 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.

F. 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. 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 Honor Committee.

G. 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 for teachers and the Registrar’s Office for students.

Contacts

- Associate Dean for Student Affairs
- Office of Academic Affairs
- Office of Undergraduate Medical Education
- Office of Student Affairs
- Ombudspersons

The School of Medicine Columbia follows the University of South Carolina policies but has in several cases adopted a subset of policies applicable to our school's specific program. This policy is intended to be consistent with the [University of South Carolina Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment & Sexual Misconduct \(CR 1.00\)](#) and [Prohibited Consensual Relationships Policy \(UNIV 2.10\)](#). In the event of any of any conflict between the policies, University policy shall control.

History

Date of Change	Change
April 2024	Policy formalized into a standard template, LCME Self-Study process. Updated Anti-discrimination categories, aligned with Honor Code and Professionalism reporting.