

Standards for Social Work Education

Department of Social Work

Criteria for Evaluating Academic Performance and Policies & Procedures for Review of Academic Performance

Department of Social Work, Augsburg College

2006-2007

Portions of this policy were used with permission from the University of Texas at Austin, School of Social Work.

Standards for Social Work Education
Outline of Contents

1. Introduction to Standards
 - 1.1. Accommodations for Disabilities
2. Criteria for Evaluating Academic Performance
 - 2.1. Basic Abilities
 - 2.1.1. Communication skills
 - 2.1.2. Interpersonal skills
 - 2.1.3. Critical thinking skills
 - 2.1.4. Physical skills
 - 2.2. Emotional and Mental Abilities
 - 2.2.1. Stress management
 - 2.2.2. Emotional and mental capacities
 - 2.3. Professional Performance Skills
 - 2.3.1. Professional commitment
 - 2.3.2. Professional behavior
 - 2.3.3. Self awareness
 - 2.3.4. Ethical obligations
 - 2.4. Scholastic Performance
 - 2.5. Sources of Evidence
 - 2.5.1 Undergraduate Students
 - 2.5.2 Graduate Students
3. Policies & Procedures for Review of Academic Performance
 - 3.1. Performance that may result in Review and/or Dismissal
 - 3.2. Three Levels of Review
4. Student Grievances

Standards for Social Work Education

Criteria for Evaluating Academic Performance, Policies and Procedures for Review of Academic Performance, and Academic Grievances

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document sets out Standards for Social Work Education that apply to students enrolled in the Department of Social Work at Augsburg College. Social workers serve children and adults who are arguably the most vulnerable people in our society and need the strongest support that can be provided on their behalf. Therefore, social work entails a rigorous course of study to acquire knowledge and skills in complex procedures, which must be applied appropriately and sensitively with diverse peoples and their communities. Not everyone has the qualities that are required to be a competent social worker. Nor are social workers well suited for employment in all other fields. This policy is designed to guide members of the department and students in identifying those situations when a student should be encouraged to leave the field of social work and pursue other interests.

Because of the nature of professional social work practice, the Department of Social Work has certain responsibilities to ensure that students are capable of competent social work practice. “Graduate and professional schools have legal and ethical responsibilities to uphold legitimate academic requirements, including competent performance in clinical settings” (Driscoll, 2000, p. 846). The standards are linked to students’ abilities to become effective social work professionals. They are provided so that students and faculty can be clear about expectations and procedures to address academic performance concerns. The ultimate goal of the Standards is to help students have a successful experience in the Department of Social Work.

Persons who teach and supervise students, along with program coordinators, will assess student academic performance and use their professional judgment to determine if standards are being met during a student’s educational career. Professional judgment is the capacity to assess a situation by applying the values and knowledge of the social work profession, combined with a professional’s own experience and practice wisdom. It also represents the application of knowledge, values, and skills to making decisions in a helping process.

All social work students will be provided with and expected to read the Standards for Social Work Education and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. Students will be asked to sign an acknowledgment that they have read, are aware of the contents of, and will abide by the documents. The form will be kept in students’ files.

1.1 Accommodations for Disabilities

No otherwise qualified student shall, on the basis of disability, be subjected to discrimination or excluded from participation in the Department of Social Work. A student with a disability may be protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and be eligible for a reasonable accommodation to provide equal opportunity to meet academic criteria for professional behavior and scholastic performance. The College is committed to providing students with disabilities with reasonable accommodations for participation in the program.

Any otherwise qualified student with a protected disability who requests a reasonable accommodation must notify the CLASS Office or Access Center and provide documentation as needed. The CLASS Office or Access Center will make recommendations for accommodations.

2.0 CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN BSW AND MSW PROGRAMS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

In order to meet its responsibilities to provide high quality professional education and to ensure that its graduates are able to function in a broad variety of professional situations, the Department faculty evaluates the academic performance of its students in four general areas: Basic Abilities to Acquire Professional Skills; Mental and Emotional Abilities; Professional Performance Skills, and Scholastic Performance. Meeting the criteria for scholastic achievement is necessary but not sufficient to ensure continued enrollment in the program. Both professional behavior and scholastic performance comprise academic standards.

Students may be terminated from the program under any of the following conditions:

1. Violation of the Department's Standards for Social Work Education or the College policies and standards of conduct including academic honesty.
2. Failure to meet conditions of academic probation.
3. Violations of NASW Code of Ethics or Minnesota's Code of Ethics for Licensed Social Workers.
4. Other conduct unbecoming of a social work student.
5. Failure to meet Field Work expectations.
6. Failure to meet minimal academic standards.

Dismissal will occur only after established procedures were followed.

2.1

Basic Abilities

Necessary to Acquire Professional Skills

2.1.1 Communication Skills

Demonstrates sufficient written and oral skills to comprehend information and communicate ideas and feelings.

a) **Written:** Writes clearly, uses correct grammar and spelling, and applies appropriate writing style, including American Psychological Association (APA) referencing, appropriate source citation, and documentation. Demonstrates sufficient skills in written English to understand content presented in the program and to adequately complete all written assignments, as specified by faculty.

b) **Oral/Sign:** Communicates effectively and sensitively with other students, faculty, staff, clients, and professionals. Expresses ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrates a willingness and an ability to listen to others. Demonstrates sufficient skills in spoken or signed English to understand content presented in the program, to complete adequately all oral assignments, and to meet the objectives of field placement experiences, as specified by faculty.

2.1.2 Interpersonal Skills

Demonstrates the interpersonal skills needed to relate effectively with other students, faculty, staff, clients, and professionals and to fulfill the ethical obligations of the profession. These include compassion, empathy, altruism, integrity, and demonstration of respect for and consideration of others. The student also takes appropriate responsibility for own actions and considers the impact of these actions on others.

2.1.3 Critical Thinking Skills

Exhibits sufficient knowledge of social work and clarity of thinking to process information and apply it to appropriate situations in classroom and field. Demonstrates grounding in relevant social, behavioral and biological science knowledge and research-including knowledge and skills in relationship building, data gathering, assessment, intervention, and evaluation of practice. Exhibits ability to conceptualize and integrate knowledge and apply that knowledge to professional practice.

2.1.4 Physical Skills

Exhibits sufficient motor and sensory abilities to attend and participate in class and practicum placement, with or without accommodations. (See section on Accommodations for Disabilities for clarification.)

2.2

Emotional and Mental Abilities

Necessary for Performance in the Program and Professional Practice

2.2.1 Stress Management

Demonstrates ability to recognize and deal with current life stressors through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms. Handles stress effectively by using appropriate self-care and developing supportive, appropriate relationships with colleagues, peers, and others.

2.2.2 Emotional and Mental Capacities

Uses sound judgment. Seeks and effectively uses help for medical or emotional problems that interfere with scholastic and professional performance. Engages in counseling or seeks out support and help if personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties do any of the following:

- compromise scholastic and other performance,
- interfere with professional judgment and behavior, or
- jeopardize the best interests of those to whom the social work student has a professional responsibility, including peers and clients (as outlined in the current Codes of Ethics by the National Association of Social Workers and the Minnesota State Board of Social Work).

2.3

Professional Performance Skills

Necessary for Work with Clients and Professional Practice

2.3.1 Professional Commitment

Exhibits a strong commitment to the goals of social work and to the ethical standards of the profession, as specified in the Codes of Ethics by the National Association of Social Workers and the Minnesota State Board of Social Work. Demonstrates commitment to the essential values of social work that includes the respect for the dignity and worth of every individual and his/her right to a just share of society's resources (social justice).

2.3.2 Professional Behavior

Exhibits behaviors that are in compliance with program policies, institutional policies, professional ethical standards, and societal laws in the classroom, field, and community. Appearance, dress, and general demeanor reflect a professional manner. Shows potential for responsible and accountable behavior by knowing and practicing within the scope of social work, respecting others, being punctual and dependable, prioritizing responsibilities, attending class regularly, observing deadlines, completing assignments on time, keeping appointments or making appropriate arrangements, and accepting supervision and criticism in a positive manner.

Works effectively with others, regardless of level of authority. Advocates for him/herself in an appropriate and responsible manner and uses proper channels for conflict

resolution. Shows a willingness to receive and accept feedback and supervision in a positive manner, as well as use such feedback to enhance professional development. Shows a willingness to critically assess the values and ethics of the profession. Some examples of conduct that would lead to dismissal from the program include:

- Repeated failure to demonstrate effective interpersonal skills for forming professional helping relationships (for example, unable to demonstrate non-judgmental attitude; unable to allow client self-determination);
- Failure to meet generally accepted standards of professional conduct, personal integrity or emotional stability requisite for professional practice, inappropriate or disruptive behavior toward colleagues, faculty or staff (at school or field placement).

2.3.3 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. Shows awareness of self and how one is perceived by others. Reflects on one's own limitations as they relate to professional capacities. Is willing to examine and change behavior when it interferes in working with clients and other professionals.

2.3.4 Ethical Obligations

Current behavior and classroom performance demonstrate adherence to the ethical expectations and obligation of professional practices, noted in Codes of Ethics by the National Association of Social Workers and the Minnesota State Board of Social Work.

Ethical behaviors include:

- Adherence to the Codes of Ethics by the National Association of Social Workers and the Minnesota State Board of Social Work.
- Systematic evaluation of practice, service, policies and programs in an unbiased, factual way. Suspension of personal biases during interactions with others.
- Comprehension of another individual's way of life and values. Empathic communication and support of the client as a basis for a productive professional relationship.
- Appreciation of the value of diversity. Effective and nonjudgmental relation to and work with others who are different from oneself. Appropriate 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. No imposition of personal, religious, sexual, and/or cultural values on clients.
- Demonstration of respect for the rights of others. Commitment to clients' rights to freedom of choice and self-determination.

- Maintenance of confidentiality as it relates to human service, classroom activities, and field placement.
- Demonstration of honesty and integrity by being truthful about background, experiences, and qualifications; doing one's own work; giving credit for the ideas of others; and providing proper citation of source materials.
- Demonstration of clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. Does not sexually harass others; make verbal or physical threats; become involved in sexual relationships with clients, supervisors, or faculty; abuse others in physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual ways; or participate in dual relationships where conflicts of interest may exist.

2.4

Scholastic Performance

Evidence of meeting academic performance criteria in the Department of Social Work may include but is not limited to any of the following:

- Grades
- Feedback or reference letters from faculty, work supervisors, or supervisors of volunteer human service activity or other field experiences
- Feedback from agency-based field instructors
- Performance in oral and written assignments, examinations, social work skills labs, or other appropriate coursework
- Signed scholastic honesty statement, contract to adhere to NASW Code of Ethics or the Standards, other contracts between the Department and the student.

2.5

Sources of Evidence

For Academic Performance Criteria

2.5.1 Undergraduate Students

BSW students must maintain an overall GPA of 2.0 in order to be a social work major in good standing and to graduate. In all upper division social work courses (i.e., courses 300 and above), students must achieve a grade of at least 2.0 or higher in each course. See the college catalog for an explanation of grades.

Students who are experiencing continued difficulties in academic achievements should consult with their social work advisor. After carefully reviewing the situation and considering the available options, students who do not have the aptitude for social work may choose or may be required to leave the Program or transfer to another major.

The student is responsible to monitor prerequisites and grades allowing enrollment into social work courses. The student's advisor and also the BSW Director must be made aware of the situation. In addition, the BSW Director is responsible to work with staff to monitor the student's progress in the program. At the point that a problem is identified, these procedures are to be applied.

2.5.2 Graduate Students

MSW students must maintain at least a 3.0 cumulative grade point average (GPA). If a student's GPA falls below a 3.0 average, the student will be placed on academic probation for the following term. A 3.0 cumulative grade point average must be restored at the end of the probation term in order for a student to be removed from probation. If the cumulative grade point average again falls below 3.0, the student may be dismissed from the program.

No more than two courses with a grade of 2.0 and/or 2.5 will count toward the degree. Courses with a grade below 2.0 must be repeated. No more than two courses can be repeated. Only the credits and grades earned the second time are counted in the grade point average.

If a student receives a grade of N in a field course the MSW Director will initiate a Level III review as outlined in section 3.2.

3.0

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REVIEW OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Three levels of review can occur in the Department of Social Work in reviewing a student's academic performance. The level of review depends upon the potential severity of the concern. Normally, the student will progress through the levels of review in sequential order. However, an instance may arise where the incident is determined by the program director to be serious enough to warrant an immediate level 2 or 3 review.

Information disclosed during student meetings with faculty, program coordinators, or school administrators *will not be kept confidential* if the information raises concerns about

professional performance. Faculty and/or program coordinators will share pertinent information with each other for the professional purpose of identifying student issues and enhancing problem solving about the concerns. Faculty will follow published college procedures.

3.1 Performance That Will Result In a Review

Student reviews can occur under any of the following circumstances:

- Failure to meet or maintain academic requirements as stated under Scholastic Performance Standard 2.4;
- Scholastic dishonesty, including cheating, lying, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, or any act designed to give unfair academic advantage to the student (Faculty must adhere to college guidelines. For complete College policy and procedures, see pages 3-4 of the Augsburg College Student Guide 2001-2002);
- Behavior judged to be in violation of the current NASW Code of Ethics;
- Any threat or attempt to harm oneself or someone else;
- Commission of a criminal act that is contrary to professional practice occurring during the course of study;
- Repeated pattern of unprofessional behavior as stated in Standard 2.3.2 Professional Behavior.
- Failure to meet any of the Standards for Social Work Education: Department of Social Work Criteria for Evaluation of Academic Performance.

3.2 The Three Levels of Review

Level 1

A Level 1 review involves a faculty member (class instructor or academic advisor) and a student. When a faculty member has concerns about the student meeting academic criteria, whether related to professional behavior or scholastic performance, that faculty member will:

- discuss those concerns directly with the student and seek to work with the student to resolve the difficulties;
- apprise the appropriate BSW or MSW Director or Field Coordinator of the concerns. The director/coordinator may be able to identify potential patterns and issues related to the student;

- document dates and content of meetings with students. Records will be kept in student file.

If a problem arises in field, the agency-based field instructor will discuss concerns directly with the student and with the faculty field liaison. It is the responsibility of the faculty liaison to apprise the appropriate director/coordinator of the concerns.

In many instances, meetings between faculty and students resolve the concerns and do not necessarily lead to further reviews, pursuant to this section.

Level 2

A Level 2 review involves the faculty member, student, and program director. Faculty and program director will meet with the student when the student is not meeting or following program or college standards, policies, and procedures or when concerns have not been resolved at Level 1. If a problem arises in field, the agency-based field instructor, faculty liaison, and field coordinator will conduct the review with the student.

In this information gathering process, the program director will determine the nature of the concern and gather sufficient information to develop a plan to address that concern, if one is needed. No further action may be required, or the student may be asked, in writing, to modify his or her behavior and/or seek appropriate help. This process is designed to assist students in dealing with identified concerns that have an impact on their performance.

The BSW Director, MSW Director or Field Coordinator will assess the nature of these concerns with appropriate faculty, consult with the Department Chair, maintain documentation that is kept in the student's file, and decide if it is necessary to conduct a more comprehensive review, pursuant to Level 3.

Level 3

A Level 3 review involves a standing panel of 3 Department faculty (2 tenured, any rank; 1 tenure-track) and the student. Faculty members, appointed by the Department Chair, will serve staggered 3-year terms. In addition to the three faculty members, the Department Chair is an ex officio member of the Committee.

A Level 3 review is conducted when concerns have not been resolved in prior reviews; when issues relate to a student not meeting the criteria for academic performance, including an N in Field (often involving professional or ethical behaviors); or when the student is being considered for withdrawal or discontinuance in the program.

In most instances, a Level 3 review is sufficient to deal with student performance and is the last decision making step in the review process in the Department of Social Work.

When a Level 3 review is called, the appropriate program director will convene a meeting with the appropriate faculty and the student to gather information, determine the nature of the problem (if one is confirmed to exist), and identify alternatives for its remediation. Appropriate faculty to be involved in a review will include but are not limited to those who have direct knowledge of and experience with the student.

The student will be notified in writing, by certified mail, of the concerns and meeting date, with sufficient time to prepare for and attend the meeting.

After the review meeting has occurred, the program director will consult with the Department Chair to discuss the problem situation and make recommendations regarding the student. Based on the review, conference, and an objective assessment of the information provided, the program director will inform the student of the decision, which can include one or more of the following actions:

- *Continue the student in the program with no conditions.*
In these situations, the concern has been addressed and no further action by the student or program is required.
- *Establish formal conditions for the student's continuance in the program.*
In these situations, specific conditions must be met in order for the student to return to or remain in the program. Action may include establishing goals, a plan, a timeline, and appropriate monitoring; providing mentoring and support; placing the student on probation (described below); referring the student to counseling and/or advising services; allowing the student to follow a reduced course load or delay entry to the field practicum; or requiring the student to withdraw from the program with the option of reapplying.

When probation is selected as a condition for continuation in the program, during the probation term, the student will:

- meet with his or her advisor prior to the beginning of the term to review the situation and to establish a plan that includes steps that need to be taken to be removed from probation; and
- meet with his or her advisor during the probation term to monitor progress and to address any difficulties.

During the probation term, the advisor will:

- meet with the student prior to the beginning of the term to review the situation and to plan the steps needed to be removed from probation;

- monitor the commitments made in the student plan;
 - verify and report to the student any failure by the student to supply the plan or meet its goals and to advise the student that a failure to meet the plan's goals will lead to termination;
 - recommend to the Department termination or retention and inform the student of this recommendation.
 - *Consult with and/or refer to the Dean.*
- In some instances, depending on the nature of the problem, the Dean's Office may be consulted. If a referral is made to the Dean's Office after consultation, the student will be notified in writing about the nature of the concern and the fact that the referral is taking place. Situations which may result in referral to the Associate Dean for Students Affairs or the Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs include scholastic dishonesty, hazing, racial or sexual harassment, possession or use of firearms or other weapons on College property, damage or destruction of College property, and conduct that endangers the health or safety of any College student, employee, or campus visitor.
- *Counsel the student to change majors/degree programs and/or discontinue the student in the program.*

In some situations, it will be recommended that the student no longer continue in the social work program. The student will be counseled to voluntarily change majors or degree programs. If that does not occur, the student will be discontinued from the program. In either case, the student will be provided with documentation regarding the specific reasons for their dismissal and the conditions, if any, under which they may re-apply.

Students must be notified of the decision by certified mail within fourteen calendar days of the review. It is the responsibility of the program director to communicate the decision to the student. Students have a right to appeal the dismissal decision on the grounds of procedural error through the College's program dismissal appeals process. Information about the program dismissal appeals process is available in the Student Guide.

4.0 STUDENT GRIEVANCES

Pursuant to the student grievance procedures for students provided in the Augsburg College Student Guide, students enrolled in the Social Work Program have the right to redress grievances related to academic matters. For grievances concerning complaints about curriculum, program, course content, faculty or students, see procedures outlined in the respective BSW/MSW student handbook. For grievances respective to field placements or personnel, see the respective BSW/MSW Field Manual.