

# Booth University College Social Work Professional Suitability Policy<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Preamble

The Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) Standards for Accreditation requires that “The academic unit has a policy regarding the professional suitability of the student for the profession of social work. Students are made aware that serious or repeated violations of the Code of Ethics put them at risk of exclusion from the program on the basis of professional unsuitability”(SB/M 2.4.5, June 2013).

The study of social work practice places students in a position of special trust with professional social workers and their clients. The Booth University College (Booth UC) School of Social Work recognizes that social work education occurs both inside and outside the classroom and that the School is responsible for ensuring that its graduates are competent and ethical. Social Work students must be aware that their behaviour outside the University and social work practice environments affect their suitability for practice. Impaired judgment (see below 3. Behaviour that May Result in a Suitability Review) as well as non-academic misconduct may be grounds for determining continuation in the program, with or without conditions, or dismissal from the School of Social Work.

All Bachelor of Social Work students are expected to demonstrate attitudes, values, and conduct that are consistent with the Canadian Association of Social Workers’ (CASW) Codes of Ethics and the Manitoba College of Social Workers’ (MCSW) Standards of Practice during classroom participation, in written assignments, presentations, and field contexts. Students are expected to be independently familiar and current with all policies and procedures including, but not limited to:

1.1 The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Ethical Practice; the Manitoba College of Social Workers (MCSW) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice; and relevant University College and Practicum policies, and agency policies, regulations, and procedures.

1.2 All students at Booth University College are required to comply with course regulations, the policy on harassment and discrimination, academic appeal and dismissal procedures, and other relevant policies. Students enrolled in the Booth Social Work program have additional responsibilities regarding personal and professional suitability through compliance with specific Social Work policies included in Booth University College Academic Calendar and in Student Handbooks.

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<sup>1</sup> In preparing this policy, Booth University College has relied substantially on suitability policies articulated by the schools of social work at the following institutions: University of Windsor; University of Calgary; Dalhousie University; Renison; Kings University; St. Thomas University; and Algoma University.

## **2. Values and Criteria**

The major values and principles in the Social Work Code of Ethics that define professional social work practice are:

- Empathy and concern for clients
- Respect for individual worth and dignity
- Human capacity for growth and change
- Self-determination
- Honesty and integrity
- Confidentiality
- Social and individual responsibility
- Social justice, human rights and equality

## **3. Behaviour that May Result in a Suitability Review**

A suitability review is to be applied when a concern is raised (see 5.1.1 & 5.1.2) that a student is failing to maintain suitability for professional social work practice. This includes but is not limited to evidence of a violation of the CASW Code of Ethics or of the Manitoba Human Rights Act evident in persistent (i.e., despite documented feedback from faculty/field liaison) and/or serious unethical behaviour (i.e. violation of the CASW/MCSW Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice). The following is a non-exhaustive list of circumstances that may raise concerns about professional suitability leading to initiation of a review process:

- Attempts to gain advantage or deceive, through falsification, forgery, or misuse of any record or document, or through false statements or representations including but not limited to academic integrity;
- Harassment, or any threat, intimidation, or attempt to harm another person;
- Persistent substance use that interferes with a student's ability to function within a professional context;
- A physical or mental condition which impairs essential social work performance, recognizing that reasonable accommodation for the special needs of individuals is required by the Manitoba Human Rights Act;
- Prevention or intent to prevent any person from exercising or intending to exercise his or her right to freedom of speech or freedom of belief;

- A conviction due to a violation of the Criminal Code of Canada, which demonstrates lack of judgment and integrity, including, but not limited to, physical assault, sexual assault, or drug trafficking;
- Concealment or distortion of the truth on the Application for Admission to the Booth UC School of Social Work or Booth UC;
- Persistent and or/serious conduct that contravenes the policies of the practicum setting (applies to students in practicum);
- Imposing stereotypes on a client, including behaviour, values, or roles related to race, ethnicity, religion, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status, income source or amount, political affiliation, disability or diagnosis, or national origin, that would interfere with the provision of professional services to the client;
- Persistent and/or serious inability to form a professional, helping relationship.

#### **4. Limits of Confidentiality**

The Booth UC School of Social Work recognizes that the safety and confidentiality of students or others who have been subjected to unprofessional conduct must be an important priority. The School of Social Work must balance the need for confidentiality against its duty to protect present and future students or persons who might otherwise be placed in jeopardy by a student who is acting in an unprofessional or unethical manner. Information disclosed during meetings with instructors, program or practicum coordinators and Field Instructors, or the Director will not be kept confidential if the information raises concerns about the student's capability of assuming the professional responsibilities of social work practice. Instructors and/or program coordinators and/or the Director will share pertinent information with each other in a respectful and professional manner, for the purpose of identifying student issues and enhancing problem solving about the concerns. The School of Social Work reserves the right to share information with the University or third parties as required by law and University regulations.

#### **5. Three Stages of Review**

Three stages of review can occur in the Booth UC School of Social Work regarding behaviour that is not consistent with the recognized ethics and standards of the profession of social work. The stage of review is dependent upon the seriousness of the allegation of the breach of this Policy. The overall commitment of the School of Social Work is to resolve any concern related to professional conduct of a student, at Stage One or Stage Two through a mediation approach with the student. Records of any incidents that are subject to the review process will be placed in the student file by the Director of Social Work.

##### **5.1 Stage One:**

- 5.1.1 When a classroom instructor has concerns about a student's professional behaviour that instructor should:

(a) discuss those concerns directly with the student and seek to work with the student to resolve the concern;

(b) document dates and content of all meetings with the student; and

(c) notify the Director that the review process is being undertaken.

5.1.2 If the problem arises in practicum, the Field Instructor will discuss the concerns directly with the student and Faculty Liaison, and will follow the procedures outlined in the Field Education Manual for "Students Experiencing Difficulty in the Field". This corresponds with Stages 1 and 2 of the three stages of review for Professional Suitability.

If the concerns are not resolved at Stage One, the individuals involved will proceed to Stage Two.

## 5.2 Stage Two:

5.2.1 If the concern is expressed by a classroom instructor and cannot be resolved at Stage One, a Stage Two review involves the instructor, the student and the student's Faculty Advisor. In situations where the instructor and Faculty Advisor are the same, the Director will appoint an alternate Faculty member. Students may elect to have someone accompany them to the meeting, but must inform the instructor and Faculty Advisor of the identity of the individual accompanying the student in advance of the meeting.

5.2.2 Stage Two Review will include:

(a) Determination of the nature and specifics of the concern

(b) Development of a written plan (including time lines and specific actions) to address the concern. A copy of the written plan will be signed by and provided to all parties personally or by registered mail within five business days.

(c) A follow up meeting with all parties to determine if the concern has been resolved. If it is determined that further intervention is required a Stage Three Review will be conducted.

If the concerns are not resolved at this stage, the parties will proceed to Stage 3 within two weeks.

## 5.3 Stage Three:

5.3.1 Generally a Stage Three review is conducted when issues are considered by the School of Social Work to be of such a serious nature that formal intervention is required. A Stage Three review is most often conducted when concerns have not been resolved in Stages One and Two. A Stage Three review always occurs when a student is being considered for withdrawal or discontinuance in the program or if a recommendation for

suspension or expulsion from the University is being considered. Any decision is based on a simple majority vote of the Committee at Stage Three.

5.3.2 Within two weeks of being advised, the Director will convene an in-camera meeting of a review committee comprised of the Director (chair), the President of the Social Work Students Association or alternate, and up to two designated full-time members of the Booth UC School of Social Work or alternates if necessary. The student has the right to express to the Director any perceived conflict of interest with any member of the review committee. Any individual who has participated in the Stage One and Two reviews will not be a voting member of the Stage Three review committee. The student (and an accompanying person if the student wishes) will be invited to attend the review committee meeting. The following individuals may also be invited to attend the meeting: the Field Education Coordinator, the student's faculty liaison and/or faculty advisor, the student's field instructor, and any other persons deemed appropriate by the Director to gather further information, determine the nature of the problem and identify alternatives for resolution. Members of the review committee will be informed ahead of time of the identity of a person accompanying the student.

5.3.3 When the concern does not arise in the practicum, any faculty member of the School may advise the Director in writing of an alleged incident or series of incidents. Any incident related to a course or instructional activity will be reported to the Academic Dean.

5.3.4 The student will be notified in writing of the specific concerns and meeting date with sufficient time to prepare for and attend the meeting. Should the student choose not to attend the review, the Committee will determine a decision in the student's absence.

5.3.5 The review committee will review any available information related to the concern(s), review any actions taken to date, hear the student's position related to the concern(s), permit the student to ask questions, and seek clarifications. Hearsay evidence is to be avoided if at all possible. The review committee will control information flow and limit questions to issues of relevance. At the conclusion of the meeting, the review committee will determine a decision based on all information gathered. The Director of the School of Social Work will inform the student of the decision in writing within 10 days of the review committee's decision.

5.4 The review committee's decision may include one or more of the following:

5.4.1 Continue student in the program with no conditions;

5.4.2 – Continue student in the program with conditions (e.g., setting goals, actions, timelines, monitoring, mentoring and support, placing the student on probation for a period of time and monitoring the student during the probationary period, referring the

student to counselling, requiring the student to temporarily withdraw from the program);

#### 5.4.3 Recommend withdrawal of student from the program and/or University College

On rare occasions, it may be recommended that the student no longer continue in the Bachelor of Social Work program, be suspended, or be withdrawn from the University College. The student will be counselled to voluntarily withdraw. If that does not occur, the student will be reported by the Director to the Academic Dean, with a recommendation for suspension or withdrawal. Under the jurisdiction of the Student Code of Conduct, the student will be reported to the Dean of Students. The student will be provided with specific reasons for the recommendation. Any readmission will be subject to the regulations pertaining to “Debarment”, “Program Continuance” & “Dismissal” outlined by the Booth UC Academic Calendar as well as providing evidence of addressing concerns related to professional suitability.

5.5 In any Stage Three review, there must be clear, concise documentation of concerns as well as verification that these concerns have been discussed with the student, and that attempts have been made to address the concerns where appropriate. Retention of information on the student’s academic record will comply with the regulations outlined in the Booth UC Academic Calendar.

## **6. Right of Appeal**

Students wishing to appeal dismissal from the Booth UC School of Social Work, may do so by submitting a written appeal, as indicated in the Booth UC Academic Calendar. Appeals must be based on substantive reasons with supporting documentation.