



# VCU

## Professionalism Policy

### Policy Statement and Purpose

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This policy establishes the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine's (VCU SOM) formal process for reviewing and addressing concerns with professional behaviors of medical students, in accordance with the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) requirement of medical schools to ensure these behaviors are monitored and promoted within learners. This includes defining a formal process for reviewing submitted concerns that are out of alignment with established professionalism expectations and establishing workflows to address these concerns in order to promote appropriate professional behaviors in medical students.

### Stakeholders

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The faculty, staff, and students of the VCU School of Medicine are responsible for knowing this standard operating procedure, its contents, and provisions.

### Definitions

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**VCU SOM:** Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine

**MD Program:** Doctor of Medicine program at the VCU SOM

**PC:** Professionalism Committee

**ADSA:** Assistant/Associate Dean of Student Affairs

**ADME:** Assistant Dean for Medical Education

**OME:** Office of Medical Education

**CD:** Course/Clerkship Director

**PAC:** Student Promotion and Advancement Committee

**Professionalism Standards:** Professionalism standards describe the specific behaviors expected from all members of the VCU SOM community, including faculty, staff, students, and all others who may interact with students in the learning environment.

**VIP:** Professionalism Values in Practice System

**CC:** Curriculum Council



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## Responsibilities

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**Students:** Students are responsible for understanding the professionalism standards and professional behaviors that are expected, and acting in a manner that aligns with these standards and behaviors. Students are also responsible for playing an active role in the creation and maintenance of a positive, supportive learning environment, and are accountable for acting in a way that promotes an inclusive, supportive environment for all.

**PC:** The PC is responsible for the development, review, and ongoing revision of the professionalism standards for the VCU SOM.

**OME:** The OME is responsible for ensuring students have completed the attestation indicating their review of the student handbook, including the professionalism standards, on an annual basis.

**VIP:** The Professionalism VIP system is responsible for determining the severity of professionalism concerns and/or commendations and categorizing these concerns utilizing a systematic approach in order to best support student growth in demonstrating professional values and behaviors.

**PAC:** The PAC is responsible for determining any actions that need to be taken to address individual students who have significant professionalism concerns or recurrent minor concerns.

## Procedures

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### Professionalism in the Doctor of Medicine Program at the VCU School of Medicine

- Professionalism is defined as behaving in a manner that is congruent with the expectations of an individual's chosen profession. The VCU MD Program further defines professionalism as conducting oneself with integrity and accountability at all times. This means that students will: engage in effective, appropriate communications while maintaining confidentiality when appropriate; act in an ethical manner; adhere to established policies and procedures; demonstrate responsibility for one's own actions; demonstrate self-awareness and acknowledge when one's actions may fall short of established professionalism expectations, and altering one's actions, attitudes, and/or behaviors to meet expectations, seeking help when appropriate, and cultivating an inclusive, collaborative, respectful environment for all people.

### Development, Review, and Revision of Professionalism Standards

- The Professionalism Committee (PC) is responsible for the development, review, and revision of professionalism standards for the SOM
  - The CC reviews and approves these for suitability for the MD program on an annual basis

### Dissemination of Professionalism Standards

### ***Dissemination to Students***

- The professionalism standards are made available to students in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to:
  - New Student Orientation/Transition to Medical School Course
  - Orientation for the M2 Year
  - Transition to M3 Course
  - Clerkship-specific Orientation Sessions
  - Transition to M4 Course
  - Posting on the class-specific site in the LMS
  - Inclusion in the Student Handbook
    - While the Student Handbook is accessible to students at all times, students are required to review the document—at a minimum—on a yearly basis, and sign an attestation indicating they have received and reviewed the Student Handbook and all the policies contained within on an annual basis
      - The OME ensures compliance through central monitoring of this process by tracking the annual attestations and meeting with any student who has failed to complete their attestation as required

### ***Dissemination to Faculty, Staff, Residents, and All other Individuals Interacting with Students***

- The professionalism standards are made available to faculty, staff, residents, and all other individuals interacting with students in the learning environment in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to:
  - Dedicated email from the course/clerkship director (CD) to all faculty teaching within the course/clerkship prior to the start of the course/clerkship
  - Posting on the class-specific site in the LMS
  - Inclusion in the required Residents as Teachers training module
  - Inclusion in the new faculty onboarding session
  - Inclusion in annually-executed faculty contracts
  - Periodically, departmental meetings or educational sessions and in-person conversations with CD's will be utilized as an additional avenue of distribution

### **Violations of Professionalism Standards**

#### ***Reporting Violations of Professionalism Standards***

- Any member of the VCU SOM community who witnesses unprofessional behaviors by students that are out of alignment with established professionalism standards may be reported/documented through:
  - Course/Clerkship Professionalism Assessments/Grades

- In courses/clerkships that include a professionalism component as part of the grading schema for the course, students who do not demonstrate competency in the professionalism component may not pass the course/clerkship
- In accordance with the Student Promotion and Advancement Committee Policy, any course/clerkship failure is advanced to the PAC for discussion of a remediation plan or any other actions deemed necessary to address the professionalism concern
- Professionalism VIP System
  - Faculty, staff, students, residents, or peers may submit a concern outlining the behavior that is out of alignment with the professionalism standard(s)

### ***Review of Reported Violations***

- The Professionalism VIP System utilizes a systematic approach to review, categorize, and track submitted professionalism concerns/commendations. The system is designed to:
  - Provide formative feedback to students in a developmental framework designed to support student achievement in maintaining values and behaviors in times of stress
  - Offer support to students who may be struggling
  - Track patterns of behavior over time that might be more indicative of a professionalism concern
  - Refer students with significant professionalism concerns to the PAC
  - Recognize exemplars of professional behavior
- Detailed procedures for the VIP system are outlined in the Professionalism Values in Practice Procedures document, included in the appendix at the end of this policy

### **Currently Approved Professionalism Standards**

Members of the VCU SOM Community are expected to:

- Recognize their positions as role models for others in all settings
- Carry out academic, clinical and research responsibilities in a conscientious manner, make every effort to exceed expectations and make a commitment to life-long learning
- Treat everyone in the SOM community with sensitivity to diversity in culture, age, gender, disability, social and economic status, sexual orientation, and other personal characteristics without discrimination, bias or harassment
- Maintain patient, research subject, and student confidentiality
- Be respectful of the privacy of all members of the SOM community and avoid promoting gossip and rumor
- Interact with all other members of the SOM community in a helpful and supportive fashion without arrogance and with respect and recognition of the roles played by each individual
- Provide help or seek assistance for any member of the SOM community who is recognized as impaired in his/her ability to perform his/her professional obligations

- Be mindful of the limits of one's knowledge and abilities and seek help from others whenever appropriate
- Abide by accepted ethical standards in scholarship, research and standards of patient care.
- Abide by the guidelines of the VCU Honor System

In addition to the professionalism standards, all members of the VCU SOM community are expected to demonstrate professional behavior, including, but not limited to:

- Arriving to all sessions on time, prepared to begin at the designated time
- Completion of course/faculty/preceptor/clerkship evaluations
- Communicate with administrators/faculty/peers using good judgement and respectful tone
- Wearing professional attire or clothing otherwise appropriate for the learning environment in which the student is participating
- Meeting all of the Technical Standards as defined in the Technical Standards for the Doctor of Medicine (MD) Program Policy
- Not participating in group activities remotely without appropriate permission

## Related Policies

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Learning Environment and Student Mistreatment Reporting and Response Policy  
Student Promotion and Advancement Committee Policy  
Student Appeal Procedures for Promotion and Advancement Committee Decisions Policy  
Technical Standards for the Doctor of Medicine (MD) Program Policy  
VCU Student Code of Conduct  
VCU Honor System & Standards of Academic Conduct

## Review Cycle and Revision History

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The policy is reviewed and may be revised by the Curriculum Council as necessary, but at least every three years.

**Current Revision Approved: 10.12.2023**

## Applicable Laws, Regulations & Standards

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LCME Standards for Accreditation of Medical Education Programs Leading to the MD Degree:

- LCME Standard 3, Element 5
- LCME Standard 7, Element 7



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# VCU

## Professionalism Values in Practice (VIP) System Procedures

- Faculty, staff, and students can submit notes regarding behaviors concerning lapses in professionalism, or behaviors worthy of commendation. This system is designed to:
  - Provide formative feedback to students in a developmental framework designed to support student growth in maintaining values and behaviors in times of stress
  - Offer support to students who may be struggling
  - Track patterns of behavior over time that might be more indicative of a professionalism concern
  - Refer students with significant professionalism concerns to the Promotion and Advancement Committee
  - Recognize exemplars of professional behavior
- Concerns and commendations are entered electronically through a web-based form that routes to the Office of Medical Education (OME)
  - The reporting individual will select a category for the level of concern when submitting the web-based form
- If the entry is a commendation, a letter is sent to the student and maintained as part of their educational record
- If the entry is a concern, the Assistant Dean for Medical Education (ADME) in the OME will review the student's educational records to determine how many concerns, if any, have been submitted in the past, and send this information to the Values in Practice (VIP) subgroup of the School of Medicine Professionalism Committee (SOM PC)
  - The VIP is a subgroup composed of three members:
    - One (1) Honor Council student representative from the M4 class
      - The student will serve a term of one (1) year
    - Two (2) members of the Professionalism Committee
      - These individuals may not have a dean role in the OME
      - These individuals will serve a term of two (2) years with the opportunity for renewal
      - These individuals will be appointed by the Chair of the SOM PC
  - The submission is mapped by the VIP utilizing the established framework, and assigned a category of severity based on majority vote
  - The VIP subgroup notifies the ADME who will activate the workflow based on the category of severity
  - The ADME follows up on a monthly basis to ensure the action has been taken



**VCU** School of Medicine



# VCU

	<b>Examples (but are not limited to)</b>	<b>Workflow</b>
<b>Category 1:</b> <b>Accidental behaviors;</b> <b>failure to engage;</b> <b>poor self-awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence or tardiness for required activities</li> <li>• Failure to complete professional requirements</li> <li>• Missed deadline</li> <li>• Poor initiative</li> <li>• Isolated lapse in professional verbal or written communication</li> <li>• Inappropriate clothing</li> <li>• Difficulty with feedback</li> <li>• Insensitivity to others' needs</li> <li>• Blaming external factors</li> <li>• Lack of awareness of own limitations</li> <li>• Inappropriate use of social media not related to HIPAA</li> <li>• Disruptive behavior in teaching sessions</li> <li>• Failure to follow SOM policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referred to Associate Dean for Student Affairs for developmental conversation</li> <li>• No further documentation in student record</li> </ul>
<b>Category 2A:</b> <b>Dishonest academic-based behaviors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheating</li> <li>• Lying</li> <li>• Plagiarism</li> <li>• Data fabrication/falsification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referred to VCU Student Conduct Academic Integrity office for action</li> <li>• ADSAs copied to advise the student</li> <li>• Per PAC Policy, if a negative decision made by SCAI, the case is also referred to the PAC</li> </ul>
<b>Category 2B:</b> <b>Egregious behavior;</b> <b>Code of Conduct Violation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abuse of patient trust or rights</li> <li>• Code of Conduct violation</li> <li>• Physical or aggressive behavior; intentional harm to patients or others</li> <li>• Privacy and confidentiality violation</li> <li>• Harassment</li> <li>• Bullying</li> <li>• Committing a crime</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referred to the PAC for action per PAC Policy</li> <li>• ADSAs copied to support the student in preparing for the PAC</li> </ul>





**VCU**

<p><b>Category 2C: Pattern of concerns</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three VIP concerns since matriculation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referred to the PAC for action per PAC Policy</li> <li>• ADSAs copied to support the student in preparing for the PAC</li> </ul>
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- Additionally, professionalism concerns may be addressed as follows:
  - Reflected in course or clerkship grades
  - Review by the Student Promotion and Advancement Committee (PAC)
    - Failing professionalism grades or significant professionalism concerns are referred to the PAC for review
    - Students may submit a letter to the PAC to provide context to the professionalism concerns being reviewed
    - The PAC reviews the concern and determines any subsequent actions that will be used to address the concern
      - Potential actions are included in the Student Promotion and Advancement Committee Policy, and may include, but are not limited to:
        - Placing the student on academic probation
        - Remediation
        - Documentation in the Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE)
- Appeals
  - Students have the opportunity to appeal certain decisions made by the PAC
    - Students must follow the process for submitting an appeal as outlined in the Student Appeal Procedures for Promotion and Advancement Committee Decisions Policy
  - Students who wish to appeal decisions made by the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity (SCAI) should follow the process for appeals as outlined in the Honor System & Standards of Academic Conduct policy

