

## STUDENT PROFESSIONAL SUITABILITY POLICY and PROCEDURES

### Introduction

The nature of the study and practice of social work places individuals in a position of trust in relation to those they serve and in a close relationship with fellow students, colleagues and staff in the university setting, and those involved in fieldwork and clinical placements / practica (collectively, a “**Placement**”).

A professional standard of behavior is expected from social work students (in both the Bachelor and Masters programs (collectively, the “**Program**”). As future social workers, students must subscribe to a set of social work values and ethics, which include respect for the inherent dignity and worth of the person, the pursuit of social justice, service as well as integrity, confidentiality and competence in professional practice.

The granting of a degree by the University constitutes acknowledgment that students are deemed qualified and suitable as social work practitioners upon graduation, with the expectation that they will conduct themselves in a professional and ethical manner.

Students in the Program must demonstrate a professional standard of behaviour in their studies and Placements. Although satisfactory performance in both academic coursework and Placements is a prerequisite to advancement, it is not the sole criterion in the consideration for advancement. The University reserves the right to require a student to withdraw if they are considered not suited to proceed with the study or practice of social work.

Progression through the Program is contingent on the student’s behavior meeting the ethical and behavioural standards (collectively, the “**Standards**”) set forth in:

- (a) the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) [\*Code of Ethics\*](#) and [\*Guidelines for Ethical Practice\*](#);
- (b) the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers (SASW) [\*Standards of Practice\*](#);
- (c) the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) Program Requirements;
- (d) the applicable graduate thesis and/or field experience manual(s);
- (e) the University of Regina [\*Regulations Governing Discipline for Academic and Non-Academic Misconduct\*](#) (the “**Discipline Regulations**”);
- (f) all other relevant University of Regina policies, including but not limited to the [\*Student Code of Conduct and Right to Appeal\*](#), [\*Respectful University\*](#) and the [\*Sexual Violence / Misconduct\*](#));
- (g) any specific rules or standards of Placement agencies and partners.

The purpose of this Policy is to outline guidelines and expectations for student performance of professional responsibilities and the suitability of the student for the social work profession. Students who are not equipped with the requisite knowledge, skills, ethics, practical ability, social understanding and values for professional practice are at risk of being removed from the Program on the basis of professional suitability. This Policy applies to all students registered

in Social Work at the University of Regina, at both the undergraduate and graduate level, upon their accepting an offer of admission.

## **Policy**

Conduct that fails to meet behavioral or ethical expectations may result in a review of the student (a “**Suitability Review**”). The outcome of the Suitability Review may include requiring the student to undertake supplemental or remedial developmental tasks, or sanctions up to and including the student being removed from the Program and the University.

Allegations of a breach of any Standard by a student enrolled in the Program offered by the Faculty of Social Work (the “**Faculty**”) shall be dealt with by the Faculty in accordance with the procedures outlined below.

### **A. Initiating a Suitability Review**

A Suitability Review to address matters related to the student’s suitability for the profession and adherence to professional expectations may be initiated when a student:

- (a) commits any breach of the Standards, and/or any University regulations or policies that relate to student behaviour, or that would engage the behavioural and ethical standards of the profession;
- (b) engages in any behavior contrary to the Standards in a Placement, or displays impaired judgment or functioning in any client contact pursuant to a requirement of a class or Placement, including failing to respect boundaries in all client interactions (including social media<sup>1</sup>);
- (c) demonstrates conduct that, if participated in by a registered social worker, would result in suspension or expulsion, or other disciplinary actions from the regulatory body.  
Examples include but are not limited to the following:
  - i) verbal, physical, emotional or sexual abuse of a client, peer, or Placement staff member, and
  - ii) misappropriation of personal or Placement agency property;
- (d) consistently practices incompetently in any Placement setting, following implementation of all reasonable supports and performance improvement plans, or to the extent where the lack of knowledge, skill, or judgment or disregard for the welfare of a client demonstrates that the student is unfit to continue in the practice of social work;
- (e) demonstrates jeopardized or impaired professional judgment through self-interest or a conflict of interest;
- (f) demonstrates behaviour with respect to other students, colleagues, faculty, staff and clients in Placement settings, or with the public, which is exploitive, irresponsible, harassing or abusive;
- (g) poses or potentially poses a risk to a client, a student, an instructor, or staff or faculty of the University, or a Placement agency staff member, or to the reputation of the University or the Faculty, or relationships between the University or the Faculty and its community partners, or a member of the public;

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<sup>1</sup> See Faculty of Social Work *Ethical Use of Social Media* policy.

- (h) acquires a criminal conviction after being admitted to the Program (or which was acquired prior to admission but became known only after having been admitted to the Program) which jeopardizes the student's ability to gain registration as a social worker, or which, in the opinion of the Faculty, demonstrated poor judgment, lack of integrity, or (other) unsuitability for the social work profession;
- (i) engages in behaviour that impairs the performance of professional responsibilities or is otherwise found to be unsuited to the social work profession, through consideration of competence or professional fitness or other behavior (including use of social media);
- (j) uses a substance (other than as prescribed by a physician) that interferes with the ability to function within a classroom, or a Placement or is under the influence of alcohol or recreational drugs while participating in client care, any other professional activity, or any activity related to social work practice; or
- (k) engages in persistent and/or serious unethical or inappropriate behaviour which interferes with the ability to function within the learning environment (classroom, Placement settings and/or online course site), including but not limited to:
  - i) Evidence that student is unable to exercise sound judgment;
  - ii) Repeated and demonstrated inability to complete tasks associated with a Placement and/or classroom learning;
  - iii) Evidence of persistent and/or inability to form and maintain professional relationships;
  - iv) Evidence of discriminatory behaviour and/or attitudes;
  - v) Persistent lack of reflexivity concerning discriminatory behaviour and a lack of effort to change behaviour and/or attitudes identified as discriminatory;
  - vi) Criminal behaviour (a charge and/or conviction for crimes such as physical assault, sexual assault, drug trafficking, or any other act that contradicts the profession's code of ethics);
  - vii) Persistent and/or serious conduct that violates any University policy in place intended to safeguard the well-being and safety of members of the student body, faculty, and staff.

Membership in the social work professional demands integrity, competence, professionalism and adherence to ethical standards. Social work is a profession that is enormously demanding and carries considerable responsibility as individuals assume a crucial and challenging role in the support, care and development of others. At all times social work students are expected to demonstrate honesty and integrity, respect for others, dependability / responsibility and accountability.

### **Procedures**

The Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of the FGSR (as applicable) shall ensure the following procedures are guided by the principles of natural justice.

Students may be asked to not attend class, Placements, and/or other school activities until the Suitability Review is complete. The Dean of the Faculty and/or the Dean of the FGSR may impose such interim measures as they deem appropriate, while the Suitability Review is underway.

It is the student's responsibility to provide the Faculty with current e-mail, postal and telephone contact information. Failure to do so may result in shorter or no notice being received. In such a case the Suitability Review may take place without the student.

Including pursuant to the CASW's [\*Code of Ethics\*](#), the Faculty is committed to meeting the highest standard in respect to maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of student information. This extends to students subject to review for issues related to professional suitability. That said, the Faculty is equally responsible in protection of the public and service users. Therefore, in matters related to professional suitability, the Faculty must balance its responsibility to the student in question and to others in the learning environment and community. Information may not be kept confidential if it raises concerns about the student's capacity to engage professionally in accordance with the Standards. To this end, where necessary, the Faculty may share information concerning a student with others within the University with a need to know, or an affected third party (such as a Placement agency or regulatory body).

Action taken under this Policy does not preclude action under the Discipline Regulations or any other applicable University Policy.

Once a Suitability Review has been commenced, the proceedings may continue notwithstanding that the student has subsequently voluntarily withdrawn from the Program, or has refused to participate in the proceedings.

If an instructor, faculty member, administrator, Placement supervisor, Placement agency staff member or any other individual identifies that a student is demonstrating unsatisfactory performance of professional responsibilities or other unprofessional or unethical behaviour as outlined above, the following process shall be initiated.

#### **A. Procedures for a Suitability Review**

The Dean of the Faculty shall request that the individual prepare a written document outlining the incidents and/or behaviours which are assessed to be indicative of unsatisfactory professional development or professional unsuitability (the "**Complaint**").

If the Complaint involves a masters social work student, the Complaint will be referred by the Dean (or designate) of the Faculty of Social Work to the Dean (or designate) of the FGSR. The applicable Dean will be the "**Designated Dean**".

The Designated Dean will provide the student with a copy of the Complaint and a copy of this Policy and will advise the student how the Designated Dean intends to proceed with the Complaint (as outlined in paragraphs 4 and 5 below).

If the Designated Dean believes that the Complaint may be resolved informally, they may request a meeting with the student to discuss the Complaint and attempt a resolution (the "**Informal Meeting**"). The Designated Dean may choose to include the individual who provided the written Complaint in the Informal Meeting.

If the Designated Dean does not believe that the Complaint may be resolved informally, or if no resolution is achieved at the Informal Meeting, the Designated Dean will establish a Professional Suitability Review Panel (the “**Panel**”) to conduct a Suitability Review.

### **B. Professional Suitability Review Panel**

If a Panel is established to conduct a Suitability Review the panel will be comprised of:

- (a) a Faculty of Social Work faculty member unconnected with the immediate facts of the case who will be the Chair of the Panel,
- (b) a SASW member from the discipline committee,
- (c) a third or fourth year undergraduate, or a graduate student in the Program
- (d) a representative from another health related profession at the University of Regina (e.g., Nursing, Clinical Psychology)

The Designated Dean will advise the student in writing that a Suitability Review has been initiated, and the names of the individuals comprising the Panel.

If the student has concerns regarding the impartiality of any member of the Panel (such as potential bias and/or conflicts of interest), those may be raised with the Designated Dean. The Designated Dean will raise the issue with the Panel member, who in turn, will be provided with an opportunity to respond. If the concerns are deemed justified by the Designated Dean, the Panel member will recuse themselves and an alternate will be sought. A member of the Faculty will not be disqualified from sitting on the Panel for the sole reason of previous contact with, or having taught, the student.

An administrative staff member will be assigned by the Designated Dean to assist the Panel and facilitate administrative matters pertaining to the Suitability Review (the “**Administrator**”). The Designated Dean will assign an Associate Dean to present the Complaint to the Panel (the “**Faculty Representative**”).

The Suitability Review will be conducted in the form of a hearing before the Panel (the “**Hearing**”). The Hearing will normally take place within two months of the Complaint being referred to the Panel, or at such other date as determined by the Chair. The student will be informed of the time, date and location of the Hearing a minimum of three weeks in advance.

Not less than 14 days prior to the date scheduled for the Hearing the Faculty Representative will file with the Administrator a written submission relating to the Complaint and any other relevant documents, emails, etc. which are relied on by the Faculty Representative in respect of the Suitability Review (collectively, the “**Complaint Submission**”). The Administrator will immediately provide the Complaint Submission to the student and the Panel. The student may file a written response to the Complaint, along with any relevant documents, emails, etc. which are relied on by the Student in their response (the “**Student Submission**”). The student must provide the Student Submission to the Administrator no less than 7 days prior to the date scheduled for the Hearing. The Administrator will immediately

provide the Student Submission to the Faculty Representative and the Panel.

All parties are required to inform the Administrator of their intention to call witnesses and the names of these witnesses and a summary of the testimony they will provide, at the time that they file their respective submissions. The Panel does not summon witnesses. It is up to the parties to make arrangements for the witnesses that each wishes to call at the Hearing.

The student may be accompanied by a representative at the Hearing. In such a case, the representative's name and relationship to the student must be provided to the Administrator in advance of the Hearing.

At the Hearing, the Faculty Representative first presents the concerns as outlined in the Complaint (which may include calling witnesses to present their information concerning the alleged behaviour of the student). The student is then given an opportunity to ask questions about the Complaint and the evidence presented and to then respond to the Complaint and provide any relevant evidence including through their witnesses). Finally, the Faculty Representative has an opportunity to comment on any issues or information that have been presented by the student. The Panel is not bound by formal rules of evidence applicable in courts of law.

The Hearing will be closed to all persons except the members of the Panel, the Administrator, the Dean of the Faculty, the Dean of the FGSR (if applicable), the Faculty Representative, the student and their respective representatives (if any). If other individuals are being called as witnesses, they may attend the Hearing only for the purpose of providing their testimony. The role of each of the Deans is to observe the Hearing – they should not actively participate in the Hearing.

When all available relevant evidence and witnesses have been heard and both the Faculty and student have had opportunity to provide comment, the Panel shall then enter into a closed session to deliberate *in camera*. The Panel will assess the evidence, and make one or more of the following recommendations to the Designated Dean (along with their detail rationale for such recommendation(s)):

- (a) the student be allowed to continue in the Program without qualification or conditions;
- (b) the student be given a written reprimand and/or a letter of expectations;
- (c) the student be referred to appropriate campus resources;
- (d) the student be allowed to continue in the Program on a conditional basis with conditions indicated in writing. These conditions will be monitored by the Associate Dean, and must be met for the student to remain in the Program;
- (e) the student be required to discontinue from the Program for a specified period of time until conditions, indicated in writing, have been met;
- (f) the student be required to temporarily withdraw from the Program and/or repeat portions of the Program;
- (g) the student be required to discontinue, either from the Program, or the University, indefinitely in accordance with the regulations of the University of Regina.

After considering the Panel's recommendations the Designated Dean will convey his/her decision in writing with reasons to the student (the "**Review Decision**"). The student will be advised of his/her right to appeal the Review Decision to the Council Committee on Student Appeals.

A record of the Review Decision will be retained in the Office of the Dean of the Faculty, regardless of the severity of the penalty, and be held for a time consistent with the University's records retention guidelines.

As described above, the student may appeal the Review Decision to the [Council Committee on Student Appeals](#) in accordance with the Terms of Reference for that committee. The appeal must be submitted in writing (to the University Secretary) within 30 days of the Review Decision.

Accepted by Faculty Council  
November 15, 2023