

## UPSOM Code of Professionalism

Medicine is a profession of service, trust, and integrity. UPSOM graduates will, like all physicians, be entrusted with the sacred responsibility to care for patients. Therefore, their professional and personal behavior must demonstrate they are worthy of that sacred responsibility. Further, UPSOM students are obligated to conduct themselves in alignment with the mission and core values of UPSOM. We trust that UPSOM students expect to be held accountable for their personal and professional behavior while respecting the rights and dignity of all members of the UPSOM community.

Consequently, UPSOM students are expected to adhere to this code of professional and personal conduct specific to the School of Medicine. Violation(s) of this code of conduct may result in a careful review of the violation(s) by the Professionalism Subcommittee (PS). The PS provides the initial review of the violation(s) to determine if a case should be referred to the Committee on Student Promotions (CSP). The CSP oversees the overall administration of the UPSOM Student Code of Professionalism and determines required remediations or sanctions for all referred cases.

Additionally, all UPSOM students are expected to adhere to all University of Pittsburgh policies, procedures and guidelines, including but not limited to the Student Code of Conduct available at: <https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/conduct/>. Any student who violates the University Student Code of Conduct may also be referred to the University's Office of Student Conduct by UPSOM officials and may face University as well as UPSOM sanctions.

The UPSOM Code of Professionalism allows us to engage in a thoughtful reflective process in order preserve the integrity of our community and learning environment as we prepare our students to assume the sacred responsibilities of the physician.

### I. Lapses in Professional Behavior

Lapses in professional behavior at UPSOM are categorized as “minor” or “major.” Examples of each type of professional misconduct include, but are not limited to, those listed below. For purposes of this policy, “repeated” is defined as occurring more than twice within a semester or more than three times during an academic year.

#### Minor Lapses in Professional Behavior:

*A **minor lapse in professional behavior** refers to relatively small, often unintentional, failures to meet established professional standards. These are typically isolated incidents or those that do not cause significant harm or disruption. Minor lapses are usually addressed with feedback or minor corrective action. The following list of examples is neither hierarchical nor exhaustive:*

1. Tardiness to mandatory teaching session or assessment (particularly if repeated)
2. Unexcused absence or leaving a group early without appropriate communication or documented approval per the requirements of each curriculum phase (particularly if repeated)

3. Late or missing course evaluations (particularly if repeated)
4. Late or missing required medical forms (particularly if repeated)
5. Lack of timely responses (3 business days) to professional communication (particularly if repeated)
6. Lack of engagement in class (in-person or virtual)
7. Class assignments not completed on time

## **Major Lapses in Professional Behavior**

*A **major lapse in professional behavior**—also referred to as a professionalism violation or gross misconduct—is a serious breach of professional and ethical standards that is either egregious, deliberate, or causes significant harm or disruption. Such lapses are distinguished from minor lapses by their severity, intent, or potential consequences. The following list of examples is neither hierarchical nor exhaustive:*

1. Repeated minor violations that continue even after being addressed by the Professionalism Subcommittee
2. Dishonesty (including, but not limited to, cheating on an exam, plagiarism, signing in without attendance, badging into a required session and leaving early, copying reports, making up data on patients, lying about prior behavior, etc.)
3. Sexual misconduct or other Title IX violations\*
4. HIPAA violations\*\*
5. Title VI violations; discriminatory actions
6. Verbal, physical, or electronic behavior that interrupts, disrupts, or causes any kind of harm in a public space at any official school event
7. Coming to a clinical or educational setting under the influence of non-prescribed mind-altering substances (e.g., alcohol or controlled substances)
8. Lack of timely responses (3 business days) to professional communication (particularly if repeated)
9. Disruptive behavior
10. Breach of confidentiality
11. Failure to attend a meeting of the Professionalism Subcommittee, a meeting of the CSP, or other disciplinary meeting
12. Behavior that poses a threat to the safety of others
13. Consistent defensiveness or ignoring of constructive feedback
14. Bias, mistreatment, or discrimination of a person or group
15. Lack of professionalism in interactions with others in the UPSOM community
16. Inappropriate posting on social media, including adherence to Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's laws and regulations\*\*\*
17. Other major negative impacts on the learning environment (e.g., egregious actions, as defined per the Mayo Clinic Values (2019): "Causing major (or potential) harm to individuals, groups or the organization; willful, conscious, or reckless disregard of policies, procedures, or law...")
18. Any violation of the University of Pittsburgh's university-wide Student Code of Conduct\*\*\*\*

\*Any accusations of Title IX violations are reported to the University of Pittsburgh's Office of Civil Rights/Title IX Team. This may result in additional, university-level proceedings and disciplinary action above and beyond any school-level disciplinary action.

\*\*HIPAA violations may be investigated by the relevant clinical site. In determining whether any school-level sanctions are warranted, the PS and CSP consider the outcomes of the clinical site's investigation to be authoritative.

\*\*\* UPSOM expectation is that the PittMed community is a supportive, collaborative, and inclusive learning environment that is free from experiences that manifest in harassment, intimidation, or coercion including through electronic means such as social media. Students should use particular caution when referencing their experiences in or events associated with the medical school or clinical sites. Always be transparent, making clear your posts are your opinion unless you are authorized to speak on behalf of the medical school. The use of the official UPSOM or University School of Medicine logo must be approved by the School prior to any post. Furthermore, students must adhere strictly to social media policies of the medical center and specific clinical sites, hospitals, and University in their social media. It is extremely important to remember the sharing of personal health information is strictly prohibited under the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Any violations of these guidelines using social media will be handled according to the specific University, UPSOM, or clinical sites/hospital policy violated.

\*\*\*\*Any accusations of conduct that violates the University of Pittsburgh's Student Code of Conduct may be referred to the university's Office of Student Conduct for a hearing. This may result in additional, university-level proceedings and disciplinary action above and beyond any school-level disciplinary action.

### **Removal from the Educational or Clinical Setting**

A student who behaves in a way that is materially or substantially disruptive to a class or curricular activity (including clinical activities), disrupts others from the benefit of the instructional program, disrupts a University- or School-sponsored event, is disorderly or displays a breach of peace under the law, interferes with the rights of others to carry out their duties on behalf of the University or School, creates a hostile or unsafe learning environment, or poses a potential threat to the safety or emotional or physical well-being of others (including but not limited to patients, faculty, staff, or fellow students) may be immediately removed (and suspended) from any educational or clinical setting at the discretion of any faculty or staff person responsible for the student. After removing the student from the immediate situation, the faculty or staff person shall file a PAIR incident report as outlined in Section II below and notify the Vice Dean for Education.

The right of patients and the public to safe professional practice supersedes students' learning and skill acquisition needs.

## **II. Reporting Procedures and Initial Decision-making Processes**

Suspected lapses in student professionalism are reported to the Office of the Learning Environment (OLE) via a Professionalism Accolade and Incident Reporting (PAIR) system incident report. Any faculty members, staff members, or students may submit PAIR incident reports when they believe they have observed unprofessional behavior, including on the part of a UPSOM student.

The OLE refers all PAIR incident reports about student professionalism to the Professionalism Subcommittee (PS) of the Committee on Student Promotions (CSP) by assigning the report to the PS lead in the PAIR system within two business days of report receipt. Students who are reported will be informed of the report by the PS lead via a PAIR system email and provided with pertinent information including a list of resources such as the Health Sciences Ombuds Office, UPSOM mental health team, etc.

In order to ensure collegiality among students, PAIR incident reports about lapses in student professionalism will not receive an inquiry or action by the PS unless the reporter includes their name (confidential report); anonymously submitted reports will not be counted as contributing toward “repeated” lapses. If a student were to anonymously include in a PAIR incident report any threat to harm someone else or themselves then the PS may “break the glass” and notify appropriate parties, in order to ensure the safety of all parties. Reports alleging Title IX violations will be referred to the University of Pittsburgh Civil Rights & Title IX program as required by law and by University policy, whether submitted confidentially or anonymously.

The PS investigates the report, may ask to meet with the student and/or the individual who filed the report, and may request additional evidence as required to make a decision. Students who are asked to meet with the PS may choose to bring one faculty advocate and may submit evidence that they would like the PS to consider.

### **Minor Lapses**

The PS has the power to determine that a reported violation qualifies as a “minor” lapse in professionalism and to adjudicate minor violations. Using the preponderance of evidence standard and with approval of a simple majority of the members voting, the PS can determine that the student is guilty of a minor violation. The PS can then, by simple majority of members voting, impose sanctions on the student. The PS determines by simple majority if the violation will be noted on the MSPE. The violation and outcome are reported to the CSP.

Possible sanctions for a minor violation may include, but are not limited to: a restorative justice exercise (e.g., public apology); a professionalism reflection assignment; regular meetings with a professionalism coach or a faculty member with appropriate expertise; mandated community service, etc. The PS will determine and assign an appropriate sanction given the severity of the violation.

If the student is found guilty of a minor violation and objects to any part of the Professionalism Subcommittee's ruling, or objects to any sanction imposed, the student may appeal to the CSP. The CSP then adjudicates the original accusation and either upholds the PS's original ruling, modifies it, or reaches a different conclusion. The CSP may decide that the alleged violation qualifies as a "major" lapse even if the PS originally ruled that it constitutes a "minor" lapse and may impose sanctions consistent with that determination.

### **Major Lapses**

The PS has the power to identify, but not to determine guilt or impose sanctions for, potential "major" lapses in professionalism. If the PS determines that it is reasonably possible that the student may have committed a "major" violation, or if the PS is unable to decide that a violation qualifies as "minor," the PS refers the matter to CSP for full adjudication as outlined below:

At least five days in advance, the student is asked to attend a meeting of the CSP, is informed of the purpose of the meeting, and is provided with the documents/evidence that the CSP has received regarding the alleged violation.

The student is required to submit a one-page written response at least one business day prior to the meeting and is required to respond to the charges at the meeting. The student must be present at the meeting.

The student may choose to bring one faculty advocate to the meeting. The student may not bring legal counsel.

The student may raise conflict of interest concerns regarding committee or subcommittee members to the CSP chair, who makes any necessary decisions regarding the validity of such concerns.

The chairperson of the CSP presides and makes all rulings with respect to questions of practice and procedure. The CSP chair may request additional evidence as required to make a decision.

In executive session, and in absence of the student and faculty advocate, the CSP determines whether a violation has occurred based on the preponderance of evidence standard, defines any found violation as major or minor, and determines what sanction should be imposed. 51% of the voting members is considered a quorum. A violation may be determined to be "major" if at least 60% of the CSP members present concur. A violation may be determined to be "minor" if a simple majority of the CSP members present concur.

The CSP informs the student in writing following its determination.

### **III. Sanctions**

If the student is found to have committed a lapse in professionalism, the CSP rules on sanctions, potentially including dismissal for major violations.

Major violations are typically noted in the student's MSPE unless the CSP rules otherwise.

The CSP rules on remediation plans and/or sanctions, which may include, but are not limited to:

1. Restorative justice exercise (e.g., public apology)
2. Professionalism reflection assignment
3. Regular meetings with a professionalism coach or a faculty member with appropriate expertise
4. Mandated community service
5. Failure for a course (major violations only)
6. Mandated leave (major violations only)
7. Suspension for a definite time (major violations only)
8. Dismissal (major violations only)

A dismissal action requires approval by at least 60% of the voting members present. Other sanctions may be approved by a simple majority.

#### **IV. Review and Appeal**

The student may appeal the decision of the CSP following the standard appeals process used for all CSP decisions. See the CSP document here:

[https://www.omed.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/csp\\_charter\\_and\\_subcommittees.pdf](https://www.omed.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/csp_charter_and_subcommittees.pdf)

Between April and July of the final year of enrollment, a student who has professionalism violation(s) noted on the MSPE may petition the CSP to expunge that comment from the MSPE. If the CSP feels that it is reasonable to remove the comment with the approval of the Executive Vice Dean of the School of Medicine, that comment may be expunged.

#### **V. Custody of Disciplinary Records Separate from Academic Records**

Records pertaining to accusations and disciplinary proceedings are documented by the assigned PS lead in the PAIR database, separately from the student's academic record. Any decisions made by the CSP or PS, including the letters sent by the CSP or the PS to inform the student of those decisions, are part of the student's academic record. Please refer to the Policy on Access to Medical Student Academic Records (with link below in References section).

#### **VI. References and Other Documents**

- [ACGME Statement on Professionalism](#)

- [University of Pittsburgh Title IX Policy](#)
- [University of Pittsburgh Student Code of Conduct](#)
- [UPSOM Policy on Access to Student Educational Records](#)

This code is not a contract.

The University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine may revise this code at any time. All revisions will go into effect immediately for the entire student body.