

Memorial University School of Social Work

Bachelor of Social Work Programs Suitability for the Profession Policy and Procedures¹

Policy Preamble

This policy is designed to increase awareness of the qualities that are associated with suitability for the social work profession and to assist in evaluating student suitability for social work practice. The criteria presented below evolved from the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) *Code of Ethics*. Statements from the Code have been developed into professional behaviours and qualities that align with the Canadian Association of Social Work Educators (CASWE) *Standards for Accreditation: Core Learning Objectives for Students* and are expected to be demonstrated during classroom participation, through written assignments, in presentations, practicum placements, and other contexts where professional behaviour and qualities are expected from students.

Suitability for the Profession Policy Statement

Students in the BSW Programs of the School of Social Work are expected to demonstrate professional behaviours and qualities that are consistent with the CASW Code of Ethics as reflected in the Suitability Criteria. These criteria are applicable between students, and between students and all members of the School of Social Work and/or the social work community, while in the classroom, during school activities/projects, in assignments, during practicum placements, and all other contexts where professional behaviour and qualities are expected from students.

Suitability Criteria

1/ Respect for the Inherent Dignity and Worth of Persons

- 1.1 Hears and considers viewpoints different from one's own
- 1.2 Assesses one's impact on others
- 1.3 Understands the importance of promoting self-determination
- 1.4 Encourages sharing of differing opinions
- 1.5 Treats people with respect, honesty, courtesy, fairness and good faith
- 1.6 Responds with attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, that accord dignity and worth

2/ Pursuit of Social Justice

- 2.1 Demonstrates willingness to advocate for social development and work against oppression
- 2.2 Shows initiative in efforts that advance social and economic justice
- 2.3 Demonstrates an appreciation and understanding of micro and macro systems

¹ This document draws significantly upon the School of Social Work, McMaster University *Suitability for the Profession Policy* (2013). Previous work to this document (initially titled *Suitability for the Profession Guideline and Implementation Process*) is credited to Mary Beth Hutchens and Dr. Ken Barter (May 2014), and Dr. Michelle Sullivan (May 2015), School of Social Work, Memorial University.

- 2.4 Articulates concerns of individuals, families, groups, and communities
- 2.5 Understands social planning, social policy and legislative development as sources and processes of both change/resistance and oppression/exploitation

3/ Service to Humanity

- 3.1 Places needs of others before own self-interest
- 3.2 Understands the harm of discrimination and oppression
- 3.3 Understands, appreciates and employs the principles of anti-oppressive practice
- 3.4 Uses power and authority in disciplined and responsible ways
- 3.5 Understands and practices knowledge and skills that assist in the management and resolution of conflicts

4/ Integrity in Professional Practice

- 4.1 Makes practice decisions that are consistently guided by research, practice theory, and knowledge
- 4.2 Regularly identifies gaps and limitations in knowledge and skill
- 4.3 Seeks feedback on performance, tries new approaches, accepts challenges, takes risks, regarding self-awareness and use of professional self
- 4.4 Demonstrates capacity for personal change
- 4.5 Takes responsibility for own decisions
- 4.6 Establishes clear and appropriate boundaries in professional relationships
- 4.7 Demonstrates and promotes the qualities of honesty, reliability, impartiality and diligence
- 4.8 Demonstrates the ability to identify one's own contribution to problems and oppression

5/ Confidentiality

- 5.1 Respects the importance of trust and confidence placed in the professional relationship by clients and the public
- 5.2 Respects privacy and holds in confidence all material obtained in professional activities
- 5.3 Treats people in a manner that respects their right to privacy and freedom from harassment/abuse
- 5.4 Understands limits to confidentiality and clearly communicates these to others in compliance with legal requirements and organizational policies/procedures

6/ Competent Application of Knowledge and Skills for Professional Practice

- 6.1 Identifies and discloses to relevant others any issues that can affect competence (e.g., to professor, someone in placement, student services coordinator)
- 6.2 Initiates/develops/maintains relationships that are purposeful, disciplined, self-aware and relevant to practice endeavors
- 6.3 Communicates professionally both orally and in writing
- 6.4 Demonstrates the ability to evaluate outcomes of actions
- 6.5 Uses knowledge to guide efforts
- 6.6 Is punctual, dependable and responsible in all tasks and efforts
- 6.7 Demonstrates the ability to make appropriate and focused responses
- 6.8 Demonstrates self-direction and responsibility for one's own learning
- 6.9 Demonstrates critical thinking skills within the context of social work practice
- 6.10 Able to challenge the status quo and to strive for innovation in practice
- 6.11 Understands the importance of reflexive and reflective practice

(Suitability for the Profession Policy was initially approved by Academic Council, April 25, 2007)

Procedures²

The *Suitability for the Profession Policy*, along with the *CASW Code of Ethics*, provides the framework for determining whether alleged behaviour of a MUN BSW student constitutes unprofessional conduct or professional unsuitability. The alleged behaviour(s) can occur within one academic term or practicum or across two or more academic terms and/or practica. The enactment of this policy will require **consideration of the fact that students are learning in a social work education degree program designed to qualify the graduate for professional practice in social work.**

Concerns about a student can be actioned using this policy and procedures document by academic staff members (faculty and field education coordinators), instructors, professional services staff, field instructors, and other students. Concerns identified during a practicum will usually be discussed first between the field instructor and the student. Further meetings will usually include the field education coordinator. Students who identify concerns about a peer can discuss the concerns with a faculty member, field education coordinator, field instructor or student services coordinator who, depending upon her/his assessment of the complaint, shall request a meeting with the identified student.

Unprofessional conduct by students is not condoned, yet may regrettably occur as students are learning to become social workers. **Professional unsuitability** refers to a more serious and/or ongoing pattern of unprofessional conduct. Student behaviour may also be subject to review under the Memorial University Student Code of Conduct .

Deciding the level of concern for a student's conduct determines which procedure to follow: The Procedures for Unprofessional Conduct or the Procedures for Professional Unsuitability

Whatever the level of concern, when an allegation has been made against a student but where reasonable efforts to contact the student are unsuccessful, the School of Social Work reserves the right to implement action according to the relevant procedures for alleged unprofessional conduct or alleged professional unsuitability.

A. Unprofessional Conduct

Situations in which students will be assessed for alleged unprofessional conduct may include but are not limited to any one or a number of the following:

- a) Repeatedly submitting assignments beyond the deadline date without prior approval of the instructor
- b) Behaving in a manner which negatively impacts the learning environment (e.g., texting, sidebar conversations, and disrespectful communication with students, school members and/or the social work community)
- c) Engaging in inappropriate and/or disrespectful behaviours and/or conversation with School of Social Work members and/or the social work community.

² Content for this section has been extrapolated and modified from Section 6.11 Academic Misconduct, MUN University Regulations 2015/2016.

When Unprofessional Conduct has Allegedly Occurred

Procedures for Faculty/Instructors/Professional Services Staff

The faculty/instructor/staff will meet with the student privately to discuss the alleged unprofessional conduct. Meetings will be held in person, or at a distance using telephone or other interactive technologies. More than one meeting may be needed. The intent of the meeting(s) is to determine if unprofessional conduct has occurred and, if so, to then decide together an appropriate plan of action to resolve the issue.

The identified action plan may include but is not limited to:

- a) a referral for the student to meet with the Student Services Coordinator and/or seek out other identified university resources
- b) consultation by the faculty/instructor/staff with the Student Services Coordinator

Once the action plan has been initiated:

- a) A follow-up meeting of the faculty/instructor/staff may occur with the student to determine the progress of the action plan.
- b) The faculty/instructor/staff may a) provide the student with a written summary of the meeting(s) they have together and b) keep a copy for the instructor's record until the grade appeals period has passed for the semester (See the current MUN Diary for dates).

When the unprofessional conduct is more serious, the issue is not resolved, or one party is dissatisfied with the resolution:

The faculty/instructor/staff will report the matter in writing without delay to the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs. **Anonymous reports will not be considered.**

Procedures for the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs

The Associate Dean:

1. will arrange a follow-up meeting with the student, which may include the faculty/instructor/staff and/or other support persons as appropriate, to become familiar with the concern and gather information to determine next steps
2. may require the student to provide relevant documentation
3. will develop a plan in collaboration with the student and the Student Services Coordinator
4. may initiate a case conference to develop an action plan to address the concern
5. will determine if the unprofessional conduct meets the criteria for unsuitability for the profession
6. will present a decision and/or revised plan to the student which may include conditions for continuance, a formal review, withdrawal, and/or readmission
7. will provide a letter to the student documenting the decision and/or detailed action plan.
8. will place a copy of the letter on the student's file.
9. will continue to monitor the student's progress to oversee that suitable supports are provided and appropriate outcomes are actualized

B. Unsuitability for the Social Work Profession³

Situations in which students will be assessed for alleged unsuitability include, but are not limited to any one or a number of the following:

- a) Concealment or distortion or submission of false information on the Admission Application Package to the School of Social Work (see the MUN Calendar under General Academic Regulations (Undergraduate) Academic Misconduct: Academic Offences)
- b) Harassment or any threat, intimidation, or attempt to harm another person;
- c) Persistent and/or serious unsuitable/unethical behaviour which interferes with the ability to function within a professional context including but not limited to any one or a number of the following:
 - Evidence that a student cannot effectively exercise judgement or function in a professional context
 - Evidence of repeated and/or persistent examples of unprofessional conduct following the development and implementation of a previous action plan
 - Evidence of persistent and/or serious inability to form professional relationships
 - Evidence of discriminatory behaviour and persistent lack of reflexivity about behaviour or lack of effort to change behaviour identified as discriminatory
 - Persistent abuse or misuse of substances that interferes with the ability to function within a profession context
 - Criminal behaviour (a conviction for crimes such as physical assault, sexual assault, drug trafficking, for which a pardon has not been received)
 - Persistent and/or serious conduct that contravenes the policies of the university or of a practicum setting which cannot be resolved through negotiation or reassignment.

When Unsuitability for the Profession has Allegedly Occurred

Procedures for Faculty/Instructors/Professional Services Staff

A faculty/instructor/staff will submit the allegation in writing, along with any pertinent documentation, to the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs. **Anonymous reports will not be considered.**

Procedures for the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs

1. Within one week of receipt of the written allegation, the Associate Dean will notify the student in writing of the nature of the allegation against her or him. The letter will be sent by registered mail to the last known mailing address of the student as noted on the student's file at the School of Social Work and to the official University email address of the student.
2. The Associate Dean will appoint an impartial third party investigator who will interview separately the complainant, the student, and relevant witnesses. Prior to the interview with the investigator taking place, a party to the investigation may request the Associate Dean appoint an alternative investigator if she/he has reason to doubt the impartiality of the original investigator. Onus to present evidence supporting an allegation that the assigned investigator lacks required impartiality rests with the party making the allegation. If the Associate Dean determines that, on the balance of probabilities, the

³ These procedures were approved by the UGSC on May 20, 2015 with slight edits that were completed May 21, 2015. The current document retains the previous content.

allegation of impartiality is supported by the evidence presented, a different investigator shall be appointed. This may necessitate that the timelines for the investigation be extended.

The Investigative Process of the Allegation of Professional Unsuitability

3. At all interviews with the investigator, the complainant, the student, and relevant witnesses all have the right to be accompanied by another person, including, without limitation, a representative from the Memorial University student union, another student, an international student advisor, a faculty advisor, or a member of the faculty or staff of the University.
4. Meetings and interviews with the investigator will be held in person, or at a distance using telephone or other interactive technologies.
5. Upon completion of the interviews, the investigator will submit simultaneously a written report of the findings to the Associate Dean and the student. Normally, the report will be submitted within four weeks of the appointment of the investigator.
6. The student may, within two weeks of receipt of the report, respond to the report in writing to the Associate Dean. At that time the Associate Dean will consider the report and any responses received from the student or witnesses and make a determination as to whether there are grounds to proceed with a hearing with the Undergraduate Studies Committee (UGSC) and the student.
7. If it is determined at that time that the evidence does not warrant further action, the allegation will be dismissed and the student and the complainant will be notified.

When the Allegation of Professional Unsuitability Warrants Further Action

If the Associate Dean determines that, based on the investigator's report, a hearing is warranted with the UGSC and the student, then the Chair of the UGSC will set a date for a hearing⁴:

8. The Chair of the UGSC will notify the student in writing of the date that the hearing will be held, which will normally be four weeks after the student has been notified.
 - The notification will be sent by registered mail to the last known mailing address of the student as noted on the student's file at the School of Social Work and to the official University email address of the student.

The notification letter to the student about the hearing will include the following information:

- The associated time lines and procedures for resolution as outlined in this document.
- The student may consult advisors or facilitators. Such advisors may include, without limitation, a representative from the Memorial University student union, another student, an international student advisor, a faculty advisor, or a member of the faculty or staff of the University.
- If the student wishes to respond to the investigator's report, s/he will submit a written response to the Chairperson of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, including any supporting documentation that s/he feels is pertinent to his/her case. This written response will normally be received **no later than two weeks** after the student's official receipt of the notification letter.

⁴ Any member of the Undergraduate Studies Committee who brings forth an allegation under this procedure, who is a witness in the process or is otherwise in a potential conflict of interest, will remove her/himself from deliberations of the accusation

- The student has the right to appear at the hearing to present her/his case. The student may be accompanied by another person to assist them with her/his presentation including, without limitation, a representative from the Memorial University student union, another student, an international student advisor, a faculty advisor, or a member of the faculty or staff of the University. Normally, however, the presentation of the student's case rests with the student and this may be done either in person or in writing.

Along with the notification letter about the hearing the student will be sent the following materials:

- The written allegation against the student, and any evidence compiled during the investigation
 - A copy of pertinent documents:
 - The *Suitability for the Profession Policy and Procedures* of the School of Social Work and/or the Memorial University *Student Code of Conduct*
 - The pertinent calendar regulations from the current MUN Calendar
 - The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) *Code of Ethics*.
9. **One week prior to the hearing**, the student will notify the Chairperson of the UGSC in writing of her/his intention to attend the meeting. If the student chooses to bring a support person, the student must inform the Chairperson of the person's identity and professional role (if applicable). The Committee reserves the right to be assisted in the hearing process by members of the faculty or staff of the university.

The Hearing

10. Determination of hearing process rests with the UGSC, but in the absence of extenuating circumstances, the UGSC will normally hear first from the investigator, and then from the student. The UGSC may ask questions of each during their respective presentations, and of either or both after the completion of these presentations. Once all evidence from the investigator and the student has been heard, the UGSC will deliberate in camera. In considering the allegation and the presented evidence, the UGSC will examine the areas in which the student has allegedly demonstrated unsuitability for the social work profession according to the *Suitability for the Profession Policy and Procedures*.
- a. The UGSC will first reach a determination as to whether the allegation of professional unsuitability is sustained.
 - b. If there is a finding of professional unsuitability, the UGSC will then determine any penalties and/or conditions that may be imposed or other actions to be taken.
 - c. The UGSC shall make available to the student its decision in writing with reasons.

Penalties and/or Conditions

The range of penalties and/or conditions that may be imposed will be determined in relation to the severity of the allegation, any previous unprofessional conduct by the student, and/or the potential benefit to the student in assisting her/him to meet the standards of professional practice. These may include:

- i. Continuing the student in the program with **Clear Promotion** (See the current MUN Calendar for criteria for Clear Promotion). This outcome applies in circumstances where the concern has been addressed, and no further action is deemed necessary.
- Probationary Promotion** with or without conditions attached (See the current MUN Calendar for criteria for Probationary Promotion). Any conditions will be determined by

the Committee. Failure by the student to successfully complete any conditions imposed may result in promotion being denied.

- ii. **Promotion Denied** from the program (See the current MUN Calendar for criteria for Probationary Promotion). In this instance, the duration of the withdrawal and any conditions will be determined by the Committee. Failure to successfully complete any conditions imposed may result in permanent withdrawal.
- iii. **Permanent withdrawal** from the program. In this instance the student will not be eligible for future readmission or admission to the BSW programs at Memorial University.

The UGSC may also consider and order other actions or means of resolution including, but not limited to, requiring that the student provide a written apology; requiring that the student research and write an essay pertaining to the issue or behaviour; referral to counseling; and any other remedy as deemed appropriate by the UGSC.

11. The decision of the Committee, with reasons, will be communicated to the student in writing by registered mail to the last known mailing address of the student as noted on the student's file at the School of Social Work and to the official University email address of the student, normally within one week of the hearing and will include information on the avenue of appeal that may be taken, if applicable.

Disposition of Documents

When the Allegation of Unsuitability for the Profession is Not Sustained

In cases where the allegation is not sustained, the documentation associated with the allegation will be destroyed.

When the Allegation of Unsuitability for the Profession is Sustained

All documentation concerning the case will be retained in the School of Social Work student file until the student successfully completes the penalty(ies) and/or condition(s) determined by the UGSC and, when applicable, successfully completes her/his program of study (see the MUN Calendar under General Academic Regulations (Undergraduate) Academic Misconduct: Disposition of Documentation) .