

Allegany College of Maryland
ALLIED HEALTH PROGRAMS
PROFESSIONALISM STANDARDS

“Professionalism is an indispensable element in the compact between the medical profession and society that is based on trust and putting the needs of patients above all other considerations.”— *Professionalism: Good for Patients and Health Care Organizations* Mayo Clinic Proceedings 2014 (Volume 89, Issue 5, Pages 644–652).

Purpose:

To establish a consistent standard of professionalism for all Allied Health programs and students. This consistency facilitates faculty's teaching professionalism across all the related curricula, supports the expectations within the professions themselves, prepares students for both clinical experiences and future employment, minimizes confusion by students who change programs, holds students accountable for meeting the standard, and creates a systemic process for both accountability and review/appeal. Allied Health faculty, staff, and related College Officials shall model professionalism – setting an example for what the Programs expect of students.

This document does not address course requirements, grades, or other purely instructional matters. See course syllabi and/or program manuals for academic information. Where student actions are addressed in course syllabi and in professionalism standards (eg., attendance), the instructor shall choose which procedure is to be applied consistently within the course or program – in consultation with the Program Director as needed.

Professionalism Statement and Standards:

Students in an Allied Health Program at Allegany College of Maryland are required to conduct themselves in a professional and ethical manner in the classroom, in labs, in clinical settings, and in any setting or activity that is related to your program or course. Professionalism is broadly understood as how a person performs the duties of his/her job with respect to ethics, compliance with policies/procedures, compliance with workplace expectations, treatment of patients, and treatment of colleagues. For Allied Health students at Allegany College of Maryland, professionalism standards include but are not limited to the following expectations:

Students shall ~

1. Follow the profession's rules of ethics.
2. Be honest and trustworthy.
3. Never violate patient/client confidentiality or HIPAA.
4. Never provide care that is inconsistent with best practice or training.
5. Maintain appropriate boundaries.
6. Show compassion/sensitivity.
7. Practice effective written, verbal, and non-verbal communication skills by being
 - (a) accurate
 - (b) timely
 - (c) courteous in content
 - (d) courteous in tone/delivery
8. Report to class and to work
 - (a) when scheduled*
 - (b) on time*,
 - (c) prepared/ready for the day's tasks,

- (d) clean, and
- (e) dressed in attire that is suitable for the day's tasks.

*In addition to being a standard of professionalism, attendance matters. Faculty, clinical coordinators, and clinic site supervisors may determine a student's schedule. The College's Academic Regulations include attendance requirements (Section U); these requirements remain in effect for students in Allied Health programs; U5 permits an instructor to drop a student if absences may adversely affect a student's grade.

9. Follow directions and apply constructive feedback from instructors and supervisors.
10. Follow safety rules and shall not act in any way that endangers the safety of patients, clients, residents, other recipients of services, classmates, colleagues, or supervisors.
11. Not report to class, lab, ACM clinics, clinical site, or any course or program/program-affiliated activities impaired by a condition which renders the student unable to provide safe, competent care or safely participate in the educational experience.
12. Not report to class, lab, ACM clinics, clinical site, or any course or program/program-affiliated activities impaired by the use of alcohol and/or other chemical agents that cause drowsiness, affect cognitive ability or judgement, and/or cause changes in behavior that negatively affect the student's safety, participation, or performance.
13. Not engage in misconduct. Students must follow all College policies including the Sexual Misconduct & Sex Discrimination (Title IX) Policy and the Code of Student Conduct. Students are expected to be familiar with both policies. Follow all local, state, and federal laws. Acts which violate these standards can prompt appropriate disciplinary action, criminal prosecution, and/or academic consequences [as described below].
14. Not engage in other acts/behaviors which are inconsistent with professional standards in the health care field. If the act/behavior could jeopardize professional employment, it could reasonably be considered a violation of these professionalism standards.

Students shall seek guidance from their instructor(s), Program Director, and/or clinical site supervisor if/when they do not understand what is expected, if they have any questions/concerns, or if they are unsure whether an act violates standards of professionalism. Students are encouraged to meet with instructors and supervisors privately if the student questions or disagrees with guidance, directions, or feedback.

Each Allied Health Program Director shall ensure that these Professionalism Standards have been provided to each student enrolled in an Allied Health Program.

CONSEQUENCES FOR UNPROFESSIONAL/UNETHICAL CONDUCT

Any violation(s) of professional standards will be addressed promptly by the instructor, clinical supervisor, or program director in accordance with the following procedures.

Step One: At the time of the alleged breach/incident.

Immediate action will be taken on site (ie., in the classroom, lab, clinical site, or other Program teaching/learning location) to correct any unsafe or dangerous situation. If the unprofessional/unethical conduct endangered any person or created a liability for the College or a clinical site, the student may be directed to leave the classroom, lab, clinical site, or other Program teaching/learning location. The student may be suspended from the Program pending an investigation and/or the accountability process detailed below.

Depending on the specific conduct alleged, the matter may need to be promptly referred to another policy or procedure; examples include law enforcement, the Code of Student Conduct, and/or Title IX; multiple policies and procedures may be applied to a given situation, and they operate independently of each other. Furthermore, if the incident occurred at a

clinical site, the student may be required to participate in a separate process or investigation conducted by the clinical site; in such cases and if permitted by the site, the Program Director or Clinical Coordinator should attend any interview or proceeding to gather information, to provide information as requested by the site or the student, and to represent the Program's interests.

If the incident occurred at a clinical site, the site may determine whether the student may or may not return to the site. The College is not empowered to overrule a clinic site's internal decision-making.

Step Two: Following the alleged breach/incident.

The Program Director will first gather preliminary information; this means getting enough basic information to know who the parties are and to confirm this process applies. Unless the matter is referred to another policy or process, the Program Director shall conduct an investigation to determine what happened and shall document the outcome. The investigation should be completed in a timely manner and shall be done confidentially. The Program Director may seek assistance and/or guidance with the investigation from the Dean of Student & Legal Affairs. At the conclusion of the investigation, the Program Director will notify the student in writing and describe the findings as well as any next steps.

The **INVESTIGATION** consists of the following elements:

1. The initial report of alleged unprofessional/unethical conduct.
2. Solicit written, signed statement or documentation from any person with first-hand knowledge of the situation/incident.
3. Notify the student who is alleged to have engaged in unprofessional/unethical conduct that the incident is being investigated. Describe the allegation being made. Solicit a written statement from the student.
4. Meet individually with the student to discuss the situation/incident. (This meeting must be in person unless there is a health/safety reason to meet remotely; such reason should be verified and documented.)
5. Confirm the student had been provided the Professionalism Standards.
6. Interview any witnesses. (Interviews should be in person or but may be remotely.)
7. Invite all parties and witnesses to submit/share evidence including but not limited to written documentation, video/audio recordings, texts/emails/posts, and/or other evidence.
8. Collect, review, and preserve any available or obtainable evidence.
9. Consult program faculty, other Program Directors, and/or other College personnel for additional information and/or guidance as needed.

Step Three: Following the investigation.

Upon completing the investigation, the Program Director shall determine **if** a violation of Professionalism Standards occurred. This determination is based upon the facts learned – not opinion or supposition. The Program Director will provide the determination and the basis for that determination to the student in writing.

- If no violation occurred, the matter will be closed with no adverse action taken against the student who may immediately resume the Program. (If the student was suspended pending the investigation, the Program Director shall facilitate any make-up work required.)

- If a violation occurred, the Program Director shall determine the appropriate consequence:
 - (a) No action required / resolved by personnel on site,
 - (b) Written reprimand,
 - (c) Specific corrective action that is appropriate for the particular situation,
 - (d) Probation [or similar warning status],
 - (e) Suspension, or
 - (f) Dismissal.

Examples of specific correction action include remedial work, apology, learning contract, restrictions, reassignment to a different clinic site (if available), or other task/assignment designed to assist the student's learning. Probation means the student is on notice that any subsequent incidents of non-professional conduct place that student at risk of suspension from the program or dismissal from the program. Probation may be accompanied by specific corrective action designed to assist the student's learning.

Suspension from program means the student is removed from the Program for a specific period of time such as the time already taken to conduct the investigation, an additional number of days/weeks, one semester, or until the next cohort.

Dismissal from program means student is permanently dismissed from the program. The student will be dropped from all currently enrolled courses and prevented from registering from future program courses. Dismissal pursuant to these procedures for Professionalism will take precedence over any Program Handbook content describing re-admission to the Program.

The Program Director has discretion to determine the appropriate consequence based upon relevant factors which may include the severity of the violation, the student's prior history of professional or unprofessional conduct, consistency with prior, similar situations, whether the student demonstrated an ability and willingness to learn from the experience, whether the violation occurred in the classroom or in the clinical setting, any adverse impact of the violation upon others (including classmates, patients/clients, colleagues, and/or community members), and whether there is an actual, foreseeable risk of future harm to any person. Each situation is unique, so additional factors may be considered.

If the alleged violation is sufficiently serious that the appropriate consequence could or should be suspension or dismissal, the Program Director has discretion to seek input from the Advisory Committee.

Advisory Committee

Allied Health Directors' Advisory Committee is a sub-committee of the Allied Health Directors' Steering Committee. Its function is advisory; the Committee does not make decisions for Program Directors but offers its individual and collective knowledge, experience, and best practices to make a recommendation to the Program Director. The Advisory Committee meets as needed and upon request from a Program Director.

A Program Director who seeks guidance from the Advisory Committee shall request a meeting by contacting the Dean of Student & Legal Affairs. Meetings may be virtual or in-person. The Program Director shall share all relevant information with the Committee including the allegation(s) of unprofessional conduct, the investigation's findings, and the student's history in the program. The Advisory Committee has discretion to gather additional information if needed to provide a fully informed recommendation. All deliberations are confidential.

Membership in the Allied Health Directors' Advisory Committee is comprised of:

5 Allied Health Program Directors,
2 Allied Health Program Directors who serve as alternates when needed, and
Dean of Student & Legal Affairs (or designee).

The Dean of Student & Legal Affairs (or designee) is *ex officio*, manages any necessary paperwork for the Committee, and verifies that due process has been provided to the student. If legal issues arise, the Dean may consult with participants, provide guidance, pause this process for a different institutional process as noted above, and/or consult the College's General Counsel. As *ex officio*, the Dean has no vote in the Committee's recommendation.

Step Four: Final Program Step

After the Program Director has determined the appropriate consequence, s/he shall issue a written notification to the student.

The Program Director's **NOTIFICATION** shall include:

1. a description of the complaint,
2. a description of the investigation's findings (preserving confidentiality of patients and/or other students),
3. a determination of whether a violation occurred,
4. the consequences for any violation that occurred, and
5. the next steps (if any)

If the student was suspended pending the investigation and final decision, the student may immediately resume the Program, and the Program Director shall facilitate any make-up work required.

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Any student who is the subject of this process has the following rights and responsibilities:

1. To be provided these Professionalism Standards upon enrolling in the Program;
2. To be informed of the allegation(s) or unprofessional conduct;
3. To provide a written statement to the Program Director responding to the allegation(s);
4. To meet individually with the Program Director before any decision is made;
5. To provide relevant information including the names of witnesses, records, and documents to the Program Director before any decision is made;
6. To participate fully and honestly;
7. To be provided a final written notification of the Program Director's decision; and
8. To appeal the Program Director's decision using the process described below.

Appeal Process

If a student chooses to appeal the decision by the Program Director, s/he shall notify the Dean of Student & Legal Affairs in writing within five (5) calendar days of the Program Director's notification. The student shall provide a new written statement detailing the reason(s) why the student disagrees with the decision and what the student's alternative solution is. The Dean of Student & Legal Affairs forwards all the documentation to the appropriate administrator.

- » Appeals from students in nursing programs will be decided by the Dean of Career Programs.
- » Appeals from students in other health programs will be decided by the Associate Dean of Nursing Programs.

The designated appeal administrator reviews all the documents and meets with the student and the Program Director. The appeal administrator may solicit additional information from other persons/records. After reviewing all the information, the appeal administrator determines whether to accept, modify, or deny the decision. The administrator then notifies the student in writing.

If the appeal administrator's decision is adverse to the student, the student may appeal the decision to the Senior Vice President of Instruction & Student Affairs following the same process within five (5) calendar days of appeal administrator's notification. The Vice President may meet with and/or solicit additional information from any persons/records. The Vice President determines whether to accept, modify, or deny the Committee's decision. The Vice President notifies the student in writing.

If the Vice President's decision is adverse to the student, the student may appeal the Vice President's decision to the President following the same process within five (5) calendar days of Senior Vice President's notification. The President may meet with and/or solicit additional information from any persons/records. The President determines whether to accept, modify, or deny the Committee's decision. The President notifies the student in writing.

The President's decision is final.

Additional Provisions/Requirements

All steps in these procedures should be done in a reasonably timely manner by the College Officials – taking into consideration critical academic calendar dates, course/program deadlines, clinical schedules, impact upon the student, impact upon classmates, impact upon clinical personnel, impact upon faculty/staff, and other relevant factors including any additional/separate processes that must be completed first. If the matter cannot be resolved in a timely manner, relevant persons (including the student) should be informed in writing of the reason(s) for any delay.

All information shared during these processes shall be confidential in accordance with relevant laws and College policy.

Retaliation is prohibited by any person.

Conflicts of Interest/Bias:

Every College Official who is part of this process should be free from conflict of interest or bias and should take care to avoid any actions that jeopardize their objectivity. Any Official who is part of this process and who is aware of any bias or other conflict of interest will recuse himself/herself.

If a member of the Advisory Committee is recused, an alternate member participates. If the Dean of Career or the Associate Dean of Nursing Programs education is recused, the matter advances directly to the Senior Vice President. If the Senior Vice President is recused, the matter advances directly to the President. If the President is recused, the decision of the Senior Vice President is final.

Third Party Involvement

No College Official who is part of the formal process may communicate with any of the parties about this matter outside of a hearing or other official proceeding. If such communication occurs with a member of the Advisory Committee, Dean of Career Education, Associate Dean of Nursing Programs, Senior Vice President, or President that Official must recuse himself/herself from any participation in the process.

The parties are free to solicit support or guidance from any person of their choosing who is not part of this process; support persons may not participate in any proceeding but may be nearby for consultation as desired during proceedings.