

Complete Policy Title:
**Professional Behaviour Code of Conduct for
Graduate Learners – Faculty of Health
Sciences**

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Senate

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**Associate Vice-President and Dean of
Graduate Studies**

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Preamble

The Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster University has identified as its mission statement *Together, Advancing Health through Learning and Discovery*. Within a culture of innovation, courage and collaboration, the Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster will lead by challenging what is, and embracing what could be.

In 2005, the Faculty of Health Sciences adopted a guiding statement of purpose for the Faculty of Health Science, namely, “In *Health Sciences Education Research and Practice* we are here to question, to learn, to discover and to communicate”.

As current and future members of the caring professions, health science learners at McMaster shall demonstrate their commitment to the professional behaviours that are outlined in this document. These professional behaviours exemplify the six tenets of the Faculty of Health Sciences guiding vision, namely: inter-professional collaboration, commitment to our communities, accountability/responsibility, excellence, integrity and respect, and optimism. As such, health science learners at McMaster are held to a standard beyond the basic conduct expected of other learners at McMaster University.

All learners at McMaster are required to adhere to the *McMaster University Student Code of Conduct* for non-academic offences. Procedures for handling allegations, complaints or charges are set out in that document. Additionally, breaches of academic integrity including academic dishonesty, cheating and plagiarism are defined in the *McMaster University Academic Integrity Policy*. As with non-

academic offences, procedures for handling allegations, complaints or charges are set out in that document.

Scope of the Guideline

All Faculty of Health Science's learners shall demonstrate these professional behaviours in all academic and clinical settings at all times. For the purposes of this *Code*, Faculty of Health Sciences learners shall be governed by this policy whether they are engaged in purely academic or academic/clinical activities, whether they are engaged in administrative functions associated with their learning, whether they are conducting or assisting in research, and whether the activities be on or off site, in real time or in a virtual reality online. Furthermore, the *Faculty of Health Sciences Professional Behaviour Code of Conduct for Learners* shall be applicable to all contexts and circumstances in which learners were, or could reasonably be, considered to be representing their educational program in either a real-world or on-line setting.

The 'tenets' articulated in this Guideline do not replace nor limit the legal or ethical standards established by the professional and regulatory bodies, or by any other applicable University standard, policy or procedure.

Should a learner engage in a behaviour or set of behaviours that constitutes a simultaneous violation of both the *McMaster University Student Code of Conduct* and the *Faculty of Health Sciences Professional Behaviour Code of Conduct for Learners*, the breach shall properly be addressed under the former in the first instance; however, the Faculty of Health Sciences reserves the right to proceed secondarily in applying the procedures of the *Faculty of Health Sciences Professional Behaviour Code of Conduct for Learners* should it reasonably decide it appropriate to do so in the circumstances.

Domains of Professional Behaviour

Guided by the tenets of the Faculty of Health Sciences and a review of the published literature assessing professional behaviour, an Inter-professional Task Force of the Faculty of Health Sciences has identified three priority domains of Professional Behaviour. For each of these domains, explanatory examples are provided; these examples may not be interpreted as defining, describing or limiting the domains themselves, but are held out merely as instructive aids. For further explanation of these domains, learners and faculty are referred to more detailed lists of expected professional behavior published by each of the Health Science Educational Programs.

Domain 1: Professional Responsibility, Integrity and Accountability

Professional responsibility, integrity and accountability will be demonstrated by the learner who fulfills responsibilities reliably and promptly; engages in ethical practice; represents information accurately and accepts responsibility for one's actions; respects confidentiality and student privileges and advocates for the patient/client and profession rather than promoting self-interest.

Domain 2: Self-improvement and Pursuit of Excellence

Self-improvement and the pursuit of excellence will be demonstrated by the learner who recognizes and acknowledges one's own limitations or difficulties; who responds reasonably and responsibly to feedback, is motivated to self-improvement; seeks the means to correct deficiencies or weaknesses; and who adapts to changing circumstances with the goal of achieving excellence.

Domain 3: Respectful Professional Relationships and Communication

Respectful, professional relationships and communication will be demonstrated by the learner who uses respectful language; recognizes appropriate professional boundaries, is sensitive to the values, attitudes and assumptions of other cultures and how these affect practice; remains open to exploring the personal impact of self on others; listens attentively to the concerns of others; and demonstrates empathy and compassion.

If a Breach Occurs and it is Reported

Academic and Clinical Setting. The Health Science Professional Education Programs currently evaluate professional behaviour of learners in the academic and clinical setting.

Breaches of the *Faculty of Health Sciences Professional Behaviour Code of Conduct for Learners* will be deemed to occur when the student has not met the expected professional behaviours within the three domains as defined by their respective professional programs. Learners are expected to have acquired a strong understanding of the expectations of their respective program.

Outside of the Academic and Clinical Setting. The Faculty of Health Science regards breaches of professional behaviour outside of the academic and clinical environment as a serious academic matter. Such breaches of conduct include behaviours that violate these standards, whether or not a learner **knew or ought to have known** that a breach would occur as a result of their actions, in addition to those behaviours that were breached through the negligence of a learner.

Breaches should be reported in writing to the administrative heads of the relevant program (either the Assistant Dean or their appointed agent under this *Code*). It is expected that faculty will apply their own professional discretion in determining a whether a breach has occurred and importantly, whether the seriousness of the breach requires that it be dealt with by the application of this policy. That is to say, it is accepted that some minor breaches may be better dealt with informally, outside of this policy and at the discretion of the involved faculty. It is further acknowledged however, that while a single 'minor breach' may be dealt with outside of this policy, it is also acknowledged that a series of minor breaches similar in character, time, or context may be considered as a "single" breach and thus must necessarily fall under the jurisdiction of this policy.

In the case of a breach having been reported, the Program Assistant Dean or (or their appointed agent) shall contact both the complainant and the learner separately and confidentially. They will investigate the allegation while providing each party with a fair and equitable opportunity of sharing

their perspective of the event or events that had transpired. Where the Program Assistant Dean determines, based on the evidence provided, that a breach has occurred, a Panel appointed by the Assistant Dean to adjudicate this Code shall be convened within thirty (30) calendar days to determine what remediation, remedy or outcome shall be required of the learner.

Once a Panel has been convened and adjudicated a breach, the Panel shall, within fifteen (15) business days, provide a confidential written summary of the breach and its resolution to the Chair of the Professionalism Advisory Group (PAG) for collation and tracking purposes. Such summaries shall have all identifiers removed and shall include information such as but not limited to the facts of the breach, the manner by which the breach was determined and reported, the decision of the Panel and the rationale behind the identified remediation and/or remedy. Should a Panel require additional support or guidance in the determination of (including but not limited to) whether a breach had occurred and/or the determination of a suitable remedy or remediation, the Panel shall consult the Chair of the Professionalism Working Group and refer the issue to the identified expert working group from PAG for further consideration. In some cases, a Panel may defer to consider an allegation and refer a breach under this Code directly to the PAG expert working group for adjudication. Some indicators for such a direct referral may include a conflict of interest of a Panel member or the perceived seriousness of the breach.

Sanctions

A sanction, where appropriate, shall be administered under this Code to ensure a learner's future compliance or conformity with the *Faculty of Health Sciences Professional Behaviour Code of Conduct for Learners*. It is acknowledged that all sanctions shall reflect the Faculty's primary commitment to remediation in the first instance.

Consequences for breaching the *Faculty of Health Sciences Professional Behaviour Code of Conduct for Learners* are at the discretion of the Panel (as above) and may include but not be limited to the sanctions described in the *McMaster University Student Code of Conduct* for non-academic offences.

Appeals

All students who are administered a sanction as a result of a finding of a breach under the *Faculty of Health Sciences Professional Behaviour Code of Conduct for Learners* are entitled to a fair and equitable process. Learners who have been found to be in violation of this Code may choose to seek an amendment of the imposed remedy by way of written application within 30 business days from the date of their receipt of the written notification outlining that they have been held to have been in breach of this policy. With written permission from the Program Assistant Dean (approved at his or her own sole discretion), a learner may request informal mediation solely with respect to the remedy itself. Such mediation would only be with respect to the specific sanction imposed, not with respect to whether or not a breach had occurred.

Should mediation not be offered or not sought by the learner prior to a formal Appeal being initiated, then for all learners (aside from postgraduate medical learners), a formal appeal is to be made in

accordance with the McMaster University *Student Appeal Procedures* and will be governed in accordance with such policy. Postgraduate medical learners shall avail themselves of the appeal process outlined in the document *Postgraduate Medical Education Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Postgraduate Student Performance*.