Introduction

The Committee on Standards for Social Work Education (“Committee”) is a standing committee of the School of Social Welfare (“School”). The Committee has three responsibilities:

I. Receiving and investigating charges against enrolled undergraduate social welfare majors or enrolled MSW students concerning violation of or failure to meet the Standards for Social Work Education. This responsibility pertains to matriculated MSW or undergraduate social welfare majors; the violation of or failure to meet standards includes academic performance and professional behavior in the classroom, in field, and in other contexts where the student is acting as a social worker or social work student. The violation or failure may or may not be simultaneous with awarding of a grade. Because the Doctoral Program does not fall under the purview of the Council on Social Work Education, the Doctoral Program Committee reviews allegations of violations of University policy by doctoral students.

II. Considering student grievances about grades and evaluations. The Committee provides the departmental grievance procedure, reviewing student appeals and making recommendations to the Dean. The grievance responsibility pertains to any student taking a course sponsored by the School of Social Welfare (“School”) (a course with prefix of SSW), including field education, regardless of level or matriculated status.

III. Receiving and participating in ad hoc committee review of petitions for readmission after dismissal (termination) from the MSW program. The readmission responsibility pertains to formerly matriculated undergraduate social welfare majors and MSW students who have been terminated from the social work degree program who wish to be readmitted. Since Doctoral Program admissions criteria substantively differ from admissions criteria to the Baccalaureate Program or the Master of Social Work Program, readmission petitions by doctoral students fall under the purview of the Doctoral Program Committee.

The Committee shall be comprised of six (6) members. Three members, at least two of which must be tenure-track and voting members of the faculty, are elected by the faculty. One member must be a student representative (undergraduate, MSW, or doctoral, depending on the review). The remaining two members must hold a professional social work degree and shall be appointed by the Dean. The Dean appointed members may include full-time or part-time faculty, field instructors, professional staff, or administrators of the School. One of the members must be a
representative of the field office for all cases (Standards, Grievance, or Readmission). The Committee members shall choose a Chair from among themselves. Four (4) members of the Committee shall constitute a quorum for the purpose of conducting the Committee’s business. Members of the Committee shall serve two (2) year terms, except for the initial members of the Committee who shall be appointed to staggered terms so that at least two (2) new members join the Committee each year. Standards Committee members may be re-elected, or re-appointed, to the Committee in the same manner as their election or appointment.

The Standards Committee follows guidelines outlined in the University at Albany Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletins, as well as other University and School policies. All University employees must uphold applicable federal, state, University and School laws, regulations, procedures, and policies. In addition, School faculty and students are bound to uphold the National Association of Social Workers’ (NASW) Code of Ethics and, as a School of Social Welfare, are required by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) to operate under and teach the NASW Code of Ethics.

All Committee members must follow, monitor, and assist with improvement of these operating procedures. The Standards Committee is an advisory body and will make a recommendation to the Dean on each case reviewed. Friendly suggestions may also be made to Program Directors as indicated. The Committee will review the procedures at least every 3 years for possible revision.

Committee members shall have no interest, actual or apparent, in any matter before the Committee that is in substantial conflict with the proper discharge of their duties under these procedures. A conflict of interest arises in a situation where personal, professional or other considerations compromise an individual’s objectivity, professional judgment, professional integrity, and/or ability to perform his or her responsibilities to the University. In such instance, a Committee member shall fully disclose the conflict and recuse her/himself from any involvement in the matter before the Committee.

If a member is disqualified, the Dean will appoint a substitute for the duration of the grievance process. If the chairperson is disqualified, the position of acting chairperson will rotate through the faculty Committee members over the course of the academic year, in alphabetical order.
I. Standards for Social Work Education

A. Introduction

All social work students are expected to meet and maintain the Standards for Social Work Education (“Standards”) established by the School. The Standards are comprised of expectations regarding both scholastic performance and professional behavior. Students are expected to meet and maintain these standards in the classroom, in field, and in other contexts where the student is acting as a social worker or social work student. Adherence to these standards will be the basis upon which students will be evaluated by faculty (including field instructors) who are responsible for evaluating student performance in the classroom and field. Meeting the criteria for scholastic performance is necessary, but is not the sole measure, to ensure continued enrollment in a program. Students must also demonstrate professional competency and an understanding of and a commitment to the values and ethics of the social work profession. Advancement through the program is a privilege, not a right.

The academic performance standards established by the School that all social work students are expected to meet and maintain are: Basic Skills Necessary to Acquire Professional Competence; Coping Skills; Professional Performance Skills; and Scholastic Performance.

B. Criteria for Evaluating Academic Performance

1. Basic Skills Necessary to Attain Professional Competence

   Communication Skills
   Social work students must demonstrate sufficient written and oral skills to:
   • Communicate ideas and feelings clearly, effectively and sensitively with other students, faculty, staff, clients and professionals
   • Understand and articulate the content presented in the program and to complete adequately all written and oral assignments
   • Demonstrate a willingness and ability to listen to others.

   Interpersonal Skills
   Social work students must demonstrate interpersonal skills to relate effectively with other students, faculty, staff, clients and professionals. These skills include, but are not limited to, flexibility, empathy, nonjudgmental attitude, respect, and the ability to listen, communicate and negotiate.

   Cognitive Skills
   Social work students must demonstrate sufficient knowledge of social work and clarity of thinking to process information and apply it to situations in the classroom and field and other professional situations. Students must demonstrate the ability to conceptualize and integrate knowledge and apply that knowledge to social work practice.

   Appreciation of Diversity
   Social work practice requires understanding, affirmation and respect of another individual’s way of life and values. Social work students must demonstrate respect and sensitivity toward other students, faculty, staff, clients and professionals and others who are different from
him/herself regardless of the person’s age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, race, religion, marital status, national origin, sexual orientation, or value system.

2. **Coping Skills Necessary for Performance in the Program and Professional Practice**

   Social work students must demonstrate the capacity to interact positively and effectively with other students, faculty, staff, clients and professionals at all times and to execute sound judgment and performance in the program. Students must demonstrate appropriate coping skills in the face of personal or other circumstances, including seeking counseling or other sources of support and assistance, to ensure that such circumstances do not:
   - compromise academic performance
   - interfere with professional judgment and behavior
   - jeopardize the best interests of those to whom the social work student has a professional responsibility.

3. **Professional Performance Skills Necessary for Work with Clients and Professional Practice**

   - **Professional Commitment**
     Social work students must demonstrate a strong commitment to further social and economic justice and to serve persons who are vulnerable, marginalized or oppressed.

   - **Professional Conduct**
     Social work students must act professionally and responsibly in matters of punctuality, attendance, appearance and presentation of self. Social work students must be able to advocate for her/himself in an appropriate and responsible manner. Students must be able to receive and accept feedback and supervision and apply such feedback to enhance professional development and self-awareness. Students must demonstrate the capacity to recognize and maintain appropriate personal and professional boundaries and appropriately use self-disclosure.

   - **Self-awareness**
     Self-awareness is a key component of social work practice. Social work students must be aware of how his or her values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions and past experiences affect his or her thinking, behavior and relationships with other students, faculty, staff, clients and professionals, including those in authority. Students must be able to accurately assess his or her own strengths, limitations, and suitability for professional practice. Students must be able to examine and appropriately modify his or her behavior when it interferes with his or her professional work.

   - **Ethical Obligations**
     The behavior of social work students must adhere to the ethical expectations and obligations of professional practice as delineated in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics.
4. Scholastic Performance

Undergraduate Students

Undergraduate social welfare majors must meet the academic standards defined in the Undergraduate Social Welfare Program Student Handbook and the Field Education Handbook, Undergraduate Program of the School of Social Welfare.

Graduate Students

MSW students must meet the academic standards defined in the Graduate Faculty and Student Handbook and the MSW Field Education Handbook of the School of Social Welfare.

C. Procedures for Addressing Violations of or Failure to Meet the Standards for Social Work Education by Students at the School of Social Welfare

Allegations of violations of or failure to meet the Standards by students enrolled in the MSW program or students enrolled as social welfare majors in the undergraduate program shall be reviewed by the Committee.

Any individual affiliated with the School of Social Welfare in an instructional role (i.e., full-time or part-time faculty, field instructors, professional staff, administrators) may file a charge with the Committee on Standards for Social Work Education alleging a violation of or failure to meet the Standards. All charges must be submitted to the Committee in writing and must contain, where possible, the following:

1. the name, local and permanent address(es), and telephone number(s) of the student against whom a charge is being filed;
2. a statement of facts explaining what happened and the acts which the charging party believes constituted a violation of or failure to meet the Standards in sufficient detail to give the student reasonable notice of the charges. The statement should include the date, approximate time and place where the alleged violation of or failure to meet the Standards occurred. If the alleged acts occurred on more than one date, the statement should also include the last date on which the alleged acts occurred as well as detailed information about all prior acts;
3. the names of any potential witnesses to the alleged violation or violations;
4. the name(s), email address(es) and telephone number(s) of faculty, staff or administrators alleging the violation; and
5. such other or supplemental information as may be requested.

If the student is a member of the Committee, the student must recuse her/himself from any participation in the review of the charge. In this instance, the Dean will appoint a replacement for deliberations concerning that appeal.

Within ten (10) calendar days of receipt of the charge, the Chair of the Committee shall send notification to the student and the faculty, staff, or administrator that a review of the matter shall take place.
Within 30 calendar days from the filing of the charge, both the student and the faculty, staff, or administrator are expected to submit statements and supporting evidence (e.g. documents, witness statements) in writing.

Within sixty (60) calendar days from the filing of the charge, the Committee shall review all relevant information and prepare a summary of its findings as to whether the student violated the Standards and make its recommendation for academic sanctions, if any, to the Dean, or designee, for final resolution. The Committee’s findings and recommendation shall be determined by a majority vote of those members participating in the investigation and made on the basis of whether it is more likely than not that the student violated the Standards. The summary shall identify the facts upon which the findings and recommendation were based, including a summary of all evidence presented to the Committee, and shall include copies of all documents accepted as evidence by the Committee. Upon transmission of the findings and recommendation to the Dean, or designee, the Committee Chair shall transmit, concurrently, copies to the Complainant and student. The Committee’s role ends with these steps.

Within thirty (30) calendar days of receipt of the written findings and recommendation, the Dean, or designee, shall issue a written statement to the Complainant and student, indicating what action the Dean, or designee, proposes to take. The action proposed by the Dean, or designee, may consist of:

(a) A determination that the charge was not substantiated; or
(b) A determination that the charge was substantiated and the imposition of an appropriate sanction.

Sanctions that may be imposed upon a student found to have violated the Standards include:

(a) Warning – A notice in writing to the student that the student has been found to have violated institutional standards;
(b) Probation – A written reprimand for violation of institutional standards. Probation shall be for a specified period of time, may include conditions for continued attendance and shall include the admonition that subsequent violations within the probationary period shall result in more severe sanctions, up to and including immediate dismissal;
(c) Dismissal – Immediate dismissal from the School (if an MSW student) or from the major (if an undergraduate student); or
(d) Such other sanction as the Dean determines to be appropriate.
The decision of the Dean shall be final within the School and may be appealed only to the Undergraduate Academic Council (if an undergraduate student) or Graduate Academic Council (if an MSW student) as may be appropriate. Appeals shall be limited to questions of compliance with the due process provisions as contained in these procedures.

Timeframes within the above procedures can be extended upon mutual consent of the student and the charging party for good cause.
II. Student Grievance Procedures

The second responsibility of the Committee for Standards of Social Work Education is reviewing grievances about grades and evaluations for social work courses (prefix: SSW), following the procedures given in the University at Albany Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletins, and then making a recommendation to the Dean. The Committee for Standards of Social Work Education has faculty and student representation and has established procedures for dealing with grievances related to student academic standing. Students who wish to challenge an academic grade or evaluation of their work in a course, seminar, or in the field (including a challenge that the method of calculating their grade was inconsistent with that announced in published course syllabi), may file a grievance following the procedures outlined in this document. The appeal must be made by the student.

A. Committee Structure for a Student Grievance

1. The Standards Committee members (as described in the Introduction) serve the function of reviewing student grievances.

2. Committee deliberations are confidential.

3. Any member of the committee who is a direct party to a grievance is disqualified from participating in the resolution of the grievance in which she or he is involved.

B. Role of the Undergraduate Program Director, MSW Program Director, and/or Doctoral Program Director in a Grievance

The Director of the program to which the student belongs may (at the Director’s discretion and upon receipt of a written request from a student) attempt to negotiate a resolution with the faculty or field member whose grade is the subject of the student’s grievance. In addition, the Director will assist students in understanding their right to grieve, provide needed instructions for filing a grievance, and review the general grading and evaluation criteria procedures outlined by the University and School. The Director does not evaluate the caliber of the student’s work, focusing only on whether a mediated resolution is appropriate and on attempting to mediate the appropriate dispute.

C. Committee Procedure for Considering a Student Grievance

1. The Committee’s work focuses on the documentation regarding the student’s grievance. This documentation consists of the memorandum filed by the student with the Committee that triggers Committee involvement (see below), and any document(s) filed by the faculty or field member whose grade assignment is being challenged. The Committee may request additional clarification or information from the student, faculty/field member, school or university needed to inform deliberations. The Committee does not evaluate the caliber of the student’s work, focusing only on whether the grading or evaluation procedure as implemented denied the student a fair evaluation.
2. The student bears the burden of establishing any error in grade assignment. With few exceptions, the Committee’s work is limited to a review of the documents referred to in the preceding paragraph.

3. In deliberating the grievance, the Committee may consult with the Disability Resource Center, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, or other offices to clarify procedures related to grade assignment in unique circumstances and to make sure all procedures were followed. The Committee’s role is to determine whether existing policies and procedures were applied to grading.

4. A faculty member cannot be compelled to respond to the Committee with any information nor shall the Committee be prejudiced in its recommendations by the refusal of the faculty member to respond to the Committee with information.

5. On all issues other than grades received in field instruction in the fall term, the Committee may deliberate for up to 40 academic year school days from the date the student submitted all materials requested. On cases involving a grade issued for fall term field instruction, the committee will act as expeditiously as possible within the 40 days, seeking to resolve the problem, if possible, before the end of two weeks from the first day of field instruction of winter term.

6. The Committee is advisory to the Dean to whom the Committee shall forward a written recommendation that includes the rationale for its recommendation.

7. The Committee’s written recommendation and the Dean’s response become a part of the student’s file in the Dean’s office as do any additional documents that are produced as a result of the student’s grievance reaching a university wide committee.

D. Grievance Procedure-Student Responsibility

1. The students must first attempt to resolve the grievance directly with the faculty member involved.

2. If the grievance is not resolved to the student's satisfaction, the undergraduate student may request assistance from the Chair of the Undergraduate Program and the graduate student to the Chair of the MSW Program. The student must submit a prepared a memo in which she or he identifies the course by name and number, the semester the course was taken, the semester the grade was assigned, if different, and the name of the course instructor or field member. The memo must also state the basis for the grievance, including a statement of why the student thinks s/he was not afforded an opportunity to be graded fairly. The program director will pursue a negotiated resolution between the student and faculty or field office member or refer the student directly to the Committee.
3. If, after engaging in the preceding steps, the grievance is not resolved to the student's satisfaction, she or he may forward a copy of the prepared memo to the chairperson of the Standards Committee.

4. Grievances pertaining to a grade may be filed with the Committee through the seventh week of the semester following the one in which the grade was issued.

5. The Committee makes a recommendation to the Dean, who makes the final in-school decision. If the student is not satisfied with the Dean’s decision, she or he may petition the Graduate Academic Council (GAC) or Undergraduate Academic Council (UAC) who, acting through their respective Committees on Admission and Academic Standing (CAAS), may elect to consider the grievance. Appeals shall be limited to questions of compliance with the due process provisions as contained in these procedures. Action on an academic grievance by the appropriate CAAS, once accepted by the GAC or UAC, is final and not subject to further formal review within the University.\(^1\)

6. It is only at this final level of grievance that a grade may be changed against the will of the faculty member(s) involved. Should this occur, the Chair of the GAC or UAC, or its respective CAAS, as appropriate, may consult at his/her discretion with departmental faculty and/or appropriate scholars to determine an appropriate grade and authorize its recording by the Registrar.\(^2\)

**E. Student File**

1. All documents pertaining to a student’s grievance will be kept in a separate folder in the Dean’s Office.

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\(^2\) Id.
III. Readmissions

The third responsibility of the Committee for Standards for Social Work Education is receiving and reviewing petitions for readmission after dismissal (termination) from the MSW or social welfare major undergraduate program.

A. Desirable Departmental Procedures Leading Up to Possible Termination

1. All documents pertaining to a student’s termination from the program will be kept in a file in the Dean’s office. Relevant documents include: (1) a petition or letter (if filed by the student with the Standards Committee) including information regarding the outcome of actions taken by the Standards Committee (if relevant); and relevant (2) correspondence; (3) transcripts; (4) field evaluations; and (5) any terms set for readmission. The file should contain sufficient information concerning the student’s dismissal to inform those later charged with considering a request for readmission.

2. Procedures leading up to a student’s termination will have been handled by the field office and office of the Associate Dean for Academics.

B. Readmissions Procedures

1. The student is given written information informing her or him of the right to request readmission. A former MSW student has the right to request readmission to the MSW program and the university by petitioning the School and the Graduate Academic Council (GAC), which relies heavily on the School’s recommendation regarding readmission. The GAC’s decision is not subject to further formal review within the University.

A former social welfare major who is in good standing at the University has the right to request readmission to the major by petitioning the School. The decision of the School is not subject to further formal review. A student who was academically dismissed from the university must petition the Committee on Academic Standing of the Undergraduate Academic Council (UAC) for readmission to the University separately from petitioning for readmission to the major.

2. The student is informed in writing that the standard(s) for readmission are high. Depending on the type of termination, the student is to submit the following:

Terminations related to the field or violations of Standards for Social Work Education: The student will provide evidence that the field related problem(s) that resulted in termination have been resolved. Problem resolution must be demonstrated with evidence since termination that the student engaged in paid or voluntary work in a social work setting for a period of time sufficient to suggest an ability to perform in a professional capacity without recurrence of the problem that led to termination. The names of at least two referees who can attest to the student’s performance must be provided;

Terminations related to academic performance in MSW courses or in core courses in the
social welfare major: The student will provide evidence of academic achievement since termination. Evidence of successful completion of academic course work taken at an accredited institution of higher education is necessary. The names of at least two referees who can attest to the student’s performance must be provided.

C. Student’s Petition for Readmission

1. A former student who is requesting readmission must submit the petition and names of referees to the Dean’s Office no later than April 1 for the Fall semester or October 1 for the Spring semester.

2. Once the student requesting readmission submits the required documentation (see Section III. B. 2 above), two faculty members of the Standards Committee will be selected by the Dean to form an ad hoc committee to review the student’s request for readmission. One of these two faculty members will chair the ad hoc committee. A third member of the ad hoc committee will be a representative of the field office or the associate dean’s office, whichever was involved in the decision to terminate the student from the program;

3. In reviewing a petition for readmission, the ad hoc committee reserves the right to use the procedures it deems appropriate, including a paper review conducted by the committee or “a formal hearing with all parties and their representatives present or… separate [meetings] with the parties and [their] representatives involved. The procedures adopted are those which the committee believes will provide the parties involved with an opportunity to present their sides of the issues to the committee and for the committee to gather the information and evidence it deems necessary to make its decision.”

4. The ad hoc committee is advisory to the Dean and will provide a written summary to the Dean including its recommendation and reason(s) for its recommendation. The Dean informs GAC or UAC, as appropriate, of the School’s recommendation regarding readmission.

5. A former student who has been dismissed from a program has a maximum of two opportunities to petition for readmission into that program.

Approved by the Committee on Standards for Social Work Education, School of Social Welfare, University at Albany, 08/28/2016
Revised to be consistent with UAC and GAC procedures with input from Assistant Dean in Office of Undergraduate Education (Kathie C. Winchester) and Vice Dean for Graduate Education (Jonathan Bartow) 11/15/2016

3 University Admission and Graduate Requirements available at www.albany.edu/grad/requirements_general_admissions.html#academic_grievance.